

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 2, 2010

Contact: Chris Barron
Assessment Communications Manager
(360) 725-6032
chris.barron@k12.wa.us

31-State Consortium Awarded RTTT Assessment Grant

SMARTER Balanced is one of two consortia awarded a \$160 million grant to develop a student assessment system aligned with the common core academic standards

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The 31-state [SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium](#), or SBAC, was awarded a four-year \$160 million Race to the Top assessment grant today by the US Department of Education to develop a student assessment system aligned to a common core of academic standards.

SBAC was one of two consortia awarded a comprehensive assessment system grant. It's the first collaboration of its kind to develop a common assessment system among a majority of states.

"I am encouraged to see so many states working together to improve our nation's approach to assessing students," said Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire, whose state is the applicant state for the grant. "Receiving this federal grant will allow the 31 states who have agreed to work together to build an innovative system that will accurately measure how students are progressing over the years and ensure that they have the skills and knowledge so they are career and college ready when they graduate."

SBAC will create state-of-the-art adaptive online exams, using "open source" technology. The online system will provide accurate assessment information to teachers and others on the progress of all students, including those with disabilities, English language learners and low- and high-performing students. The system will include:

- 1) the required summative exams (offered twice each school year);
- 2) optional formative, or benchmark, exams; and
- 3) a variety of tools, processes and practices for teachers to use in planning and implementing informal, ongoing assessment. This will assist teachers in understanding what students are and are not learning on a daily basis so they can adjust instruction accordingly.

SBAC's goal – to ensure that all students leaving high school are college and career ready – will be achieved with the high-quality assessment system to be created by the consortium. The system will include rigorous, internationally benchmarked tests that report on how each student has been progressing toward and is currently performing on a pathway to career and college readiness.

"The immediate assessment results will provide teachers the information they need to adapt their instruction to the needs of each student," said Judy Park of Utah, co-chair of the newly elected SBAC executive committee. "Those results will also improve student motivation during the testing process and help students better understand their current knowledge and skills."

The test scores will also be able to be used for improved educator accountability and to help identify professional development needs of teachers and principals.

Throughout the year, students will have the option to take formative exams, which provide guidance to teachers about instructional milestones. These formative tests and multiple opportunities to take what are traditionally year-end summative exams will move the testing process away from the traditional one-size-fits-all state exams. The goal is for students who score well on specific learning standards earlier in the school year not to be tested on those standards later on an end-of-the-year test because they've already demonstrated proficiency.

SBAC's assessment system will be tied to the [Common Core State Standards](#), an initiative led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association to create a consistent and clear set of learning standards for K-12 in English language arts and mathematics that all states can use. By the end of 2011, states in the consortium must agree to adopt the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math. States still in the consortium in 2014-15 must agree to use the consortium's tests as their accountability assessments.

Overseeing SBAC's project will be a seven-person executive committee, led by Park and co-chair Tony Alpert of Oregon. Other committee members include Joe Willhoft (Washington), Carissa Miller (Idaho), Joseph Martineau (Michigan), Lynette Russell (Wisconsin) and Dan Hupp (Maine).

"Our executive committee will quickly dig in and establish requests for proposals, advisory committees and support our member states as they coordinate with their district and school administrators and teachers to provide guidance for our work," Alpert said.

The SBAC tests will measure the full range of the common core standards in grades 3-8 and 11, including assessing problem solving and complex thinking skills. Teachers in participating states will be involved at all stages of item and test development, including writing, scoring and the design of reporting systems. Educators will also be able to access a reporting system that identifies each student's strengths, weakness and progress toward college and career readiness.

"This partnership allows us to leverage the expertise and resources in other states to develop this new assessment system," Willhoft said. "We're excited about the possibilities this collaboration presents."

Funding for the RTTT assessment grant will begin October 1. SBAC, led by 17 governing states, will begin its work by conducting an assessment framework study, meaning the group will analyze the common core standards at each grade level to determine what skills are able to be tested. The bulk of the test development work will be conducted in spring 2011.

The governing states are those that are fully committed to SBAC and are engaged in all decisions. The advisory states, as defined by the US Department of Education, can belong to more than one consortia and participate in all meetings and workshops, but are not part of the decision-making process.

Learn more about the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium at <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER>. For individual state contacts regarding SBAC, please click on the following link: <http://www.k12.wa.us/smarter/pubdocs/SBACContact.pdf> (PDF).

###