Report of the

South Carolina
Assessment Study Group

November 7, 2011

Report of the
South Carolina Assessment Study Group
November 7, 2011

Introduction

The South Carolina Department of Education convened the Assessment Study Group (ASG) to provide input to state policy makers on the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment options the state might pursue in support of implementing the Common Core State Standards. Full implementation of the Common Core State Standards is scheduled for the 2014-15 school year. Since it typically takes three years to develop and plan for implementation of a statewide assessment, it is appropriate that the state consider the options for assessing the Common Core State Standards now.

The ASG was composed of 16 members with representation from the legislature, the Education Oversight Committee, and school district staff including a superintendent, assistant/associate superintendents, curriculum specialists, and assessment and accountability coordinators (see the Appendix for a list of study group members). The task force was supported with facilitation, documentation of the meetings, and research by the Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL.

The South Carolina Department of Education convened the first meeting of the ASG on September 22, 2011. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an overview of the group's purpose, provide context for the group's work, and to begin learning about and evaluating the assessment program options. Staff from the South Carolina Department of Education presented information on the time line necessary for implementing assessments based on the Common Core State Standards. Working backward from the 2014-15 implementation date, the Department of Education staff indicated that work on state-developed assessments would need to begin during the fall of 2011. The South Carolina Department of Education also presented information on similarities and differences between the state's 2007 mathematics standards and 2008 language arts standards and the Common Core State Standards. There are some similarities in the content of the state's mathematics and language arts standards and the Common Core State Standards. The main difference in the two sets of standards is the greater emphasis within the Common Core State Standards on higher order thinking skills and application of those skills to complex, real-world situations.

The group was provided a brief overview of four options for assessing the Common Core State Standards:

- State-Developed (Home-Grown) assessments

- Commercial Off-the-Shelf assessments

- Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

- SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SMARTER Balanced or SBAC)

At the September 22, 2011 meeting of the ASG, Joe Willhoft, Executive Director of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) presented information on the purpose of the consortium, state involvement and partners, SBAC assessment principles and approach, assessment options, and the time line for implementation.

The ASG met again on September 26, 2011 where information on Home-Grown assessments was presented by Elizabeth Jones, Director of the Office of Assessment for the South Carolina Department of Education. The ASG was presented information on the current state assessments; an assessment development time line; examples of the difference between current state assessment items and items assessing Common Core State Standards; and assessment design decisions that would need to be made if the Home-Grown option is pursued. The group was also presented information on September 26th on Commercial Off-the-Shelf assessments by the group facilitator, Kris Kaase. Due to the fact that implementation of the Common Core State Standards is three years away and a majority of states are collaborating in the development of assessments for the Common Core State Standards, few providers of commercial assessments indicate they are providing or intend to provide assessments of the Common Core State Standards. The group was presented information on the ACT®, SAT®, and the American Diploma Project Algebra I and Algebra II assessments, which are commercially available.

The final meeting of the ASG was held on October 17, 2011. At this meeting, the ASG was presented information on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) by Jeff Hauger, Director of Student Learning and Assessments for the New Jersey Department of Education and PARCC Governing Board member. Mr. Hauger presented information on PARCC's assessment design, supports for implementation and classroom educators, higher education engagement, and development timeline. The ASG was limited by the information available at the time of their meeting. Many decisions about the assessments for Common Core State Standards are being made on an ongoing basis.

Group Process

The ASG took a deliberate approach to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the four assessment options that were presented. For each option, the group members were presented with a form to record:

> Pluses: What I liked. What I think will be good for students and teachers.

> Deltas: What concerns me. Things that might be a problem for students or teachers.

ASG members were asked to record their thoughts on the form as information about each option was presented. They were also asked to record any questions they had after the presentation of information or questions they felt were not answered for follow up.

