Building Educator Assessment Literacy
A Partnership of WestEd and SCALE

MAKING THE MOST OF

Performance Tasks in Summative Assessment

Building Educator Assessment Literacy in Oregon

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Summary

The Common Core State Standards, adopted by Oregon and most other states in 2010, articulate what students need to know and be able to do in order to succeed after high school. This new focus on college and career readiness represents a significant shift in expectations for students. To measure student progress in meeting those expectations, Oregon joined with other states to develop the Smarter Balanced assessment system, which offers assessments aligned to standards, for English language arts and math in grades 3–8 and high school. To gauge students' ability to apply content knowledge, analyze information, think critically, and communicate their thoughts, the new assessment system uses performance assessment, which asks students to demonstrate their skills by completing real-world tasks.

Because performance assessment provides insights into students' knowledge and skills that cannot be elicited through multiple-choice questions, the Smarter Balanced assessment system has the potential to guide deeper teaching and learning in the classroom. However, when teachers don't fully understand the test's design or the demands it places on students, this opportunity to enhance classroom learning is lost. The Building Educator Assessment Literacy (BEAL) project was created to improve classroom instruction by providing teachers with in-depth, hands-on training that helps them to better understand performance assessment and how it relates to their teaching.

This paper explores the implementation and impact of the BEAL project in Oregon, between November 2014 and February 2015. As the state transitioned from the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) test to the new Smarter Balanced assessment system, the project provided educators with the opportunity to learn more about the design of the new performance tasks, to score actual student responses, and to consider, together, how their new understanding of the test's performance tasks could lead to better classroom learning.

This paper draws on survey responses from project participants and features profiles of four Oregon educators from different parts of the state who were interviewed about their takeaways from the BEAL project. More than a year after their participation in the project, these educators are still drawing on their experiences with BEAL in their own practices. And while they each have different perspectives on the Smarter Balanced assessment and its implications for their work, several common themes emerged across both the survey data and the educator interviews.

THEME 1

BEAL participants gained confidence in the value of the Smarter Balanced performance tasks.

Given the opportunity to explore the test's design, educators developed a deeper understanding of the test's effectiveness in measuring student preparation for college and career. The educators interviewed for this paper left the training feeling that the Smarter Balanced assessment is an improvement over previous tests, and that its performance tasks measure knowledge and skills that matter.

THEME 2

More transparent assessments can support more effective classroom instruction.

The interviewed educators all emphasized the value they found in being able to analyze performance tasks and see a full range of actual student responses to the tasks. This analysis helped to clarify for participants exactly what is expected of students under Oregon's standards. The BEAL project helped these educators understand what it looks like for students to demonstrate mastery of the standards, and it provided guidance about the kinds of classroom opportunities students need in order to develop this mastery.

THEME 3

Educators want more professional development linking assessment to instruction.

The educators identified a need for additional training that would allow them — and more peers from their school — to further understand the design of the assessment and make explicit connections to the instructional decisions they can make in the classroom in order to effectively prepare students for college and career. The survey results highlighted the educators' desire for both ongoing training to build on the work of BEAL and more trainings like BEAL in order to reach more educators.

Policy and Practice Implications

- Engage greater number of teachers in professional learning opportunities like BEAL to help them understand the student learning expectations reflected in Smarter Balanced assessments and how the assessments can support good instructional practice.
- Build upon what teachers learn in trainings like BEAL by providing additional professional learning opportunities focused on deepening educators' understanding of using performance assessment and formative assessment to improve teaching and learning.
- Communicate that the best student preparation for the Smarter Balanced performance assessment is effective teaching aligned to the standards, and challenge the common perception that teachers should somehow be providing separate test preparation for students.
- Ensure that all educators have access to practical, high-quality materials that provide clarity about the Smarter Balanced assessments in the context of the teaching-and-learning cycle and that support effective teaching and learning practices.
- Make sure educators, schools, and districts receive timely assessment data that can be used to inform their continuous improvement efforts and curricular planning. Help each audience understand how to interpret Smarter Balanced test results and decide what adjustments to their practice could be helpful.
- Recognize and publicly acknowledge that the results of summative assessment are just one source of data that should be considered in conjunction with multiple other sources of data from the school and classroom.
- As state agencies are developing proposals for assessment and/or professional development contracts, ensure that professional learning opportunities like BEAL are built into plans and consider how teachers can be more active in scoring or reviewing student work on state assessments.

Introduction

A group of elementary educators huddle around a table in a conference room at an airport hotel in Portland, Oregon. They lean in and listen intently to one of their colleagues until a woman at the table shakes her head. "I just don't see it that way," she says, pointing her pen at a paper marked up with yellow, green, and blue highlighting. The paper is a student response to the essay portion of a Smarter Balanced English language arts/literacy (ELA) performance task. "I just don't see this as integrated evidence in the second paragraph," she continues. "To me, this is imprecise and weakly integrated." The conversation progresses, each person coming back to the colorful text to argue an idea, until the group reaches a consensus: That the student essay should earn a "2" out of "4" on the rubric for "Evidence and Elaboration."

