How did Smarter Balanced determine the minimum technology specifications?

The Technology Approach Work Group collaborated with member states, as well as Navigation North, American Institutes for Research, Measured Progress, and Pearson to analyze the memory and processor load that the test delivery engine will require; the bandwidth necessary to transmit stimulus materials and items to students; and the data submitted by Smarter Balanced schools and districts through the Technology Readiness Tool. These analyses identified the minimum technology necessary to assess the full depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards in a next-generation assessment.

I thought this was supposed to be a next-generation assessment. Doesn’t supporting old technology limit the assessment?

For many states, any online assessment is next-generation technology. In addition, each of our item specifications were developed without knowing the limits of technology (e.g., by content experts) and don’t appear to be limited by the OS we will support. Finally, the assessment needs to work and we don’t anticipate extra money to be available in 2012-13 and 2013-14 to buy new computers for 2014-15.

How will new innovative items be constructed after 2014-15 if it is limited to field testing on old technology?

While we haven’t encountered a limit to item types based on the OS we plan to support, during 2013-14 field testing we may consider the browser being used and, if necessary, send some new Field Test items only to the newer browsers if for some reason older browsers can’t support all of the item functions.

I thought Microsoft was ending support for XP in 2014. Doesn’t Smarter Balanced support for XP create a security risk?

Districts need to make decisions about their available budget and the educational technology that best supports their instructional plan. In addition, districts need to make many decisions about their network security with the OS being just one small part. In choosing to support XP in 2014-15, Smarter Balanced is allowing districts to make these decisions. It is not the role of Smarter Balanced to develop network security strategies for districts. We do not anticipate that XP would create a unique security risk for assessment items.

Smaller devices are cheaper, why won’t Smarter Balanced support screen sizes smaller than a 10” class?

Assessment is very precise and standardization is critical. An item on a test must be equally hard (or easy) regardless of whether or not a student views it on a tablet or a desktop. We’re collaborating with technology providers to implement the 10”-class of tablets in large-scale assessment and will continue to consult with them regarding the possibility of allowing additional form factors and screen sizes.
Why do secure browsers need to be installed on each student’s computer prior to those computers being used for a Smarter Balanced assessment?

To deliver a secure summative assessment, the desktop needs to be restricted to prevent students from accessing resources that compromise the meaning of the assessment results and otherwise allow students to breach the security of the assessment. To protect computers from malicious websites, browsers block access to operating system functions and do not generally allow server-side commands to control the computer. For example, without modification, off-the-shelf web-browsers generally do not know if there are other programs running in the background (e.g., a recording program that might take pictures of the assessment items or record a student’s keystrokes). Although Smarter Balanced will continue to investigate the option of providing access to the assessment through server-based applets or commands, it is likely that secure browsers will continue to be required for at least the first two years of the operational assessment for most operating systems.