

A Policy Briefing on Assessment and Testing

CTA believes effective assessment and testing – both aligned to state standards and used as diagnostic tools – can improve instruction and learning. Testing must be age and subject appropriate. It must be free from cultural, racial, gender, socio-economic and linguistic biases. Teachers must have the resources and professional development to help their students succeed. State and federal intervention in challenged schools must focus on assistance, not sanctions.

Educational Accountability

Meaningful educational accountability must assure teachers the resources and professional development needed to align curriculum, instruction and assessment with standards. Schools must have adequate materials and facilities. Special programs must assist teachers to help students who do not yet meet standards. Evaluations of the accountability system must rely on valid testing and provide results that are quickly available. Statewide tests should be used as a diagnostic tool, and evaluations of curriculum should rely on local and statewide assessments.

Student Performance

A valid system to measure student achievement is vital, including multiple measures to gather a complete picture of student achievement. Good testing and assessment stems from performance-based assessments including samples and/or portfolios and observations of student work, student classroom performance, student conferences, and teacher- made or teacher-selected tests. Testing and assessment should be used as a diagnostic tool for the improvement of both instruction and learning; reflect what students know and can do; and must be free from cultural, racial, gender, socio- economic and linguistic biases. Standards and assessments must be grade and subject appropriate. Curriculum content, student performance standards, and student assessment programs must work together. Schools should not use student assessment results to evaluate bargaining unit members or determine compensation or employment status. Districts should train bargaining unit members on how best to use assessments to improve student achievement. Teachers must take part in developing, analyzing, and evaluating content standards, student performance standards, and student assessment programs.

Standardized Testing of Students

Standardized achievement tests and/or assessments promote quality education when: content standards support effective curriculum, instruction, professional development and assessment; stakeholders determine high priority content standards, and assessments are appropriate for their intended purposes. Standardized tests are counterproductive when: they are mandatory for students in Grade 2 and below; they do not match students' motor skills, academic development levels or language proficiency; they limit instructional time; they impede learning, threaten the quality of teaching and learning, and become the criterion for high-stakes decision-making.

Consequences of Accountability Systems

State and federal government intervention must provide assistance to challenged schools including collaboration, professional development, parent involvement, and high-quality assessment. Sanctions do not produce meaningful improvement. Interventions must provide sufficient support and resources to increase the likelihood of success. Schools and districts moving toward improvement must have sufficient time for changes to take effect, and schools must not be stigmatized. CTA specifically opposes sanctions, including taking over public schools, privatizing management, reconstituting schools or converting them to charters. State funds must help all students meet adopted standards. Incentives to individual students, bargaining unit members, schools or districts based on test results constitutes unequal treatment.

Educational Excellence: Accountability Systems

The use of statewide longitudinal data should be limited and relevant to informing effective instructional strategies and student outcomes. Multiple measures of student achievement must be used along with any mandated state and federal assessment systems to show the progress of each student. The use of longitudinal diagnostic information about student learning shall be limited to decisions about instructional strategies, allocation of classroom resources, student placement, and professional development opportunities designed by educators.

The privacy rights of students, parents, educators and education support professionals must be protected in a statewide longitudinal education data system, including all privacy protections under state and federal law (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and protections under CALPADS and CALTIDES. The privacy rights of parents, students, educators and education support professionals must be maintained by all users of education data, including state and local officials, researchers, and policy makers.

Adequate funding and adequate time during the work day must be provided to allow educators and education support professionals appropriate and effective training in the use of longitudinal education data. Hardware and software needed for data use must be kept up-to-date and adequate technical support must be provided. Any governance structure, state or local, designed to manage education data must include CTA representatives as an integral part of that governance and oversight structure.

Education data systems should be subject to regular periodic review for the purpose of assuring that they are consistent with the goal of educating students and are valid, reliable and meaningful to the users of education data.

Educational Excellence: Student Growth Models

Academic growth models can best support teaching and learning when they are based on a set of common-sense principles and approaches to guide instruction as they describe – not measure – the progress of students. Growth models use multiple indicators to evaluate, quantify, and describe a finite set of student data in multiple ways. Multiple indicators do not mean more testing.

An academic growth model is a description of the student's performance on state or local assessments aligned to the standards; is a clear, usable report to parents; provides coherent and developmentally appropriate information in a timely manner; and is not used alone or in conjunction with data from the student achievement database for purposes of pay, promotion, sanction, or personnel evaluation of an individual teacher or groups of teachers.

Pre K-12 educators must lead the process of creating the growth model including development, piloting, implementation and revision.