



Key Impressions from NEA and FairTest's Spring 2023 Convening

**Promoting Equity and Excellence
Through Performance-Based Assessment**

This publication was created by the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) to summarize an event cohosted with the National Education Association. (2023)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2023, the National Education (NEA) and the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) convened experts and practitioners in the area of performance-based assessment (PBA) as part of a joint search for potential exemplars that embody [NEA’s Principles for the Future of Assessment](#).¹ NEA and FairTest sought to identify considerations for incorporating performance-based assessment practices into assessment systems that promote equity and opportunity for all students—of every race, place, background, and ability—and support deeper learning for all students.

NEA and FairTest would like to express appreciation and gratitude to Princess Moss, vice president of the National Education Association, and Daaiyah Bilal-Threats, senior director of the NEA Education Policy and Implementation Center, for their ongoing leadership and support of NEA’s work on the future of assessment.

It is important to note that themes described in this report may include proposals and policy recommendations that do not necessarily represent like-mindedness or concurrence of attendees, panelists, and/or participants.

Questions Examined and Conclusions

Convening discussions were organized around four themes pertaining to the design, implementation, and review of systems that include high-quality performance-based assessment. During each of the four sessions, panelists responded to questions about performance-based assessment and critical professional and institutional capacity necessary for scaling this strategy.

Theme	Questions	Conclusions
Professional Readiness and Assessment Literacy	How can teachers and schools implement quality performance-based assessments?	A “bottom-up” approach to assessment reform can be successful when educators and communities collaborate to make assessment more meaningful and educationally beneficial for students.
	How do communities of practice and quality assurance mechanisms function to produce quality assessments aligned with deeper learning?	Communities of practice can support professional learning and usher in a culture shift that can energize educators in expanding their professional practice to include PBA. Professional supports, including communities of practice, should include classroom visitation and observation, moderation (quality control) studies, and free exchange of ideas to cultivate educator capacity.

Continued on Next Page

Theme	Questions	Conclusions
<p>Scaling the Practice of Performance-Based Assessment</p>	<p>How can this work be brought to scale?</p> <p>What does performance-based assessment look like within the larger system of education at the district and state levels?</p>	<p>“Top-down support for bottom-up reform” can be a model of scalable growth for assessment practice.</p> <p>Quality assurance in preparation, design, and scoring of PBA can effectively happen at a single school site or across a consortium or network of schools. Engagement of the community and field experts—including outside examiners, community members, and family members—can help assure assessments are high-quality, aligned to standards, and racially and culturally sustaining.</p> <p>State education agencies can support PBA by establishing or supporting networks or consortiums of schools and local education agencies to share professional development, research of practices, information exchanges, and technical assistance in assuring quality control, moderation, and validation of PBA.</p>
<p>Implications of Incorporating Performance-Based Assessment for Assessment and Accountability Systems</p>	<p>What can and should be the relationship between performance-based assessment and federal and state accountability?</p> <p>How does performance-based assessment fit within larger structures, including policy and accountability?</p>	<p>Many local and state assessment systems lack the flexibility and time needed to incorporate PBA because of the burden of implementing excessive federal, state, and district testing batteries. These systems create an unnecessary impediment to innovation and implementation of PBA.</p> <p>Districts and states should scale back on unnecessary and duplicative assessment methods to create space and time for PBA. The federal government should provide targeted waivers to allow states to pilot innovative assessment strategies, including PBA, without double-testing students.</p> <p>Local and state education agencies should share and celebrate the achievements of students on PBA by incorporating information in school report cards. Additionally, local education agencies should publicly amplify school quality data through dashboards and other systems that include a diverse array of well-rounded indicators and assessments.</p>

Continued on Next Page

Theme	Questions	Conclusions
<p>Reliability, Validity, and Comparability of Performance-Based Assessment Strategies</p>	<p>Are performance-based assessments a valid and reliable mechanism for assessing student learning?</p> <p>What can performance-based assessments tell us that standardized tests don't?</p>	<p>State education agencies should not be deterred by federal testing mandates in advancing assessment reforms and innovations, including PBA. State education agencies must advocate zealously for federal flexibility to foster innovation and expansion of the use of PBA.</p> <p>The purpose of comparability and standardization must be to ascertain the best, most holistic measure of each individual student's proficiency (as opposed to the best measure of most students' proficiency). PBA should explicitly sustain linguistic and cultural diversity and support student learning (as opposed to propping up accountability systems that rank and sort students, educators, and schools).</p> <p>PBA could replace high-stakes standardized testing and be calibrated to meet accountability criteria of validity, reliability, and comparability. Accomplishing such goals should not come at the expense of compromising important goals of the strategy, which are to support and amplify student learning.</p> <p>Tailoring PBA tasks and conditions to accommodate individual students' needs will improve comparability by focusing on the breadth and depth of students' knowledge and skills rather than the accessibility of the testing platform or components.</p> <p>Outcomes of PBA should not be expected to correlate to standardized test scores because they create a much richer picture of what student know and can do.</p> <p>Existing research shows PBA outcomes can extrapolate to college and career readiness, real-world outcomes, and sophisticated and higher-order thinking in a content discipline. The study of students attending CUNY from New York Performance Standards Consortium schools, where PBA is used instead of statewide standardized tests, showed that students who "begin high school more educationally and economically disadvantaged than their peers . . . are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and persist in college." Additional studies are desirable to the education field.</p> <p>PBA can maintain and promote students' culture and language. Through high-quality PBA, students learn and demonstrate competency, mastery, and readiness in ways that reinforce who they are and where they come from, which is fundamental to equity.</p>

