



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 15, 2014

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Chief State School Officers and Urban School Leaders Announce Joint Effort to Improve Student Testing

Washington, D.C. (October 15, 2014) – The leaders of state and large-city school districts today announced a joint effort to evaluate and improve the quality and quantity of student assessments in public schools across the nation.

Working together, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools jointly released *Commitments on High-Quality Assessments*, a series of established principles to guide state leaders and district leaders in making sure every assessment administered is high-quality, coherent, and meaningful to students, parents and teachers.

“Assessments are a critical part of public education because they help measure how every student is learning and making progress toward the goals we have set. Yet we as state leaders understand there is always room for improvement. As we transition to new assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards in every state, this is a great opportunity for state leaders to take a look at all assessments and make sure they are of the highest quality and deliver meaningful results,” said Council of Chief State School Officers Executive Director Chris Minnich.

“Tests are an important way for schools and parents to determine our students’ academic needs, and gauge how well our children are progressing toward being college or career ready by the time they graduate,” said Council of the Great City Schools Executive Director Michael Casserly. “But we hope through this process to create some additional rationality, coherence and purpose to how the nation assesses the learning of its children.”

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Minnich and Casserly made the announcement today, joined by New York State Commissioner John B. King, Jr., Louisiana State Superintendent John White, District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson and Oakland (CA) Unified School District's School Board Member Jumoke Hinton Hodge.

“High quality assessments are an integral part of teaching and learning,” New York State Education Commissioner John B. King, Jr. said. “They provide useful feedback to teachers, parents and students. In New York, we haven’t increased the number of tests the state administers, and virtually all of the tests we give are required by federal law. Unfortunately, due to various pressures at the federal, state and local level, local testing has increased in many districts in New York, and this additional local testing does not always support good instruction and sometimes even crowds out time for student learning. Testing should be the minimum necessary to inform effective decision-making in classrooms, schools and districts. Earlier this year, New York asked for and received a waiver to eliminate double-testing for our accelerated 8th grade math students. We’ve introduced a grant program to help reduce non-essential local testing in hundreds of school districts across the state. More important, these grants will help teachers teach more and test less, which is exactly what our students need.”

Jumoke Hinton Hodge, School Board Member with the Oakland (CA) Unified School District, said, “It is the responsibility of local, state, and federal entities to ensure that we are using academic assessments of student learning that are useful to teachers and will benefit students. We need more than cumbersome ranking systems and fill-in the bubble tests to improve achievement. What the Chief State School Officers and the Great City Schools are announcing today is an important first step in moving towards new standards and ensuring that our assessments measure up to the goals we are setting for the college and career readiness of our children. It is also an important occasion for revisiting questions of equity and opportunity in our schools and a chance to look afresh at whether these assessments further that goal or hinder it. I fully support this critical first step.”

To learn more, download a [copy](#) of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools jointly released *Commitments on High-Quality Assessments*.

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 67 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations.