

Section 3

State Superintendent Recommendations for the Reauthorization of California's Assessment System

Introduction to the State Superintendent's Recommendations

California's current student assessment system has proven to be a powerful tool for improving school accountability and student achievement. Nevertheless, it must evolve to meet the changing educational needs of our students and our state. Our assessment system must be responsive to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that call for deeper learning, problem solving, and critical thinking.

The Governor and Legislature recognized this need in Assembly Bill (AB) 250 (Brownley, 2011, enacted as California *Education Code (EC)* Section 60604.5), which has guided the work of the California Department of Education (CDE) for the last year in the preparation of this report and the recommendations of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (State Superintendent).

What we test, how we test, who we test, when we test, and why we test all continue to be subjects of intense debate among policymakers, educators, and the public. These ongoing discussions spring, in part, from the fact that—whether intended or not, what is tested deeply impacts what is taught and how it is taught.

Because the objectives we set for our assessments have profound implications for our students, parents, teachers, and schools, the foremost purpose of our assessment system should be to model and promote high-quality teaching and learning activities across the entire curriculum. The concept is simple but powerful: If our assessments require students to use problem solving and critical thinking skills to perform well, those same skills are much more likely to be taught in our classrooms day in and day out.

Despite the strengths of the existing summative assessment system, a single multiple-choice assessment at the end of the year cannot fulfill this purpose. The pedagogical utility of the current set of assessments is limited not only by the current test format, content, and item types, but also by the current one-time test administration during the year.

To promote high-quality teaching and learning, assessment items need to elicit behaviors that students exhibit when they engage in high-quality instruction. Innovative assessment approaches such as collaborative student-relevant

performance tasks, constructed-response items, and technology-enhanced items must be a primary component of our new assessment system.

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) will provide these features for English–language arts (ELA) and mathematics. To achieve these benefits across the curriculum (e.g., science and history–social science), the state will need to invest resources to develop and administer these types of assessments.

To successfully impact teaching and learning, the future statewide student assessment system will also need to include not only end-of-year grade level summative assessments for accountability, but also interim and formative tools. Item banks and intact interim assessments are being created by SBAC to provide students, teachers, schools, and LEAs results that will display current student performance relative to end-of-year goals as well as the summative assessment.

Formative tools, also being developed through SBAC, will include teaching resources such as innovative item types, exemplars, rubrics, and professional development modules. In order for these tools to benefit all students, additional resources must be invested. If the same benefit for ELA and mathematics is desired for science, history–social science, and other curricular areas, similar investments in changing the assessments must be made for these subjects as well.

The development of these new tools creates a wide new range of options – and raises intriguing new questions for policymakers to consider, each with distinct advantages and disadvantages.

AB 250 called for the State Superintendent to consider an assessment system that met the requirements of the reauthorized federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Unfortunately, there has been no reauthorization of ESEA, and California must continue to meet the unrealistic and burdensome requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a law so flawed that its academic targets no longer discern between low and high performing schools.

Given this situation, while the State Superintendent has put forth a set of recommendations that meet ESEA's requirements, he encourages policymakers and the public to question the current regimen of testing all students, every year, in ELA and mathematics. This approach has unquestionably narrowed the curriculum in many classrooms, and just as unquestionably has failed to achieve the objectives set forth in NCLB. Inexplicably, neither Congress nor the federal Administration has made a commitment to re-examine this approach, and the State Superintendent again urges them to do so.

In the absence of federal action to provide greater flexibility to California, it will be difficult to fundamentally reconsider the state's role in assessing students. Confined to a one-size-fits-all federal model, policymakers are all but denied an opportunity to define for themselves the state's role in assessment and accountability systems.

Nevertheless, the importance of this discussion prompted the State Superintendent to offer a different approach to assessment, which is provided in Appendix A. This approach includes sampling students (i.e., not testing every student, every year) and defining a schedule that would not assess every subject every year. This same approach is included in recommendation 7 for curricular areas other than ELA and mathematics. The State Superintendent urges policymakers and the public to consider the wide range of options and advantages that might be available to the state and LEAs in developing an assessment system less bound by a set of strict federal mandates.

Our current fiscal climate is an important reality; therefore, the State Superintendent recommends a tiered or multi-year approach to changing California's assessment system; that is, it is recommended that not every aspect of the statewide student assessment system change at once. Taking a tiered, multi-year approach to implementation will move California in the right direction in a sensible, fiscally responsible, and practical way. With this tiered approach, it is expected that the development process for assessments outside of those provided by SBAC will take several years.

