

The Road Ahead for State Assessments

WHAT THE ASSESSMENT CONSORTIA BUILT, WHY IT MATTERS, AND EMERGING OPTIONS



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This publication is the final edition in a series that chronicled the work of the six federally funded assessment consortia, *Coming Together to Raise Achievement*. Leaders from across the country provide their reflections on the impacts of the Race to the Top Assessment Program, its lasting contributions, its shortcomings, and the assessment opportunities and challenges that lie ahead under the Every Student Succeeds Act.



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The *Coming Together to Raise Achievement* series was produced by the K-12 Center at ETS. The mission of our K-12 Center is complete! At the K-12 Center, our goal was to support national, state and local policymakers, and school leaders with the latest research, discussion and resources to assist in the development of Next Generation Assessments. Now that states have begun to implement new standards and the supporting assessments, our mission is complete.

The Changing Landscape of State Assessments

The Race to the Top Assessment Program (RTTAP) has brought unprecedented change to the world of assessments — on an unprecedented timeline.

With more than \$360 million in grants as an incentive, it fostered a new level of collaboration among states, fostered multistate agreement on what is meant by college and career readiness, enabled states to incorporate better measurement of those skills, and drove innovation in the use of technology-enhanced testing.

In just six years, it produced higher-quality assessment tools at greater scale than ever before. “We actually figured out how to write better tests for the first time since I’ve been working on assessment,” notes Chris Minnich, Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers. “Back into the early 2000s we had been talking about the need for performance assessments, and the need for kids to respond to multistep problems. We had put our toes in the water in certain places, but we had never systematically gotten to higher levels of assessment. That’s a huge benefit of this investment.”

At the same time, coming on the heels of the No Child Left Behind initiative begun in 2002, RTTAP sought to achieve rapid change in a time when many states, governors, and members of Congress began to feel that federal oversight of education had gone too far and diverged too much from the tradition of local control.

The sheer duration of that oversight helped create a kind of “fed fatigue” at the state level, opposition in state legislatures, and passage by Congress of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which largely returns

control of assessments and testing to the states.

“If you are a high school senior today, you’ve finished almost your entire K-12 experience under No Child Left Behind,” says Jeremy Anderson, President of the Education Commission of the States, which advises and assists states on education policy. “ESSA is a dramatic change. I’m not sure how it is going to play out in a lot of states. It is a new dynamic after 12 years of federal policy.”

What Have We Gained?

Though much has changed politically and educationally since RTTAP was launched, there have been tangible benefits from both the process and the work of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessment consortia.

Foremost has been the development of higher-level assessments that measure multipart and critical thinking, assessments enhanced by technology, and assessments geared toward measuring skills that will be essential for college and career readiness.

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forms of assessment,” notes Stephen Lazer, Senior Vice President of Student and Teacher Assessment at Educational Testing Service. “Certainly we already had computer-based and performance testing, but the new assessments have done a significantly better job than much of what came before in using these methods to assess the range of reasoning skills necessary for success in modern education. Technology and performance assessment have also been used at a scope many thought impossible just a few years earlier.”

In addition, participation in the consortia enabled states to advance more quickly toward developing integrated assessment systems that can inform instruction.

“California’s participation in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium has allowed our state to implement a comprehensive and high-quality assessment on a timeline and scale that would never have been possible if we had gone it alone,” says Michelle Center, Director of Assessment Development for the California Department of Education.

The program also accelerated development efforts of independent vendors like ETS by providing resources that were not available previously.

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“On the testing vendor side, vendors finally got to do what they were capable of all along, but states couldn’t afford,” Minnich notes. “There had been no incentive to drive toward these multistep problems, doing things that more accurately put students at their achievement levels, more accurately described the three- or four-step things that students will have to do later in their life. ... We’ve pushed forward through this process, and I think that’s an exciting benefit.”

The collaboration achieved by states in the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia may prove to be one of the greater lasting benefits of RTTAP, even if membership in the consortia fluctuates. In the political debate over the program, much attention has been given the changing number of states enrolled in the consortia — Smarter Balanced now has 16 governing members and PARCC 8, enrollments that are significantly down from earlier peaks.

To Minnich of the Council of Chief State School Officers the focus on consortia membership is a classic half-empty, half-full discussion.

“The fact that they had so many states participate up front has created this narrative that states are backing away from them when, in reality, if we had said seven years ago that we would have a majority of states working together to give the same test and the remaining states giving assessments that are significantly better, we would have chalked that up as a major success.”

Perhaps a better indicator of the lasting impact of collaboration is the number of states that have with-



drawn from the consortia but still have interest in licensing consortia items and collaborating on a more informal basis.

“There’s a lot more work across state lines,” says Anderson of the Education Commission of the States. “We see state school officers and elected officials at the executive and legislative levels, who are searching for what others are doing. They are contacting us weekly to find out where other states are making policy changes and what the outcome was. The notion of coordinating and learning from each other is a very positive aspect and hopefully it will continue as a trend.”

Shelley Loving-Ryder is Assistant Superintendent for Student Assessment and School Improvement for the Virginia Department of Education, which did not join either PARCC or Smarter Balanced. She says she feels “there is an appetite for collaboration” and hopes either the U.S. Department of Education or outside organizations can develop ways for assessment directors “to talk about what we’ve learned and how we might move forward.”

In Virginia, education leaders chose not to participate in either consortia, preferring to maintain a strong tradition of state control of education standards and assessments. And Loving-Ryder says the dynamics of the consortia actually “had a negative impact on collaboration” for states not within the consortia.

“Once the consortia were developed, those states tended to collaborate only with the consortium they joined and the previous level of collaboration across states based on topics of interest was reduced in many cases. Now that we have so many more independent states, I think people are now trying to figure out ‘who I should partner with.’ ... I think states are struggling to figure out how to collaborate in a different way.”

Advances in Technology

The collaboration of the consortia, plus a tight timeline, spurred rapid innovation in the development of technol-



ogy enhanced assessments and multipart, extended response tasks that are important to assessing hard-to-measure career and college readiness skills.

While some states bristled at the speed at which the consortia were working, and the compressed deadlines for implementation, a new generation of higher level assessments came to market more quickly under RTTAP than would have happened had states been working alone. These assessments, which will almost certainly be enhanced over time, are now part of the catalogue of approaches on which future assessments will be developed.

Some states moved quickly to take advantage of the more complex assessments developed by the consortia.

“In Michigan we changed directly from paper and pencil based, multiple-choice assessments to an online test that included multiple choice, a variety of technology-enhanced items, and a variety of constructive-response items of varying lengths,” says Andrew Middlestead, State Assessment Director for the Michigan Department of Education. “That really changed the game in terms of how we measure a student’s ability and mastery of their grade-level content.”

College and Career Readiness

The advances in testing techniques and content now position states to more effectively incorporate assessments into efforts to ensure that students are college and career ready by the time they graduate from high school. While many states pulled back from commitments to the consortia, their commitment to the RTTAP college and career goals remains intact.

“Through the collaboration with PARCC and Smarter Balanced, states and their stakeholders appear to have come much closer to reaching common agreement about what it takes to be ready for the academic demands of college coursework,” says Kit Viator, Senior Executive at Educational Testing Services and former Director of Assessment for the Massachusetts Department of Education. “The consortia and their assessment

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vendors have made huge strides in developing innovative assessments that more precisely measure the depth and rigor of performance in English language arts and mathematics required to support students’ readiness for college and careers. These represent an historic breakthrough and opportunity for truth-telling to promote greater equity of educational opportunity for all students.”

“The honesty argument around the new assessments is really compelling,” adds Liz King, Senior Policy Analyst and Director of Education Policy for The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. “Being more honest about how far away many of our kids are from where their parents think they are and want them to be — where the kids need to be for their own hopes, dreams, and goals — is hugely important. We never think that assessment in and of itself has a real value. The value we see in assessment is the ability to inform action.”

The emphasis on college and career readiness also will benefit students with special needs, according to Rachel Quenemoen, Project Director for the National Center and State Collaborative. “I hope the focus on content and the way students get to that content will result in all students actually being taught well,” she says. “... I’m hoping that that conversation has shifted to say, ‘All students need these college and career ready skills and knowledge. If they haven’t been taught them yet, then we have to change that.’”

To support the needed changes in instruction, the consortia developed a wide array of formative assessment and professional development resources as well as digital libraries for sharing high quality teacher-developed instructional resources. This transition from a statewide assessment used solely for accountability to a broader set of aligned resources was a “welcome paradigm shift,” according to Michelle Center, Director of California’s Assessment Development & Administration Division, “that will continue to serve our students and educators into the future.”

Lessons from Shortcomings

While a catalogue of long-term benefits usually doesn’t include things that didn’t work well, several shortcomings of the RTTAP program may have lasting benefit, if only as cautionary tales.

“I think the biggest disappointment was that the program ... didn’t anticipate the level of political or policy interference,” notes Middlestead of Michigan. “It’s been a debate in most of the states that are involved that ‘it’s great that we’re working together with other states to do this, but we want our own thing. Nobody can tell Michigan what to do.’ ... Perception of federal overreach

“I think the biggest disappointment was that the program ... didn’t anticipate the level of political or policy interference. ... Perception of federal overreach maybe could have been strategized a little more on the front end of it.”

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maybe could have been strategized a little more on the front end of it.”

For Liz King of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, “stakeholder engagement” was the biggest shortcoming “from the beginning” — especially with the civil rights community.

“In general, our understanding is that both PARCC and Smarter Balanced are better when well implemented than most of the state assessments,” she says. “... I think the problem is on the community engagement side around what are these assessments, and how were they developed, and how did the assessment developers ensure that historical problems around cultural bias were addressed? The engagement work around talking to people about those decisions first was not handled well.”

What Can We Expect Under ESSA?

Politics is a pendulum that can swing widely over time. With the RTTAP program, and No Child Left Behind before it, the political pendulum clearly swung toward greater and more active federal oversight of education. With passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the pendulum has swung back to greater state control, independence, and flexibility.

Throughout the Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind years, many states and members of Congress wanted to give states greater authority and independence.

“But what happens now that the Dog has caught the Car?” asks Liz King of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. “You said you wanted this authority. Now, you have it.”

As a start, ESSA has bipartisan support — President Obama signed it and Republicans in Congress supported it. And state leaders of both parties certainly will welcome more flexibility in crafting assessment programs to measure the proficiency of their students and their preparedness for college and careers.

Moreover, the advances creating higher level assess-

ments with multiple parts and technology enhancements will continue to benefit states, whether they are members of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia or not. Both consortia have indicated they will make their item bank available to states outside the consortia under leasing or licensing agreements.

Supporters of the new statute say its flexibility will give states the opportunity to build on the advances of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia, unleash innovation at the state level, and restore a sense of local ownership of education.

At the same time, critics of ESSA fear it will result in a backsliding of standards, produce a patchwork of proficiency measures that vary from state to state, and weaken the prospects of American students competing in an international economy.

“In general, we have an anxiety about state authority and the devolution of federal authority,” says Liz King of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. “Just from a civil rights perspective, our experience is that the federal government is the protector of vulnerable people when states and districts and schools have dropped the ball, and they have hidden things, and they have let children be invisible. The federal government has been the one to step up to defend children’s civil rights and ensure that those are enforced in a meaningful way.”

Still to be addressed is one of the original goals of RTTAP — a system that would give a nationwide picture, through two or more comparable assessments, of student proficiency, while not subjecting students who move with their families to shifting standards or assessments. And states will have to balance the goal of offering higher level assessments with what they can afford.

Still, Chris Minnich of the Council of Chief State School Officers sees little likelihood that states will return to the time before No Child Left Behind when the performance of low-performing students was “invisible” in the way data were reported.