Performance-based assessment—including a variety of hands-on activities, such as written reports, oral presentations, and exhibits—should be the predominant way educators evaluate and encourage student learning. To implement and scale the practice of performance-based assessment, educators, school leaders, and policymakers must:

- » Prioritize PBA as a primary tool for understanding student learning;
- » Garner buy-in;
- » Collaborate to develop;
- » Embed into current systems and reduce stakes; and
- » Secure more flexibility from the U.S. Department of Education.

To pivot toward centering assessment systems around students as opposed to accountability, the federal government should provide targeted waivers to give states more flexibility to pilot innovative assessment strategies without placing an additional testing burden on students and schools. At a minimum, expanding funding and flexibility under the Competitive Grants for State Assessment (CGSA) and Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act could entice states to propose true assessment innovations that include performance-based assessment strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In 2021, the [National Education Association](#) created the NEA Task Force on the Future of Assessment in the wake of the U.S. Department of Education’s decision to reinstitute statewide assessment mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic. NEA and the [National Center for Fair & Open Testing](#) (FairTest) opposed this decision, as did multiple state and local educational agencies who proposed alternatives to high-stakes standardized testing that they felt would provide better information to support teaching and learning.

Amid the ongoing debate about the value and use of standardized testing, the NEA Task Force created a vision for reconceptualizing why and how we assess student learning to secure more just learning environments for all students of every race, place, background, and ability across the country. The result of their work was [NEA’s Principles for the Future of Assessment](#): a statement of key values that NEA believes should underpin the creation of equitable, well-rounded, asset-based assessment systems.

The next step of NEA’s work was to identify assessment methods that align with the Principles and examine how they should fit into district and state assessment systems and whether they should be used to fulfill federal requirements for statewide assessment. Performance-based assessment emerged as a values-aligned model for assessment practices that center on educator expertise, value the input of the community, cultivate student agency, and propel student achievement.

Performance-Based Assessment Defined

As defined by the NEA Task Force for the Future of Assessment, “assessment” is the process of gathering information to inform education decisions. For educators, the primary purpose of assessment is to support and strengthen professional practice by gauging student progress and guiding instruction. Our education system relies on a variety of decision-makers and decisions, all of which bear directly on the quality and impact of instruction in our schools. Education stakeholders—including students, families, caregivers, educators, policymakers, and community members—rely on assessment to inform these decisions. Through quality assessment practices, we can identify students’ strengths and areas for growth; encourage students to become lifelong learners; measure a program’s effectiveness; provide a basis for determining instructional strategies; and create developmentally appropriate, high-quality learning experiences for students.

“Performance-based assessment” (PBA) is a kind of “authentic assessment”—an assessment that measures students’ ability to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world concepts. Authentic assessment can be achieved using a variety of methods, including, but not limited to, projects, portfolios, performances, and interviews. PBA requires the completion of a task that demonstrates mastery of specific skills and competencies and may involve producing a product, performing an activity, or reporting on an investigation.

Just like standardized tests, PBA measures one or more specific course standards. It is also complex, authentic, process- and/or product-oriented, and open-ended, and it may be time-bound.²

PBA examines students’ ability to apply knowledge and skills learned from a unit or course of study. At its very best, performance-based assessment is grounded in local and community contexts, values students’ backgrounds and identities, and is meaningful to students’ learning goals and preparedness.

Benefits and Challenges of Performance-Based Assessment

Benefits	Challenges
<p>PBA provides a fuller and more complete picture of what students know and can do and provides a more rewarding teaching and learning experience for both educators and students.</p> <p>PBA may also “better . . . [reflect] . . . the achievements and potential of historically underserved students, responding to concerns raised by many stakeholders about racial and socioeconomic gaps in standardized test scores.”³</p> <p>PBA fosters student engagement and student confidence by providing choice, transparency, flexibility, and holistic evaluation of students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities.</p> <p>PBA offers an alternative to high-stakes standardized tests and provides a chance to emphasize students’ knowledge as well as higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and universal competencies.⁴ As thousands of colleges and universities rethink admissions requirements and continue test-optional or test-free policies in Fall 2024, PBA can provide well-rounded information that allows institutions to pivot away from over-reliance on high-stakes standardized tests that disadvantage underserved and marginalized students.⁵</p>	<p>PBA is time-consuming to prepare, deliver, and evaluate.</p> <p>Educators not steeped in assessment literacy and the practice of PBA may put students at risk of subjective results.</p> <p>Like any other measure of student proficiency and achievement, PBA can be misused to label students, schools, and/or educators to hold them “accountable” for progress or lack thereof.</p> <p>Depending on the circumstances and culture, PBA can be just another high-pressure test that produces student anxiety and stress.</p>

Intended Goals

On May 11, 2023, FairTest and the NEA convened at NEA headquarters with experts—including administrators, psychometricians, academics, and practitioners—to discuss the benefits of performance-based assessment strategies, examine whether and how to include performance-based assessment in accountability systems, and identify best practices for supporting educators.⁶ Panelists representing programs across the country shared evidence of how PBA enhances equity and opportunities for students to engage in deeper learning and enriches educators’ professional practice. NEA and FairTest would like to offer special recognition and thanks to NEA President Becky Pringle for delivering powerful remarks during the convening about the current state of assessment and NEA’s vision and hopes for the future and for engaging in conversation with panelists and guests.

