

IMPLEMENTING COMMON CORE ASSESSMENTS:

Challenges and Recommendations



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Council of the Great City Schools



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Implementing Common Core Assessments

Implementing Common Core Assessments: Challenges and Recommendations

**By the
Council of the Great City Schools**

Introduction

The United States is transforming how it assesses the academic attainment of its schoolchildren. These changes will come, in part, with the implementation of the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (SBAC) assessments in the spring of 2015, as well as other assessments developed by individual states to measure student performance on the Common Core State Standards or other college- and career-readiness benchmarks.

These tests—selected by the states—will replace the disparate collection of assessments that many states independently develop, administer, and score, and they will give the country a clearer sense of how our children are performing across jurisdictions and compared to students in other countries. Except for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), nothing like a common set of academic standards and assessments has existed in the United States until now.

The assessments will also be different from anything the United States has done before for another reason. The state assessments that currently exist grew largely from requirements by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, and were meant to be inexpensive and quickly scored. The result was that, in some cases, many of these exams used rather simplistic, multiple-choice questions where students could pick the correct answer from among a number of options.

In contrast, while the new PARCC and SBAC assessments in English language arts will retain some multiple-choice selections, students will also be asked to read from multiple challenging texts, construct both short and extended responses citing information and evidence from those texts, and justify their responses. In math, students will be asked to apply their understanding of key concepts, solve more complicated, multi-step problems, and explain their reasoning.

In addition to the assessments being different for students, their administration will present a number of challenges for school administrators and teachers: (1) Administrators will need to put technology in place for students to access and take the assessments, (2) they will need to create a test-taking schedule based on both technology and human resources and enlist teachers and administrators to supervise the assessments in ways that are different from current assessments, and (3) they will need to explain the results to a public that will not be used to seeing test scores that appear so low—at least initially.

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For their part, teachers will be asked to fundamentally shift their instruction in order to equip students with a deeper understanding of content, critical reading and problem-solving skills, and the ability to demonstrate and apply their knowledge in novel ways.¹

It will be important for school districts to ensure the smoothest and most effective possible implementation of these assessments. All school systems and schools want to make sure that students have the best possible experience as their learning is being assessed. In addition, school systems, administrators, and teachers will want to make sure that they are getting the most accurate information possible from the assessments in order to improve programming and instruction.

The purpose of this booklet is to help school districts across the country, particularly those in our major cities, get ready for these assessments. The booklet will briefly summarize important features of both major common core assessments—PARCC and SBAC—outline major challenges that school districts will need to attend to when planning for these assessments, and present proposals and recommendations to school districts to help them in the planning process.

There is a great deal at stake in making sure that the new assessments are administered properly and effectively. Smooth implementation of the assessments will help build the public's confidence that the nation's movement toward the Common Core State Standards is a step in the right direction. Conversely, a rocky implementation could be used to fuel opposition to the new standards and undermine their political viability—in common core and non-common core states alike.

This risk is particularly high in America's Great City Schools. The press is located in our cities and they will look at our schools first in judging whether implementation nationwide is going well. In addition, administration is more complicated in our city school districts because of the sheer scale of operations. Getting these assessments right is critical to our students, to the future of the standards, and to the public's view of our schools. This booklet is meant to help ensure success.

Summary of the PARCC and SBAC Assessments

PARCC and SBAC are the two state-led assessment organizations established with funds from the federal Race-to-the-Top program to develop and implement tests aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The following briefing describes the two assessment systems.²

PARCC. The purpose of the PARCC assessment system is to increase the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for success in college and the workplace. It is

¹ See *Beyond Test Scores: What NAEP Results Tell Us About Implementing the Common Core in Our Classrooms*. Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, 2014.

² Source: *Coming Together to Raise Achievement: New Assessments for the Common Core State Standards*. Center for K-12 Assessment & Performance Management at ETS, Updated March 2014, page 6.

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based on the core belief that assessments should be a tool for enhancing teaching and learning. The state-led PARCC consortium intends for the assessments to help educators increase student learning by providing timely, concrete data throughout the school year to inform instruction, interventions, and professional development as well as to improve teacher, school, and system effectiveness.

The system of aligned diagnostic, interim, and summative assessments is being designed to provide valid, reliable, and timely data; provide feedback on student performance; help determine whether students are college- and career-ready or on track; support the needs of educators in the classroom; and provide data for accountability, including measures of growth.

The PARCC assessment system will consist of five components: a required two-part computer-based summative assessment (a performance-based assessment and an end-of-year assessment); two optional components (a diagnostic assessment and a midyear assessment); and one required non-summative assessment in speaking and listening.

Teachers will have access to an online repository of resources being developed by PARCC, culled from the best products from member states, and professional development modules to support implementation and use of the assessment system. A web-based reporting system is expected to provide teachers, students, parents, and administrators with timely, user-appropriate information about the progress and instructional needs of students.

PARCC will leverage technology across the design and delivery of the system to support student engagement, innovation, accessibility, cost efficiency, and the rapid return of results. (For additional information on PARCC, see the “frequently asked questions” section in the appendix of this report.)

SBAC. The state-led Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is expected to be fully functional by the 2014-15 school year.³ This comprehensive system has been designed to strategically “balance” summative, interim, and formative assessments through an integrated system of standards, assessments, instruction, and teacher development, while providing accurate year-to-year indicators of students’ progress toward college and career readiness.

Two of the system’s three components—the year-end summative assessment and the interim assessments available throughout the year—will contain multiple item types, including scenario-based performance tasks. The third component—a web-based set of formative tools and resources—is an instructional resource that will support teachers with their day-to-day, classroom-based assessment activities.

All components will be fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards and will draw upon research-based learning progressions that further define how students acquire the knowledge and skills called for in the standards.

³ Source: *Coming Together to Raise Achievement: New Assessments for the Common Core State Standards*. Center for K-12 Assessment & Performance Management at ETS, Updated March 2014, page 17.

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A foundational feature of both the year-end summative assessments and the interim assessment system is that computer adaptive testing will be used to minimize testing time, assure broader coverage of common core standards, and provide greater score precision, particularly for students toward the high or low end of the performance spectrum.

Teachers will have access to an optional suite of online resources and tools to help them provide high-quality instruction using formative assessment processes. Through an interactive electronic platform, Smarter Balanced will provide both standardized and customized reports that can be targeted to a range of audiences for tracking, describing, and analyzing progress. (For additional information on SBAC, see the “frequently asked questions” section in the appendix of this report.)

A guiding principle for states in Smarter Balanced is “responsible flexibility.” The Consortium will make it possible for states to customize system components, while also ensuring comparability of student scores across all participating states on the summative assessments. Exhibit 1 on the next page summarizes and compares the critical features of both testing systems.

Exhibit 1. Key Similarities and Differences of the Comprehensive Assessment Consortia

PARCC	SBAC
Major Similarities	
Summative Assessments	
Online assessments for grades 3-8 and high school, ELA and mathematics	Online assessments for grades 3-8 and high school, ELA and mathematics
Uses a mix of item types, including selected response, constructed response, technology enhanced, and complex performance tasks	Uses a mix of item types, including selected response, constructed response, technology enhanced, and complex performance tasks
Has two components, both given during the final weeks of the school year	Has two components, both given during the final weeks of the school year
Uses both electronic and human scoring	Uses both electronic and human scoring
Is delivered and supported on computers, laptops, and tablets and a limited variety of operating systems.	Delivery supported on computers, laptops, and tablets and a limited variety of operating systems.
Other Assessments, Resources, and Tools	
Has online practice tests by grade and subject	Has online practice tests by grade and subject
Has optional diagnostic and interim assessments	Has optional diagnostic and interim assessments
Has professional development modules	Has professional development modules
Has formative items and tasks for classroom use	Has formative items and tasks for classroom use
Has an online reporting suite	Has an online reporting suite
Has a digital library for sharing vetted resources and tools	Has a digital library for sharing vetted resources and tools
Maintains state ownership and control of student data, like current state assessments	Maintains state ownership and control of student data, like current state assessments
Major Differences	
Summative Assessments for Accountability	
Has summative assessments for grades 3-11	Has summative assessments for grades 3-8 and 11 (states can add grades 9, 10, and/or 12 at an additional cost per student tested)
End-of-year test: Fixed-form delivery, i.e., students take one of several equated sets of items and tasks	End of year test: Adaptive delivery, i.e., students see an individually tailored set of items and tasks

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PARCC	SBAC
Performance-based assessment: Three ELA performance tasks and one or more mathematics tasks	Performance tasks: One ELA performance task and one mathematics performance task
Reporting results: Student results will be reported as one of five performance levels	Reporting results: Student achievement will be reported as one of four achievement levels
Language translations to be provided at additional cost	Language translation provided at no additional cost in Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog, Ilokana, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, and Ukrainian
One retake opportunity for grades 3-8 and up to three for high school, with state approval	One retake opportunity, but only for instances of a test administration irregularity
Estimated total testing time for combined ELA and mathematics, spread over nine testing sessions:	Estimated total testing time ⁴ for combined ELA and mathematics, spread over several testing sessions over several days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 3..... 8 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 3-5.....7 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 4-5.....9 hours 20 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 6-8.....9 hours 25 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 6-8.....7 hours 30 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 9-10..... 9 hours 45 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 11..... 9 hours 55 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 11..... 8 hours 30 minutes
Paper and pencil version available as accommodation for the 2014-15 school year for schools approved by their state	Paper and pencil version available as an accommodation for three years for schools not ready for online delivery
Assessment Delivery	
States and districts select from a set of four-week testing windows, one for the performance-based assessments and one for the end-of-year assessments	States establish one 12-week testing window for grades 3-8 and one 7-week testing window for grade 11 for summative assessments
A vendor delivery platform will be used through 2014-15 (TESTNAV), after which a PARCC-developed, open-source or fully documented delivery system will be available to member states and their contractors	An open source delivery system is being developed and will be made freely available to states and vendors for delivery of SBAC assessments and other assessment applications
All system components delivered and operational in the 2014-15 school, except for K-1 formative	All system components delivered and operational in the 2014-15 school year

⁴ The summative assessments are untimed, so estimates are descriptive only.

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PARCC	SBAC
tools, diagnostic assessments, speaking/listening assessment, and PARCC test delivery platform	
Other Assessments, Resources and Tools	
A diagnostic assessment (grades 2-8) and a mid-year assessment (grades 3-11), with the latter made up primarily of tasks similar to the summative performance-based tasks (optional use)	Interim assessments for grades 3-8 and 11 (optional) will be computer adaptive and include multiple item types, including performance tasks. The number, timing, and scope (all standards or clusters of standards) can be locally determined. Item bank can be accessed by educators for instructional and professional development uses (optional use).
A speaking and listening assessment for grades K-12 (required for grades 3-8 and high school but not used for accountability)	No speaking and listening assessment
K-1 formative performance tasks (optional use)	Exemplar instructional modules, three per grade level in ELA/literacy and mathematics, with teacher training resources; additional instructional resources submitted by educators that meet quality criteria.
(Future) item bank with released summative items and tasks	
State-developed formative and diagnostic tools will be added to the Partnership Resource Center	Formative tools, processes, and practices available in digital library
Sustainability Model	
Independent non-profit organization governed by chief school officers of PARCC states, PARCC Inc.	Affiliation being established with CRESST at UCLA
Costs	
\$29.50 per student for summative assessments in 2014-15 includes centralized delivery and scoring	\$22.50 per student for summative assessments in 2014-15 includes estimated costs for state-determined delivery and scoring
Costs of additional resources to be announced	Additional \$4.80 per student annually for optional resources

Source: *Key Similarities and Differences of the Comprehensive Assessment Consortia*. K-12 Center at ETS, updated March 2014, pages 29-30.

Challenges in Implementing the New Assessments

School districts across the country, particularly major urban school districts, will face a number of critical challenges this new school year as they implement PARCC, SBAC, and other state-defined college- and career-ready assessments. These challenges fall into five broad areas: leadership and politics; academic preparation; assessment planning, logistics, and sustainability; technology; and strategic communications. For a successful implementation, school district personnel will need to attend to all of them. This section describes those challenges, and the subsequent section will present recommendations for addressing them.

A. Leadership and Political Challenges

The most immediate and overarching challenges facing school systems are the need for district leaders to make implementation of the new assessments a major priority for the district and the need to constructively address the range of political challenges that will inevitably arise. Leadership and political challenges that school districts will need to be aware of include the following—

- *High-level Strategic Vision.* The foremost challenge that will present itself to school districts involves how well states and their school districts have envisioned what a successful implementation looks like. How well has that vision been articulated by the state and understood by local school districts? Is there a common strategy for implementation across the state and within the district? Does everyone have a clear understanding of what that strategy is and what the benchmarks are for pursuing the strategy?
- *District Priority.* A related challenge facing school districts is whether their leadership views effective implementation of the assessments as a major priority. Are the superintendent and school board communicating the importance of both the new tests and a smooth implementation to everyone in the district and the community? Are they deploying the personnel, resources, time, and monitoring necessary to signal to everyone that this is a priority?
- *An Overarching Plan.* A major challenge for school districts in the implementation of the new assessments will involve the development of a comprehensive plan to guide their work. Has the district plotted out the work it needs to accomplish in order to have a smooth and effective roll-out of the assessments? Is this plan comprehensive, well integrated, and coordinated? Has it articulated the roles and responsibilities of key staff, as well as the importance of full organizational participation? Does it clearly lay out procedures, tools, and ultimate outcomes? Has this plan been communicated widely and understood clearly throughout the district?
- *Staff Communication and Collaboration.* It will also be vital to break down the silos that often define district central offices and to ensure cross-departmental collaboration in the implementation of the new standards and assessments. To undertake such a dramatic shift in teaching and learning, staff will need to communicate and work together closely to ensure that schools are provided with consistent and comprehensive support, resources,

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and guidance. Staff and teachers will also need to be trained on how to communicate with parents and community members since research shows that most parents prefer to receive information about schools from teachers rather than from other parents.

- *Change Management.* A fifth major challenge is the need to effectively manage the changes associated with the new assessments. Do parents, teachers, school-based staff, and district-level personnel understand what the changes are and the implications of the new approach to both instruction and assessment? Do staff and parents understand why these changes are being made? Do school personnel and community members understand and embrace their roles in the change process?
- *Community and Staff Engagement.* A related issue facing school districts in the implementation of the new assessments is whether the community, parents, school staff, and other stakeholders feel engaged in the process of putting the assessments in place and feel a sense of ownership for how well it is done. Has the district effectively communicated with the community, parents, and staff about the standards and assessments and their implications?
- *Press and Media Scrutiny.* The Great Cities are home to the nation’s media and major newspapers, radio, and television stations. Many of these outlets will be looking for concrete examples of how implementation is going—and opponents of the standards are likely to look specifically for examples of school and district missteps to bolster their claims that the new benchmarks are a boondoggle. This is more than a communications challenge to school districts; it is a strategic and political challenge as well. (See section on communications challenges for further discussion.)
- *Political Opposition.* As test-time approaches, the level of political rhetoric about the assessments is likely to intensify. A large part of this will be outside the school district’s control, but districts need to be mindful of it and of how their implementation feeds the political rhetoric. There are vocal opponents of the standards and the assessments—from the political right and left—that would like to block implementation or see it go badly. Is the school system cognizant of where this opposition is likely to come from and what their best arguments are? Is the district prepared to address them? How well has this messaging been coordinated with local political and business leaders, other school districts, and allies?
- *Parental Concerns over Testing Time and Difficulty.* In addition to challenges from various political and ideological forces, parents and others may raise concerns about the length and difficulty of the new assessments. This may be particularly true in school districts whose states have chosen to participate in PARCC. School districts are not fully in control of this situation, but they may be the victims of parent pushback. Districts will need to consider how they conduct outreach and constructively address parental concerns about test-taking time or difficulty.
- *Lower Test Scores.* Student scores on the new assessments are likely to appear much lower to parents and the public than the results of previous assessments. Is the school system prepared to explain why this is occurring and what it means and doesn’t mean? Is

there a plan in place for communication and outreach to the public? (See section on communications challenges.)

