THE SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENT CONSORTIUM

The "Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium" was formed from a merger of three Consortia that emerged in January 2010 in response to the Race to the Top competition: the Balanced Assessment, MOSAIC, and SMARTER Consortiums, comprising a total of 45 states.

The Consortium's priorities for a new generation assessment system are rooted in a concern for the valid, reliable, and fair assessment of the deep disciplinary understanding and higher-order thinking skills that are increasingly demanded by a knowledge-based economy. These priorities are also rooted in a belief that assessment must support ongoing improvements in instruction and learning, and must be useful for all members of the educational enterprise: students, parents, teachers, school administrators, members of the public, and policymakers.

The Consortium recognizes the need for a system of formative and summative assessments, organized around Common Core standards, that support high-quality learning and the demands of accountability, and that balance concerns for innovative assessment with the need for a fiscally sustainable system that is feasible to implement. The efforts of the Consortium will be organized to accomplish these goals.

Priorities for Assessment

As described below, the Consortium members have agreed to a set of principles that are consistent with those used by educational systems of high-achieving nations and states. These include the following:

1) **Assessments are grounded in a thoughtfully integrated learning system** of standards, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and teacher development. Teachers and other instructional experts are involved in the process of developing formative and summative assessments grounded in the learning standards. These guide professional learning about curriculum, teaching, and assessment. Instructional supports are provided to enable thoughtful teaching. Thus, assessments are provided to schools as part of a well-aligned system that guides and supports a coherent approach to students' and teachers' learning.

2) **Assessments include evidence of actual student performance** on challenging tasks that evaluate standards of 21st Century learning. The assessments will be strategically used to evaluate a broad array of skills and competencies and inform progress toward and acquisition of readiness for higher education and multiple work domains. They emphasize deep knowledge of core concepts within and across the disciplines, problem solving, analysis, synthesis, and critical thinking.

3) **Teachers are integrally involved in the design, development and scoring of assessment items and tasks.** Teachers will participate in the alignment and unpacking of the Common Core Standards and the identification of the standards in the local curriculum. The Consortium will involve teachers in formative and summative assessment development and support moderation of scoring processes to ensure consistency and to enable teachers to deeply understand the standards and to develop stronger curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessment. Assessment literate teachers 1) who have gotten "inside" the Common Core standards, 2) who have taught to the standards, 3) who have learned how to appropriately measure the standards, and 4) who have learned strategies to intervene if students have not measured the standards, will be teachers whose students are learning. Teachers' roles include the construction and review of items/tasks, the definition of scoring guides, selection of student work exemplars, and scoring.

4) **Technology is designed to support assessment and learning systems.** Technology is used to enhance these assessments in a number of ways, by: delivering the assessments; enabling adaptive technologies to better measure student abilities across the full spectrum of student performance and evaluate growth in learning; supporting on-line simulation tasks that test higher-order abilities, allowing

students to search for information or manipulate variables and tracking information about the students' problem-solving processes; and, in some cases, scoring the results or delivering the responses to trained scorers / teachers to access from an electronic platform. Such a platform can support training and calibration of scorers and moderation of scores, as well as the efficient aggregation of results in ways that support reporting and research about the responses.

5) Assessments are structured to continuously **improve teaching and learning**.
Assessment *as*, *of*, and *for* learning is designed to develop understanding of what learning standards are, what high-quality work looks like, and what is needed for student learning. It is also designed to foster instruction that supports transferable knowledge and skills. These outcomes are enabled by several features of the assessment system:

- The use of school-based, curriculum-embedded assessments provides teachers with models of good curriculum and assessment practice, enhances curriculum equity within and across schools, and allows teachers to see and evaluate student learning in ways that can feed back into instructional and curriculum decisions.

- Close examination of student work and moderated teacher scoring are sources of ongoing professional development that improve teaching.

- Developing both on-demand and curriculum-embedded assessments around learning progressions allows teachers to see where students are on multiple dimensions of learning and to strategically support their progress.