These teachers are participating in a BEAL training, and they're scoring and discussing student work from a Smarter Balanced performance task. As they negotiate and come to a consensus about the score, they are forming a shared understanding of what it looks like for students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core State Standards — and are considering what this new understanding means for their teaching.

What is BEAL?

The BEAL project is a partnership between WestEd and the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) that supports educators in developing a deeper understanding of the role of performance assessment in ensuring students' college- and career-readiness. A key component of the BEAL training is giving educators the opportunity to learn from real student responses to Smarter Balanced performance tasks.

The Smarter Balanced assessment system was developed by a group of states, including Oregon, collaborating to create a next-generation system of assessments aligned with the Common Core standards. Smarter Balanced measures students' skills in ELA and mathematics using a two-pronged approach that consists of computer-adaptive testing and performance assessment in each subject area. In the computer-adaptive testing portion, the difficulty of the questions is adjusted according to each student's ability level. The performance tasks require students to show what they know by demonstrating content knowledge, analytical ability, critical thinking, and communication skills. The tasks are meant to meaningfully engage students with real source materials, like data sets and complex informational texts. Students are asked to explain their reasoning and to produce a culminating product.

In the BEAL project, WestEd and SCALE designed a 4-day training-of-trainers and a 2-day educator training model in which participants are given the chance to analyze and score actual student responses to performance tasks from the Smarter Balanced assessment and to consider how what they have learned from this analysis can help them improve teaching and learning in their classrooms.

The BEAL training offers participants the opportunity to

- Complete a Smarter Balanced performance task that students would be expected to complete, and consider the demands of the task in terms of both teaching and learning;
- Better understand the purpose and role of performance tasks and their alignment with college- and career-readiness standards;
- Use the Smarter Balanced scoring tools to practice scoring real student responses;
- Reflect together on the instructional implications of the performance tasks they analyze; and
- Begin to plan for instruction that will support all students in demonstrating mastery of the standards.

WestEd and SCALE initially collaborated with the California, Oregon, and New Hampshire departments of education to provide the BEAL training to 74 trainers and nearly 1,600 educators across all three states. BEAL professional learning has since been offered to another 500 educators in California and Hawaii.

BEAL in Oregon

In the fall of 2014, WestEd and SCALE partnered with the Oregon Department of Education to recruit and prepare a team of 19 educators to facilitate three BEAL events in Oregon. This team traveled to Sacramento, California, in November 2014 to participate in a training-of-trainers event alongside other educators from California and New Hampshire. The Oregon trainers included elementary and secondary classroom teachers, teachers on special assignment, state department of education staff, and local school district leaders.

Upon returning to Oregon, the team facilitated three 2-day BEAL events for 258 Oregon educators in Portland, Roseburg, and Pendleton.

What Happens in a BEAL Training?

Participants in a BEAL training select a content area — ELA or math — and remain with the same content-area group in a grade-specific cohort (elementary or secondary) for the full training.

Facilitators begin the BEAL event with a foundational discussion situating summative assessment, which happens at the end of each school year, within the broader context of the student assessment cycle and the ongoing assessment that teachers carry out in classrooms. Participants are also introduced to the principles of Universal Design for Learning.[1]

BEAL trainees then get a chance to delve into the Smarter Balanced performance tasks. Thanks to support from the California Department of Education and Smarter Balanced, participants in the

1 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework intended to support the design of instructional goals, assessments, and methods that can accommodate individual learning needs. The UDL framework builds flexibility and alternatives into education materials in order to make learning accessible to all learners. In the BEAL training, UDL is incorporated to help educators consider the needs of all students as they plan for their own classrooms.

Oregon trainings had access to actual performance task items and student responses from the 2014 Smarter Balanced Field Test. In a BEAL training, participants complete a real performance task themselves, unpacking the demands the tasks place on students and making connections between the skills required to be successful in these tasks and the instructional shifts needed if students are to meet those expectations. Next, facilitators help participants understand the Smarter Balanced "claims" and "targets" and their connections to the Common Core standards. Claims are broad statements of an assessment system's intended learning outcomes, and targets are more detailed descriptions of the expectations within each claim.

Once participants develop a strong understanding of the performance task design, they turn to scoring. Participants analyze the scoring tools for the performance tasks: constructed-response score criteria and full-write essay rubrics in ELA and task-specific rubrics in math.

In the ELA sessions, participants learn a procedure for evidence-based scoring of full-write essays in which colored highlighters are used to tag evidence in student writing and the corresponding indicators on the rubrics. Participants discuss and score samples of student work in several tasks that represent different writing purposes, considering the student exemplars in the context of the implications for student learning.