PANEL 1: How do communities of practice and quality assurance mechanisms function to produce quality assessment aligned with deeper learning?

Moderator

Harry Feder, Executive Director, National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)

Panelists

Doannie Tran, Center for Innovation in Education, Georgia Deeper Learning Network

Lisa Harmon-Martínez, Director, Learning by Doing, Future Focused Education, New Mexico

Ellen Hume-Howard, Executive Director, New Hampshire Learning Initiative (PLACE)

Phyllis Tashlik, Director, Center for Inquiry, New York Performance Standards Consortium

Terri Grosso, New York Performance Standards Consortium

See [Appendix](#) for more information on our distinguished panelists.

[Access Panel 1 slide decks.](#)

Panel 1 Summary

Performance assessments are a crucial tool in education, with practitioners working with schools and practitioners to develop and implement quality assessments. These assessments are at different stages of development, with districts and states playing varying roles in each case. Examples shared during the panel include the following:

- » In Kentucky, the Local Laboratories of Learning model was used to create new systems of local accountability and assessment using inclusive design processes.
- » In Georgia, the [Georgia Deeper Learning Network](#) was created to develop greater student mastery through experiences and assessments that are empowering, engaging, and meaningful.
- » New Mexico has seen the growing use of capstones for graduation, supported by the state department of education's multiple pathways to graduation established in 2019. This shift to performance assessment and capstones is seen as transformative work necessary to reflect, affirm, and sustain the cultural and linguistic assets of New Mexican students.
- » New Hampshire's unique experience with performance-based assessments is highlighted by the PACE project, which attempted to implement a statewide system of common local performance-based assessments and reduce the footprint of standardized tests.

- » The [New York Performance Standards Consortium](#) has maintained the quality of student work and learning through professional development and classroom practices. The consortium began in the late 1990s using the theory of “top-down support for bottom-up reform” and maintains an infrastructure of teacher workshops, visits, and exchanges of practice across its member schools.

However, the work of teaching and assessing in this inquiry and performance-based way is not easy, requires educator buy-in, and is significantly more time-consuming than traditional methods of teaching and testing. The shift in school culture required to do meaningful performance assessment takes time and effort on the part of teachers and students to live with more choice and less certainty.

Panel 1 Conclusions

- » Assessment reform and the development of performance-based assessments can successfully happen from the “bottom up” when educators and localities take action to make assessment more meaningful and educationally beneficial for students. Educators, students, and schools need support from systems—in the removal of testing barriers and the establishment of infrastructure for communities of practice—to implement quality performance-based assessments.
- » Qualified practitioners working as third-party intermediaries or through a framework of state or district support may help ensure resource coordination and ongoing high-quality support for educators and systems engaged in performance-based and other authentic assessment.
- » Professional learning opportunities must be tailored to local contexts, convenient and accessible for educators, and provide ongoing opportunities for educators to access support and resources. Collaboration, exchange, classroom visitation, and good professional development are important for the development and implementation of quality performance-based assessments.
- » There must be buy-in from educators and schools for the requisite culture shift to take place for quality performance assessment practices to take hold. As relayed by panelists—including practitioners—educators engaged in PBA anecdotally report that implementing PBA is professionally rewarding, meaningful to students, and supports educator motivation and job satisfaction.⁷
- » Schools and educators need to engage in strategies to generate community support for these practices to protect performance assessment and deeper learning from mandates that would undermine practice. This includes bringing community members, political leaders, and business leaders into the schools to see the work being done and establishing validation from external experts.

PANEL 2: What does performance assessment look like within the larger system of education at the district and state levels?

Moderator

Harry Feder, Executive Director, National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)

Panelists

Carmen Coleman, Chief of Transformational Learning and Leading, Ohio Valley Education Cooperative, Kentucky

Dan French, President, Education Commonwealth Project

Alexandra Rathmann-Noonan, Director of School Support, New York Performance Standards Consortium

Aneesha Badrinarayan, Director of State Performance Assessment Initiatives, Learning Policy Institute

See [Appendix](#) for more information on our distinguished panelists.

[Access Panel 2 slide decks.](#)

Panel 2 Summary

PBA is a crucial tool in education, allowing educators to evaluate student learning in a more meaningful and relevant way. Examples shared during the panel include the following:

- » In Kentucky, the [Ohio Valley Education Cooperative](#) has been working to scale local PBA practices across districts, focusing on the “[Backpack of Success Skills](#)” and performance-based artifacts. The state is establishing collectives of school districts to instill these practices, forcing students to develop the necessary artifacts.
- » In Massachusetts, the [Massachusetts Consortium of Innovative Educational Assessment](#) (MCIEA) has developed a network of districts working to develop different assessment practices to the statewide standardized MCAS system, including a [PBA task bank](#). The goal is to redefine student assessment through multistep standards-based, teacher-generated, culturally responsive PBA that requires transfer and application of knowledge. Network infrastructure has been developed to support the MCIEA districts, including PBA institutes, coaching services, a task bank, and cross-district teacher scoring.
- » The [New York Performance Standards Consortium](#) (NYPSC) has developed systems and structures to scale the work of the consortium to new schools over its 25-year history. The consortium has three pillars: an extensive network of shared practice and school-based professional development, a system of network-wide accountability through moderation studies of student work and calibration of rubrics, and school-specific phase-ins of improved curriculum and assessments.

However, scaling PBA faces obstacles such as onerous standardized testing requirements, subject matter graduation testing requirements, and adherence to federal and state testing requirements. Advocacy is needed to gain legislative support and funding.

Professional preparation plays a crucial role in fostering conditions for growth of performance-based assessments (PBAs) in schools. States need to be willing to unbalance the assessment system in the service of teaching and learning, with mindset shifts from identifying students, teachers, and schools who are not meeting expectations to improving teaching and learning to make learning meaningful.

Professional learning workshops and one-offs are not enough for transformative change. States must incentivize and support networks of schools and districts that can develop the assessments aligned with classroom practice and curriculum and fund and build deep network expertise and flexible capacity.

Panel 2 Conclusions

- » Having a network of support is crucial to sustainable scaling of PBA (e.g., MCIEA, NYPSC, Kentucky district cooperatives).
- » Quality assurance in preparation, assessment design, and scoring can effectively happen at a local or network level of schools. Use of outside examiners, community-level scrutiny, and a constant examination of practice can create a real system of accountability that far surpasses standardized test results.
- » Excessive standardized testing through federal, state, and local mandates are a genuine impediment to PBA. Advocacy through shining light on the work and bringing influential community members and policymakers into the fold is necessary to mitigate or remove those testing burdens.
- » The state, at a minimum, should get out of the way of PBA innovation and allow for adoption of performance-based options to gateway standardized tests. If a state is serious about scaling PBA, it would have to do more—funding, granting testing waivers, and changing its mindset from regulatory/compliance to partnering with schools and districts on developing and sustaining high-quality teaching and learning.

PANEL 3: How does performance-based assessment fit within larger structures, including policy and accountability?

Moderator

Chris DonFrancesco, Senior Policy Analyst, Education Policy and Implementation Center, National Education Association

Panelists

Tony Monfiletto, Executive Director, Future Focused Education, New Mexico

Paul Leather, Partner, Center for Innovation in Education, was represented by Doannie Tran on this panel

Angela Landrum, Principal Consultant, Performance Assessment and Assessment Literacy Program, Colorado Department of Education

Lillian Pace, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, KnowledgeWorks

See [Appendix](#) for more information on our distinguished panelists.

[Access Panel 3 slide decks.](#)

Panel 3 Summary

The panel discussed the relationship between federal accountability requirements and scaling performance-based assessments. States like New Mexico, Kentucky, and Colorado have implemented statewide approaches to develop more opportunities for authentic and performance-based assessment:

- » New Mexico uses an Innovation Zone strategy rooted in its graduation profile. It focuses on experience-based learning and assessments, aiming to minimize the role of standardized testing in defining student achievement. The state has changed graduation requirements to include performance assessments, like capstones, and will begin with the Class of 2025.
- » Kentucky developed a “United We Learn” framework to provide a “system of systems” approach for each county to innovate deeper learning opportunities for students. Guided by state commonalities and shared practices, the framework aims to create a coherent “system of systems” to support authentic, hand-on learning at the state and local levels. Now, the state is exploring the design of an accountability approach that connects to the Learning (L3) work and input from participating districts, such as portrait of a graduate and community of practice components.

- » Colorado created a policy using authentic assessment (including PBA and graduation capstones) for graduation, and some districts moved forward, with the state providing technical and research support. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) supports districts in integrating performance assessments and capstones into their assessment systems. The state provides support for districts to develop systems of PBA, offering a design, feedback, reflection, and revision tool for teachers. Colorado educators have used nationally recognized frameworks to define performance outcomes and have formed a professional learning community (PLC) to cultivate strong PBA practices.

Federal policy and regulations—including accountability requirements—impact states’ ability to engage in assessment innovation. To support PBA and other assessment strategies, state educational agencies need to communicate to the U.S. Department of Education and Congress the need to fix the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority and make it a viable pathway to innovation.

