

2017 Issue Brief
Aligned Assessments of Student Progress

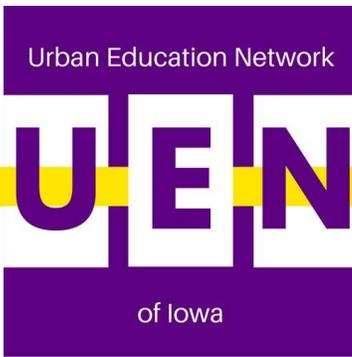
Background: The 2013 Education Reform effort addressed Iowa's state tests of reading math and science, requiring the tests used before continue until July 1, 2016, at which time the State Board of Education could again determine the state test. HF 215 also required Iowa's Department of Education to convene a task force to review and make recommendations for a statewide assessment of student progress. The task force was required to recommend a state assessment aligned to Iowa standards and at a minimum, valid, reliable, tested and piloted in Iowa. The task force considered costs to schools and the state to provide and administer tests and needed technical support. The task force, including UEN representatives and members of every educational role group, did its job, with a very rigorous and scientific process. In a nearly unanimous vote of the task force members, 20:1, members recommended moving to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) suite of assessments, including summative tests used for accountability and formative assessment and instructional tools to help teachers support students throughout the school year. The task force report is found here: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/boards-committees-councils-and-task-forces/2015/01/2014-12-31-iowa-assessment-task-force>

Current Situation: On Sept. 17, 2015, the State Board of Education initiated rules to implement SBAC, intending first use of the test statewide in spring of 2017. The legislature delayed the requirement for schools to use SBAC until spring of 2018. The legislature also agreed to have the State BOE rules reviewed again in Dec. 2016, but the governor vetoed that requirement as the education associations, including UEN, requested. The DE issued an RFP and has begun to prepare schools for the spring 2018 use of SBAC.

Alignment: The UEN has a long-standing legislative priority calling for an assessment aligned to standards schools teach. UEN has opposed using a norm-referenced test for federal accountability. A state test is required for ESSA compliance, but school leaders recognize the importance of formative assessments along the way to improve teaching. The suite of assessment tools, including formative assessments, an online digital library and professional development(all in the task force recommendations), will help teachers diagnose what students know and can do, and change instruction along the way.

Key components of the SBAC system that improve learning for students:

- **Tools for teaching:** The suite of formative tools and digital library of instructional lessons, both tied to standards, help teachers tailor instruction to the needs of students. The use of the formative tools, including which questions are asked of students, is left to local districts to determine. Teacher teams will likely build common formative assessments based on the standards they are working on with their students when they need them. Online test taking provides timely information back to district, teachers, parents and students.
- **Valid accountability:** The system's ability to focus on what students know also takes away the age-old argument that schools can't be held accountable because the test doesn't assess what is taught. Instead, supports and expectations will align appropriately to standards required to be taught.



- **Performance tasks:** Students engage higher levels of thinking to master the tasks required. Performance tasks usually take a little longer for students to complete. The SBAC test does not have a time limit; students may take more time to demonstrate their ability.
- **Computer adaptive test:** Next questions are based on prior answers. Standards mastery for all levels of students will be better identified. Students are less frustrated with the test and more engaged. Iowa students interviewed after piloting the SBAC tests confirmed their preference for this test format.
- **Development of the test involved Iowa educators and students.** SBAC was piloted in Iowa. Likewise, thousands of lessons in the digital library have been submitted by Iowans. Iowa educators, administrators, school board members, AEAs, curriculum directors, the business community and parents were included in the 21-member task force, which offered a nearly-unanimous recommendation.

Change is hard and we expect bumps in the road. It is critical that the state recognize and support school district technology needs in order to administer the test online:

- **Transitional challenges:** Some districts may need a lengthened test window or an option to initially deliver the test with paper/pencil. Educators and students need time to learn how to administer and take the test. With a more rigorous test, aligned to higher expectations, it is smart to anticipate the dip.
- **Resources:** An appropriation to support the additional costs of the test is necessary. Likewise, it would be prudent for the Iowa House and the Governor to show support for extending the state penny sales tax beyond its current 2029 sunset. This predictable and stable funding source will help school districts upgrade technology and purchase the devices necessary to properly administer computer-based assessments.

UEN calls on the Iowa Legislature to fund an assessment system aligned to Iowa Standards and implement the recommendation of the Assessment Task Force to use the Smarter Balanced Suite of Assessments, measuring progress along the way, including attainment and growth.

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