



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Governance | Accountability | Achievement | Oversight | Career & College Readiness

To: Members of the Core to College Project Task Force
From: Washington State Board of Education
Date: March 6, 2014
Re: Feedback on Draft Recommendations for the Use of the Smarter Balanced 11th Grade Assessment by Washington Institutions of Higher Education

Thank you for an opportunity to comment on the recommendations of the Core to College Project on potential uses of the 11th grade Smarter-Balanced Assessment in the higher education system.

An intentional strategy for making the 11th grade assessment relevant at both the secondary and post-secondary levels is essential. As a Board, we discussed opportunities for alignment across three major domains: post-secondary course placement, admissions, and high school course-taking and guidance, and would make the following recommendations.

High school course-taking and guidance

The Board supports the approach offered by the Report on course placement, with some suggested modifications. It is of primary importance to the Board that "Level 1" students are not left behind in the transition to college-readiness. The Board will work with the broader community of stakeholders to articulate specific recommendations for a viable pathway for these students to access the "college readiness courses" referenced in the draft recommendations, and ultimately living wage employment opportunities. We need to craft a set of 12th grade requirements that articulates a sense of optimism for the post-secondary prospects for students who test at Level 1, and would ask that you consider reframing the matrix to reflect these pathways. I think we would agree that retesting alone is not a sufficient strategy of support for these students.

It is also important to the Board that the 11th grade assessment remain relevant to the High School and Beyond Plan of each high school student. The Legislature has indicated, at least preliminarily, that passing the SBAC 11th grade test, at a proficiency level to be determined by the Board, will be a high school graduation requirement beginning with the Class of 2019. In the meantime, relevance will need to come in a different form.

Dr. Kristina Mayer, *Chair* • Ben Rarick, *Executive Director*
Dr. Deborah Wilds • Kevin Laverty • Elias Ulmer • Bob Hughes • Dr. Daniel Plung • Mara Childs • Cynthia McMullen
Peter Maier • Holly Koon • Tre' Maxie • Connie Fletcher • Judy Jennings • Isabel Munoz-Colon • Jeff Estes
Randy Dorn, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

Old Capitol Building • 600 Washington St. SE • P.O. Box 47206 • Olympia, Washington 98504
(360) 725-6025 • TTY (360) 664-3631 • FAX (360) 586-2357 • Email: sbe@k12.wa.us • www.sbe.wa.gov

Admissions

For some students, the primary relevance is likely to be through the course placement options available to students who demonstrate proficiency on the assessment, as a way of avoiding remedial coursework. However, for our higher achieving students, the primary relevance may be experienced in what role the 11th grade assessment plays in admissions decisions. We have observed over the years the significant public and private resources devoted to preparation on the SAT and other college admissions tests, and it would be a great policy outcome if some or all of these resources were devoted to mastery of Common Core Standards. The extent to which we are able to achieve this objective will depend on the degree to which our four year universities – the University of Washington in particular – integrate the results into admissions decisions. Indeed, during Board discussion, our student representative made the comment that it might appear to certain college-going students that they are basically taking “the same test twice” to qualify for college. Ultimately, if the 11th grade test is our state’s measure of “career and college-readiness,” then it seems logical to use that test in decisions about who is ready to attend our state’s most selective post-secondary institutions.

Seamlessness in transition course policy, and assessment use

In our transition to new graduation requirements for the class of 2019, we see an opportunity for further alignment. For example, under current law, there is the potential for three “cut scores” on the 11th grade test: the cut score for “college and career readiness” (set by SBAC), the cut score for high school graduation (set by SBE), and the cut score for course placement as proposed by this Report. Eventually, the latter two could be the same, so that our expectations are aligned.

It is also worth considering how we could align the expectations of high school course-taking requirements, and post-secondary course placement options. For example, it is conceivable that taking and passing a “transition” or “college-readiness” course, as you’ve proposed, could satisfy the 3rd math credit requirement (treated as equivalent to Algebra II in the sequence) and/or the 4th year quantitative course required by WSAC for minimum college entry. We are also considering whether completion of such a course could also serve as an alternative pathway to high school graduation for students who don’t pass the 11th grade test initially. Under this scenario, students could complete a “collection of evidence” as they do now, or take and pass a rigorous “transition course.” While none of these decisions have been made yet, we are actively considering them, as they all represent opportunities for greater alignment with our partners in the higher education system.

Another issue for further alignment is in our descriptors pertaining to these various requirements. Our board members were sometimes confused by the relationship of terms like “entry level,” “remedial,” “developmental,” “basic,” and “pre-college level” to describe coursework at the community college level. We came to believe that these terms all describe essentially the same thing, but this was not initially obvious to board members. Streamlined terms going forward will be an important consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your recommendations.