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TODAY

Back to School, Celebrating Teachers



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Common Core State Standards:

Approaching the Assessment Issue

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been adopted by 43 states and the District of Columbia. But what does this mean for schools, teachers and students? It means change, but the dimensions of that change are going to vary from state to state and school to school. There are several issues that will need to be sorted out before teachers will be able to answer questions concerning what type of change: is it useful, imposed, or off-the-mark. All circle around the issue of the assessments.

Transition from NCLB

Most states and districts have been conducting end of year assessments to judge whether or not their school has made adequate yearly progress (AYP). The implication of failing to make AYP can be severe. Some schools are labeled failures, twenty percent of funds for Title I instruction gets shifted to supplemental educational services and public school choice, and in the extreme cases principals and teachers can lose their jobs.

But just how will the “system” go from measuring the No Child Left Behind standards to new college and career ready standards such as the Common Core?

Professional Development

Let’s take as a given that the CCSS are different than most state standards. For some states the gap between the standards of the NCLB era and the new CCSS is large. Note the new emphasis on writing as a part of reading as one example, and for another the links to content. This approach is very different. How will states provide information and support for teachers to adjust their curriculums? How will the assessments be used to inform instruction?

Assessments and the Consortia

In 2010 the US Department of Education awarded two contracts to two different consortia to develop two sets of assessment systems for states to choose from as a part of their implementation of the CCSS. These two systems, PARCC and Smarter Balance have provided *Reading Today* with the accompanying companion articles on how formative assessments will be integrated into their systems.

They are well aware of the need to provide teachers with information relevant to instruction. Each is proposing different ways to accomplish their technology-based tasks. Do you think they are on the right course? Note that these are their plans, and that the



Richard Long

is IRA’s Director of State and Federal Relations, rlong@reading.org

Common Core State Standards Initiative
 An Initiative of
 the Council of Chief State School Officers
 and the National Governors Association
 Center for Best Practices

assessments are being developed very quickly. Kentucky has already adopted the standards for use in the upcoming school year.

Some Complicating Factors

Clearly, both consortia are dealing with important and complex issues. They are working on how to address issues related to students who are English language learners, and those with disabilities. In addition, both consortia are committed

to providing information back to the schools in a timely manner. This means that much of the work will be done using technology. But, again, how will this work given the current state of technology adaption by individual school buildings? They are looking into this problem.

The Afflerbach Committee

The IRA board is concerned with this issue. They have asked Peter Afflerbach,

University of Maryland, to form a committee to provide clear suggestions to both consortia on the use of formative assessments.

It is also true that many in the education community don't fully understand the concept of formative assessment or know how to implement it. And, the implementation is as much a part of the professional development program as using the standards themselves to develop curriculum. ■

PARCC Consortium — A Five Component Assessment Model

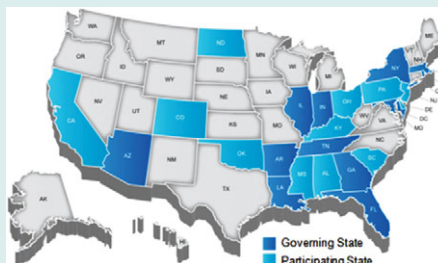
By Dr. Bonnie Hain

Much of the recent national conversation about testing has focused on school accountability and teacher evaluations. While these are important issues, much less discussion has been dedicated to what makes assessments truly powerful—the ability to provide students, parents, and educators the information they need to support learning.

The Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is keenly aware of this as 24 states work together to create common assessments that provide meaningful data that can be used to guide and inform individualized instruction.

The primary goal of the PARCC assessments is to help make sure all students graduate from high school ready for college and the work place. Well-structured, high-quality assessments given throughout the school year help educators determine where extra focus and supports must be placed and when students are ready for enrichment.

The PARCC assessments will be comprehensive, providing meaningful data throughout the year and summative data that is a true indicator of college and career readiness. The system of technology-based assessments will measure the range of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in



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

English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics, including standards that historically have been difficult to measure. For ELA, the assessments will have a special focus on measuring student performances in reading and comprehending complex literary and informational texts, and writing effectively when analyzing texts.

Five components comprise the English Language Arts PARCC assessments, with the two serving as formative assessments. The first component, to be given early in the school year, is designed to be an indicator of student knowledge and skills in reading and writing, so that instructional supports and professional development can be tailored to meet student needs. The second component, given toward the middle of the school year, will contain performance-based items and tasks that focus on ELA/literacy standards relating to writing effectively when analyzing text. A third component

is built around assessing speaking and listening skills.

The final two components will measure student achievement through performance-based tasks and innovative items that give a robust picture of student achievement. Data from these components will be combined into a single summative report.

PARCC is also supporting the development of a computer-adaptive text complexity diagnostic tool that can be used throughout the year to help teachers and parents find materials with the appropriate level of text complexity for each student. This tool will help close the current gap between the complexity of what is read by many students and the demands of college and work place.

As a system, the PARCC assessments are being developed to give a clear picture of how students are learning and progressing throughout the year and over the course of their K-12 education. And, ultimately, that is the most important goal of an assessment—to provide information that tells us whether our students are on track to success in school and beyond.

Dr. Bonnie Hain is the senior advisor for English language arts/literacy for Achieve, Inc, bhain@achieve.org. Achieve serves as a project manager partner for the PARCC consortium.

SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium— Creating a Digital Library of Research Base Assessment Resources

Statement provided to Reading Today by the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium

We all know the criticisms of summative state exams vs. interim, or formative, assessments given throughout the school year. The latter certainly provides classroom teachers with more immediate information to assist their students' learning.

That's why the goal of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium is to use both the latest research and technology to develop exams that accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness, and to transform the role of assessments so that they provide actionable information for classroom teachers.

SMARTER Balanced comprises 29 states working together to develop innovative student assessments in English language arts and math. These assessments, built on the Common Core State Standards that have been adopted by more than 40 states, will provide valid, reliable and fair measures of the higher-order thinking skills increasingly demanded by a knowledge-based global economy.

One of 10 state-led SMARTER Balanced work groups is focused on formative processes and tools and professional development. In short, our work is guided by the belief that a high-quality assessment system — with a range of assessment types — will provide resources and tools for teachers and schools to improve teaching practices and student learning.

To achieve this vision, our approach includes optional computer-adaptive interim exams — administered at locally-determined intervals — allowing schools and teachers to track and monitor student progress throughout the year. Results will be reported in a secure, online platform linked to resources designed to help



SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

teachers interpret assessment data and identify learning challenges.

At the heart of this system will be a SMARTER Balanced Digital Library with research-based formative resources and tools to help teachers transform classroom instructional practices to support student success. The library will include instructional best practices aligned to the Common Core, strategies for cross-classroom collaboration and professional development resources related to the assessment system

Through the library, teachers will have access to scoring rubrics for performance tasks and examples of student work. Educators will also be able to submit resources to the library and engage in online discussions with colleagues from around the nation to share information and learn about best practices.

During the next few years, teachers will be integrally involved in creating the assessments and formative tools and

processes. SMARTER Balanced member states will convene teams of teachers to review formative processes and tools and recommend quality resources to upload to the Digital Library. Teachers will also be engaged in item development, item writing and the scoring of the assessments.

The transition to the Common Core State Standards and to next generation assessments represents an important shift in public education. The standards provide teachers, parents and students with a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills students need for success in college and the workforce.

SMARTER Balanced is committed to a transparent process — working in partnership with educators — to develop an assessment system that measures student progress toward college and career readiness and ensures that teachers have the tools and supports they need to help students meet those expectations. To learn more about SMARTER Balanced, visit www.smarterbalanced.org.