

Colorado's Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) Assessment System

Considerations for the Colorado State Board of Education

Adopted December 6, 2010

FINAL

Vision:

Colorado's new assessment system will signal mastery of (PWR) Colorado Academic Standards at grade level. As the Colorado Academic Standards reflect both knowledge and application of skills as expressed in the description of postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR), the new assessment system will also measure progress toward PWR. It will be designed to produce meaningful results which will be both easy to understand and applicable to students, parents and educators.

Ongoing feedback, student relevance and interim results each represent a new approach to the role of assessment in high-quality instruction. The new assessment system will inform instruction and provide early feedback, which will also help to reduce remediation. Over time (and where appropriate) the assessments will be given online, in order to accommodate the timely return of results. Voluntary formative practices and aligned interim benchmark assessments may be provided by the state. The summative assessments, given by the state as the state record and for accountability, will be given as late in the school year as possible to allow for more instruction and results will be made available prior to the end of the school year.

The state, in collaboration with educator preparation programs, shall prepare annually a report on the effectiveness of IHE-based and alternative educator preparation programs, using aggregated data on student academic growth, educator placement, and educator mobility, and retention.

Introduction:

Passed in 2008, Senate Bill 212, often referred to as Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids or CAP4K, set forth a framework for reform in Colorado. The promise of CAP4K is a simple one: align Colorado's educational system from preschool to college to focus on the readiness of all children at key transition points and prepare them for postsecondary and workforce readiness. Students that graduate from high school "ready by exit" will meet minimum academic qualifications for admission at all open, modified open, or moderately selective public institutions of higher education in Colorado.

The first step in working toward the goal expressed in CAP4K was establishing descriptions of what it means for a child to be ready to enter a learning environment at the preschool and kindergarten levels and what it means to be ready to exit high school and be successful in a variety of postsecondary options. In December 2008, the state board adopted a description of school readiness. The state board of education and the Colorado commission on higher education accomplished the latter goal in June 2009 by adopting the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness description which outlined the content and skills all high school graduates must know and be able to do upon exit.

The fulfillment of SB212 continued with the revision of the Colorado Academic Standards and aligning them to these descriptions of readiness. The new standards represent a dramatic shift in expectations. The standards, beginning in preschool and continuing through high school, are constructed to guide students' progress towards being postsecondary and workforce ready. In addition to content concepts, 21st century skills are embedded throughout, making them more comprehensive than previous sets of standards. To assist

educators in implementing the new standards and assessments, CDE is currently providing voluntary model curricula exemplars to support and be used as needed by both pre-service and current educators. In addition, higher education will align their admissions standards to the PWR expectations and facilitate the necessary improvements to educator preparation programs.

Creating an assessment system to complement these standards is the next priority. Per SB08-212, the system must include school readiness assessment(s); state summative assessments, including an alternate assessment for our students with the most significant cognitive disabilities; postsecondary and workforce measures; and assessments for English Language Learners.

The proposed assessment system represents a shift in thinking about assessment away from the concept of assessment being only one time high stakes events for some grades seemingly separate from instruction. Rather, the P-20 system recognizes that good assessment and instruction cannot occur in isolation of one another. Under the proposed new system, educators and students will receive ongoing feedback on student performance that will inform instruction in meaningful and more immediate ways. In addition, shared data across the system will provide information on effective practices across the P-20 systems, including educator preparation. This is expected to result in improved student learning and increased postsecondary and work readiness for the students of Colorado. It is important to emphasize that only some of the proposed assessment results, such as those from the summative state assessments, will have high stakes accountability decisions attached to them. Others, the much more frequent formative and interim results, are only meant to provide monitoring of student learning of the standards and guidance for instruction.

One thing is clear, creating a truly aligned P-20 system and the implementation of the proposed assessment system is predicated on the commitment of early childhood providers, districts, the Colorado Department of Education, and the Colorado Department of Higher Education working together.

The following articulates the recommended assessment system attributes resulting from many discussions of subcommittee, stakeholder and community groups. They represent the key features for the State Board of Education to consider.

