



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #536

### **Pupil Assessments (DPI -- Administrative and Other Funding)**

[LFB 2015-17 Budget Summary: Page 369, #4 and 371, #6]

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#### **CURRENT LAW**

State law requires that standardized pupil assessments are administered to pupils in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grades in all public, charter, and private choice schools in the state, to evaluate the level of proficiency attained by pupils in the subjects of mathematics, science, social studies, reading, and language arts/writing.

Beginning in 2005-06, federal law under the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, or "No Child Left Behind") requires states to administer exams in reading and mathematics annually in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades, and once in high school. Beginning in 2007-08, federal law requires state to assess science proficiency once each in the elementary, middle, and high school grades.

To meet these state and federal requirements, beginning in the 2014-15 school year, pupils in grades three through eight take English language arts and mathematics assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, while pupils in grades nine through 11 take assessments that are part of the ACT Suite. The Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) will be administered to measure pupil achievement in science and social studies in grades four, eight, and ten. Alternative assessments, including the Dynamic Learning Maps assessment, are administered to pupils with significant cognitive disabilities.

#### **GOVERNOR**

Prohibit the State Superintendent from participation in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, beginning on the effective date of the act. Provide additional \$1,500,000 GPR annually in the appropriation for the pupil assessment program to fund development costs

associated with implementing a new statewide assessment.

Provide funding of \$2,091,400 GPR in 2015-16 and \$3,043,900 GPR in 2016-17 above base year funding of \$14,588,500 in the appropriation for the state's pupil assessment program for the Dynamic Learning Maps assessments administered to pupils with disabilities and the ACT assessments administered to pupils in grades nine through 11.

Delete current law provision requiring public schools, independent "2r" charter schools, and private schools participating in a private school choice program to administer a ninth grade assessment in the fall of each year.

## **DISCUSSION POINTS**

### **Smarter Balanced Assessment**

1. The Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) measures pupils' progress towards achieving the state academic standards in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, in all grades required under state and federal law. Prior to 2014-15, WSAS included the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WCKE), the Wisconsin Alternative Assessment for Students with Disabilities (WAA-SwD), and alternative assessments for pupils with limited English proficiency. The assessments were aligned with Wisconsin's model academic standards, which specified what pupils should know by grades four, eight, and 12.

2. In June, 2010, the State Superintendent issued a proclamation adopting the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics in Wisconsin. The common core standards were jointly developed through the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association, with the help of the educational policy organization Achieve. The common core replaced the state's prior model academic standards, with a more rigorous, cohesive, and specific set of standards for K-12 education.

3. In September, 2010, the federal Department of Education awarded a four-year \$160 million grant, and later a second \$16 million grant, from funds provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to fund the development costs of a new, comprehensive assessment system. Smarter Balanced was one of two multi-state consortia working to develop new student assessment systems aligned with the common core that could be used to compare pupil performance across states. The consortium was given four years to develop valid English language arts and mathematics assessments, with full implementation required by 2014-15 under the federal grant. Wisconsin is currently one of the consortium's governing states.

4. The Smarter Balanced assessment, known in Wisconsin as the Badger Exam, is intended to be a "next-generation" assessment that will use computer-adaptive testing, adjusting the difficulty level of questions based on prior answers in order to produce a more accurate measure of pupils' knowledge and skills. The assessment includes multiple choice questions, short answer questions, essay writing, and performance tasks, in which pupils participate in a group classroom activity followed by answering a series of short questions individually. The Smarter Balanced

system is intended to include summative assessments administered annually to monitor pupils' cumulative learning and used for accountability purposes, benchmark assessments to periodically monitor learning at key intervals, and formative assessments to quickly provide feedback during instruction.

5. As part of the 2013-15 biennial budget, the Legislature increased funding for the pupil assessment system by \$1,550,600 GPR in 2013-14 and \$2,782,500 GPR in 2014-15 to do the following: (a) fund the final year of the WKCE; (b) administer the Smarter Balanced assessment and the Dynamic Learning assessment for pupils with disabilities in 2014-15; and (c) administer science and social studies assessments in 2014-15. The budget bill also provided additional funding to administer the ACT assessments to high school pupils and alternate assessments for pupils with disabilities and English language learners.