Following the presentation of each option, ASG members discussed their pluses and deltas in table groups of three to four members each and were asked to add to or revise the pluses or deltas on their individual form. Each table group was then asked to share the pluses and deltas they identified with the entire ASG. The pluses and deltas recorded by the individual ASG members were collected and compiled into a combined list of all pluses and deltas identified by the ASG.

In order to indicate the relative importance of the pluses and deltas for each assessment option, the ASG used a group voting process. Prior to voting, the combined list of pluses and deltas for each assessment option was presented to the ASG for review and ASG members were given an opportunity to revise, combine, or add any pluses or deltas. The revised lists were then e-mailed to each ASG member to indicate the importance of the pluses and deltas for an option using the following rules:

a) Each ASG member has six votes per assessment option.

b) An ASG member can only vote once for any plus or delta.

c) The votes may be used for any combination of pluses and deltas.

d) All or none of the votes may be used.

e) Votes cannot be saved and used for another option.

The ASG members sent their responses to a Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL staff member who compiled the results.

Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

Presented below are the pluses and deltas (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) of the four assessment options considered by the ASG. All the pluses and deltas listed represent

crucial issues raised by the ASG members. The horizontal bars indicate the number of votes or importance as judged by the 13 ASG members who chose to submit votes. Each assessment option is presented with pluses and deltas listed in rank order based on importance as indicated by the ASG. The horizontal bar beside a plus/delta indicates the relative importance indicated by the ASG. If there is no horizontal bar beside a plus/delta, then that indicates the plus/delta was judged to be less important relative to the other items.

State-Developed Home-Grown Assessment

Plus

Assessment Office does a good job with development and accessibility	▮
Could allow for adjustment to legislative issues, particularly cost	▮
Stakeholder involvement in development of the test	▮
Would be consistent with science and social studies still being done at state level	▮
More local control would/could mean more information	

Delta

Lack of comparability to other states, may lead to public perception that SC does not want to be compared to other states	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
More state resources will have to be devoted to assessment development than for implementation support	▬▬▬▬▬
Investment of money and time would be the sole burden of the state versus joining the consortia and sharing responsibility across states	▬▬▬
Vertical scaling may be challenging/impossible	▬▬▬
Smaller item pool	▬▬
Still would have to contract out to vendor for development, administration, scoring and reporting.	▬▬
Students would not have scores that could be used in other states for college or other purposes	▬▬
Consortia will have access to funding that state will not have (grant funds)	▬
State may not have resources to provide instructional supports desired by stakeholders	▬
Tight time frame for assessment development	▬

State-Developed Home-Grown Assessment (continued)

Delta

Consortia have larger body of experts

Students may not have an assessment score that indicates they are college ready

Less involvement of higher education

Test security

Commercial Off-the-Shelf Assessments

Plus

Ready-made and are familiar to stakeholders

Simple answer to very complex issue

State-to-state comparison in Algebra I & Algebra II

Delta

Lack of vertical scaling

Not fully aligned to the Common Core State Standards (as reported by vendors)

These assessments were not developed for the purpose of assessing Common Core State Standards

Lack of instructional feedback to help teachers

Would not meet federal requirements (not testing until higher grades/ no testing for grades 3-7)

Lack of career readiness assessment with focus being on college readiness

Supplemental assessments would be required

Limited resources as compared to the consortia

Lack of interim test

Lack of retake options

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

Plus

Comparable scores across member states and consortia

K-2 resources and assessment options

Multiple item types, including performance tasks, provide deeper measure of cognitive achievement

Access to interim assessment items that are aligned to the summative assessments which the state can use as desired to support instruction

Availability of resources (frameworks, instruction modules, released items, rubrics, etc.)

