FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Smarter Balanced Pilot Test is now well underway, and I’m pleased to report that more than 300,000 students in grades 3-11 have already participated. By May, more than one million students in more than 5,000 schools will take part.

You can learn more about the Pilot Test below, including details about the availability of practice tests for all schools later this spring. The Pilot Test represents an important milestone for the Consortium, providing detailed information about how test items and the technology behind the assessments perform in a real-world setting.

Another critical milestone for Smarter Balanced is developing a long-term sustainability plan once our federal grant is complete in 2014. As part of this planning, Smarter Balanced announced an affiliation with UCLA’s National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). The affiliation with CRESST—one of the premier educational assessment and research centers in the nation—is exciting news. It will ensure that Smarter Balanced continues to develop and enhance the assessment system in the future.

If you appreciate receiving Smarter News, help us spread the word. Forward this email to your colleagues and encourage them to sign-up.

INSIDE THE STATE-LED CONSORTIUM

The third Smarter Balanced Collaboration Conference brought together representatives from the Consortium’s member states and territories in Arlington, Va. last month—including chief
state school officers, K-12 state leads, higher education leads, work group members, and contractors—to facilitate coordination on key projects.

During a public session, the Governing States voted to accept recommendations from the Sustainability Task Force, including a scope of services and a plan to engage with CRESST at UCLA’s Graduate School of Education and Information Studies as an ongoing affiliate. CRESST will provide access to faculty expertise and research support and offer a full array of administrative services that the Consortium requires after the conclusion of the federal grant in 2014.

In addition, state education chiefs approved initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs)—which distinguish among the levels of student performance in English language arts/literacy and mathematics on the Smarter Balanced assessments. Adoption of the initial ALDs is part of an extensive collaboration between K-12 education agencies and institutions of higher education. The development of the initial ALDs began in October 2012 with collaboration among K-12 teachers and administrators and higher education faculty from two- and four-year colleges and universities representing Smarter Balanced Governing States. A six-month review process engaged a broad array of K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, content experts, and education partners through two rounds of public comment in November and February.

A complete recap of the Smarter Balanced Collaboration Conference is available on the Smarter Balanced website.

**SUPPORTING CLASSROOM TEACHERS**

Smarter Balanced is swiftly moving forward with the development of formative assessment tools and resources for teachers—a critical component of a balanced system that also includes summative and interim assessments.

This spring, hundreds of educators will be recruited from Smarter Balanced Governing States to form state networks of educators, charged with providing feedback and guidance on the resources to be included in a Digital Library of formative assessment practices and professional learning resources for educators.

The Digital Library, set to launch in fall 2014, will provide teachers with an online clearinghouse of classroom-based, formative assessment strategies and practices that enhance day-to-day instruction, including resources to

**IN THE NEWS**

- The *Marin Independent Journal* provided details on the administration Smarter Balanced Pilot Test in local schools.
- *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reported on the importance of the Common Core and aligned assessments in preparing high school students for college and the workplace.
interpret data and reports from the Smarter Balanced summative and interim assessments.

The state networks of educators will be composed of K-12 educators and faculty from institutes of higher education with expertise in English language arts, mathematics, students with disabilities, and administration.

The work of the networks will be guided by quality criteria policies, developed by the Formative Assessment Advisory Panel, that ensure all Digital Library resources reflect the vision and purpose of the Consortium. Using these criteria, the networks will review existing resources for the Digital Library and recommend additional resources to include.

More information about the development of the Digital Library can be found here.

PRACTICE TEST AVAILABLE IN MAY

With more than a million students signed up to participate in the Smarter Balanced Pilot Test, it’s clear that schools are eager to participate in one of the largest pilots of an assessment system in the U.S.

Data from the Pilot Test will allow the Consortium to gather valuable information about the performance of assessment items and the test delivery system 18 months before the assessment system is launched. Participation in the Pilot Test is also an important step for Smarter Balanced member states and territories as they transition to the Common Core and aligned assessments.

The first phase of the Smarter Balanced Pilot Test includes approximately 10 percent of schools in Governing States. These schools were recruited as a part of a scientific sample to ensure that the results of the Pilot Test fully represent the Consortium.

The second phase allows schools to volunteer to participate. Due to the overwhelming demand for access to the Volunteer Pilot assessment, Smarter Balanced will release a more complete and more broadly available “practice test” in late May.

Like the planned Volunteer Pilot, the Practice Test will allow students to experience items that look and function like those found on the Scientific Pilot. The Practice Test will also include performance tasks (not previously planned for the Volunteer Pilot), and will be constructed to follow a test blueprint similar to the blueprint intended for the operational test.

More details about the Pilot Test and the plans for the Practice Test can be found here.

The Joplin Globe reported on how Missouri districts are implementing the Common Core and preparing for the Smarter Balanced assessments—including participating in the Pilot Test.

Education Week reported on a new study explaining how states can afford higher-quality assessments by reallocating the money they currently spend on state assessments.

In a Curriculum Matters blog post for Education Week, Catherine Gewertz highlights the approval of initial ALDs by Governing States.

The Seattle Times featured an AP article on Washington state’s involvement with the Smarter Balanced Pilot Test.