6. The Smarter Balanced assessment has faced a number of challenges in its first year of implementation in Wisconsin. The computer-adaptive testing element was not available this spring, and because of a delay in the availability of the benchmark and formative assessments, DPI chose to purchase only the summative assessment for the 2014-15 school year. Additionally, errors identified in the data associated with the test questions required DPI to manually check the accuracy of each question, and the testing window for the assessment was delayed by two weeks after DPI determined that additional time was necessary to ensure the reliability of the online delivery platform. DPI also chose not to administer performance tasks accompanying the English assessment this year in order to reduce the amount of time required for the test.

7. Additionally, the cost to administer the assessment is higher than originally estimated. While DPI originally estimated the cost of the assessment at \$26 per pupil, DPI's 2015-17 agency budget request indicated that the cost of the contracts negotiated with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the test vendor responsible for administration, scoring, and reporting (Educational Testing Service, or ETS) totaled approximately \$34 per pupil in 2014-15. The cost has since been reduced as a result of the decision not to offer the benchmark or formative assessments. The final cost will depend on the total number of pupils tested, and will be determined following final negotiations.

8. In its agency budget request, DPI indicated that additional funding would be required to continue to administer the Smarter Balanced assessment in future years because of the increased costs associated with the test and because of increases in the number of assessed pupils, in particular pupils attending a private school under a choice program. DPI requested an additional \$1,172,000 GPR in 2015-16 and \$912,000 GPR in 2016-17 to fully fund the assessment for pupils in grades three, four, and eight above base level funding of \$4,724,800 appropriated for testing in those grades. The assessments in other grades that are required to be tested under federal law will be funded through Title VI federal funds. The request totals \$2,084,000 over both years of the biennium, or \$916,000 less than the amount provided in the bill for the development of a new assessment.

9. Under the bill, the State Superintendent would be required to select a new statewide assessment. The proposal provides an additional \$1,500,000 GPR annually above base level funding for the state standardized assessment to fund development costs associated with implementing a

new statewide assessment. DPI indicates that these costs would include developing the framework and items for the assessment, developing the test form, reviewing items for content, bias and sensitivity testing, developing scoring specifications, and developing practice tests.

10. In April, 2015, the Department of Administration issued requests for proposal (RFPs) on behalf of DPI for new online summative assessments in the subjects of English language arts and mathematics in grades three through eight, and science and social studies in grades four, eight, and ten. The RFPs specify that the assessments must be based on Wisconsin state academic standards and must be predictive of college and career readiness attainment. The initial terms of the contract would be six years, with the option to renew for two additional two-year periods. Proposals are due by May 27, 2015. DPI indicates that the RFP was issued in April to allow sufficient time to select and implement a new assessment for the 2015-16 school year.

11. Some argue that selecting a different assessment system would give greater flexibility to districts that wish to adopt academic standards that differ from the common core. While current law allows school districts to adopt their own academic standards, some have expressed concern that because the Smarter Balanced assessment was designed to align with the common core, school districts are pressured to adhere to the common core standards in order to prepare students to perform well on that assessment. It would follow, therefore, that an assessment that is not as closely associated with the common core standards could allow school districts greater flexibility to select different standards.

12. On the other hand, some argue that it would be disruptive to school districts to transition to another assessment after one year of the Smarter Balanced assessment. Many school districts have put substantial effort into preparing to administer the Smarter Balanced assessment since Wisconsin joined the consortium in 2010. In particular, some Wisconsin school districts have required certain technological upgrades in order to administer the new online test, including faster computers, increased Internet bandwidth, additional wiring, or other technology investments. Many school districts have likely also engaged in professional development to prepare teachers to administer the new Smarter Balanced assessment. The RFPs specify that the new statewide assessment must be also be delivered online, which could reduce the amount of disruption to school districts.

### **ACT and Dynamic Learning Maps**

13. As part of the 2013-15 biennial budget, the Legislature provided funding for the administration of ACT Suite assessments to pupils in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. To meet the testing requirements under state and federal law, the ACT Aspire assessment is administered to pupils in the fall and spring of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and the spring of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and the ACT Plus Writing and WorkKeys assessments are administered to pupils in the spring of 11<sup>th</sup> grade. In 2014-15, the Aspire is administered online and the ACT Plus Writing and WorkKeys are administered using pencil and paper, although it is anticipated that all ACT assessments will be administered online in future years.

