



Next Generation Assessments

By Lauren Heintz

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In the 2014-2015 school year, many states will implement a new generation of common statewide assessments. These assessments will evaluate students based on the Common Core State Standards, a new set of rigorous standards in English language arts and mathematics. Most states that have formally adopted the Common Core Standards will implement a new assessment system developed by one of two multi-state assessment consortia: the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (Smarter Balanced). States also are considering additional alternative assessment systems to accommodate students who have significant cognitive disabilities or who are English language learners. Each assessment consortia has developed a unique assessment system to achieve the common goals of producing reliable, relevant student data that will help support and inform the transition to the Common Core in the states and measure student progress toward college and career readiness.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative

The voluntary, state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative was launched by state leaders in 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia in June 2009 through the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers.¹ The standards were created to provide states with a common set of essential knowledge and skills for K-12 students in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics that would prepare students to be successful in college and careers. Teachers, researchers, school administrators and educational experts helped develop the standards, which were finalized in June 2010 after extensive public comment and review.² By 2011, 46 states, the District of Columbia and four territories formally adopted the Common Core standards.³ The CCSSI also called for development of tools and resources to help participating states fully implement the standards, including instructional materials

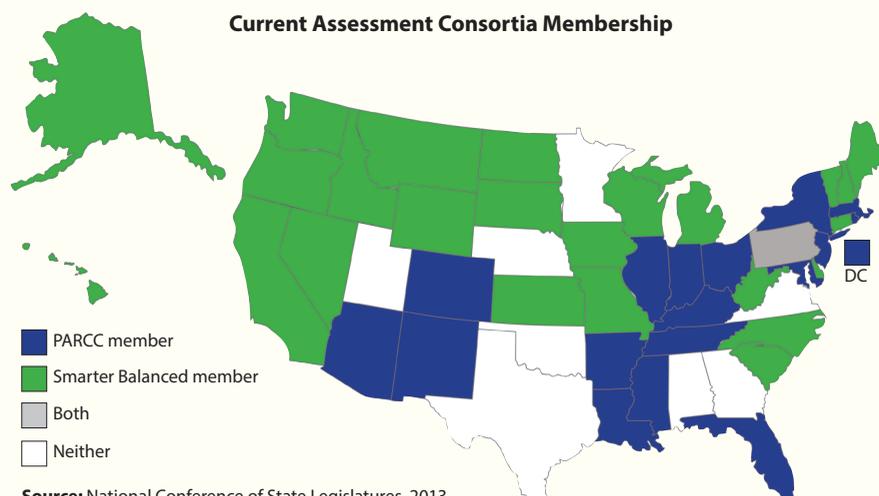
aligned with the standards, resources for educators to adjust their classroom practices, and assessments to measure and report on student progress using the standards. To help support development of this new generation of assessments, the federal government created a new Race to the Top competitive grant program.

Race to the Top Assessment Program

In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Education provided funding through a Race to the Top competitive grant program to two consortia of states to work together to develop new Common Core aligned assessment systems. Each consortium had to include at least 15 states, and all participating states had to agree to adopt a set of college- and career-ready standards, such as the Common Core State Standards.⁴ The assessment consortia also must designate one state as the primary fiscal agent and have a project management service provider. To receive the federal funding, the assessment systems the consortia developed were required to include one or more summative assessments in ELA and mathematics for grades three through eight and one year in high school; produce student achievement and student growth data that can determine a student's college and career readiness; assess all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners; and produce data that can be used to determine school effectiveness, principal and teacher evaluations, necessary professional development and support, and inform teaching, learning and program improvement.⁵ In addition, the assessment systems must be fully implemented by the 2014-2015 school year. Two state consortia—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced—received Race to the Top assessment grants totaling approximately \$330 million to develop the new generation of assessments.⁶

