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Helmsley Charitable Trust Makes \$1.6 Million in Grants to PARCC and Smarter Balanced Consortia to Engage Leading U.S. Teachers' Unions in the Development of Next-Generation Student Assessments

New York City – The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust today announced two grants totaling more than \$1.6 million to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) to engage the nation's two largest teachers' unions in the development and implementation of Common Core State Standards-aligned end-of-year testing for K-12 students across most of the nation. These grants fund the first formal partnerships between the two common assessment consortia and the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which together represent the majority of the U.S. teaching workforce. In addition, this initiative further deepens the critical participation of teachers in the design and rollout of the new, higher standards that have been designed to improve college and career readiness among American students.

The grant to PARCC, totaling \$830,000 over 18 months, will engage hundreds of members of union affiliates across PARCC's 18 states plus the District of Columbia in an effort to increase transparency around critical assessment development activities – including item review for summative assessments as well as the development of diagnostic tools critical to providing educators with timely information to tailor instruction to student needs. The grant also supports teacher-to-teacher training and other communications to the broader audience of union members and will fund the development of teacher-created instructional supports that will clearly demonstrate how the new tests relate to data-driven classroom instruction.

Through a \$785,000, 18-month grant, Smarter Balanced will engage approximately 125 Teacher Ambassadors in the 26 states that make up the Smarter Balanced consortium. Teacher Ambassadors will provide turnkey training related to the new assessments to 1250 teachers across the Smarter Balanced states and assist in the development of exemplar lessons and professional learning modules that will meet the Quality Criteria for the Smarter Balanced Digital Library. This grant will also fund 78 additional members of the Smarter Balanced State Network of Educators drawn from all 26 states.

“Teachers play the most critical role in ensuring that our nation's K-12 students will graduate better prepared for college and the workforce,” said Rich McKeon, Program Director of Education for the Helmsley Charitable Trust. “We are delighted that PARCC, Smarter Balanced, the NEA and the AFT have committed to this broad-based collaborative effort to greatly expand upon the already significant level of input that teachers have had in developing Common Core-aligned student assessments and the related instructional resources for teachers throughout the 46 states that have adopted the new standards.”

“The new standards, properly implemented, represent an unprecedented opportunity for the students in our nation's public school system,” said National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel. “In order to fulfill the standards' worthy goals we need to ensure that educators are included in the development and review the assessments to better gauge students' preparation for citizenship, college

and for 21st century careers. More importantly, these assessments must support the larger goal of moving to better accountability systems that encompass multiple ways for students to show what they have learned and can do. NEA is committed to working collaboratively on this effort and applauds the Helmsley Charitable Trust for recognizing the importance of engaging educators and their unions in the development of the next-generation assessments.”

“The Common Core State Standards will succeed only if teachers have input and ownership in their implementation,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten. “That is particularly true when it comes to new assessments, which we hope will be much better measures of the kind of critical thinking, problem solving, and application of knowledge that we know are essential to college and career readiness. This is not an endorsement of either consortium’s assessments, but it is an important opportunity to bring teacher voice and expertise to the development and rollout of the assessments, which should serve to inform teachers and families and enhance instruction.”

“Since states first launched PARCC, hundreds, if not thousands, of K-16 educators have helped design and develop the assessments” said Laura Slover, CEO of PARCC. “We estimate each PARCC item has been reviewed over two dozen times by educators — an unprecedented commitment to high-quality tests. The partnership with AFT and NEA will allow PARCC to further involve teachers in the rigorous quality control processes the consortium uses, as well as engage them in item reviews and the development of instructional supports and tools for their peers. By listening closely to teachers, we’re making sure this is a test designed for educators and by educators.”

“Engaging teachers in the development of the assessment system is a core principle of Smarter Balanced,” said Joe Willhoft, Ph.D., executive director of Smarter Balanced. “Through this grant, teachers will collaborate with their peers to provide professional development about the Common Core and how to use information from the assessments to help all students meet the challenge of college- and career-ready standards.”

About the Helmsley Charitable Trust

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust aspires to improve lives by supporting effective nonprofits in a variety of selected areas. Since 2008, when the Trust began its active grantmaking, it has committed more than \$1 billion to a wide range of charitable organizations. Through its national Education Program, the Trust views education as a lever to advance both American economic competitiveness and individual social mobility. In K-12, the Trust focuses on ensuring all students graduate high school prepared for college or careers by supporting teacher effectiveness and the adoption and implementation of high academic standards. In postsecondary education, the Trust is primarily interested in increasing the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates who can participate in high growth sectors of the economy. The Trust also focuses on policy levers that improve postsecondary completion, particularly for underrepresented populations. For more information, please visit www.helmsleytrust.org.

About PARCC

PARCC is an alliance of states working together to develop common assessments. PARCC's work is funded through a four-year, \$186 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Partners include state and local educators as well as over 200 higher education institutions and systems representing hundreds of campuses across the country that will help develop the high school

component of the new assessment - and then put it to good use as an indicator of student readiness. PARCC's ultimate goal is to make sure all students graduate from high school college- and career-ready. For more information, visit www.parcconline.org or follow us on Twitter at @PARCCPlace.

About Smarter Balanced

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium brings together states to create a common, innovative assessment system for mathematics and English language arts/literacy that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and helps prepare students for college and careers. The Consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven process to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. The Consortium's projects are funded through a four-year, \$175 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education and the generous contributions of charitable foundations. Membership is open to any interested U.S. state, territory, or commonwealth. For more information, please visit www.smarterbalanced.org.

About WestEd

WestEd, a national nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency, works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has 16 offices nationwide, from Washington and Boston to Arizona and California. Its corporate headquarters are in San Francisco. More information about WestEd is available at WestEd.org.

About the National Education Association

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

About the American Federation of Teachers

The AFT represents 1.5 million pre-K through 12th-grade teachers; paraprofessionals and other school-related personnel; higher education faculty and professional staff; federal, state and local government employees; nurses and healthcare workers; and early childhood educators.

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