14. The ACT Aspire and the ACT Plus Writing assess pupil readiness in math, science, English, reading, and writing. Additionally, the ACT Plus Writing has been shown to be a reliable

predictor of college success and is commonly used as a college entrance exam. Both assessments are aligned with the common core standards, and because the material tested grows more difficult with each test, they can be used to measure pupil performance throughout high school, identify areas for intervention or remediation, and track pupil growth over time.

15. The ACT WorkKeys is an applied skills assessment used to measure pupils' career readiness. The assessment measures pupils' current skill levels relative to specific skills needed in the workplace. Wisconsin pupils take three WorkKeys assessments: locating information, reading for information, and applied mathematics. Pupils can earn a national career readiness certificate offered by ACT based on their scores on these three assessments.

16. In its 2015-17 agency budget request, DPI requested an additional \$1,634,700 in 2015-16 and \$2,587,200 in 2016-17 to fully fund the cost of administering the ACT assessments. DPI indicated that the cost of the ACT Suite would be increasing in each year because of the transition to online assessments and because of the nature of DPI's year-to-year contract with ACT. DPI indicates that in 2015-16, the Aspire assessment will cost \$20 per pupil and the ACT Plus Writing assessment will cost \$50 per pupil, while in 2016-17, costs are expected to increase to \$24 per pupil for the Aspire and \$51 per pupil for the ACT Plus Writing. The three WorkKeys assessments will cost \$7.00 each in 2015-16 and \$7.50 each in 2016-17, with the cost of the national career readiness certification increasing from \$6.75 per pupil in 2015-16 to \$7.25 per pupil in 2016-17. The request also includes funding for administrative costs equal to \$316,300 in 2015-16 and \$254,500 in 2016-17.

17. The Dynamic Learning Maps assessment is the state's assessment for pupils with significant cognitive disabilities. The assessment was developed by a consortium of states and administered for the first time in 2014-15. DPI estimates that approximately 7,600 pupils will be eligible to participate in the alternative assessment in each year. In 2014-15, no state funds were required for Dynamic Learning Maps because federal grant funds were available for the first administration of the assessment. In its 2015-17 agency budget request, DPI proposed that the state fund the assessment for pupils in grades three, four, and eight, as well as alternative Aspire and ACT assessments for pupils in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades, at a total cost of \$456,700 annually. The assessments in other grades that are required by federal law will be funded through Title VI federal funds.

18. The bill would eliminate the current law requirement that 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupils are assessed in both the fall and the spring. DPI requested this change in its agency budget request, indicating that the additional assessment creates a burden for schools during the beginning of the school year. Additionally, the fall administration does not provide useful information for students, educators, or schools because the assessment results are available too late to help pupils plan their 9<sup>th</sup> grade year and because the assessment is not designed to measure pupil growth from fall to spring of the same year.

19. The funding provided in the bill would provide full funding for the ACT and Dynamic Learning Maps assessments in both years of the biennium, including funding to assess 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupils in both the fall and spring as required under current law. If the Governor's proposal to eliminate the fall administration of the assessment is approved, funding could be reduced by

\$574,000 GPR annually, the amount provided by the Legislature in 2013 Act 20 for the second administration of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade assessment in 2014-15.

## ALTERNATIVES

### 1. Smarter Balanced Assessment

a. Approve the Governor's recommendation to prohibit state participation in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and to provide funding for DPI to implement a new statewide assessment.

b. Delete provision. Adjust funding by -\$329,000 in 2015-16 and -\$588,700 in 2016-17 to provide full funding for the Smarter Balanced assessment required under current law.

| ALT 1b | Change to Bill |
|--------|----------------|
| GPR    | - \$917,700    |

### 2. ACT/Dynamic Learning Map Assessments

a. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide full funding for the ACT Suite and Dynamic Learning Maps and to eliminate current law provisions requiring that 9<sup>th</sup> graders are assessed in both the fall and the spring.

b. Approve the Governor's recommendations, and reduce funding by \$574,000 annually to reflect the decrease in costs associated with administering only one assessment to ninth grade pupils.

| ALT 2b | Change to Bill |
|--------|----------------|
| GPR    | - \$1,148,000  |

c. Delete provision. No additional funding would be provided for the ACT or Dynamic Learning Maps assessments.

| ALT 2c | Change to Bill |
|--------|----------------|
| GPR    | - \$5,135,300  |

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