PARCC

The Partnership for Assessment for College and Careers is one of the state assessment consortia that received federal funding to develop a next generation assessment system. PARCC re-



ceived \$186 million through the Race to the Top competition and is currently comprised of 19 member states and the District of Columbia.⁷ The states are categorized as governing states—which oversee the process and development of the new assessments—and participating states—which have agreed to implement the assessments developed by the consortium. The Florida Department of Education acts as PARCC’s fiscal agent, and project management services and coordination are provided by Achieve, a bipartisan, non-profit organization focused on helping students become college- and career-ready.⁸ PARCC not only works with K-12 educators to develop the assessments and resources teachers will need for implementation, but also partners with post-secondary institutions and systems to help develop the high school-level assessments to be used as an indicator for student readiness for college-level courses. Data from the assessments can be used to help determine school and school district effectiveness, educator effectiveness, and student placement in college credit-bearing courses, and to provide data for comparison both with other states and internationally.⁹ An estimated 22 million students are educated collectively in the PARCC member states.¹⁰

PARCC has developed an assessment system for students in grades three through eight and high school students. The assessment system has four primary components: two summative, required assessments and two non-summative, optional assessments. The summative assessments will be used to evaluate students against Common Core standards, determine a student’s college and career readiness, and provide data for accountability, including student growth. These assessments will be comprised of performance-based assessments (PBA) and end-of-year assessments (EOY). The PBAs, to be administered as close to the end of the school year as possible, will evaluate students on hard-to-measure standards. PBAs for English language arts will focus on writing effectively when analyzing text; the mathematic assessments will focus on applying mathematical reasoning to real world problems and constructing mathematical arguments. The EOY assessments, to be administered after approximately 90 percent of the school year has passed, will assess students’ mastery of grade-level or course standards. ELA assessments will focus on reading comprehension, while mathematic assessments will focus on the content of the standards through innovative technology-based questions.¹¹ Students’ final overall scores will be based on a combination of PBA and EOY scores. All PARCC states will receive the summative assessments. PARCC states also will receive a required formative assessment that will allow students to demonstrate speaking and listening skills—required by the Common Core Standards—that can be administered any time throughout the school year.¹²

The optional non-summative components can be used to generate information to inform instruction, student intervention and professional development throughout the school year. A diagnostic assessment will be available to PARCC states throughout the school year that can be used to gauge students’ current knowledge and skills to help inform instruction and curriculum. Mid-year assessments also will be available to help inform both instruction and educator professional development. These assessments, similar in format and content to the end-of-year summative assessments, will focus on performance-based tasks to evaluate students on hard-to-measure standards.¹³ Member states will have flexibility in regard to use and timing for the non-summative assessments, allowing them to generate other accountability data to respond to specific state needs.

PARCC’s latest estimates indicate the summative assessments will cost approximately \$29.50 per student for ELA and mathematics.¹⁴

To support implementation of the new assessment system, PARCC has created tools and resources for both educators and member states. Teachers will receive support in four primary ways: instructional tools to support implementation, professional development modules, timely student achievement data, and educator-led training to support “peer-to-peer” training.¹⁵ The instructional tools will include model content frameworks, sample assessment tasks and model instructional units. The professional development modules will provide professional development on both implementation of the new assessments and interpretation and use of assessment results. Student data will be available to teachers throughout the year to mark progress and inform instruction and student intervention. PARCC also aims to secure multi-state support to build leadership cadres of educators who are deeply engaged in the use of tools, the CCCSS and PARCC to support implementation and continually engage postsecondary educators in assessment design and use.¹⁶

Member states can participate in several capacity-building initiatives developed by PARCC to help support the transition to assessment use. State leadership teams will meet twice a year at multi-state transition and implementation strategic planning institutes. These institutes will allow leadership teams to discuss policy decisions and common challenges, as well as monitor and continue to develop strategic plans. The leadership teams will be composed of state leaders, district and local leaders, and other state stakeholders.¹⁷ PARCC also will hold informative webinars between meetings to discuss any common high-priority issues that arise among member states in the implementation phase. PARCC also is developing a partnership resource center, which will contain model content frameworks and sample assessment items, among others.



