
Concerns and Responses Regarding the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

1. **The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is funded by the federal government, so states don't control the assessment.**

Several assessment consortia were formed in the United States in order to achieve economies of scale and to develop assessments that would readily permit comparisons across states; the two largest are Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Rather than states spending money to develop customized tests 50 times over, most states have chosen to belong to one of the two major assessment consortia (SBAC or PARCC). These consortia applied for one-time federal funding/start up dollars to develop their assessments. Once the development funding expires in the fall of 2014, states will financially support the administration, scoring, and reporting functions. The US Department of Education (ED) currently provides grants to each state to fund some of the cost of state assessment systems—and they have for many years.

The attributes of the Smarter Balanced assessment were developed primarily by state assessment directors, and each Governing state in the Consortium has a vote as key decisions about the assessment continue to be made. In addition, states have an opportunity to participate in various SBAC activities. As an example, about 50 Wyoming teachers have been trained to write and submit test questions for the assessment, and another 50 or so are involved in creating and evaluating formative assessment tools and resources for the Consortium's digital library.

2. **The Memorandum of Understanding between the federal government and SBAC as well as the one between SBAC and Wyoming require sharing of confidential student level data.**

While aggregate student performance data are annually reported to ED by every state, no confidential individual student data has ever been shared with ED by Wyoming, consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Further, no confidential student data will be shared by SBAC with ED. The [Higher Education Opportunity Act \(HEOA\) of 2008](#), [No Child Left Behind \(NCLB\)](#) legislation amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the [Education Reform Sciences Act of 2002](#), and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) all prohibit the creation of a federal database with students' personally identifiable information. In September, the member states adopted a principle which affirms that states retain ownership over their own student data. Like PARCC, SBAC is developing a set of data privacy rules for the Consortium. We expect these will be released in mid-January.

3. If Wyoming decides to leave SBAC, it must follow a five step process that involves federal government approval.

Exit from SBAC requires three steps. The member state education chief sends a letter notifying the Consortium of the intent to exit, then the SBAC Executive Committee reviews the letter, and then ED is notified of the change in membership. At the members' request, the process to exit the Consortium was streamlined to three steps in September, 2013, and the new process is reflected in the updated Governance document. Neither ED nor SBAC approval is required for exit of a member.

4. SBAC assessments will dictate local curriculum.

SBAC is an assessment system that is curriculum independent. Like our existing state assessment, it is designed to assess students' performance on the state's adopted standards, not to dictate programs, texts, or curriculum. Any references to curriculum in SBAC documents are intended to communicate that the Consortium aims to provide resources that states/districts can elect to use to help integrate and align assessment, curriculum and instruction. Resources from SBAC will be provided in a digital library comprised of submissions supplied by educators in member states, including Wyoming.

5. Wyoming participation in SBAC is limited because Wyoming isn't represented on the Consortium's Executive Committee.

Until Wyoming became a Governing State in July 2013, holding a seat on the Executive Committee wasn't an option. Now, though, as a Governing State lead, the Assessment Division Director could run for an open seat on the Executive Committee just as any other state lead. Regardless of whether or not Wyoming has a seat on the Executive Committee, the state still has a vote on all policy matters and many budget decisions of SBAC—no less than any other Governing State.

6. Wyoming educators are involved in SBAC activities even though the assessment hasn't been approved for use in our state.

One of the benefits of becoming a Governing State was to facilitate Wyoming educator participation in the work of the Consortium. This is consistent with best practice in state assessment; educator involvement is sound professional development in assessment literacy and improves teachers' understanding of the standards.

7. The MOU as an SBAC Governing State stipulates that we'll work to address any state statutes that inhibit implementation of SBAC.

This is true, but the WDE doesn't see it as a problem because the department would ask the Legislative Services Office and the Select Committee to consider changes to state statutes anyway in order to more fully assess our state's adopted standards. Regardless of the state assessment option chosen for 2015 and beyond, best practice in statewide, large-scale assessment includes using multiple item types and integrating reading and writing assessments.