The State Superintendent recognizes that developing the right assessment system for California will take time. The recommendations that follow demonstrate the desire to embrace a new system that assesses students at a deeper level of understanding and reveals what students truly know and are able to do while offering opportunities and methodologies to produce a more balanced assessment system that places a greater focus on teaching and learning across the full curriculum.

Consultation with Stakeholders

In developing recommendations for the transition to California's new statewide student assessment system, the State Superintendent carefully considered feedback and suggestions provided by stakeholders across the state. The CDE, on behalf of the State Superintendent, used extensive outreach strategies to seek input from stakeholders statewide, including educators, parents, students, assessment experts, representatives of the business community, and the general public. In addition, multiple opportunities were provided for stakeholders to collaborate and dialog with CDE staff regarding the transition to the future assessment system. Stakeholder groups included:

- Teachers and administrators
- Higher education faculty
- Assessment experts
- Parents and students
- Business leaders
- Advocacy leaders

The CDE used a variety of methods to collect and analyze the information and insight gathered from these various stakeholders. The outreach included:

- The Statewide Assessment Reauthorization Work Group Meetings (the members of this group fully represented the stakeholders with whom the State Superintendent was legislatively required to consult)
- Stakeholder focus groups
- Statewide survey
- Regional public meetings
- Reauthorization e-mail account for public comments
- Additional stakeholders/technical or policy experts

The stakeholders provided a great amount of insight and feedback which is detailed in Appendices B through E. Additionally, CDE staff has presented information requiring the AB 250 work publicly at regularly scheduled California State Board of Education (SBE) meetings (see Appendix F for a summary of SBE reauthorization items) and gathered feedback from SBE members and through public comments. The feedback gathered through these different processes revealed many consistencies in the trends and topics mentioned or addressed by the different stakeholders. The following points highlight common themes where considerable consistency was observed across stakeholders and stakeholder groups:

- All statewide assessments should include a statement that communicates a clear and explicit purpose for the assessment, and the use of the assessment results should be aligned with this purpose. In addition, all statewide assessments should be aligned with the adopted standards and 21st century skills.

- The reauthorized assessment system should offer a new level of functionality at the local level. For example, the new system should include (1) diagnostic assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics for the primary grades; (2) formative tools and practices for all grades; (3) a variety of item types beyond multiple-choice items; and (4) assessments in science and history–social science in multiple grades.
- Data and results should be available to monitor students' progress within a school year and over time. More information and greater detail should also be provided in the reports, such as reporting at the level of selected standards.
- The needs of all students, including students who are learning English and students with disabilities, should be taken into consideration in designing the statewide student assessment system. This means that consideration should be given to factors such as access to technology, alternate assessments, and the linguistic complexity of the test questions.
- Developing and rolling out a reauthorized assessment system will take time. Activities should be prioritized, with careful consideration to the infrastructure needs for the new system and a clear plan for communication at each step of the process.

Some stakeholders' input was determined to be beyond the scope of the requirements of the legislation. For example, issues of accountability for English learners, availability of assessment professional development activities, and expansion of what determines a highly-effective school were raised by various stakeholders. While these were determined to be beyond the legislative requirements, the State Superintendent has directed staff to consider each of these issues separately and determine any appropriate action to be taken.

The State Superintendent's Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Suspend Portions of the Standardized Testing and Reporting Program Assessments and Adjust the Academic Performance Index to Reflect Suspension of Such Assessments

Beginning in the 2013–14 school year, suspend all Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program state academic assessments that are not required to meet ESEA, or used in the Early Assessment Program (EAP). The following STAR assessments required for ESEA would continue to be administered until the new SBAC, alternate, and science assessments are fully developed and implemented:

- California Standards Test (CST) / California Modified Assessment (CMA) / California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) in ELA and mathematics in grades three through eight

- CST/CMA/CAPA in science in grades five, eight, and ten
- CAPA in ELA and mathematics in grade ten

For the purpose of continuing the highly successful EAP, allow schools to offer the following STAR Program assessments to meet the EAP requirements. These would include the following assessments for **students in grade eleven only**:

- Grade 11 CST in ELA
- CST Algebra II
- CST High School Summative Math

In addition, adjust Academic Performance Index (API) calculations and reporting to accommodate suspension of any assessments. Suspending assessments and adjusting API reporting in this way will allow staff and stakeholders to focus attention, efforts, and resources on building a new assessment and accountability system.

