

Replace, Don't Add On

Giving Performance Assessment a Chance

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Across the country, educators and policy makers are searching for ways to develop and implement innovative assessment programs as part of larger efforts to address accountability requirements and to reform instruction to enable deeper learning and impart 21st-century skills. These efforts are taking place for a variety of reasons, including the flexibility regarding accountability assessment offered by the Every Student Succeeds Act, concerns about over-testing, and general dissatisfaction with the focus of traditional tests on lower-level cognitive skills. In particular, there is renewed interest in performance assessment, which can gauge students' higher order thinking skills and involve students in engaging assessment activities that add instructional value as well.

Lack of Time Inhibits Innovation

As both local and state educators consider new assessment models, it is not surprising that they find themselves coming up against many issues of time. It's widely agreed that there's too much time spent on testing and test prep, and there's too little time to teach and take on additional responsibilities that would significantly transform instruction. Educators often feel that innovation represents an additional burden on their time rather than a benefit.

This perception persists despite advances in efficiency. Since the last big push to reform instruction and assessment nearly a quarter century ago, we've developed new psychometric techniques as well as new technologies to assist us in our attempts to innovate. Internet access, electronic collection of student work, and online distributed scoring, for example, can all play significant roles in making performance assessment more manageable and efficient.

The "Minimal Burden" Principle

Many recent efforts have not adhered to a fundamental principle that I believe must be followed if performance assessment is to have a chance of

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surviving this time around. That principle is very simply this: Efforts to take performance assessment to scale, making it a significant contributor to instruction and accountability systems, must **minimize or eliminate additional burden on local educators.**

While I can think of several other relevant principles to assure the success of local and state performance assessment programs, they all seem to support the "minimal burden" principle. They tend to relate to

what teacher support can be provided at the state and district levels and to time-saving instructional approaches and tools (e.g., online instructional resources) that **replace or modify things teachers are already doing or using**. The general strategy upholding the principle is to replace; don't add on.

One Solution: Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments

An effective way to follow the “replace; don't add on” maxim is to use curriculum-embedded performance assessments (CEPAs). As defined by Hofman, Goodwin, and Kahl (2015)ⁱ, a CEPA is a multi-day instructional module that consists of a series of instructional activities. Some of the activities lead to student work that can be used in the formative assessment process, and some can be used for summative assessment purposes. The parts of the CEPAs that require students to produce scorable products or demonstrations are performance tasks built into the instructional modules from the get-go. Alignment of the assessment tasks to instruction is guaranteed—something that is not easily accomplished by required on-demand tasks from outside sources that are administered at the end of or throughout the school year.

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The intent of CEPAs is that they be used in place of, not in addition to, instructional units or parts of units that teachers have been using. Marion and Shepard (2010)ⁱⁱ promote “replacement units,” which are similar to CEPAs, but which focus exclusively on formative purposes. Because both types of units include recommended activities and resources and provide assessment tools, techniques, and scoring rubrics, the teachers, in effect, are given tried-and-true lesson plans.

Teacher Input and Ownership

While CEPAs provided to teachers can be tremendously helpful, teachers may want to or have a need to incorporate their own input into these instructional units. This can be accomplished in several ways:

- Teachers can have flexibility implementing instructional activities in the CEPAs—except for those that lead to summative student work (if, for example, the student work is to be evidence of student proficiency used for statewide accountability purposes requiring common assessments).
- Initial CEPAs developed by state teacher committees, vendors, or district consultants can serve as models for teachers to emulate if and when they develop their own. For state programs, teacher-developed CEPAs can be submitted to the state for review, revision, and pilot testing.
- Whether for local or statewide assessment, teachers can choose the CEPAs they want to incorporate into their instruction.
- Teachers can score their own students' work on CEPAs, making the results immediately available for local use. (Assuring the scoring consistency needed for state accountability programs could require a scoring audit of a few samples of student work per teacher, possibly resulting in score adjustments.)

Communicate and Phase In

Implementing a statewide CEPA program has a strong advantage because it won't place a tremendous burden on local educators. This audience is frustrated with current state assessment programs and asking for local assessments to count towards accountability results, so states should not find it difficult to "sell" the approach, assuming they use effective communications.

So what about the cost, effort, and time required for a state department of education? I don't believe that phasing in a CEPA component of an accountability assessment program has to be costly or time consuming. For a particular grade and subject to be assessed, how many CEPAs would be needed in the first year? My answer is one. Get a good one out there and used. It doesn't have to count the first year, but the state can use the opportunity to test out and refine the sample student work collection approach, score auditing and adjustment techniques, and psychometric procedures for merging performance scores with the results of the end-of-year assessment. Plus, school personnel can gain a good view of what can come in the future. In the second year, another CEPA can be introduced; and this time it can count.

Multiple Benefits of CEPAs

Over subsequent years, a robust program can take shape. CEPAs can provide both accountability results and evidence of learning that educators can use to inform instruction. Such a program can provide a variety of benefits.

- As more CEPAs become available, states can work up to having three that count.
- Over time a bank of CEPAs can be built, and teachers or schools can choose the ones they want to use for accountability and any others they want to use.
- Statewide results on the performance tasks within the CEPAs can provide the comparability required by ESSA.
- The CEPAs would be reusable, without concerns about test security as long as teachers follow directions regarding the summative performance tasks within the CEPAs—the same expectation we have of teachers with respect to other state tests.

And there's another major advantage to this approach—the state's end-of-year assessment can be much shorter if a few CEPAs are used during the year.

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We Can “Get it Right”

I've been involved in large-scale performance assessment efforts for well over three decades, and I can say with certainty that while we've learned a lot of lessons, we have yet to get performance assessment right. Only by minimizing the burden on educators and phasing it into local instructional programs can we give this valuable model a chance. Implemented thoughtfully and over time, performance assessment can become a significant contributor to both instruction and accountability assessment.

ⁱ Hofman, P., Goodwin, B., & Kahl, S. (2015). *Re-balancing assessment: Placing formative and performance assessment at the heart of learning and accountability*. Denver, CO: McREL International.

ⁱⁱ Marion, S. & Shepard, L. (2010). *Let's not forget about opportunity to learn: Curricular supports for innovative assessments*. Dover, NH: Center for Assessment.