- *Other Tests Given by the District and Required by the State.* Compounding the challenge of explaining the time students will spend taking the new test is the fact that some states will be giving both PARCC or SBAC and their old summative assessments—or parts of the old assessments—in school year 2014-15. This is likely to be a temporary situation, but it will not make sense to a lot of people. Are the state and the school system being clear with the public and the press about how these assessments are being sequenced? In addition, districts will be faced with the challenge of articulating how the new assessments fit into the broader testing portfolio of the school system.
- *Teacher Organization Concerns.* Some teacher organizations—national, state, and local—have expressed concerns about the use of assessment results and the amount of testing in general. Some of these concerns are well grounded but others are not. How has the school district addressed these concerns with teachers, their organizations, and the parents who listen to them?
- *Decentralization and Non-standardization.* Many school districts have decentralized and non-standardized approaches to technology budgeting. The result may be an uneven need for devices from school to school depending on the leadership of the principals and their investments in technology. The district may face circumstances where it may be appearing to reward schools for not keeping up to date if the central office makes purchases in support of the new testing. In addition, the lack of standards in purchasing across schools may result in widely different technology without a central understanding of computing capacity to support the testing.

B. Academic Challenges of Preparing Students and Teachers

Successful implementation of the assessments will require more than administering the tests effectively or securing public support and buy-in. It also means ensuring that students are prepared to do well on the new tests. And it means ensuring that classroom teachers are prepared to modify their instruction to meet the new standards. These may be the most difficult and long-term implementation challenges that school districts will face with the new assessments. Academic and instructional challenges that school districts will need to address include—

- *Expectations of Students and Their Work.* A major challenge to the successful implementation of the new assessments involves adult belief systems in what students can do. Many staff members and teachers will be tempted to claim that the tests are too hard and that students are incapable of meeting the new standards and doing well on the new assessments. The district's ability to infuse high expectations and necessary supports into the implementation of the assessments will be critical to their success—and to the success of students.
- *Preparing Students to Meet Higher Learning Standards.* Preparing for new assessments aligned to the common core standards will involve clarifying why the changes conveyed in the new standards are being made, what they entail at each grade level, and what their

implementation will look like in classrooms. In addition, teachers will need the time and opportunity to plan for and practice implementing the instructional shifts prescribed in the new standards. Do teachers know how to build and enhance complex language skills and vocabulary among their students? Do teachers and principals know what to look for in student work to determine whether students are making progress developing these skills? Do students have access to complex texts, and are teachers prepared to use such texts to advance learning? Do teachers know how to develop and use text-dependent questions that require students to explain their answers and apply their skills? Are students grappling with ideas, growing in their knowledge, working and conversing with their peers, presenting evidence and justifying their reasoning, being expansive in their responses, and applying their skills to concrete problems? Do teachers have effective strategies to help students fill in gaps in their learning while working on grade-level requirements?

- *Preparing Students to Meet Higher Assessment Standards.* Many students are used only to seeing assessment items on their annual state tests or end-of-course tests that are multiple choice and do not require them to explain their answers or perform a task. An immediate challenge that students will have relates to preparing them and their teachers for the differing formats in which questions may be asked, in contrast to previous state tests. Part of this challenge will involve preparing students to tackle multi-step problems that require them to struggle over an extended period with how to apply a concept they have learned and to write out an explanation of their reasoning. No longer will teachers be asking questions that require students to give one-sentence responses; students will be asked to generate thoughts, justify their thinking, and cite evidence. In addition, the challenge in preparing students will involve having teachers develop and regularly use these types of complex, multi-layered questions in their own classroom work and quizzes rather than using test-preparation worksheets.
- *Differentiating Student Preparation.* Students of differing needs will also present a diversity of challenges to school districts as they implement the new standards and assessments. Students who are learning English as their second language, for instance, may require additional instruction and support on mathematical vocabulary to understand precisely what is being asked of them in math items, and they will need the language skills and grasp of English conventions to effectively communicate their answers. Similarly, students with disabilities will require special preparation, depending on the disability, well beyond what their accommodations specify. In fact, a wide range of students will present unique challenges —students who are eligible for a free or reduced price meal; struggling learners in either reading or math; students who are chronically absent from school or are highly mobile; male students, particularly males of color; Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE); gifted and talented students; and students who are encountering the new standards and assessments at the mid-point in their school career.
- *Revisiting and Updating the Curriculum.* School districts should continue to design and, where necessary, rework or restructure their formal curricula or scope and sequence documents to ensure alignment with the common core and other college- and career-ready standards. But these materials need not only align with the standards; they also

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need to provide concrete, accessible guidance for classroom instruction and should embed technology in their use. This is critical for ensuring that the standards are well implemented at the ground level and that students have access to the instruction they need to do well on the assessments.

- *Securing High-Quality and Aligned Instructional Materials and Texts.* This challenge is a particularly difficult one for most school systems because of the relentless salesmanship facing staff members who make purchasing decisions. Many publishers claim that their materials, texts, and tools are fully aligned to the common core and other college- and career- readiness standards. This claim is rarely true, so district leaders face the challenge of making such determinations themselves. Has the district reviewed its materials and other instructional tools and guidelines to ensure alignment with the standards? Has the school district offered adequate professional development on the use of those materials and tools? In addition, a major challenge facing district implementation of the standards and the assessments will involve ensuring that the materials, texts, and supports are appropriate for the district’s varying subgroups, i.e., English language learners, students with disabilities, and struggling learners.
- *Overseeing and Monitoring Implementation.* Effective implementation of the standards will also involve the challenge of ensuring that they are being put into place as the district’s leadership intended. How does the district monitor implementation, and how does it know when it is off-track? Has the district developed indicators of successful implementation at the systems, school, and classroom levels? Has the district developed or adopted instructional rounds or look-for protocols that will ensure that the expected instructional shifts are being carried out in classrooms? Do all instructional staff understand the protocols? Does the district have a feedback loop in place by which it can quickly identify and resolve implementation problems?
- *Professional Development.* This challenge is a multifaceted one and involves going well beyond familiarizing teachers with “what” the standards are to preparing them on “how” to implement them in their classrooms. Has the district defined what professional development is needed to adequately prepare teachers to make the instructional shifts called for in the standards? How has the district changed the focus of its professional development to focus on new academic needs? Has the district put into place appropriate mechanisms to promote teacher use of the standards, student work samples and artifacts, and released items from PARCC and SBAC. (Are they being used by teachers in their professional learning communities and common planning time?) Are teachers using the time to modify their instruction and co-construct lessons that are consistent with the new standards? Is the work embedded in ongoing teacher development? Is it articulated across grades and content areas? Moreover, will the professional development cover use of the technology being deployed to administer the new assessments, e.g., item types, keyboarding skills, drag and drop?
- *Differentiating Teacher Preparation.* Another issue confronting school districts as they implement the new assessments will involve differentiating professional development according to the experience and expertise of teachers. New teachers may have substantially different needs than mid-career teachers and teachers near retirement—even

if they are implementing the same standards and assessments. In addition, elementary and secondary-level teachers will all require differing kinds of preparation for the new assessments. Reading teachers will need preparation that differs from the preparation of math teachers. Moreover, almost all teachers will have English language learners and students with disabilities in their classes who will require differentiated instruction. And teachers in subjects other than reading and mathematics, particularly science and social studies, will require additional preparation on how to build the standards into their respective subject areas.

- *Pre-service Preparation.* While it may not be feasible for school districts to address this challenge in the 2014-15 school year, over the long run they will face the challenge of whether or not the universities and colleges of education preparing our future teachers are doing so with the new standards and assessments in mind.

C. Operational Challenges

In addition to challenges of leadership, politics, and the academic preparation of students, school districts will be faced with a host of logistical and operational challenges in the implementation of the new assessments. Short- and long-term challenges that school districts will need to address include—

Assessment Systems and Policies

- *Streamlining Systems of Assessment.* School districts nationwide test students extensively. Unfortunately, many of these assessments were designed well before the common core and other college- and career-ready standards were in place, and they do not necessarily align with the new standards. In addition, many school systems administer tests that have fundamentally similar purposes and are sometimes redundant. One of the fundamental challenges presented by the new assessments involves building a system of tests that fit together and are appropriately aligned with the expectations that the new standards are setting. This challenge will exist in the 2014-15 school year and beyond. Finally, school systems will face the challenge of deciding upon and implementing interim or benchmark assessments and ensuring that they fit with the summative assessments they will be giving.
- *Test Administration Guidelines.* School districts will also face challenges associated with needing to develop their own test-administration guidelines to accompany and supplement those provided by the states and the test vendors. These may need to include which portions of the day will be devoted to testing, which testing segments can be given when, etc. The district will also need to make decisions about the use of paper-pencil test administration—under what conditions and circumstances, how accommodations are applied, and who approves them.
- *Accommodations.* Another challenge facing school districts with the new assessments relates to accommodations for English language learners and students with disabilities. These accommodations may be different from the ones that previous state assessments included. School districts will need to ensure that each student needing accommodations

gets the appropriate set when taking their technology-based assessments, something that may be difficult if the tests are not proctored by a student's teachers.

- *Use of Data.* Districts will also face the challenge of what to do with the data that the new assessments generate. Staff members will need to think about this before the assessments are actually administered. How will the assessment results be disaggregated? Will staff members and teachers be provided with item-by-item results? How will the results be used by the district—and by principals and teachers—to improve instruction? How will the results be used to define and shape professional development of school-based staff? How will the results be integrated into the ongoing work of professional learning communities? How will results be used to focus teachers on next steps in the implementation process to improve student achievement? How will student work samples be integrated into the examination and analysis of results from the new assessments? How will results be used for administrator and teacher evaluations and accountability—and when?

Logistics and Scheduling

- *Logistical and Operational Details.* School districts will face a series of challenges involving the critical logistical details of administering the assessments that their state has adopted. For instance, has the district clearly and widely communicated information on when the testing windows are, how long the tests are, how test administration can be segmented, and how many devices will be needed? Has the district used this information to determine the number of administrators needed and how many days will be involved in both planning and test administration?
- *Use and Coordination of Facilities.* Administrators will also need to plan for where students will be tested at each school and whether any accommodations in facilities or special plans need to be made. Will students be tested in classrooms, computer labs, libraries, gymnasiums, or some other facility—or a clearly specified combination? Challenges will also entail making sure that grounds maintenance, building repairs, and other operational considerations do not interfere with or diminish the ability of students to concentrate on their work.
- *Scheduling.* School districts will face a number of scheduling challenges. These will involve scheduling of both students and staff. If your district does not have a device for every student, how are you planning to rotate students in a way that maximizes their best work and is logistically viable? How will the district schedule both actual testing and retesting due to either student absences or technology failures that nullify a student's responses or result in testing irregularities? How will staff members be deployed to monitor students when they are not being tested— either because they have already been tested or it is not yet their turn? How many substitute teachers will you need, for whom, and during what time periods? How will the district schedule students who require special accommodations or staff monitoring? How will you handle transportation back and forth to school if there is a need to alter the regular busing schedules? How will students be scheduled into school-lab settings? Will the test administrator be a teacher of record (e.g., homeroom teacher) or a resource teacher assigned as the test administrator in

the lab for the entire administration? If the test administrator is not the homeroom teacher, how will the district upload rosters of students that are associated with the test administrator, so that the test administrator can open and close the testing sessions for the selected students? Would the testing of students best be done alphabetically or through some other method?⁵

- *School-by-School Consistency.* Large school districts, in particular, may face challenges concerning whether and how administration of tests will differ from school to school and how those differences will be managed or sequenced. For instance, has your district determined how much latitude each school has in the test scheduling and administration process? What standard test administration guidelines have you communicated to schools? Will schools need to wait for other schools to test before enough devices can be moved to their campuses for testing? If administration is staggered, how will districts control student transmission of test content through social media?
- *Deployment and Training of Staff to Administer Tests.* Part of the challenge in preparing for the new assessments will involve how to effectively train and deploy staff to administer assessments, including any interim assessments the district or state has chosen. How should staff teams be defined? What training do they need? How much of the training needs to be done face-to-face and how much can be done online or *via* video? Who is responsible for what, and how will staff be held accountable for the implementation? How do you need to think about roles both vertically and horizontally in the organization? Will the roles of principal supervisors and principals need to change over the long run in order to be more instructionally oriented?
- *Real-time Support and Backup Plans.* Districts will also face challenges related to providing real-time support for schools as they begin test administration. How technologically literate are staff members who will be training students to take the tests? Will the district need to set up a “command center” or other centralized or regional space in which to coordinate logistics and resolve problems as they occur? (Is there someone documenting the issues and how they were resolved?) Does the coordinating team include a technology specialist? Is everyone at the school level clear about whom to call, text, or email if a question arises? Who is assigned to answer the questions, how many schools will each person cover, and what training have they had? In addition, districts will need to consider the need for backup equipment—who will have it, and how will it be deployed? Other backup challenges will also need to be considered: What will be done if there are power outages, equipment failures, or bandwidth overloads during the testing

⁵ In some states, a pre-identification file is sent to the district where a particular student is attached to a particular test, i.e., each record or student can have a ‘class’ identifier to help with management at each school site. Since schools do not typically operate in a 1:1 environment and some districts use test data for teacher evaluation, one fair way to test students would be alphabetically. Teachers testing by homeroom or class sometimes get upset if their students aren’t chosen for morning testing. Some computer programs like Pearson Access show all students alphabetically anyway, so management of this process can be relatively easy. At the same time, it may be hard on young students to be tested in a new room or to be overseen by someone they do not know. Pulling students alphabetically might also mean that regular classroom instruction cannot take place because some students will be missing from class. Districts will need to consider their options carefully.

cycle that cause students to be knocked offline? What contingencies have the district put into place if emergency situations arise?

Costs and Sustainability

- *Costs.* The public and press are likely to want to know how much it cost the district to plan, administer, and staff the tests— and where the money is coming from. Of course, this will include the costs of training, technology hardware and software, technology infrastructure and broadband, curriculum and materials, and other items. A lack of understanding about the “true costs” of the assessments—start-up costs, transition costs, and ongoing or “steady-state” costs—could easily trip up a district. Districts will also need to answer questions about the costs of any interim or benchmark assessments it chooses to use.
- *Funding.* Districts will also face the issue of how to fund the acquisition of devices that are needed and what mix of funding will be handled centrally or in individual school budgets. Rapid deployment of testing purchases will place great pressure on decentralized systems, in particular, where technology purchases are made at the school level.
- *Sustainability.* Finally, the district will face a number of important challenges related to sustaining the district’s capacity to administer these assessments beyond the first year. Has the district thought about how the devices being acquired or purchased can be used for instructional and other purposes in addition to testing? How will the district store or warehouse the data? Is there a plan for how the data will be analyzed and tracked over time? How will data be disseminated back to the school levels, and how will it be used for accountability and value-added calculations? Have district administrators considered how they could bring together funds from instructional, professional development, assessment, and information technology sources to support the testing program over time? If the district has decided to move to a 1:1 environment (where each student has a device), is there a plan in place for attaining that goal, sustaining the ratio over time, and increasing the number of staff in order to support the configuration? Building these costs into the general fund after any initial grants expire will also present districts with challenges. In addition, districts will face sustainability challenges related to (1) communicating the value of the new tests and how the information they generate will be used to inform student instruction and supports and (2) understanding the people, environmental factors, and opinion leaders who drive the debate and public opinion about these assessment.

