

Smarter Balanced Assessment Team

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From the Test Director:

Are third and fourth graders **DEVELOPMENTALLY** ready for computer-delivered assessments?

Over the last few weeks I've received three letters – two from teachers and one from a parent – describing the struggles and frustrations their youngest students have experienced with the Smarter Balanced digital test delivery system. Each of the writers offered the same conclusion: Third and fourth graders are not developmentally ready to take tests on computers. First off, I want to make it perfectly clear that I do not doubt the sincerity or veracity of my correspondents, nor do I believe they are exaggerating the problem. What I would like us to explore is if the problems are truly developmental, that is, whether or not eight and nine year olds have developed the cognitive and motor skills needed to show what they know with a mouse and a keyboard. Before we accept that these students are struggling because they lack developmental readiness, there are three questions we should ask:

1. **Have we used all the accommodations and embedded accessibility tools and supports that are part of the Smarter Test Delivery System?**

The Smarter Balanced digital system provides students with a variety of options for entering their responses to test questions, including their written responses. If they are proficient at keyboarding, students can compose answers directly into the testing interface. If they are not, they can compose on paper and then enter their answers. When keyboarding is just not an option for a student it is permissible for an adult to do the entry provided that the adult types in exactly what the student wrote on paper including any errors the student may have made. The testing program also includes a practice and training test that introduces students to the digital features of the student interface. It is also untimed and has no set session lengths. Plus, students can take breaks whenever needed. One of the letters suggested that two continuous hours of testing is too long for students in the early grades. I couldn't agree more. In fact, we suggest that test sessions should not exceed one hour at any grade level, and for younger students, shorter sessions and frequent breaks are highly recommended. Breaks that include fun activities that get students out of their seats and moving are particularly good. SBAC Zumba, Anyone?

2. Might the issue actually be “opportunity to learn?”

Over the last few years we have seen classroom computing in our schools grow in leaps and bounds, spurred on by improved access to the necessary digital infrastructure. Unfortunately, there is still considerable variation across our schools in terms of broadband access and ratios of devices to students. Our schools also differ in their development and use of classroom computing. It is important to note here that our English Language Arts Standards for Writing in grades K through 6 include the following:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.6

*With guidance and support from adults, explore a variety of **digital tools** to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.*

In this context, perhaps we should ask if the reported problems with Smarter Balanced are not so much that young students are incapable of using its digital features, but that they have not been given the opportunity to learn how to use them either at home or at school. This is not just a testing issue. It’s a problem that can limit the student’s access to the broad array of digital learning tools that are fast becoming a mainstay of 21st Century classrooms

3. What do the data say?

On the specific topic of developmental readiness for computer delivered assessment, the data don’t say much at all. However, if third and fourth graders are in fact developmentally unprepared to take a test on a computer, wouldn’t we expect their test scores to be uniformly low? They are not, at least not here in Vermont. In both 2015 and 2016, results across Vermont schools for third and fourth grade ranged from 0% proficient to 100% proficient, a pattern that can be seen across the other assessment grades. In 2017, by the way, 3rd and 4th graders actually posted better math scores than their counterparts in grades 8 and 11. The range of scores within grade-level cohorts – what psychometricians call within group variance – approximates a “normal curve” at all grade levels. If the testing format disadvantages younger students because they lack developmental readiness, rather than a normal distribution, we would expect to see a curve that is skewed toward the left where the lowest test scores are found. Overall, the data do not suggest that the third and fourth grade cohorts have been disadvantaged specifically by any part of the testing program including its digital delivery.

So what’s the point? If little kids are shedding big tears on their computer keyboards during testing, isn’t that really all that matters? Testing is supposed to be a tool for improving learning, not an instrument of torture. However, the notion that students are not developmentally ready for these tests leaves us with no other option than a return to bubble sheets and number two pencils, which would be unfortunate.

Computer test delivery has permitted us to develop tests that provide more precise results, in less time, with more engaging “technology-enhanced” test questions, and an

array of embedded accessibility options for our students from special populations. Perhaps what is more important is that the skills students need to take the tests have much broader application in school and in life. These are among the most critical of those 21st century skills we hear so much about. As the standard states, we should be guiding our students' exploration of these digital skills, and not so much because it will help them do better on the test, but because it will help them do better in life.

Michael Hock, State Assessment Director

Smarter Balanced & English Learners (ELs)

Every year, questions surface regarding the testing of English Learners. Within the past two weeks, two common themes emerged: 1) Exchange Students and 2) ELA Exemptions/documentation.

