



DIGITAL LEARNING NOW!

GETTING READY FOR ONLINE ASSESSMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**DLN
SMART
SERIES**

THIS IS THE THIRD PAPER IN A SERIES OF INTERACTIVE PAPERS THAT PROVIDES SPECIFIC GUIDANCE REGARDING THE ADOPTION OF COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND THE SHIFT TO PERSONAL DIGITAL LEARNING.

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It's just 21 months from the release of this report in December 2012 to the start of the 2014-15 school year – that's when states and districts that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will begin the challenging process of administering new assessments. These new K-12 assessments, led by states working with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced), are designed to provide a common assessment in English and math. These assessments will build a pathway to college and career readiness and help measure students' progress in achieving the standards. The results will help to better inform state policy decisions, provide a more accurate picture of student preparedness, and provide teachers with timely information to inform instruction and support students.

Preparing for these assessments will require an unprecedented collaborative effort to align instruction to the CCSS, prepare the community for the results, and ensure that schools have the necessary technological infrastructure to administer the assessments. PARCC and Smarter Balanced recently released minimum technology requirements to guide states and districts in assessing and closing the gaps between current technology capabilities and those required for students to participate in the new assessment programs. These technology and bandwidth specifications provide an important guideline to help schools prepare for the assessments and provide the technology environment needed to support next-generation digital learning tools and services.

Making the Shift

This report begins by framing the shift to online assessments within the larger framework of the transition to personalized learning. Instead of striving for readiness for the assessments, leaders should instead be preparing for the [instructional shifts](#) that the CCSS and new assessments require. [Digital Learning Now!](#) (DLN) sees the 2014-15 implementation as an important catalyst to expand overall access to technology, shift to digital tools and materials, and move toward personalized learning for all students by this deadline. DLN's [10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning](#) and [Roadmap for Reform](#) offer policy advice around the core belief that all students must have equal access to high-quality digital learning opportunities, including both summative and formative digital assessments.

Without a plan for making these broader instructional shifts, we will miss this once-in-a-generation opportunity for systemic improvement that could meaningfully and sustainably address educational equity. If leaders instead focus only on meeting the minimum requirements, schools will suffer from instructional disruptions to accommodate testing rotations, destructive gaps in student learning experiences between instructional environments and testing environments, missed opportunities to take full advantage of online formative and diagnostic assessments to personalize instruction, and the continued inefficiencies that result from the purchase of outdated equipment and materials.

Determining Readiness

After providing some background on the testing consortia and the current state of online assessments, this paper discusses the tools and resources available to help states and districts determine their readiness. This section begins describing test readiness by reviewing the recently released minimum technology requirements from each state testing consortium. The next section details the importance of using these minimums as the catalyst for launching a broader shift to instructional environments that expand equitable student access to online and blended learning. The "Countdown to 2014 Timeline" provides leaders with discrete action steps over the next two years to make these shifts.

Recommendations

The paper concludes with recommendations to states, districts, and the state testing consortia. The authors offer states and districts the following advice to help them seize the opportunities for better teaching and learning that the shift to online assessment creates.

1. Match teaching and testing environments;
2. Shift to digital instructional materials;
3. Boost access;
4. Build a plan for the greater shift;
5. Support blends;
6. Boost broadband;
7. Invest in teaching training;
8. Learn from other states;
9. Use sample items; and
10. Use Core-aligned adaptive assessment.

Recommendations to PARRC, Smarter Balanced, and related parties are provided to help the consortia build continued momentum and generate on-going awareness of the instructional shifts that the assessments necessitate.

The consortia are advised to:

1. Encourage upgrades;
2. Plan versions;
3. Redefine comparability;
4. Go "on demand;"
5. Lean forward;
6. Don't phase in; and
7. Support competency-based learning.

The Opportunity

Our nation's schools stand at an important "inflection point" in the history of education. Taken together, the implementation of CCSS, the shift to online assessments, the availability of affordable devices, and the growing number of high-quality digital instructional tools create an unprecedented opportunity to fundamentally shift the education system to personalize learning around the individual needs of every student. The 2014-15 implementation of the new tests creates a timeline. With just 21 months, states and districts must act now.