Panel 3 Conclusions

- » States can provide room for local districts to develop performance-based assessments and capstone or other pathways for graduation by developing expected skills and knowledge criteria for graduates and allowing local educational agencies to develop assessments that allow students to demonstrate those criteria.
- » Moving toward PBA can engage students who may not feel that school is a safe or supportive space, and foster students’ love of learning by connecting their interests, identities, and lived experiences to the curriculum.
- » The cocreation of a “portrait of a graduate” with input from education investors—including students, families, community representatives, local business owners, and other natural partners—can spur innovation in assessment and lead to adoption of PBA.
- » States can support PBA by establishing new or supporting existing networks of schools and districts with professional development, research of practices, information exchanges, and technical assistance in assuring quality control, calibration, and validation.
- » States should not be deterred by ESSA requirements and current limitations on innovation under ESSA definitions and regulations. State school officers should lean in and advocate to federal authorities for flexibility to allow for experimentation with different types of assessment that are more performance-based and align with deeper learning and goals of characteristics of a graduate.

PANEL 4: Is performance-based assessment a valid and reliable mechanism for assessing student learning?

Moderator

Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Social Psychology, Women's Studies, and Urban Education, City University of New York Graduate Center

Panelists

Stephen Sireci, Distinguished Professor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Executive Director, Center for Educational Assessment

Carla Evans, Senior Associate, National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment

Susan Lyons, Principal, Lyons Assessment Consulting

Elena Diaz-Bilello, Associate Director, Center for Assessment, Design, Research, and Evaluation, University of Colorado Boulder

See [Appendix](#) for more information on our distinguished panelists.

[Access Panel 4 slide decks.](#)

Panel 4 Summary

The panel discussed the meaning of assessments and how PBA can provide stakeholders with the information they need to evaluate student learning. Standardization and personalization were discussed, including the critical point that having everyone take the exact same test doesn't guarantee the most valid assessment. It is important to understand differences in the population being assessed and be flexible enough to accommodate everyone. One panelist pointed out that ensuring flexibility to all students in how they demonstrate their understanding promotes the validity of the test because the use of the score will be more accurate for the individual student.

The panel also discussed generalizability, including the concept that PBA can be a valid and reliable mechanism for assessing student learning. However, this depends on its use and application in decision-making. PBA evaluated under the current accountability framework would have to become more standardized in design, more common, and less complex and constrained with little student choice over the topic or the way they demonstrate knowledge and skills. PBA can be made generalizable by completing an in-depth task, but time is a hurdle because there would need to be a large number of tasks to cover the assessment of content for accountability. While PBA could be made to look more like standardized tests demanded by current federal accountability rules, it would undermine the true benefit of PBA.

PBA assesses students under more authentic conditions that reflect how the knowledge and skills are used outside the classroom. The more authentic the testing condition, the more it will demand interactions with peers and people outside the school environment. PBA also lets students engage with the assessment when they are ready to demonstrate what they know and can do, rather than an artificial testing window that is disconnected from the teaching and learning experience.

Panel 4 Conclusions

- » The goal of standardization should be to get the best measure of each student’s proficiency rather than the best measure of most students’ proficiency, inclusive of and explicitly sustaining cultural diversity. PBA can do this in a way that best supports student learning.
- » PBA could replace high-stakes standardized testing and meet accountability criteria of validity and reliability but accomplishing such goals could compromise important benefits of the strategy. A better course to foster the use of PBA would be to reduce federal assessment mandates and test-based accountability to free up resources and time for PBA.
- » Current notions of comparability under federal law are illusory because students demonstrate knowledge and skills in different ways. Attempts to control conditions and tasks do not produce true comparability. Tailoring PBA tasks and conditions to meet students’ needs in demonstrating their knowledge and skills (i.e., accommodations) will, in fact, improve comparability of student results by producing more accurate evidence of the depth and complexity of students’ knowledge and skills.
- » Students’ outcomes on PBA should not be expected to correlate to students’ performance on standardized tests because they ascertain a much richer picture of what students know and can do. PBA outcomes can be used to extrapolate to college and career readiness, real-world outcomes, and sophisticated and higher-order thinking in a disciplinary area.⁸
- » To evidence the theory that PBA is an effective strategy for driving and evaluating student achievement, additional studies are desirable to the education field, including local, state, and federal educational agencies. One study of students attending CUNY from New York Performance Standards Consortium schools, where PBA is used instead of statewide standardized tests, showed that students who “begin high school more educationally and economically disadvantaged than their peers . . . are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and persist in college.” Studies will help grow a body of research that can help divert away from the overuse of high-stakes standardized tests data.

CONCLUSION

Policy Recommendations and Key Takeaways

Performance-based assessment strategies should be a key component in systems that evaluate and encourage student learning.

PBA is an authentic way to evaluate student knowledge and skills. PBA can provide valuable information about students and schools and enhance teacher professionalism. These assessments also can be used to determine whether students are graduation-ready, have mastered skills and knowledge deemed necessary in completing a unit of study, or even as part of admissions criteria. Ultimately, they should enhance the curriculum, be designed to fulfill a specific purpose, and most importantly, be used to engage students and make their learning meaningful to them.

Educators must have ample time, resources, and support to engage in the preparation, practice, and moderation of PBA as part of a student-centered curriculum.