In March 2013, PARCC announced it would become a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization to help create sustainability for the consortium after the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top Assessment grant period ends in September 2014.¹⁸

Smarter Balanced

Smarter Balanced, a state assessment consortium, received \$175 million in federal grants and is currently comprised of 25 member states.¹⁹ Through its Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington acts as the fiscal agent for the consortium, while project management services are provided by WestEd, a nonpartisan nonprofit research and development agency.²⁰ Smarter Balanced currently is working with K-12 educators and higher education faculty to develop test items and pilot components of the assessment system, and also is partnering with higher education institutions that will use the assessments as an indicator for student readiness for college-level courses. Data from the Smarter Balanced system can be used for school, district and state accountability for federal requirements, for teacher and principal accountability, to indicate student readiness for credit-bearing college coursework by higher education institutions, and optionally by states for graduation requirements and end-of-course assessments. Smarter Balanced estimates more than 19 million students are educated collectively in its member states.²¹

Smarter Balanced has created an assessment system that will be given to students in grades three through eight and 11, with optional interim assessments available for grades three through eight and high school. The Smarter Balanced assessment system has three components: summative assessments, interim assessments and formative resources. The summative assessments will be used to evaluate the Common Core standards in ELA and mathematics, to measure student achievement and growth toward college and career readiness, and to provide data for accountability purposes. Summative assessments can be administered once a year within the last 12 weeks of the school year.²² These assessments will consist of performance tasks and end-of-year adaptive assessments that include selected response questions, short constructed response, extended constructed response, technology enhanced and performance tasks. The performance tasks will include extended projects to demonstrate writing and analytical skills.²³ This range of item types will be included in both interim and summative assessments. The Smarter Balanced adaptive assessment component will adjust the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. This will provide students with individually tailored sets of items to more accurately describe each student's performance.²⁴ Students may retake the assessments in rare cases with the approval of

local education authorities when there is a test administration irregularity.²⁵

Interim assessments are an optional component of the Smarter Balanced assessment system and also will be computer adaptive with performance tasks. These interim assessments, to be available throughout the year, will be available as comprehensive assessments and as "content-cluster" assessments.²⁶ The comprehensive assessment, similar to the end-of-year summative assessment, can be used to measure student growth and achievement; the content-cluster assessments will focus on a smaller set of standards to help inform instruction and professional development.²⁷ The use and timing of the interim assessments will be determined locally.

The other optional component of Smarter Balanced is on-demand tools and resources to support the formative assessment process. This is a deliberate instructional practice that provides actionable feedback used to adjust teaching to improve student learning. The resources will be housed in the Digital Library, an online application that will contain resources aligned to the Common Core State Standards for educators with varying interests and professional learning needs. Materials include a series of assessment literacy and exemplar instructional modules in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. In addition, the library will include professional learning and instructional resources contributed by educators from all Governing States. The library will encourage users to interact using social networking features, allowing them to rate materials and to share their expertise with educators across the country. Approximately 2,000 educators from Smarter Balanced member states have been recruited to identify and evaluate materials for inclusion in the digital library.

Smarter Balanced currently estimates cost of the new assessments will be \$22.50 per pupil for only the summative assessment and \$27.30 per pupil for the summative, interim and formative assessments.²⁸

Smarter Balanced offers several tools and resources beyond the formative assessments to help member states with the transition to the new assessments and common core. A multi-state collaborative, Implementing the Common Core Standards (ICCS), has been created by the CCSSO to help engage and support states with the Common Core transition. ICCS members meet three times a year to share and discuss policies and practices important to K-12, including curriculum, instruction, professional development and the assessments.²⁹ Smarter Balanced covered membership fees for ICCS for consortia states to help support implementation. ICCS membership for each Smarter Balanced governing state is covered for two years; membership for each advisory state is covered for one year.³⁰ Smarter Balanced also collaborated with McKinsey & Co. to develop a compre-



hensive toolkit of resources to assist states with developing customized communication resources, comparing the cost of the Smarter Balanced system to current state and local assessment expenditures, assessing current and needed school technology capacity, and creating a comprehensive implementation plan for the assessment system.

Smarter Balanced initiated pilot item development in March 2012. It awarded a contract for development of 10,000 pilot items and tasks in math and ELA.³¹ Winning vendors hired and trained educators from member states to write items, review them for CCSS alignment and check for bias. More than 5,000 schools and over 600,000 students participated in the pilot in the spring of 2013.³² A field test of approved items will occur in the 2013-2014 school year. Item and task development began in spring 2013 for production and field testing of the additional 32,300 items and tasks.³³

Smarter Balanced is currently engaged in negotiations with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to become a project within its Graduate School of Education and Information Science.

