California Department of Education

Executive Office

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# **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 11, 2019

**TO:** MEMBERS, State Board of Education

**FROM:** TONY THURMOND, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Update on Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments and Digital Library Resources.

## Summary of Key Issues

California is a governing member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced), a multistate partnership to provide high-quality assessments and resources that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics. This Information Memorandum describes several new resources and efforts to support educator use of the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments and Digital Library. The following topics will be covered:

* Interim assessments for the 2019–20 school year
* Updates and additions to the Digital Library Connections Playlists
* Digital Library 2.0 (Tools for Teachers) development activities
* The Smarter Content Explorer web tool for teachers
* California Educator Reporting System activities
* The reporting system Sandbox training tool

### **Interim Assessments for the 2019–20 School Year**

The Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments are designed to support teaching and learning in ELA and mathematics throughout the school year. There are two types of interim assessments: Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICAs) and Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs). The ICAs cover the same range of claims and targets as the summative assessments and include the same item types and formats, including performance tasks. The IABs focus on smaller sets of learning targets than the ICAs and provide more detailed information for instructional purposes. For the 2019–20 school year, new IABs and ICAs were added to the more than 100 interim assessments that were previously available to California local educational agencies (LEAs):

* **New IABs**. In response to requests from educators for IABs that are even more granular, Smarter Balanced has introduced a new type of IAB called the focused IAB. Focused IABs assess even smaller bundles of content to give teachers specific information about what students know and can do so they can plan next steps for instruction. Each focused IAB assesses one to three assessment targets—a more granular level than claim to describe the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities assessed by the items and tasks within each claim.

Beginning this school year, California educators have access to 42 new focused IABs, three for each of grades three through eight and high school for ELA and mathematics. Additional focused IABs are anticipated to be available in the next few years.

* **New ICAs**. To support educators in measuring the progress of high school students in meeting college and career readiness standards, Smarter Balanced has introduced grade-specific cut scores for the high school ICAs. As a result, there are now four additional ICAs available at the high school level—two ICAs for each of grades nine and ten, one for ELA and one for mathematics. The previously available “high school” ICAs have been relabeled as grade eleven ICAs.

For ELA, the new ICAs for grades nine and ten are identical in content to the grade eleven ICA and feature grade-appropriate cut scores. For mathematics, the items in the grades nine and ten ICAs differ slightly to cover grade-appropriate content areas and include content-appropriate cut scores.

Further information about the 2019−20 interim assessments, including a list of available ICAs and IABs, is available in the Interim Assessment Overview at [http://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/interim-assessments-overview.pdf](https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/interim-assessments-overview.pdf).

### **Digital Library Connections Playlists—Updates and Additions**

Smarter Balanced provides educators with Digital Library instructional resources that are linked directly to the interim assessments. There are 150 Digital Library Connections Playlists available, one for each IAB. This includes 42 new playlists—aligned with the new focused IABs—which feature 126 new instructional resources for ELA and mathematics. These playlists help teachers save time by identifying suggested Digital Library resources on the basis of students’ performance on an IAB. Educators can use these resources to determine next steps for instruction as a part of the formative assessment process.

### **Preparing for Digital Library 2.0 (Tools for Teachers)**

The instructional resources that appear in the Digital Library, many of which are featured on Digital Library Connections Playlists, are created primarily by members of the Smarter Balanced State Network of Educators (SNE). The SNE consists of educators, primarily teachers, from Smarter Balanced member states, who are trained in the development of formative assessment resources for the Digital Library. To date, SNE members have created more than 3,000 subject- and grade-specific formative assessment resources for ELA and mathematics for inclusion in the Digital Library.

Smarter Balanced will introduce a new portal, which will be an enhanced version of the Digital Library. This will occur in June 2020, in conjunction with the ten-year anniversary of Smarter Balanced. After consulting with its members, Smarter Balanced announced on September 18, 2019, the official name of the new portal—Tools for Teachers. The Tools for Teachers portal will contain instructional resources that include the following features:

* Simple and easy to use, with step-by-step directions
* Accessible (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1AA-compliant)
* Purposefully developed to align with Smarter Balanced grade-level claims and targets
* Embedded with options and ideas for differentiation and student access of content
* Embedded with formative assessment strategies (e.g., gallery walk, exit ticket, fist-to-five, and think-pair-share)
* Aligned with new Smarter Balanced quality criteria

In addition, Tools for Teachers will include easier search features that will enhance the overall experience of users in finding quality instructional and professional learning resources for improving teaching and learning while using the formative assessment process in the classroom.

In June and July 2019, Smarter Balanced conducted two workshops for SNE members to develop instructional resources for the Digital Library and prepare for the 2020 launch of Tools for Teachers. California was well represented at these workshops, with 23 teachers and curriculum coaches participating. These participants were experienced at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and were from districts representing the northern, central, and southern regions of the state as well as each of the district types (urban, suburban, and rural). Two staff members from the California Department of Education’s (CDE’s) Assessment Development and Administration Division also participated as members of the Digital Library State Leadership Team (SLT). The SLT provided guidance to SNE members in creating the instructional resources. During the two summer workshops, 120 new resources were developed to fill gaps in existing Connections Playlists and to build new playlists that align with the new focused IABs.