Quality PBA is tied to classroom practice and curriculum that supports critical thinking and deeper learning. The purpose of creating and administering PBA is to support students as individuals in a true-to-life process of inquiry and learning. To accomplish this, educators must be prepared to foster climates of mutual respect, academic risk-taking, and student efficacy. Thus, for PBA to deliver anticipated benefits for student learning, it must be a part of a school culture of inquiry-based pedagogy and rich curriculum.

Quality PBA requires support and resources for educators to engage in an exchange of practice, professional development, development and norming of rubrics, task creation, and external evaluation. Local authorities need to support the work. It may be beneficial to contract with third-party intermediaries, such as professional associations/labor unions and other organizations with expertise, to establish communities and networks of PBA in practice.

Achieving buy-in from students, educators, school leaders, and communities is key to making PBA meaningful and powerful to the teaching and learning experience.

In places where PBA has secured the most support, there is an exposition component that provides the public, including parents and policymakers, with the opportunity to witness and learn about students' learning through displays, presentations, or other exhibits.⁹ This transparency fosters public trust in the education system and promotes student engagement by giving students an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of content objectives and mastery of skills to their peers, families, and the education community at large.

Pursue and support PBA independent of federal assessment requirements to preserve its educational benefits.

PBA components may be a great way to branch out from the type of rote selected-response test items that are the hallmarks of high-stakes standardized assessment. Expanding the use of PBA for local assessment, graduation or capstone activities, and classroom assessment are all pathways to increase students' access to assessment strategies that can enrich their learning and help them recognize and apply curricular content to real-world scenarios. No matter the application, PBA's primary objective must be to support individual students' learning journeys—not merely to fulfill objectives of state or federal law.

Panelists did not establish a consensus regarding whether standardized tests should be replaced with PBA under the current assessment and accountability mandates set forth in federal law. Some panelists voiced concerns about the risk of losing the iterative learning benefits of PBA if they are cast as oversimplified substitutes for existing standardized tests. Some panelists noted that forced incorporation of PBA strategies into current accountability models under current law and regulations could compromise the value of the assessment and should likely be avoided.

States and localities should reduce the volume, stakes, and accountability footprint of standardized tests to free up space and support for high-quality PBA and other assessment strategies.

Through careful and selective implementation, states can confine test-based accountability to a limited place in the education system. By limiting the consequences of statewide tests, establishing reasonable expectations for their use, and stressing their limited legitimate psychometric claims, authorities can limit the negative impacts of standardized tests.

Federal law does not mandate that high-stakes standardized tests are used as the sole or primary determinant for decisions pertaining to grade promotion or retention, course grades or enrollment, or graduation. In fact, over the course of recent years, the federal government has consistently issued guidance recommending states reduce high-stakes decisions associated with statewide assessment.¹⁰ As such, states should decouple assessment from accountability and high-stakes decisions in all possible cases and consider whether PBA should be incorporated as a worthy replacement or an additional high-quality method of assessing student achievement within a well-rounded system.

States also should reduce reliance on standardized test scores when evaluating and discussing school quality. Dashboards with multiple intelligently weighted indicators are tools that not only are more reflective of genuine school quality but also provide more space and opportunity for the development of quality PBA.

Efforts should be made to reduce the overall testing burden. More time, space, and resources would then be available to support authentic assessment. Accountability tests can get in the way of authentic assessments that give students real feedback on their learning.

States and local authorities should offer freedom for “bottom-up” reform at the classroom and school level and then “top-down” support for the scaling of efforts that are promising. The support can take the form of granting appropriate waivers and variances; establishing clearinghouses; funding development of tasks,

professional development, visitations, and moderation studies; and contracting for or providing external evaluation of the assessment system.

The federal government should provide greater space and funding for assessment innovation at the state and local levels through waivers and existing programs.

PBA should not be extensively entangled in school accountability, nor should it be stifled by outdated “seat time” or credit-hour requirements. States need more space on the “plate” in their assessment systems so that they can be free to develop, implement, and evaluate a diverse array of high-quality assessment methods, including PBA, suited to various purposes (e.g., providing student feedback, helping educators identify students’ learning needs, and identifying gaps in learning opportunities across schools, districts, or states).

Panelists and participants strongly pushed for continued and enhanced flexibility from the federal government through both the waiver process and revisions to two programs under ESEA that support assessment development and implementation. The Competitive Grants for State Assessment (CGSA) and Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) programs should both be expanded and include ample funding to entice state applications and support authentic, meaningful engagement of educators in the assessment design process. Additionally, guidance and regulations regarding comparability under IADA should be updated and expanded to encourage assessment practices that are not tied to replicating current results.

The Department of Education should continue to solicit feedback from state education agencies, labor unions, professional associations and other public education partners regarding the need for targeted flexibilities and grant them accordingly. Such waiver requests could ensure sufficient time for community feedback on innovative assessment design, analysis of innovative assessment results, and incorporation of innovative assessment strategies into state accountability systems. Finally, the federal government should commit resources to establishing laboratories of assessment innovation with PBA as part of that framework.

Next Steps

[Join FairTest’s distribution list.](#)

Connect with the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) to learn about their work to end the misuses of high-stakes standardized testing and advocate for high-quality, authentic assessment.