D. Technology and Broadband Challenges

The technology challenges to smoothly implementing new, online assessments are among the most troubling and well publicized. These challenges will not be confined to the technology department but will impact the entire school district. (Comparisons of the technology features of both consortia can be found at www.setda.org.)The challenges that school districts will need to address in this area include but are not limited to—

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- *Gathering Information on the Current State of Technology in the District.* The lack of information on what technology the district already has and where it is located school-by-school will present a major challenge in attempting to plan for the new assessments. Are devices currently purchased directly by the schools? Does each school have a dedicated technology support staff? Do larger schools (high schools and middle schools) need additional support staff? Has your district conducted a basic inventory of technology in the district to use as the baseline for planning? Does the technology inventory include facility readiness, such as adequate electrical plugs and circuit capacity? Does the technology inventory extend to peripheral devices, such as keyboards, mice, tracking balls for mice, batteries, and headsets? Does the inventory include all the different versions of the operating system? And does it contain all of the different browsers and versions of browsers? Has your district prepared a gap analysis between the existing state of the technology and the technology specifications in the assessment implementation plan—and what the assessment consortia call for? Does your assessment implementation plan incorporate the technology specifications for the assessment being given in your state? Has the district established minimum technology standards for schools? What is the ratio of technology support staff to schools?
- *Determining Equipment Functionality.* In addition to lack of information on the school district's inventory of technology equipment, a lack of information on the functionality of the equipment will present school systems with a major challenge. Does the equipment fall within the district's technology standards? Will the equipment withstand the service required by the assessment plan? Do wireless devices meet acceptable standards for connectivity? Do devices have the capacity to accommodate the required testing software? Is there a plan in place to upgrade devices (a refresh strategy)? Does the equipment take into consideration the ages of students and grade levels being tested? Are electrical plugs and interface devices (i.e., keyboard, headphone, and a mouse) available and functional for every device? Are backup interface devices available and a streamlined deployment process in place for schools during testing time? Are the monitors large enough to ensure that students can read the test questions? Are the mobile devices stored and charged overnight in a safe location? Do the devices have the battery life to last the entire duration of the tests? The challenge for school systems will be to determine answers to these questions well before the testing date.
- *Standardization of FF&E.* Because of past decisions to decentralize budgets in many districts and because of insufficient funds for capital modernization, districts often face the risk of not having standardized fixtures, furnishings, and equipment (FFE) for the learning environment. Does the district have a standard computer contract? Is there a specific operating system being used? Is there a specific feature set? Do desktops or laptops constitute what is a standard device? What type of computing stations will be used? Where will the power run in terms of electrical outlets and/or charging stations?
- *Strategic Equipment Acquisition.* A related challenge to school districts will involve how they think through their acquisition of new assessment technology to augment the hardware and software they currently have. This set of issues will involve making sure that new technology is compatible with the requirements and standards that PARCC and SBAC have laid out for districts. Does the district have an asset acquisition plan that (1)

coordinates the purchase of equipment and applications school by school, (2) ensures that there is a consistency of equipment that will make maintenance and support easier to manage, (3) expedites the purchase of equipment where and when needed, and (3) determines the turn-around time for acquiring the technology? Does the district have a migration strategy for sustaining equipment use by ensuring that it has the functionality for instructional and other purposes after testing is complete? Has the district aligned these decisions with their technology and assessment plans to ensure a smooth implementation and operational environment? Has the district performed reliability analysis to ensure that the devices being acquired and deployed have the highest reliability possible?

- *Configuration and Deployment Management.* The high volume acquisition of devices may be much larger and different than current incremental technology purchases in terms of the receipt, configuration, and deployment of devices. Such a high volume may place a stress on current processes and capacity to configure and deploy. Has the district assessed its method to configure and deploy devices? Does the district have the capacity with current internal staff to perform this function at the high volume needed? Is there a quality assurance process built to ensure the devices are fully functional at setup?
- *Network Capacity.* School systems will also have the challenge of making sure that they have the Wide Area and Local Area Network (WAN & LAN) capacity to handle the web-based testing in PARCC or SBAC. Each testing consortium has its own requirements, and districts will have the challenge of determining school-by-school, room-by-room, and device-by-device whether its bandwidth is sufficient to meet testing requirements. Does the district have a network infrastructure plan that will handle the testing requirements? Does the plan account for both wired and wireless capability? Has the district conducted a bandwidth analysis determining the adequacies of supporting the testing environment? Does the district have the necessary tools needed to maintain (manage and actively monitor) the network? Does the district have the tools necessary to manage devices dependent on and independent of the testing environment? These issues are critical to ensuring the viability of the testing environment. Has each school conducted a mock/practice test with pertinent personnel, designated devices, and designated rooms to ensure that the facility and the IT infrastructure (wired and wireless networks) have the capacity to accommodate the concurrent load?
- *Facilities Adequacy.* Depending on the age of the school building, is the electrical wiring within the school sufficient to support the assessment program? Is access to sufficient electrical outlets adequate? Has the district reviewed fire/life/safety approaches to ensure the electrical connections meet all fire codes?
- *Asset Management.* Device costs are likely to fall below the threshold for formal asset tagging and accounting in a school district's financial systems. Does the district have an asset management policy for low-dollar assets that is not required by the current financial system? How will the district track the devices acquired if they are below policy thresholds for asset tagging?

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- *Warranty Management.* The new assessment system will introduce a significant number of new devices into the district, and will increase the volume of warranty repair issues as the result. Is the district going to include warranty management within the contract for devices? What contingency threshold will the district have on hand for devices that fail and require replacement within a critically short period of time?
- *Procurement.* Given the issues of cost and the higher likelihood of decentralized budgets in some districts for technology acquisition, school systems will face an issue of procurement strategy and acquisition planning. Does the district have a central contract for devices, configuration, asset tagging, and deployment? Does the district need to amend current contracts or establish new contracts? Are there other support programs and systems needed to handle warranty, insurance, asset management and others?
- *Physical Security.* With an increase in the volume of devices and public awareness of the devices, schools will have greater risks of being targeted for theft. Does the district have adequate security systems? What is the district's nighttime asset protection program? What is the relationship with law enforcement to ensure rapid response?
- *Technology Staffing.* Identifying staff requirements and the distribution and deployment of the talent pool effectively and efficiently will be a major challenge facing school districts before and during test administration. Does the district have a staffing model that will satisfy the assessment plan? Has the district identified the staff that will constitute a cross-functional team responsible for the initial rollout of the testing? Has the district defined the subject-matter experts needed to work with the district's research and technology staff? This will entail identifying the district's best central-office and school-based staff and naming building coordinators and test-security personnel, along with considering how the use of these staff members affects other projects. Decisions will be needed on how the work is coordinated with the district's IT leadership and how it is coordinated with the broader district project team. Personnel considerations will also include how to coordinate with any local technology support that has been independently funded by individual principals.
- *Service level Agreements.* The speed at which the district can provide support to a school with single or multiple device failures is becoming more important as the move to a fully digital environment continues. Greater reliance on technology means districts must have the ability to rely on and respond to schools to minimize downtime. Time can mean all the difference in the ability of a student to complete the testing requirement. Does the district have service level agreements (SLAs) for response to device issues? Is the response time in the SLA adequate to support and maintain the testing environment? Does the district have the capacity to meet or exceed the SLA with internal staff?
- *Coordination with Vendors and States.* If school districts have not thought about or set up mechanisms by which they communicate and coordinate with testing vendors, then they heighten the chances that problems will not be resolved in a timely fashion. Has your district verified the platforms that your vendors support or recommend? In addition, has the district included the local and state purchasing protocols in the asset acquisition plan?

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The lack of a mechanism or a set of protocols to coordinate with the state is also likely to create challenges.

- *Helpdesk Challenges.* The school district helpdesk(s) will also be challenged to handle the testing environment in conjunction with ongoing operations. Does the district have the capability to prioritize issues by severity tiers? Does the district have the tools necessary to capture information that can delineate problems for future resolution? Does the district have the capability to create a knowledge base that will facilitate user self-resolution? Has the district developed a metric matrix that will help measure the testing process? Are the helpdesk staff and field technicians familiar with the devices, the mobile device management software, and the wired and wireless network access software? Is the helpdesk administrator empowered to ramp up support staff to meet the demand during the testing periods? Is there a process for monitoring the helpdesk? Are the functional and technical support efforts coordinated? Has the district set up a dynamic survey that will check the pulse of students/teachers/administrators before, during, and after testing to help address issues?
- *Student Familiarity with Technology.* Most students will be taking the new assessments on a computer, lap-top, tablet, or other device. The tests will require students to respond electronically, manipulate graphics, drag-and-drop material, utilize touch screen gestures, and other tasks. Does the district have a plan for introducing students to the testing environment? Does the plan include documentation detailing the devices that will be used in the testing environment? Students will need to be familiar with computer features well beyond basic key-boarding skills. Questions will arise about whether students have been prepared for the equipment they will use and whether or not they have had an opportunity to practice on it if it is unfamiliar. For instance, some students who are used to a mouse and keyboard may not know what to do with a touch-screen device or vice versa.
- *Security and Privacy.* School districts will also be faced with security challenges at both the device and the test levels in order to maintain the integrity of the testing environment. Does the district have a data and network security plan? Does the district have a device management strategy for security and acceptable use? Does it have the ability to manage secure-wired and wireless environments for testing? Has the district developed a strategy for test monitoring and test security? Has the district identified the pool of test proctors and backups? Does the district have a training plan for test proctors to handle onsite technology and other test security issues?
- *Best Practices.* Another set of challenges in the technology area will involve documenting what worked and what didn't, so that the school system can adjust its practices in subsequent years. Does the district have a knowledge base set up to incorporate documentation of the ongoing testing? Does the knowledge base or documentation include district activities in the areas of technology, logistics, and scheduling, as well as practices in academic instruction? This documentation will be vital for communicating to students, teachers, administrators, parents, press, and the public.

E. Communications Challenges

School districts will also need to think about how to inform and engage the public, the press, and various stakeholders internal and external to the organization. Some of the main challenges in the area of communications will include—

- *The Messages.* The first major communications challenge the school district will face will be to define what messages you want to send about the new assessments and their likely results. Ensuring that the overall message is uniform, simple, and coherent is key to making it compelling and accessible. In your outreach to the community, you will also need to inform stakeholders about (1) what the new standards are and what they are not, (2) how the new assessments relate to the standards, (3) why the new assessments are so long, (4) the new and higher expectations that the standards set, and (5) what those new standards and expectations mean for the future success of students. The districts may also need to clarify where the standards came from, who developed them and who did not, why the standards matter, what the test results will tell us, and how they relate to concerns being raised in the public about the standards and the accompanying assessments. Moreover, the district will need to have a plan for how it uses social media and its full arsenal of communications tools to make sure the district's messages have broad reach.
- *The Messengers.* A related challenge will involve determining who the messengers should be, how they will be trained, and how to keep their statements consistent. Matching messengers with targeted audiences will be an important consideration, as will be translating the materials and messages into languages spoken by community members. School board members, the superintendent, and other district-level advocates will also expect to be part of the communications strategy of the district, so districts will need to determine how to strategically build them into the process.
- *The Audience.* Most big city school districts have very diverse stakeholders with very different perspectives about the meaning and value of standardized testing. Identifying these audiences is a crucial challenge for most school districts. Districts will also face the challenge of how to differentiate their messages for both internal and external audiences. Critical audiences will include the teachers' organization or union, the business community, the press, higher education officials, charter leaders, community organization leaders, faith leaders, and others. Getting the cooperation and buy-in of opinion leaders, advocates, and others who shape community opinion will be particularly critical.
- *The Results.* Communicating the results of the assessments will be one of the biggest challenges that school districts will face. The public is not likely to understand the apparent drop in student performance, and opponents of the standards and their assessments will use the lower results in an attempt to undermine both. Parents and the public will need help in understanding the metrics in which the results are reported, as well as what the new, likely lower scores mean and don't mean about student achievement.

- *Using the Results.* Describing how the new assessment results will be used to improve instruction, guide teacher practice, and improve outcomes for students will also be important challenges for school districts. Part of this will entail outlining how the district will differentiate instruction and support struggling students based on test results. Districts might also face challenges in describing how the new assessment results will be used alongside results from other tests like student learning objectives (SLO). One particularly controversial issue that is bound to arise as well is how the results of the new assessments will be used to evaluate teachers and when. Addressing the current public focus on teachers will be a crucial district communications challenge.
- *Sustaining Communications.* Finally, school districts will face the ongoing challenge of sustaining effective communication with the public about the purpose of the assessments, what they mean, how they are being used, and what they will eventually tell us about district and student progress toward college and career readiness. The challenge will be to sustain the messaging both at the grassroots level and among district and community leaders.

Recommendations for Successfully Implementing the New Assessments

Anticipating the challenges that school districts are likely to face in implementing new college- and career-ready assessments is only the first step. How a district addresses those challenges will ultimately determine the success of implementation. This section presents a series of recommendations and proposals to address the challenges identified in the previous section. These recommendations are meant to help districts be proactive and thoughtful in their approach to implementation in the coming school year and beyond.

A. Recommendations to Meet Leadership and Political Challenges

The recommendations in this section are designed to help school systems set the leadership preconditions and strategies needed to ensure that assessment implementation is successful. These proposals are broad, overarching steps that need to be put into place if the tactical, programmatic actions the district takes are to be successful. In order to address leadership and political challenges, districts should—

- Ensure that the board of education and the superintendent send a strong, positive and unified message to staff and the community that implementation of common core standards and assessments are leading priorities of the district. No one should mistake what the leadership thinks on this matter.
- Make sure that the implementation of common core standards and the accompanying assessments are incorporated as a centerpiece in the school district's overarching strategic plan for the year and into the future. Continue to broadcast the district's commitment well after the first administration of the new assessments
- Develop an implementation plan to prepare for and administer the common core assessments districtwide. This plan should articulate how online testing fits into other major district initiatives/priorities and how it aligns with other district assessments. The

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plan should include the following components—

- a. Prioritization of the new standards and their assessments
 - b. A description of how district resources will be aligned or realigned for successful implementation
 - c. An estimate of the time it will take the district to ensure all the pieces of the plan are in place (See exhibit 3 on page 45.)
 - d. How steps in the planning and implementation process will be sequenced
 - e. What staff will be deployed, how they will be coordinated, and how the effort will take into account staff's other duties and responsibilities
 - f. How staff will be held responsible for results
 - g. How technology resources and gaps will be identified school by school and at the district level—and when the inventory will be completed
 - h. A description of the budgetary implications of implementation and how financial resources will be allocated
 - i. A description of who makes budgetary decisions and how they will be made, along with details on the source of funding
 - j. A process for long-term planning, since the assessments will be given each year for the foreseeable future
- Review district policies that might present barriers to effective and consistent implementation of the assessments. Examples might include policies around school adoption of differing technology devices, acceptable use policies, and policies around accommodations.
 - Name a cross-functional executive steering committee to support and oversee the process of implementing the common core and their aligned assessments. This team should incorporate staff from the following offices or areas—
 - Superintendent's office and cabinet
 - Academics or curriculum and instruction
 - Assessment and testing
 - Technology
 - Special education and bilingual education
 - School leadership and principal supervision
 - Operations and business services
 - Communications
 - Budget and finance
 - Principals and teachers
 - Facilities Services
 - Human Resources

Subdivide into specific work teams to correspond with priority areas of implementation.

- Strategically use meetings of leadership and of the superintendent's cabinet to ensure smooth implementation of the assessments and to gauge progress. Develop a

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responsibility assignment matrix (RAM), also known as a RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) matrix, delineating responsibilities, accountabilities, and lines of communication, along with a list of individuals who need to be kept up to date on project progress and status.

- Develop a school readiness checklist and implementation plan template.
- Develop a strategic outreach plan focused on district and school staff, parents, the community, and key local constituencies, emphasizing what the district is doing to implement the assessments well and the objectives of the district in pursuing this work. The purpose of this outreach plan should be to inform the public and build buy-in for what the district is doing.
- Proactively address the issue of lower test scores in your communications with parents, the media, and the community. Prepare the public for the apparent “drop” in test scores before the results are released, emphasizing that proficiency rates on new assessments are not comparable to previous assessments and that lower test scores do not mean that students have learned less or fallen behind academically. Reference other state examples for context, and, if you are a TUDA district, look to your NAEP results for indicators of likely district scores and to demonstrate progress over time. If you are able to do so, conduct an equating study on the old and new state assessments to develop comparable trend lines that can better inform the public about progress.
- Wherever possible, direct the story toward the strength of the new standards and assessments and what better instruction will mean for the preparation of students for the future.
- Create strategic allies in the community to help the district advance understanding of and support for both the standards and their assessments. Be clear about how the district intends to sustain this support over time.
- Create strategic alliances with the local teacher unions and associations, if possible, in support of the implementation plan. The best way to do this is to involve them early in the planning process and to involve them in discussions about use of results.
- Ensure that each district department that has a role in implementing the new assessments is sufficiently staffed, even temporarily, and has the skills necessary to support the implementation.
- Ensure that critical staff members have the knowledge of technology, training, and access to tools and supports they need to oversee and guide the implementation. Promote cross-functional collaboration among the key players.
- Document best practices and lessons learned during the planning and implementation process to inform continuous improvement for future assessments.

