



Teacher Learning Through Assessment

How Student-Performance Assessments
Can Support Teacher Learning

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Introduction and summary

As the internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards, or CCSS, are adopted in states across the country, educators are seeking ways to support an increasingly diverse student population to meet these more demanding expectations. The likelihood that students will achieve the aims of the standards will be substantially shaped by how well teachers teach these challenging academic skills in ways that support a wide range of learners. Teachers' understanding of the standards and their grasp of how to teach them will also influence whether the new assessments provide useful insights, rather than harmful side effects, particularly for those students who have historically been least well served by their schools.

Designing professional-learning opportunities that can develop and improve the capacity of teachers to support more ambitious teaching and thus enhance learning for all students is challenging—and now even more so given the demands of teaching the Common Core State Standards. Research and experience have demonstrated the limitations of short-term training models such as the all-too-common one-shot workshop designed to transmit information to passive recipients.¹ In fact, research shows that what teachers have dubbed “drive-by” professional development has little effect on teacher practice and virtually no effect on student achievement, despite the fact that this form of professional development is ubiquitous in American schools.² By contrast, significant gains in student achievement can result from strategies that engage teachers in content-specific activities that are linked to collegial analyses of student work and learning over a more sustained period of time.³

Indeed, the performance assessments themselves may offer such an opportunity. Past experience suggests that teachers' involvement in developing, scoring, and analyzing the results of performance-based student assessments in the CCSS could be a powerful opportunity for teachers to learn about the standards, their students, and their teaching practice. This kind of professional learning can help teachers acquire the tools to teach the more complex skills and knowledge represented in the CCSS, which are crucial to preparing our citizens for the global workforce of the 21st century.

This paper describes how teacher learning through involvement with student-performance assessments has been accomplished in the United States and around the world, particularly in countries that have been recognized for their high-performing educational systems. We discuss how teachers' engagement with performance assessments influences their understanding of the standards and their students' abilities. This discussion includes comments from teachers about their experiences with performance assessments as provided through interviews conducted for this report as well as in previously published research.

Finally, we recommend how these kinds of performance-assessment opportunities can be planted and scaled up as states and districts implement CCSS and deepen their efforts to teach 21st-century skills. Specifically, we encourage states, districts, and schools to do the following:

- Ensure that performance assessment is integral to the learning system.
- Include performance tasks as part of assessments.
- Ensure that rubrics for scoring assessments are clear and explicit.
- Involve teachers in collaborative scoring of assessments.
- Expand opportunities for teachers to engage in assessment.
- Provide teachers with coaching and professional development around assessment.
- Build communities of practice to inform performance-assessment work.

Teacher involvement in the design, use, and scoring of performance assessments has the potential to powerfully link instruction, assessment, student learning, and teacher professional development. The use of high-quality standards and performance assessments over time has been shown to improve both teaching and learning. As teachers become more expert in their practice through involvement and engagement with performance assessments, the outcomes for students can be expected to improve. If used wisely, this approach has the potential to address multiple important education goals through one concentrated investment. Not only will overall pedagogical capacity be enhanced, but also teaching and assessing will remain focused on its central purpose: the support of learning for all involved.

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