“We’re in a different place now,” he says. “States are going to get this information on kids. They’re going to maintain subgroups. They’re going to continue to report all that out — that’s all in the law anyway. ... I think we’re in a place where states are going to step up and improve their schools. Quite frankly, I hope this not going to be a discussion of ... whether you believe the people inside D.C. that are telling you it’s terrible for the states to run things, or whether you believe the people in the states that say, well, give us all the flexibility we need. I hope it’s a discussion of performance, in the end. If we see kids doing better, then ultimately, this is a better thing for the country.”

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The Race to the Top Assessment Legacy

Joanne Weiss



The Race to the Top Assessment Program (RTTAP) was designed to support states in creating sophisticated, new assessments that would measure the knowledge and skills demanded by new standards. The standardized tests of the prior era had been focused almost exclusively on concepts that were easy and inexpensive to measure using fill-in-the-bubble items. By doing so, the tests

had fostered a narrowing of what students were taught, had lowered the bar for what students should know and be able to do, and had provided little useful information to teachers or parents.

RTTAP needed to upend this, but developing innovative assessment models would be expensive, requiring new types of items and new approaches to measurement. Individual states were in no position to drive the needed changes on their own. But through RTTAP, states were able to band together into two consortia and collectively elevate the state-of-the-art in educational assessment.

Four significant and lasting benefits have come from RTTAP. First, the new tests provide a more accurate and fuller picture of what students know and can do. They are carefully aligned to states' academic standards and use meaningful tasks to determine a student's depth of knowledge and skill. State Teachers of the Year support the new tests, saying that they better reflect student learning, align with stronger instructional practices, and provide educators with more useful information (see article by Katherine Bassett on page 9).

Second, because the new tests were designed from the outset to maximize accessibility for English learners and students with disabilities, the new tests measure the progress and performance of every student better than ever before.

Third, with so many states involved in the large-scale redesign efforts, the capacity of test creators — both within states and across major testing companies — has increased significantly. Innovations such as evidence-centered design, technology-enhanced items, performance tasks, and adaptive algorithms are becoming affordable. And educators are increasingly expecting them as “the new normal.”

Finally, because the tests had to be offered online, states and districts modernized technology devices and upgraded bandwidth. These enhanced technologies are now available for student instructional use during the 98 percent of the school year that testing is not occurring.

One unmet challenge persists. Neither of the consortia's assessments accurately measures academic growth for students who are significantly above or below their grade level. The new assessments could, for example, have captured learning gains for the struggling fifth grader who advanced from a second- to a fourth-grade

reading level, or for the gifted fifth grader reading at a high-school level. Such information would have shed much-needed light on how best to engage and teach these students and would have better supported movement toward competency-based learning.

Admittedly, the assessment consortia paths have not been straightforward or easy. Both consortia have had to manage huge workloads, clunky governance structures, and fierce political headwinds. And now, just a year into the administration of the new assessments, some states are leaving the consortia for mostly political reasons and going it alone. Developing high-quality assessments takes significant expertise and financial resources. As history clearly teaches, in states that set their own bar for student proficiency and use their own tests to judge performance, assessment quality and student expectations generally decline.

There is an antidote to this. States, whether in consortia or not, could continue to work together and lean on one another, administering shared collections of high-quality items and adding unique items to address states' specific needs. This would allow states to compare results with one another and to set a consistent (and hopefully high) bar for student proficiency. It's a new way of looking at the business for testing companies or the consortia, but one with promise.

While the past five years has been a rich period for innovation in assessment, we sit on the precipice of even more dramatic changes, spurred by increasingly powerful technologies and policies that encourage experimentation. Thanks to the RTTAP work of the past few years, states are better positioned than ever before to build assessments that measure complex student learning, reflect good teaching, and inform strong policy. Hopefully, now that so much hard work has been done, states will advance from this position to support better testing for better learning.

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Joanne Weiss is an independent consultant to organizations on education programs, technologies, and policy. She is the former chief of staff to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and led the Race to the Top and Race to the Top Assessment programs.

Better Tests, but an Uncertain Future

David T. Conley, Director of the Center for Educational Policy Research at the University of Oregon



The Race to the Top Assessment Program (RTTAP) was designed to achieve several key goals, most important among them to be able to make comparisons across states on how well students mastered the tested content. That content turned out to be the Common Core State Standards for both Smarter Balanced and PARCC consortia.

This key goal clearly will not be achieved as states drop out of the consortia, make modifications in how they deliver the tests, and use a variety of performance levels in noncomparable ways.

However, the tests may still have benefits and value. What is the legacy of the RTTAP assessments, and how will these assessments be affected by the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act?

The primary lasting benefits of the RTTAP are in the delivery platforms and item types. The tests have led to a much broader acceptance of computer-delivered assessment. The somewhat wider variety of item types and attempts at more innovative items will likely influence testing more broadly.

In addition, the feasibility of administering performance tasks on a large scale was demonstrated. However, a series of issues involving delivery, testing time, and scoring threatened to overshadow the value of the tasks

as more complex measures of student knowledge and skill.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the initiative was the failure to anticipate how politicized the Common Core would become or how quickly the resistance to high stakes testing would grow. Ironically, few of the objections were to what was tested on the consortia assessments

themselves. Instead, the length of time required by these higher quality tests was the putative problem. As a result, the tests were never given a fair chance to become national benchmarks for student learning at deeper levels of cognition.

In the final analysis, not enough teachers viewed the assessments as reflecting what they were teaching and as being vehicles for improving instruction. This, along with the linking of the assessments to teacher evaluation in many states, resulted in low teacher buy-in and even overt hostility to the tests, which was often communicated to parents.

The passage of ESSA has further changed the assessment environment, giving states more flexibilities and hence some incentives to “go it alone.” The primary

problem with states commissioning their own unique, one-of-a-kind assessments is going to be the inability to compare results across states. While the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) may become the primary vehicle for such comparisons (and may evolve to assess the Common Core to a greater degree), NAEP has been used primarily as a state-level measure. Therefore, states using their own assessments will have less insight into how their districts and schools are doing, comparatively speaking.

These states may also not be able to take full advantage of curated sets of instructional and professional development resources the consortia are building. Finally, a number of states appear to be moving in the direction of using college-admission tests in place of consortia assessments. While doing so allows a modicum of comparison nationally, those tests were never designed to be comprehensive measures of the high school curriculum in English and mathematics. Additionally, the ACT and SAT do not include performance tasks, other than an optional writing assessment, or measures of speaking or listening, which are included or plan to be included on consortia exams.

It is unclear at this point how the consortia assessments will ultimately be judged. Given the political nature of the decisions currently being made about assessments, it's a certainty that in the short run, the consortia assessments won't often be judged solely on their merits. As good as the tests may be technically, they are still externally-developed and imposed assessments that take a lot of time to administer and yield information that many educators view as only marginally useful to inform and improve instruction and achievement.

According to recent studies, the consortia assessments are high quality tests that generate more information about student performance than do most current tests, and are better measures of student depth of knowledge. If the climate of increased state control created by ESSA results in decreased anxieties about testing, and if the consortia assessments can evolve to become the “anchor” for a more comprehensive, multifaceted profile of student competencies and capabilities linked to college and career readiness, then the tests might have a future in a policy environment more focused on outcomes than status measures.

David T. Conley is Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership in the College of Education, University of Oregon and Founder and Director of the Center for Educational Policy Research at the University of Oregon.

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Our Newest Normal: Living in a Post-Race to the Top Education World

By Katherine Bassett, Director and CEO of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year



The last five years have seen great and needed change in terms of how we determine what our students will learn. And to illustrate the significance of that change, I'd like to share some personal history.

As an eager college freshman, I started my classes at a state school majoring in biology, intending to serve as a physical therapist. I quickly discovered that there was a significant gap between my preparation in mathematics and science in my home state and that of my peers educated in this neighboring state. While I had been inducted into the National Honor Society and told that I was a top student, I was by no means prepared for the challenging work I faced in precalculus and organic chemistry, while my classmates seemed quite comfortable with the content. This disparity was my first realization that "school" did not mean the same thing in different geographic locations. And it was my "new normal."

That normal was widespread in American education. As a result of the Race to the Top Assessment Program (RTTAP), however, we were given a new "new normal," and I embrace it.

The two most significant, lasting impacts I see emerging from RTTAP are: high-quality, rigorous academic standards that are comparable across states; and richer and more rigorous assessments that require students to think creatively and critically.

As a result of RTTAP, we have moved to put in place high-quality academic standards that put students on the same educational page regardless of zip code. Though some states are individualizing these standards, we may actually be able to compare apples to apples in terms of student performance, knowing that teachers in rural Vermont and teachers in Los Angeles are preparing curriculum and lessons based on the same set of content standards. We may ensure that students moving across district or state lines can pick up where they left off. Until now we have too often seen students enter a new school unprepared for the content being taught; or, having learned that content three months earlier. This is a travesty for student learning in a mobile society.

With new standards came assessments designed to measure them. The National Network of State Teachers of the Year conducted a comprehensive study comparing former state assessments with the new exams developed by the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia. A small group of expert teachers spent upwards of 20 hours taking three different tests each, analyzing test questions on a scale measuring analytical depth, and

participating in rich discussion. The findings of the teachers was important: PARCC and Smarter Balanced do a better job measuring students' learning progress, and ask questions that require complex, analytical thinking like that required in college and the workplace. These new assessments are richer and more rigorous — and they are harder. And, if we are truly committed to preparing our students to compete in a global work world in which they need to think creatively and critically, they need to be harder.

My greatest disappointment in RTTAP falls in the area of implementation of the standards. Across the country, we provided limited time for teachers and parents to become familiar with the standards before rushing to assess student knowledge of them and tying teacher evaluation to student test scores. This resulted in a plethora of misperceptions around the standards, with many people today believing that they are national standards and a national curriculum. They are not.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, we are facing another "new normal," and I have concerns. ESSA dismantles much of Race to the Top, raising significant questions. Will we backslide into an era in which every U.S. entity educates its children based on a different set of standards? Will the misconceptions that prevail around the new standards again result in 50 plus different sets of standards and assessments? Will we move backwards, using assessments that do not push students to think or provide parents and teachers with rich data?

While I understand the concerns around some of the results of the Race to the Top Assessment Program, there are positive changes that occurred because of it. Losing the momentum that we have gained in these important areas would be wasteful, as we adjust to this newest normal in the world of education.

"The National Network of State Teachers of the Year conducted a comprehensive study. ... PARCC and Smarter Balanced do a better job measuring students' learning progress, and ask questions that require complex, analytical thinking like that required in college and the workplace."

Katherine Bassett is the Executive Director and CEO of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year. She is the 2000 New Jersey Teacher of the Year.

The Classroom Impact of New Assessments of College and Career Readiness

The Race to the Top Assessment Program (RTTAP) raised the bar for what constitutes high-quality assessments and showed states what a coherent system of such assessments should look like through the work of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia.

In the process, it brought the issue of college and career readiness (CCR) to the forefront, helped advance policy discussions on how to use assessments to inform instruction, and generated national discussion of what

“I often found myself thinking ‘This is exactly what I want my students to be able to do,’ while concurrently worrying ‘This is not where most of our students are.’”

— Liz Lichtenberg,
elementary school teacher

kinds of professional development are needed to prepare teachers to effectively address CCR goals in instruction.

The effects of RTTAP emphasis on college and career readiness are already being felt in schools and classrooms, according to master teachers surveyed through the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) for this publication. Each of these teachers

participated in the NNSTOY evaluation of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments, reviewing both test forms from those programs and test forms from recent predecessor state assessments.