Recommendation 2 – Beginning in the 2014-15 School Year, Fully Implement the SBAC ELA and Mathematics Assessments

Use the multistate consortium, SBAC, for ELA and mathematics summative assessments to assess all students in grades three through eight and grade eleven. These assessments would assume the responsibility for federal accountability measures. Individual scores would be made available. For those students who are unable to access a computer, provide for a paper and pencil version of the assessment for up to three years. If developed by SBAC, assessments for additional high school grades should be made available to LEAs for local use.

Recommendation 3 – Use the Grade Eleven SBAC ELA and Mathematics Assessments as an Indicator of College Readiness

Use the grade eleven SBAC ELA and mathematics assessments to serve as the indicator of college readiness for entry into college credit-bearing courses, a task that is currently fulfilled through the CST/EAP assessments. All grade eleven students would take the grade eleven SBAC and, therefore, all grade eleven students would be provided with an indicator of college readiness.

Recommendation 4 – Develop and Administer Science Assessments Aligned to the New Science Standards, Once Adopted

Develop new state science assessments consistent with new science standards, once adopted by the SBE in the fall of 2013, that include item types consistent with the SBAC assessments (e.g., short and extended constructed-response items and performance tasks).

Once developed, administer the new state science assessments described above to all students in grades five, eight, and once in grades ten through twelve, as required by ESEA. Consult with education experts and stakeholders to identify potential end-of-course assessments as a possible way to meet the current ESEA high school science assessment requirement.

Recommendation 5 – Develop or Use Multistate Consortia Alternate Assessments in ELA, Mathematics, and Science for Students with Severe Cognitive Disabilities

Students with severe cognitive disabilities and identified as eligible and appropriate through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) are currently assessed by the CAPA. Determine if the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) alternate assessment, once it is developed, is appropriate for California students and teachers. Should the NCSC assessment not be suitable, pursue alignment of CAPA to the CCSS using a variety of item types.

Administer the alternate assessment described above in grades three through eight and eleven in ELA and mathematics to all students with severe cognitive disabilities and identified as appropriate through the student’s IEP.

Develop new state science alternate assessments consistent with new science standards, once adopted by the SBE in the fall of 2013. Administer the new state science alternate assessments to all eligible students in grades five, eight, and once in grades ten through twelve, as required by ESEA.

Recommendation 6 – Determine the Continued Need and Purpose of Academic Assessments in Languages Other than English Once the SBAC Assessments Are Operational

SBAC will contain optional customized language supports and accommodations for English learners in the ELA and mathematics assessments, making the assessments more accessible. In addition, it is anticipated that translation options for mathematics items will be made available, minimally in Spanish and American Sign Language. Once SBAC assessments are fully developed and administered, consult with stakeholders and English learner experts to determine if stand-alone academic assessments in primary languages (languages other than English) are needed to supplement the SBAC assessments; and if so, determine the appropriate purpose for such assessments.

Recommendation 7 – Assess the Full Curriculum Using Assessments that Model High-Quality Teaching and Learning Activities

Over the next several years, consult with stakeholders and subject matter experts to develop a plan for assessing grade levels and curricular areas beyond those

required by the ESEA (i.e., ELA, mathematics, and science) in a manner that models high-quality teaching and learning activities. Areas for consideration should include the visual and performing arts, world languages, technology, science, and history–social science. The plan should include the use of various assessment options such as computer-based tests, locally-scored performance tasks, and portfolios. In order to address feasibility and fiscal concerns, the plan should explore the use of a state-determined assessment calendar that would schedule the assessment of non-ESEA required subjects over several years.

For example, the 2016 assessment calendar could include a technology portfolio in grade five, a history–social science assessment in grade seven that includes constructed-response items, and a chemistry locally-scored performance task. The 2017 assessment calendar might include a computer-based science test in grade four and a visual arts performance task in grade eight. This approach would have the benefit of addressing the concern that limiting the assessment system to those ESEA required assessments narrows curriculum to ELA and mathematics while also acknowledging the fiscal constraints to developing and administering assessments in other subject areas.

To further address the concern of the amount of time students spend taking assessments, the CDE should consult with stakeholders and assessment experts to explore ways to more efficiently assess the non-ESEA required content. One approach may be to sample students or schools in the grades and subjects on the state-determined assessment calendar. Another approach may be to use matrix sampling whereby different groups of students are administered different parts of an exam. The use of matrix sampling allows the state to assess more content without increasing the time any one student spends on testing.

Regardless of the approach used, release a sample of items to encourage the use of rubrics and related material in professional development activities.

