Quarterly Report YEAR 2 QUARTER 2 (JANUARY–MARCH 2012)

Project Snapshot
The first three months of 2012 were a period of growth and acceleration for Smarter Balanced. As more details of the assessment system are established, the Consortium continues to engage additional participants in the work. February saw our first collaboration conference, gathering state members, work group members, and vendors for face-to-face work meetings. The launch of the new Smarter Balanced website ushers in a new phase of public connectivity. The release of the Technology Readiness Tool will enable states and their districts to gauge technology needs in support of the assessment system.

Policy decisions, consistent with our Theory of Action and technical considerations, were reached on the design of the assessment system, and discussions continued regarding test length, test design, and out-of-grade testing. Member states approved the ELA/Literacy Content Specifications claims, allowing work to proceed to item writing; mathematics claims and Mathematics Content Specifications will be finalized next quarter. Contractors began detailed work on helping develop accommodations and accessibility policies and item/task specifications. New vendor contracts across the assessment community have expanded the team to work in the areas of item writing, psychometric services for pilot and field tests, test specifications and blueprints, and computer adaptive testing (CAT) specifications and preliminary simulation studies.

Support for the Consortium continued to grow with the addition of representatives from higher education in policy and work group roles. Our higher education partners have enhanced the quality and efficacy of our work by exchanging ideas in meetings and on work groups, in which experts from two- and four-year institutions provide not only higher education perspective but content expertise and another level of community support for the Consortium’s work. Dr. Beverly Young of the California State University system joined the Executive Committee as its second higher education representative.

Engage Our Members

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Launched a new public website to strengthen member, stakeholder, and public communications by providing a single, user-friendly source of information and updates on the progress and products of the Consortium—drawing more than 30,000 visitors in the first month.
- Brought together member states and vendors contracted to support the development of the assessments by hosting our first collaboration conference with almost 100 participants, spanning state leads, work group members, and contractors.
- Interviewed and surveyed member state leads to learn more about their state’s current test lengths, to inform Smarter Balanced practices.
- Met with chief state school officers to discuss key policy decisions including sustainability, technology capacity, and test length, and held monthly Chiefs webinars to discuss Consortium progress.
- Held webinar with public information officers to discuss communications resources and support available from Smarter Balanced.
- Produced and distributed new Smarter Balanced tri-fold brochure and fact sheets for internal and external stakeholders, including business leaders and parents.

**PRIORITIES FOR NEXT THREE MONTHS**

- Conduct first joint Smarter Balanced–CCSSO webinar to support state implementation of the CCSS.
- Host Governing States at April ICCS meeting in Atlanta and hold meeting with Higher Education Leads on the last day.
- Continue to add new information, resources, and deliverables to the public website that increase awareness and transparency about the work of the Consortium and provide new avenues for engagement with stakeholders.
- Meet with contributing authors to the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.
- Launch monthly eNewsletter to engage a wider audience about the progress of the Consortium.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

► Continued weekly email updates to all member states to ensure that open lines of two-way communication exist between leadership and Consortium members.

► Increased involvement of higher education community by holding monthly meetings of Higher Education Leads, adding higher education representatives to work groups, hiring regional higher education consultants, and adding a second higher education representative to the Executive Committee.

► Supported attendance of Higher Education Leads from the Governing States at CCSSO’s Implementing the Common Core Standards (ICCS) conference in April to discuss the definitions of college and career readiness.

► Received over 130 work group membership nominations from the higher education community and added two higher education representatives to each of the ten work groups.

► Held two Consortium-wide webinars: computer adaptive testing, with featured speaker Gage Kingsbury; and NAEP and 12th Grade Academic Preparedness research, presented by Cornelia Orr and Susan Loomis from NAGB.

► Received input and support from contributing authors to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy on our assessment claims and item specifications.

► Reviewed the drafts of the item specifications and guidelines with LEA staff, teachers, vendors, and content organizations. Feedback was captured via survey. State leads were encouraged to reach out to districts and teachers as appropriate so that the item specifications may have broad review and input.

► Sought, as part of our Sustainability Task Force, input from state chief school officers and state members on the RFP for a consultant to develop post-grant options on how states will procure, administer, and maintain the assessment system after the federal grant ends in October 2014.

► Provided materials to support states in submitting ESEA Flexibility Waivers.

► Disseminated interviews of Smarter Balanced leadership by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Policy Coordinator Sue Gendron, about the Common Core and the transition to next generation assessments) and in Governing magazine (Executive Director Joe Willhoft and Executive Committee Co-Chair Carissa Miller, about the development of next generation assessments aligned to the Common Core). The Sacramento Bee published an op-ed by Technical Advisory Committee member and Senior Research Advisor for the Consortium Linda Darling-Hammond about the benefits of Smarter Balanced assessments for California.
## Establish Rigorous Processes and Organization Structure

- Engaged in annual “stocktake” meeting with U.S. Department of Education Secretary Duncan, senior leadership, and program officers to discuss year one accomplishments and challenges.
- Implemented standard project management procedures and templates for use by all contractors, allowing for consistent tracking of project schedules and status.
- Made substantial progress on existing vendor contracts and managed the development and procurement efforts of multiple RFPs.
- Added Dr. Beverly Young, assistant vice chancellor of academic affairs for the California State University System, to the Executive Committee as the second higher education representative.
- Launched strategic communications plan informed by stakeholder research study and member state input.
- Developed draft master work plan for formative assessment practices and professional learning, and sent it to member states for feedback.
- Prepared an RFP to hire a consultant for the Sustainability Task Force, to develop post-grant options on how states will procure, administer, and maintain the assessment system after the federal grant ends in October 2014.
- Created the role of state readiness coordinator and requested that each member state assign an individual or team to fill the role. The coordinator will liaise between the state and the Consortium regarding the technology readiness effort.
- Provided procurement update and contractor orientation webinar.