Alternative Consortia

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education, through the Office of Special Education Programs, also offered smaller competitive grants to fund development of common alternative assessments to evaluate students who have significant cognitive disabilities (that could not be accommodated on general state assessments) and English language learners. Three consortia received funding: Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM), the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) and the Assessment Services Supporting English Language Learners through Technology Systems (ASSETS). The alternative assessments are expected to be piloted in the 2014-2015 school year and implemented in participating states' schools in the 2015-2016 school year.³⁴

Technology

States will want to consider whether schools have the technological infrastructure to support online and computer adaptive tests as the new generation of assessment systems are being implemented. To help guide and inform schools and school districts in their technology purchases, PARCC and Smarter Balanced issued official minimum guidelines for hardware purchases in April 2012. The minimum guidelines follow.³⁵

Hardware	Operating System	Networking	Device Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 GHz or faster processor 1 GB RAM or greater memory 9.5 inch (10 inch class) or larger screen size 1024 x 768 or better screen resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windows 7 Mac 10.7 Linux (Ubuntu 11.10, Fedora 16) Chrome OS Apple iOS Android 4.0 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wired or wireless Internet connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktops, laptops, netbooks, thin client, and tablets that meet the hardware, operating system, and networking specifications

Both consortia have developed further instructional guides and diagnostic tools to ensure that schools will be technologically prepared to make the transition to the new assessment systems. These guides discuss technology requirements and recommendations such as hardware, security requirements and bandwidth.

More information about PARCC assessment technology guidelines and compatibility can be found at www.parcconline.org/technology, and more information about Smarter Balanced assessment technology and compatibility can be found at www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology.

Testing Time

Both PARCC and Smarter Balanced have released estimates for the amount of time students will spend on the new summative assessments per school year.

PARCC³⁶

- 8 hours for math and ELA summative assessments for grade 3
- 9 hours for math and ELA summative assessments for grades 4-5
- 9½ hours for math and ELA summative assessments for grades 6-8
- 9½ hours for math and ELA summative assessments in high school

Smarter Balanced³⁷

- 7 hours for math and ELA summative assessments for grades 3-5
- 7½ hours for math and ELA summative assessments for grades 6-8
- 8½ hours for math and ELA summative assessments for grade 11



The Future of Assessments

As states begin to implement these newly developed assessment systems, more discussion is occurring around the future potential of such assessments and how they can support larger educational initiatives. One group examining the future of assessments is the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education, created in 2011 by the Educational Testing Service. This group of education scholars, policymakers and practitioners was formed to study the best of educational assessments, estimate what will be needed from educational measurement during the 21st century, and provide recommendations for the future of assessments.

In March 2013, the Gordon Commission released its two-year analysis of assessments, which contains a 10-year plan for the future of assessments. This 10-year plan outlines the potential of assessments to measure student growth, support accountability, and inform instruction; it also provides policy recommendations for states, the federal government and research development. The primary policy recommendations include:

- Creating a permanent Council on Educational Assessments modeled on the Education Commission of the States.
- Asking the president and Congress to encourage experimentation with various approaches to assessment and accountability.
- Requiring the U.S. Department of Education, the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, along with the philanthropic community, not-for-profit and for-profit sectors, professional teacher organizations and universities, to commit to a 10-year research and development effort to strengthen the assessment system in the United States.³⁸

The full report can be found at www.gordoncommission.org.

Policy Questions to Consider

State policymakers also may wish to consider more immediate policy implications of the new generation of assessments, such as:

- Will schools have the technological infrastructure to support online, computer-adaptive tests?
- Will the cost of the new assessments exceed current expenditures? If so, how will states pay for the new assessments?
- Will districts use both summative and formative assessments?
- How will data be used to inform instruction and policymaking?
- How will new teachers, principals and administrators be trained?
- How will experienced teachers, principals and administrators be trained?
- How will the assessments affect compliance with NCLB accountability provisions?



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National Conference of State Legislatures
William T. Pound, Executive Director

7700 East First Place
Denver, Colorado 80230
(303) 364-7700

444 North Capitol Street, N.W., #515
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 624-5400

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