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- Document and celebrate key milestones and victories to build momentum past the first year of the test administration.
- Establish an accepted approach for the budgeting and acquisition of computer devices needed to support the testing environment. Create the buy-in necessary based on the district's culture and relationships with school-based staff. There are two general approaches:
 - *Centralize budget and acquisition:* Based on an operational-gap analysis conducted by IT professionals, establish a central budget, contracting, and allocation system. Determine if schools will be “held harmless” in the budgeting approach, or if a charge-back method to off-set costs will be created.
 - *Standardize budget and acquisition:* If centralizing is not viable, districts should establish a standardized approach on a per student basis to ensure appropriate investment at the school level. A central contract agreement can be established so all schools are acquiring devices that support the testing requirements.
- Establish a specific strategy map in which each representative on the steering committee integrates the strategies their team will be using with a set of specified timeframes. Require each work team to have project management plans that detail the specific actions and deadlines that have to be met. Ensure that the steering committee collaborates on interdependent timelines and actions that cross department lines. (See suggested timeline.)

B. Recommendations to Meet the Challenges of Academic Readiness

A second critical component for successfully implementing the new assessments involves making sure that students are academically prepared to do well on the tests. Much of this has to do with implementing the standards well, but the new assessments are not the standards and special attention needs to be devoted to ensuring that children are ready for and comfortable with an assessment that is likely to look very different from the state tests they have taken in the past. In order to address this challenge, districts should—

- Ensure that the instructional shifts called for in the common core are being implemented in every classroom and that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and professional development necessary to teach students to the new, higher standards. (The Council of the Great City Schools is in the process of developing indicators to measure district implementation of the standards.) Identify indicators of successful implementation at the system, school, and classroom levels, and adopt look-for protocols based on these indicators. Establish a process for soliciting feedback from schools on issues and challenges and adjusting school supports and resources accordingly.
- Ensure that teachers of different subjects, grades, and students receive the differentiated professional development they will need to implement new college- and career-ready standards across the curriculum. In its support and communications with teachers and schools, the district should be clear that high expectations and access to the new higher standards apply to *all* students.

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- Ensure that students are getting experience performing the types of tasks and answering the types of higher-level questions likely to be asked on the new common core assessments and that demonstrate understanding of concepts and skills. This does not mean “test prep” —you cannot drill your way to success on these new assessments. But students should be getting more experience struggling with the kinds of complex, multi-step questions they will encounter on the assessments and providing written explanations and justifications for their answers. (See [*Beyond Test Scores: What NAEP Results Tell Us About Implementing the Common Core in Our Classrooms.*](#))
- Ensure that teachers and students have classroom experience with the technology and the devices the students will use when taking the online assessment. They should also have experience with the kinds of commands (e.g., drag and drop, touch screen gestures) that some assessment items might ask of students.
- Articulate clear roles and expectations for district instructional staff, principals, principal supervisors, and school-based instructional staff concerning implementation of the new standards and assessments. Design professional development that prepares staff at various levels for their implementation roles.
- Design and provide appropriate and consistent training and preparation of school-based teams to ensure fidelity of test implementation of the curriculum and the use of technology for instruction and assessment. Align the responsibilities of school testing coordinators and technology support staff members.
- Tap lead teachers to build knowledge, ownership, and buy-in at the school level and in the community for the standards and the new assessments. Pay a stipend for additional work if need be.
- Ensure that appropriate accommodations are provided in daily classroom instruction for special populations, and that school staff are fully aware of which students are assigned what accommodations for assessment purposes. Each student should be familiar with the types of accommodations they will have and should be able to practice with them prior to the assessment.
- Establish procedures or benchmarks by which the district and schools are able to determine ongoing student progress toward common core expectations over the course of the school year and ways to address what the benchmarks reveal.
- Ensure that the district is continuously revisiting and adjusting the curriculum and all instructional materials to ensure that they are aligned with the new standards and provide clear guidance for classroom instruction.
- Approach the acquisition of new materials supposedly “aligned” to the common core with a critical eye. Conduct an alignment and quality review of all potential new materials using resources such as the Publishers Criteria, IMET, GIMET, and ELL 2.0, and ensure that any new materials, texts, and supports fully meet the needs of *all* students

in a district, including struggling learners, non-native English speakers, and students with disabilities. Provide professional development on the use of any new materials and tools.

C. Recommendations to Meet Operational Challenges

As we saw in the section on challenges, some of the most daunting are in the areas of operations, logistics, and scheduling. In order to address both general logistical and operational challenges and the challenges associated with scheduling students and staff members, districts should—

Planning and Operations

- Create a specialized logistics team to handle the details of assessment implementation. On the team, include district and possibly state staff with expertise in—
 - a. Technology
 - b. Assessment
 - c. Operations
 - d. Facilities
 - e. Finance
- Charge principals with naming a school-based team to implement and sustain the common core assessments at the school level. The team should include the following school staff—
 - a. Assessment coordinator
 - b. Technology coordinator
 - c. Special populations staff to handle accommodations and scheduling for special students
 - d. Departmental, grade-level, and instructional staff
 - e. Lead teachers and other teachers
 - f. Principal and assistant principal to handle general scheduling
- Develop a plan that maps backward (a “backwards design plan”) from March 2015 to September 2014 and that articulates—
 - a. A detailed test administration schedule, including any practice tests
 - b. The state’s policy for retesting or finishing an already-started assessment.
 - c. Steps for training test administrators
 - d. An inventory of technology by school and the functionality of that technology along with an analysis of gaps in what is needed.
 - e. Policy guidelines governing test administration, data privacy, and transfer of data and records.
 - f. Training documents and/or PowerPoints offered by the state that describe test procedures and other consistent messaging across school systems.
 - g. Test-item security provisions and protocols, including security agreements signed by school staff members handling secure test materials, and provisions to eliminate the potential for students to transmit test content through social media.

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- h. Guidelines for purchasing equipment, technology, and other materials, including reserve quantities to ensure rapid response to emergencies.
 - i. Guidelines for installing applications on devices that might interfere with testing sessions, including operating systems, hardware, and firmware updates (e.g., security locator applications that signal the computer's location periodically—even during a testing session, which may interrupt the session).
 - j. The process for developing and sharing school-by-school plans for implementation (in early fall, as well as iterations in January/February). These plans should be reviewed by the district to determine immediate concerns at the school level.
 - k. Performance metrics, e.g., network performance data, help desk statistics, incidents, interactions, etc.
 - l. A map of all assessments and how they are sequenced in addition to common core consortia or state assessments
 - m. How the district and schools will use holiday periods and Spring break to move the implementation forward.
 - n. How the district will communicate with schools about scheduling, and how the district and schools can adjust testing dates with state approval.
 - o. A readiness checklist.
- Identify and ensure teacher and administrator familiarity with the accommodations and embedded supports for special populations in the assessment process.

Troubleshooting

- Conduct mock/practice tests to evaluate the readiness of pertinent staff, devices, facilities, and network infrastructure. Include feedback surveys (of students and staff) for the district or state to monitor progress. Report all facilities and technology issues well in advance to allow ample time for the departments to remediate/repair
- In planning for potential crises, identify tiers of issues for each managing entity: state, district, and vendor. For example, tier 1 issues might include immediate testing situations, while a tier 2 or 3 issue might include longer-term considerations, such as ensuring data privacy. Clarify the appropriate resources needed to address these issues within schools, with vendors, and at the district and state levels. Immediate test-day issues should be separated into individual tiers by their complexity: lowest tiers, e.g., resuming a student's test; middle tier, e.g., fixing a power outage; and highest tier, e.g., recovering a lost log file.
- Name “troubleshooters” at the district level who can address any problems that individual schools encounter during the testing process.
- Establish a system for documenting problems and successes at the conclusion of the testing cycle to inform future administrations. Be prepared to share these lessons with the public.
- Also establish a system for communicating with schools regarding updates, immediate concerns, and lessons learned.

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- Conduct a gap analysis to assess the response time needed to fix devices and/or to address connectivity issues in schools. If internal capacity is not adequate to meet the needed response times, then consider contracted resources to perform this service.

Scheduling

- Develop districtwide and school-level scheduling plans that include the following considerations:
 - a. Testing time and number and times of testing sessions and duration based on available computers used for testing and the numbers of “to-be-tested” students.
 - b. Number of staff members needed for test administration (given considerations of teacher certification, special needs students, contract limitations, split staff, available outside support for administration—i.e., retired teachers, educational assistants, etc.).
 - c. Whether or not teachers assess their own students and what it means for test security. Consider schedules that allow fourth grade teachers to assess third grade students, etc.
 - d. Cost of staff members and auxiliary and contract staff.
 - e. Devices and peripherals per student and types of devices.
 - f. Fully charged devices with updated operating system.
 - g. Idle computers where class sizes are small. Consider pooling classes or testing by alphabetical order. (Note: testing in alphabetical order may maximize device usage, but may disrupt instruction and student comfort.)
 - h. Number of sessions in a testing day, taking into account lunch, dismissals, and “early-releases.”
 - i. What subject is tested and when. For example, testing one subject at a time, so a child isn’t over-tested on a given day.
 - j. Number of testing environments (e.g., accommodations, extended time, etc.).
 - k. Constraints such as the number of devices vs. available staff.
 - l. Time management, i.e., how staff will need to manage their time in order to oversee test administration in addition to their other responsibilities
 - m. What to do with students who are not in test sessions? Those students might include:
 - Students displaced from class sites.
 - Students left in class because the district scheduled test-takers by alphabetical order.
 - Non-tested grades.
 - Students who finish early.
 - Absent students.
 - Make-up tests.
 - Waivered students.
 - Incomplete tests (due to a technology glitch, due time, mobility, etc.).
 - Students in jail, the hospital, or are homebound. How will they be tested and in what format?
 - n. School size and grade span, i.e., elementary vs. secondary.
 - o. The need for a contingency schedule (if Internet goes down or buffers).

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- Review sample schedules from other districts to inform options.
- Train district-level school scheduling staff on multiple scheduling options to help guide and customize scheduling for school sites. Identify:
 - a. Who is on the staff team?
 - b. What areas they are tackling?
 - c. Have they been vetted by principals?
 - d. How successes and failures with the various scheduling options are captured and shared across the district for future reference?
- Ensure that staff members are able to respond to such questions as:
 - a. How are we scheduling to optimize the testing environment?
 - b. How are we minimizing disruptions to the regular instructional day?
 - c. How can we accomplish testing within the allotted testing window?
 - d. How have we addressed the needs of special populations?
 - e. How have we addressed test security considerations?
 - f. How are individual test-administration plans aligning with the overarching district plan?
 - g. How are we communicating the testing schedule to parents and stakeholders?

Sustainability

- Conduct an ongoing needs analysis to inform scheduling and logistical requirements.
- Monitor the district website and email to ensure awareness of technical and functional issues being experienced by the district and its personnel. Communicate these issues to the testing provider and schedule system maintenance in a timely manner.
- Quantify the *total* cost of implementation over one, three, and five years, including costs associated with devices (purchase and maintenance), professional development, staff, the time it takes to prepare for and administer tests, etc.
- Identify likely shifts in sources and uses of funds to maintain support for online assessments aligned with the common core.

D. Recommendations to Meet Technology Challenges

In addition to the operational and logistical challenges of implementing new assessments and sustaining them over time, the *online* nature of the new tests also presents districts with critical technology and broadband challenges. In order to ensure that the technology infrastructure and human resources necessary to successfully administer these tests online are in place, districts should—

- Create a special technology team for the initial roll-out and ongoing support of testing (i.e., a “tiger team”). This team should provide oversight and serve as the point of contact to facilitate technology decisions. This team should be selected from the following areas:

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- a. Help-desk personnel
 - b. Field technicians
 - c. Network technicians and engineers
 - d. Device management specialists
 - e. Subject matter experts, e.g., reading coordinators and math directors
 - f. Test proctors and monitors
 - g. Assessment department staff
- Build, enhance, and leverage existing relationships with assessment vendors, and work toward a more strategic role for them in district planning.
 - Review the district’s existing portfolio of vendor contracts in advance of the implementation to ensure maximum flexibility in purchasing and servicing through a fair and open procurement process.
 - Conduct an inventory of current devices and peripherals in the district to establish a baseline of technology and determine technology readiness. The inventory should detail equipment by type, age, software versions, and state of functionality. All of this should be detailed by school and location within school. In addition, the inventory should take into account the age and grade of students, e.g., younger and smaller children will need to have smaller earbuds. And the district may want to consider lice-resistant headsets.
 - Establish a reserve of spare components and devices to minimize downtime, e.g., tablets, earbuds, microphones, and other equipment identified by the cross-functional team and the specialty teams.
 - Conduct a gap analysis between the baseline inventory of equipment and the minimum standard detailed by PARCC and SBAC to understand where the district stands. This analysis should then be compared to the assessment implementation plan to determine equipment needs.
 - Be aware that operating systems and browser versions have a huge impact on how the testing environment functions. Both PARCC and SBAC have compatibility criteria that should be taken into account. It is important to note that both entities update these criteria on their websites and districts should be mindful to consult the websites and review the changes. (See exhibit 2 on page 43.) Specific details that districts should be aware of include the following—

Smarter Balanced

- a. Each year, SBAC will release a new set of secure browsers.
 - These browsers prevent students from accessing other applications and copying or creating screenshots.
 - The secure browsers must be installed on each computer used for online testing.

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- The secure browser must be installed on a yearly basis, due to implementation of new features in the test delivery system and to support operating system updates.
 - Standard web browsers can be used to access other components of the assessment package, including test administration tools, student practice tests, and the test administrator interface.
- b. For data reports, Google Chrome, Safari on IOS (Apple devices), Firefox, and Internet Explorer 8 and above are supported.
 - c. The operating systems supported by SBAC include Windows (XP, Vista, 7 & 8), MAC OS (10.4.4-10.9), Linux (Fedora Core 6+, Ubuntu 9-12), Chrome OS (31 or higher), IPAD, (IOS 6&7), Android 4.0.4-4.2).
 - d. Although commonly used browsers such as Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome, and Firefox are supported, only certain versions of the browsers are compatible with the operating system versions of the devices.
 - e. Average estimated Internet bandwidth utilized by the Secure Browser for testing is 8 kilobits per second per student.
 - f. Network and device requirements and other technical details such as the minimum and recommended operating system and browser compatibility charts are provided on the SBAC website (http://sbac.portal.airast.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/SmarterBaanced_TechnicalSpecificationsManual.pdf)

PARCC

- a. The operating systems supported by PARCC include Windows (XP, Vista, 7&8), MAC OS (10.6+), Chrome OS (33 or higher), iPad (IOS 6&7), Windows Tablets (8&8.1).
- b. Android tablets are currently being tested, and updated requirements will be posted on the PARCC website.
- c. Although commonly used browsers such as Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome, and Firefox are supported, only certain versions of the browsers are compatible with the operating system versions of the devices.
- d. Minimum specifications may not be adequate beyond the second year of PARCC assessments in 2015-16 and may experience slower performance.
- e. Recommended specifications can be expected to satisfy PARCC guidelines through the 2018-19 school year.
- f. PARCC recommends 100 kilobits per second per student or faster for assessment and instruction.
- g. For schools with limited Internet bandwidth conditions, “caching” provides a secure option for the delivery of the interactive computer-based tests. Schools should plan to have 5 kilobits per second of available bandwidth in their connection to the Internet for each simultaneous test-taker.
- h. The Technology Guidelines for PARCC Assessments document (http://parconline.org/sites/parcc/files/Technology%20Guidelines%20for%20PARCC%20Assessments%20v%204_2%20May%202014.pdf) provides detailed specifications for operating systems and browser combinations, as well as firewall and network configuration requirements.

