Overview of Achievement Level Descriptors

A committee of educators will develop achievement level descriptors (ALDs) for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium in grades 3–8 and 11 in English language arts/literacy (ELA/literacy) and mathematics. This document provides an overview of what ALDs are, discusses how the Smarter Balanced ALDs will be developed, and outlines the ALD workshop.

Achievement level descriptors are commonly used with K–12 statewide assessments to explain the knowledge, skills, and processes (KSPs) of students in each level of achievement (e.g., Basic, Proficient, and Advanced). In short, they are used as a means of reporting student performance on the assessment. For example, the Proficient category in a state may say, “The proficient student performs on-grade level in mathematics.” These ALDs are often found on student-level score reports or on state websites so that stakeholders (e.g., parent, teachers) understand the types of KSPs that students have demonstrated on the assessment.

The Smarter Balanced ALD-development workshop represents a new direction in the focus and purpose of ALDs. At this workshop, panelists will develop an interconnected system of ALDs, which tie into the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced policy and content claims, and which represent educator expectations and knowledge of students. This system of ALDs will set high-level expectations for the Smarter Balanced assessments and will provide guidance to item writers and standard setters. The ALDs used for communicating KSPs to stakeholders will be developed following the standard-setting workshop.

Types of ALDs

There are four types of ALDs, and the first three will be developed at the October workshop.

- **Policy ALDs** are general descriptors that articulate the goals and rigor for the final performance standards. These descriptors set the tone for and are embedded within subsequent descriptors.
- **Range ALDs** are grade- and content-specific ALDs that may be used by test developers to write items that align to the cognitive and content rigor that has been defined within a particular achievement level.
- **Target ALDs** are created in conjunction with or following the Range ALDs, and they are used to guide the standard setting. The Target ALDs are a subset of the Range ALDs and use only the information from the Range ALDs that define the minimum performance required to be considered as meeting the achievement-level expectation.
- **Reporting ALDs** are the final ALDs that are developed following the standard setting once cut scores are finalized, and they define the appropriate, intended interpretations of the test scores.

Tools for ALD Development

During the workshop, participants will carefully examine the Smarter Balanced Content Specifications and the Common Core State Standards in order to write the different types of ALDs. The policy and content claims that are found within the Smarter Balanced Content Specifications (p. 19 for math, p. 21 for ELA/literacy) will be important for the development of the general policy descriptors. The specific KSPs and the assessment targets found within the Content Specifications will be important for developing the Range ALDs. The Target ALDs will be developed from the Range ALDs. Staff from CTB and the College Board will lead workshop participants through a process to create the Policy, Range, and Target ALDs. For this process to be successful, it will be important that all participants study the Smarter Balanced content specifications prior to start of the workshop.
Achievement Level Descriptors

Workshop Overview

The Smarter Balanced ALD-Writing Workshop will comprise five days of training, discussing, writing, and editing. Unless a participant is a member of the across-grade meta-committee, participation will be limited to two days. The table below provides an overview of the activities of the ALD workshop.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Across-grade meta-committee and higher-education meta-committee create general policy and content ALDs</td>
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<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Grade 11 committee creates range and target ALDs</td>
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<td>Day 3</td>
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<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Grades 3–8 committees create range and target ALDs</td>
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<td>Day 5</td>
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Review Process

The ALDs produced during the five-day workshop will then go through an extensive review and editing process. This review process will allow input from members of the public, state leads, and Smarter Balanced workgroups, among others. Following the review and editing process, the ALDs will be finalized by the leadership of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.