Q. How are the new hardware purchasing guidelines different from minimum specifications?

A. New hardware purchasing guidelines support state, districts, and school administrators as they determine which new computers that support their instructional programs may also be used in the Smarter Balanced assessments in 2014-15. By contrast, minimum specifications provide information about which existing computers—already in schools—will be compatible with the assessments.

Q. Do I need to purchase new computers just for the assessment?

A. No. Decisions regarding new computers should be made as part of a larger technology plan to support instruction and individual student needs. Smarter Balanced is committed to achieving a successful compromise between allowing the oldest hardware possible, while still meeting the requirements to assess the full depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards.

Q. When will I know which existing computers will be eligible to be used on the Smarter Balanced assessments in 2014-15?

A. The decision about legacy operating systems will be informed by the data received from the Technology Readiness Tool. The first data collection for the survey closes in mid-June 2012. We expect to complete our analysis of the data by mid-July and will vet among our member states a comprehensive approach to the use of legacy systems by mid-August.

Q. How much network bandwidth will the assessment use?

A. Bandwidth requirements will be determined after the process for RFP-11 Test Engine Development is completed. We anticipate that this information will be included in the August 2012 technology plan.

Q. Why might mechanical keyboards be needed as an accessory to tablets?

A. The Common Core State Standards require students to analyze text carefully and to write cognitively complex responses. A mechanical keyboard (wired or wireless) may be a necessary means to preserve the smaller screen real-estate on tablets so that students can successfully engage in this type of process. Smarter Balanced will make the decision regarding mechanical keyboards based on existing available research and cognitive labs scheduled for this spring as a means of observing how students use tablets and what policies need to be put in place to optimize their opportunities for success.

Q. Why might mechanical mice be needed as an accessory to tablets?

A. The use of touch-based devices with large-scale assessments is relatively new. While we believe that mice are likely not necessary, we will make the final determination based on the cognitive labs scheduled for this spring as a means of observing how students use tablets and what policies need to be put in place to optimize their opportunities for success. Mice may be wireless or wired.

Q. How will Smarter Balanced address any potential test security concerns associated with the iPad?

A. The growing popularity of tablets over the past several years has given school districts a broader range of technology options to support instruction for students. To ensure that schools can leverage their investment in tablets for assessments, we are committed to including the iPad as an eligible device for the Smarter Balanced assessments in 2014-15. After meeting with Apple, we are confident that the iPad will be able to deliver the Smarter Balanced assessments in a secure manner. We will continue to work with Apple and will notify our member states as soon as additional information is available.