

TRANSCRIPT

California Department of Education's Resources and Support for Common Core Implementation: Part I

SPEAKER Deb Sigman

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DEB SIGMAN Thank you very much for allowing us to spend some time with you today. It's so encouraging—you know, when we stay in the building at the California Department of Ed, we get a little bit, we forget sometimes, not often, but sometimes we get so wrapped up in the work that we're doing just as you do when you get so wrapped up in the work that you are doing at your schools in your districts. And it becomes overwhelming, and you forget that there's so many wonderful things happening, so it's so encouraging to hear Sandy and Chris and the folks from the other states talk about how they are making this work. And it really is quite an experiment if you think about this; never before in the history of—that I can remember, and I've been in the business quite a long time—have we had such collaboration not only across districts but across states. We actually have a Common Core set of standards. Probably a decade ago none of us thought that that would happen. And we are approaching a common set of assessments, also unheard of probably a decade ago. So it's really very much an experiment, and I think an enormous opportunity for all of us who have been wanting something a bit different to happen in our schools and for our students. And so we're happy that this is moving the way that it is.

So my piece of this presentation, we really wanted to focus on kind of what can the department do for you and what is the department doing for you. And you know, we're a large state and thank goodness you are all nimble enough and flexible enough and smart enough to move down this Common Core implementation path without being told what to do because you'd be waiting a long time. So our goal is to provide you resources that can help do your job. And so I am going to talk a little bit about Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Within my branch, I have the assessment accountability, Title I intervention, charter schools, and data systems around California. So I want to talk a little bit about the up-and-coming Smarter Balanced Assessment activities, and then Nancy and Barbara will talk about statewide implementation activities and share with you some resources.

Now, everywhere I go to speak in California, when we talk about Common Core Standards, the attention seems to turn to what? Can you tell me? Assessment. That's right. And I love assessment; I've devoted the better part of my professional career to assessments, and so they are so very important. But folks, there's other stuff to do before the assessments get here, so we need to focus on making sure that our folks know what the standards are about. And it was so refreshing to hear this: Don't worry about it. It'll happen. I love Chris when he talks about it's okay, we'll care of it, we'll get it done. And that's great leadership, and we know we have so many of those in the state of California. But the next question that folks ask is, well, are they really going to happen? Are they really going to be ready? In fact, I remember at the last board meeting, and I think President Kirst asked me as I was up at the podium, Deb, are the assessments going to be ready in '14-'15? And I said absolutely. Absolutely. The question he didn't ask me was, well, are we going to be ready? So that's probably the more appropriate question, and I think we will.

You know, those of you who've been in the system for a while, you know when we adapted the set of standards in 1997-98, you know it didn't all happen overnight. Somebody said that today on the panel. It takes time, and so you know this is an evolution of thought; this is an evolution of practice. So we need to be a bit patient. So it's kind of basics, and I am assuming that most of you know this, so I am going to go through this very quickly. But California has joined the consortium, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. We are a governing state that took the signature of Superintendent Tom Torlakson, Governor Brown, and Board President Kirst. So all three folks agreed that that was a consortium that California needed to be in. That consortium, which is run by a federal brand, will be an assessment that assesses children in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 in English language arts and math. That's all it's going to do. So those of you who currently teach know that the state of California is a prolific tester; we like assessments, we test a lot, right? So we test in second grade and we test science and we test social studies. And then we have a whole host of end-of-course exams in the high school.

So but for Smarter Balanced this is what the charge is, and it will serve as the accountability, as the federal accountability measure for all those states that participate. Eleventh grade, those of you who are teaching at the high schools, you were familiar with our early assessment program, which is a partnership with our California State University system and our community college system. Students can participate in that test and then be deemed ready for credit-bearing courses. Smarter Balanced and PARK will create also a college-ready test, if you will, and so that would take the place of our EAP exam. So the idea is that both of these assessments will be looking at making sure that there's a measure of postsecondary success, college and career readiness, and, as I said, operational in 2014-15. And both of the consortia as a requirement of the grant had to have a technology component. Smarter

Balanced is a computer-adaptive assessment mode, which is very different for the state of California. We're very excited about it because it can give us a much more precise measure for our students, and any of you who took probably GRE or GMAT probably took a computer-adaptive assessment. It's not new technology, but it's certainly new to the state of California.