Effective Tools

Now in their second year of use, the new assessments have demonstrated they can be effective tools to measure the skills and abilities students will need to be college and career ready — even as students, schools, and teachers struggled to adjust to their rigor. While states may choose to develop their own variations of higher-quality assessments, there is now a pool of shared knowledge and experience to draw on.

“The [Smarter Balanced] consortium assessment ... was a vastly better reflection of the content and style of teaching that I believe will produce the kind of future employees our nation is longing for,” says Liz Lichtenberg, an elementary school gifted and talented teacher from Alton, NH, who evaluated the Smarter Balanced English Language Arts exam as part of the NNSTOY study. “... The consortium test encouraged extended thinking and application of learning. I often found myself thinking ‘This is exactly what I want my students to be able to do,’ while concurrently worrying ‘This is not where most of our students are.’”

“Colleges and careers demand that our graduates do more than just remember,” notes Bill Day, a middle

school mathematics teacher in the District of Columbia. “Graduates must think deeply about problems and communicate their ideas clearly. The tech-enabled features and extended tasks [of the PARCC assessments] demand that students demonstrate their thinking, which gives a much clearer picture of whether they have developed the capacity to think and communicate in the ways necessary for college and careers.”

The technology built into the new assessments is itself an asset for ensuring college and career readiness, according to those who have used them. Race to the Top required that the new assessments take advantage of technology both for content and delivery, and that they measure students’ ability to think critically when navigating the wealth of information available through technology and the Internet. This will inevitably lead to changes in instruction, according to those surveyed.

“We cannot continue to educate our students in a pre-calculator, pre-Internet world,” says Barbara LaSarcina, a middle school mathematics teacher in Warren, NJ. “The skills that were once valued and marketable are now done by advanced technology. Critical thinking skills are needed now more than ever to allow our students to be competitive in a global marketplace. If we do not provide advanced critical thinking skills to our students, they will surely be underemployed.”

“Knowing the depth of inquiry involved in these tests, teachers will make greater efforts to offer deeper thinking experiences in class to prepare students,” adds Allison Riddle, a fifth grade mathematics teacher in North Salt Lake City, UT, who evaluated the PARCC assessments.

Preparation, of course, will be the key to using higher quality assessments to advance college and career readiness. And preparation for teachers must come in the form of focused professional development, according to those surveyed.

“The greatest challenge to districts is finding the time and resources to provide high quality professional development by master teachers for their staff,” LaSarcina says. “We tend to neglect the importance of professional development. It needs to be a priority and it needs to be ongoing. Teachers want their students to achieve on these tests, and they long for the tools to help their students find growth and success.”

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middle school mathematics teacher



The Need for Training

Teaching more sophisticated concepts will require more sophisticated training, Riddle notes, and an investment of both time and resources at the district level.

“Districts must go beyond the traditional ‘sit and get’ workshops,” she says. “They must offer opportunities for embedded professional learning where teachers observe content specialists demonstrating instructional strategies onsite with actual students. Districts and schools must provide time for teachers to collaborate each week, observe their peers, analyze data, and discuss new instructional approaches.”

“Being with peers in a safe environment where planning and conversations are relevant to current teaching has more value than reading any book, taking any class, or attending any off-site professional development seminar,” Lichtenberg adds. “Having opportunities to work with and learn from peers is invaluable.”

Technology training continues to be a concern for teachers, not only for themselves, but for their students who are taking the tests. Many schools and districts are still limited digitally, according to those surveyed, with not enough computers or tablets to go around. Approximately 30 percent of schools have a shortage of computers for classroom use when high stakes testing monopolizes them. And many students still are hampered by lack of regular experience with computers and tablets.

“The time spent showing students how to navigate the testing systems, the tools, and the mouse functions can be lengthy,” Riddle adds. “The information received from these assessments, however, is well worth the time. And we now have arrived at a place where our primary grade students are comfortable taking assessments using technology rather than paper and pencil.”

Challenges of Technology

For others, however, the technology challenges of the new assessments remain daunting.

“I found that the PARCC exam, like other exams, weighs heavily on the student’s ability to understand how to take the test,” notes Jemelleh Coes, a University of Georgia field instructor for teacher preparation who has experience with PARCC’s ELA assessments. “While the content was rich, it was difficult at times to determine whether or not a student would have trouble understanding the content or if they would have trouble understanding the dynamics of taking the test.”

Though technical and training issues remain, the national commitment to college and career readiness seems to have

been established, according to Jeremy Anderson, President of the Education Commission of the States — even though passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act returns control of assessments to the state level.

Anderson says he doesn’t believe there will be “extremely divergent” paths taken by the states going forward, even with the greater “leeway” provided by ESSA.

“The passage of the new federal law does provide states with a lot more flexibility,” he says, “yet there still are 40 plus states that have made the choice to have some kind college and career readiness standards that are appropriate for their students. Whether they are Common Core State Standards, or a different name, or a slightly different type, they still have set standards for their students.

“For the first time in a while, large numbers of states are having honest and open discussions about what are the assessment tools they going be using and how they are going to be assessing those metrics to make sure their students actually are becoming college and career ready,” Anderson adds. “That discussion alone is very valuable. ... It’s not perfect but it’s definitely progress.”

“The time spent showing students how to navigate the testing systems, the tools, and the mouse functions can be lengthy. The information received from these assessments, however, is well worth the time.”

— Allison Riddle,
fifth grade
mathematics teacher

The Technology Benefit: Measuring More of What Matters



By Nancy Doorey

One of the goals of the Race to the Top Assessment Program was to stimulate states to move to computer-based assessments as quickly as possible¹. The consortia grants served as major “carrots” to drive the transition, but did not include funding for the computers and infrastructure

needed in schools, leaving that to states and districts.

While the U.S. Department of Education provided multiple reasons for this push for online testing, foremost among them was the assertion that states could better assess the skills and knowledge needed for college and career readiness through computer-based tests.

Concern had been mounting since the passage of No Child Left Behind that the quality and rigor of state tests had declined to the point that few were testing complex skills or higher order thinking. Evidence included:

- Nearly half of the nation’s students were taking state reading and mathematics tests that contained only multiple choice items, which were overly prone to guessing and to emphasizing lower level skills;²
- States assessed writing in just a few grades, if at all, and none reflected the dominant types of writing required in higher education or the workforce;^{3,4}
- Between 2000 and 2010, even among the country’s “best” state tests, only about 2% of mathematics items and 21% of ELA items assessed higher order skills, such as analysis, evaluation, explanation of reasoning, or synthesis.⁵

Costs had driven some of these changes. NCLB required a significant expansion in state testing, stressing state coffers, and the cost for human scoring of constructed response items are many times greater than for machine scoring of multiple choice items.

By converting to computer-based tests, states could include a number of machine-scorable item types that require students to generate, as opposed to select, a response. These include short constructed response items calling for entry of a word, number, equation, or technology-based response such as selecting coordinates on a graph or highlighting evidence in a text.

Online tests can also require students to employ the technological tools used in colleges and the workforce

today, such as word processors, search engines (in simulated search environments), audio and video informational sources, graphing software, and spreadsheets.

Finally, by stimulating the creation of consortia of states, RTTAP increased the feasibility of including complex and technology-rich tasks, such as simulations. Such tasks are expensive to develop for use in a high-stakes test, placing them beyond the financial reach of most, if not all, individual states.

How well have the consortia met this goal of improved measurement of key skills through technology enhanced testing? Three studies released in recent months reached the same conclusion: while there is room for improvement, the new consortia assessments have taken advantage of these opportunities and are distinctly better tests than the previous generation of state tests.

As described on page 9, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year convened panels of expert teachers which performed side-by-side comparisons of former state tests and those of the consortia. They concluded that the consortia tests better reflect the range of knowledge and problem-solving skills that all students should master in the tested subjects, and better align with and support great teaching and learning.

Similarly, expert panel reviews conducted by the Fordham Institute and the Human Resources Research Organization concluded that the new consortia tests do a better job of assessing high priority skills and knowledge than a former best-in-class state assessment, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS 2014).

With its emphasis on college and career readiness, RTTAP has encouraged states to think in new ways about how to assess the skills and knowledge important to students’ futures. With its emphasis on rigor, it has helped states incorporate the higher order thinking skills so critical in the international economy.

There is still a great deal of untapped potential, to be sure, but the push for computer-based assessments has helped many states measure more of the skills and competencies that matter which, in turn, helps advance educational quality and equity.

Nancy Doorey is an educational consultant and lead author and editor of this publication series.

¹ Notice Inviting Applications for the Race to the Top Fund Assessment Program, Federal Register / Vol. 74, No. 204 / Friday, October 23, 2009.

² *Margins of Error: The Education Testing Industry in the No Child Left Behind Era* by Thomas Toch (Washington, DC: Education Sector, 2006).

³ *Constructs of writing proficiency in US state and national writing assessments: Exploring variability*, J. Jill, Assessing Writing, Volume 14, Issue 1, 2009.

⁴ Council of Chief State School Officers Database of State Assessments, 2010.

⁵ *Estimating the Percentage of Students who were Tested on Cognitively Demanding Items through State Achievement Tests*, L. Yuan and V. Le, RAND Corporation, 2012.

⁶ *The Right Trajectory: State Teachers of the Year Compare Former and New State Assessments*. C. McClellan, J. Joe & K. Bassett, National Network of Teachers of the Year, 2015.

⁷ *Evaluating the Content and Quality of Next Generation Assessments*, N. Doorey and M. Polikoff, the Fordham Institute, 2016.

⁸ *Implementation of the CCSSO Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High Quality Assessments: Evaluation of Test Content for Four Assessment Programs*, S. Schultz, C. Wiley, H. Michaels & R. Dvorak, The Human Resources Research Organization, 2016.

Coming Together to Raise Achievement for Students with Disabilities and English Learners



By Cara Laitusis

One of the great challenges in assessments has always been how to gauge the knowledge and skills of students whose disabilities or language abilities may impede their performance. The Race to the Top Assessment Program has brought about profound advances in the accessibility of assessments. While these advances are still in need of some improvements, I would be remiss to not point out how far accessible computer-based assessments have come.

Prior to the Race to the Top Assessment Program (RTTAP) the range and quality of testing accommodations varied widely across states. Most students participated in their state assessments using paper-based test booklets and an array of standardized testing accommodations. These included some provided by every state, such as braille and larger print test forms; accommodations provided only in some states, such as Spanish language test booklets in mathematics; and unique accommodations produced by only a handful of states, such as prerecorded videos of sign language interpretation or audio of the test content. Each state struggled to provide as many accommodations as possible within the constraints of state budgets.

In addition to these standardized accommodations, most special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school level staff were required to administer a host of other accommodations, either individually or in small groups. These included reading aloud or signing the entire test or portions of the test, translating test content for English learners, and assembling a host of physical accommodations (e.g., color overlays, templates, or magnification equipment). Implementation was far from consistent across schools and across states, however. In about half of the states the school personnel received no guidance on how to administer these accommodations.¹

Prior to 2015, some states had transitioned to computer-based testing and had embedded some accommodations in their delivery systems. Unfortunately, even these systems did not include the alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Today, nearly all state assessments are delivered by computer and include embedded accommodations and accessibility tools. Moreover, significant advances have been made in the range and quality of those tools, which include text-to-speech, enlargement, refreshable braille, American Sign Language video translations, translated directions, pop-up glossaries, and use of approved external assistive devices, to name a few. These advanc-

es are due in large part to the investments from RTTAP but also to the concerns of states, test vendors, and advocacy organizations that new assessments must be accessible for all students.

This is not to say that there are not still challenges to overcome. After the first operational administration, students and teachers reported glitches with delivery of text-to-speech and other accommodations; students having difficulty with too many different accommodations and tools being used simultaneously; and challenges with the difficulty and text complexity of test content. Additional accommodations have been requested, such as new languages and dialects, simplified test content, improved text to speech for mathematics, speech to text for writing, and illustration-based glossaries.

