Oregon's Smarter Balanced Field Test

Lessons Learned

Fall 2014

Oregon Department of Education

Assessment

OVERVIEW:

Background

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)—composed of 20 states, Oregon included, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—completed a practice run of new, college- and career-ready assessments in English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics for students in grades 3 through 8 and high school between March and June of 2014. With more than 4.2 million students participating across 16,549 schools, the Smarter Balanced field test stands as the largest of its kind in the history of education in the United States.

Field testing represents an essential step in developing high quality assessments. For SBAC, the intent of the field test was three-fold: ensure the quality of assessment items and the online testing system; generate data to use in setting preliminary achievement standards; and evaluate the capacity of current technology and test administration systems to implement the new assessments on a broad scale. As part of SBAC's commitment to developing next-generation assessments that are accurate and fair for all students, over 19,000 items and performance tasks were tested to ensure alignment to and measurement of student achievement against the Common Core State Standards.

Purpose

Noted above, the primary purpose of the field test was to ensure the functionality of item types, embedded tools, and the general assessment delivery system. Additionally, 13 of 20 Consortium states chose to collect educator, test administrator (TA), and student **feedback** to assess the readiness of their schools to administer and students to take the new summative assessments. Here, field test feedback provides an important, more individualized snapshot of state readiness in the areas of test administration, curriculum alignment to state-adopted content standards, and student preparation for higher education and the 21st Century workplace.

In Oregon, 195 schools across 78 districts participated in the Smarter Balanced field test, totaling more than 24,000 participants. Specifically, 16,803 students completed the math test and 14,965 completed the ELA test. Post-test, our goal was to capture the experiences of those involved in the testing process to better understand what works well and what requires further improvement as we move into our first operational year (2014-15). In addition to Oregon-specific observations, this report features general results from feedback collected across the consortium to provide a more holistic picture of the Smarter Balanced field testing experience.

Process

We provided student surveys and teacher/test administrator (TA) questionnaires to all Smarter Balanced field testing schools with submission guidelines and collected responses during a two-week window from May 28th to June 11th, 2014. To supplement questionnaires, we conducted focus groups with students from schools that responded to a recruitment email sent to all field testing schools. Participation in both feedback venues was voluntary.
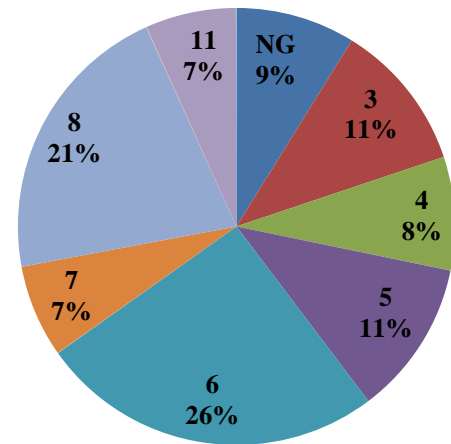
Results

Approximately 2,549 Oregon students and 93 educators/TAs (survey + focus group participants) provided feedback on their testing experiences. Responses include both descriptive information (i.e. grade level, testing hardware, etc.) and dialogue regarding the testing experience. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 responded to the survey, with sixth and eighth graders representing the majority of student respondents at a combined 47% of the total. 9% of respondents did not provide their grade. 82% of student respondents took the field test on a desktop computer, with another 14% using some form of tablet (4% did not answer). We also conducted focus groups with students from five different schools and across five grades (4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, and 10th). We did not record focus groups but collected notes and verbatim quotes.

Questions included:

- *What did you think about the test?*
- *What would you tell your friends and other students who ask what they need to do to be prepared for the test?*
- *What would you tell teachers to do to help students be prepared for the test?*
- *If you were talking to the test developers, what would you recommend?*

Dialogue from both focus groups and open-ended responses on questionnaires were coded and categorized into themes of talk.

Grade levels of students who took the field test survey.

