

Commitments from CCSSO and CGCS on High-Quality Assessments

October 15, 2014

As leaders of state school systems and the nation's largest city school districts, we know assessments are a necessary part of education to help improve learning for every child. High-quality assessments provide an academic checkup so students, parents, and educators understand how each child is progressing toward goals, regardless of race, income, or language. Without assessments given at least once a year, educational leaders would not have the information they need to know about who is learning, and who is not. We use tests – at the classroom, school, district and state levels – to make critical decisions about instruction, additional assistance, advanced opportunities, and policies.

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools believe that assessments should be guided by the following principles:

- ✓ *Assessments should be high quality.* We cannot waste student or teacher time with low-quality tests. Assessments must be aligned with college- and career-ready standards. Assessments must measure students' abilities to think critically, synthesize material from multiple sources, analyze problems, and explain and justify responses.
- ✓ *Assessments should be part of a coherent system.* Assessments should complement each other in a way that defines a coherent system of measures. Assessments should be administered in only the numbers and duration that will give us the information that is needed and nothing more. Multiple assessments of the same students for similar purposes should be minimized or eliminated.
- ✓ *Assessments should be meaningful.* Assessments are critical to improving instructional practice in the classroom and to helping parents make decisions. Therefore, the results of assessments should be timely, transparent, disaggregated, and easily accessible to students, parents, teachers and the public so they can interpret and analyze results, as needed.

Based on these principles, we as chief state school officers and district superintendents and school board members have taken initial steps to ensure assessments are used in responsible ways. Last year, CCSSO, on behalf of member states, published the *High-Quality Summative Assessment Principles* for states to hold themselves and their assessments accountable for high quality. State chiefs have embraced these principles and are moving toward next-generation assessments. Several member states took additional steps to comprehensively review their state assessment systems and make sure every test is in the best interest of students and teachers.

At a local level, the Council of the Great City Schools is taking similar actions. The CGCS has conducted a comprehensive inventory of tests across its membership and is compiling case studies at the school level to gauge the amount of school-based testing and “test prep” time.

As leaders in education, we also understand the importance of continuous improvement, especially when it comes to assessing academic progress. To that end, states and large-city school districts announce today that we will work in tandem to continually improve assessments and assessment systems at state and local levels, based on our guiding principles, so every assessment improves decision-making, bolsters the capacity of our educators to provide the highest quality instruction, and ensures every student is on target for college- and career-readiness. These efforts must occur not only at the state and district level but also at the national level, school level, and in our classrooms if we are to strike the right balance between instruction and assessment.

Today, we announce our commitment to the following efforts:

State School Chiefs will:

- Increase the transparency of the state assessment system by publishing an easily accessible list of all state assessments.
- Evaluate the state’s assessment system for quality and coherence.
- Work with educational stakeholders to eliminate redundant assessments.
- Partner with school districts to review their benchmark and formative assessments.

Large City School Districts will:

- Review the entire array of assessments administered in our districts to determine alignment, appropriateness, and technical quality.
- Name and convene a special task force to review the findings from the comprehensive survey of district testing and make recommendations for improvement.
- Streamline or eliminate assessments that are found to be of low quality, redundant, or inappropriately used.
- Ensure greater transparency in our portfolio of assessments and what the results mean for students and parents.
- Improve the use of assessment results to enhance classroom instruction, and curtail counterproductive “test prep” practices.
- Report the results of our efforts to the public.

