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Education Leaders Release Criteria for High-Quality Assessment

List Provides Critical Guidance on Measuring the Skills U.S. Students Need

National Harbor, Maryland—(June 20, 2013)—A group of the nation’s leading education experts today released new criteria for high-quality student assessment that challenge current tests and pave the way for approaches that promote deeper learning of the 21st-century skills needed to succeed in today’s knowledge-based economy. The criteria provide the most significance guidance to date to states and school districts making critical testing decisions as they implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which 45 states have adopted.

The Common Core State Standards feature an increased focus on deeper learning, emphasizing students’ ability to analyze, synthesize, compare, connect, critique, hypothesize, prove, and explain their ideas. States are at different points in the CCSS transitions, but nearly all will be assessing their K–12 students against these higher standards during the 2014–15 school year.

Some of the nation’s leading education researchers and assessment experts co-authored the report, “Criteria for High-Quality Assessments.” Based on the changing demands of today’s workforce, advances in other nations, and original analysis, the group developed the criteria to help states and school districts improve how they build systems to measure their effectiveness in preparing students for the future.

The report underscores the role that high-quality assessments will play in supporting students to develop the skills employers now consider high priorities, such as the ability to work in teams, solve problems, and communicate clearly. Developing these skills requires assessments that measure short- and long-term progress, so teachers can adjust instruction and students know where they need to improve.

The report holds up five core criteria for states, districts, and the public to use in evaluating assessments:

- Assessments should examine higher-order thinking skills, especially those that are transferable and relate to applying knowledge to new contexts.
Assessments should provide “high-fidelity” evaluation of these higher-order skills, such as through researching and presenting arguments.

Assessments should be internationally benchmarked to align assessment content and measurement practices with those used in leading nations.

Assessment should use “instructionally sensitive” items that reflect how well teachers are teaching and give them useful guidance on how to improve.

Assessment must be valid, reliable, and fair, as well as accessible to all learners.

“The Common Core will not achieve what educators, policymakers, and the public hope without high-quality assessments that measure the right skills and help teachers offer thoughtful instruction,” noted Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at the Stanford University School of Education, Faculty Director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), and one of the report’s co-authors. “As we move beyond fill-in-the-bubble tests, we must ensure that new assessments encourage good teaching and learning.”

The findings in today’s report align with those of the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education, which released policy and technical reports in March. The Gordon Commission reports noted that the Common Core assessments correctly emphasize deeper learning and encouraged states to keep their focus on assessment quality as well as on how assessments will be used for accountability.

“The three R’s of reading, writing and arithmetic are important, but they are just the baseline for success in the 21st century,” said James Pellegrino, a co-author of the report, co-chair of the Gordon Commission, and Liberal Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. “Standards alone will not get our students to this next level. Assessments are the lever that drives deeper curriculum and instruction, so they must be much richer than those we have now.”

“There are a lot of options for assessment, and it’s easy to lose sight of what matters most. These criteria, when followed, will make it much more likely that all assessment tools will work together to promote the instruction and learning that we want and need as a nation,” said Joan Herman, Co-Director Emeritus of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The report is being presented today at the National Conference on Student Assessment, organized by the Council of Chief State School Officers, which led the development of the Common Core State Standards. The report was co-published by SCOPE, CRESST, and the Learning Sciences Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The full report and a brief can be downloaded from [http://edpolicy.stanford.edu](http://edpolicy.stanford.edu).
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