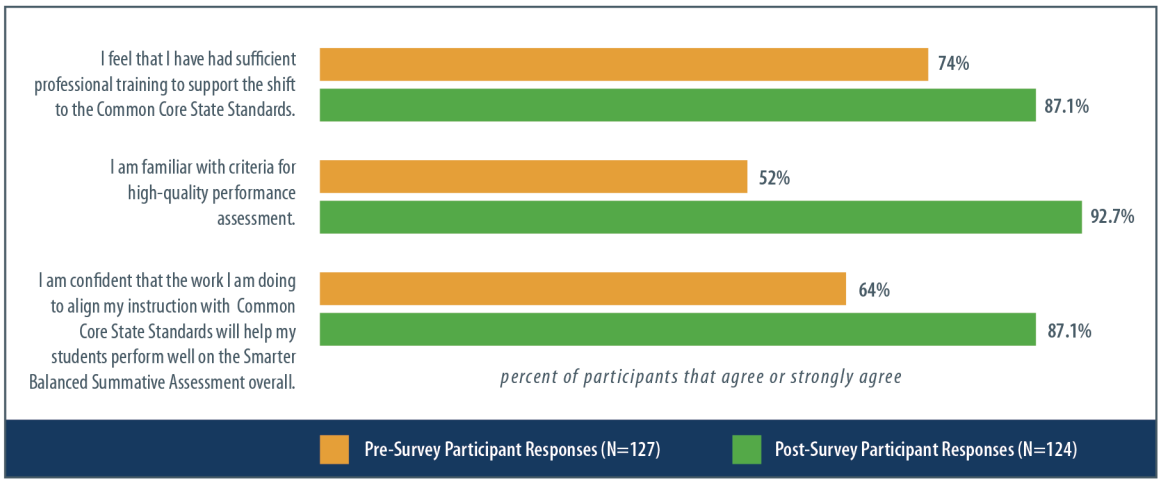
In math, participants move through three hand-scoring cycles that are each followed by a consideration of the kinds of learning experiences students need in order to be successful on math performance tasks. In each cycle, participants begin by experiencing a performance task as if they were students. They then identify the mathematics involved in the task and anticipate the challenges students are likely to encounter. Finally, they analyze and score samples of student responses to the more open-ended items in the task.

A key aspect of the BEAL training entails participants in both the ELA and math content areas discussing the instructional implications of the performance tasks, sharing strategies and plans for helping students develop the kinds of essential skills, knowledge, and habits necessary to demonstrate mastery of the standards. Participants consider how to incorporate performance tasks into classroom instruction in ways that are accessible to all students.

In the post-training survey, participants were asked to identify which BEAL activities were most helpful; the overwhelming majority (92 percent of 109 respondents) identified activities related to the hand-scoring sessions as the most beneficial part of the training.

The Effects of the BEAL Training

Educators were surveyed before and after they participated in BEAL's professional learning opportunity. Results showed significant increases in how well the educators felt they understood the Smarter Balanced assessment and how well equipped they felt to prepare their students to meet the demands of the Common Core standards.



POST-TRAINING SURVEY RESULTS (N=124)

92%

Respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

"This training helped me think about ways to enact curriculum-embedded performance assessment with my students."

Respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

"Scoring student responses to the Smarter Balanced Performance Tasks deepened my understanding of the Common Core State Standards."

84%

Key Themes that Emerged from the Training

THEME 1 BEAL participants gained confidence in the value of Smarter Balanced performance tasks.

Even those educators who went into the BEAL training with skepticism about the Smarter Balanced assessment system reported leaving the training with a deeper appreciation of the effectiveness of its performance tasks in measuring students' skills and knowledge. Both educator interview responses and the survey data from the Oregon BEAL trainings reflected this increased confidence in the assessment.

> **"There's a lot of bad press out there [about the Smarter Balanced assessment] and I think that once people take the time to learn about it, they realize that, oh, well this is really going to be a good measure of what my students know and can do."**
>
> – Laura Lethe

The BEAL trainings in Oregon took place in the months leading up to the state's first administration of Smarter Balanced, in the spring of 2015. When asked in the post-training survey about their concerns related to the upcoming assessment, participants focused primarily on students' capacity to perform well. Seventy-nine percent of the 104 educators who responded to this question touched on this theme, reporting the following concerns: students are not prepared to perform well on the test; they will feel overwhelmed and give up (40 percent); the vocabulary/language/wording used on the test is too challenging; students are not at the reading level required by the test (20 percent); students need better computer literacy skills, including the ability to transfer thoughts and processes into the computer interface (12 percent); students are unable to effectively explain and communicate what they are trying to say (7 percent).

Yet, despite these initial concerns, after the BEAL training educators reported having positive feelings about the design of the test's performance tasks. Asked on the post-training survey what they felt optimistic about, many of the 107 educators who responded to this question touched on the theme that Smarter Balanced performance tasks assess mathematics and writing skills more rigorously and authentically than previous assessments. (About 29 percent of respondents touched on this theme, more than any other theme seen in the responses to this question.) Many educators felt that the rigor of the test could inspire better instruction in the classroom. Post-training survey responses included the following:

> *"I am very encouraged and excited because I feel that I can change my curriculum and lessons to mirror the rigor of the performance tasks and it will give my students a deeper understanding of the math concepts, thereby connecting their learning even closer with the Common Core State Standards."*

"I am hopeful that these [performance tasks] can be a tool to leverage important shifts in instruction to use more cognitively demanding math tasks."

