



New Balanced Assessment System

Q&A

Updated September, 2009

What is the timeline for the new assessments?

DPI will create specifications for bids this fall, and will request proposals from vendors. We hope to have completed the bid process and have selected a vendor(s) by Spring 2010. Test design and item development with educator input will take place during the 2010-11 school year. Field testing will likely occur in Spring 2011, with the first operational test potentially in place by 2011-12. The time line may be modified depending on funding and compliance requirements. If full funding is not available, the transition will take longer or some aspects may not be available. The bidding process will be structured so that separate components of the system can be funded as money becomes available, allowing us to move forward at a different pace if necessary.

How will educators be involved?

DPI is committed to a strong and consistent involvement by educators throughout the test development process. There will be opportunities for educators to be involved in test design, item writing/reviewing, establishing scoring criteria, and standard setting. We will let districts know when various opportunities for feedback or involvement are available. Watch <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/oea> for the latest information about the progress of the new assessments and opportunities for input.

How will the new assessment system be different from the WKCE?

The new assessment system will be just that – a system, rather than a single test. We are envisioning a computer-based assessment tool that allows multiple opportunities to test during the school year, with user-friendly student and classroom reports available on-site. Ideally it will provide both diagnostic information (“At what level is this student performing?”) as well as summative data for accountability purposes (“How is this student performing on grade-level skills?”). We would like the assessment system to be adaptive in nature, meaning that the computer generates different questions for a student depending on how they answer previous questions. The Department will develop this balanced assessment system following the recommendations of the Next Generation Assessment Task Force (<http://dpi.wi.gov/oea/ngatf.html>).



Will the test items be different than the WKCE?

One of the advantages of computer-based assessment is that new test designs and item types are possible. We can consider focusing less on discrete test items, and more on interactive assessment modules. Initially, test items will draw from the WKCE test item bank, as these items are developed and owned by Wisconsin and are aligned to Wisconsin standards. As we develop new test items and assessment modules, the test item bank will change over time.

Will the same grade levels be tested, in the same subjects as WKCE?

At this time, federal requirements include annual testing in Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 3-8 and once in high school, and science testing at least once in each level – elementary, middle, and high school. State statute requires assessment in five content areas at grades 4, 8, and 10, and reading comprehension testing at grade 3. Reauthorization of ESEA or changes to state statute would be required to change any of these grade levels and content areas.

What if district computer capacity is not sufficient for computer-based assessment?

For a time, it will be necessary to have both computer-based and paper/pencil components depending on district readiness. In states that have made this transition, there is typically a “readiness” assurance process that a district completes to indicate they meet the minimum technology requirements. Typically the network configurations and hardware specifications are not overly complex.

What time of year will the new tests be administered?

The advantage of a system rather than a single test is that tests may be administered throughout the year rather than during a designated test window. For example, in Oregon districts may test students at any time, up to three times a year, and the highest score is used for accountability. This allows schools to plan testing around a schedule that works for them, and to test students with fewer available computers. We will consider if this option might work for Wisconsin.

How can I prepare my students for the new tests?

Follow the development of the revised Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (WMAS; at <http://dpi.wi.gov/cal/standards-revisions.html>), as well as the national Common Core Standards (<http://www.corestandards.org/>). Our final state standards, which may include the Common Core Standards in some form, will be the basis for test design and item development. The assessments will need to demonstrate full alignment with the standards. The best way to prepare students is to provide them with rich instructional units around the standards. When the assessment system is developed, practice tests will be provided to make sure students are familiar with the computer and the test format.



Will the student reports be different than WKCE reports – and will they show student growth?

This will be a good opportunity to redesign the student, school, and district test reports. The goal is to have user-friendly reports that track growth and that provide sufficient information to help a teacher or parent know what should come next for a student’s learning. For the diagnostic component, student reports should be available when the student completes the assessment.

How will this assessment system be used for federal ESEA accountability?

We will need to comply with whatever accountability requirements are in place at the time of implementation. At this time, accountability tests must be standardized, customized test instruments fully developed and aligned to each state’s content standards, and must only ask grade-level questions. While the test may be adaptive, it must not have a diagnostic function that moves above or below grade-level. If we develop a system that includes both grade-level summative and on/off grade level diagnostic functions, it might be possible to meet accountability requirements while also providing diagnostic information. We picture this as one system with two functions.

Can we just adopt a commercial test and use it for accountability?

No existing commercial test by itself meets current federal requirements. It is possible that the future reauthorization of ESEA could lead to changes in those requirements, but that is not known at this time. All test vendors will have the opportunity to bid on the Wisconsin assessment system, so vendors with products that can be adapted to Wisconsin requirements may bid on the contract. It is also possible to design a system with the functionality that is most valued in certain other commercial products.

How will the high school assessment be designed?

The specific design for high school assessment has not yet been determined. The focus will be on options that are meaningful for students, and that have links to college- and career-readiness. We need to define the requirements, then put it out for bid.

Are there any alternatives to testing students on a computer? What about students who need special accommodations during testing?

The summative computer-based assessment component will also be provided in a paper/pencil version until districts can all meet technical requirements for computer-based testing. Some students may always need the paper/pencil version as an accommodation, although computer-based assessment does allow for new accommodations not possible with paper/pencil: mouse-over translation, audio, text enlargement, highlighting, etc. We will explore the cost and feasibility of adding these features.



Will the WAA-SwD also be changing?

The overall format and structure of the WAA-SwD will stay the same. Once the Wisconsin Model Academic Content Standards have finished the revision process, it will be necessary to review and revise the Extended Grade Band Standards. This will result in the need for some new items, and at some point a new standard setting will be needed to re-set the cut scores. More discussion is needed to determine if there is a need for a more diagnostic component, or if some components would benefit by computer-based delivery.