



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

A high-quality education system that prepares all students for college, career, and life.

Title:	<u>WEA Survey Results</u>	
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Policy Considerations / Key Questions:	Key Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were the experiences of educators regarding the first statewide administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA)? 2. How could the SBA experiences be improved for students and for educators on the next administration? 	
Possible Board Action:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Approve	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Materials Included in Packet:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Memo <input type="checkbox"/> Graphs / Graphics <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Third-Party Materials <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint	
Synopsis:	<p>The WEA conducted an online survey of its membership about opinions and issues on the Smarter Balanced Assessment. Major themes include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents report a need for more curriculum support and professional development to implement the new learning standards. • Respondents were concerned with the loss of instructional time, • Respondents believe that students' testing experiences were negatively impacted by the delivery platform. • Respondents were concerned with cultural item bias and socioeconomic bias for or against particular student groups. • Respondents were concerned that not all students eligible for accommodations actually received the appropriate accommodations. 	



WASHINGTON EDUCATION ASSOCIATION 2015 SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS

Key Questions

The presentation summarizes the results of a Washington Education Association survey of its membership on issues and opinions on the 2014-15 Smarter Balanced assessment administration. The presentation is meant to provide information on two key questions.

1. What were some of the experiences of educators regarding the first statewide administration of the Smarter Balanced assessment?
2. How could the Smarter Balanced assessment experiences be improved for students and for educators on the next administration?

Summary and Highlights

In the spring of 2015, Washington students participated in the first statewide administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA). The SBA is a new computer adaptive assessment, based on new learning standards, and was primarily delivered through a new online platform. Subsequent to the SBA administration of 2015, the Washington Education Association (WEA) conducted a survey of members as to their opinions and issues with the SBA. Themes evident from the responses include the following.

- Respondents report a need for more curriculum support and professional development support to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- Respondents were concerned with the loss of instructional time, which included the reduced availability of technology when testing was underway.
- Respondents believe that students' testing experiences were negatively impacted by the delivery platform (in-test tools, split screen, and text boxes for example).
- Respondents were concerned with cultural item bias and socioeconomic bias (on technology availability at home) for or against particular student groups.
- Respondents were concerned that not all students eligible for accommodations actually received the appropriate accommodations.

Survey Methodology

Design

In the beginning of the summer of 2015, the WEA initiated a survey of its members about their opinions and issues with the first administration of the SBA. As the potential respondents were not randomly selected for the survey, the findings here are not generalizable to the population of Washington educators or WEA members. This is not a criticism of the WEA survey design, as this is true for most survey research. The survey was administered online and was made available to approximately 56,000 certificated and paraeducator members for most of the month of June. The online survey comprised a total of 55 questions that included predetermined categorical responses, open-ended responses, and Likert-type opinion responses. An electronic copy of the survey and a full length PowerPoint presentation are included with the online materials.

Response Rate

Approximately 5400 responses were received, resulting in an overall participation rate of approximately 9.6 percent. Approximately 4500 of the respondents were actually involved with the SBA administration and the results of these 4509 respondents (8.0 percent of the queried membership) form the basis of this presentation. For an online survey of group members or clients, a researcher could expect to achieve a participation rate of 5 to 40 percent and would be targeting a participation rate of approximately 25 percent. When a large proportion of members fail to complete the survey, nonresponse bias becomes a serious concern if the responding group differs from the nonresponding group. Nonresponse bias has the potential to yield answers or results that do not represent the opinions of the intended population.

The WEA survey was sent to all members with the knowledge that approximately 50 percent of the membership was not directly involved with the SBA administration because of their assignment to a non-tested grade or a non-tested subject area. All members were provided with the opportunity to provide other feedback and comments on the SBAs, and this is considered a strength of the design. When the respondent data are collectively considered, a sufficient response rate was likely achieved to reduce the likelihood of significant nonresponse bias. However, the design of the WEA survey limits the ability to generalize the findings to the population.

Strengths and Limitations of the Survey

A survey or questionnaire such as that used by the WEA is conducted for the purpose of collecting information or data on a topic to be subject to some form of statistical analysis. If the design, instrument, and analyses are sufficiently robust, the results may be generalizable to the population. One of the most serious limitations of survey data is the ability (or lack thereof) to generalize the findings to a population. In order to generalize survey findings, the respondents should be randomly sampled and be of a sufficient number depending on the population size.