As education moves toward online textbooks, adaptive learning and assessment content, and digital literacy, it is important that all students, including students with disabilities and English learners, are fully included. In addition, assistive technologies are important skills for college and career readiness for some students with disabilities, so integrating them into assessments allows students to show their knowledge, skills, and abilities when they have access to assistive technologies that they use instructionally.

Moving forward, there is a need for assistive technology vendors, testing organizations, teachers, students, and advocacy organizations to build upon this new foundation by continuing to work together to improve the integration of less common assistive technologies with computer-based testing platforms. In addition, continued collaboration is needed to develop standards for how new types of test questions can be made accessible to students with disabilities and to English learners. Finally, there may be a need to reconsider how learning progressions, competency based assessment, automated scoring, and adaptive testing can be best used to ensure the difficulty of the assessments are matched to students' performance level and English proficiency level, while also ensuring accountability for grade level instruction and instructionally relevant feedback. Each step forward will help our schools meet the needs — and tap the full potential — of all of the students they serve.

“The Race to the Top Assessment Program has brought about profound advances in the accessibility of assessments.”

Cara Laitusis is a Senior Research Director at Educational Testing Service.

¹ Thurlow, 2007 <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/Presentations/AERA07Thurlow.pdf>

ESSA and the New Era of Local Control for Assessment and Accountability



Andrew Latham, Director of Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation at WestEd

The newly signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was ushered in with considerable fanfare, and deservedly so. This new legislation represents an exciting step forward for balanced and effective state assessment systems — and an opening for responsible innovation. Through the federally funded Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation, we help states navigate the legislative and measurement challenges associated with designing and implementing balanced assessment and accountability systems. In this article we highlight what's new about ESSA, and some key considerations for states engaged in a redesign effort.

While ESSA contains many changes, we think the following key ones will likely have the largest impact on state assessment systems:

- States are now permitted to use multiple locally administered measures given throughout the year to contribute to a summative score quantifying student achievement and growth. While an integrated assessment system such as this shifts design responsibility and control back to the states, it also poses significant technical and psychometric hurdles for states that elect to pursue this option.
- In the same vein, states may reduce reliance on end-of-year test scores and broaden their definitions of school and district success by including some nonacademic measures, such as ones assessing school climate and culture, in their state accountability systems.
- It is now up to states to decide whether and how to include in accountability systems the degree to which achievement gaps are narrowing, or low-performing groups are improving.
- Districts may, with state approval, apply to their states to use college entrance exams (e.g., ACT or SAT) rather than standards-based tests as their high school tests.

“This new legislation represents an exciting step forward for balanced and effective state assessment systems — and an opening for responsible innovation.”

While these changes are exciting, and return much of the authority and responsibility for assessment and accountability systems to the states and their districts, it would be foolhardy to expect overnight success. The next eight months will be a time of transition, as provisions of the No Child Left Behind law remain in effect until August 1, 2016 — the start of the 2016-2017 school year.

Implementing strong new multicomponent assessment systems will require a substantial commitment from states, and the local districts with whom they partner, to study and adapt promising approaches, collect data, and adjust each solution as necessary before it will be ready for operational use. Not surprisingly, this level of commitment also requires substantial and sustained funding. For these reasons, while we believe that many states will strongly support the concept of ESSA's assessment flexibility, we suspect relatively few will aggressively pursue the development and implementation of their own combined local solution within the next year or two. In this article, we look at what these “early adopter” states should be doing between now and August 2016 to make sure they are ready not just to be compliant with the new legislation, but to take advantage of the flexibility it affords them to enhance their systems.

Key Considerations for States

States already have begun reaching out to our Center for help understanding the implications of the new ESSA legislation for their testing programs. Here are key points we advise them to consider:

1. As with any major policy shift, perhaps the most critical lesson of the past decade is that states will need to develop strategies for effectively communicating emerging changes to their stakeholders. The implementation of new approaches in the field of assessment must be done thoughtfully, with widespread public engagement, and with careful monitoring of intentional and unintentional consequences.
2. The advantages of using multiple, locally administered measures to contribute to a single summative score, each with the potential to effectively measure a unique aspect of rigorous college- and career-ready standards, is well documented in the research literature (see Darling-Hammond et al., 2013; CCSSO, 2013; NRC, 2010; Pellegrino, 2010).¹ Research is not practice, however. To date, no state operationally combines results from different measures to produce a state-level summative assessment composite score. As a first step in the design

¹ Darling-Hammond, L., Herman, J., Pellegrino, J., Abedi, J., Aber, L., Baker, E., Bennett, R., Gordon, E., Haertel, E., Hakuta, K., Ho, R., Linn, R., Pearson, D., Popham, J., Resnick, L., Schoenfeld, A., Shavelson, R., Shepard, L., Shulman, L., & Steele, C. (2013). *Criteria for high-quality assessment*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.
Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2013). *States' commitment to high-quality assessments aligned to college- and career-readiness*. Washington, DC.
National Research Council (NRC). (2010). *State assessment systems: Exploring best practices and innovations*. Retrieved February 2013 from National Academy of Science web site.
Pellegrino, J. (2010). *The design of an assessment system for the Race to the Top: A learning sciences perspective on issues of growth and measurement*. Paper presented at seminar convened by the Educational Testing Service.



process, we recommend that states convene both technical advisory panels of assessment and education experts, and focus groups of educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders, to begin addressing seminal questions such as the following:

- Who are the major stakeholders, and how can they be usefully involved in the design of the solution? How will each solution be communicated to all these stakeholders?
 - In what content areas or grades are these new measures needed?
 - Who will develop, vet, administer, and score the performance-, portfolio-, or project-based measures?
 - How will the state evaluate the comparability of results from different assessment types and weight them to produce a valid summative score?
 - Under previous legislation, accountability systems had to quantify how well states were reducing achievement gaps among student subgroups; now that this federal requirement has been removed, how will states track their progress in closing such gaps?
 - How does the state plan to evaluate the impact of the new assessments and monitor the intended and unintended consequences?
3. Several of the states we have worked with have conceded that while they are confident that they have a clear understanding of state testing requirements, they know less about the local testing practices in each of their districts. For these states,

we have advised that they conduct an assessment audit to develop an understanding, not only of the types of tests currently being administered, but also to quantify how useful teachers and other stakeholders find these various measures to be. Once the state has a better understanding of local needs and the most commonly used assessments to meet those needs, it can begin to explore ways to integrate the most useful measures into a coherent system and gradually phase out the others.

4. A common question from states is, “Do you know of any other states that face challenges and have needs similar to ours? If so, what solution is working for them?” To help states leverage these connections and capitalize on the good work of their peers, researchers at the CSAI developed a *state of the states* tool, an interactive map that indicates the ELA, mathematics, and science standards each state has adopted, plus the assessments they use for accountability purposes. It is our hope that states will use tools like this to increase their dialogue with peers in other states.

In Search of Balanced Systems

Though ESSA encourages states to develop local solutions to meet both state needs and federal accountability requirements, flexibility and local control can be a double-edged sword. Ideally, local control will spur innovation across states’ testing and accountability programs. But innovative, coherent assessment systems can take many years of educated trial-and-error and monitoring of collected data before they are polished and ready for full-scale implementation.

Each state will need to gauge its public’s tolerance for experimentation and innovation. Summative assessment, in general, has more than its share of detractors who worry that such assessments encourage teachers to drill their students as opposed to teaching to rigorous standards; consume far too much valuable instructional time; and provide standardized results that fail to tease out the unique learning of each student.² Even with these challenges, many policymakers and civil rights advocates argue that summative tests, designed to withstand legal challenges, are essential for monitoring the quality and equity of education being provided to students through state and local tax dollars.

Public support for formative assessments is generally much stronger. We know that effective teachers are able to seamlessly integrate formative assessment within their instruction, systematically checking on student understanding and engagement, and adapting in real-time to optimize the learning experience. Few would argue that rich formative assessment is a bad thing.

ESSA tries to bridge the gap between formative and

“Perhaps the most critical lesson of the past decade is that states will need to develop strategies for effectively communicating emerging changes to their stakeholders.”

² For a useful summary of many of these concerns—and how best to address them—see the Fact Sheet: Testing Action Plan first announced by President Obama on October 24, 2015.



summative assessment by allowing states to use their locally-developed and administered assessments — including “portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks”³ — to contribute to their summative assessment results. At first glance, this combined model seems the

“Combining results on disparate assessments over the course of an entire year with a summative assessment to produce a single, valid, comparable, meaningful score for students poses a host of technical challenges, and ESSA is essentially silent on how these challenges can best be met.”

ideal solution because it enables instructionally-focused formative, interim, and performance assessments to contribute to final summative results. But combining results on disparate assessments over the course of an entire year with a summative assessment to produce a single, valid, comparable, meaningful score for students poses a host of technical challenges, and ESSA is essentially silent on how these challenges can best be met.

New Hampshire may be paving the way. In 2012, the state received USED permission for four school districts to implement its Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE), “a first-in-the-nation accountability strategy that offers a reduced level of standardized testing together with

“The most common advice we give to states is to combine energy and enthusiasm with patience.”

locally developed common performance assessments.”⁴ These districts give the Smarter Balanced statewide assessment once during each grade span (elementary, middle, and high school) instead of requiring it annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school. For the remaining grades, the districts administer locally developed performance assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science.⁵

PACE, however, is still in the piloting phase, and many hurdles remain. The lesson to be learned here is that even with strong local support, dedicated leadership, and an innovative design, it takes years and years to complete the conceptualization, development, data collection, and analysis for new assessment models and instruments before they can be implemented operationally, with real stakes attached to the results.

Slow and Steady May Win the Day

Given this, the most common advice we give to states is to combine energy and enthusiasm with patience. If overhauling a statewide accountability system can take upward of five years from conception to implementation, the key is to start by defining long-term goals. Where does the state want to be in five years? Specifically, what do they want to be able to say about how all their students are learning, and how these results align with state standards and goals? Once states have answered these seemingly straightforward but potentially loaded questions, they can begin to work backwards to define all the steps they will need to take to get there. Staying the course over such a long time frame will require sustained effort, even when the change seems to be happening excruciatingly slowly. But with patience, the view will be worth the climb: ESSA has opened up the door for states and districts to play a real formative role in designing the systems that best meet their needs, and those of the students they serve.

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³ The full ESSA document is posted at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114s1177enr/pdf/BILLS-114s1177enr.pdf>. This quote is taken from Section 1111.(b).(2).B.vi on page 25.

⁴ <http://education.nh.gov/assessment-systems/pace.htm>

⁵ <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/policy/MultimetricAccountability-WhitePaper.pdf>

The Assessment Consortia

The following pages contain abbreviated summaries of each of the six assessment consortia and their membership as of January, 2016. At this time, 47 states and the District of Columbia belong to one or more of these assessment consortia.

All six of these assessment consortia have developed integrated systems of computer-based summative and nonsummative assessments and aligned professional development and instructional resources based on college and career readiness standards. This transition from stand-alone state summative assessments to integrated, aligned systems that both support and measure student learning is a significant advance for K-12 education, as is the shift to college and career readiness standards.

The designs of several of these systems have evolved significantly since their inception, while others have remained quite constant. We describe their 2015-2016 summative assessments, the other resources and tools each consortium provides its members, the costs per pupil, and any provisions for use of the materials by nonmember states or districts.

Each consortium was provided funding for initial development work by the U.S. Department of Education, but each is independently governed.

The two large comprehensive assessment consortia, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, were awarded competitive grants in 2010 through the federal Race to the Top Assessment Program. That program, its lasting benefits, and its shortcomings have been discussed in preceding articles.