"We are finally focused on deeper learning and student engagement in our assessment system. Hopefully teachers will enjoy this opportunity, as well as students."

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Reina Pike

"I think that …what makes Smarter Balanced a superior test [is that students] really have to think, and write, and organize information… This is good stuff! I don't mind teaching this!"

Prior to the BEAL training, Reina Pike, an English teacher at Douglas High School in Winston, Oregon, felt that she knew how to prepare her students for the OAKS test, but was confused and frustrated by the looming Smarter Balanced test that her students would soon take instead. She wasn't getting the information she thought she needed, and the limited insight she was gaining was coming too slowly. "When you don't know something or understand it, it's scary," she says.

Reina, who started teaching six years ago, had embraced the Common Core State Standards since the beginning of her career. But she felt like she had to toggle between the kinds of rich learning aligned with these standards and teaching students what they needed to know to pass the OAKS assessment. "I was essentially teaching two different things: here's how to pass OAKS, which has nothing to do with what's going to help you in college or your career, and then here's your assignment in class, which is going to help you learn those other things."

Reina registered for the BEAL training in hopes of taking away some of the mystery surrounding the Smarter Balanced test so that she could better support her students. She participated in a BEAL training in Roseburg, Oregon in February 2015. The training gave her the opportunity to understand what the Smarter Balanced performance tasks were, how they measured the standards, and what they were asking of students. For her, the most powerful element of the training was the opportunity to score authentic student samples and to develop a strong sense of the differences between the performance levels. "That, for me, was exactly what I needed and what I wanted. And those are things that I can share with my students." Analyzing the scoring rubrics also gave her clarity about what was and wasn't measured by these tasks.

After the BEAL training, Reina took advantage of some additional professional development offered by her school district that helped her learn more about the design of the Smarter Balanced assessments, including the computer-adaptive portion of the test.

Gaining greater understanding of the test gave her a sense of relief as she realized that the test was measuring students' knowledge more deeply than previous tests. She recognized that this assessment was aligned with the instructional goals that she herself had for her students. "If the test gets in the way of kids' learning, then you have an issue," she says. "But I think the things that are being tested by Smarter Balanced — gathering evidence, supporting statements with evidence — I mean,

that's something I can get behind, something that I can teach my kids and feel like, 'This is something that's going to help you in the real world.'"

Reina left the BEAL training feeling that Smarter Balanced allows her to align her instruction with the standards and the assessment in ways that better serve her students. Now, as her students are building skills that will help them on the Smarter Balanced assessments, they're also developing proficiency as readers, writers, and thinkers in ways that prepare them for college and for their careers. Reina is emphasizing annotation of text, introducing tools to help students organize their writing, and building up over time to the complexity of a performance task. She can't help but picture her students in a few years. "I remember being in college and being so overwhelmed by the amount of reading," she says. She feels good knowing that she's arming her students with the tools they need to tackle the literacy demands that lie ahead of them.

THEME 2 More transparent assessments can support to more effective classroom instruction.

All of the educators interviewed for this paper stressed the value of having access to real-life examples from the Smarter Balanced assessment. These educators emphasized their desire to understand the design of the test and its relationship to the standards. They reported that seeing student examples that illustrated a range of performance levels and participating in collaborative discussions about scores and instructional implications shifted their thinking about teaching and learning. The BEAL project helped them connect curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Two sub-themes emerged around this topic: setting instructional priorities and the power of scoring student work.

> **"What has come out of being a part of the BEAL project is that I know what is being looked for, what kids need to know, and I have now been able to find curriculum that matches that."**
>
> – Rena Wagner

Setting Instructional Priorities

When asked about how the training would impact their own instruction, 75 percent of the 103 educators who responded to this open-ended prompt touched on the value of gaining clarity about the expectations inherent in the assessment and the kinds of learning experiences students would need in order to meet those expectations.

> *"I have a much more comprehensive understanding of the higher order thinking required to carry out these tasks and will help teachers 'up their game' in the classroom by sharing this information and including it in my trainings."*

"This will change how I instruct in class, and it will deepen student learning. I am going to start incorporating performance-task work in unit projects and final assessments."

"I will be more intentional about classroom discourse and assure my students are doing real problems that push their mathematics to the deeper thinking level."

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Laura Lethe

"I feel like we talk about how bad it is when the test drives instruction, but I think in this case, [when] the test is written well, then… maybe it's okay that it drives instruction."

Laura Lethe, a math specialist with the Salem-Keizer School District, works with math teachers in grades 6–12, as well as with coaches and administrators, to improve math instruction in her district.

Before participating in the BEAL training, Laura did what she could to learn about the Smarter Balanced assessment system. She gained a general sense of what this new assessment looked like, but she was struggling to see how everything fit together and what it meant for her own work.