Exchange Students:

We have gotten a few questions about exchange students and state testing. Often foreign exchange students will be enrolled in programs whereby an independent organization is sponsoring their trip. (Rotary Clubs, etc.) Because the need to test is determined by public funding and because exchange students are not publicly funded, these students do not need be assessed.

ELA First Year Exemption for ELs / Documenting TIDE

ESSA, much like the predecessor NCLB, gives permission for a student to be exempted from taking the ELA portion of the state assessment within the student's first year of enrollment in a US school. However, there is nothing in the law that *prohibits* a school from testing a newcomer. For this reason, simply putting the LEP and entry date in TIDE will not prevent the ELA tests from appearing on the student's assessment landing page. In order to get the ELA tests to not show, the School Testing Coordinator (STC) will need to go into the After Testing / Data Cleanup section in TIDE and exempt the student from both the ELA CAT and ELA PT. Traditionally, this will get captured during the Agency's data reconciliation over the summer, but for those who would like to make sure the newcomer isn't unintentionally assessed, please be sure to enter the EL Exemption Code in Tide.

**Please note: ELs are still required to take the SBAC Math and NECAP Science during their first year.*

Julie Voice Pack – PC Users!

Update License Only:

On May 3, 2017, the current license for the *Julie* NeoSpeech™ voice pack will **expire**. If you already have the NeoSpeech™ voice pack installed on your computer, you simply need to renew your license. *You do not need to re-install the voice pack.* To ensure that your voice pack continues to function as expected, please download the updated **license** at the link below and transfer the license to the appropriate license folder on Windows machines following the instructions available in the document: [Updating the NeoSpeech™ License](#).

Smarter Balanced Ready: Big Ideas for Implementation

With two successful years of implementation, the Smarter Balanced Team surveyed districts from four states and one territory to find out what they learned about implementing the Smarter Balanced Assessment Suite (Summative, Interim, & Formative/Digital Library). What they learned was that the Smarter Balanced System was more than a test given at the end of the school year. The feedback has been compiled into a document called [Smarter Balanced Ready](#). This document outlines *six big ideas* for successful implementation. Included in the document are implementation recommendations, stories of district work, and resources developed by districts.

Digital Library (DL)



Digital Library
Connections

DL Summer SNE Workshop

This year's SNE Summer Workshop will be held in Denver, Colorado. This summer's workshop will be open to veteran SNEs only. It will take place from Wednesday, June 21st thru Friday, June 23rd. Unlike the winter workshop, which ended after two days, the summer workshop will run for 2 ½ days. Because it is not being held during the school year, a small stipend will compensate SNEs for their time. During the school year, stipend funds go to the school for substitute reimbursement. Please feel free to contact Linda Moreno with any questions. (See contact information on page 1.)

DL Enhancement Release #4 (mid-July)

The fourth enhancement release is set to be deployed within the next few weeks. These enhancements include grade and subjects linked to educator profile, all filters will be closed by default except for grade and subject, and resources posted with distinction will be at the top of the list. One will also see two tabs at the top of the page: Educator Resources and Professional Development. All changes are carefully thought out in an

Question of the Week

Several staff members have not been able to register or access the Digital Library. Is the self-registration tool operational? Yes, the self-registration tool became operational in December. If your educators are having trouble, it has usually been one of two common issues: the teacher is trying to create an account with a public domain (i.e. Gmail, or AOL), or your district has merged and the new domain has not been registered with Smarter Balanced. Please have teachers create accounts using their work email, and if your district has recently merged, please contact me with the new domain and I'll make sure it gets added to the list.





Smarter Balanced Assessment Tally

VT 2017 SBAC Assessment Tally: 4/24/17 (Completed)								
Grade	# of students	ELA CAT	MA CAT	ELA PT	MA PT	Total #	% Completed	
	43506							
11	6888	4924	4564	4848	4537	18873	68	
8	5989	2762	1958	2708	1955	9383	39	
7	6054	2737	2086	2675	2074	9572	40	
6	6206	2892	1893	2879	1886	9550	38	
5	5997	2015	1515	1971	1507	7008	29	
4	6202	2824	2263	2786	2242	10115	41	
3	6170	2229	1652	2165	1505	7551	31	

41%

Courtesy Post:

Strengthening and Streamlining Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems: Guidelines and Support for Leadership Teams

The [Strengthening and Streamlining Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems: Guidelines and Support for Leadership Teams](#) provide guidelines and resources to help educators in supervisory unions and districts develop a streamlined balanced local comprehensive assessment system for all students. This document was produced following a thorough review of the literature and current practices in the field of student assessment by Agency of Education staff as well as educators in the field. It provides a synthesis of research and current policy, including the MTSS field guide and Education Quality Standards.

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