In addition to the inability to generalize the findings, and as is the case with most survey instruments, the WEA survey has strengths and limitations that are summarized below.

- The survey was widely distributed to the entire WEA membership and represents the single largest body of comments and responses on important educational issues. The large number of responses is a positive element of this work.
- The survey questions are, for the most part, narrowly focused on the highly charged issue of statewide summative testing. However, the questions explore other topics and issues not generally addressed by the general public. The exploration of a wide breadth of issues is considered a strength.
- Large-scale surveys generate a high volume of data, especially when open-ended responses are included, such as this. In these cases, the researcher is often required to summarize findings in a manner that results in telling only part of the story. This is referred to as 'data selectivity', is a byproduct of large-scale survey research, and is considered a limitation of the survey approach.
- No survey instrument is perfect. The instrument's validity and reliability hinge on the developer's ability to construct items and predetermined responses capable of yielding data in a form that provides evidence relevant to the research questions. This is neither a strength nor limitation of this survey, but a limitation embedded in all survey designs.
- With a relatively modest response rate, it is difficult to generalize the findings from the survey to a much larger external population. This is a limitation of most surveys.

Results

The results of the survey as discussed through the WEA presentation are mostly critical of the Smarter Balanced assessment and administration. Varying degrees of criticism is not surprising given the level of change that educators were expected to implement over the past few years, as well as teachers' general preference for locally administered, formative assessments and interim assessments that has been communicated to the SBE in previously administered feedback instruments.

The Smarter Balanced assessment system infused a series of changes into schools in a manner not witnessed for a number of years. In a very short period of time, the local education system has been subject to new learning standards, new assessments (interim, formative, and summative), enhanced educator evaluation systems, and new school accountability measures.

The respondents provide a glimpse into the problems of summative assessments in general and the Smarter Balanced assessment in particular. The opinions expressed by the WEA membership are a testament to their passion for this work – they want the best for the children they serve and that idea is well expressed through the survey. Some of the responses from this survey would be expected of any new assessment system. Some comments appear to be an indictment of assessment systems in general rather than the SBA in particular.

The survey questions populate the questionnaire in a manner that addresses the researcher's chosen themes or topics. This is not uncommon as related questions help the respondents to focus their attention. Each of the themes or topics are summarized below.

- **Support and Professional Development:** The respondents indicate that those administering the SBA see a need for or the benefits of more curriculum support and professional development support to effectively implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This would be the expected response from educators for any new curriculum, learning standards, and assessment system. This should not be viewed as a criticism of the SBA, rather a plea for assistance so that the school staff can better serve children.
- **Testing Time:** Approximately one-third or more of the instrument examines the amount of time allocated to testing activities, and this includes the use of the interim and formative assessment tools. In general, the respondents were concerned that testing-related activities took excessive time from their regular classroom instruction. This would be true of the previously used formative and interim assessments (MAPS and IDMS for example) but the SBA is designed to be an integrated assessment system. This criticism is not necessarily unique to the SBA.

The outdated paper-and-pencil testing previously used by the state allowed an entire school to test at the same time, but that time has passed. School staff must now develop a testing plan that allows groups of students to access the required technology at different times and over a longer period. Until all students have on-demand technology access, longer test administration windows will be required to access the computer adaptive assessment.

Since the SBA relies on an electronic delivery platform, the experience is new to many students, educators, and other school staff. As such, the SBA puts additional pressure on technology resources that would otherwise be available for use in regular classroom activities. The use of the SBA would be expected to have a negative impact on the availability of computer labs for instructional and learning activities. Had this impact been better anticipated and communicated to school staff, criticisms may have been reduced.

- **Technology Concerns:** As related to the item above, the SBA is delivered electronically and this was a new experience for nearly all students. Respondents felt that students were frustrated and generally unable to navigate the delivery system that the students were unfamiliar with

(split computer screens and expanding text boxes for example). Respondents also had concerns with technology (students being inadvertently logged off and students' work being deleted or lost for unknown reasons for example). Technology is not perfect and the concerns expressed here are probably fairly widespread. However, as students become more familiar with the delivery platform and as device selection improves, it is likely that the technology concerns will be greatly reduced.