Through the training, Laura had the opportunity to study the design of the Smarter Balanced performance tasks, and what she saw made a significant impact on her. The quality of the assessment tasks was evident to her, and she saw clear implications for the professional development she provides to teachers in her district. Through the BEAL training she could see how a strong assessment can inform good teaching.

Laura participated in the BEAL training as both a participant and a facilitator, first attending a BEAL training in California and then facilitating a BEAL math session in Portland, Oregon. For Laura, in-depth analysis of the design of the Smarter Balanced performance tasks brought into focus the big picture she had been struggling to see. "These are very well thought out," she says of the performance tasks. "And they all follow specific guidelines. I think I just realized that this assessment really measures a lot more deeply than our former state assessments, which were multiple choice."

Laura says the biggest takeaway from the training was the realization that "if we don't expect students to do this type of thinking in the classroom, then they are not going to be prepared." For her, it was clear that her teachers needed the same professional learning opportunity she had received: the powerful experience of analyzing the design of the tasks, examining and scoring student work, and discussing with colleagues the implications for instruction. She replicated the BEAL training for teachers in her own district and used this foundation to support teachers in planning the kind of instruction students need to develop the skill sets she sees being asked of them in the Smarter Balanced performance tasks.

She facilitated a weeklong performance-task development work session for 18 secondary-level math teachers. Over the course of the week, participants learned some fundamentals about performance assessment, and each wrote two math performance tasks, refining them through peer evaluation.

"What I remember most about the performance-task writing work we did…was the depth of discussion," Laura reports. She listened to teachers deeply engaged in discussions about whether the tasks they were writing were really asking students to make decisions and to justify their reasoning, and whether the tasks were truly measuring the standards. "It was tremendous professional development," she says. "Plus, we were able to create some products for all our teachers to use."

In one interaction during the work session, Laura recalls, a young math teacher asked a colleague, "How could these items build on each other a little more to lead up to the culminating product of this task? They are feeling a little bit like discrete items that use the same data. Let's think about the progression." This kind of rich professional development opportunity grew out of the learning that Laura engaged in through the BEAL project.

She is proud of the work her teachers did in the performance-task development session. Her current focus on supporting teaching that engages students in mathematical discussion aims to take teachers to the next level.

Reflecting on the professional development she has been conducting in her district, Laura says she's motivated by the idea that Smarter Balanced could inspire more richer classroom learning for all students. "If we really understand how the test is put together and what the expectations are — and if they're good — then teaching to the test will end up with better instruction in the classroom. That's what I'm hoping is going to happen as we examine Smarter Balanced a little more deeply."

The Power of Scoring Student Work

The hand-scoring sessions were a highlight for many BEAL participants. When asked what part of the training helped them the most in understanding Smarter Balanced performance tasks, 100 of 109 survey respondents mentioned those sessions.

> *"This was the most important part of the training for me. Actually scoring student work — calibrating our scoring, figuring out what their misconceptions were, what strategies they did and didn't have, etc. — helped me add to a list of skills needed and ideas for instruction and tools for a class on performance tasks in our district."*

> *"Going through the sample performance tasks helped me understand the expectations and implications, and especially scoring a variety of student responses and comparing it to the 'anchor papers.'"*

> *"Going through the performance task as a student would was helpful, but especially when combined with scoring student work and looking closely at the rubric. The discussion with peers was very helpful as well."*

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Lisa Kane

Lisa Kane takes her role as an educator seriously. She grapples with questions about what type of education system our students deserve and the role of large-scale assessment in education. As a fifth-grade teacher in Portland Public Schools, Lisa came to the BEAL training with some reservations. "I'm not sold on our whole system of assessment," she says. Before she committed to the BEAL project, she wanted to ensure that she would not be expected to become an advocate for the test, but she was interested in the opportunity to learn more and to share what she learned with her fellow educators in Oregon. Lisa attended an elementary ELA BEAL training in California and later served as a facilitator at a BEAL training in Oregon.

"If you're going to ask teachers to do something and impact their practice…they have to know where their targets are, they have to have a rationale and a reason, and they also have to have exemplars. And those exemplars are a critical part of understanding what's expected of them."

Despite her continued concerns about large-scale assessment in general, the BEAL training gave Lisa a newfound respect for the design of the Smarter Balanced assessments — particularly the performance tasks, which, "although harder, feel more respectful of a child's learning," she says. Laura reports that in the high-performing schools where she was teaching during her initial BEAL work, her students experienced the Smarter Balanced tasks as challenging, but saw them as a better reflection of the work they had been doing in class than summative assessments they had taken in the past. "I don't think they saw it as a test," she says. "They knew it was a test, but it didn't feel significantly different than a lot of things we have done [in class]."

