

# Common Core Assessment Consortia<sup>1</sup>

## Background

The Race to the Top Assessment Program, authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), provided funding to consortia of States to develop assessments that are valid, support and inform instruction, provide accurate information about what students know and can do, and measure student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace. These assessments are intended to play a critical role in educational systems; provide administrators, educators, parents, and students with the data and information needed to continuously improve teaching and learning; and help meet the President's goal of restoring, by 2020, the nation's position as the world leader in college graduates.

In September of 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded two Comprehensive Assessment Systems grants to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Consortium and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (SBAC). The consortia are to develop and implement assessment systems by the 2014-2015 school year. In addition, PARCC and SBAC were each provided a supplemental grant award to support the work in their approved application and to successfully transition to the new standards and assessments. Each received a supplemental grant award to include activities that focused on:

- Developing gap analyses between current and new standards, curriculum analysis tools, professional development related to the new standards and assessments including support for educators to better understand the content of the new standards, state and local assessment audits to determine what assessments will no longer be needed.
- Enhancing technology to be used in the assessments systems, including assessment delivery.
- Supporting educator understanding and use of assessment results, and other steps needed to build the professional capacity to implement more rigorous common standards.

On January 7, 2011, PARCC and SBAC each entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the Department regarding these grants. The agreement is intended to provide for substantial communication, coordination, and involvement between the Department and the grantee to ensure the success of the grant. At the August 2011 Governing Board meeting, representatives of PARCC and SBAC provided a briefing about their implementation plans.

Also in 2010 the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education offered competitive grants to spur the development of a new generation of alternate assessments for students with disabilities to be jointly developed and used by groups of states. Grants were awarded to two consortia — the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium (DLM) and the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). These new alternate assessments will be aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and are expected to fit cohesively within the comprehensive assessment systems under development PARCC and SBAC. Both DLM and NCSC are to be ready for use by the 2014-15 school year, the same year in which the comprehensive assessment systems will be operational.

- The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium (DLM) received a \$22 million award. Thirteen (13) member states include Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin serving

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<sup>1</sup> At the May Governing Board Meeting in San Antonio, a hard copy report was distributed that contains detailed information about each of the five assessment consortia. The April 2012 report, *Coming Together to Raise Achievement: New Assessments for the Common Core State Standards*, was published by the Center for K–12 Assessment & Performance Management at ETS, is also available on the Internet at [http://www.k12center.org/rsc/pdf/Coming\\_Together\\_April\\_2012\\_Final.PDF](http://www.k12center.org/rsc/pdf/Coming_Together_April_2012_Final.PDF).

approximately 60,000 students who require an alternate assessment. The University of Kansas Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (CETE) serves as the host, fiscal agent, and project management lead in partnership with member states and three additional partner organizations: the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on professional development and support materials; Edvantia, Inc., on alternate standards definitions and project evaluation; and The Arc on the reporting system and dissemination.

- The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) received a \$45 million award. Nineteen (19) member states/jurisdictions include Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Pacific Assessment Consortium (PAC-6), Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wyoming serving approximately 90,000 students who participate in an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards. The National Center for Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota is the host fiscal agent and leads the Project Management Team. Four additional organizations also provide leadership: UKY on professional development; NCIEA on assessment design; UNCC on curriculum and instruction; and edCount, LLC, on evaluation.

To support the development of English proficiency assessments, the U.S. Department of Education's 2011 competitive Enhanced Assessment Grant provided funding for the development of new assessments by a state consortium. In September 2011 the sole award of \$10.5 million was given to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in collaboration with the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium. The assessment system under development, called Assessment Services Supporting ELs through Technology Systems (ASSETS) is to be ready for use by the 2015-16 school year. Twenty-nine (29) member states/jurisdictions include Alabama, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. WIDA at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research serves as the project management partner. Other organizations have major responsibilities. They include: the Center for Applied Linguistics for item and test development; WestEd for accommodations, validation, and interoperability; the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for language learning progressions development and validation research; Data Recognition Corporation for field testing; and MetriTech for scoring.

## **Introduction**

At this meeting, representatives of the PARCC and SBAC Common Core Assessment Consortia will provide a briefing for the Board about their current status and address topics of interest to the Governing Board. Jeff Nellhaus, representing PARCC, will describe their accomplishments and future plans. Attachment A includes a brief summary about PARCC and the bio for the presenter, Jeff Nellhaus. Joe Willhoft, representing SBAC, will describe recent SBAC accomplishments and future plans. Attachment B includes an overview and summary of the SBAC consortium and the bio for the presenter, Joe Willhoft. Both presenters will discuss collaborations with NAEP and assistance that would be helpful to their consortia going forward.

## Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

<http://www.PARCConline.org>

### Jeff Nellhaus, Presenter

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a consortium of 24 states working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in English and math anchored in what it takes to be ready for college and careers. These new K-12 assessments will build a pathway to college and career readiness by the end of high school, mark students' progress toward this goal from 3rd grade up, and provide teachers with timely information to inform instruction and provide student support. The PARCC assessments will be ready for states to administer during the 2014-15 school year. PARCC received a \$186 million grant through the U.S. Department of Education's [Race to the Top assessment competition](#) to support the development and design of the next-generation assessment system.

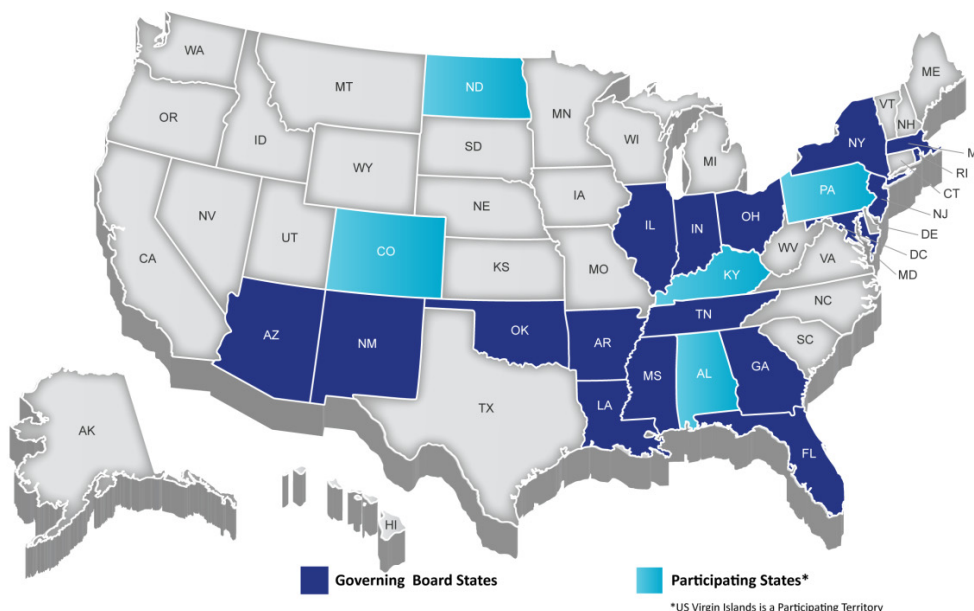
### *The PARCC Vision*

PARCC states have committed to building a K-12 assessment system that:

- Builds a pathway to college and career readiness for all students,
- Creates high-quality assessments that measure the full range of the Common Core State Standards,
- Supports educators in the classroom,
- Makes better use of technology in assessments, and
- Advances accountability at all levels.

### *PARCC States*

Collectively the 23 states in PARCC educate about 24 million students and include 16 of the 22 Race to the Top winners. The PARCC states include: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Tennessee. Governing Board states are shown in dark blue and Participating states are in light blue.



### **PARCC 2011-2012 Progress**

In the past year, PARCC has made significant progress to build its assessment system by contracting with vendors for the following:

- Creating the architecture to build PARCC assessment technology infrastructure
- Development of assessment items and tasks
- Facilitation and management of Educator Leader Cadres
- Item tryouts, field test & operational forms construction (expected summer 2012)

### **Biography of Jeffrey Nellhaus**

Jeffrey Nellhaus joined Achieve as Director of PARCC Assessment. PARCC (Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) is one of two state consortia that received Race to the Top Assessment Grants to design and develop next generation student assessment systems based on the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts & Literacy and Mathematics.

Before joining Achieve, Mr. Nellhaus spent nearly 25 years with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education where held the positions of Deputy Commissioner, Acting Commissioner, and Associate Commissioner for Curriculum and Assessment. While at the MA DESE, Mr. Nellhaus directed the design, development and implementation of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), and the development of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, which include the Common Core State Standards. For his work on MCAS he was awarded the Manuel Carballo Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Service.