[Sign up for updates from NEA.](#)

Learn about opportunities to take action, including asking the U.S. Secretary of Education to grant states waiver flexibility to implement innovative assessment practices, such as PBA.

[Start a conversation in your school or district.](#)

Share NEA’s Principles for the Future of Assessment and ask what your school or district is doing to help ensure that your assessment system gives students the chance to show what they know and values the full breadth of students’ knowledge and skills.

END NOTES

1. Access [NEA's Principles for the Future Assessment](#). Keep up with NEA's advocacy on assessment by visiting [Standardized Testing & Student Assessment | NEA](#).
2. Hilliard, P. (2015, December 7). [Performance-based assessment: reviewing the basics](#). Edutopia. George Lucas Educational Foundation.
3. Guha, R., Wagner, T., Darling-Hammond, L., Taylor, T., & Curtis, D. (2018). [The promise of performance assessments: Innovations in high school learning and college admission](#). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
4. “Globally-recognized competencies” include knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values that allow students to thrive in a diverse and interdependent world. Examples include collaboration, communication, and overcoming challenges. This definition was adapted from [NEA's Principles for the Future of Assessment](#) and the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's PISA 2018 Global Competence](#).
5. FairTest Staff. (2007). [Different Tests, Same Flaws: A Comparison of the SAT, SAT II, and ACT](#). National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest).
6. [Access the materials from the PBA Convening](#).
7. Koretz, D., Mitchell, K., Barron, S., & Keith, S. (1996). [Final report: The perceived effects of the Maryland school performance assessment program](#). CRESST/RAND Institute on Education and Training.
8. See Willis, L., & Martinez, M. R. (2022). [Authentic student work in college admissions: Lessons from the Ross School of Business](#). Learning Policy Institute. Also, see Fine, M., & Pryiomka, K. (2020). [Assessing college readiness through authentic student work: How the City University of New York and the New York Performance Standards Consortium are collaborating toward equity](#). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
9. For example, see photographs memorializing the Capstone Expo hosted by Canon City High School in Colorado in Spring 2023. Available at [Capstone Expo — Spring 2023 Pictures | Canon City High School \(canoncityschools.org\)](#). The New York Performance Standards Consortium also maintains a collection of student work samples. Available at [Student Work — New York Performance Standards Consortium \(performanceassessment.org\)](#).
10. [Frequently Asked Questions Impact of COVID-19 on 2021-2022 Accountability Systems Required under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 \(ESEA\)](#). (2022). Also, see [Dear Colleague Letter from Secretary Cardona Regarding Statewide Assessments](#) (September 13, 2022). U.S. Department of Education.

RESOURCE LIST

Fine, M., & Pryiomka, K. (2020). [Assessing College Readiness Through Authentic Student Work: How the City University of New York and the New York Performance Standards Consortium Are Collaborating Toward Equity](#). (July 2020). Learning Policy Institute.

Guha, R., Wagner, T., Darling-Hammond, L., Taylor, T., & Curtis, D. (2018). [The promise of performance assessments: Innovations in high school learning and college admission](#). Learning Policy Institute.

Landrum, A. (2021). [Collaboratively-developed, Standards-based Performance Assessment: Graduation Guidelines Menu of Assessment Options](#). Colorado Department of Education.

Pellerin, E. (2020). [Performance Assessment: An Engaging Alternative to Traditional Test-Taking](#). REL Appalachia.

Task Force on the Future of Assessment. (2022). [Principles for the Future of Assessment](#). National Education Association.



Scan for [PBA Convening Materials](#)

APPENDIX

NEA and FairTest would like to express appreciation and gratitude to [Princess Moss, vice president of the National Education Association](#), and Daaiyah Bilal-Threats, senior director of the NEA Education Policy and Implementation Center, for their ongoing leadership and support of NEA's work on the future of assessment.

Panelist Biographies

[Aneesha Badrinarayan, Director of State Performance Assessment Initiatives, Learning Policy Institute](#)

For the last decade, Badrinarayan's work has focused on supporting states, districts, and educators to develop and implement student-centered systems of assessment that support all learners. Prior to joining the Learning Policy Institute, she was the director for special initiatives at Achieve, a museum professional, and a neuroscientist.

[Carmen Coleman, Chief of Transformational Learning and Leading, Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative, Kentucky](#)

Coleman leads education innovation for a cooperative of 15 school districts under Kentucky's United We Learn framework. She served as the chief academic officer for Jefferson County Public Schools from 2017 to 2022, where she developed and led implementation of the Backpack of Success Skills, a district-wide competency-based initiative.

[Elena Diaz-Bilello, Associate Director, Center for Assessment, Design, Research and Evaluation, University of Colorado Boulder](#)

Drawing on a background in measurement, evaluation, and policy, Diaz-Bilello helps design, implement, and evaluate educational reforms and initiatives. She also works on developing comprehensive assessment strategies that foster deeper learning for all students.

[Chris DonFrancesco, Senior Policy Analyst, Education Policy and Implementation Center, National Education Association](#)

A former high school teacher, DonFrancesco evaluates policy to support NEA's state and local affiliates and advocates for assessment and accountability reform on behalf of NEA's 3 million members. She is a member of the Florida Bar.

