

## Smarter Balanced Assessment Team



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## From the Test Director

The Vermont Agency of Education Assessment Team wishes you all a Happy New Year and our gratitude for the work you will be doing to make this year's Smarter Balanced Assessment a success. What, you might ask, should we be doing to get ready for the testing window that opens on March 15<sup>th</sup>? Here are a few suggestions:

- √ If you haven't done it already, load your students' names and demographic information into TIDE.
- √ Make sure that all personnel who will be administering the test have completed the Online Assessment Administration Module (Note: Because the latest version of the module includes an overview of changes and additions to the Test Delivery System, all test administrators will need to complete the module including those who completed it last year.)
- √ Identify students who may need accessibility tools or accommodations in order to have a positive testing experience. Try out some of the options with the practice tests if needed.
- √ Develop a schedule for your assessments, using the flexible scheduling options to maximize access to computers, and identify key roles and personnel who will fill them. Encourage personnel to participate in the webinars that will be presented over the next two months.
- √ Make sure that all devices being used for the assessment have the latest secure browser loaded and that operating systems are up to date (see below).
- √ Begin to discuss testing with your students, but please don't administer the training tests until two weeks prior to your test administration dates. See contacts chart in the margin.

**Michael Hock, State Assessment Director**

**A quick note on the Assessment Window:**

This year's assessment window opens on March 15<sup>th</sup> and closes on June 20<sup>th</sup>.

However, as previously announced, we are designating the June dates for make-up testing. There are two points we want to clarify:

1. The test delivery system will not prevent you from initiating large group testing in June. However, we are strongly encouraging you to reserve those dates for make-up sessions to help ensure that your students have plenty of time to finish testing. Last year a few schools waited until June to start testing and ended up with a number of students with incomplete test records.
2. You do not need to wait until June to schedule make-up testing, particularly if your students are taking the test early in the assessment window. Make-up sessions can be scheduled whenever it is most convenient for the students and staff.

**Parent Opt Outs:**

We are already fielding questions about parent opt outs, and need to stress that the Agency's policies on test participation have not changed. We do not recognize parent opt out and consider any student who is not tested because of a parental objection as a parent/student refusal. You do not need to contact the Agency regarding parent opt out requests, nor should you submit an exemption request. We can only approve exemptions for reasons of health that will prevent the student from participating in assessment at any time during the assessment window, including the June make-up dates. You can read the Agency's policy on assessment participation [here](#). Please note that the US Department of Education recently released a [Dear Colleague letter](#) to Chief State School Officers that stress that ALL students must participate in assessment except those with a legitimate health exemption. USED has also cited 10 states with low participation rates (in most cases because of active parent opt out movements) and are requiring corrective actions for this year's assessment, with threat of fiscal penalties if participation rates do not improve.

**Technology Update:**

The technology folks at Smarter Balanced and AIR have been working with Apple Computers to make sure that the Smarter Balanced Test Delivery System can support all the recent Mac and iPad operating system upgrades. AIR is happy to report that our test delivery system (TDS) is now able to support the El Capitan operating system and IOS 9.2. AIR has also assured us that all components of the TDS will be fully functional. **IPad users please note: AIR will no longer support IOS 9.0, so please update your devices before the start of the assessment.**

**GreatKids Test Interpretation Website:**

One of our colleagues discovered a website you might want to share with parents. It's called "Great Schools" and has a nice test interpretation guide for both SBAC and PARCC that helps parents understand test results in a way that directly references specific Common Core State Standards. You can access Great Schools [here](#).

**Accommodations: Text-to-Speech (TTS) & Read Aloud**

New for the 2016 test administration is the ability to select TTS for grades 3-5 on the ELA CAT portion of the Smarter Balanced Assessment. The protocol and criteria has not changed from last year. If you plan on assigning the TTS or a human reader (Read Aloud) in **grades 3-5, you will need state approval**. Similar to last year, the District Test Administrator (DA) will need to enter this accommodation into TIDE. We are asking all DAs to not enter the TTS or Human Reader Accommodation for grades 3 through 5 without state approval. The [Text-to-Speech and Read Aloud Accommodation Form](#) can be found in the [Special Populations Section](#) of the Vermont Smarter Balanced portal. For more information, please contact Linda Moreno at [linda.moreno@vermont.gov](mailto:linda.moreno@vermont.gov) or 802-479-1309.

**High School Assessment Survey: Smarter Balanced, SAT or ACT?**

The Agency of Education is inviting interested individuals to complete a survey that will help the Agency select the best approach to assessment for Vermont's high school students. The survey, only takes a few minutes to complete and can be accessed here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WZC3W6W>. Please feel free to forward this link to your parents and **high school students**.

Click on the icon to take the survey.