Mr. Nellhaus has served on the National Validity Studies Panel to National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and on Technical Advisory Committees for the states of Maine, Kentucky and Rhode Island. He has also served on the Technical Advisory Committee on Standard Setting for NAEP and on the Growth Model Peer Review Panel for the U.S. Department of Education.

Prior to joining the Massachusetts Department of Education, Mr. Nellhaus was a Peace Corps Volunteer in India, taught chemistry and mathematics in a public high school in Vermont, and directed a federally-funded educational program in Thailand for Cambodian and Laotian refugees preparing to resettle in the U.S.

Mr. Nellhaus holds a B.S. in Chemistry from the University of Massachusetts, a M.S. in Science Teaching from Antioch Graduate School of Education, and an Ed.M. in Administration, Policy and Planning from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

## SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org>

### Joe Willhoft, Presenter

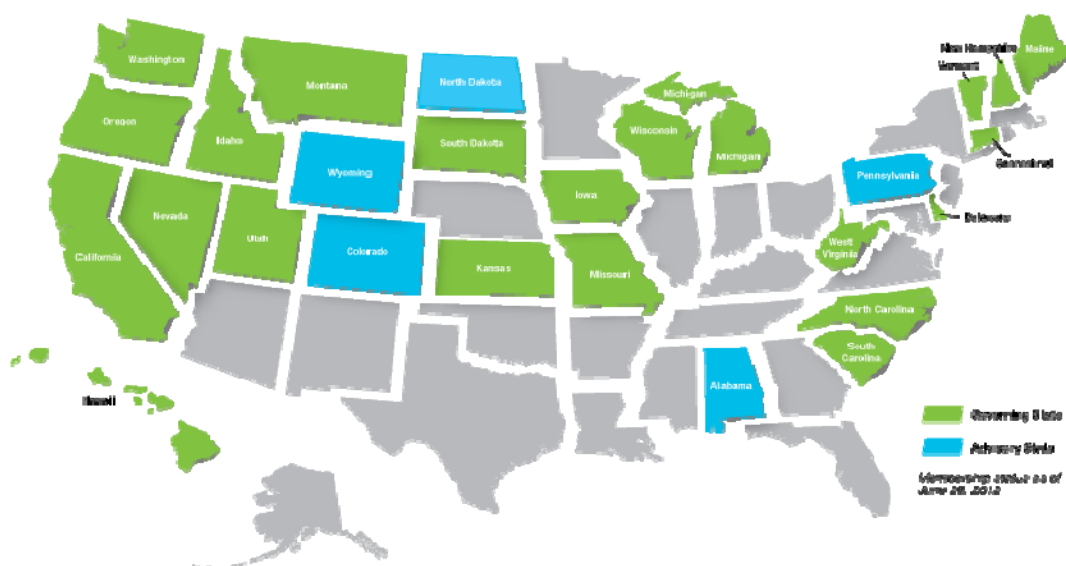
The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a national consortium of states that have been working collaboratively since December 2009 to develop a student assessment system aligned to a common core of academic content standards to apply for a Race-to-the-Top Assessment grant. On the Sept. 2, 2010, the SBAC was awarded a four-year \$176 million Race to the Top assessment grant by the US Department of Education (USED) to develop a student assessment system aligned to a common core of academic standards.

SBAC will create state-of-the-art adaptive online exams, using “open source” technology. The online system will provide accurate assessment information to teachers and others on the progress of all students, including those with disabilities, English language learners and low- and high-performing students. The system will include:

1. the required summative exams (offered twice each school year);
2. optional formative, or benchmark, exams; and
3. a variety of tools, processes and practices that teachers may use in planning and implementing informal, ongoing assessment. This will assist teachers in understanding what students are and are not learning on a daily basis so they can adjust instruction accordingly.

### SBAC States

Smarter Balanced now includes 22 Governing States and five Advisory States. The member states include Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Smarter Balanced member states educate approximately 22 million of the nation’s public K to 12 students. These states share a commitment to developing a next-generation assessment system aligned to the Common Core State Standards that provide educators with meaningful feedback and actionable data. Governing states are shown in green and Advisory states are in blue.



## ***Smarter Balanced Update***

Smarter Balanced is approaching the end of the second year of the four-year Race to the Top Assessment Program grant and is on track to deliver a fully functional assessment system by the 2014-15 school year. Fourteen of the 17 anticipated contracts to conduct the work of Smarter Balanced are either complete, underway, or in contract negotiations. Working with our 27 member states and partners, we have established an information technology architecture, are developing a common accessibility and accommodations policy, and are developing the first batch of assessment items and performance tasks aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Keeping in mind the end-goal of the assessment system, Smarter Balanced is presently entering into contract negotiations with a vendor to provide an open-source reporting solution that will support summative and interim assessments.