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- Set up specific times to test all of the devices to be used in the testing environment. All peripheral components (i.e., earbuds, headphones, keyboards, etc.) and special keyboard keys (like CAP locks) should be tested to ensure functionality and compatibility with devices and testing applications. If at all possible, a practice test might be conducted and should reflect as closely as possible the actual testing environment to measure the impact of concurrent sessions.
- Ensure that teachers and students have classroom experience with the technology and the devices they will use when taking the online assessment (to the extent possible). They should also have experience with the kinds of commands (e.g., drag and drop, touch screen gestures) that some assessment items might ask of students.
- Because there are multiple factors that can have a detrimental effect on the continued service of technology, develop a technology continuity plan to provide a fallback to minimize downtime and network failure. The plan should reflect the contingencies, recoveries, and replacements that could be enacted if a situation arose. Network examples could involve procuring broadband (4G) enabled wireless hotspots as a secondary connection to the network or cloud-managed wireless access points (Instant Access Points) to extend the wireless coverage in testing locations.
- Utilize the capability provided by PARCC to pre-download—or cache—the encrypted test questions and assessment content locally on a computer to minimize the impact on the schools’ network. In addition, districts’ IT departments should utilize the technology readiness tools offered by PARCC to evaluate their network readiness. If the capacity metrics do not meet the school needs, then caching can be used to reduce impact on their networks. (PARCC has caching capability that eliminates the dependence on Internet access. SBAC is also working on creating one. School districts that have used the caching are pleased, but they do need a trained testing coordinator who can set things up properly at each school.)
- Establish an acquisition plan with your procurement department to ensure that the supply chain of devices are purchased, configured, allocated, and set up in time to test the environment prior to student testing dates. Should adequate time not be available to compete, leverage existing contracts that meet state/local competitive bidding requirements and can be combined or extended to provide additional resources. These might include leveraging current contracts, piggyback contracting, consortium purchasing, purchasing-off-the-state bid, and others. This is critical to ensuring a successful start to testing and having resources and equipment ready and available. At a minimum, ensure that the plan articulates the following:
 - a. Technology
 - New devices
 - Equipment upgrades
 - Peripherals
 - Asset etching/tagging
 - Storage and charging devices
 - Configuration services for high volume acquisition and deployment

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- Support capacity for maintenance and support if internal capacity is insufficient.
- b. Program Support
 - Facilities
 - Electrical wiring and drops
 - Network support
 - Finance
 - Asset management system if needed
 - Asset inventory supplies and support
 - Warranty/insurance support
 - Security
 - Device security equipment
 - School security equipment
- Ensure that functional and technical support staff are utilizing the same service desk software to manage school issues. This may require centralization of IT technology support staff and standardization of information collected for school needs.
- Ensure that regular system and technology maintenance does not overlap with the testing period.
- Be aware of the lag time needed for the installation of necessary components to ensure a stable and effective network infrastructure. This complexity requires the development or augmentation of a network infrastructure plan for both wired and wireless environments that:
 - a. Ensures that schools and rooms where testing will be conducted can support the devices being utilized, i.e., testing rooms have appropriate numbers of electrical outlets, power sources, and facility readiness.
 - b. Ensures that district and location network capacity is sufficient to support the published testing standards
 - c. Determines the bandwidth adequacies for supporting testing, with an emphasis on concurrent loads on the environment
- Develop a network and information security plan that maintains the integrity of the testing environment and of student information. The plan should reflect compliance with local, state, and federal laws.
- In order to effectively manage the testing environment, districts should acquire the appropriate tools to:
 - a. Monitor the school-based local wired and wireless network infrastructure in real time
 - b. Remotely configure and repair network appliances
 - c. Secure network access through authentication/802.11x (Network Access Control)
 - d. Manage device assignment, configuration, and content (Mobile Device Management)

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- Ensure that the technology implementation plan aligns with other department plans, since many district departments will have their own plans that are germane to their respective disciplines but that will have aspects that cross over to other departments. Consider the following—
 - a. Help desk schedules that include testing and ongoing operations
 - b. Training and deployment of pertinent personnel, e.g., temporary staff to support the helpdesk, substitute teachers, field technicians, etc.
 - c. Ensuring student and teacher familiarity with devices
 - d. Metric matrix for monitoring progress and stability
 - e. Needed consultations with collective bargaining units
- Develop a staffing model to support the implementation in a way that is cognizant of the fact that the testing environment is an added function for staff. The model should reflect the time mandates and labor distribution for ongoing operations and the testing environment, including:
 - a. Funding for full-time location-based technology resources.
 - b. Test proctors and monitors.
 - c. Peak-time help desk personnel.
 - d. Identify staff from other departments that can be brought onboard to support the schools.
- Monitor and analyze help desk statistics (e.g., wait time, dropped calls, open tickets by type, aging reports) to assign appropriate resources to identified issues.
- Develop technology training and “digital citizenship” for teachers, students, and support staff.
- Develop surveys for school administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and administer the surveys after every assessment to identify problems and successes. The surveys will serve as a conduit to the testing environment, ensuring that issues can be resolved and processes streamlined to minimize frustration.
- Conduct daily update meetings with the implementation teams to review common issues, support challenges, and review service desk statistics. Take necessary actions needed to resolve the issues and update the district’s website. Escalate actions as necessary.
- Consult PARCC, SBAC, and the websites of other districts, especially those districts that participated in the 2014 practice test for technical standards, specifications, and lessons learned documents. Examples include—
 - a. <http://achieve.lausd.net/sbac>
 - b. <http://achieve.lausd.net/cctp>
 - c. <http://www.parcconline.org/>
 - d. <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>
 - e. <http://www.cosn.org/focus-areas/it-management/becoming-assessment-ready>

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- *Facilities Adequacy.* Depending on the age of the school building, the adequacy of the electrical load and the availability of outlets may be insufficient. Districts should have their facilities engineering teams assess schools for electrical capacity, work with school leaders to determine the layout and configuration of testing logistics, and determine if there are appropriate electrical connections. Facilities professionals should ensure solutions meet all current building and fire safety codes. To do this, we recommend that districts assess current internal capacity in the facilities department and current workload requirements for ongoing operations. If there is less than sufficient capacity, districts should consider contracting out for an engineering assessment for electrical adequacy. Further it is recommended, districts do the same to manage rapid execution of any modifications that will be necessary to ensure adequate electrical support and access.
- *FF&E Standardization.* The district should convene a team to examine standards for fixtures, furnishings, and equipment to support testing. This will not only ensure school staff have defined device types, but the procurement office will have a better chance to rapidly meet needs and the IT office will have a better chance of focusing support and training on a single device and operating system.
- *Asset Management.* It is likely that some testing devices will fall below the dollar threshold of the inventory requirements in the district's financial system. Therefore, districts should review their asset management thresholds and determine if they need to make adjustments to support test device acquisition, or ensure that low-dollar assets that are not tracked in the district's financial system are accounted for in the asset management system. This is particularly important if the district will be centralizing and/or standardizing technology devices across schools. Districts may also be able to track devices within their textbook inventory systems, but they should assess the adequacy of this option. In the event that devices will not be tracked in the district's main financial system, and the school-based textbook inventory system is not adequate, districts should examine acquiring a lower dollar value asset system that will meet their needs. If districts elect to implement a laptop and cart solution for testing, it is recommended that a component of the contract agreement for configuring devices also include an asset etching component to mark the device as district property.
- *Warranty Management.* The new testing system will introduce a significant number of new devices into the district, and will increase the volume of warranty issues as a result. Districts should review their current warranty contracts and insurance policies for adequacy, as simple coverage for repair and replacement will not be adequate. Districts should also assess internal capabilities for support and review their warranty contracts to cover any possible gaps in internal staff coverage capabilities. Warranty coverage should have an expediency clause to ensure replacement happens at an acceptable pace to ensure devices are on hand to support student testing.
- *Configuration and Deployment Management.* Districts should assess internal capacity to configure and deploy testing devices. Most districts will assume that their current systems will be able to handle far larger demand, but the influx of devices and materials may create risks in timelines and quality assurance. District should assess this capacity and

risk, and consider using a third party to receive, configure, deliver, set-up and test all devices. This will address both capacity and quality control, and shift risk to a third party.

- *Physical Security*. There will be greater awareness that district schools have significantly higher volumes of devices on hand, resulting in increased risk of schools being the target of break-ins. Districts should review the following areas of their security program in advance of new devices arriving on campus:
 - a. *Asset Protection*: Districts are familiar with lock-down devices that will deter theft of stand-alone desktop computers. Should districts determine that laptops and carts will be the method used to cover testing, they should identify lock-down rooms or areas to secure the rolling carts and devices.
 - b. *Alarm/Camera Systems*: Districts should review their alarm system adequacy with a team from facilities and security to identify if there are gaps in school coverage. The adequacy of camera system support should also be assessed.
 - c. *Nighttime Security*: Districts should review their nighttime asset protection detail for adequacy. This is particularly important if a district is required to be first to open a school for law enforcement to enter. If there are too few staff and response time is inadequate, nighttime theft risk may increase.
 - d. *Law Enforcement*: District representatives should meet with law enforcement to review the new testing requirements and the volume of devices that will be in schools.

E. Recommendations to Meet Communications Challenges

Finally, districts will need to take deliberate and strategic steps to inform and engage parents and the community. Long-term success of college- and career-ready standards and assessments will depend on broad-based support and buy-in for the new tests as a tool for improving teaching and learning throughout the district and the nation. Districts are encouraged to consult [*Communicating the Common Core: A Resource for Superintendents, School Board Members, and Public Relations Executives*](#). In designing a strategic communications strategy, districts should—

- Develop deliberate, positive, and consistent messages designed to communicate to parents and communities the key value of the standards and their assessments. Focus on how they will be used to improve youngsters' knowledge and skills for college and careers. Use the messages when reaching out to parents and staff throughout the organization.
- Identify three key messages for parents around common core standards. These messages should be tangible, meaningful, and student-focused. Examples might include:
 - a. Students mastering CCSS will graduate from high school better prepared for college and careers.
 - b. Higher standards will benefit *all* students—no matter where they live.
 - c. The new standards will lessen the need for college remediation.
 - d. The standards will be the same no matter where you move.

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- e. New standards should be given time to work.
 - f. The new standards have students reading the kinds of complex material they are likely to see in college and the workplace
 - g. The new assessments will provide a more accurate assessment of what my child knows and whether he or she is progressing appropriately
- Identify key messages important to other stakeholders, such as chambers of commerce, government leaders, etc. Examples might include:
 - a. Higher standards will mean a higher return on educational investments.
 - b. Higher standards will lead to greater workforce preparation.
 - Provide specific, concrete information about the tests (e.g., how they will look, how they will be administered).
 - Keep the press informed as you are putting the pieces of the implementation plan into place.
 - Develop compelling messages specific to the new assessments. Key assessment messages might include:
 - a. Assessment is a tool to measure student mastery of standards.
 - b. Assessment will provide data that can improve instruction. Test scores will indicate where progress has been made and where progress is needed.
 - c. Assessments will provide districts with information to make better decisions regarding the allocation of resources and where to provide additional support.
 - d. Testing takes time, but the data provided will be of great benefit to districts and educators, helping them to make informed decisions about resource allocation, instructional planning and practice, etc.
 - e. Testing data will give parents the information they need on how well their children are doing and will empower them to advocate for their children (particularly since proficiency rates may not appear artificially high like they do on some current state assessments).
 - f. New assessments cannot be compared to old assessments.
 - The old tests often measured minimum competency. The new tests hold higher expectations for students.
 - The new, more challenging tests can spur greater student engagement.
 - There will be fewer multiple-choice questions and more student-generated responses on the new tests.
 - While we cannot compare new to old test results right away, we will be able to measure our students' mastery compared to other students across the country (and we want our students to be the best).
 - g. Assessments require technology, but that technology can also be used for instruction and to expand learning opportunities for kids.

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- In crafting messages, lead with points related to teaching and learning, NOT with testing. References to testing often elicit negative responses from parents and the public.
 - a. Emphasize that teaching and learning are the most important things, not preparing students to take tests. Tests are meant to measure how well students are progressing.
 - b. Instruction should not focus on improving test scores, but test scores can improve instruction by underscoring areas of need and prompting teachers to shift their instructional approaches.
- Utilize a diverse array of communication vehicles, including—
 - a. The district website
 - b. Print materials
 - c. PTO/PTA/parent meetings, conferences (creating key communicators and advocates among teachers, principals)
 - d. Media pitches/releases
 - e. Social media
 - f. District TV or radio
 - g. Intranet
 - h. Email/texts
 - i. District publications (internal and external)
 - j. Board meeting presentations
 - k. One page fact sheets
 - l. City council collaborations (local and state officials)
 - m. Videos and parent roadmaps prepared by the Council of the Great City Schools
- In identifying effective messengers, remember that parents often look to teachers first to help them make up their minds about educational reforms or approaches. It is therefore critical to build buy-in and ownership of the standards and assessments among educators and equip them with basic talking points and frequently asked questions.
- Engage students with specific messages about common core and the benefits to them in informing and preparing them for college and careers.

Exhibit 2. Focus on Technology: Developing a Device Plan

- Determine the device type that will be deployed.
- Determine number of devices to be deployed.
 - a. One student per device (1:1)—The advantage is that all testing can happen simultaneously if district bandwidth is available.
 - b. Up to three students per device—The advantage is cost feasibility, can still test one grade level at a time.
- Determine arrangement of devices.
 - a. Lab arrangement with laptops or desktop computers
 - b. Classroom sets of devices
 - c. Classroom stations for small groups of students
- Determine number of types of devices to be used.
 - a. Same devices throughout the school system—The advantages are consistency, a similar experience for all students, easier technical support, easier browser-platform compatibility, and easier professional development and support.
 - b. Multiple devices throughout the school system—The advantages are the ability to leverage purchases from previous years (less costly), and ability to create differential arrangements (i.e., labs and mobile devices in classrooms).
- Assess the features of devices to be used.
 - a. Monitor/display size: tablets vs. laptop vs. desktop
 - b. Mouse vs. touchpad vs. touch screen
 - c. Battery life of mobile devices—accessories for recharging, including during a testing period
 - d. Headphone capability
 - e. Separate keyboard
- Device storage and transportation considerations:

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- a. Do devices need to move from school to school? Will need a storage, delivery, inventory, and security plan.
 - b. Do devices need to move from classroom to classroom? Will need storage carts with rollers.
- Device preparation considerations:
 - a. Ensure delivery with at least three to six months to unpack, image, meet local technology access guidelines, and practice with the device.
 - b. If the devices are to be used for test administration only, the school or district will need a plan for storing the devices when not in use, and preparing the devices (i.e., charging, updating operating systems and software) as the next testing period approaches.
 - c. If the devices will be used for instructional purposes in between testing periods, the district will need to conduct device maintenance prior to testing, including screen and keyboard review and review of applications that may have been downloaded, which could interfere with device performance during testing or could jeopardize test performance or privacy.
 - d. If the device is normally used for instructional purposes, plans will need to be made for how instruction is pursued when the device is being used for assessment purposes.
 - e. The preparation process could take multiple weeks, depending on the condition of the devices and the staff available.
 - Name a district test coordinator.
 - a. In addition to traditional skills (e.g., organizational, scheduling, managing school coordinator training, ensuring test procedures are followed, etc.), the district test coordinator will need to have skills to assist school coordinators with opening testing sessions, password management, student access to enter in their IDs, and using technology support staff to respond to technological glitches as they occur.
 - b. The district test coordinator also develops summary test administration support documents and indexes for school-level test coordinators.