Alaska Joins the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Alaska has joined the Consortium as an Advisory State. Smarter Balanced now includes 26 member states and territories working collaboratively to develop a next-generation assessment system. As an Advisory State, Alaska may participate in Consortium work groups and provide guidance for the development of the assessment system that will measure college- and career-readiness, and provide actionable information to improve teaching and learning. Read the full release here.

U.S. Virgin Islands Joins Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

The U.S. Virgin Islands became the first Affiliate member of the Consortium. Smarter Balanced Governing States voted in July 2012 to create a new membership category, allowing territories and commonwealths of the United
As teachers and students log on to participate in the Smarter Balanced Pilot Test, communities across the country are learning more about the new assessments through local media coverage. Below is a sampling of perspectives from educators on the Pilot Test:

• “As we prepare to implement fully the Common Core State Standards, it’s important that we have next-generation assessments that reflect this change,” said State Superintendent Randy Dorn in a press release. “We need to get this right. The successful implementation of Smarter Balanced assessments is a critical part of our goal to ensure all students are ready for college and careers by the time they graduate from high school.” – Washington State Superintendent Randy Dorn, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, February 25, 2013

• “It’s gratifying to see so many schools accept the challenge of taking part in this pilot test, which is an important step toward our goal of creating a testing system that measures how ready our students are for the challenges of a changing world,” said State Superintendent Tom Torlakson in a press release from the California State Office of the Superintendent. “The immense interest we are seeing reflects the desire among teachers and administrators for California to move toward assessments focused on improving teaching and learning.” – California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, California Department of Education, February 20, 2013

• “We’re excited. We volunteered to do the pilot this year. We want our kids to have experience taking the test, so we’re ready to go.” – Assistant Superintendent of Schools John Battista, Monroe Patch (Connecticut), February 20, 2013

• “I think it’s nice to be on the front lines of piloting a program like this. Even though there’s going to be inherently some bugs to work out...we get first peek at what’s going on.” – Mackinaw High School Principal Alan Kern, MLive (Michigan), February 26, 2013

• “For us, it’s one of those things, realizing that the bars are gonna be raised a little bit higher. And not that that’s a bad thing, it’s actually a good thing. But it just makes us realize the efforts that we have to put forward to help our students achieve that next level.” – Wiley Elementary School principal Marc Nelson, KAPP-TV (Washington), February 26, 2013

• “The pilot test will help ensure that schools will be able to effectively assess students’ progress toward acquiring the knowledge and skills they need for the future. The new assessment system will give parents, teachers and policy makers better tools and information they can use to increase student achievement.” – Missouri Commissioner of Education Chris L. Nicastro, Farmington Press (Missouri), April 4, 2013
Director of Support for Under-represented Students Magda Chia and Director of Higher Education Collaboration Jacqueline King hosted a webinar with higher education math faculty. The discussion focused on how the Smarter Balanced assessment system can accurately measure mastery of the Common Core State Standards for all students, including English language learners. View the webinar recording here.

NEW COMMON CORE VIDEOS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

The Council of the Great City Schools has developed a suite of video tools that help introduce the public to the Common Core State Standards, equip teachers with a deeper level of understanding of how the standards will affect teaching and learning, and provide parents with a step-by-step guide for what their children will be learning in K-8. Videos and tools include:

- A three-minute PSA video (in English and Spanish) that illustrates how the new state standards will establish milestones for students at each grade level, and how these standards will help students graduate college- and career-ready.
- A series of 45-minute professional development videos for educators and teachers on how to implement the Common Core in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.
- Parent roadmaps to the Common Core for English language arts/literacy and mathematics. These roadmaps show parents what their children will be learning and how they can support that learning in grades K-8 and high school.

SURVEYS OF EDUCATORS SHOW GREATER AWARENESS OF THE COMMON CORE

Several recent surveys demonstrate that states are steadily moving forward with Common Core planning, teachers are more aware of the new state standards and are beginning to implement them, and teachers are optimistic about the impact they will have on student success.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

Can students use their Chromebooks to complete the assessment?

Yes, students may test on Chromebooks. For more information about supported technology and technology requirements, please refer to the Smarter Balanced Technology Strategy Framework and System Requirements Specifications posted on the Smarter Balanced website.
The following reports provide a good pulse on states’ progress in implementing the Common Core:

- **The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership:** Nine in 10 teachers (93%) and principals (90%) surveyed are confident teachers have the skills and ability to implement the new standards. In addition, 93 percent of teachers said “assessments aligned to standards that indicate mastery of concepts” are very helpful or helpful in implementing the new standards.

- **National Survey of Teacher Perspectives on the Common Core:** This survey provides insights into educators’ awareness of the Common Core and the quality of professional development they have received to implement the new standards in the classroom. The survey found that while more than seven in 10 (71%) teachers have had some professional development on the CCSS, more is needed. A similar proportion (72%) agreed that access to aligned assessments would help them feel better prepared to teach to the standards.

- **Moving forward: A National Perspective on States’ Progress in Common Core State Standards Implementation Planning:** This report provides an update on state Common Core implementation. Among the findings: all 47-CCSS adopting states and territories have formal implementation plans, and 21 have fully developed plans in the areas of teacher professional development, curriculum guides, and/or teacher evaluations.