- **Bias:** The WEA reports that educators felt that test items were culturally biased. Cultural and gender item bias is a potential issue for all assessments. Test developers place items through a thorough and rigorous Bias Review process long before items are given to students on a test. Educators can be advised that items placed on summative assessments have been deemed to be 'bias-free' by teams of educators and outside stakeholders.

The potential for some form of socioeconomic bias to be introduced is more likely than the cultural bias described above. This is because students in low income households may not have similar access to technology generally available in higher income households. However, this has always been an element in education as children in poverty generally have less access to books, learning materials, and other educational supports found in the households of the well-to-do. Although unproven, some form of socioeconomic bias probably resides somewhere in the results. Without the availability of well thought-out research, it is difficult to explain how the electronic delivery system of the SBA impacts socioeconomic bias.

- **Accommodations:** Again, this is a concern for any summative assessment. Test proctors should be provided with a list of accommodations for eligible students as determined by an IEP, 504 plan, or Bilingual education plan at the time of the assessment. The proctor is required to be sure that the accommodation is available for the student to use or refuse to use and this should be noted for the testing record. An electronic delivery system should be recording the use or refusal of each accommodation for every student to ensure adherence to the law. This is not at all an issue unique to the SBA.

Accommodations are required under law to be provided to eligible students. This is a major concern if not being fulfilled. It would be a violation of the law for an educator to administer an assessment to a student without accommodations when an accommodation is specified for the child. Perhaps the concern here is that some accommodations typically used in classroom instruction are not transferable to an electronic delivery system or the accommodation differs in some other important way. If the electronic accommodations are unsuitable for students, perhaps the paper-and-pencil version of the SBA would be a better option for the students whose accommodation needs cannot be met by the electronic delivery system.

Conclusion

As was the intention of the researcher, the WEA survey results report on the opinions and views of a subset of the WEA's certificated and paraeducator membership. The survey is important as it represents the most timely and most comprehensive collection of ideas and opinions of Washington educators on the Smarter Balanced assessment, and as such, should be given close attention. However, the reactions to and conclusions drawn from the results in the presentation materials should be viewed in light of the limitations cited. The SBE has requested the full data report of the survey to further understand these limitations.

The results show that the respondents are generally critical of the SBA and this should not come as a surprise as the transition to the SBA has required many changes, some of which have been challenging. Further, some of the criticism appears to be directed toward summative assessments in general and not the SBA in particular, and it is important to distinguish the two.

The results form the basis upon which to start a conversation as to ways in which the experiences for students may be improved upon.

1. Provide more support for educators so that they can better do their job of teaching children.
2. Reduce the time it takes to administer the assessments. This may best be done with more computer devices available to students in the classroom.
3. Ensure that technological infrastructure is sufficient to support the delivery platform and ensure that students understand and know how to access to the delivery tools.
4. Ensure that the SBA is free from bias.
5. Ensure that all students who require testing accommodations have access to those at the time of testing.

Action

No Board action is expected.

Please contact Andrew Parr at andrew.parr@k12.wa.us if you have questions regarding this memo.