Two alternate assessment consortia were also funded in 2010 to develop next generation assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Grants were awarded to the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium (DLM) and the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). These new alternate assessments are also aligned to the Common Core State Standards and similar college and career readiness standards. The NCSC grant has ended and those resources have transitioned to the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) Consortium.

In order to support the development of next generation assessments of English language proficiency, the U.S. Department of Education awarded Enhanced Assessment Grants to two multistate consortia: the WIDA collaborative for the development of the ACCESS 2.0 assessment system (formerly called ASSETS and funded in 2011) and the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) Consortium (funded in 2012).

The Six Federally Funded Assessment Consortia

<p>Comprehensive Assessments</p> <p><i>for all students except those with significant disabilities</i></p>	<p>Alternate Assessments</p> <p><i>for students with significant cognitive disabilities</i></p>	<p>English Language Proficiency Assessments</p> <p><i>used to measure English proficiency of English language learners</i></p>
<p>Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)</p> <p>www.parcconline.org</p>	<p>Dynamic Learning Maps</p> <p>www.dynamiclearningmaps.org</p>	<p>English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21)</p> <p>www.elpa21.org</p>
<p>Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium</p> <p>www.smarterbalanced.org</p>	<p>Multistate Alternate Assessment</p> <p><small>(formerly National Center and State Collaborative)</small></p> <p>www.ncscpartners.org</p>	<p>WIDA Consortium's ACCESS for ELLs 2.0</p> <p>www.wida.us</p>

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

The purpose of the PARCC system is to increase the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for success in college and the workplace. Based on the core belief that assessment should be a tool for enhancing teaching and learning, the system of assessments and instructional tools was developed 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 assessments include required summative assessments and several optional instructional tools: diagnostics in ELA and mathematics, speaking and listening tools, and formative instructional tasks for grades K-2. The Partnership Resource Center, a portal for accessing a wide range of resources includes a digital library containing a growing number of classroom-focused resources to support teachers, students, and parents, released items from the summative assessment, and professional learning resources.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

PARCC provides computer-based, fixed-form tests in English language arts/literacy (ELA/literacy) and mathematics at grades 3-11.

Multiple item types are used, including evidence-based selected response, short and extended constructed response, and a variety of technology-enhanced item types. Each test also includes one or more performance tasks composed of multiple questions. In ELA/literacy, these tasks focus on writing effectively when analyzing texts. In mathematics, the tasks require students to

express their mathematical reasoning and to apply key skills, concepts, and processes to solve complex real-world problems.

Districts may select high school mathematics assessments based on either a traditional course sequence (algebra I, geometry, algebra II) or an integrated mathematics sequence.

The expected student testing time has been reduced in 2015-2016 by 60 minutes in mathematics and 30 minutes in ELA/literacy, resulting in a range across the grades of 8.25 hours to 9.7 hours for the total testing time for both subjects.

PARCC makes available one retest opportunity for grades 3-8 and up to three retest opportunities for students in high school. Individual states determine whether and/or how many retest opportunities to make available.

Assessment Delivery and Scoring

PARCC assessments are typically delivered on computer devices, including tablets, but paper versions are available as an accommodation and, for a limited time, as approved or made available by member states.

All components of the summative assessments will be administered within a single 30-day testing window.¹ States and districts select a testing window within a period that begins at roughly the 75 percent mark of the school year and ends at the 90 percent mark. Each content area test is given across three or four testing sessions (also called units).²

A mix of human and computer scoring is used. Results from the spring 2016 assessments are expected to be ready for state use by August 1, after which each state will determine its own release date.

Supports for All Students, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities

PARCC provides accessibility tools and accommodations for three categories of students. These include, but are not limited to, the following.

- All students: zoom, underline, flagging of items for review, read-aloud of directions, a highlighter tool, a notepad, a general masking/line reader tool, and a pop-up glossary.
- Students identified in advance by local educators: change of background color or font color, a line reader tool, and text-to-speech for the mathematics assessments.
- Accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners: American Sign Language, braille, speech-to-text, read-aloud, closed-caption of multimedia resources, language translations, and

Participation at a Glance

- GOVERNING and FULLY PARTICIPATING STATES/ ENTITIES: Colorado, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts*, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Rhode Island
- Entities Participating in PARCC and giving the PARCC assessment: Bureau of Indian Education
- States LICENSING use of items or test forms: Louisiana, Massachusetts

The information provided has been approved by PARCC, Inc. for its accuracy as of February 2, 2016.

* In Massachusetts, districts that chose to give the MCAS assessments in 2014-2015 may continue to do so in 2015-2016.

The information provided has been approved by the PARCC Consortium for its accuracy as of February 2, 2016.

¹ This single testing window is a revision as of the Spring 2016 administration. Previously, the performance tasks and the end-of-the-year assessment had separate testing windows.

² This is a reduction in ELA/literacy of 1 testing session for students in grades 3-5, 2 sessions for students in grades 6-11, and a reduction of 1 mathematics testing session for students in grade 6-11.

approved external assistive devices.

PARCC provides written general test administration directions — those read by the test administrator — in 10 languages. In addition, the mathematics assessments are available in Spanish and, if allowed under state policy, an onsite translator may provide human read-aloud in a student’s native language.

Accountability

The summative assessment system produces three types of results: scale scores/performance levels, growth data, and on-track-to-college and career readiness determinations, for use in state accountability systems as determined by each state. Results are reported using 5 performance levels, with Level 4 used to designate college and career readiness on the grade 11 ELA/literacy, Algebra II, and Integrated Mathematics III assessments and, at each prior grade or course, “on track for the next grade level.”

PARCC member states use common performance levels and a common set of cut scores to determine college and career readiness, but each state determines how to use the results within their state-defined accountability system.

OTHER ASSESSMENTS, RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Technology Tutorial, Practice Tests, and Released Items

A Technology Tutorial is available to familiarize students with the testing platform and the embedded supports and accommodations. Online Practice Tests at each grade level familiarize students with the online system and types of questions. Educators may also access released test items, with accompanying scoring rubrics and samples of scored student work, for use in classrooms.

Performance-Based Modules

These optional performance tasks for grades 3-11 preview the tasks in the summative assessments and are designed to be scored by teachers using provided rubrics and sample responses.

Diagnostic Subtests, Grades 2-8

Available throughout the school year, the computer-adaptive diagnostic subtests in ELA/literacy and mathematics provide an indication of how well students have learned key content and skills at each grade level. They can be administered multiple times across the year to monitor student progress.

Speaking/Listening Tools, Grades K-12

These optional tools may be used at any time during the school year to assess speaking and listening skills. Teachers score the tasks using a standardized rubric and may use the scores as part of student grades.

Formative Tools, Grades K-2

These activities are designed to be incorporated into instruction in a way that is “invisible” to the student, while yielding information that teachers can use to adjust instruction as appropriate.

The Partnership Resource Center (PRC)

The PRC is a continually expanding collection of resources for teachers, students, administrators, and parents. It includes professional development materials, released items with accompanying rubrics and samples of student work, tools to help 11th grade students who have gaps in their college and career ready academic preparation, and formative and diagnostic tools developed by member states and districts.

GOVERNANCE, COSTS AND ACCESS

The PARCC Consortium is governed by a Board composed of the chief state school officers from member states. A nonprofit entity, PARCC Inc., manages the day-to-day operations and carries out the Board’s policy and operational decisions.

2015-2016 Costs

The cost per student for both the ELA/literacy and mathematics summative assessments is \$23.97 for the computer-based administration, plus a small administrative fee, and \$32.97 for the paper-based version³ in 2015-2016. This cost includes test delivery and scoring of human-scored responses. There is no charge in 2015-2016 for use of the optional system components.

Nonmember Access to Consortium Resources

PARCC has established for the 2016-2017 school year, three levels of access for nonmember states. With full membership referred to as Tier 1A, the other levels are:

- Tier 1B: states wishing to give the PARCC assessments but to have autonomy to select a vendor for administration, delivery, scoring, and related services must agree to utilize the PARCC test blueprint, which may be augmented, and to adhere to PARCC procedures in order to report scores that are comparable to PARCC scores. These states may join the PARCC contract with Pearson for test delivery, scoring, reporting, and related services, or may procure another vendor.
- Tier 2A: states may license PARCC items either as coherent sets of test content related to reporting claims or as individual items. The ability to make claims about comparability to PARCC is dependent on the set(s) of items licensed, as well as adherence to other procedures. These states secure their own vendor for test delivery, scoring, reporting, and related services.
- Tier 2B states have the same options as Tier 2A states but are not seeking to make comparison claims and therefore have complete autonomy regarding testing procedures.

³ See www.parcconline.org/cost.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

The Smarter Balanced Consortium system is designed to strategically “balance” summative, interim, and formative assessment through an integrated system of standards, assessments, instruction, and teacher development and to provide accurate year-to-year indicators of students’ progress toward college and career readiness. The year-end summative assessments utilize computer-adaptive testing (CAT) to minimize testing time and provide greater score precision than fixed tests, particularly for students toward the high or low end of the performance spectrum. Member states may customize system components, while also ensuring comparability of student scores on the summative assessments.

The system consists of a required two-part summative assessment given near the end of the school year, a system for locally-customized interim assessments, practice tests, and a digital library with training materials, formative assessment tools and resources, instructional resources, and tools to support teacher collaboration.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Summative assessments for English language arts/literacy and mathematics are provided for grades 3-8 and 11, with additional optional assessments available for grades 9, 10, and 12.

Taken during the final 12 weeks of the school year, each test includes one Performance Task and a Computer Adaptive component. The Performance Tasks are organized around real-world scenarios and measure students’ ability to integrate knowledge and skills across multiple standards. In ELA/literacy, the tasks focus on research and writing skills and analysis of complex texts. In mathematics, the tasks require students to apply knowledge and higher-order skills to solve complex, real-world problems.

The tests include selected-response, constructed-response, and technology-enhanced items. The adaptive test software selects items for students to maximize the precision of each student’s reported score while follow-

ing the test blueprint instructions for content coverage and cognitive complexity. To a limited extent, items from out of grade level may be used to increase score precision, but most students will respond to items that assess on-grade standards only.

The estimated total testing time for both mathematics and ELA/literacy ranges from six hours in grades 3-5 to seven and a half hours in grade 11, spread over several days and testing sessions. These estimates do not include the now optional classroom activities designed to introduce the mathematics and ELA/literacy performance tasks.¹

In cases where there is an irregularity in the administration of the test, students may be given one opportunity to retake the summative assessments. The retake consists of a new set of items and tasks.

Assessment Delivery and Scoring

The assessments are designed to be delivered on a variety of digital devices, including laptop computers and tablets. Paper-based versions will be available at least through the 2016-2017 school year for schools that have not yet transitioned to online assessments.

Within the following consortium-wide testing windows, each state determines a schedule for the administration of the summative assessments:

Grades 3-8: 12 weeks (the final third of the school year), up to and including the last day of school.

Grade 11: 7 weeks (the final 20% of the school year), up to and including the last day of school.

Schools may complete their testing within much shorter testing windows, based on their technology infrastructure or their use of the paper-and-pencil versions.

Both the Performance Tasks and the Computer Adaptive component contain some items that are scored by computer and others that require human scoring. Each state contracts for scoring and will determine the timeline for reporting of results.

Supports for All Students, English Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities

Three categories of accessibility and accommodation resources are available which include, but are not limited to, the following.

