



Transition to High-Quality, College- and Career-Ready Assessments: Principles to Guide State Leadership and Federal Requirements

This is a critical moment in education. States across the nation are implementing comprehensive reforms to ensure that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. As part of this effort states will be transitioning to new, high-quality assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards (Common Core) or state College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards, including assessments developed by the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia. We must move forward in our efforts to ensure that every child receives a solid education. CCSSO specifically rejects a moratorium on accountability. At the same time, we must be thoughtful about how we evaluate teachers and use test results in school consequences. The purpose of this document is to present key principles that will guide state leadership in this assessment transition and to address several immediate state-federal issues in that regard.

Key Principles of State Leadership in Transition to CCR/CCSS-Aligned Assessments

1. **Continued Commitment to Accountability.** As part of our efforts to promote CCR outcomes for all students, states remain strongly committed to robust accountability for raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps. The move to new Common Core/CCR assessments is an opportunity to improve, not undercut or delay, meaningful accountability and supports.
2. **Continued Commitment to Thoughtful Implementation.** In making this transition to new, high-quality, Common Core/CCR assessments, states are committed to being thoughtful in how these transitions can best be made to transform teaching and learning, including through proper implementation and valid use of new assessments. The move to new assessments is a critical opportunity to help educators, parents, and students understand where we are and provide comprehensive supports to improve student outcomes. Urgency is not at odds with thoughtfulness.
3. **Commitment to High-Quality.** States are committed to implementing *high-quality* assessments that are fully aligned to the Common Core or other state CCR standards, assess deeper learning knowledge and skills, cover the full range of cognitive complexity, meaningfully inform and reflect strong teaching and learning, are internationally benchmarked, and are valid and reliable for each intended use. Whether implementing the new Common Core consortia assessments or other assessments aligned to Common Core/CCR standards, states will ensure that new assessments meet a new, higher bar of quality that can help transform teaching and learning, and help ensure that all students are prepared for college and career.

State-Federal Issues in Assessment Transition

The overarching state principles above will play out in many ways as states transition to new, high-quality assessments aligned to the Common Core or other CCR state standards. The majority of states will implement one of the two consortia-developed assessments (PARCC or Smarter Balanced). These states will administer a field or transitional assessment in 2013-14, consisting of a full assessment, and will administer new assessments statewide in 2014-15. States that may implement an assessment other than one of the consortia-developed assessments will likely follow a similar timeline, although some states began this transition in 2012. While there are many policy issues that states will need to address in this transition, there

is immediate need to provide clear guidelines and bottom-line options for three issues that implicate state and federal legal requirements, as follows:

Managing school and district accountability during transition to new assessments. As a matter of sound state education policy and federal NCLB requirements, states remain committed to making annual accountability determinations for all schools and districts; reporting timely data (including by subgroup) to schools, parents, and other stakeholders; and providing a range of supports and interventions to underperforming schools. There will not be a “pause” in accountability. Accountability determinations in 2013-14 (and 2014-15) will continue to be based in part on state assessments, and will continue to reflect to the extent possible status, growth, graduation rates, subgroup performance, etc. As a matter of federal requirements, each state may at the end of 2012-13 identify the lowest performing priority and focus schools prior to assessment transition, and maintain that designation and support through the assessment transition period. For remaining schools, each state shall establish through the transition a system of accountability that maintains supports. These principles apply to states that have ESEA Flexibility as well as to those that do not.

Managing educator evaluation during transition to new assessments. As a matter of sound state education policy, states that are designing, piloting, implementing, and continuously improving new systems of educator evaluation based on multiple measures will continue to do so under the timelines indicated by state law or ESEA Flexibility. This includes phasing-in new Common Core/CCR assessments for tested grades and subjects between 2013-14 and 2015-16 to the extent valid and appropriate for determining student growth or basing evaluations on other valid measures, and phasing-in uses of educator evaluation during that period as determined by each state to best support and transform teaching and learning. As a matter of federal requirements, each state shall have the authority to determine most appropriate use of new assessments in 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15, and/or to phase in uses of educator evaluation systems for “personnel decisions” through 2015-16, including but not limited to use in professional development.

Determining what assessments to administer to students in 2013-14. During the 2013-14 school year, states will determine the best approach for assessing students as they transition from their old state tests to Common Core or other CCR or transitional assessments. As a matter of sound state education policy and federal NCLB requirements, states are committed to continuing to assess each student every year, at least in grades 3-8 and once in 10-12, using either current state assessments or new assessments aligned with Common Core/CCR standards (including transitional assessments/field assessments). Further, states will continue to provide timely data and reports to students and families that explain to the full extent possible what the tests show (and do not show) with regard to current state standards and/or emerging Common Core/CCR standards. USED must provide states with the flexibility to administer the form of assessment in the transition that is most appropriate for each state. In Smarter Balanced states, the considerable number of students required to take the field test poses a unique issue. In these cases, USED should work with those states to come up with an appropriate approach that adheres to the principles set forth above. States should not be required to double test.