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Exhibit 3. Timeline for Non-Instructional Support Preparations

Month	Function	Strategy	
September	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with Instruction to develop device and FF&E standards. • Perform gap assessment of each school against the standard. • Review internal configuration and deployment capacity to determine if contracted support is needed. • Review school based device inventory and asset management. • Define requirements for the procurement process. 	
	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform electrical engineering assessment. • Define scope of work for contracting support and project management. 	
	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate funds based on the gap assessment and needs determination. • Review asset management policies and thresholds and determine if school devices will be inventoried in central financial system or in a school based system. • Review warranty and insurance policies and contracts. 	
	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review schools for device security and school envelope security requirements needed for procurement scope. 	
	Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all current term agreements and research potential consortium and state contract opportunities. • Define acquisition plan to identify where competition is possible and where consortium contracting is necessary. 	
	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize annual district assessment calendar. • Identify building level assessment coordinators and assessment teams. • Conduct initial training for assessment coordinators to include overview of district assessment plan, state guidelines and protocols for testing, and specific training for fall assessments. 	
	October	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review internal technical and help desk support capacity. • Review SLAs for schools for sufficiency of response time, and test internal capacity to support them at scale.
		Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish project plan and engage program manager if internal capacity is insufficient to meet timeline.
Finance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralize the budget or establish a cost allocation to school budgets. • If a school asset tracking system is needed, establish requirements with Instructional and Technology leadership. 	
Security		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review internal staff capacity for nighttime asset protection. • Review law enforcement agreements for response to alarms. 	
Procurement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire through new bids or consortium purchase agreements for devices and equipment. • Acquire additional resources as needed including configuration support, warranty modification, and asset management systems. 	
Assessment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with technology on review of school based technology inventory and device readiness for conducting computer based assessments. • Ensure teachers and students utilize practice items as part of the normal instructional program to ensure students develop familiarity with college- and career-ready item types including short answer and extended response items and performance based tasks. 	
November		Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and hire additional support as needed for configuration and deployment, and for technical help to schools (if internal staff is preferred). • Review procedures to support response time defined in SLAs.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align decentralized support, including staff and issue tracking, to ensure standards will be met for SLAs.
	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin modification of electrical requirements as needed.
	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform physical security modifications at high priority schools.
	Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor supply chains to ensure vendors are on track to meet device volume requirements.
	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop school based assessment plan for spring testing to include teacher training for spring testing, device deployment and student familiarity with assessment conditions.
December	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff on new procedures to support response time and support standards for testing program. Establish school roll out plan for delivery and setup. Establish asset tagging and inventory plan to support device deployment.
	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish electrical modifications.
	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish any changes to alarm response and law enforcement MOUs.
	Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor supply chains to ensure vendors are on track to meet device volume requirements.
	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train teachers and staff on the use of embedded accessibility and accommodations features for computer based assessments and ensure the weekly use of these tools with students.
January	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive and deploy new devices and equipment. Asset tag all new devices and equipment. Implement the asset management program for schools (if needed) and load all asset information.
	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust electrical load and access needs as deployment of devices takes place.
	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform concurrent asset risk review to ensure deployed devices have identified theft protection support.
	Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist Technology team in the accounting for devices received. Identify any contingency procurement that has to be performed for any areas where shortfalls may exist. Ensure an overall contingency is established for rapid replacement of devices that fail.
	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct training for school based assessment coordinators on spring testing protocols. Work closely with technology to ensure school based device deployment meets school needs based on school testing plans. Revise school spring testing plans as needed.
February	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform configuration and load tests of the devices and testing labs with Instructional staff.
	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust electrical load and access needs as deployment of devices takes place.
	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to check devices daily for necessary refresh of devices and peripherals (e.g., mice, keyboards, etc.). Ensure school based assessment coordinators re-deliver training for spring assessments to school staff.
During Testing	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with assessment staff to establish a command center to quickly address technology and assessment concerns as they arise.
	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with assessment staff to establish a command center to quickly address technology and assessment concerns as they arise.

Implementing Common Core Assessments

Frequently Asked Questions of PARCC

Implementing Common Core Assessments

Frequently Asked Questions of PARCC⁶

What is PARCC?

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a group of 19 states working together to develop a common set of computer-based K–12 assessments in English language arts/Literacy and math linked to the new, more rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

PARCC is one of two state consortia developing assessments aligned to the CCSS through the federal Race to the Top assessment grant program.

Why do states need new assessments?

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia voluntarily adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and 2011, and these states need assessments that are aligned to these higher standards.

The new tests also are being developed in response to the longstanding concerns of educators, parents and employers who want assessments that better measure students' critical-thinking and problem-solving skills and their ability to communicate clearly.

They will provide more meaningful, actionable and timely information for educators, parents and students.

The PARCC assessment system will have several benefits not found in current assessment systems including benefits to *students*, who will have clear information about whether they are working at expected levels and are on track for postsecondary success; *teachers*, who will receive more timely and useful data to help inform instruction; *parents*, who will have clear and timely information about the progress their children are making; and *states*, which will have comparable results across PARCC member states and will be home to a youth population that is better prepared for success.

The PARCC assessments will replace state tests currently used to meet the requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Which states make up PARCC?

PARCC is made up of 19 states. Nineteen are Governing States in the consortium: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island and Tennessee. Kentucky and Pennsylvania are Participating States. The U.S. Virgin Islands is a participating territory.

The states in PARCC educate nearly 25 million elementary, middle and high school students and include 16 of the 19 Race to the Top winners.

How does a state participate in PARCC?

Any state can join, as either a Governing or Participating State, by signing the PARCC Memorandum of Understanding. All states in PARCC commit to adopting the Common Core State Standards. PARCC Governing States commit to participating exclusively in PARCC and to administering the

⁶ http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCFAQ_9-18-2013.pdf

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assessment system statewide during the 2014–15 school year. These states also commit to field testing the assessment system components in spring 2014.

What are the benefits of the PARCC assessments?

In ELA/literacy, many states don't assess writing and few assess critical-thinking skills. PARCC will do both.

In math, most current assessments are fill-in-the-blank "bubble tests." PARCC will give students a chance to solve real problems. Plus, they'll not only have to solve complex problems, but show *how* they solved them.

Many current state tests measure only lower-level skills. The new assessments are designed to measure whether students are actually on track for college or careers.

Most current tests just require students to fill in the blanks. PARCC's computer-based assessments will be much more interactive and engaging.

Too often, current tests fail to adequately measure the skills and knowledge of students working significantly below or beyond their grade level. PARCC assessments will.

The new tests will create comparability among states and equity among the students who reside in them. What it means to be ready for success in college or careers shouldn't vary from state to state.

What are the components of the PARCC assessment system?

The assessments will cover English language arts (ELA)/literacy and math for grades 3–11. The system includes the following components:

- **Diagnostic assessments in reading, writing and mathematics.** These optional tests, available throughout the year, will help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses.
- **Mid-year assessments in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** Designed to be given mid-way through the year, these optional tests will help schools shape decisions about curriculum, instruction and professional development.
- **Performance-based assessments (PBA) in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** All students will take this summative test toward the end of the school year to show what they know.

In ELA/literacy, this will involve analyzing literature and a narrative writing task. Students will read texts and write several pieces to demonstrate they can read and understand sufficiently complex texts independently; write effectively when using and analyzing sources; and build and communicate knowledge by integrating, comparing and synthesizing ideas.

In math, students will be asked to solve problems involving the key knowledge and skills for their grade level (as identified by the CCSS), express mathematical reasoning and construct a mathematical argument, and apply concepts to solve model real-world problems.

- **End-of-year assessments (EOY) in ELA/literacy and math.** All students will take this at the end of the school year. The results will be combined with the performance-based assessment to produce a student's summative assessment score. For the end-of-year

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assessment, students will demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge by answering computer-based, machine-storable questions.

- **Speaking and listening component (ELA/literacy only).** All students participating in the PARCC assessments will demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency using this tool, which can be administered anytime during the academic year. While this is a required component of the assessment, currently PARCC does not envision combining results from this with those of the performance-based assessment or end-of-year assessment to determine a student's summative assessment score.

Item and task prototypes that illustrate what will be included in the PBA and EOY components are available here: www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes.

For more on the design of the assessment system, visit this site: www.parcconline.org/parcc-assessment-design.

When will the PARCC assessments be ready?

PARCC is on track to deliver the new tests in the 2014–15 school year.

Who is developing the PARCC assessment items?

PARCC states have contracted with Pearson and Educational Testing Services (ETS), each working with subcontractors, to develop the assessments. Additional information about contractors is available via the PARCC website. (See www.parcconline.org/Procurement.)

Who is involved in reviewing the assessment items?

Hundreds of K–12 and postsecondary educators, content specialists, and assessment experts from across the PARCC states are participating in thorough reviews of all items. Their priority is to evaluate whether the items are closely aligned to the Common Core; are of high quality; and are rigorous, fair and unbiased. (See www.parcconline.org/assessmentdevelopment.)

Will the PARCC high school ELA/literacy and mathematics exams be given at the end of the course or end of the grade?

The high school ELA/literacy exams will be given at the end of the grade (for grades 9, 10 and 11).

The high school math exams will be given at the end of the course. PARCC is creating two sequences of exams, aligned to two different math course sequences. The first is a traditional sequence of courses, including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II. The second is an integrated pathway of courses often titled Mathematics I, II and III. Each state can decide whether to require one set of exams for all districts, whether to allow districts to choose either the integrated or traditional sequence, or some hybrid approach.

Are sample items available?

Sample items and tasks for math and ELA/literacy — along with a range of supplementary materials and additional resources — are available at www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes. New samples will be added over the coming months.

Are test blueprints available?

PARCC released assessment blueprints and accompanying materials in April 2013 for both English language arts/literacy and mathematics at all grade levels.

These tools show how the assessments reflect and measure the Common Core at every grade level. Educators can use the blueprints, combined with other PARCC tools — including the PARCC Model Content Frameworks, assessment claims, evidence statements, sample items and performance-level descriptors — to support quality implementation of the standards.

The blueprints are available online at www.parcconline.org/assessment-blueprints-test-specs.

Will students have opportunities to practice the tests?

PARCC tests will mirror the kind of high-quality work students are already doing in effective classrooms. In essence, “practice” should be occurring throughout the year.

A formal practice test, consisting of representative items for each grade level, will be available in spring 2014. PARCC also will continue to release sample items to help teachers familiarize students with the format of the assessments and technology.

Is PARCC replacing my state’s current assessments?

The PARCC assessments are being designed to replace current state assessments for English language arts/literacy and mathematics in grades 3–11.

What sort of data will teachers receive based on the PARCC assessments?

The PARCC states are working to develop detailed descriptors of student achievement at each performance level on the new tests in all grades and subjects. [Policy-level descriptors](#) were adopted in October 2012, while grade- and subject-specific content descriptors were released in April 2013 for public comment. These will provide more information about what students scoring at a given level on the tests know and can do.

How quickly will assessment data be returned to teachers?

PARCC’s goal is to have data from the performance-based assessment and end-of-year assessment returned before the end of the school year.

Will the PARCC assessments be all machine scored?

PARCC is exploring a hybrid approach to scoring that includes scoring by both machines and humans.

PARCC is exploring current research on the efficacy of automated scoring technology to ensure its reliability.

Will student test results on the summative assessment be broken down into components with separate scores? If so, what are these components? If not, what will the cumulative score reflect?

In ELA/literacy, the key claims — for which PARCC will report results — include whether students can read and comprehend a range of complex texts independently, whether students can write effectively when using and/or analyzing sources, and whether students can build and present knowledge through research and the comparison and synthesis of ideas.

In math, PARCC will report scores tied to whether students can solve grade-level/course-level problems with a focus on the content outlined in the [PARCC Model Content Frameworks](#). Information also will be available about students' ability to demonstrate fluency in key areas and to solve problems using mathematical practices, mathematical reasoning and modeling.

How will the end-of-year (EOY) assessments and performance-based assessments (PBAs) be weighted within a student's total score?

The PARCC score will include the results from both the PBA and EOY assessment components.

PARCC has not determined yet how scores from the PBA and EOY assessments will be weighted but expects that both components will be significant factors. Data provided through item development research in spring 2013 and field testing in the 2013–14 school year will inform this decision.

How is PARCC making College- and Career-Ready Determinations?

PARCC intends to make College- and Career-Ready Determinations in ELA/literacy and math based on new high school tests. The PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination policy describes the academic knowledge, skills and practices students must demonstrate in ELA/literacy and math to enter directly into credit-bearing college courses without remedial coursework.

The PARCC Governing Board and Advisory Committee on College Readiness adopted this policy in 2012, after several months of public and stakeholder review. It is guiding the development of the PARCC high school assessments and, ultimately, will serve as a guidepost for setting [performance levels](#) and associated test scores.

Will the high school assessments be used for admission into two- and four-year institutions of higher education?

The assessments are not intended to be used by colleges and universities in decisions about college admission. They are intended only to give students a [College- and Career-Ready Determination](#) that indicates they are academically prepared to enroll in first-year, credit-bearing courses at two- and four-year institutions and can be exempt from taking a placement test at the college or university they attend.

Will the PARCC college-ready assessment replace the college/university's current placement exam, used to determine what level of coursework students are ready for?

Not necessarily. Colleges and universities will continue to use their existing placement tests, for example, for returning students or adult learners. The decision to use the PARCC college- and career-ready assessment ultimately rests with the states, colleges and/or universities.

Who will decide in my state whether colleges and universities will use the PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination?

K–12 and higher education leaders in PARCC states are working together to develop the college- and career-ready assessments to increase the likelihood higher education institutions will accept a PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination.

Higher education systems in each state have different governance structures, which means the decision to use this determination may lie with different postsecondary leaders in each state.

When will the college- and career-ready scores be available to use?

The PARCC college- and career-ready test will first be administered in the 2014–15 school year. Colleges and universities are evaluating whether the College- and Career-Ready Determination can be used for placement in fall 2015 or later.

What are the consequences for students who do not earn the College- and Career-Ready Determination?

Students who do not earn the College- and Career-Ready Determination will likely have to take placement tests when they enroll in a college or university, depending on the policies adopted by higher education systems in the PARCC states.

Does “college ready” mean readiness only for four-year institutions? What about two-year degrees, technical colleges and community colleges?

Getting students “college ready” refers to preparing them for success in credit-bearing postsecondary education, whether at a two- or four-year college or in a technical program. For more information, see www.parcconline.org/CCRD.

What is the Technology Readiness Tool?

The Technology Readiness Tool supports states and districts in their transition to next-generation assessments. This measures districts’ current capacity and compares that to the technology needed to administer the new online tests.

How many computers/devices will schools need to administer the assessments online?

The number of devices a school needs largely depends on the number of students enrolled at each tested grade, the number of students that can be tested simultaneously and the available bandwidth.

To assist schools in planning for an adequate number of devices for PARCC assessments in 2014–15, PARCC has developed some rule-of-thumb [guidance](#).

What kinds of computers/devices will be needed?

PARCC has released preliminary guidance on the minimum specifications for hardware/devices so districts buying instructional technology can determine whether those devices meet the specifications for PARCC: <http://www.parcconline.org/technology> .

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PARCC is working to keep the tests “device-neutral,” so districts won’t need to purchase specific devices to administer the tests and so the devices can be used throughout the school year.

Desktops, laptops, netbooks (Windows, Mac, Chrome and Linux), tablets (iPad, Windows and Android) and thin client computers will be compatible provided they are configured to meet the established hardware, operating system and networking specifications — and are able to address the security requirements described in the Security Considerations section of the PARCC Technology Guidelines.

More information can be found at <http://www.parcconline.org/technology>.

What can PARCC states and districts do to help schools get ready to administer the tests online?

States and districts will need to collaborate to determine the best approach for preparing to administer the tests online.

In collaboration with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, PARCC created the Technology Readiness Tool for states to use with districts.

PARCC state leaders are collaborating to share ideas and best practices.

PARCC also released a [white paper](#) that presents a variety of strategies states are taking to build technology capacity, including how states can leverage currently existing federal funding streams as well as specific state-developed strategies.

Will retakes be allowed on PARCC?

PARCC will make retests available to states.

In grades 3–8, PARCC will offer one retest opportunity per year.

In high school, PARCC will offer a maximum of three retest opportunities per year (per end-of-course assessment).

Individual states will determine whether to offer retests and how many times per year in high school.

Will the PARCC tests be used as a graduation requirement for high school students?

This is a state decision.

When will districts and schools know whether their states are offering the diagnostic and mid-year assessments?

This is a state decision. If a state decides not to offer the diagnostic and mid-year assessments, these will likely still be available for districts to purchase and use.

If optional diagnostic and mid-year assessments are adopted or made available by the state, how do teachers access them?

These components will likely be housed on the PARCC online resource center, or another platform that teachers will have access to if their state or district decides to make these available.

How will the PARCC assessments be administered in schools with block scheduling (or other “nontraditional” schedules)?

PARCC will offer testing windows for the mathematics performance-based and end-of-year assessments that accommodate schools with block or similar non-traditional schedules. PARCC is still determining whether the English language arts/literacy can be administered during those windows.

What is PARCC policy on calculator use in the classroom?

PARCC adopted a [Calculator Policy](#) on the use of calculators on the PARCC assessments for grades 3–5, grades 6–8 and high school. (PARCC is considering a separate policy on calculator use for students with accommodations.)