All students: highlighter, marking of items for review, strike through of text or answer options, zoom, a digital notepad, scratch paper, and a pop-up glossary

Students identified in advance by local educators: color contrast, text-to-speech, translated test directions, translations for mathematics items

Students with disabilities and English language learners: American Sign Language, braille, text-to-speech,

Participation at a Glance

- GOVERNING and FULLY PARTICIPATING STATES/ ENTITIES: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Bureau of Indian Education, and U.S. Virgin Islands
- States LICENSING use of Smarter Balanced items: Michigan

The information provided has been approved by Smarter Balanced for its accuracy as of February 3, 2016.

¹ The classroom activities, which require up to 30 minutes per performance task, were made optional as of the Spring 2016 administration. Individual states, however, may require their use.

speech-to-text, read-aloud, closed-caption of multimedia resources, language translations², print-on-demand, and approved external assistive devices.

Accountability

Student scores are reported on a continuous vertical scale, across the grade 3-11 span, in English language arts/literacy and mathematics, which can then be used as the basis for growth measures evaluating the individual's progress toward college and career readiness across the years. Student performance is also reported as one of four achievement levels, with level 3 used to designate grade-level proficiency.

Member states use common achievement levels and a common set of cut scores to determine college and career readiness, but each state determines how to use the results within their state-defined accountability system.

Nearly 200 colleges and universities in six states — California, Delaware, Hawaii, Oregon, South Dakota, and Washington — have developed policies for placing students directly into credit-bearing courses based on their Smarter Balanced score. For students who do not reach those levels, K-12 and higher education members in these states have developed grade 12 courses to help students fill the gaps.

OTHER ASSESSMENTS, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS

Sample Items, Practice Tests, and Training Tests

Three sets of resources are available to students, educators, and the public on the consortium's website to build familiarity with the item types, test interface, and accessibility tools.

Sample items and Performance Tasks, with scoring guides.

Online Practice Tests in ELA/literacy and mathematics in grades 3-8 and 11, each with the range of item types found on the summative assessments, including Performance Tasks. The same test interface and many of the accessibility tools are used.

Training Tests, intended primarily for students who have not previously experienced online testing, familiarize students with the software interface, accessibility and accommodations resources, and item types.

Optional Interim Assessments

Local schools and districts can determine the number and timing of interim assessments, based on local curricula. They are available in two formats:

Interim Comprehensive Assessment (ICA) mirrors the length and scope of the summative assessment and yields a score on the same scale as the summative assessment that can be used as a growth or achievement metric. Currently fixed-form, these will become adaptive as the item banks expand.

Interim Assessment Blocks (IAB) focus on smaller sets

of skills and produce more targeted information about student performance. The IABs can be administered based on local scope and sequence to check for understanding at the end of units of instruction.

Educators may also use these items and tasks for professional development and/or instructional purposes.

The Digital Library

The Digital Library is an online collection of curated professional learning and instructional resources, in print, audio, and video formats, contributed by educators for educators. Networking features enable educators from across the consortium to collaborate and share their knowledge virtually and to rate and comment on resources they have used.

GOVERNANCE, COSTS AND ACCESS

Smarter Balanced is a member-led consortium, and governing member states each have a vote in policy decisions. An Executive Committee composed of a chair, a chair-elect, a past-chair, four representatives from four separate governing states, two representatives from higher education, and one representative for post-secondary careers oversee the development of the system in accordance with those policy decisions.

2015-2016 Costs

For member states, Smarter Balanced provides the assessments, but states must contract separately for the delivery, scoring, and reporting services needed. The 2015-2016 cost per student for use of the full set of ELA/literacy and mathematics assessments, including access for all tested grades to the summative, interim, and formative tests, is \$9.55 for the computer-based administration. The cost per pupil for access to the summative tests only in ELA/literacy and mathematics is \$6.20. Smarter Balanced does not have current information regarding the average total cost per pupil for delivery, scoring, and reporting of the assessments, but estimated total cost in 2013 to be \$27.30 for the complete system and/or \$22.50 for the summative assessments only.

Member states may contract with Smarter Balanced for additional secure assessments for grades 9, 10, and 12. Prices are based on the number of students taking the assessments.

Nonmember Access to Consortium Resources

Smarter Balanced has adopted a policy for access of its materials by nonmember states. Nonmember states must pay the same per-student annual membership fee established by the Member States and must agree to maintain the security of consortium materials, administer assessments in accordance with consortium test administration manuals and copyright agreements, and submit a certification of results to the consortium prior to reporting results on the Smarter Balanced scale.

² Smarter Balanced mathematics items have customized glossaries, as needed, in English and/or a student's primary language (Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog, Ilokano, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Ukrainian, and American Sign Language are currently provided, at no additional charge to states). These function like a specialized thesaurus to ensure that students understand what is being asked of them.

Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM)

The purpose of the DLM assessment system is to significantly improve the academic outcomes of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, thereby improving their preparedness for postsecondary options and the world of work. The comprehensive assessment system is designed to measure more validly what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and are able to do than previous assessments. It provides useful, timely diagnostic information and targeted instructional support to teachers through a highly customizable system of instructionally embedded and end-of-year assessments. In addition, professional development resources developed by the DLM Consortium provide IEP¹ teams with clear, consistent guidelines for the identification of students for the alternate assessment and support teachers in the use of the assessment system.

The system is based on a set of standards derived from college and career readiness standards but at reduced depth, breadth, and complexity, which the DLM Consortium refers to as Essential Elements.

The DLM assessment system is based on the use of learning maps, which are described as being similar to a road map that shows both the main route to a destination as well as several alternate routes. They do not assume that all students take the same learning pathway, but allow and provide support for multiple pathways. In addition, the maps show all the “places” a student must travel through to get to the learning destination.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The summative assessment is a computer adaptive assessment in which each student’s customized test is delivered as a series of “testlets.” Each testlet consists of an engagement activity and 3-8 items that model good instruction and that teachers would be interested in using for purely instructional purposes.

There are two different models that states use for their summative assessment system in ELA and mathematics. One is based on a standardized blueprint with testlets administered only in the spring. In the states that use the year-end model, summative results are based on the

student’s responses during the spring. The integrated model features a blueprint with some standardization and some opportunity for local choice in the content tested. In these states, summative results are based on instructionally embedded and spring assessments. For 2015-2016 the DLM science assessments² follow a year-end model, regardless of the state’s assessment model for ELA and mathematics.

To allow for differentiation based on student needs and disabilities and possible use of assistive technology devices, multiple testlets are available for each assessed skill, and teachers select, with guidance, the appropriate one for the student. Each testlet includes lists of materials or manipulatives needed, allowed accommodations and prohibited accommodations, and levels of scaffolding.

Although the tests are untimed, the estimated total testing for the summative assessment is 35-60 minutes in mathematics, 60-90 minutes in ELA, and 90-100 minutes in science. Educators administering the assessments may stop between testlets or pause and resume administration at a later time as needed to support students.

Assessment Delivery and Scoring

The DLM system utilizes dynamic adaptive delivery, which is a variant of computer adaptive testing. Under traditional, item-by-item adaptive delivery, items are selected based on their difficulty. A correct response results in the selection of a more difficult item to follow, and an incorrect response leads to a less difficult item. In contrast, dynamic delivery relies on several pieces of information, including the student’s level of success with the previous testlet and the position in the learning map of the skills tapped by the task, to select the next testlet.

The majority of items are designed for the student to interact directly with the computer. In some cases, the teacher may administer the items offline and then choose the response in the system that matches the student’s offline response.

Students are not given raw scores, percentages, or scales scores from DLM assessments. Instead, the system determines the learning objectives (nodes) that have been mastered, based on performance on the testlets administered, and one of four performance level descriptors is produced: *emerging, approaching the target, at the target, or advanced.*

Supports for Students with Disabilities

The presentation of items, whether on a computer screen, through manipulatives, or by other means, varies based on the cognitive and sensory abilities and needs of the student and the skill being assessed. Students who can complete the assessments on a computer, with

Participation at a Glance

- MEMBER STATES: Alaska, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin

The following summary of the DLM assessment system has been approved by the DLM as being accurate as of January 23, 2016.

¹ Individualized Education Program, mandated by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is a written plan for a student with disabilities that describes how the student learns, how the student best demonstrates that learning and the program(s) and special services that the student requires to do so more effectively.

² All DLM states use the ELA and mathematics assessments. States choose whether to add the science assessments.

or without the use of assistive technologies, are allowed to do so. The system is accessible to students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or have low vision, and to those with neuromuscular, orthopedic, or other motor disabilities. Student responses can be entered through keyboards, switch systems, a computer mouse, or touch-screen technology (when available). The system is also compatible with a variety of common assistive technologies and allows for varying levels of teacher assistance. For students unable to use computers on their own, teachers administer items offline and enter responses into the system.

Accountability

Summative score reports are provided at the end of the academic school year. These reports indicate student performance compared to grade-level achievement expectations. Each state determines how the four DLM performance categories are used to identify proficient/non-proficient status for state accountability purposes. Indicators of student growth that may be used for accountability purposes are reported to the state but are not described in student score reports.

OTHER RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Instructionally Embedded Testlets

Testlets like those on the spring assessment are also available to teachers for use during the school year. These testlets are designed to be embedded in instruction periodically across the school year. Progress reports are available on-demand to show student mastery during instructionally embedded assessments throughout the year. Progress reports provide the teacher with diagnostic feedback that can be used to guide instruction.

The testlets in mathematics typically require 5-10 minutes each to complete, and those in ELA (reading and writing) require approximately 10-15 minutes.

Professional Development Resources

In order to support teachers' efforts to meet the wide range of needs in this student population, DLM provides a range of professional development resources, which are available at <http://dlmpd.com/>. More than 50 modules have been developed, and more will be added. Each module includes video segments featuring students with significant cognitive disabilities and is available in two primary formats to allow each member state to choose how best to implement professional development.

- Self-directed modules combine videos, text, and activities and require 30 to 40 minutes to complete.
- Facilitated modules are intended for small groups and face-to-face meetings, and include videos for delivery of the content as well as all handouts and materials needed for facilitation.

Both types of modules include a posttest that can be taken to earn state professional development credits.

Additional modules provide clear, consistent guidelines for the identification of students for the alternate assessment and support teachers in the use of the assessment system.

The Virtual Community of Practice

DLM provides a range of additional supports for educators of students with significant cognitive disabilities. The Virtual Community of Practice website (<http://dlmpd.com/clds/forum/>) is available to all across DLM member states, allowing them to share materials, insights, and expertise.

Instructional Texts

To address a challenge often faced by educators of students with significant disabilities — finding materials that link directly to the content of the grade level that are also accessible to their students — DLM has a library of accessible, open-source, easy-to-read texts for each grade level, organized by grade level. These texts may be downloaded from Tar Heel Reader at <http://tarheel-reader.org/>.

GOVERNANCE, COSTS AND ACCESS

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium is led by the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (CETE) and includes experts from a wide range of assessment fields, as well as key partners. The DLM Consortium is a self-governing entity composed of staff from state departments of education who provide guidance on the design and implementation of the DLM alternate assessments and are supported by professional staff located at CETE.

2015-2016 Costs

Member states pay \$39 per student per subject area (ELA, mathematics, and science where applicable) in 2015-2016 for use of the system. This includes administration, scoring and reporting; service desk support; and access to all DLM professional development materials. These costs are much less than the amount most states had been paying for Alternate Assessments, due in large part to the cost savings that result from shared development and support services.

Nonmember Access to Consortium Resources

DLM professional development materials are available to nonmember states and can be accessed via the DLM Alternate Assessment professional development web page dlmpd.com. Additional information and sample items can be found on the DLM Alternate Assessment System website at dynamiclearningmaps.org

The Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) (formerly the National Center and State Collaborative)

The grant for the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is ending. All of the resources from the NCSC project will transition to the participating states of the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA). MSAA is committed to using the NCSC assessment items, test blueprints, and the curriculum and professional development resources, updating them over time as appropriate. In addition, other states are independently continuing use of the NCSC assessment under licensing options. This information applies only to the MSAA approach.

