

SUMMARY OF RACE TO THE TOP ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Assessment and Student Information

By March 2010, the US Dept of Education intends to announce a competition for \$350M to “support one or more consortia of States that are working toward jointly developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments aligned with a consortium’s common set of K-12 standards that are internationally benchmarked and that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school completion.”

On October 20 the Department announced public meetings to be held in Boston, Atlanta, and Denver to “inform the design of this program and the development of a notice inviting applications that establishes the requirements for this competition.” Those meetings concluded on December 2.

The proceedings of those meetings are available at:

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/resources.html>

The following is an excerpt from materials provided to participants in advance of the meetings...

Assessment Program Design and Questions

The Assessment Program is intended to support consortia of States working toward jointly developing and implementing a next generation of common summative assessments that are aligned with a common set of K-12 internationally benchmarked, college and career ready standards that model and support effective teaching and student learning. Such summative assessments would allow students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, to demonstrate at each grade level tested their mastery of knowledge and skills and the extent to which each student is on track to college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation.

In designing the requirements for this program, the Secretary is particularly interested in innovative and effective approaches to assessment that will assist States in creating powerful and useful systems of assessment that meet these requirements.

In the following paragraphs, we have provided a framework that outlines the characteristics we believe should be required or encouraged in assessment systems supported by a grant under this proposed program. We then list the specific questions on which we seek input, taking into account this framework. It is important to note that this proposed program, the public meetings, and the framework below would focus on the design and quality of assessment systems and not accountability policies. Given the pending reauthorization of the ESEA, we intend that the Assessment Program would support the development of the best possible assessments that could be not only appropriately used by States under the current ESEA assessment and accountability requirements, but could also serve additional purposes as outlined in the notice.

Design of Assessment Systems – General Requirements

The Department is particularly interested in supporting the development of summative assessments that measure:

- Individual student achievement as measured against standards that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school completion;
- Individual student growth (that is, the change in student achievement data for an individual student between two or more points in time); and
- The extent to which each individual student is on track, at each grade level tested, toward college or career readiness by the time of high school completion.

At a minimum, we would expect that the common assessments would measure each of these elements in the subject areas of reading/language arts and mathematics, and would provide information for each student annually in grades 3 through 8, and provide information at the high school level about each student's college and/or career readiness. The assessments need not be limited to a single end-of-year assessment but could include multiple summative components administered at different points during the school year. Moreover, the assessments might be viewed as replacing rather than adding to the assessments currently in use in States participating in the consortia.

Information gathered from the assessments should be useable in informing:

- Teaching, learning, and program improvement;
- Determinations of school effectiveness;
- Determinations of principal and teacher effectiveness to inform evaluation and the provision of support to teachers and principals; and
- Determinations of individual student college and career readiness, such as determinations made for high school exit decisions, college course placement in credit-bearing classes, or college entrance.

Design of Assessment Systems – Required Characteristics

With respect to the design of the assessment system, the Department would likely require that the assessments, at a minimum, meet the following characteristics:

- 1) Reflect and support good instructional practice by eliciting complex responses and demonstrations of knowledge and skills consistent with the goal of being college and career ready by the time of high school completion;
- 2) Be accessible to the broadest possible range of students, with appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners;
- 3) Contain varied and unpredictable item types and content sampling, so as not to create incentives for inappropriate test preparation and curriculum narrowing;
- 4) Produce results that can be aggregated at the classroom, school, LEA, and State levels;
- 5) Produce reports that are relevant, actionable, timely, accurate, and displayed in ways that are clear and understandable for target audiences, including teachers, students and their families, schools, LEAs, communities, States, institutions of higher education, policymakers, researchers, and others;
- 6) Make effective and appropriate use of technology;
- 7) Be valid, reliable, and fair;
- 8) Be appropriately secure for the intended purposes;
- 9) Have the fastest possible turnaround time on scoring, without forcing the use of lower-quality assessment items; and
- 10) Be able to be maintained, administered, and scored at a cost that is sustainable over time.

Design of Assessment Systems – Desired Characteristics

In addition, the Department is particularly interested in assessment systems in which:

- 1) Teachers are involved in scoring of constructed responses and performance tasks in order to measure effectively students' mastery of higher-order content and skills and to build teacher expertise and understanding of performance expectations;
- 2) The assessment approach can be easily adapted to include summative assessments in other content areas (e.g., science, social studies) in the future;
- 3) The technology "platform" created for summative assessments supports assessment and item development, administration, scoring, and reporting that increases the quality and cost-effectiveness of assessments; and
- 4) The technology infrastructure created for summative assessments can be easily adapted to support practitioners and professionals in the development, administration, and/or scoring of high-quality interim assessments.

Design of Assessment Systems – LEA-Level Activities

With funds that are directed to LEAs under this program, the Department is interested in supporting LEA-level activities that are designed by the State consortium to support development and implementation of its assessment system. With respect to LEA-level funds, the Department would likely require that the funds be used to support the following types of activities conducted by LEAs that choose to participate:

- Pilot testing of the new assessments with different populations, including English language learners and students with disabilities;
- Designing systems to support and enable effective and consistent teacher scoring, providing professional development support for these activities, and implementing them statewide;
- Statewide transition to the consortium's K-12 common, college and career ready, internationally benchmarked standards, with new high-quality assessments (consistent with the State plans described in the notice of proposed priorities, requirements, definitions, and selection criteria for the Race to the Top Fund general program);
- Development of formative or interim assessments that align with State summative assessments as part of a comprehensive assessment system.