## Priorities for Next Three Months

- Continuously monitor and maintain the Consortium’s Master Work Plan and schedule.
- Receive member feedback on post-2014 Sustainability Task Force consultant RFP and post RFP.
- Select members of the Students with Disabilities Advisory Committee and convene.
- Finalize and obtain Governing States’ approval of the Formative Master Work Plan.
- Finalize communications protocols and implement strategies outlined in communications plan.

## Develop the IT Backbone

- Released a report establishing the IT (information technology) Systems Architecture. Developed collaboratively with member states and technical experts, the IT Systems Architecture identifies the requirements and specifications for the different software components that will administer, score, and report results from Smarter Balanced assessments.
- Convened the Architecture Review Board to support the ongoing technology implementation phase.
- Began reviewing interoperability standards.
- Developed the state Technology Readiness Tool in collaboration with PARCC. The tool will support states and LEAs in evaluating their existing technology and infrastructure in preparation for the transition to online assessments.
- Solicited and selected state readiness coordinators and trained them on how to administer the Technology Readiness Tool through a series of webinars and online training modules and documents.
- Administer the Technology Readiness Tool to all states and analyze the results.
- Begin work on item authoring/item pool application.
- Finalize contract with vendor for test delivery engine application and begin work.
- Release RFP to vendors for design of the reporting system.
Develop the IT Backbone (continued)

- Concluded contract negotiations with successful bidder of the item authoring/item pool application, and prepared to begin implementation.
- Requested vendor proposals to develop a computer-based, adaptive test delivery system.
- Developed the application requirements and RFP for applications to support reporting.
- Hosted a three-part webinar series in collaboration with the Software Information Industry Association and the Association of Test Publishers, to raise awareness about the Smarter Balanced IT Systems Architecture.

Develop the System

- Approved content specifications claims for English language arts/literacy.
- Presented the Mathematics Content Specifications claims to the Governing States for approval.
- Released the third draft of the Item Specifications and Guidelines for review and comment. These item specifications provide item writers with specific guidance on how to translate the Common Core State Standards into assessment items. In addition, guidelines for bias and sensitivity, accessibility and accommodations, and style help item developers and reviewers ensure consistency and fairness.
- Held in-person meeting of over 50 state experts to review and discuss accommodations and accessibility policies and guidelines; distributed surveys to gather current member state guidelines.
- Finalized the Consortium’s design for the interim assessment.
- Developed initial recommendations on test length and discussed with Chiefs and state leads; gathered current test-length data from member states.
- Began the following areas of work:
  - Item/task development for the pilot testing of the summative assessment in 2013. The work will include development and research (through small-scale trials and cognitive labs) of a small number of items and tasks, including innovative items; review of state-submitted items for inclusion in the item bank; and development of new items and tasks.
  - Psychometric services for pilot and field tests, scale development, and implementation of a validity framework.
  - Training materials and policies to guide the writing and review of items and tasks for content, accessibility, and bias/sensitivity.
  - Test specifications and blueprints, CAT specifications, and preliminary simulation studies.

Priorities for Next Three Months

- Obtain Governing States’ approval of content specifications claims for mathematics.
- Obtain agreement on test length.
- Continue work in the areas of item specifications, accessibility and accommodations policy guidelines, item/task materials development, and test and CAT specifications.
- Launch English Language Learners (ELL) and Students with Disabilities Advisory Committees that will provide guidance on development of an accessible assessment for all students.
- Finalize accessibility and accommodations guidelines for item and task development and review.
- Refine the Consortium’s college and career readiness definitions, in consultation with higher education, to guide the content of the high school assessment and the vertical articulation of grades 3–8 performance standards.
- Begin work on item authoring/item pool application.
- Release RFPs for the following areas of work:
  - Reporting system development;
  - Test administration, pilot test, and field test;
  - Determination of translation approach and conducting item translations; and
  - Formative assessment and professional learning.
- Review proposals and select vendor for developing initial achievement level descriptors for the summative assessment.
** PRIORITIES FOR NEXT THREE MONTHS

** ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Reviewed, with Smarter Balanced work groups and member states, the Formative Master Work Plan, which outlines our approach to developing a digital library of professional development materials, resources, and tools aligned to the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced claims and assessment targets.

- Requested vendor proposals to develop a computer-based, adaptive test delivery system for the Smarter Balanced assessments.

- Concluded contract negotiations with successful bidder of the item authoring/item pool application, and prepared to begin implementation.

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** Develop the System (continued) **

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# Procurements Managed by the State of Washington

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Status current as of 4/27/2012