THE CENTER ON STANDARDS & ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION
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CSAI Update

Selected Alternatives for Assessing College and Career Readiness

States often use summative assessments as a measure to determine students' readiness for college and career tracks. Some states administer the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) or Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments to measure high school student performance on college and career readiness content. Other states administer their own state-developed assessments, or administer the SAT or ACT assessments as part of their state assessment portfolios, as a measure of college and career readiness.[1] States often use summative assessments to measure student performance against academic standards designed to represent college and career ready knowledge and skills. However, a summative assessment may not always be the best method of measuring students' college and career readiness. Due to differences in learning needs, or differences in state definitions of college and career readiness, students may require alternative methods of properly and accurately demonstrating this knowledge and these skills. Three examples of these alternatives are utilizing local assessments, utilizing performance-based assessments (such as a portfolio), or offering dual enrollment programs. This brief discusses each of these three examples.

Local Assessments

A single standardized assessment can often be insufficient for capturing the range of student knowledge and skills related to college and career readiness. Some students may have difficulty responding to the generalized types of prompts and questions that are included in standardized assessments. Consequently, some states have moved to support development of local assessments and their incorporation into state assessment portfolios, to provide a more student-responsive option, compared to large-scale summative assessments, that can be used to measure students' college and career readiness. Nebraska and Vermont have provided state support for the identification, development, and administration of local assessments that are aligned with state content standards (Darling-Hammond, Rustique-Forrester, & Pecheone, 2005).[2] For example, at the local level, the Brandywine School District, near Wilmington,

1 For more information on the assessments that states are using, please reference the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation's State of the States feature, which includes information on state assessments and college and career readiness measures.

2 Darling-Hammond, L., Rustique-Forrester, E., & Pecheone, R. L. (2005). *Multiple measures approaches to high school graduation*. Stanford, CA: The School Redesign Network at Stanford University. Retrieved from https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/multiple-measures-approaches-high-school-graduation.pdf.

Delaware, has been working with teachers and administrators to review and revise local formative assessments to ensure that they are of high quality and are aligned with state content standards (United States Department of Education, n.d.).[3] States and districts have recognized how local assessments can be integrated as a key tool to measure student performance on college and career readiness standards.

Local assessments can be part of a system of indicators that are used to measure students' college and career readiness. While local assessments are not a substitute for the annual state testing that is required under the Every Student Succeeds Act, the use of local assessments can be a beneficial tool for states and districts when assessing students' college and career readiness. Instead of relying solely on standardized assessments that are typically only administered annually, states and districts can use local assessments, which can be administered as frequently as needed, to measure student learning progression (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Through the use of local assessments, students can receive feedback more frequently regarding their performance on state standards for college and career readiness, and can better understand their learning trajectories. Additionally, local assessments can be used to measure the different ways students apply their college and career readiness knowledge and skills (ACT, Inc., 2012).[4] With the greater latitude and flexibility that local assessments allow in assessment design, states and districts can incorporate assessment items that are not always included in large-scale standardized assessments, focusing on skills and practices identified as important for postsecondary work. Whether they are used independently of or in conjunction with large-scale assessments, local assessments can be a viable option to measure students' college and career readiness.

To support the development and use of local assessments, states can identify, build upon, and disseminate locally developed assessments that are aligned to state standards for college and career readiness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Local assessments can be composed of a variety of item types (e.g., selected response, constructed response, performance task) that are selected to assess knowledge and skills aligned with standards for college and career readiness.

Performance-Based Assessments

Performance-based assessments can be an effective option for states that are interested in using a measure that gauges how students apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problem solving. This option requires students to perform tasks or to generate their own responses, as opposed to standardized assessments which typically require selection from pre-determined responses. It allows students to demonstrate their higher-order thinking skills and how these skills might apply to college and career contexts (School Redesign Network at Stanford University, 2008).[5] Performance-based assessments may enable more accurate measurement of how students master, combine, and use their knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond, 2017),[6] providing clearer, more actionable information about how students might perform in postsecondary contexts.

One example of a type of performance-based assessment that can be used as a measure of college and career readiness is a portfolio. Student portfolios can consist of a collection of a student's work or an in-depth research project, with students selecting materials that demonstrate their effort, progress, and achievement over time

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3 United States Department of Education. (n.d.). *Testing action plan: State and district profiles*. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/testing-action-plan-profiles.pdf.

4 ACT, Inc. (2012). *Rising to the challenge of college and career readiness: A framework for effective practices*. Austin, TX: Author. Retrieved from https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/RisingToChallenge.pdf.

5 School Redesign Network at Stanford University. (2008). *What is performance-based assessment?* Stanford, CA: Author. Retrieved from https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/events/materials/2011-06-linked-learning-performance-based-assessment.pdf.

6 Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Developing and measuring higher order skills: Models for state performance assessment systems*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/AssessmentModelsCCSSOLPI03162017.pdf.

(Hopkinson, 2017).[7] After materials for the portfolio have been collected, students may be asked to explain to teachers or peers how their portfolio exemplifies their progression and their readiness for postsecondary work. For example, at Oakland International High School, in Oakland, California, all students are required to create portfolios that present and explain their work and how it relates to college and career settings. The use of portfolios challenges these students to reflect and refine their work, and then to present and defend their portfolios, requiring application of higher-order skills (Hopkinson, 2017). By measuring students' college and career readiness knowledge and skills in a challenging and engaging manner, portfolios can be an effective alternative to standardized testing.

Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual enrollment (also referred to as "dual credit") programs are another avenue for students to measure their knowledge and skills against college coursework and expectations (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, n.d.).[8] This can be an option for high school students to demonstrate their competence with college-level coursework, and, consequently, their readiness for postsecondary work, in a setting that is aligned with postsecondary contexts. In dual enrollment programs, high school students enroll in college academic or career/technical courses and can receive both high school and college credit for successful course completion. In that way, these programs differ from Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, in which students take AP or IB courses at their high schools and earn college credit by passing corresponding end-of-course assessments. Depending on state policies, students may be able to apply earned dual enrollment credits toward high school graduation requirements, allowing students to gauge their performance on college-level coursework while simultaneously progressing toward diploma completion. Participation in a dual enrollment program may also be effective in exposing high school students to college-level coursework; successful completion of college-level courses may encourage these students to pursue and persist in postsecondary education (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, n.d.). However, one potential challenge of dual enrollment (both college-preparatory and career/technical) programs is that they are the products of partnerships between a school or district and a local institution of higher education, and these partnerships may be difficult to establish (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, n.d.).

Dual enrollment programs can be structured to allow students to earn credits toward a career certificate or an industry certification. The goal of such programs is to enable students to explore career-aligned work and demonstrate career readiness while also continuing a progression toward high school graduation and postsecondary certification. For example, Florida allows students to enroll in a career-ready dual enrollment program, in which students can earn industry certifications that count as credits toward a high school diploma (Florida Department of Education, 2016).[9] This program also provides opportunities for students to enroll in a career center or in a Florida College System campus program, in which industry certifications can be used for credit toward either a high school diploma and certificate or an associate's degree (Zinth, 2014).[10]

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7 Hopkinson, A. (2017, April 12). *High schools turning to student portfolios to assess academic progress.* EdSource. Retrieved from https://edsource.org/2017/high-schools-turning-to-student-portfolios-to-assess-academic-progress/580147.

8 Cassidy, L., Keating, K., & Young, V. (n.d.). *Dual enrollment: Lessons learned on school-level implementation*. SRI International. Retrieved from: https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/finaldual.pdf.

9 Florida Department of Education. (2016). *Dual enrollment*. Retrieved from http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5423/urlt/DualEnrollmentFAQ.pdf.

10 Zinth, J. D. (2014). *CTE dual enrollment: A strategy for college completion and workforce investment*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from https://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/11/50/11150.pdf.

Resources

This section includes selected resources on local assessments, performance-based assessments, dual enrollment programs, and other measures of college and career readiness.

Local Assessments

- The CSAI Assessment Design Toolkit includes resources and videos focused on assessment design principles that can be used when designing local assessments.
- A brief from the Arizona State Board of Education describes criteria for the selection of high-quality local assessments as part of an assessment system.
- The New Hampshire Department of Education operates the Performance Assessment of Competency Education program, which allows districts to select from among local and commonly assessments to measure student competencies across a variety of contexts.
- The Oregon Department of Education has shared a list of resources for the development and scoring of local assessments.
- The Rhode Island Department of Education has published a brief that includes information on selecting high-quality and appropriate assessments for secondary classrooms.

Performance-Based Assessments

- The Colorado Department of Education includes a capstone project as part of its high school graduation requirements. The project requires students to select their work that best represents their learning trajectory.
- In summer 2010, the New York City Department of Education conducted a pilot of performance-based assessments. A subsequent brief provides an overview of these pilots, which were held in elementary, middle, and high schools.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education has listed resources that can be referenced when helping students design and maintain their career portfolios.
- The Rhode Island Department of Education requires students to successfully complete two performance assessments, which may include exhibitions, portfolios, and/or comprehensive course assessments.
- The Virginia Department of Education is developing resources and professional learning to support development of performance-based assessments; these resources will be posted to a state webpage as they are available.

Dual Enrollment Programs

- The U.S. Department of Education has curated resources that outline how state policies shape dual enrollment programs, including some examples of local and state programs.
- The Education Commission of the States has compiled information on which states offer dual enrollment (or "dual credit") programs, including information on the types of institutions that offer these programs and the credit offerings for each program.
- The Indiana Department of Education has published an overview of the state's dual credit program, including answers to frequently asked questions and information on credits and eligibility.

- The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction provides information on and resources for implementing dual credit programs.
- A 2016 *Education Week* article provides some cautions and considerations for ensuring that dual enrollment programs provide students with transferable credits.

Other Measures of College and Career Readiness

- Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are other options for students to take college-level coursework in high school. Both AP and IB courses allow students to take college-level courses and to earn college credits by passing associated end-of-course assessments. A *U.S. News & World Report* article notes the major differences between the AP and IB programs: AP courses tend to be more focused on a particular subject, while IB courses have a more holistic approach towards course content. The IB program also allows students to earn an IB diploma, which is recognized by international higher education institutions. The IB program is less prevalent in U.S. high schools; some schools offer both AP and IB courses.
- Alternative standardized assessments are administered in some states to provide a different option for students to demonstrate their college and career readiness. For example, the New Jersey Department of Education offers the SAT, PSAT, ACT, ACCUPLACER, and Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery assessments as alternatives to the PARCC assessments. The Mississippi Department of Education also offers multiple options for assessments that students can complete to meet graduation requirements.
- Career/technical education (CTE) courses—previously discussed in this brief in the context of dual enrollment—offer students both academic and technical training in preparation for careers. These courses are designed to impart core academic skills, employability skills, and technical, job-specific skills. They may be offered at high schools, career centers, career academies, community and technical colleges, or four-year universities. Students can take these courses to learn workplace competencies in real-world contexts, preparing them for the workforce. The Association for Career & Technical Education's website provides more information about these courses.
- Index scores that combine multiple measures have been used in states' higher education admission policies. Index scores may combine variables such as grade point average, class rank, and/or assessment scores.

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