

Higher education is participating in the development of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System with the goal that colleges and universities recognize performance at designated levels as evidence that students are ready for credit-bearing coursework and may be exempted from remedial or developmental courses. In order to guide colleges and universities, schools, students and parents in interpreting student performance, an operational definition of college readiness and a policy framework were developed by states' Higher Education and K–12 Leads, as well as the faculty and teachers representing their states, at a week-long workshop to draft detailed descriptions of student achievement levels, called initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs). Together, this definition and policy framework describe what a college-readiness designation means in the context of the Smarter Balanced assessment and how schools, colleges and universities, students and parents should interpret student performance.

Smarter Balanced recognizes that college readiness encompasses a wide array of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, not all of which will be measured by the Smarter Balanced assessments. As a result, Smarter Balanced narrowed the focus of its college-readiness definition to content readiness in the core academic subjects of English language arts/literacy and mathematics (see Table 1). Further, Smarter Balanced recognizes the limits of relying on a single test score for making high-stakes decisions and fully supports the use of multiple measures to determine student course placement. As a result, the policy framework encompasses the evaluation of evidence of grade 12 learning and the use of additional data drawn from placement tests or other sources to determine appropriate course placement in higher education (see Table 2). Finally, the college content-readiness definition and policy framework are not designed to inform college or university admission decisions because the Smarter Balanced assessments are not being developed for that purpose.

Table 1. College Content-Readiness Definition

English Language Arts/Literacy	Students who perform at the College Content-Ready level in English language arts/literacy demonstrate subject-area knowledge and skills associated with readiness for entry-level, transferable, credit-bearing English and composition courses. These students also demonstrate reading, writing, listening, and research skills necessary for introductory courses in a variety of disciplines.
Mathematics	Students who perform at the College Content-Ready level in mathematics demonstrate subject-area knowledge and skills associated with readiness for entry-level, transferable, credit-bearing mathematics or statistics courses. These students also demonstrate quantitative reasoning skills necessary for introductory courses in a variety of disciplines.

Table 2. Policy Framework for Grade 11 Achievement Levels

Level	Policy ALD	College Content Readiness	Implications for Grade 12 and College Placement
4	Demonstrates deep command of the knowledge and skills associated with college and career readiness.	Student is exempt from developmental coursework.	States/districts/colleges may offer advanced courses (such as AP, IB, or dual enrollment) for these students. Colleges may evaluate additional data (courses completed, grades, placement test scores, etc.) to determine student placement in advanced courses beyond an initial entry-level course.
3	Demonstrates sufficient command of the knowledge and skills associated with college and career readiness.	Student is exempt from developmental coursework, <i>contingent on evidence of continued learning in grade 12.</i>	Within each state, higher education and K-12 officials determine appropriate evidence of continued learning (such as test scores or course grades). Colleges may evaluate additional data (courses completed, grades, placement test scores, etc.) to determine student placement in advanced courses beyond an initial entry-level course.
2	Demonstrates partial command of the knowledge and skills associated with college and career readiness.	Student needs support to meet college-readiness standard.	States/districts/colleges may implement grade 12 transition courses or other programs for these students. States also may choose to retest these students near the conclusion of grade 12. Colleges may evaluate additional data (courses completed, grades, placement test scores, etc.) to determine placement in developmental or credit-bearing courses.
1	Demonstrates minimal command of the knowledge and skills associated with college and career readiness.	Student needs substantial support to meet college-readiness standard.	States/districts/colleges may offer supplemental programs for these students. States also may choose to retest these students near the conclusion of grade 12. Colleges may evaluate additional data (courses completed, grades, placement test scores, etc.) to determine placement in developmental or credit-bearing courses.

Review and Approval. The college content-readiness definition and policy framework, along with detailed achievement level descriptors for grades 3–8 as well as 11, are available for public review until January 15, 2013. A revised draft will be circulated to states in February in advance of a Governing State vote in mid-March to approve the college content-readiness definition and policy framework and initial achievement level descriptors.

Next Steps. The material presented here represents a significant step forward for Smarter Balanced in defining how the Smarter Balanced Assessment System can be used by higher education. However, there are several additional areas of work required in order to provide stakeholders with a complete understanding of the role the Smarter Balanced Assessment System can play in helping to determine student readiness for college and careers.

- **Score Expiration Guidance.** Because some students do not proceed directly from high school to college, the Consortium will develop guidance for colleges and universities on how long the grade 11 assessment score should be considered valid. This guidance will be developed in collaboration with the Consortium's psychometric experts, content specialists, and Higher Education Leads.
- **Validation.** It will be important to validate the chosen cut scores through longitudinal studies of students who completed the Smarter Balanced assessments in grade 11 and subsequently entered higher education. The first such students will enter higher education in the fall of 2016. As Smarter Balanced develops and implements its comprehensive validity research agenda, the Consortium will consult with higher education officials.
- **Career Readiness.** The Smarter Balanced overall assessment claim asserts that a student can demonstrate career readiness in addition to college readiness. Smarter Balanced is committed to preparing students for both the workforce and for college, as specified by the Common Core State Standards. Smarter Balanced is working with experts in career readiness to determine how the assessment can best advise students on their readiness for postsecondary career pursuits.