So I know that you have lots of questions about assessment and I am—we're going to save a little bit of time—but I am just going to kind of go over the highlights about what's happening because I think folks think that Smarter Balanced is somehow outside of the state. We are Smarter Balanced, right? California and 25 other states, we are Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Every one of you is Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. So the state of California and the Department of Education are committed to making this work, so we have devoted resources to have staff very much involved in the development and implementation of this assessment. So the technology piece is scary for folks, but as Chris said, you know, they looked at a problem and they went and they took action to do something. There is—there are new hardware purchasing guidelines. What that means is that if you are going to go out and buy hardware, there are guidelines for you to do that that will be compatible with Smarter Balanced. But there has been a technology readiness survey that the state of California has participated in, and that survey data is being collected as we speak. A report is probably slated for late August, early September, and the data that come from that report will help the consortium determine what kind of legacy systems that will be appropriate for this assessment. So what that means is we obviously are aware that there are different kinds of systems all across the state. The idea is for you not to have to go out and purchase but rather hopefully capitalize on the equipment that we already have. We know that won't be possible everywhere.

There is item development that is going on right now, and we put out a call for volunteers routinely. It goes out to a wide, wide span of folks. The problem is that, of course, there are 25 states. That's not a problem; that's a good thing. But what that means is that we have to share in these activities, we have to share in these opportunities. And so you can rest assured that we push very hard to have California be represented, which essentially means that we believe strongly we should have a greater percentage than other folks in terms of all of these things. So we have educators being trained to write and pilot items and look at bias and sensitivity review. And then our students in California—Monterey and LA counties this year, this summer—are participating in cognitive labs to really get a sense of what they think about these items, what they think about computer-administered items. And so that will help when we think about administration policies.

Now, achievement-level descriptors, right? You all know what those are. We have five of them in the state of California: far below basic, basic, proficient, advanced, below basic. So I don't know if any of you were around when we decided on those descriptors, but that was a debate, right? That was a lively debate. Now I want you to think about this. Twenty-six states, 25 states—it changes just about every day—but 25, 25 states have to agree on what it means to be proficient. So technology is the easy part of this experiment, trust me. So this will be exciting; this work is underway because obviously this is going to have to happen soon. Preliminary descriptors will be set, or levels will be set after—before the '14-'15 test, and then final levels will be set after the '14-'15 test. The pilot test will occur next year, '12-'13. And just talked to the executive director yesterday—I have the good fortune to serve on the Smarter Balanced executive committee for the 25 states; there are in nine of us. So not only myself but Beverley Young, who's a vice chancellor—or, pardon me, she's a dean for the CSU system. We both sit on this committee, so California is well represented. But what I was told is that the pilot will be available to all. So anyone who wants to participate in the pilot will be able to. Not everyone will be considered in terms of using the data for the information that will feed into the field test and operational test, but everyone will have the opportunity to pilot. That's a good thing, actually, for those of you who want to do it, right? Now, not everyone will, but the fact is that the opportunity for you will be there.

And then finally, you know, this is a grant, so both Smarter Balanced and PARCC funding ends in October of 2014. Now, think about that because when will we be administering the operational test for the first time? 2015, the spring of 2015, the last 12 weeks of the year. So obviously states and the consortium have to figure out a way to sustain this, and how are we going to administer that. So the consortium will be hiring a contractor to kind of look into the feasibility of this. There is a sustainability task force, which we have the good fortune—our executive director of the state board of education Sue Burr sits on that task force. Again, California very well represented in the Smarter Balanced work.

So, you know, as I said, it's a large state and there's lots of information to get out to you. And so we really encourage you to take advantage of the resources that we have. So here are four ways that you can keep in touch with the Smarter Balanced activities. We have about—we have six people that are devoted to work groups on Smarter Balanced. We have a readiness coordinator. We have a teacher coordinator. And so those, any kind of information that goes out will go out through these mechanisms. So there—all of our presentations are kept on that first website. There is an electronic mailing list. If you are not on it, please, please sign up. We send out a weekly update for Smarter Balanced. And then our recruitment efforts—we use not only this, but we do use this mailing list to recruit. The Smarter Balanced

Assessment website is located at the third bullet there. We'll answer your questions at CDE. Send us a question sbac@CDE. And if you have questions about IT readiness, we also have a mailbox set up for that.