At the next workshop, which will take place in November 2019, Smarter Balanced will continue the development of the Tools for Teachers portal by working with SNE members to review and enhance previous versions of instructional resources using Smarter Balanced quality criteria. When the portal initially launches, the number of instructional resources available is expected to decrease to just under 1,000, and all of the instructional resources will be included in Connection Playlists that link to IABs. After the initial launch, Smarter Balanced plans to continue adding high-quality resources to the portal.

### **Smarter Content Explorer**

The *Smarter Balanced Content and Item Specifications* are key documents developed by Smarter Balanced to ensure that its ELA and mathematics assessments cover the range of knowledge and skills set forth in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The content in these lengthy documents can be immensely helpful to teachers, as they provide insight into how Smarter Balanced tests assess academic standards and cover the range of knowledge and skills for college and career readiness. Teachers have indicated, however, that navigating these resources in their current format, as stand-alone documents, is difficult.

As a result of this feedback, Smarter Balanced released, in September 2019, a new web tool called the Smarter Content Explorer for desktop and mobile devices. This web tool helps to bridge the gap between the language used by test developers and the language used in classrooms every day, allowing educators to filter content by CCSS, target, or claim. Educators will be able to quickly identify the content assessed and what students are expected to know on any of the Smarter Balanced Interim and/or Summative Assessments using this new tool in their exploration of the content and item specification. This information can help educators plan instruction and build curricular supports to align instruction with the rigor demanded by the content standards.

CDE staff, along with members from other states who make up the Smarter Content Explorer Steering Committee, participated in the user acceptance testing for the new web application. The Smarter Content Explorer is available through the Smarter Balanced website at [http://ContentExplorer.SmarterBalanced.org](http://contentexplorer.smarterbalanced.org/).

### **The California Educator Reporting System**

The California Educator Reporting System (CERS) is the new name for the system previously known to LEA staff as the Interim Assessment Reporting System. This system has been used by California LEA staff since September 2017 to view individual and aggregate student results from the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments for ELA and mathematics.

California *Education Code* Section 60642.6(b) requires LEAs to “ … ensure that teachers who administer the [interim] assessments have access to all functions and information, which are designed for teacher use, relating to the assessments and pupil performance on the assessments.” To help LEAs ensure that this requirement is met, the CDE offers regular communications, resources, and trainings regarding the use of the reporting system and its many features.

During the November 2018 SBE meeting, the SBE approved an amendment to the current interagency agreement with the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) for the customization, configuration, and implementation of CERS for the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) non-Smarter Balanced assessments and for the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). The original interagency agreement included the development of a reporting system for all Smarter Balanced assessments, so the amendment built on the original system infrastructure.

Over the next two years, student results from all CAASPP and ELPAC assessments will be added to CERS. Ultimately, CERS will become the “one stop shop” for LEA staff to view student results from all CAASPP and ELPAC assessments. The table below lists, by assessment, when the results from prior years and daily feed of results will be available in CERS.

| **Assessment Name** | **Results From Prior Years Available** | **Daily Feed of Results Available** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ELPAC | November 2019 | May 2020 |
| Summative assessments for ELA and mathematics | January 2020 | Spring 2021 |
| California Alternate Assessments (CAAs) for ELA and mathematics | January 2020 | Spring 2021 |
| California Spanish Assessment | Summer 2020 | Spring 2021 |
| California Science Test | Summer 2020 | Spring 2021 |
| CAA for Science | not applicable | Spring 2021 |
| Alternate ELPAC | not applicable | Spring 2022 |

In the coming months, updates will be provided to the California State Board of Education on the progress of CERS development.

### **CERS Sandbox Training Tool**

To support LEAs in training staff on how to use CERS, the CDE, through its interagency agreement with UCSC, has developed a training tool called the Sandbox. Introduced in July 2019, the Sandbox helps educators become familiar with the features and functions of CERS in a nonsecure environment. The Sandbox offers users virtually the same features and functions as CERS. It uses practice test items along with mock student data and can be used individually or in group training environments.

CDE and LEA staff conducted user acceptance testing to ensure the Sandbox functions as designed. Initial feedback from LEAs on this new tool has been extremely positive. In addition, the Sandbox was used during the CAASPP Summer Institute, which trained teachers and other LEA staff on how to use the interim assessment and Digital Library systems as well as how to conduct hand scoring of constructed responses and performance tasks. Trainers found the Sandbox to be a highly useful tool, much more effective than looking at screen shots on slides for training. For example, trainers reported that, using the Sandbox, they were able to better demonstrate to teachers how they can create and view assessment results for customized student groups. The Sandbox offers various grade- level teacher role options to select from—elementary, middle, and high school—to provide a more customized experience for training participants.

The Sandbox is available on a public website, and no logon credentials are needed to access it. Simply go to <http://bit.ly/CERSsandbox> and select a role such as teacher, school administrator, or district administrator to enter the Sandbox and view it from the perspective of that role. A link to the Sandbox is featured on the Interim Assessment Administration Resources page of the CAASPP Portal at <http://www.caaspp.org/ta-resources/interim.html>.

## Attachment(s)

None.