

Respected Iowa Test of Basic Skills is the Most Cost-effective Way to Meet National Testing Requirement

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Key Findings

1. The Director of the Iowa Testing Programs reports that the new Iowa Test of Basic Skills is aligned with the national Common Core learning standards.
2. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is a high-quality test.
3. Private schools across the country use the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to measure the success of their students.
4. The new Iowa Test costs much less to administer than the proposed Common Core test.

Washington state budget writers are considering whether to spend \$300 million to implement the national Common Core Standards Initiative in Washington. The Common Core Standards are new learning standards which the federal government has required states to adopt as a condition of competing for federal Race to the Top dollars, a competition that Washington state lost. The \$300 million in new spending would include \$182.6 million for informing teachers, principals and districts about this initiative, and \$122 million in spending on new textbooks.¹ This \$300 million figure does not include the spending that would be needed to update the state's testing system.

Washington state has joined the federally financed effort to develop a new test based on the Smarter Balanced Assessment program. This test is being developed by a group of 28 states, called the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Another federally financed effort, the Partnership for the Assessment of College and Career (PARCC), is writing its own test to measure student learning under the Common Core Standards.

Washington is already receiving about \$300,000 a year in federal money over four years from SBAC to push for state implementation efforts.² To continue as a member of SBAC after 2014, Washington must agree to use the Consortium's tests as its federal accountability assessment.³ The current plan is to start giving this test to Washington students in the spring of 2014.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction reports that the cost of administering and scoring the Smarter Balanced Assessment will be \$20 per student. In contrast, the cost of the well-established and nationally recognized Iowa Test of Basic Skills is nearly half as much, about \$10–15 per student. The annual cost to the state of Washington for administering the SBAC test in grades three through eight and in high school would be \$21 million. The cost of administering the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in these grades would be only \$15.75 million.

¹ "The Common Core of State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, Analysis and Recommendations, Report to the Legislature," Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, January 2011, pages ix and x, available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/legisgov/2011documents/CCSSLegReportJan2011.pdf>

² "The Common Core of State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, Analysis and Recommendations, Report to the Legislature," Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, January 2011, page 26, available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/legisgov/2011documents/CCSSLegReportJan2011.pdf>

³ "Frequently Asked Questions, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)," Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/FAQ.aspx>.

Private schools across the country use the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to measure the success of their students. Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn opposes the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, saying it is not aligned with the Common Core Standards and does not meet federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act.

To determine whether Superintendent Dorn's position is accurate, Washington Policy Center asked Professor Steve Dunbar, Director of the Iowa Testing Programs at the University of Iowa College of Education and a national expert of student testing.

Professor Dunbar says the updated version of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, called the Iowa Tests, is aligned with the Common Core Standards and, contrary to Superintendent Dorn's assertion, does meet federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. Specifically, Professor Dunbar reports:

Like Washington, the state of Iowa is a member of SBAC and the state department of education is considering the promised assessment system as an alternative to its present NCLB plan, which uses the Iowa Assessments, formerly the ITBS.

Iowa's current NCLB plan received full approval from the USDE for accountability, and in 2007 Iowa was one of a small number of states that were approved for a growth model option based on the ITBS growth scale. The appropriations required for Iowa to move to SBAC represent a seven-to-tenfold increase in the per-student cost the state currently pays to use the new Iowa Assessments, the latest revision of the ITBS. These costs are just beginning to be understood in the legislature, so I am interested in how the discussion in your state moves through the appropriations process.

The new Iowa Assessments are aligned to the Common Core State Standards in ELA and Mathematics — every question is tagged to the Common Core. Criterion-referenced reports break out results in terms of the major domains of the Common Core at the individual and group level. We still provide national comparisons, based on a 2010–11 national sample, and support growth models through a developmental score scale. In addition, college readiness indicators based on research relating Iowa scores to ACT and SAT scores are provided. We can report “on-track” information beginning in 6th grade.

The question of peer review for Title I is a red herring at this point in time given the waiver process underway and the pending reauthorization of NCLB. There will be continuing debate over the federal role in Title I evaluations up to the November election and beyond. Our contention in Iowa is that the Iowa Assessments provide the core assessment necessary for successful peer review. There are aspects of the Common Core not amenable to large-scale, summative assessment.

The new Iowa Test of Basic Skills meets federal requirements and provides a high-quality alternative to the current plan. In addition, the Iowa Test costs much less to administer than the proposed Common Core test.

Recommendations

Lawmakers should not impose the Common Core test in Washington schools, and should instead adopt the proven and less expensive Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Liv Finne is director of the Center for Education at Washington Policy Center, a non-partisan, independent policy research organization in Washington state. Nothing here should be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation before any legislative body. For more information, visit washingtonpolicy.org.

To determine the true costs involved, a complete accounting of all current and expected costs associated with the Common Core Standards Initiative is necessary. These sums should be separated out from planned spending under current Materials, Supplies, Operating Cost (MSOC) accounting. This separate accounting should include all the costs associated with administering and scoring the SBAC test, all costs associated with administering and scoring the Iowa Tests, the cost of new curriculum aligned with the SBAC, and the cost of training teachers in the SBAC test and the new curriculum.

This accounting should also include:

- An itemized list of savings in curriculum training costs Washington schools would gain if lawmakers adopt the Iowa Tests.
- A list of savings school districts would receive from using free open source courseware for K–12 schools, as allowed by new legislation passed in 2012, HB 2337.