Goals for the Assessment System

The *SMARTER BALANCED* Consortium intends to build a system of assessment upon the Common Core Standards in English language arts and mathematics with the intent that all students across this consortium of states will know their progress toward college and career readiness. These states believe that the connection between the student, the teacher, and the curriculum, instruction and assessment is the foundation for success for the Common Core Standards, and that working together collaboratively to accomplish these tasks is critical.

The consortium is committed to the development of a system that is state led and will provide:

- **Common summative tests in English language arts and Mathematics** that assess student progress and mastery of core concepts and critical transferable skills using a range of formats: selected-response and constructed-response items, and performance tasks, designed together to assess the full range of standards.

- **Formative assessment tools and supports**, that are shaped around curriculum guidance which includes learning progressions, and that link evidence of student competencies to the summative system.

- Focused **professional development** around curriculum and lesson development as well as scoring and examination of student work

- **Reporting systems** that provide first-hand evidence of student performances, as well as aggregated scores by dimensions of learning, student characteristics, classrooms, schools, and districts.

- A governance structure that ensures a strong voice for state administrators, policy makers, school practitioners, and technical advisors to ensure an optimum balance of assessment quality, efficiency, costs, and time.

Principles

This system and its development will incorporate:

- A variety of item types to measure the full range of Common Core Standards, including those that address higher-order cognitive skills and abilities;
- A plan to scale up over time to incorporate curriculum-embedded performance and complex computer based simulations;
- Online adaptive solutions for summative and interim assessments to provide assessments that meet the needs of all students;
- Support for structured transitions from paper/pencil to online adaptive assessments, with a backup paper version available for those states who need it when the assessment initially scales up;
- A systematic solution to informed decision-making by including formative strategies, benchmark/interim assessments, and summative assessments;
- High quality curriculum and instructional supports for teachers;
- Inclusion of teachers in design, development and implementation of the system;
- Adherence to professional standards for assessment;
- Principles of universal design in the design and development process for **all** students; and
- Optional components that states can use based on their needs.

Design Agreements

The Consortium will develop a common summative assessment that will provide comparable results across all of the participating states. This comparability will be achieved by applying psychometrically sound scaling and equating procedures to items and a modest number of performance tasks of limited scope (e.g. no more than a few days to complete) that will be used in common across consortium states. Consortium states will use commonly determined performance standards that are internationally benchmarked.

In addition, some states will work on pushing the edge of the envelope with respect to more ambitious performance assessments – which may be used in common by one or more sub-consortia of states – and, in the same way, others will undertake more ambitious work with respect to computer adaptive testing and simulations. This design allows the Consortium to create at one time, a new summative assessment used by a large number of states within the five-year horizon of the federal grant, and to create even more leading-edge assessment components used by sub-consortia of states who decide to offer augmented assessments. Common use of these augmented assessments across subsets of states would result in comparable results for those components across those states, without disrupting the existence of a leaner, common summative assessment across all the states in the Consortium.

Current understandings about the nature of the assessment items, tasks, and strategies are noted below:

Objective machine-scored items

- Movement toward more analytic types of selected-response and constructed-response items that are easily scored, including computer simulations.

Open-Ended Constructed response

Artificial intelligence (AI) scored items.

- Work to establish efficient means of developing items and reliable scoring processes for complex responses scored by computer.

- Build and maintain the confidence teachers have in the system by incorporating a systematic read-behind by teachers.

Human scored constructed response

- Develop training and moderated scoring processes for teacher scoring of items that cannot be scored by AI and for additional scoring of AI items.

- A strategic mix of teacher and machine scoring should be created to take advantage of efficiencies and reduce burden, while also ensuring teacher participation and learning.

Curriculum-embedded performance assessments

- The common summative assessment would incorporate performance events of modest scope (1-5 days) to evaluate the standards more fully.

- Some states will form a workgroup to go further with rich performance tasks that can make advances in performance assessments on behalf of the consortium

- These more ambitious performance assessments could be included for individual state accountability systems (and for comparisons across a subset of states, if desired) until a greater proportion of states has capacity for implementation.

Advanced Computer based simulations

- Some states will form a workgroup to make advances in computer based simulations on behalf of the consortium

- These simulations could be included in individual state accountability systems until a greater proportion of states have capacity for implementation.