Summary

Ultimately, Smarter Balanced emerges as more "difficult," "challenging," "interactive," and more writing- and typing-intensive than OAKS in the same content areas. Results include specific call-outs for increased capacity of both instructional and testing supports for students, teachers, and TAs. Respondents identified the need to spend more time preparing teachers and aligning curriculum to the assessed content standards, as well as spending more instructional time working with students on typing, word processing (computer literacy), and writing. Respondents also mentioned using the practice tests more and earlier to familiarize students with the new test format and tools. Three key recommendations follow student and teacher/TA lessons learned:

1. Prioritize familiarity with test interface and question types early;
2. Strengthen instructional alignment to Oregon's new content standards;
3. Increase opportunities for students to practice typing, word processing, multi-step problem-solving, and writing.

Moving forward, ODE is using participant feedback to adjust testing instructions and associated materials (i.e. district trainings), refine internal and external communications, and elevate policy, testing content, and technology considerations to the appropriate owners (e.g. ODE management, test vendors, SBAC). The following materials can be used by schools/districts to learn and communicate about the new assessments as well as develop local policies and procedures to better facilitate test administration (see **Recommended Practices, p. 5-6**).

Oregon Lessons Learned

Oregon Lessons Learned are organized around six major topics addressed by participant feedback that speak to our state's test administration and technology readiness as well as our students' ability to navigate the test interface and respond to question types and tasks. This chart summarizes the key insights of survey and focus group responses. Recommended practices developed in light of student and teacher/TA insights are outlined on pages 5-6.

Topic	Key Insights in Oregon
Test Administration	➤ Given the newness of the tests, TAs suggest hands-on training time is essential to test administration efficiency, particularly for schools that did not field test.
In-Class Activity + Performance Task	➤ TAs and students were confused about the relationship between the In-Class Activity and the Performance Task. ➤ TAs desired clarification regarding what they could and could not say and do during the In-Class Activity preceding the Performance Task.
Technology	➤ Common problems reported include difficulty logging in, computers freezing, audio issues, and information loss due to test sessions timing out during longer sections. *ODE's test vendor has repaired all known technology glitches.* ➤ TAs experienced logistical problems with providing headphones.
Accessibility Supports	➤ TAs reported not being fully familiar with the accessibility supports available through Smarter Balanced. ➤ Given the amount of reading on the ELA portion, TAs needed additional support to assist multiple students with special needs with the read-aloud accessibility support.
Test Security	➤ Security breaches were rare across the consortium, and mostly involved students taking pictures of test questions with their phones and posting them on social media sites. ➤ Because students were not familiar with how to submit answers, TAs reported difficulty assisting students without violating test protocols (i.e. looking at content).
Student Preparation	➤ Students were not prepared to navigate the new testing platform, which impacted their focus on content and performance. Students need opportunities to become familiar with the Smarter Balanced test interface, tools, and supports prior to testing so the mode of delivery does not impact the validity of their scores. ➤ Typing, solving multi-step problems, and writing processes top the list of practice items for students.

Consortium Lessons Learned

SBAC collected and synthesized the results of surveys collected from 19,600 students and 4,946 adults (administrators, classroom teachers and proctors, test coordinators, and others closely involved in field test administration) across 13 of the 20 member states. Five key findings, listed verbatim below, were provided in the Smarter Balanced Field Test Report released to the consortium in late October 2014.

These findings are entirely those of the author of the report, and are intended to assist state and district planning alongside individual state feedback collection efforts. In addition to these findings, SBAC's report indicates that instructional alignment to the Common Core State Standards is lacking and must be intensified, particularly in the upper grades, if students are to perform well on Smarter Balanced. This finding is mirrored by Oregon educator/TA and student feedback, and has heavy implications for both federal- and state-level policy-making moving forward.

Key Insights Across 13 Consortium States

➢ States need to customize the Test Administrator Manual and Training Modules based on their implementation choices and get those materials out to districts as soon as possible to allow sufficient time for thorough preparation, training of test proctors, and testing of the technology infrastructure at the district and school levels. *ODE posted its 2014-15 Test Administration Manual with Smarter Balanced administration policies and requirements on October 1, 2014.*

➢ Schools and districts need to continue to update their technology infrastructure and ensure sufficient Internet connectivity/bandwidth in all locations that will be used for testing.

➢ Students with weak keyboarding or word processing skills need opportunities to strengthen them, whether in or out of school.