The BEAL training provided instructional direction Lisa says she wasn't getting from the standards alone. "Until you get exemplars, until you get concrete examples of what [something] means — especially when you're talking about language and writing — I won't say it is meaningless, but I will say it's difficult to get an idea. [Getting] clarity is really important." Particularly powerful for Lisa was the opportunity to work with her peers to analyze and discuss actual student work at each performance level, which allowed them to gain insight into what the standards looked like in action. Collaborative discussions about the student responses gave her a new perspective on "how one would design daily instruction — not test prep, but daily instruction — to meet those criteria…It really changed my thinking about, 'How does the student demonstrate understanding of the standard?'"

The insights she gained validated some of her instructional efforts and also spurred her in other directions, particularly when she moved from a higher-income, high-performing school to serve as a literacy coach with the grades K–2 instructional team at Woodlawn Elementary, a school that serves a large population of students living in poverty. She is bringing in more opportunities for her colleagues to learn from exemplars and she's supporting reading comprehension with challenging nonfiction texts. She's concerned about her young students, particularly her English learners, but she is drawing on what she learned about the standards and assessments in BEAL to better prepare students by providing more opportunities for them to respond to text in writing, helping them to develop reading and writing stamina, and introducing sentence frames to support their academic writing.

For her, the value of the BEAL project boiled down to one thing: trust. She appreciated that the educators in the training were entrusted with real student work from the Smarter Balanced assessment.

"If we're supposed to aim for something, it would be nice if people trusted us … to actually look at some materials that give some solid idea of the target," she says, explaining that, from her perspective, one of the most frustrating aspects of the new standards and assessments for teachers has been "not knowing where we're going." She sees BEAL's use of actual student work as an invaluable indication of trust and, as a facilitator of the training, she saw how that trust paid off when coupled with participants' collaborative discussions: "People really appreciated having time to work together toward mutual understandings. That's so critical in teaching and is so underdone."

Lisa still has concerns about the assessment. "I have reservations about a single test being used to determine so much about our school system. That's a huge part of my reservations." She's worried that her young English learners won't be fairly assessed, and she wants to have more actionable data that can guide her instructional decisions. She describes herself as conflicted, and her thinking as nuanced. The purpose of the BEAL training was to use the Smarter Balanced performance tasks to help teachers provide daily instruction that prepares students for college and career, and Lisa agrees that the project "met those intentions admirably."

Her concerns about summative assessment don't invalidate Lisa's need to understand the assessment or diminish the value of what she learned from the tasks and student samples. She is able to separate her appreciation for the learning experience and the implications for her teaching from her skepticism about assessment policy. "Ultimately, what I wish we could do is use the structure of these tasks to design instruction." What Lisa wants is "a system where none of this is necessary because teachers know how to do this and teach this way on a daily basis and have no need for a summative assessment." She pauses to laugh, before wondering aloud what it will take to get there.

THEME 3 Educators want more professional development linking assessment to instruction.

Several of the educators interviewed described feeling confused, frustrated, or negative toward the assessments before the training, primarily because they weren't getting the information they felt they needed about the Common Core standards and the Smarter Balanced assessment to adequately serve their students. Their perceptions of the assessment and their role in preparing students for it shifted during the BEAL training. Afterward, they highlighted a need for additional professional development for themselves to deepen their capacity to make instructional shifts in the classroom. They also expressed a desire for broadening the reach of trainings like BEAL in order to support a greater number of their colleagues across the state.

Asked what type of professional support they needed in order to prepare students for the Smarter Balanced assessment, nearly half of the 103 respondents (46 percent) said they wanted more

training that includes access to performance tasks and the opportunity to score student work. Their comments included the following:

> *"Practicing performance tasks and scoring them. I scored writing for five years at the state level and it helped my teaching quite a bit."*
>
> *"More training like this one after we have a little time to practice and try to put what we learned into practice."*
>
> *"Trainings like this should have been happening two years ago. This training demystifies the Smarter Balanced assessment."*
>
> *"Everyone should have to attend this training."*

The pie chart below illustrates the dominant themes that emerged from responses to the following question:

What kinds of additional supports do teachers in your school need to successfully implement performance assessment tasks in preparation for the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment?

(n=103)

Nearly 25 percent of the 103 respondents also mentioned the need for more time to prepare students for the assessment. (Because this is an open-ended question, responses sometimes touched on more than one theme.)

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Rena Wagner

"I would say I was hesitant before the training and I'm not as hesitant now. I'm ready to dive in and do it."

Before participating in the BEAL project, Rena Wagner was uneasy about the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced assessments. Rena is a Learning Specialist in the Silver Falls School District, teaching K–2 students at her school who have been identified as falling below grade level in reading and math. She did not believe that the standards were attainable for her students, and she assumed the Smarter Balanced assessments, particularly the performance tasks, were setting her kids up for failure.

For Rena, the BEAL training was transformational. "I would say in my 25 years of teaching, it was one of the more meaningful experiences I have had," she says. After attending a BEAL training in California, Rena facilitated BEAL math trainings in Portland and Pendleton, Oregon. Rena was enthusiastic about everything she learned in the BEAL training. "I did not feel like any of my time was wasted… It was probably one of the most thorough trainings I've been to in my career." But what really stuck with her was undertaking a Smarter Balanced performance task from the perspective of a student, experiencing first-hand the demands the tasks place on test-takers and unpacking what that meant for her own instruction. She also found it helpful to analyze and score student responses with educators from around the state.