College and career readiness – students would not have to take remedial college courses if they achieve readiness score on the assessment

Availability of optional tests for diagnostic or interim purposes

High school end-of-course assessments

Later testing window (after 90% of instruction)

Model 12th-grade bridge courses for students who need support to meet college and career readiness standards

Allowance for students in grades 3-5 to respond to assessments through paper and pencil

Availability of customizable reports

Computer-based

Sub-scores in English language arts and math concepts and procedures will be available

Timely results

Two summative assessments

Assessment is designed to measure achievement of low and high ends of the scoring scale ("the tails")

Assessment will be operational 2014-15

At least partial higher education buy-in

Comprehensive consortium staff across levels, disciplines

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (continued)

Plus

End-of-year assessment is machine scorable with multiple-choice and other item formats

Logistic advantages balance cost

Lots of participation from states

Opportunity to administer several assessments during a school year

Technology readiness audit tool (specifications, time lime)

Through-course assessment for speaking/listening with flexible administration time

Train-the-trainer professional development (peer-to-peer) with state support

Delta

Assessment is not computer adaptive

May not have vertical scaling (being researched)

Comparability of assessment results may not be valid if states are using a different combination of assessments (e.g., end-of-year only vs. mid-year and end-of-year assessments)

May not be possible for schools on 4X4 to administer end-of-course assessment at the end of the first (fall) block (end-of-year administration only design currently)

High school assessment requires three years of assessment (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II; English 9, English 10, English 11)

There is no re-take option for the summative assessment

Concern that combining human and computer scoring of assessments may not result in timely reporting of results

Sustainability (What will happen to assessment system post-development?)

Cost of per-student interim assessment

The assessment will drive scope and sequence and assumes more math for all students

SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium

Plus

Computer-adaptive; individualized information on student progress

Comparable scores across member states and consortia

Assessments are intended to be vertically scaled

Multiple item types, including performance tasks, provide deeper measure of cognitive achievement

Summative assessment large item bank-consortium design (40,000 items)

Access to interim assessment items that are aligned to the summative assessments which the state can use as desired to support instruction

One retake option for summative end-of-year adaptive assessment

Can be used for absolute and growth ratings

Opportunity to administer several assessments during a school year

The states can select items to build end-of-course tests

Growth reports

Professional development for teachers in how to use formative assessments and incorporate Common Core State Standards

Administer online-quick turnaround

Better precision for growth

Can participate in item-writing as a governing state (teachers participate)

Comprehensive consortium staff across levels, disciplines

Digital clearing house (shared state resources)

Exit exam in grade 11 more reasonable than grade 10

Impressive work group members

Spiraling summative performance tasks across students

Student data before end of year testing for better decision making

Sub-scores in English language arts and math concepts and procedures will be available

Technology readiness audit tool (specifications, time lime)

SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (Continued)

Plus

Ability to be on high tech end of assessment/innovative

Assessment will be operational 2014-15

At least partial higher education buy-in

Availability of customizable reports

Cognitive science approach to assessment development

College and career readiness – students would not have to take remedial college courses if they achieve readiness score on the assessment

Computer-based accommodations

Conducting research to measure teacher effectiveness

Logistic advantages balance cost

Lots of participation from states

Security advantage with using technology

Timely results

Work plans, comprehensiveness, sequencing

Delta

No K-2 assessment

High school concerns with timing of test administration (e.g., if a student completes a course first semester of 10th grade but is not tested until end of 11th grade)

How valid is computer scoring of writing?

Misuse of results for teacher evaluation; instrument may be created for this secondary purpose, but cannot control use

Additional cost and effort to have end-of-course test

Assessments take 3 class periods to administer

Challenges for accessing speaking during alternate year only

Computer technology-readiness for states and districts (accessibility to technology and infrastructure, support, availability of computers)

Cost of per-student interim assessment

SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (Continued)

Delta

Have not begun item writing yet

No review cycle established yet

Possible release of interim assessment items by individual states threatens test security

Retake during 12-week period at end of year (especially at elementary level)

Security administration procedures change

Students' computer skills

Suitability for 4X4 block schedule

Sustainability (What will happen to the assessment system post-development?)