What is PARCC’s guidance around the instructional use of technology?

PARCC states know that in the 21st century students need to have access to technology in the classroom throughout the year, not just at testing time. Devices used for tests also should be used for instructional purposes.

What is the timeline for the rollout of all the resources leading up to the PARCC assessments?

The most updated information about the PARCC timeline is available [here](#).

Major deadlines include:

- Item development research in spring 2013
- Field testing in spring 2014
- Full-scale implementation of summative assessments in spring 2015
- PARCC also has established a timeline for the release of important information to schools and districts, which is available [here](#).

Will all schools and districts get to participate in item development research in spring 2013? Field testing in 2013–14?

PARCC is conducting *item development research* in spring-summer 2013, with 2,300 students across six PARCC states, to evaluate the quality, usability and accessibility of test items.

Field testing will take place in the spring of 2014. All items and tasks that will appear on the PARCC summative assessments will be field tested in schools across the PARCC states.

PARCC is in the process of specifying the requirements for field testing, as well as the identification and selection of participating schools and districts.

PARCC will share guidance with schools and districts on field test participation in June 2013. All schools — even those not selected for field testing — will be able to use the PARCC practice test in spring 2014.

Will districts have flexibility within testing windows?

Schools and districts will have a maximum of two four-week windows to complete the administration of the performance-based and end-of-year components (one window per component). States or districts can choose to administer the tests in a shorter time span if they have sufficient capacity to do that.

How much time will the PARCC assessments take? How does this compare with what is currently in place?

Since testing times currently vary from state to state, some states may find an increase in testing time and others a reduction of testing time. In some places, time spent on testing will stay the same.

Based on early research on the PARCC test items, PARCC released information about estimated testing times for each grade. These include the estimated time it will take students to complete all of the sessions of the performance-based and end-of-year components in both ELA/literacy and mathematics at each grade level. The estimated times for both components and both subject areas are as follows:

- 8 hours on performance-based and end-of-year assessments in ELA/literacy and math annually in 3rd grade
- Just over 9 hours to assess those subjects in grades 4–5
- A little less than 9 ½ hours in middle school
- A little more than 9 ½ hours in high school

These times refer to on-task time, or the time it will take most students to complete the PARCC summative tests. While it is anticipated that most students will complete the test sessions in the estimated times, states will make a limited amount of additional time available to learners who work at slower rates.

Of course, schools will continue to make special accommodations for children with disabilities who have specific requirements and arrangements established.

What types of accommodations will be allowed for students with disabilities for both the performance-based assessments and the end-of-year tests?

The draft PARCC [Accommodations Manual](#) is a comprehensive policy document that will support local educators in the selection, administration and evaluation of accommodations for the assessment of students with disabilities and English learners on the PARCC end-of-year, performance-based and mid-year assessment components.

The draft manual was released for public and stakeholder input in spring 2013, and the first edition will be finalized in summer 2013.

How will the tests be accessible to students with disabilities?

The intent is for the PARCC assessments to be administered to all students, except those with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom the state will administer a modified or alternate

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assessment. Some PARCC states are working with other consortia to develop tests for those students, and other states are working to develop their own assessments.

PARCC is using Universal Design principles to make the new tests as accessible as possible to all students.

What is being done to assist students with disabilities that need paper and pencil assessments?

PARCC will make paper and pencil assessments for those students that require them due to an identified need.

What opportunities do educators of students with disabilities and English learners have to provide feedback and inform the conversation?

PARCC's Operational Working Group and [Technical Working Group](#) for Accessibility, Accommodations, and Fairness weigh in on all aspects of PARCC assessments to ensure they are widely accessible.

PARCC also has put in place mechanisms for states to involve educators — including educators of students with disabilities and English language learners:

- Educator Leader Cadres
- Local Educator Item Review Committees
- Bias and Sensitivity Review Committees
- Public reviews of the PARCC Model Content Frameworks, tools and resources (such as draft accommodations policies and manual in early 2013)

What resources will PARCC have available for teachers, school leaders and others?

Educator Leader Cadres (ELCs), groups of 24 educators from each PARCC state, serve as state and local leaders in helping raise awareness around the CCSS and the PARCC assessments. PARCC launched the [ELCs](#) in July 2012. ELC members use an [online portal](#) to share resources.

PARCC released [Model Content Frameworks](#) in ELA/literacy and math in 2011 to articulate the key shifts in the CCSS to guide the assessment development. The content frameworks were opened for additional feedback from educators in June and July 2012, and updated versions were published in August 2012.

In August 2012, PARCC also released item and task prototypes for selected grades in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The primary purpose of sharing these is to support educators as they transition to the new standards and tests. More [sample items](#) will be released in the coming months.

PARCC is planning to create professional development modules to help teachers and administrators get ready.

The K–2 formative assessments, diagnostic assessments and mid-year performance-based assessments also will serve as excellent resources for teachers.

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PARCC also will release a significant portion of assessment items and tasks each year, along with annotated student work, to provide educators with insight into the types of questions that appear on the tests and examples of student work.

How is PARCC engaging teachers in the development process?

As part of the [test development process](#), PARCC states are bringing teams of educators together to review and provide feedback on test items as part of local educator review committees.

The [Educator Leader Cadres](#) include educators from every PARCC state.

How is PARCC governed?

The chief state school officer for each of the governing states serves on the [PARCC Governing Board](#). The Governing Board meets quarterly to make major policy, operational, design and financial decisions regarding PARCC. The Governing Board elects a chair from among its members to serve a one-year, renewable term. Governing Board members from six of the states serve on the Executive Committee, which meets weekly.

How is PARCC funded?

PARCC is funded through a \$186 million grant through the U.S. Department of Education's [Race to the Top assessment program](#) to support the development and design of the next-generation assessment system.

What is a Governing State? What is a Participating State?

PARCC **Governing States** have committed to administer the assessment system statewide during the 2014–15 school year. These states also have committed to field testing the assessment items in spring 2014.

States that want to participate in the design of PARCC's assessment system but are not prepared to make the level of commitment of Governing States are **Participating States**.

What is Achieve?

Achieve is a non-profit education advocacy organization with a 15-year history of working with states to improve standards and assessments. In 2010, Achieve was selected through a competitive bidding process by PARCC as the project management partner for the consortium. PARCC has since separated from Achieve and has established itself as an independent non-profit organization.

Who from the states is involved in PARCC?

Leaders and educators from K–12 and postsecondary institutions in all PARCC states are involved.

K–12: The chief state school officers in [PARCC Governing States](#) lead the consortium and make the major policy, design and operational decisions for PARCC. Each state also has designated a K–12 State Lead for PARCC, to help guide the day-to-day work of test development. Other state officials and local educators serve on a range of PARCC committees and item review teams.

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Postsecondary: Senior higher education officials, such as state higher education system leaders and chancellors/presidents of two- and four-year degree-granting institutions, serve on the PARCC [Advisory Committee on College Readiness](#). Each state also has designated a state [higher education lead](#) to coordinate the day-to-day work and participate in assessment development and state implementation activities. Higher education faculty and campus administrators also are engaged in discussions about the development of the tests, including through item review teams.

Who manages and leads the day-to-day work of PARCC? And, how is that structured?

PARCC has formed a number of committees to help manage and lead the day-to-day work of the consortium.

The [PARCC Governing Board](#) has authority for major policy, operational, design and financial decisions.

The [Advisory Committee on College Readiness \(ACCR\)](#) works in partnership with the Governing Board to shape PARCC's strategy for working with higher education systems and institutions and K–12 leaders. ACCR is comprised of higher education leaders from PARCC states and recognized education leaders.

Design, Development & Implementation Committees are responsible for leading major areas of work related to the development of the PARCC assessments and related tools.

Does PARCC have any national experts advising its work?

The [Technical Advisory Committee \(TAC\)](#) advises PARCC as it develops a next-generation assessment system to ensure the assessments will provide reliable results to inform valid instructional and accountability decisions.

PARCC **Technical Working Groups (TWGs)** are advising the consortium on specific assessment and policy issues, including accessibility, accommodations and fairness; mathematics; and English language arts/literacy.

Who should I contact if I have additional questions about PARCC?

If you have general questions about PARCC, please use the contact form on the PARCC website to submit a question: www.parcconline.org/contact. PARCC's project management partner Achieve monitors these questions and will respond directly to you or direct you to a PARCC state representative who can help answer your question.

If you have a question regarding PARCC in your state, you also may use the PARCC state pages on the PARCC website (www.parcconline.org/parcc-states) to identify the K–12 or higher education lead for PARCC in your state so that you can contact them directly.

Frequently Asked Questions of SBAC

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Frequently Asked Questions of SBAC⁷

1. What is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?

Smarter Balanced is a state-led consortium working collaboratively to develop next-generation assessments aligned to the **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** that accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. The Consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven process to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. The Consortium's projects are funded through a four-year, \$175 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, comprising 99 percent of activity resources, with the remaining support provided through generous contributions of charitable foundations.

2. What are the Race to the Top Assessment grants?

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded \$330 million to two groups of states—the **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)** and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—to develop a valid, reliable, and fair system of next-generation assessments. The new tests will assess students' knowledge of mathematics and English language arts/literacy from third grade through high school. They will be aligned to the **Common Core State Standards**, developed by governors and chief state school officers and adopted by more than 40 states.

These assessments will provide educators, parents, and students with the information they need to continuously improve teaching and learning and help ensure that students graduate high school college- and career-ready. The assessments will serve all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

While federal funding currently supports the research and development work of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, all policy decisions about the structure and content of the assessments are made by the member states based on input from stakeholders across the county. At the conclusion of the federal grant in September 2014, Smarter Balanced will become an operational assessment system supported by its member states. The Consortium does not plan to seek additional funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

3. What will the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium provide?

By 2014, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium will develop a fair and reliable system of next-generation assessments for English language arts/literacy and mathematics for grades 3-8 and 11 aligned to **Common Core State Standards**. These assessments will be administered online, allowing for timely results that will provide information to teachers to help differentiate instruction. The assessment system will include:

- A computer adaptive summative assessment administered during the last 12 weeks of the school year. This assessment can be used to describe student achievement and growth of student learning as part of program evaluation and school, district, and state accountability systems.
- Optional computer adaptive interim assessments administered at locally determined intervals. These assessments provide information about student progress throughout the year.

⁷ <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/>

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- Formative tools and resources that help teachers differentiate instruction and meet the unique needs of each student.
- An online tailored reporting system that provides access information about student progress toward college and career readiness.

To learn more, [download a one-page overview](#) of the Consortium.

4. When will the new assessments be in place?

Smarter Balanced is committed to delivering a fully functional assessment system that will be ready for implementation in the 2014-15 school year. In addition, Smarter Balanced is supporting member states as they implement the **Common Core State Standards**. Tools and resources for educators will be posted online in 2012 and incorporated into the digital library as part of the assessment system.

5. How will Smarter Balanced assessments contribute to student success?

All students deserve an education that prepares them for their next step in life—whether that’s going on to postsecondary education or starting a career. The Smarter Balanced assessment system will give parents and students accurate information about whether students are on track to graduate high school ready for college and the workplace. It will provide teachers with resources to tailor instruction to student needs through a digital library of instructional best practices. Importantly, educators will be able to easily compare student achievement between schools, districts, and states to ensure that students are making progress. For more information, visit the [Parents & Students](#) page.

6. How do states join Smarter Balanced?

Smarter Balanced is a state-led consortium, and membership is open to all states, territories, and commonwealths of the United States, as well as the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). To join, states and territories agree to abide by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by the State’s Commissioner or Superintendent of Education, the Governor, and the President of the State School Board (if applicable). The MOU defines the Consortium’s governance and decision-making processes, describes how states may join or exit the Consortium, and specifies other membership requirements. In addition, all Smarter Balanced member states and territories must adopt academic standards in English language arts and mathematics that are designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace and that are substantially identical to the standards adopted across all states in the Consortium.

7. What will the assessments cost?

Smarter Balanced has released cost estimates for its assessments that include expenses for ongoing research and development of the assessment system, as well as test administration and scoring. The end-of-year summative assessment alone is estimated to cost \$22.50 per student. The full suite of summative, interim, and formative assessments is estimated to cost \$27.30 per student. These costs are less than the amount that two-thirds of the Consortium’s member states currently pay. These costs are estimates because a sizable portion of the cost is for test administration and scoring services that will not be provided by Smarter Balanced; states will either provide these services directly or procure them from vendors in the private sector.

8. How is Smarter Balanced different from current assessments?

Smarter Balanced is guided by the belief that a balanced, high-quality assessment system—including formative, interim, and summative components—can improve teaching and learning by providing information and tools for teachers and schools to help students succeed. Timely and meaningful assessment information can offer specific information about areas of performance so that teachers can follow up with targeted instruction, students can better target their own efforts, and administrators and policymakers can more fully understand what students know and can do, in order to guide curriculum and professional development decisions.

Smarter Balanced assessments make use of computer adaptive technology, which is more precise and efficient than fixed-form testing. Teachers, principals, and parents can receive results from computerized assessments in weeks, not months. Faster results mean that teachers can use the information from optional interim assessments throughout the school year to differentiate instruction and better meet the unique needs of their students.

Smarter Balanced assessments will go beyond multiple-choice questions and include short constructed response, extended constructed response, and performance tasks that allow students to complete an in-depth project that demonstrate analytical skills and real-world problem solving. For more information, download the Smarter Balanced [Theory of Action](#).

9. What is a performance task?

Performance tasks challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems. They can best be described as collections of questions and activities that are coherently connected to a single theme or scenario. These activities are meant to measure capacities such as depth of understanding, research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with selected- or constructed-response items.

Performance tasks in reading, writing, and mathematics will be part of the Smarter Balanced summative, year-end assessment. Performance tasks can also be administered as part of the optional interim assessments throughout the year. The performance tasks will be delivered by computer (but will not be computer adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete.

10. How are the assessments being tested before implementation in the 2014-15 school year?

Smarter Balanced has incrementally tested the content of the assessment and the technology that will support the assessment. Smarter Balanced has already completed:

- Cognitive Labs: Individual students provided feedback to test developers about their experience with the innovative test questions, accommodations for students with special needs, and the testing software.
- Small-scale Trials: Promising types of questions and software features were further tried out with hundreds of students.
- Pilot Test: Students at about 5,000 schools across the Consortium responded to a preliminary pool of test questions and performance tasks.

In spring 2014, the Consortium will conduct its Field Test to present the entire pool of Smarter Balanced items to students across member states. The Field Test is expected to involve students in

about 15 to 20 percent of Consortium schools, and will gather the information necessary for final evaluation of item quality.

11. Are sample Smarter Balanced assessment questions available?

In April 2013, Smarter Balanced released online Practice Tests that provide an early look at sets of assessment questions aligned to the Common Core for grades 3–8 and 11 in both English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The Practice Tests allow teachers, students, parents, and other interested parties to experience the features of online testing and gain insight into how Smarter Balanced will assess students' mastery of the Common Core.

In October, 2012, Smarter Balanced released [sample items and performance tasks](#) that illustrate the variety of innovative item types students will encounter on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

12. How is Smarter Balanced developing achievement level descriptors (ALDs)?

Achievement level descriptors (ALDs) are text statements that articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities represented at different categories of performance on the Smarter Balanced assessments, including the college- and career-ready category for the high school assessment. They describe how students are progressing toward mastery of the Common Core State Standards and provide clear explanations of student performance for policymakers, educators, and parents.

Draft initial ALDs were developed in October 2012 by K-12 teachers and administrators and higher education faculty from two- and four-year colleges and universities representing Smarter Balanced Governing States. The ALDs are linked to an operational definition of college content-readiness, as well as a policy framework to guide score interpretation for high schools and colleges.

Following their initial development, both the ALDs and the definition of college content-readiness were revised based on a series of reviews from member states, partners, and individual stakeholders. The initial ALDs were approved by Governing States in March 2013, and the college content-readiness policy was approved in April 2013. To download the ALDs and college content-readiness policy, click [here](#).

13. Will students be able to retake the Smarter Balanced summative assessment?

Smarter Balanced will offer a retake opportunity on the CAT portion of the summative assessment for students who feel their scores are inaccurate or that believe the test was administered under non-standard circumstances.