This September Smarter Balanced will hold the second of its bi-annual collaboration conferences. At this conference the Consortium will engage Chiefs and State Leads on important assessment design and implementation decisions and Smarter Balanced work group members and contractors will have the opportunity to meet face to face to collaborate on work in process.

Much of the Consortium's work this summer and fall will center on research and development of items and tasks for the Pilot Test of the assessment system in early 2013. The Pilot Test—which will begin in late February and run through March—will provide the first opportunity for a large-scale tryout of the 10,000 assessment items and performance tasks now being developed. Pilot testing will not only inform ongoing item development and help orient Consortium members to the Smarter Balanced assessment, it will also serve the important function of providing initial item and task calibrations. These initial calibrations will provide the information necessary to build forms for the Field Test in 2014. Final item and task calibration will be conducted on the Field Test data.

Smarter Balanced is working with educators from Governing States to write and review items guided by the Consortium's item and task specifications. Developed earlier this year, the item/task specifications and review guidelines are designed to provide item writers with guidance on how to translate the Smarter Balanced Content Specifications into high-quality items and tasks with appropriate reviews for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility. In addition, the Consortium is conducting research to better understand how students respond to innovative item types. Cognitive labs are underway, and small-scale trials will begin this fall.

The Consortium is finalizing accessibility and accommodations guidelines to ensure that the assessment system will provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for students with disabilities and English language learners. The assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers—allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Accessibility tools include, but are not limited to: foreground and background colors; tactile presentation of content (e.g., Braille); and translated presentation of content in signed form and select languages.

Smarter Balanced is also collaborating with institutions of higher education to ensure that the 11<sup>th</sup> grade summative assessment provides evidence that students are ready to enter into entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary courses. Each member state has appointed a higher education lead to provide input in the development of the assessment system and coordinate outreach to higher education institutions in their state.

The process for drafting initial achievement level descriptors is underway. The Consortium has initiated a contract with CTB to assist with the development of preliminary achievement level descriptors. K-12 and

higher education will have an opportunity to provide early input into the process which started with an online Webinar for our higher education leads last month, and continuing into the fall of 2012, with further rounds of review and input opportunity anticipated from the larger education community extending into the winter.

This summer, state higher education leads are drafting plans to engage faculty and administrators in the implementation of the Common Core and Smarter Balanced assessments. In addition, Smarter Balanced has engaged five highly experienced and respected higher education leaders to work with the Governing States on a regional basis. These regional senior consultants assist the state in crafting and implementing plans to engage college faculty and administrators in understanding the Common Core, responding to the standards' implications for higher education, and contributing to the development of the Smarter Balanced Assessment system.

This past June Governing States approved the Formative Assessment master work plan. This master work plan describes the key activities and timing of the Smarter Balanced Formative Assessment work ahead. Key activities include the creation of a digital library of curricular resources, providing assessment literacy training, and development of instructional modules. As part of this work, Smarter Balanced will convene State Leadership Teams charged with recruiting an average of 100 educators per state to form State Networks of Educators. These educator networks will provide feedback on the development of formative assessment resources and professional learning tools. They will also serve as ambassadors to help states engage stakeholders with resources and trainings to understand and interpret assessment results.

### **Biography of Joe Willhoft**

Mr. Willhoft is the Executive Director of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, one of two federally-funded consortia that are developing a new generation of state assessment systems aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Prior to this appointment he was the assistant superintendent for assessment and student information for the state of Washington. His responsibilities included design and implementation of Washington's assessment program and collection and reporting of student information for the state's longitudinal data system. Before working at the state level, Mr. Willhoft directed assessment and evaluation activities at the district level for more than twenty years, primarily in Tacoma Public Schools in Washington and in Maryland.

Mr. Willhoft earned his doctorate in educational measurement and statistics from the University of Maryland. He is past president of the Maryland Assessment Group, the Washington Educational Research Association, and the American Educational Research Association Classroom Assessment Special Interest Group. He has been involved in multiple collaborative data and assessment efforts, including having served on technical advisory committees in several states and the Technical Work Group for the most-recent congressionally-mandated evaluation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). He is past chair of the CCSSO/NAGB Policy Advisory Task Force, a collaborative effort of the National Assessment Governing Board and the Council of Chief State School Officers.