➢ In order to give students the full benefit of the untimed nature of these assessments and the optional breaks, schools will need to thoughtfully develop their test administration schedules.

➢ Students should have an opportunity to try out the test so that the final results describe students' knowledge and skill rather than their familiarity with the test format. Teachers have several resources available to help students become familiar with the format of the test, including a practice test, training test, and the optional interim assessments.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES*

Test Administrator Preparation:

➢ **Visit the OAKS portal** http://oaksportal.org/ **regularly to stay up-to-date on important information.**

   o The portal serves as a central location for information, resources, and technical help, including:

      ▪ **Policies and Procedures**—*Includes links to Oregon's* Test Administration Manual, Oregon Accessibility Manual, TA User Guide, *and* more.

      ▪ **Training Site**—*Allows TAs to practice setting up test sessions and administer non-secure practice tests that mirror the functionality of the secure, operational tests.*

      ▪ **Supported Web Browsers + Technical Documentation**

   ODE and its vendor will continue to add new resources to the portal throughout the year, which schools/districts can use to assess their technology readiness and update TAs on test administration procedures and promising practices (e.g. In-Class Activity + Performance Task instructions; Sample Test Schedules).

➢ **Ensure headphones are available for all students.**

   o Simple earbuds work—unlike ELPA, headsets are not required.

> *Helpful Hint: If providing headphones is an issue, supplement school supplies by encouraging students to bring their own.*

➢ **Develop local processes to provide for students who miss one or both parts of the In-Class Activity and Performance Task (i.e. absent students, late transfers). Time-savers include:**

   o Identify free periods (i.e. study hall, float periods, access courses) that can be used for teachers or aides to administer the In-Class Activity. Group students together when scheduling make-up sessions.

   o Record all In-Class Activities (i.e. podcasts) to be used in the case that teachers or aides are not available to support an absent or late transfer student. In-Class Activities are non-secure and not content-related so recordings will not violate test security.

➢ **If applicable to your school, ensure enough test administrators are available to support students assigned with the read-aloud designated support/accommodation *prior* to scheduling testing.**

> *Helpful Hint: Use the Smarter Balanced practice tests to identify which students would benefit from the text-to-speech tool rather than the TA-delivered read-aloud.*

➢ **Distribute ODE's weekly Assessment & Accountability Update (AA Update) to relevant personnel to keep districts up-to-date on the latest news related to testing.**

*Use in addition to annual Test Administration and Security Training Requirements

Student Preparation:

➢ **Test administrators and students should take the Smarter Balanced practice and training tests to become more comfortable navigating the test.**

- o Access the practice and training tests through the OAKS portal rather than the Smarter Balanced portal to more closely replicate the testing experience in Oregon.

- o Familiarize students with available accessibility supports and universal testing tools and how to use them (i.e. text to speech, pop-up glossaries, pausing audio, masking text).

- o Learn how to submit answers for extended and constructed response items.

- o Take advantage of the unlimited break option to mitigate testing fatigue.

- o Help students identify appropriate stopping points throughout the tests to avoid losing information typed into response sections and/or the notepad feature.

Helpful Hint: When taking the training tests, test takers can right click to generate a tutorial of how to solve a given item type.

➢ **Communicate the basics of the testing experience broadly so parents and students are not surprised by the differences between Smarter Balanced and OAKS tests. Recommendations include:**

- o Explain that questions go beyond multiple choice to include typing in answers and completing multi-step problems.

- o Encourage students to do their best on the tests and avoid language that may negatively impact their experiences (i.e. "the tests are really hard").

- o Provide community presentations to inform parents and students about our new state assessments and what they can do to prepare. ODE offers Smarter Balanced PowerPoint Presentation materials in English and Spanish for districts interested in tailoring these resources to fit their communication needs.

Helpful Hint: Visit ODE's Communicating Student Assessment in Oregon webpage for parent-friendly assessment communication resources.

Please contact Jessie McGraw, Public Affairs Specialist, at 503-947-5970 or jessica.mcgraw@ode.state.or.us with questions regarding ODE Smarter Balanced feedback collection and results.