She suddenly saw that her students *could* be successful. "With the proper support, our kids would be able to do it…It really, completely relieved my stress level," she says. Rena now felt empowered to better implement the Common Core standards in her classroom: "I would say that I was hesitant before the training and I'm not as hesitant now. I'm ready to dive in and do it."

Rena took the insights she gained in the BEAL training and turned a critical eye toward her own practice. She researched new math curricula and found one better aligned to her new understanding of the standards. She now had the knowledge she needed to recognize the way this curriculum would support the math standards and practices. "Now that I understand the standards, the [new] curriculum makes total sense to me and I can use it," Rena says. She now sees value in certain elements of the lesson plans that she might have skipped in the past. For example, she points to an application problem built into each lesson plan that she would likely have passed over before. "I know it's preparing the kids for that part of the Smarter Balanced assessment," she says, "and if we start practicing it in first and second grade, it will be natural in third grade." She's also changing her expectations for students, aligning the goals in student Individualized Education Program plans with the standards and the expectations in the Smarter Balanced performance tasks.

Her students are responding. "They love what they're doing," she says. "They feel successful…It's a lot of hands-on, a lot of thinking, a lot of real-world application, and math is making sense for them."

While Rena is concerned that her young students may not be prepared by third grade, she is more optimistic in thinking about their progress if there is coherent instructional support throughout the

grades. "I know they will get there," she says. However, as one of only two teachers in her district to have participated in the BEAL training, she is concerned that other teachers haven't yet gotten the kind of information they need to provide continuous support to students as they move through the grade levels. "My one disappointment of this whole project was we didn't reach enough teachers…I just wish that if something like this were to happen again in the state, we could find a way to reach more people…so that teachers would be more aware of what they needed to do to help prepare kids."

Policy and Practice Implications

The Common Core State Standards, with aligned assessment systems like Smarter Balanced, aim to put more students on a pathway to success after high school. For that reason, they emphasize the teaching and learning of higher-level skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and writing. In doing so, the standards and assessments also set new expectations for teachers, who must re-tool their curriculum accordingly, try out new teaching approaches, and become familiar with new ways their students will be assessed.

As with any big system change, the shift required by implementation of these standards can be challenging. The intent of this publication is to encourage education decision-makers in Oregon to consider ways to extend the work of teacher learning efforts like the BEAL project, with the objective of making Smarter Balanced more transparent to more educators and, in the process, helping them to connect the Common Core standards and assessments to their own teaching practice so as to improve student learning.

To that end, policymakers and education leaders should consider the following:

- Engage greater number of teachers in professional learning opportunities like BEAL to help them understand the student learning expectations reflected in Smarter Balanced assessments and how the assessments can support good instructional practice.
- Build upon what teachers learn in trainings like BEAL by providing additional professional learning opportunities focused on deepening educators' understanding of using performance assessment and formative assessment to improve teaching and learning.
- Communicate that the best student preparation for the Smarter Balanced performance assessment is effective teaching aligned to the standards, and challenge the common perception that teachers should somehow be providing separate test preparation for students.
- Ensure that all educators have access to practical, high-quality materials that provide clarity about the Smarter Balanced assessments in the context of the teaching-and-learning cycle and that support effective teaching and learning practices.

- Make sure educators, schools, and districts receive timely assessment data that can be used to inform their continuous improvement efforts and curricular planning. Help each audience understand how to interpret Smarter Balanced test results and decide what adjustments to their practice could be helpful.
- Recognize and publicly acknowledge that the results of summative assessment are just one source of data that should be considered in conjunction with multiple other sources of data from the school and classroom.
- As state agencies are developing proposals for assessment and/or professional development contracts, ensure that professional learning opportunities like BEAL are built into plans and consider how teachers can be more active in scoring or reviewing student work on state assessments.

This report arrives at a timely moment, as Oregon and other states have been given new flexibility under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) to redefine their vision for K–12 education and to adjust provisions for teacher support, assessment, and accountability in ways intended to make that vision a reality. As state leaders finalize plans for implementing ESSA, BEAL can serve as a model for the sort of support teachers need in order to succeed with the expectations reflected in the Common Core State Standards.

APPENDIX A

What is a Smarter Balanced Performance Task?

Being ready for college and career means students must have such essential skills as problem solving, integrating information, critical thinking, and communication. Performance assessment is an important tool for providing teachers and students with information about how best to teach and learn these competencies.

Because these key skills cannot be adequately measured with selected- and constructed-response items alone, the Smarter Balanced assessment includes performance tasks that meaningfully engage students with real source materials, like data sets, and complex informational texts, and asks students to produce a culminating product.

