

Additional information on Common Core, Smarter Balanced, and SB 455

As part of SB 389, signed into law August 28, 2007, public institutions of higher education were charged to work with the commissioner of Higher Education in the development of competencies for first general education courses in key disciplines. The Curriculum Alignment Initiative (CAI) established both entry- and exit- level competencies for college-level general education courses. Entry-level competencies set a threshold for student access to collegiate-level coursework across disciplines as a means for smoothing the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Exit-level competencies facilitate the transfer of general education courses. Optimal competencies were also developed to outline additional requirements for students in the pipeline who aspire to prepare for selected careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In June 2008, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) approved entry-level competencies in several areas, including mathematics and English language arts. The initial CAI report, historical background information regarding CAI, and documents detailing previously approved competencies are available on the MDHE website: <http://dhe.mo.gov/casinitative.shtml>

In September 2009, Missouri and 47 other states committed to adopt the standards for mathematics and English language arts contained in the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Adoption of the Common Core Standards was required as part of the state's application for "Race to the Top," even though the standards themselves had not been finalized. In the fall 2009, the Missouri Department of Higher Education staff compared the CAI entry-level competencies in mathematics and English language arts to the draft standards of the CCSSI to assess the extent of alignment between the two sets of standards. The MDHE also asked content experts in both mathematics and English language arts to do a similar analysis. Both the MDHE and the content experts concluded that there were no significant gaps in alignment between the CAI competencies and common core standards.

From the Smarter Balanced website: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/#2451>

"The writers of the CCSS, who included college and university faculty, began by defining the knowledge and skills in mathematics and ELA/literacy that students need to be ready to succeed in entry-level credit-bearing coursework and the high-skill workforce. To do this, the standards writers consulted existing college readiness benchmarks, research on student academic preparation, and surveys of business leaders, as well as content standards for top-performing states and countries. The College and Career-ready Standards were vetted by faculty around the country, including panels convened by the American Council on Education in collaboration with leading scholarly societies. Once the College- and Career-ready Standards were agreed upon, standards writers then created the grade level standards, "back-mapping" them to the college- and career-ready benchmarks. A recent survey of 1,800 faculty in an array of disciplines at a diverse set of institutions found substantial agreement that the CCSS define the knowledge and skills that students need to be ready for entry-level course work."

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

From the Smarter Balanced website: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/#2451>

“Smarter Balanced is a state-led consortium working collaboratively to develop next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. The Consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven process to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. The Consortium’s projects are funded through a four-year, \$175 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, comprising 99 percent of activity resources, with the remaining support provided through generous contributions of charitable foundations.

Smarter Balanced seeks to align its assessments as closely as possible to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Through its member states, and in consultation with the lead standards writers and other national education experts, Smarter Balanced is translating the CCSS into assessment targets, test blueprints and, ultimately, assessment items and performance tasks. The Consortium also must establish performance benchmarks that define the level of content and skill mastery that marks students as college- and career-ready. The consortium has begun the process of translating the standards into assessments, releasing content specifications in English language arts/literacy and mathematics and approving the core “claims” about student knowledge and skills that the assessments will seek to measure. Item Specifications also have been developed and released for comment. Setting performance standards will not occur until 2014 after student data have been collected through pilot and field testing.”

In 2011, Missouri became one of the governing states of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), charged with developing formative and summative assessments of student proficiency of the core standards in mathematics and English for each grade level, K-12. To complete its work by October 2014 (when its federal funding ends) the consortium is working on a very tight schedule, which has hampered engagement with the higher education community. Missouri institutions of higher education signed letters of support to help develop the assessments and to accept the work of the consortium in placing students in credit-bearing, college-level courses in mathematics and English. Higher education participation in the work of the SBAC, however, has to this point been quite limited. The consortium recently has added a Director of Higher Education Collaboration to its staff. The director works with “leads” from each of the governing states to increase the participation of higher education in developing the assessments.

The bulk of the SBAC’s work—developing assessments for the elementary and middle school grades—does not affect higher education directly. Much of this effort is highly technical and specialized, involving psychometricians and other experts, although there are opportunities for content experts in higher education to comment on specific aspects of test development.

The SBAC's plan is for students to be assessed in mathematics and English toward the end of their high school career to determine their readiness to do college-level work. The SBAC will set a numerical score that equates to "proficient" in each content area, similar to an ACT or SAT score. Students who achieve the "proficient" score will be deemed "college ready" and institutions will be expected to place these students in college-level, credit-bearing courses. Where the "college ready" score will fall has not yet been determined.

SBAC late last year hired Jacqueline E. King, PhD, as director of its Higher Education Collaboration initiative. King, a former vice president for policy analysis with the American Council on Education, has taken a number of steps to bring higher education into the work of the consortium. She has convened a State Higher Education Leads (I am the state lead from Missouri) that meets monthly. She arranged for another seat on the SBAC Executive Council be designated for higher education, which Beverly L. Young, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Teacher Education and Public School Programs at the California State University, has assumed. SBAC has reached out to higher education in providing comment on various parts of the assessment development, although its timeline is extremely tight and the window for comment exceedingly narrow. SBAC has also agreed to add higher education representatives to each of its 10 workgroups.

It's worth mentioning that the other assessment consortium, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), recently voted unanimously to give members of its advisory committee on college readiness voting power on four issues: how to describe the expected performance levels on the tests, who will set the cutoff scores for the tests, what evidence will be used to decide the cutoff scores, and, crucially, what the cutoff scores will be.

Missouri's future with SBAC is somewhat uncertain. The cost per pupil for the formative and summative assessments is projected to be approximately \$27.00; Missouri currently expends about \$12.00 per pupil for assessment. Other states are facing a similar dilemma. Because of this uncertainty, I have not sought your counsel in identifying Missouri faculty to serve on the SBAC workgroups. I did not want to ask for a commitment to the work if we, as a state, ultimately remove ourselves from the consortium. There also has been some discussion of Missouri pulling out of the consortium because the projected cost per student of the SBAC's formative and summative assessments are more than twice what DESE currently spends. If this happens, Missouri still is committed to implementing the CCSSI and will have to develop its own assessments.

SB 455

SB 455 directs the CBHE to "require all public two-year and four-year higher education institutions to replicate best practices in remediation identified by the coordinating board and institutions from research undertaken by regional educational laboratories, higher education research organizations, and similar organizations with expertise in the subject, and identify and reduce methods that have been found to be ineffective in preparing or retaining students or that delay students from enrollment in college-level courses."