[Carla Evans, Senior Associate, National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment](#)

Evans is actively engaged with projects that attempt to bridge the gap between classroom assessment and large-scale assessment. She supports states in designing and implementing innovative assessment and accountability reforms, especially those that rely on PBA. Evans currently works with the Hawaii Department of Education on culturally responsive PBA.

Harry Feder, Executive Director, National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)

Feder previously taught history at a member school of the New York Performance Standards Consortium. He previously served as board chair of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Prior to teaching, Feder spent a decade in private litigation practice in New York, including representing the consortium to help maintain its standardized testing waiver from New York State.

Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Social Psychology, Women's Studies, and Urban Education, City University of New York Graduate Center

Fine is a founding member of the Public Science Project, a university-community research space designed in collaboration with movements for racial and educational justice. Her work centers on questions of justice and dignity, privilege, and oppression and how solidarities emerge. She is the author of numerous books and research papers.

Dan French, President, Education Commonwealth Project

French is the cofounder of the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessments (MCIEA) and Education Commonwealth Project (ECP). ECP seeks to disseminate MCIEA tools and resources across the state of Massachusetts and the nation.

Terri Grosso, New York Performance Standards Consortium

Grosso currently serves as codirector at Urban Academy Laboratory High School, where she has worked for three decades as a science and computer science teacher. In addition to having been deeply involved in the development and implementation of the consortium's performance-based assessment tasks, Grosso has also mentored teachers in inquiry-based science education.

Lisa Harmon-Martínez, Director, Learning by Doing, Future Focused Education, New Mexico

Harmon-Martínez and the capstone initiative team at Future Focused Education work directly with the Public Education Department, schools, and districts, offering support and resources as they develop or refine graduate profiles and capstones to reimagine teaching, learning, and assessment in the state.

Ellen Hume-Howard, Executive Director, New Hampshire Learning Initiative (PLACE)

Working directly with teacher leaders and administrators, Hume-Howard currently supports competency-based and personalized learning, assessment design, and instructional practice. She has worked with state and national experts to design a program using performance assessment for state accountability under the federal grant for innovative assessment design, New Hampshire's former PACE system.

Paul Leather, Partner, Center for Innovation in Education

Leather led development of a first-in-the-nation educational accountability model called "Performance Assessment of Competency Education," or PACE, which was approved as a pilot program by the U.S. Department of Education.

Angela Landrum, Principal Consultant, Performance Assessment and Assessment Literacy Program, Colorado Department of Education

Landrum has proven expertise in developing and implementing standards and assessment reform to support closing the achievement gap through high-quality instructional practice and educator effectiveness.

Susan Lyons, Principal, Lyons Assessment Consulting

Lyons's firm is a leader in supporting innovation in educational assessment and school accountability. Lyons is a part-time faculty member at Boston College and is the executive director of a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing gender and racial equity in educational measurement, Women in Measurement. She is also the technical advisor to the Massachusetts Collaborative for Innovative Education Assessment.

Tony Monfiletto, Executive Director, Future Focused Education, New Mexico

Working in education since 1990, Monfiletto has been a leader in establishing the context for a network of schools in his hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and a broader vision for schools to become catalysts for the creation of healthier and more prosperous communities. Monfiletto is actively involved in creating a policy climate that welcomes innovative solutions to public school challenges.

Lillian Pace, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, KnowledgeWorks

Pace directs the foundation's policy and advocacy strategy, forging partnerships with national organizations and federal and state policymakers to create flexible policy environments that support the exploration, replication, and transformation of high-quality personalized learning systems. She is the former director of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education.

Alexandra Rathmann-Noonan, Director of School Support, New York Performance Standards Consortium

A former public school science teacher, Rathmann-Noonan also worked as an administrator in the New York City Education Department, including supporting the launch of a district-union collaboration around school innovation and as a leadership coach in the Office of the Superintendent overseeing schools.

Stephen Sireci, Distinguished Professor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Executive Director, Center for Educational Assessment

Sireci is known for his research in evaluating test fairness, particularly issues related to content validity, test bias, cross-lingual assessment, standard setting, and computerized-adaptive testing. He has authored or coauthored more than 160 publications. Sireci is a fellow of the American Educational Research Association and Division 5 of the American Psychological Association; past-president of the National Council on Measurement in Education; and president of the International Test Commission.

Phyllis Tashlik, Director, Center for Inquiry, New York Performance Standards Consortium

Tashlik runs the professional development center for the Consortium. She helped design and implement the Consortium's performance assessment system, including interim assessments, moderation studies, and rubrics. She has decades of teaching experience and has written extensively about literacy issues and performance assessment.

Doannie Tran, Center for Innovation in Education, Georgia Deeper Learning Network

Tran is the partner for liberatory cocreation at the Center for Innovation in Education, where he focuses on family and community empowerment as a lever for systems change. Tran worked extensively with state and local officials in Kentucky on its United We Learn campaign. He also served as assistant superintendent for Boston Public Schools after teaching both middle school and high school science.