The goal of the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) remains the same as the goal under the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), which is to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for postsecondary options. The MSAA comprehensive system includes summative assessments in ELA and mathematics for students in grades 3-8 and 11, as well as evidence-based instructional supports, curriculum resource guides, professional development modules to support educators, and IEP¹ teams to design and implement appropriate instruction that addresses academic content aligned to the states' content standards.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The MSAA summative assessments are on-demand, computer-based tests and consist of approximately 35-40 items for each grade level. MSAA is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measures academic content that is aligned to and derived from states' content standards.

All grade level tests include selected response items and, at some grades, also contain constructed response items and open ended response for the writing prompts.

Assessment Delivery and Scoring

The MSAA test window opens in early March and ends

Participation at a Glance

- PARTICIPATING STATES/ENTITIES: Arizona, Arkansas, Guam, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Northern Mariana Islands, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Tennessee.

The following summary of the MSAA/NCSC assessment system has been approved by MSAA representatives as being accurate as of February 3, 2016.

in mid-May. A certified test administrator presents items utilizing the scripted *Directions for Test Administration* to students. The assessments can be paused and resumed during the test window to address the specific needs of the student.²

Accessibility including optimal testing conditions, assessment features, and accommodations allow students to interact with the online assessment system. The test contains many built-in supports that allow students to take the test using materials they are most familiar with and to communicate what they know and can do independently. This includes reduced passage length for ELA reading passages, pictures and other graphics to help students understand what they read or what is being read to them, models and or demonstrations for students to use during the ELA and mathematics tests, common geometric shapes and smaller numbers on the mathematics tests, and the option to have the entire test read aloud.

All student responses are entered directly into the MSAA assessment system, either by the student or the test administrator (scribe). Scores are calculated and a student score is generated. Local Education Agency test coordinators can then access district, school, and student reports through the MSAA reporting portal.

Supports for Students with Disabilities

The assessments are designed to capture student performance through two item design features: (1) levels of content complexity, and (2) degrees and types of scaffolds and supports, based on evidence-based practices of how students who participate in AA-AAS demonstrate their learning in the classroom. Principled design procedures, based on the evidence-centered design (ECD) literature, were used to ensure the items enable students to independently show what they know at varying levels of understanding.

Every item includes scripted directions for test administrators to ensure that the item is given to the student as intended, without inadvertently changing what is measured. These directions present specific ways a test administrator can adapt to the student's mode of communication and unique needs, while ensuring that the student can independently demonstrate the targeted knowledge and skills, including use of accommodations in the student's IEP consistent with NCSC accommodation policies.

In addition, the assessment is designed to work with varied communication modes and systems, provide optimal testing conditions, and offer assessment features appropriate for individual students. For the operational

¹ Individualized Education Program, mandated by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is a written plan for a student with disabilities that describes how the student learns, how the student best demonstrates that learning, and the services, supports and special instruction that the student requires to do so more effectively.

² NCSC had planned to implement a staged adaptive delivery process, as described in the 2014 edition of this guide. The MSAA Participating States are working toward the future implementation of a stage adaptive design.

test, the built-in features include: compatibility with assistive technology, text-to-speech, speech-to-text, amplification, color contrast, highlighting, increased size, a line reader tool, and masking. Test administrators may also, in compliance with testing procedures, read test questions aloud, use American Sign Language; print some or all items, and cover response options that the student has eliminated.

Accountability

The system is designed to produce ELA and mathematics scores that can be used to meet all of the uses and requirements of member states' accountability systems. Individual student scores and performance levels are reported in ELA and mathematics. Scores on the reading and writing assessments are combined into a single ELA score and performance level.

OTHER ASSESSMENTS, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS

To assist teachers, schools and districts, MSAA has created an online, open-source Wiki website that offers a growing collection of resources for educators and parents.

Formative and Interim Assessment Tools

The NCSC Mathematics Activities for Scripted Systematic Instruction (MASSI) and the Language Arts Scripted System Instruction (LASSI) instructional resources are supports available for teachers to use throughout the school year to monitor student progress based on a real world application of concepts and skills. Professional development webinars are available on the Wiki to develop skills in using Wiki resources to build MASSIs and LASSIs beyond the modeled content. The Curriculum Resource Guides (CRGs) include samples of performance tasks modeling how to assess prioritized content as part of classroom assessment, while the Content Modules provide examples of real-world application of the targeted content. All are available in an online digital resource library.

The NCSC Digital Resource Library

An online resource library (<http://wiki.ncscpartners.org>) of curriculum, instruction, and professional development materials was developed using the same evidence-based practices used to design the summative assessments. The digital resources are publicly available. Web statistics have shown that users from every state and many international communities have made use of the resources. An orientation to these resources is available at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/Media/Default/PDFs/Resources/NCSCBrief7.pdf>

Professional Development Resources

A professional development collection that includes presentations and interactive modules helps special and general education teachers understand and use the states' content standards to ensure that students

with significant cognitive disabilities can access instruction. These presentations and modules include training on how to use the resources to continue developing units, lessons, and progress monitoring tools for use in classrooms throughout the year. The Communication Tool Kit has modules that focus on communicative competence and supports educators in determining communication targets, tools, and supports for students with or without consistent modes of communication. The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) awards continuing education units for professionals who qualify, once they have successfully completed the Communication Tool Kit modules.

Instructional Resources

Sample units and lessons are provided, based on evidence-based instructional practices. Noteworthy resources currently available in the NCSC wiki include curriculum resource guides that explain how to teach students with significant cognitive disabilities and provide examples for differentiating instruction; content modules that focus and support education on some of the hard-to-teach concepts; and instructional units developed using UDL — universal design for learning — to support inclusive education.

Parent Resources

The wiki includes a variety of resources for parents and the public including summaries of each aspect of the system, guidance for participation in the alternate assessments, and tips for parents.

GOVERNANCE, COSTS AND ACCESS

Unlike many of the other assessment consortia, MSAA is managed directly by the participating states and does not have a management organization or company. The Arizona Department of Education is the fiscal agent for MSAA. All participating states are actively involved in continuing development and improvement of the assessment system, through a consensus-driven participatory process.

Costs

MSAA Partner States have a participating addendum to include state specific options. The cost per student is dependent on the selected state specific options. Participating states use a competitive open bid process to procure a vendor for the core services as a group.

Nonmember Access to MSAA/NCSC Resources

Several licensing options are available for entities that want to make use of the NCSC system and/or test content that was developed under the NCSC grant. For more information, please visit the website edcountmanagement.com.

The English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) Consortium

ELPA21 is an enhanced assessment system designed to measure the English language proficiency (ELP) of English language learners (ELLs) as they progress through their K-12 education and achieve college and career readiness. Designed for states by states and other assessment and content experts of English language development, ELPA21 provides assessments for English language learners — along with strategies for test design, administration, scoring, and reporting — that give students, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities the current and relevant information they need to best support every student as they work toward achieving English language proficiency in support of college and career readiness.

The ELPA21 assessment system includes: (1) an annual summative assessment for each of six grades/grade bands for monitoring student progress, tracking accountability, providing evidence for continued ELP support services, and prompting instructional improvement; and (2) a screener to provide information for English language learner identification and placement.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The ELPA21 assessments are based on the English language proficiency standards developed by WestEd and the Council of Chief State School Officers and adopted by consortium member states. These standards emphasize the important connections between learning English and engaging with classroom content aligned to the college and career ready Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards. There are a total of 10 ELP standards organized in grade bands of K, 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Each of the 10 standards at each grade band is further refined at five proficiency levels to provide ELL and content area teachers with an understanding of what an ELL's language use would look like as that student progresses toward independent participation in grade-appropriate course work.

The ELPA21 summative assessments for each of six grade bands — K, 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12 — are

administered in the winter and spring of each school year.¹ Because English language learners arrive in schools with varying levels of English and academic proficiency, each grade band assessment measures across a wide range of proficiency. These assessments measure students' level of English proficiency in the four domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In addition, a comprehension score as well as a composite score are reported to facilitate monitoring of student progress across school years.

The assessments use a range of item types, including selected response, short constructed-response, speech-capture, and technology-enhanced items. Technologies such as audio output and recording technology are utilized, as well as other interactive item types, particularly in the speaking and listening domains.

Assessment Delivery and Scoring

The summative assessments are delivered on computers or other approved digital devices. The decision to employ online delivery as the preferred mode was made based on the desire to (1) ensure standardized administration of the assessments, (2) have more flexibility and standardization in providing students with disabilities a range of accommodations and accessibility features that are consistent with other large-scale assessment programs, (3) include innovative item types that improve the ability to measure the ELP standards, and (4) provide economical and easily accessed training for administrators, proctors, and scorers.

The consortium does not administer the summative assessments directly, but develops and provides all of the necessary components for delivery within states. States have selected their own platform vendors for the first operational year of ELPA21, school year 2015-2016.

ELPA21 also provides the materials and protocols for consistency in the scoring of the assessments across member states. Although each state contracted its own vendor for 2015-2016, scoring is standardized. The vendors will use materials developed and refined during range-finding and hand-scoring for the field test, which took place in Winter 2015.

Student scores will be provided for each of the four language domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as well as a composite ELP score and a comprehension score (comprised of reading and listening). The consortium is currently examining both compensatory and conjunctive scoring models to determine which better meets states' needs and reflects the theory of ELP embodied in the standards.

Participation at a Glance

- **MEMBER STATES:** Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington, and West Virginia

The following summary of the ELPA21 assessment system has been approved by the Oregon Department of Education and CCSO managing partners as being accurate as of February 4, 2016.

¹ The timing of the summative assessments will depend on each state's assessment schedule.

Supports for ELLs and ELLs with Disabilities

ELPA21 assessments include three levels of accessibility features and accommodations, but the specific list may vary by state. The options include:

- **Universal Features:** All students may access a variety of tools, including amplification, a digital notepad, mark-for-review, highlighter, zoom, and masking of eliminated answer options.
- **Designated Features:** Students identified in advance by local educators may access, as approved, a set of tools that includes color contrast, a line reader, or print-on-request. Non-embedded supports for students include color overlay, language translations of directions, read aloud, and a paper version.
- **Accommodations:** For students with an IEP or 504 plan, the system supports the use of assistive technologies, and braille, large print, speech-to-text, and use of a scribe are available as nonembedded accommodations.

Accountability

The summative scores from the ELPA21 assessments may be used in conjunction with other data to evaluate whether a student is ready for reclassification from the ELL program. Individual consortium states determine how and what combination of evidence will be acceptable. The results can be used within state accountability systems and for program improvement purposes.

OTHER ASSESSMENTS, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS

Screener

Beginning in the fall of 2016, the ELPA21 screener will be used to inform potential identification of ELLs and ELD placement decisions for identified English language learners. It is designed to be given when a student first enrolls in a public school district. While shorter than the summative assessment, the screener is designed to assess students across the four language domains. To the extent possible, the screener will be administered online and will be composed of items from the same item bank as the summative assessment. In order to support prompt and appropriate identification for placement of students into ELL services, ELPA21 will design the screener to be scored promptly through a combination of computer scoring and trained local scorers.

ELPA21 will establish and use a consortium-wide common cut score to inform initial ELL identification and program placement decisions. Teachers will have access to the score reports from the screener to inform instruction.

Sample Items

On the ELPA21 website (<http://www.elpa21.org/assessment-system/sample-items>), interested educators, students, and parents can see sample test items. These sample items illustrate the types of items on the summative assessments and include many of the



technology enhancements, such as audio files for the listening items.