Unclear how the assessment addresses career readiness

Questions for Consideration

The ASG identified questions that may need to be considered by state policy makers and the South Carolina State Department of Education. Although the questions may have been generated based on one of the assessment options, many of the questions are appropriate regardless of any decision made regarding assessments going forward.

Questions Related to Students Exiting High School

- What will a consortium-based assessment of the Common Core State Standards mean for high school graduation requirements (HSAP) and the South Carolina Uniform Grading Policy?

- Does a consortium-based assessment of the Common Core State Standards have to be used as an exit exam?

- What is South Carolina's thinking about HSAP or an alternate assessment such as this for graduation? This must be decided early.

- What will be the effect on students if an 11th grade high school assessment is implemented, which would reduce students' opportunity to pass to two years?

- Will all students be required to take Algebra II to graduate?

- What is the role of higher education? Is this a graduation mastery test or a test for college acceptance?

- What if a student is still "not college and career ready" after remediation in 12th grade? Will a "not ready" label be a problem for students exiting high school?

- Are college and career readiness exactly the same? What will be the impact on graduation rates if college ready and career ready are considered to be the same?

- Will South Carolina post-secondary institutions accept a "college ready" score from an assessment of the Common Core State Standards?

Questions Related to Preparation for South Carolina Common Core State Standards

- How will teachers and students be prepared for innovative item types?
- How will teachers and students be prepared for performance tasks?
- Is higher education also agreeing to teach preparedness in teacher preparation programs?

Additional Questions

- Will South Carolina continue to test science not required by ESEA and social studies in grades 3-8?

- Will the decision about optional use of interim assessments be a state or school district choice?

  - Will the state of South Carolina or will school districts pay for optional tests? If optional tests are a district responsibility, then will all districts be able to afford such tests?

- How will the 1% exceptional education [significantly cognitively disabled] students be tested?

- Will the assessment include teacher scoring? Teacher scoring increases the possibility of error compared to vendor-trained and monitored human scoring.

- Will the test be appropriate for judging teacher effectiveness?

- How will student improvement/growth be measured from year-to-year without a vertical scale? How will student progress toward college and career readiness be measured from year-to-year without a vertical scale?

Appendix

South Carolina Assessment Study Group

Deborah Barnhill, Assistant Superintendent, Marion School District 7

Rita Bixler, Secondary Mathematics Consultant, Greenville County Schools

Glen Carson, Assistant Superintendent, Spartanburg School District 4

Rebecca Clark, Elementary English Language Arts Specialist, Richland County School District 1

David Foster, Senior Curriculum Coordinator, Richland County School District 2

Sen. Robert Hayes, Jr., Chairman, K-12 Subcommittee of the Senate Education Committee

Harriet Jaworowski, Associate Superintendent of Instruction, Rock Hill Schools

Karen Kerr, Middle/Secondary Instruction Director, Chester County School District

Rainey Knight, Superintendent, Darlington County Schools

Gretchen Looney, English Language Arts Curriculum Specialist (K-12), Charleston County School District

Rep. Phillip Owens, Chairman, House Education and Public Works Committee

Christie Reid, Mathematics Instructional Supervisor K-12, Clover School District 2

Janelle Rivers, Director of Assessment and Accountability, Lexington School District 1

Jan West, Coordinator of Assessment and Accountability, Fort Mill School District Four

Rhonda Willis, Curriculum Coordinator, Hampton District 1

Education Oversight Committee (EOC) Staff

Melanie Barton, Interim Executive Director

Other Meeting Participants

South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) Staff

Charmeka Bosket, Deputy Superintendent, Policy & Research

Nancy Busbee, Deputy Superintendent, Division of Accountability

Elizabeth Jones, Director, Office of Assessment

Jenny Howard, Education Associate, Office of Assessment

Harriet Pritchard, Education Associate, Office of Assessment

Southeast Comprehensive Center Support

Beth Howard

Kris Kaase

Robyn Madison-Harris