SUBJECT: Smarter Balanced Implementation Update

The state continues work on a number of fronts to support the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and, here in South Dakota, to prepare for the derived Smarter Balanced assessments. The new assessments will be piloted next spring and will formally come on line as the foundation for the state’s accountability system in spring of 2015. These efforts are being built by a P-20 partnership.

The 11th grade Smarter Balanced Assessment will serve as a measure of a student’s college/career readiness. Since this will constitute an early warning, a project is being implemented to create a “remedial” curriculum for those students in Grade 12 who were not deemed “college content ready” by this assessment. The goal of this work, supported with a grant from the Bush Foundation, is to create the curricula in math and ELA that will help reinforce the skills and knowledge that these students will need to enroll in a credit-bearing, entry-level course upon their arrival at college. Once the students complete this coursework, they will be retested using an assessment such as the Accuplacer and if they have made enough progress, they will be allowed to enroll in entry-level courses. This way, students can address these deficiencies before they arrive at the system’s doorstep. A planning team including Board and DOE staff as well as K-12 and higher education representatives has been created. This group will be meeting in mid-May to plan and schedule working sessions this summer. These curriculum planning meetings will be two or three day sessions during which participants will identify and begin to develop strategies and materials for possible curriculum pilots. There will likely be a couple of groups working on math and a couple on ELA with meetings scattered around the state. The work will continue into the fall.

Smarter Balanced is beginning to work on communication strategies that will be used with students and parents to make sure the results and the implications of the 11th grade assessment are clearly understood. The system has been asked to identify an individual to serve on the national team working on this and the name of Dr. Marysz Rames, Vice President for Student Affairs at SDSU, was forwarded.
In addition, BOR and DOE staff have started discussing strategies that can be used to communicate the impacts of implementation. Dr. Toman has begun meeting with representatives from the Department of Education as well as from ASBSD and SASD to begin developing communication strategies and supporting materials. As has been mentioned, the Common Core State Standards are viewed as being significantly more rigorous than the existing state-level standards. In addition, the derived Smarter Balanced test items normed at a higher level. As a result, more students are expected to be identified as not proficient as this set of assessments come on line. While it is expected that this will change as students and teachers become more familiar with the expectations established by the Standards and those captured by the assessments, communication strategies will need to be designed to ensure parents and the broader public understand the nature of this transition.

As a reminder, the work mentioned here is being supported by a grant the Board Office received from the Bush Foundation to support implementation of the Common Core State Standards/Smarter Balanced Assessments in South Dakota.