wea

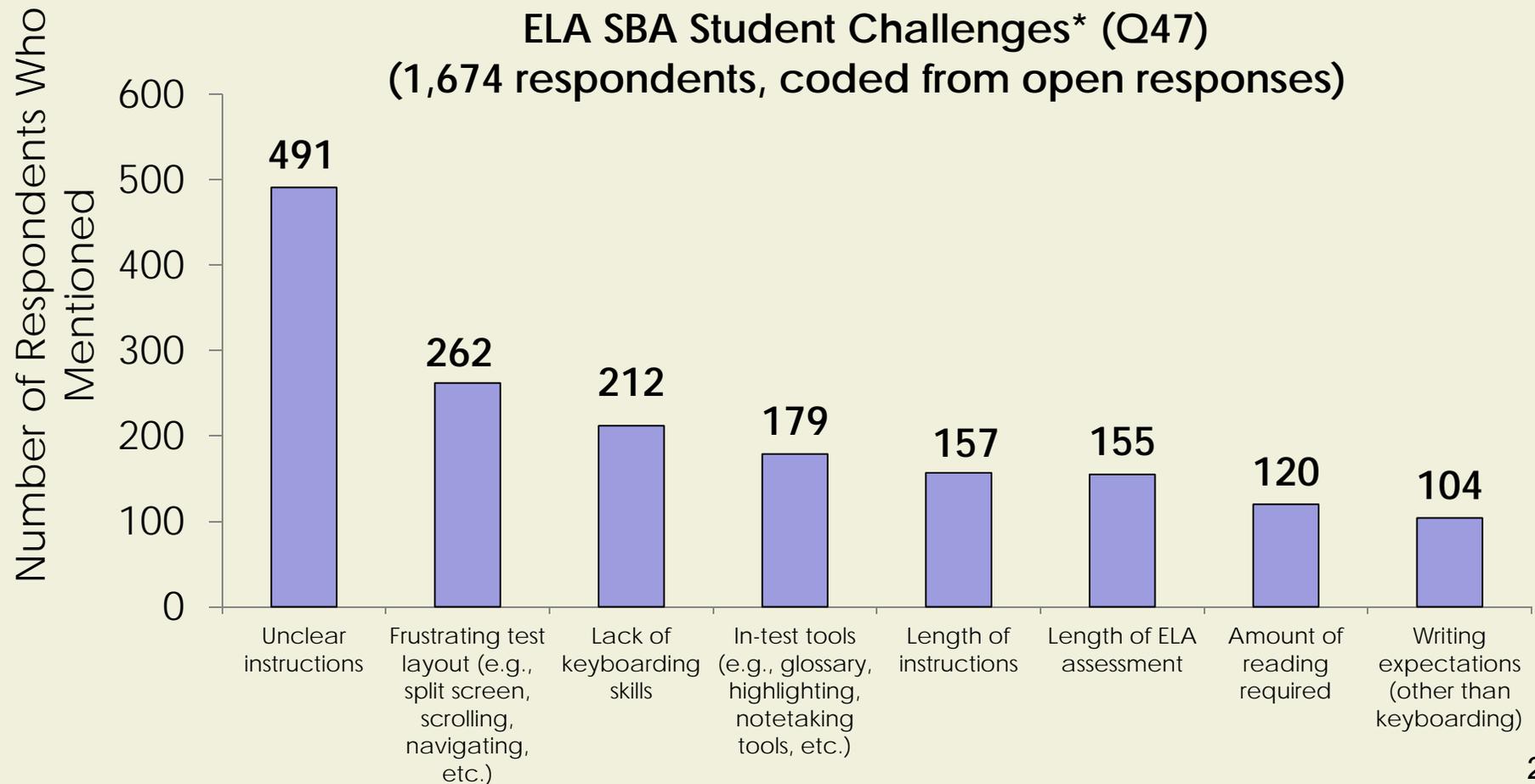


2015 Smarter Balanced Assessment Member Survey

Short Presentation for SBE

ELA Student Challenges

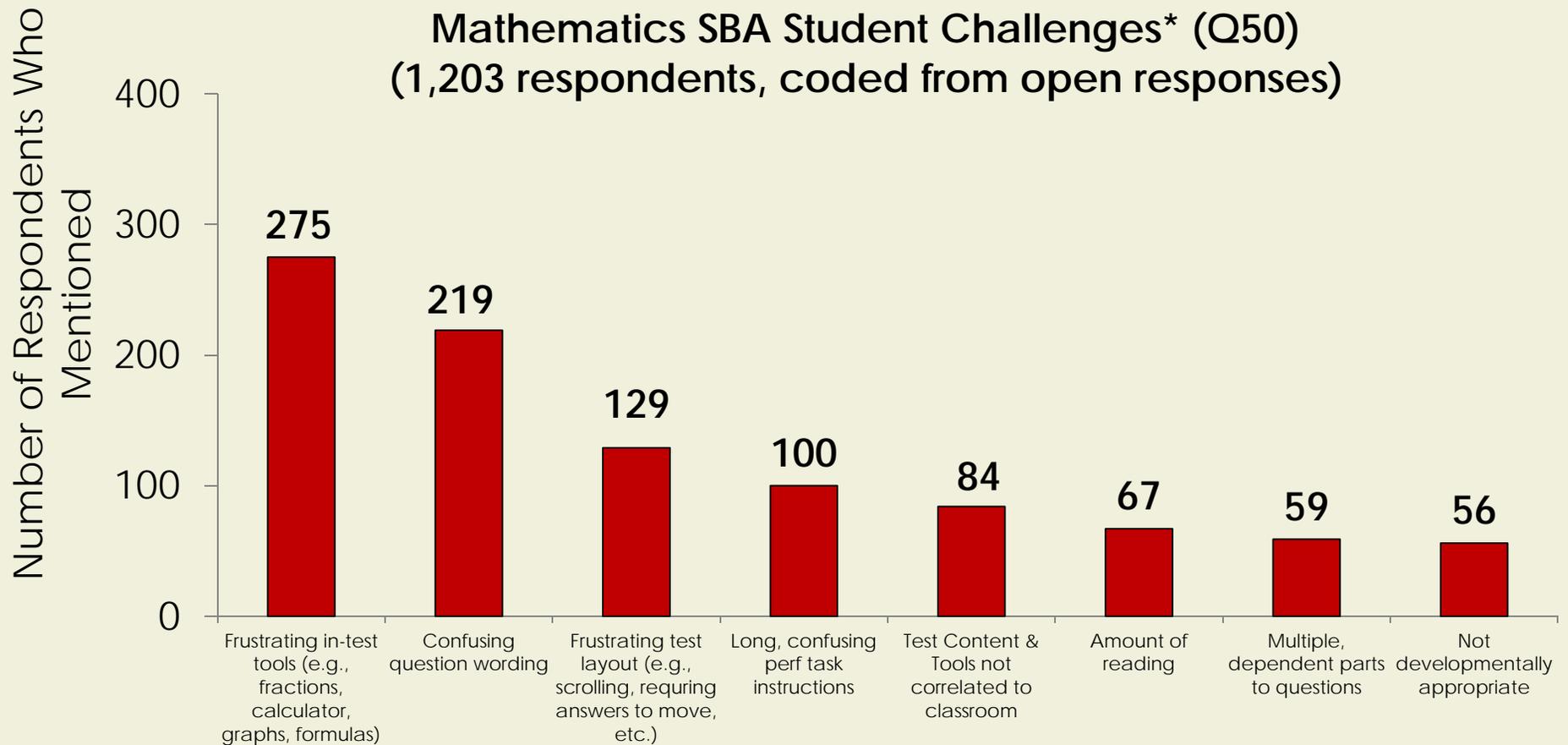
The most frequently reported ELA student challenge was unclear instructions, followed by the frustrating test layout (e.g., split screen, scrolling and difficulties navigating, etc.).



* Open response question; responses were coded with up to three topics.

Mathematics Student Challenges

The most frequently reported Mathematics student challenge was using the in-test tools (e.g., fractions, calculator, etc.), followed by confusing question wording.



* Open response question; responses were coded with up to three topics.

Top Six Take-Aways



1. A vast majority of respondents found Smarter Balanced testing to be extremely disruptive to teaching and learning.
2. Students' experiences with the test varied greatly from school to school, often due to inequitable resources to administer the new on-line assessment.
3. Accommodations for students with IEPs and 504 plans weren't always provided as required by law.
4. Student directions were unnecessarily complicated and created confusion for many students.
5. The on-line delivery of the test made it difficult to determine if this was a test of ELA and math skills, or one of technology proficiency.
6. Teachers feel their professional expertise is undermined by the assessment.

- Respondents report a need for more curriculum support and professional development support to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- Respondents indicate the need for work to align curriculum to the CCSS to continue. ELL teachers were the least likely to feel they received curriculum support from their district to align to the new standards.
- Both the ELA and math assessments were criticized for not allowing students to use tools and strategies they use regularly in the classroom. For example, organizing ideas, writing and editing drafts, working through problems in steps, or correctly labeling answers were not supported by the test.

SBA Time Themes



- The most frequent SBA comment was about the loss of instructional time and schedule disruptions. This included not only time students missed due to taking the test but also teachers/staff, facilities and resources such as computers being unavailable for regular instruction.
- The SBA's estimated completion times are very different from the completion times reported by respondents. Grades 3-5 and Grades 6-8 took far longer than the SBA estimates.
- Many students were administered Training Tests, Practice Tests and/or Interim Assessments, also resulting in a loss of additional instructional time.
- Respondents who administered the SBA in grades 3-5 and 6-8 spent significantly more time preparing and practicing with students than those who administered at the high school level.