Professional Development Resources and Activities

ELPA21 is developing materials and guidance that can be used in group trainings and also accessed by individual teachers. Six online training modules will focus on classroom implementation of the ELP Standards, addressing topics for both ELL teachers and content area teachers. The resources completed to date can be found on the ELPA21 website at www.elpa21.org, and others will be added over time.

ELPA21 also provides resources for all teachers including ELL instructors and academic content teachers on (1) how to provide a secure and accurate assessment experience, (2) how to best use the assessment results to inform instructional placement, and (3) how to discuss results with students and families.

GOVERNANCE, COSTS AND ACCESS

ELPA21 is transitioning from being an Enhanced Assessment Grant-funded project to becoming a state-funded consortium housed at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in Summer 2016. Members of ELPA21 at UCLA will have a choice of two participation levels, Basic and Comprehensive, each with their own cost structure. These two levels of membership are offered to provide flexibility to states to select their own test administration vendor (Basic) or to join with other states to realize potential savings for test administration services (Comprehensive). This flexibility allows members to have the benefits of an innovative assessment system and to determine how best to administer the assessments to their ELs. The costs for membership and use of the assessments have not yet been determined.

ELPA21 is a self-governing grant-funded collaborative overseen by a Consortium Council composed of one state agency representative from each member state. ELPA21 at UCLA will continue to be a member-led and member-governed project, with a Governing Council and Executive Committee assisting an Executive Director and senior managers in the day-to-day operations of the consortium.

The WIDA Consortium's ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 (formerly the ASSETS Consortium)

WIDA, a collaborative of states that formed in 2002, and project partners have developed a next generation, technology-based English language proficiency assessment system for English language learners in grades 1-12.¹ The system, initially funded by the ASSETS grant and now referred to as ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, measures student progress in attaining the academic English necessary to succeed in school and, ultimately, in postsecondary studies and work. It includes a summative language proficiency assessment, an on-demand screener, and foundations for formative assessment resources, as well as accompanying professional development materials. These summative assessments of English language proficiency became operational in the 2015-2016 school year.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

All of the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 system components and support materials are grounded in the WIDA English Language Development Standards, which connect both topically and linguistically to states' College and Career Readiness Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards, as well as to those content standards of other states that are of comparable rigor.

The annual summative assessment, ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, is an online, adaptive summative assessment provided in grades 1-12 for accountability and program improvement purposes. The English language proficiency assessment covers the language domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing and addresses the language of the academic content areas as well as social and instructional language. In addition, a paper-based ACCESS for ELLs is available for grades K-12.

The summative assessment includes separate test forms for the following grade bands: 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. At each grade band, the full range of language

proficiency levels is represented, allowing educators, students, and families to monitor students' progress in acquiring English over time.

The assessments include both selected response and constructed response items. The exact number of each item type will vary based on the domain, grade level, and the language proficiency levels targeted in the test form. The listening and reading tests are composed of selected response items, and the writing test is composed of constructed response items in which students respond to writing tasks. The speaking test is composed of constructed response items and includes recording of students' speech. Responses on both the writing and speaking test are to be scored by centrally-located raters.

ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 incorporates technology within the delivery of test items (i.e. listening passages and audio prompts), and within test items and response options, such as the recording of students' spoken English and use of task models and guides.

Supports for All Students and Students with Disabilities

Similar to other online assessments, the range of accessibility supports available to all students has expanded. Available accessibility tools include highlighter, line guide, magnifier, and color contrast. Test administration procedures have been reframed to provide all schools and districts greater flexibility in selecting from a range of standardized testing conditions for all students. Examples include individual administration, repetition of directions, supervised breaks, and familiar school personnel.

Accommodations are available to ELLs with disabilities who require them to participate in the assessment meaningfully and appropriately. Examples include presentation of test directions in American Sign Language, manual control of item audio, large print, and braille formats. Examples of response accommodations include scribed responses, augmentative communication devices, and extended speaking response time.

Assessment Delivery and Scoring

Each member state determines its own testing window in accordance with its local needs. Students use computers or other digital devices, such as tablets, to take the assessments and use headsets in order to complete the listening and speaking components. A paper-based test is available for students requiring this format as an accommodation, as permitted by the member state.

The test delivery is adaptive. Test items are grouped by proficiency level within thematically linked sets of items. Based on a student's performance on an individual folder, the test engine determines the appropriate next

Participation at a Glance

- MEMBER STATES/ENTITIES that use the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessments: Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

The following summary of the WIDA assessment system has been approved by as accurate as of February 8, 2016.

¹ Note that Kindergarten is not included in the grant and will remain an interactive, paper-based kit for the near future.

sets of items for the student. At each stage within the test, students receive the higher or lower level set of items that are best suited to their abilities, thereby shortening testing time.

The amount of time required for a student to complete all four domains of the summative assessment (i.e. listening, reading, writing, and speaking) is estimated to be under 4 hours, with less than one hour per domain for the listening, reading, and speaking tests, and 65 minutes for the writing test.

The selected response items for the reading and listening sections are automatically scored by computer, whereas student responses for the writing and speaking tasks are digitally recorded and subsequently scored offsite by trained raters.

Scores on ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 are reported as scale scores and proficiency levels. Scale scores are derived from a K-12 vertically aligned scale. Each scale score is then interpreted as a grade-level specific proficiency level. WIDA reports a scale score and proficiency level for each domain: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. WIDA also reports composite scores, generated from a combination of weighted language domain scores: oral language composite score; literacy composite score; a comprehension composite score; and overall composite score (see illustrated weightings, lower right).

Weighting of the Overall Composite Score on ACCESS for ELLs 2.0			
Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
15%	15%	35%	35%

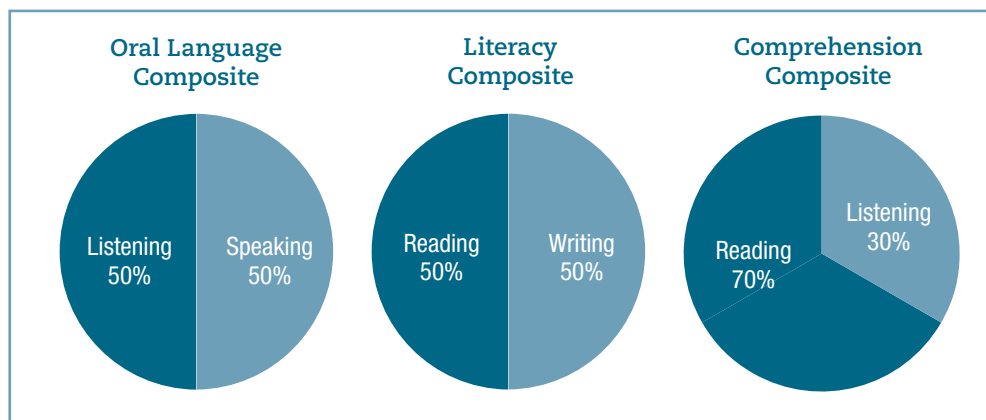
Accountability

The composite English Language Proficiency scores described above and at lower right can be used by member states to inform decisions about whether an individual student should be reclassified, as well as to contribute to decisions about district and state performance for accountability purposes.

OTHER ASSESSMENTS, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS

Test Demo and Sample Items

Students and administrators can become familiar with the item types through Test Demos (which are video tutorials) or with practice items. Sample items are available online for public viewing, and the consortium will seek to add technology-enhanced item types to the summative assessments.



On-Demand Screener, WIDA Screener

This technology-based, on-demand screener is used in combination with other measures to determine eligibility and appropriate placement for English learner program services. The WIDA Screener is adaptive, meaning that parts of the test may be discontinued as soon as the student reaches his or her performance “ceiling.” It includes item types similar to those found on the summative assessments and indicates a student’s social and academic English language proficiency in the domains of listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Professional Development Resources

WIDA offers workshops and multi-day academies to interested entities. In addition, its website contains training materials in the use of the system and results, as well as a growing collection of resources to support educators working with ELLs. These include lesson plans, videos, and professional learning modules.

ACCESS for ELLs Growth Reports

ACCESS for ELLs Growth Reports are intended to help educators identify district- and school-level patterns in language growth. They can be used along with other information as one source of data to help understand systems-level strengths and needs. These reports are available to districts and schools at an additional cost.

GOVERNANCE, COSTS AND ACCESS

WIDA is a self-governing and membership-based collaborative of states.

The cost for use of either the online or paper/pencil version of the summative assessments in 2015-2016 is \$25.75 per student up to 75,000 students and \$24.25 for each student above that number. This cost also brings membership in the WIDA Consortium, which entitles the state education agency to use of screener assessments, research services, WIDA standards, professional learning opportunities (varies according to number of students tested), involvement in WIDA governance, and other components.

Membership in Assessment Consortia

State	Comprehensive Assessment Consortia		Alternate Assessment Consortia		English Language Proficiency Consortia	
	PARCC (8)	SBAC (16)	DLM (17)	NCSC (10)	ASSETS (34)	ELPA21 (10)
Alabama					Member	
Alaska			Member		Member	
Arizona				Member		
Arkansas				Member		Member
California		Governing				
Colorado	Governing		Member		Member	
Connecticut		Governing				
Delaware		Governing			Member	
District of Columbia	Governing				Member	
Florida					Member	
Georgia					Member	
Hawaii		Governing			Member	
Idaho		Governing			Member	
Illinois	Governing		Member		Member	
Indiana						
Iowa			Member			Member
Kansas			Member			Member
Kentucky					Member	
Louisiana						Member
Maine				Member	Member	
Maryland	Governing			Member	Member	
Massachusetts	Governing				Member	
Michigan					Member	
Minnesota					Member	
Mississippi						
Missouri			Member		Member	
Montana		Governing		Member	Member	
Nebraska						Member
Nevada		Governing			Member	
New Hampshire		Governing	Member		Member	
New Jersey	Governing		Member		Member	
New Mexico	Governing				Member	
New York			Member			
North Carolina			Member		Member	
North Dakota		Governing	Member			
Ohio						Member
Oklahoma			Member			
Oregon		Governing				Member
Pennsylvania			Member		Member	
Rhode Island	Governing			Member	Member	
South Carolina					Member	Member
South Dakota		Governing		Member	Member	
Tennessee				Member	Member	
Texas						
Utah			Member		Member	
Vermont		Governing	Member		Member	
Virginia					Member	
Washington		Governing				Member
West Virginia		Governing	Member			Member
Wisconsin			Member		Member	
Wyoming					Member	
Territories, Other						
Bureau of Indian Education		Governing				
Department of Defense						
Guam				Governing		
N. Mariana Islands				Governing		

The Road Ahead

Our goal at ETS is to provide quality measures that give educators, administrators, employers, and policymakers around the world information they can count on to form insights and make decisions that help learners evolve.

Unparalleled research capabilities and an unwavering commitment to exacting standards set us apart and allow us to lead the industry with innovative products and approaches to assessment.

We believe that by promoting fair measurement in educational and professional development, we can make a difference. And our clients and partners can trust the validity of the solutions we develop in collaboration with them.

At the heart of the ETS brand is our devotion to enabling opportunity for all learners by focusing on quality that matters and by providing valid and fair assessments that measure what they are intended to measure. Only then can we stand by our mission of advancing quality and equity in education for all people worldwide.

The ETS Opportunity Project



The focus of nonprofit ETS is the achievement of its mission to advance quality and equity in education for all learners. ETS recently has strengthened its resolve to explore an issue at the heart of the future of our country: the widening inequality of opportunity that threatens the American dream for current and future generations. The ETS Opportunity Project aims to catalyze a conversation among individuals and organizations interested in and engaged with efforts to restore and redefine pathways to opportunity.

Together, ETS hopes to create an actionable and flexible framework that can guide efforts to create a better future for America.

Learn more, sign up for email updates, and download ETS's published works at opportunityproject.ets.org.



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