ELA

Smarter Balanced clusters the Common Core State Standards into skill-set categories called "claims" and "targets." Claims are the broad statements of the assessment system's intended learning outcomes. For each claim, a set of assessment targets is provided. These targets describe the expectations that will be considered within each claim. The Smarter Balanced ELA assessment has four claims:

- **Claim #1 — Reading:** Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.
- **Claim #2 — Writing:** Students can produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences.
- **Claim #3 — Listening:** Students can employ effective [speaking and] listening skills for a range of purposes and audiences.
- **Claim #4 — Research:** Students can engage in research/inquiry to investigate topics, and to analyze, integrate, and present information.

A Smarter Balanced ELA performance task measures the writing and research claims. In the task, students read a series of informational texts and respond to a set of selected and constructed-response items based on these texts. These items require students to think critically about sources and synthesize evidence from multiple sources. The task culminates by asking students to produce an essay that draws on evidence from each of the sources and involves a real-world application. Students may be asked to write for different purposes, like providing information, making an argument, or creating a narrative.

For example, a fourth-grader might be asked to read three informational articles on how animals adapt to their environments, then answer questions that require the student to evaluate each source and identify specific evidence from the texts. The student then writes an original article about animals and their habitats, using more than one of the sources to support a main idea, including quotes and citations.

This fourth-grade informational essay is scored using three separate rubrics focused on 1) organization and purpose, 2) evidence and elaboration, and 3) conventions.

Math

Smarter Balanced math performance tasks include a stimulus that consists of some contextual information and quantitative data, followed by four to six items that typically increase in complexity or cognitive demand.

Smarter Balanced math assessments, as a whole, are designed to assess evidence of four claims:

- **Claim #1 — Concepts and Procedures:** Students can explain and apply mathematical concepts and carry out mathematical procedures with precision and fluency.
- **Claim #2 — Problem Solving:** Students can frame and solve a range of complex problems in pure and applied mathematics.
- **Claim #3 — Communicating Reasoning:** Students can clearly and precisely construct viable arguments to support their own reasoning and to critique the reasoning of others.
- **Claim #4 — Data Analysis and Modeling:** Students can analyze complex, real-world scenarios and can use mathematical models to interpret and solve problems.

The performance task portion of the test assesses evidence of claims 2, 3, and 4. Evidence of claim #1 is assessed with the computer-adaptive portion of the test. Claim #2 and claim #4 are reported together as a single claim score in the Smarter Balanced reporting system.

As an example, a sixth-grade performance task asks students to reason mathematically about a scenario involving efforts to conserve water. The stimulus provides data about average American water consumption, including water usage in everyday household activities, such as flushing toilets and taking showers. It includes a table that notes the number gallons of water used in such activities. The items that follow progress from questions that ask students to directly interpret data or perform simple calculations to items that require modeling and analysis of the impact of different strategies for conserving water. The final stage of the performance task requires students to synthesize what they have learned and support an analysis of a multi-part plan for conserving water.

APPENDIX B

Findings from Participant Evaluations

Educators who took part in the BEAL training were invited to participate in a pre-training survey and a post-training survey, both conducted online. Response rates to the surveys varied slightly by event, with a 49 percent overall response rate (127 responses) in the pre-training survey and a 48 percent rate in the post-training survey (124 responses).

The surveys consisted of three types of questions: demographic questions; Likert scale items focused on attitudes toward, and familiarity with, the CCSS, the Smarter Balanced Assessment System, and performance assessment; and open-ended questions about participants' views of Smarter Balanced and the impacts of the training on instructional practice. The post-training survey had additional questions about the impacts and quality of the training.

	Participant Pre-Survey (N=127)	Participant Post-Survey (N=124)	Difference Between Pre- and Post-Survey, by Percentage Points
	Agree or Strongly Agree	*Agree or Strongly Agree*	*Agree or Strongly Agree*
I feel that I have had sufficient professional training to support the shift to the CCSS.	74.0%	87.1%	13.1
I am familiar with the Smarter Balanced Assessment System overall.	76.4%	93.5%	17.1
I am familiar with the role of Performance Tasks within the Smarter Balanced Assessment System.	69.3%	96.8%	27.5
I feel that I have had sufficient professional training (including this one) to support the shift to the Smarter Balanced Assessment.	45.7%	82.3%	36.6
I am confident that the work I am doing to align my instruction with CCSS will help my students perform well on the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment overall.	64.0%	87.1%	23.1
I am confident that I can provide instruction that supports students in performing well on the Smarter Balanced performance tasks.	66.4%	89.4%	23.0
I am familiar with criteria for high-quality performance assessment.	52.0%	92.7%	40.7

The post-training survey also asked questions about the impact and quality of the training. With 124 participants responding,

- 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "This training helped me think about ways to enact curriculum-embedded performance assessment with my students."
- 84 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Scoring student responses to the Smarter Balanced Performance Tasks deepened my understanding of the Common Core State Standards."
- 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Scoring student responses to the Smarter Balanced Performance Tasks deepened my understanding of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System."

Building Educator Assessment Literacy

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