

Feedback Sessions about Smarter Balanced Testing

April 2015

This spring marked the launch of the operational Smarter Balanced assessments in California in English-language arts and mathematics as part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) system. As part of on-going efforts to gather feedback to improve various components of the Smarter Balanced system, the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE), on behalf of the California Department of Education (CDE), will conduct feedback sessions with students and teachers. The purpose of these feedback sessions is to gather input from students and teachers as close to their testing experience as possible about various aspects of the testing system and their test experience. This information will be used to inform future planning and improvement of the Smarter Balanced test administrations.

General Plan

To provide the CDE with information about all aspects of the testing process, the team conducted feedback sessions with students and teachers in late May and early June 2015 in several regions of California including, Los Angeles, Fresno, San Diego, Sacramento, San Joaquin, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Targeted Groups

- Students in grades three through eight, and eleven
- Teachers of students in grades three through eight, and eleven

Topic Areas for Feedback Sessions

Students

- Opinions about taking the test on a computer versus paper and pencil
- Interest level of questions, including reading passages
- Level of engagement with new item types, format of the test
- Clarity of test directions
- Use of practice or training test; use of interim assessments
- Use of universal tools, designated supports and accommodations (embedded and non-embedded)

Teachers

- How the new online tests have changed the way they do things in the classroom and in the school
- How have students who have limited experience with use of technology at home been supported
- Opinions about the usefulness of the various online test administration manuals and resources
- Challenges encountered during testing and ways that those challenges were addressed

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Unofficial Preliminary Key Findings from Student Interviews

- Most students did not take a practice test. Since there are aspects of the on-line testing environment that are unique, these students had to spend testing time learning how to navigate and use the supportive tools. Comments made by students included:
 - It was hard to coordinate my answers and to flip through the test.
 - How do I answer this question on the computer?
 - It took a long time to find some of the keys.
 - It was hard not being able to write on things. It was hard not being able to create outlines or draw things on the math test
 - I had difficulties answering one of the highlighting questions. I didn't know how to highlight the answers or if I could highlight anything.
 - We had to figure out what to do.
 - I didn't see any directions – where were they?

- Most students reported not being very motivated by this test. The newness of the test and the test administration as they experienced it was lax. Students didn't know the tests were being scored this year. They asked how the scores will be used, and how the scores will affect them. Most students reported not knowing what the EAP was. Many students did not know the test was going to count ... even as a baseline. Their comments included:
 - We were more motivated by the old STAR test.
 - The teachers made it seem like the test didn't matter, so we didn't try very hard.

- **Mathematics:** Many high school and middle school students reported that a significant amount of the material covered on the test had never been covered in their classes, or it was covered so long ago that they didn't remember how to do the problems.

- **English Language Arts:** Students reported that some of the reading passages went on for so long that they were bored. They wanted shorter passages that would allow them more time to analyze the texts. Their comments included:
 - Seeing a scroll bar on a passage makes you want to just scan and get through it.
 - Having five articles on one page is too much. In general there was way too much on the screen to read.