

Support Locally-Designed Assessments in ESEA Reauthorization



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Amidst debate in the House on H.R. 5, an amendment was passed by a bipartisan voice vote that would provide needed flexibility on testing by allowing school districts to also administer locally-designed assessments to students for accountability purposes. While we support an annual measure of student learning, we believe parents and educators should have more timely information about students' assessments and flexibility in the type of assessment system used to better inform instruction.

Locally developed assessments provide more useful data on student learning than statewide summative standardized tests.

- ▶ Statewide tests generally do not yield specific-enough data to use in addressing individual students' needs. This leaves a clear and essential role for local assessment: developing diagnostic information about what students do well, where they are having difficulty, and how instruction might be adjusted to address their specific needs.
- ▶ Local assessment programs have greater potential for generating this kind of complex information largely because they are not bound by the same constraints as state-level programs. As a result, they can more realistically be innovative in their methods, such as portfolios and performance events, which are able to generate more specific information about the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. (Source: http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/kn-01-01.pdf)
- ▶ **The highest performing education systems in the world – including Finland, Singapore, Sweden, and Australia, among others – use multiple measures systems that include locally developed assessments.** (Source: <http://www.fairtest.org/refocusing-accountability-using-local-performance->)
- ▶ **In the United States, a number of high quality locally developed assessment systems have produced outstanding results for students – especially for students in most need.** (Source: http://performanceassessment.org/articles/DataReport_NY_PSC.pdf)

Examples of local assessment system innovations that drive student performance

The graduation, college-going, and college retention rates of the New York Performance Standards Consortium's 28 schools routinely top city, state, and national averages. These successes are the product of teacher-created, project-driven curricula and student-focused assessments based on portfolios and oral presentations.

- ▶ The New York Performance Standards Consortium, formed in 1997, is an alliance of New York City public high schools whose student body is more **diverse in income and ethnicity** than the city as a whole (see chart on the back of this page for details).

- ▶ What sets Consortium schools apart is their **approach to student learning and assessment**: teaching and learning are inquiry-based, classrooms are discussion-driven, and the accountability system is built around student-focused assessments instead of high-stakes standardized tests.
- ▶ “[T]he results achieved by schools within the New York Performance Standards Consortium are **not just noteworthy, they are remarkable**. On almost every measure of need and disadvantage these schools are serving a more challenging population of students, yet they are finding ways to meet their learning needs by focusing on the types of skills that are too often ignored: critical thinking, problem solving, research and expository writing, public speaking, independent initiative. “([Source: Educating for the 21st Century: Data Report on the New York Standards Consortium](#))
- ▶ Consortium students are **far less likely to be suspended** than their peers: the suspension rate is 5 percent in Consortium schools, compared to 11 percent in conventional public high schools and 12 percent in charter schools.
- ▶ **Consortium graduation rates** for African American and Hispanic students exceed city averages by more than 10 percentage points. Among English language learners, 7 in 10 graduate from Consortium schools compared to city high schools. Half of all students with special needs graduate from Consortium schools, double the rate at other city schools.
- ▶ While the national college acceptance rate for African-American males is 37 percent and for Latino males is 42 percent, **Consortium rates are 86 percent for African-American males and 90 percent for Latino males**.
- ▶ Consortium classrooms have **much greater teacher stability** than the average city school—the turnover rate for teachers with less than 5 years of experience is 15 percent for Consortium schools, 26 percent for charter schools, and a staggering 58 percent for New York City high schools overall.

In New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) has partnered with the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) and the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA) to develop capacity in school districts for the use of performance assessment to build and measure student mastery of college and career ready competencies. The NHDOE policy requiring all high school courses to be aligned to local competencies is one step the state has already taken to foster new practices of assessment that promote and assess “deeper levels of understanding important academic content and skills.” (<http://www.education.nh.gov/assessment-systems/>)

Chart 1: Comparison of Consortium and NYC Public High School Data

	Consortium	NYC High Schools
% Black & Hispanic	71.95%	71.87%
% ELLs	12.7%	12.3%
% Students w/ special needs	14.3%	13.0%
% Students in poverty*	64.2%	63.6%
Average 8th grade proficiency <i>(out of 4.50)</i>	2.71	2.76
4-Year Graduation Rate <i>(based on 2 or more years of enrollment)</i>	68.6%	59.0%
5-Year Graduation Rate <i>(based on 2 or more years of enrollment)</i>	76.0%	66.1%
Dropout Rate	5.3%	11.8%
Black Graduation Rate	60.8%	53.9%
Hispanic Graduation Rate	64.9%	51.8%
Asian Graduation Rate	87.6%	76.8%
White Graduation Rate	77.9%	73.9%
ELL Graduation Rate	69.5%	39.7%
Students w/ special needs Graduation Rate	50.0%	24.7%

* Defined as qualifying for free or reduced lunch

Statistics found and derived from: NYCDOE (2009): 2008-09 Progress Report Measures for high schools; NYCDOE (2010): 2008-2009 Progress Report Measures for schools for transfer students; NYCDOE (February 2010): School register data, found at each school's NYCDOE website; NYSED (April 2010): NYStart Accountability and Overview Reports for each school; NYSED (2010): *Public School Total Cohort Graduation Rate and Enrollment Outcome Summary - 2008-09 School Year All Students*; NYCDOE (March 2010): *New York City Graduation Rates Class of 2009 (2005 Cohort)*.