Recommendation 8 – Invest in Interim, Diagnostic, and Formative Tools

Create a state-approved list of grade two diagnostic assessments for ELA and mathematics for use at the local level. These diagnostic assessments would be voluntary for LEAs to use and purchase locally.

Acquire the SBAC interim item bank and formative tools. California must take full advantage of the SBAC interim item bank and formative tools allowing complete access for all public schools. It is not the intent of this recommendation to mandate any LEA or school to use such tools or for any data to be collected at the state level. It is the intent to take full advantage of the tools offered through the consortium so that all LEAs in California will have equitable and equal access and local discretion on use.

Recommendation 9 – Consider Alternatives to the Current California High School Exit Examination

While AB 250 did not require the State Superintendent to specifically consider the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), the CDE determined that Consideration #15—*Minimizing testing time while not jeopardizing the validity, reliability, fairness, or instructional usefulness of the assessment results*—provided an opportunity to discuss CAHSEE in envisioning a new assessment system. Based on the numerous comments received during outreach efforts and the input of the Statewide Assessment Reauthorization Work Group, the State Superintendent recommends a consideration of alternatives to the CAHSEE for measuring students' demonstration of grade level competencies and where possible, reduce redundancy in testing and use existing measures. These alternatives include, but are not limited to the following:

- Instead of administering a stand-alone High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), use the SBAC ELA and mathematics high school assessments to determine academic readiness for high school graduation.
- As a proxy for meeting high school exit requirements, use the results of other voluntary exams (e.g., PSAT, SAT, ACT, or AP). These would need to be used in conjunction with a state-administered assessment, such as the SBAC high school assessments, as all students would not choose to take the voluntary exams.
- Consider the successful completion of specific courses to determine if students meet minimum high school requirements for graduation. Successful completion would need to be defined.
- Consider the use of any relevant end-of-course assessments that may be developed in the future to determine high school exit requirements.
- Consider the use of matriculation examinations, if developed, to satisfy high school exit requirements (see Recommendation 10).

Recommendation 10 – Explore the Possible Use of Matriculation Examinations

Matriculation or qualification examinations are used in numerous countries to assess student acquisition of prerequisite knowledge and skills for entrance into college, career, and/or upper high school levels. The use of such examinations in the United States is rare, but the potential benefits of this type of examination to students, LEAs, colleges, and business alike suggests that consideration be

given to the idea of introducing them in California. Matriculation examinations can provide students with evidence of their requisite skills for prospective colleges or employers; in turn, these exams could make assessment relevant to students in a way that few other past state exams have.

In California, the concept of matriculation examinations was most recently introduced during the 2011-12 legislative session by Assembly Member Bonilla in Assembly Bill (AB) 2001. AB 2001 called for California's statewide assessment reauthorization legislation to include:

(a) A plan to bring together elementary and secondary school policy leaders, the community colleges, the California State University, the University of California, private colleges and universities, and postsecondary career technical and vocational programs to develop criteria and create non-punitive pathways in which assessments taken by middle and high school students are aligned with college and career readiness and may be recognized as one of a number of multiple measures for entry into college, placement in college-level courses, and career training.

(b) A plan for transitioning to a system of high-quality, non-punitive assessments that has tangible meaning to individual middle and high school students, including, but not limited to, recognition and rewards for demonstrating mastery of subject matter and progress toward mastery of subject matter.

Assembly Bill 2001 was not enacted into law, but as the state considers its next generation of assessments, it is recommended that further research and discussion take place regarding matriculation examinations, including exam format (i.e., written, oral), cost, fee coverage (e.g., student, LEA), and ways in which such exams could be used to meet high school exit requirements.

Recommendation 11 – Conduct Comparability Studies

It is recommended that comparability studies be conducted linking performance on the STAR assessments with performance on SBAC. To conduct these studies, a representative sample of students across California would need to take both tests, at approximately the same time in the same school year. The results would allow the relative performance of students on each test to be compared. The information from the compatibility study will provide a means of interpreting the results of the new tests relative to past performance. The information will also help with the interpretation of performance levels set for the SBAC assessments.

Recommendation 12 – Maintain a Continuous Cycle of Improvement of the Assessment System

Provide for a continuous cycle of improvement to the statewide student assessment system, including, but not limited to:

- Ongoing collection of data and information to evaluate aspects that are working as intended and aspects that need to be reviewed and improved (unintended consequences).
- Provide for periodic independent evaluations of the assessment system to ensure system remains relevant and valid.