14. Will Smarter Balanced provide end-of-course assessments?

Smarter Balanced is not developing end-of-course assessments. The 11th grade summative assessment will provide evidence that students are college- and career-ready. However, Smarter Balanced will develop software to allow states to create end-of-course assessments using the interim item bank.

15. How long will the assessments take to administer?

Smarter Balanced Governing States adopted the [preliminary summative test blueprints](#) in November 2012. The test blueprints include critical information about the number of items, score points, and depth of knowledge for items associated with each assessment target. Estimated testing times are

available in a supporting document, [Scoring Reporting and Estimated Testing Times](#). It is important to note that these are estimates of test length for most students. Smarter Balanced assessments are designed as untimed tests; some students may need and should be afforded more time. Smarter Balanced will use data collected through the Pilot and Field Tests to revise estimated testing times.

16. What happens after Smarter Balanced assessments are implemented in the 2014-15 school year?

Smarter Balanced is a consortium of states initially financed through Race to the Top funding. It is currently housed under the [State of Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\)](#) and is planning a transition to University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as a unit operating under the [Graduate School of Education and Information Studies](#). Although the [National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing \(CRESST\)](#) is also a UCLA organization, it will remain an independent research and development institute. This approach 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.

Smarter Balanced will continue to be a state-led organization committed to providing high-quality assessment tools and information to educators and policymakers in our member states. We will not be seeking any additional federal funding for development work. Rather, our ongoing development and continuous improvement will be integrated into our overall sustainability efforts, all of which will be governed by the decisions of our member states and territories.

17. How is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium different from the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)?

Both Smarter Balanced and PARCC are developing assessment systems aligned to the [Common Core State Standards \(CCSS\)](#) in English language arts/literacy and mathematics with the goal of preparing K-12 students for college and career. However, there are key differences between the two consortia. For example, Smarter Balanced assessments will use [computer adaptive technology](#), while PARCC will use computerized assessments that are not adaptive. For a summary of both design approaches, see [Coming Together to Raise Achievement: New Assessments for the Common Core State Standards](#), a white paper developed by Educational Testing Service.

18. Will results from Smarter Balanced assessments be comparable to assessments from other consortia?

Smarter Balanced is collaborating with the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers \(PARCC\)](#) to ensure that there is comparability across the two assessments at the proficiency cut score for every grade. Both consortia will jointly engage with technical and policy advisors to study cross-consortia comparability.

19. What are the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how are they related to Smarter Balanced?

Developed voluntarily and cooperatively by 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, the [Common Core State Standards](#) offer schools, teachers, students and parents clear, understandable, and consistent standards in English language arts and mathematics. The CCSS defines the knowledge and skills students should take away from their K-12 schooling to be

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successfully prepared for postsecondary and career opportunities. More than 40 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards.

Teachers and parents need information about whether students are meeting the expectations set by the CCSS. Smarter Balanced is developing an assessment system that will measure mastery of the Common Core State Standards and provide timely information about student achievement and progress toward college and career readiness. Educators will also have access to a robust library of formative assessment resources and tools that they can use in the classroom to address the individual needs of their students.

20. How do the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) define college- and career-readiness?

The writers of the CCSS, who included college and university faculty, began by defining the knowledge and skills in mathematics and ELA/literacy that students need to be ready to succeed in entry-level credit-bearing coursework and the high-skill workforce. To do this, the standards writers consulted existing college readiness benchmarks, research on student academic preparation, and surveys of business leaders, as well as content standards for top-performing states and countries. The standards-writers sought to create standards that are:

- Aligned with college and work expectations;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Informed by top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and,
- Evidence and/or research-based.

The College and Career-ready Standards were vetted by faculty around the country, including panels convened by the American Council on Education in collaboration with leading scholarly societies. Once the College- and Career-ready Standards were agreed upon, standards writers then created the grade level standards, “back-mapping” them to the college- and career-ready benchmarks. A recent survey of 1,800 faculty in an array of disciplines at a diverse set of institutions found substantial agreement that the CCSS define the knowledge and skills that students need to be ready for entry-level course work.

21. What is Smarter Balanced doing to support states as they implement the Common Core State Standards?

Smarter Balanced is committed to assisting states as they implement the Common Core State Standards. These efforts include:

- Funded membership for Governing States in the Council of Chief State School Officers’ (CCSSO) Implementing the Common Core Standards (ICCS) state collaborative. Participation in this collaborative provided an opportunity for states to develop plans to assist students and teachers in implementing the Common Core State Standards.
- Participating in collaborative efforts, such as the Math Common Core Coalition, whose members also include: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators (AMTE), the Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics (ASSM), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Governors Association

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(NGA), and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

- Developing a digital library of formative assessment practices and professional development resources aligned to the CCSS. The library will include examples of instructional best practices at each grade level, strategies for cross-classroom collaboration, and professional development resources related to the assessment system, such as scoring rubrics for performance tasks.

22. A coalition of states is developing next-generation science standards. Will science be incorporated into the Consortium's assessments?

Smarter Balanced will not include science assessments at the time of implementation in the 2014-15 school year. However, it is likely that the online test delivery options selected by states (or the Consortium) will support the delivery of online test science assessments in the future—particularly in cases where the science assessments are comprised of selected-response items. Smarter Balanced will continue to monitor the development and adoption of science standards.

The Next Generation Science Standards are being developed by a partnership that includes The National Research Council, the National Science Teachers Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Achieve. For more information, visit: <http://www.nextgenscience.org>.

23. Does a shared assessment system require a shared or common curriculum?

No. We believe that curriculum decisions are best made by educators at the local and state levels. States participating in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium will have access to professional development materials and instructional resources for teachers through a digital library. These tools are optional and can be used, as needed, to complement state curriculum supports to districts and teachers.

24. To what extent will the assessments measure 21st-century skills?

The Smarter Balanced assessment system will measure the full depth and breadth of the **Common Core State Standards** in ELA/literacy and mathematics. The authors of the Common Core explicitly focused on the cognitive skills and knowledge that students need to be ready to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses and in workforce training programs. Critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills are a major focus in the standards. Through innovative items and performance tasks, Smarter Balanced will measure these important skills.

However, the Common Core authors also note that the standards are not meant to encompass everything a student should learn, or describe all of the skills that students need in the 21st century. Indeed, academic readiness—as defined by the Common Core—is only part of a more comprehensive set of knowledge and skills that contribute to college and career readiness, such as work habits, persistence, and postsecondary planning.

25. How are teachers involved in creating the Smarter Balanced assessment system?

Smarter Balanced is committed to engaging teachers in the design of an assessment system that provides resources and information to improve teaching and learning. Teachers are helping write and review assessment items and performance tasks for the Pilot Test of the assessment system in early

2013. Teachers will also contribute to the development of items for the Field Test in early 2014. More information about item development is available in [a series of online trainings](#) for item writers and reviewers.

In addition, Smarter Balanced will recruit teams of teachers from each state to evaluate formative assessment tools and resources and contribute to professional learning resources available through the assessment system. Finally, teachers will score parts of the assessments, including extended response and performance tasks.

26. How will teachers be selected to participate in the State Networks of Educators?

Smarter Balanced is committed to involving teachers in the development and vetting of formative assessment practices and professional learning opportunities. Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, 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. It is expected that states will work with existing networks for professional development, and will invite the regional representatives of professional organizations to recommend teachers to participate in the sessions. Additional information will be available in early 2013. For more information about the development of formative assessment resources, download the Formative [Assessment Master Work Plan](#).

27. Do the Smarter Balanced assessments support English language learners, students with disabilities, and other students with special needs?

The Smarter Balanced 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.

Our work is guided by the [Smarter Balanced Technical Advisory Committee](#), as well as [advisory panels](#) for English language learners and students with disabilities. For more information, download the [Accessibility and Accommodations](#) factsheet and visit the [Support for Under-Represented Students](#) page

28. How is the higher education community involved in Smarter Balanced?

Collaboration with higher education is critical to achieving the goal of better preparing students to enter college and the workforce. Representatives from higher education are involved in key design decisions—with the goal that colleges and universities across Smarter Balanced member states will accept the assessment as evidence that high school students are ready for entry-level, credit-bearing coursework.

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 addition, two higher education leaders hold seats on the [Executive Committee](#) and higher education representatives serve on Consortium [work groups](#).

29. How is Smarter Balanced defining college- and career-readiness?

Smarter Balanced is developing assessments aligned to the full depth and breadth of the [Common Core State Standards \(CCSS\)](#). Through its member states, and in consultation with the lead standards writers and other national education experts, Smarter Balanced is translating the CCSS into assessment targets, test blueprints, and, ultimately, assessment items and performance tasks. The Consortium also will establish performance benchmarks that define the level of content and skill mastery that marks students as college- and career-ready. These performance benchmarks will be determined through a deliberative and evidence-based standard-setting process, which will include input from K-12 educators and college and university faculty. Preliminary performance standards will be established in 2014 after student data have been collected through pilot and field testing. Following the Field Test in spring 2014, the Consortium will conduct standard setting for the summative assessments in grades 3–8 and grade 11 in ELA/literacy and mathematics. These performance standards will be validated in July/August 2015 using spring 2015 operational data.

30. Will Smarter Balanced assessments replace the SAT and ACT?

No. The 11th grade summative assessment is not designed to be a college admissions test. Rather, it is designed to help students and institutions of higher education better gauge which students leave high school prepared for entry-level, transferable, credit-bearing work in English and mathematics. That is a different question than whether or not students should be admitted. Colleges and universities often admit students who are not immediately ready for credit-bearing coursework. Additionally, colleges and universities vary in how much they rely upon the SAT and ACT—and in the scores on those tests they expect students to meet. Therefore, we believe institutions of higher education will continue to rely on scores from the SAT and ACT in the admissions process. Smarter Balanced is also coordinating with member states to determine how Smarter Balanced results can most effectively be reported to the colleges and universities students choose.

31. Is the Smarter Balanced summative assessment designed for use in college admissions?

No. The Smarter Balanced assessments are not designed to serve the function of admission examinations. Use of Smarter Balanced assessment scores in admission decisions is ultimately a policy decision for higher education systems and institutions, but Smarter Balanced is not designing its assessments for this purpose.

32. How will the performance standard be set for defining college- and career-readiness?

[Higher education leads](#) will work with college and university faculty to play a very active role in this process, with higher education representatives playing a primary role in establishing college- and career-ready standards for the 11th grade assessment. In addition to expert judgment from K-12 teachers and higher education faculty, Smarter Balanced will draw upon multiple sources of empirical data to guide the setting of performance standards, including: international and national benchmarks such as PISA, TIMSS, NAEP, SAT and ACT; and information about student performance in high school and subsequent postsecondary success from state-level longitudinal data systems.

33. Will performance on the Smarter Balanced assessment have any impact on students' college experience?

Yes. Smarter Balanced Governing States have agreed on a College Content-readiness Policy that guarantees exemption from developmental coursework to students who perform at an agreed-upon

level on the grade 11 summative assessment and meet state requirements set jointly by K-12 and higher education for grade 12 course taking and performance. In 2014-15, after the Field Test is complete and preliminary performance standards have been set, colleges and universities in Smarter Balanced Governing States will be asked to agree to abide by this policy beginning with students who enter college in fall 2016. To help colleges and universities make this decision, Smarter Balanced will provide information on how scores on the grade 11 assessment compare to scores on commonly used admission and placement examinations and conduct a series of studies of predictive and consequential validity.

34. How will Smarter Balanced validate its college- and career-readiness benchmark?

A substantial research program has been designed and is being refined to validate and make adjustments to the college- and career-ready standard after full-scale administration begins in 2014-15. Because of the rigorous standard-setting process planned, it is anticipated that the initial college- and career-ready benchmark will be predictive of student performance in the first year of college. Nonetheless, it will be important to validate the standard, and make any necessary adjustments, once postsecondary performance data are available for students who have taken the Smarter Balanced assessments.

35. How does computer adaptive testing (CAT) work?

The Smarter Balanced assessment system capitalizes on the precision and efficiency of **computer adaptive testing (CAT)** for both the mandatory summative assessment and the optional interim assessments. This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments used in many states today. Computer adaptive testing adjusts to a student's ability by basing the difficulty of future questions on previous answers, providing more accurate measurement of student achievement, particularly for high and low-performing students. For more information, download a CAT **factsheet** and **webinar**.

36. If states administer a paper-and-pencil version of the assessment, will scores be comparable with the computer adaptive test?

Smarter Balanced will make a paper-and-pencil version of the summative assessment available during a three-year transition period as schools and districts upgrade their technology. Smarter Balanced will conduct research and will perform equating studies to ensure that results are comparable across the two modes of assessment, and to put the paper-and-pencil forms onto the scale used for the online testing. To improve the precision of the paper-and-pencil version, Smarter Balanced may develop a short "locator" test that will help target an appropriate longer form of the assessment for individual students.

37. What are the technology requirements to administer the Smarter Balanced assessments?

In December 2012, Smarter Balanced released a Technology Strategy Framework and System Requirements Specifications that provides minimum hardware specifications and basic bandwidth calculations that will allow schools and districts to evaluate which of their existing devices will support the administration of next-generation assessments. The framework was developed with input and feedback from Smarter Balanced member states, work groups, and data from the Technology Readiness Tool, an online inventory of technology resources. Based on the research and data analysis, Smarter Balanced estimates that the majority of schools and districts in member states will be able to

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successfully administer the assessments with their existing infrastructure. For more information and to download the specifications, visit our Technology page.

38. What if my school or district does not have the infrastructure to support computer adaptive testing?

Smarter Balanced is committed to helping states transition successfully to next-generation assessments. The assessments are being designed to work with the computing resources in schools today. The assessments can be offered on very old operating systems and require only the minimum processors and memory required to run the operating system itself (for example, the summative assessment can be delivered using computers with 233 MHz processors and 128 MB RAM that run Windows XP). Likewise, the file size for individual assessment items will be very small to minimize the network bandwidth necessary to deliver the assessment online. A 600-student middle school could test its students using only one 30-computer lab.

To assist states that have not yet made the transition to online testing, the Consortium also will offer a paper-and-pencil option for the first three years of operational testing. For more information about technology requirements, visit the Technology page.

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Common Core Resources from the Council of the Great City Schools

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Common Core Resources from the Council of the Great City Schools

- Grade-level Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool—Quality Review (GIMET-QR), 2014
- Implementing the Common Core Assessments: Challenges and Recommendations, 2014
- [A Framework for Raising Expectations and Instructional Rigor for English Language Learners](#), 2014
- [Beyond Test Scores: What NAEP Data Tell Us about Implementing the Common Core Standards](#), 2014
- [Communicating the Common Core Standards: A Resource for Superintendents, School Board Members, and Public Relations Executives](#), 2013
- [Common Core Calendar of Questions](#), 2013
- [Staircase: Explaining the Common Core State Standards](#) (Three Minute Video in English and Spanish), 2013
- [Staircase: Explaining the Common Core State Standards](#) (30-second Public Services Announcement in English and Spanish), 2013.
- [Implementing the Common Core State Standards: Year Two Progress Report from the Great City Schools](#), 2013
- [Parent Roadmaps to the Common Core in English Language Arts](#), Grades K-12 (English and Spanish), 2012
- [Parent Roadmaps to the Common Core in Mathematics](#), Grades K-12 (English and Spanish), 2012
- [From the Page to the Classroom: Implementing the Common Core State Standards—English Language Arts and Literacy](#) (Professional Development Video), 2012
- [From the Page to the Classroom: Implementing the Common Core State Standards—Mathematics](#) (Professional Development Video), 2012
- [Common Core State Standards and Diverse Students: Using Multi-tiered Systems of Support](#), 2012
- [Implementing the Common Core State Standards: Progress Report from the Great City Schools](#), 2012

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Assessment Implementation Working Group

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* Special thanks to Michael Eugene, Chief Operating Officer, Orange County Schools for his thoughtful comments and additions to the document.

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About the Council of the Great City Schools

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Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 66 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems. Its board of directors is composed of the superintendent of schools and one school board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between superintendents and school board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c) (3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in the improvement of leadership and instruction. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in areas such as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961 and has its headquarters in Washington, DC.

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