- Open comments suggest that student instructions and test questions be clearer and more succinct. ELA questions/writing prompts, in particular, could be reformatted and/or reworded so students can more easily determine what they were being asked to do.
- Lack of clear instructions disproportionately impacted special education and ELL students.
- Administrator instructions need to be more streamlined and user friendly. Instructions, especially for administering accommodations, were not timely or clear, resulting in inconsistent application across buildings, districts and the state.
- Students who tested in March/April were at a disadvantage because many were tested on content they hadn't yet been taught that school year.
- Schools with a poor technology infrastructure reported longer testing windows causing school-wide schedule disruptions for several months. More computer devices, more modern equipment and up to date networks would help alleviate this.

SBA Student Experience Themes



- Many respondents felt the SBA was more of a technology proficiency test than a test on ELA and Mathematics.
- Respondents were concerned about cultural bias embedded into questions that assumed student familiarity with topics such as zip lines, Earth Day, zoos (California Condor), heat waves, or animal shelters.
- The in-test tools were unfamiliar to many students and often did not work properly or students did not know to access them. For example, the calculator tool that used a "*" instead of "x" or "/" instead of "÷" to show mathematical operations, symbols students were unfamiliar with.
- The test layout (e.g., scrolling, split screen, forced to answer before moving to next question, etc.) frustrated many students.
- Some classroom Based Activities did not match the Performance Task. For example, a classroom activity was on space, but the PT was on marine animals for some of the students.

- The on-line test interface often confused students. For example, students did not realize a small text box would expand as they typed resulting in students answering with a few sentences or a short paragraph instead of a more developed response.
- Many respondents reported students unintentionally ending their test session before they had completed due to unclear directions, being involuntarily logged off or taking breaks and not being allowed to return to unfinished questions.
- Some students had to take the test multiple times including when the wrong test was administered, student work was lost, or special education students were administered two different grade level tests.

- Many respondents pointed out socioeconomic bias due to the SBA's online administration. Less affluent communities and districts have less access to technology at home, are more likely to have older equipment and fewer computers per student.
- Respondents noted a lack of test alignment with developmentally appropriate keyboarding skills. Students with limited typing skills should not be asked to type written responses.
- More technology integration within classroom instruction, especially in early grades, came up as a need. In schools with limited technology, this is a challenge when computers are only used for test preparation and administration.
- Students who were administered the test on a desktop computer reported the fewest technological problems, compared to other devices. Respondents who administered the SBA on tablets reported various technical issues at a higher rate than all respondents.

- Minimum standards for screen sizes, keyboards and sound are needed for SBA devices. Respondents rated the screen size on netbooks and tablets as significantly more inadequate than those who used other devices. Since the ELA SBA has a split screen, this puts students with smaller screens at a disadvantage. Minimum screen size standards are critical for students with reading or visual disabilities.
- Adding the capability to adjust sound without logging in and out of the SBA is needed.
- English Language Learner (ELL) teacher respondents rated their students' keyboarding proficiency and their students' familiarity with their devices significantly lower than all respondents.

SBA Accommodations Themes



- The State and districts need to provide clearer, more timely communication about the legal obligations to students entitled to accommodations.
- School districts need to provide more support for student-specific testing accommodations.
- The SBA needs a greater ability to meet required accommodations of students' IEPs and/or 504 plans.
- Students with accommodations were often cited as rushing through the test and/or giving up quickly.
- English Language Learner (ELL) teacher respondents rated district support to provide testing accommodations as significantly lower than all respondents. They also rated the SBA's ability to meet required accommodations significantly lower than all respondents.
- Students should not lose legally mandated IEP services because of test administration.

- The usefulness of the Digital Library needs to be improved. Better navigation/filtering and adding more high quality relevant resources were mentioned most often as suggestions.
- Regardless of grade level, only 33% of respondents used the Digital Library and 29% did even know what it was.
- Interim assessments were even less likely to be used with just 27% of respondents administering ICAs and/or IABs to students.
- Consistent across grade levels, respondents who administered Interim Assessments rated them as being helpful to both themselves and students in preparing for the SBA, yet they rated Interim Assessments as not being helpful in informing their instruction.