## Legislative Briefing

# Overview

In 2013, the Legislature acknowledged the need for a new state test for Iowa’s students and called for a task force to study Iowa’s needs and to make a recommendation.

Twenty-one Iowans who make up the Assessment Task Force\* delivered on this legislative charge after more than a year of careful and public consideration. In December 2014, the task force recommended that Iowa legislators adopt the Smarter Balanced Assessments as Iowa’s new state test for public and accredited nonpublic schools starting with the 2016-17 school year.

The task force strongly concludes Iowa needs state test results that accurately reflect how students are progressing in meeting Iowa’s statewide expectations for what students should know and be able to do.

The Smarter Balanced Assessments are aligned with the expectations outlined in our state standards, reflect what is taught in Iowa classrooms, and move Iowa toward having students demonstrate high levels of knowledge and skills.

The assessments’ online format also provides teachers with a more detailed and immediate picture of skills that their students have mastered, as well as those areas where students are struggling. This information allows educators to adjust instructional approaches to meet the individual needs of students. The use of online testing is already common. In Iowa many districts use online assessments successfully and usage continues to grow state-wide.

The Smarter Balanced Assessments were developed by a consortium of states guided by the belief that a high-quality assessment system aligned to rigorous academic standards will improve teaching and will help prepare students for success in college and career training.

The Assessment Task Force represents a cross-section of Iowa education stakeholders, including K-12 and higher education, parents and the business community. They were charged by the Legislature to research available assessments and identify the assessment best suited for use in Iowa Schools. The Smarter Balanced Assessments are the best choice for an assessment that will help Iowa’s children grow toward their best possible future.

Smarter Balanced represents an assessment system that includes tests for end-of-year mandatory accountability purposes, as well as optional interim tests for classroom use throughout the year. The assessments are aligned to the Iowa Core standards, measure higher-order skills instead of simple fact recall, and generate faster results. The assessments also will be computer adaptive, which means they present an individually tailored set of questions to students based on their responses. This approach is an improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments because it gives teachers a more detailed picture of a student’s strengths and weaknesses. These assessments measure growth, not only in overall achievement, but also in content knowledge and skills.

\* *This briefing paper was compiled and vetted via email and is offered on behalf of all members of the Task Force except for the individual who wrote the original dissenting opinion.*

# Task Force Comparison of Assessments

|  | **Next Generation Iowa Assessments** | **Smarter Balanced Assessments** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Scoring: passed initial screening (round one) | Yes | Yes |
| Task force vote after full analysis of what is best for Iowa’s children (rounds one and two) | 1 member recommended NGIA in a minority report | 20 members recommend full suite of SBA assessments |
| Meets legislative requirements of HF 215 (the law commissioning the task force study) | Yes (includes science based on *current* standards) | Yes (defers science until new standards are available) |
| Depth of contribution to test development | 1 University  1 State (Iowa) | 35 Universities and other national groups  64 national and international content experts  26 States (including Iowa) |
| Contributions to test development by Iowans | Yes, educators wrote and reviewed test questions | Yes, educators wrote and reviewed test questions and helped define passing scores |
| Pilot testing (testing to refine individual test items) | Yes, NGIA items developed so far are tested on Iowa students (400,000 students over several years) | Yes. SBA items were piloted (4 million students in one year, including over 9,000 Iowa students) |
| Field testing (testing of complete tests built from previously piloted items) | No. NGIA has not been field tested; items still being developed | Yes. Along with other states, Iowa participated in SBA field testing in spring 2014 |
| Proposed assessment fully developed and in use | No (Iowa Assessments current version) | Yes (Smarter Balanced assessments are now operational in multiple States)\* |
| Number of states that use the assessment to meet federal and state accountability laws | None (one if adopted in Iowa) | 18 (plus US Virgin Islands and Bureau of Indian Education) |
| Complete balanced assessment system   * Includes end-of-year summative assessment, plus tools that provide feedback to teachers throughout the year on the skills their students have mastered | Summative only | In addition to summative tests, teachers can use assessment resources to construct tests throughout the year that can provide specific, aligned information about student progress. |
| Includes performance tasks   * These extended test items measure student ability to apply learning in depth to real world problems | No | Yes |
| Testing time | 3 hours average estimate for summative assessments (test is untimed)   * Less than 1% of total instructional time | 7-8 hours average estimate for summative assessments (test is untimed)   * 3-4 hrs. summative assessments * 3-4 hrs. performance tasks * Less than 1% of total instructional time |
| Reporting results | Printed reports include:   * Individual student reports * Grade level reports * School level reports * District level reports * State level reports | Interactive online reports with print option include:   * Individual student reports * Grade level reports * School level reports * District level reports * State level reports |
| Grade levels covered | * Grades K-11 | * Grades 3-11 |
| Percentage of Iowa school districts reporting sufficient bandwidth | 95-99% of Iowa Public Districts report sufficient bandwidth\*  (Source: Iowa Department of Education) | 95-99% of Iowa Public Districts report sufficient bandwidth\* |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **First year cost of an assessment system** | **$7,970,630**  **(this is an underestimate, see \*\* below)** | **$8,270,234\*** |
| Annual cost to state for assessment (based on 2014-2015 enrollment: 326,242 students, grades 3-11)  (Source: Iowa Department of Education) | **Next Generation Iowa Assessments**   * $15 per student = **$4,893,630** * **$575,000** to state for reports and services, (anticipated based on current costs) * $250,000 one-time cost per form, two forms for Braille = **$500,000\*** * **Total for first year = $5,968,630\*** * **Future year costs = $5,468,630**   (Source: Task Force report, Iowa Department of Education contracts) | **Smarter Balanced Assessments**   * $25.35 per student = **$8,270,234\*** (based onConnecticut’s contract for Smarter Balanced full suite & ongoing development) * Cost for SBAC membership included * Cost for reports, braille forms or other accommodations: None * **Total cost = $8,270,234**   (Source: CT Department of Education, SBAC website) |
| **Multiple Measures to meet IAC 281.12**  All districts must administer multiple measures per IAC 281.12. The tests used are a local decision. Currently there are often annual cost to districts for these additional formative and accountability measures. | Multiple Measures costs will continue:\*   * 57% of Iowa districts spend at least $14 per student (NWEA MAP tests): 143,332 students in grades 3-11 = **$2,002,000+** * 43% use 200+ other assessments, costs for these other assessments are unknown. \*\*   (Source: Iowa Department of Education, NWEA) | None required.   * If Smarter Balanced is selected, districts would have the option of replacing current assessments (which are paid through local dollars) with interim assessments which are aligned to the summative assessment. * Districts may choose to continue using other assessments as they do now |
| **Total Cost For Accountability and Formative Assessments (first year)** | **$5,968,630** first year NGIA\*  **$2,002,000** Multiple assessments required\*  **$7,970,630 Total costs\*** | **$8,270,234** for Smarter Balanced suite\*  **$ 0** Multiple assessments included  **$8,270,234 Total Costs\*** |

\* Includes additional information that became available after the task force report was published in December 2014.

\*\* The broad range of assessments reported by districts (to meet IAC 281.12 requirements using Iowa Assessments or if using NGIA) are too varied to be summarized in order to estimate cost. It is safe to assume costs are higher than represented in this brief summary.

December 31, 2014