State Summative postsecondary and workforce accountability system

Background:

The purpose of the state summative assessment is to measure progress toward college and career readiness and mastery of the PWR Colorado Academic Standards (both content knowledge and skills). For a small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, an aligned alternate assessment will be developed as well.

Assessments will be given as late in the school year as possible with the results reported on student transcripts and report cards. In addition, the summative results will be used for the state accountability system and reflected in the Colorado Growth Model.

CCHE and SBE agreed that the results from the final high school summative assessment will provide an indication of a student's postsecondary and workforce readiness. Implications may include high school graduation guidelines, higher education admissions policies and criteria for endorsed diplomas.

A nationally recognized college admissions test will also be required of all 11th grade students.

Agreement: SBE acknowledges that summative assessments aligned to the PWR Colorado Academic Standards (including both content knowledge and skills) will be part of the new assessment system.

1. The state summative assessments will at least measure Math and English Language Arts, including the application of knowledge and skills, in grades 3-11.
2. Science and Social Studies will be measured, at least once in elementary, middle, and high school.
3. To take advantage of new interactive item types and facilitate the timely return of the results, the summative assessments will be on-line to the extent it fits instructional best practice and is fiscally possible or feasible.

Formative (on-going) postsecondary and workforce measures

Background:

Formative assessment is best thought of as formative instruction and therefore it changes expected teaching practice. These practices will determine incremental progress toward mastery and reveal student confusion, resulting in improved teaching and learning.

The best teaching in Colorado uses daily and an on-going cadence of questions to evaluate student academic progress. These formative questions must be tightly aligned to the new PWR standards at every grade.

For those educators already in the classroom, formative assessment demands on-going professional development in the use of these practices and interpretation of these results.

Agreement: SBE agrees that formative assessment will be part of the new assessment system; therefore, the state will support and provide guidance for local education providers in formative assessment.

1. CDE will support districts in providing on-going professional development activities in the use of these practices and interpretation of these results. Support should include differentiated approaches based on local needs: collaboratively developing learning progressions, models/exemplars, and videos as resources allow.
2. CDE will support the creation of district or regional consortia to promote professional dialogue on assessment throughout the state as resources allow.

Interim (benchmark) postsecondary and workforce measures

Background:

Interim assessments measure a student's progress toward mastery over time. Optimally, students will be able to understand their results and their progress and what they mean in terms of their academic and post-high school plans. The use of interim assessments is expected to help prevent the chronic need for postsecondary remediation.

Aligning interim assessment to the PWR Colorado Academic Standards impacts educator preparation programs (IHE-based and alternative), ongoing professional development, induction, and classroom practices.

Agreement: SBE agrees that interim assessments should be a part of the new assessment system and that the state will support and provide guidance for local education providers with the uses of interim assessments.

1. Districts will determine timing, frequency, and design/selection of interim assessments.
2. CDE will offer exemplary, voluntary interim assessment tools aligned to the state-tested subjects with the goal of providing interim assessments aligned to all standards as resources allow.
3. CDE will provide a vetting process and rubrics to assist district in purchasing or designing rigorous and standards-focused interim assessments for all grades and all content areas as resources allow.

School readiness measures for grades P-2

Background:

Per Senate Bill 212 early childhood measures must be included in the assessment system and be aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards. The law states that by Fall 2013 each local education provider shall administer the school readiness assessment to each student enrolled in a kindergarten program.

The new system must provide one or more assessments to measure preschool and kindergarten students' level of readiness to engage in and benefit from elementary classroom environments. The primary purpose of measuring readiness factors is to inform instruction and intervention to achieve positive outcomes. The data derived from school readiness assessments will lead to a deeper understanding of each child so that instruction and support can be differentiated to best meet individual needs.

Results from assessments may NOT be publically reported for individual students and may NOT be used to deny admission or progression through first grade. Ensuring all students in public schools have a unique student identifier, (i.e. SASID) allows for the sharing of results and data across education sectors. Aligning early childhood measures to PWR Colorado Academic Standards impacts educator preparation programs, ongoing professional development, induction, and classroom practices.

Agreement: SBE agrees that school readiness assessments will include primarily a mix of state-approved formative and interim assessment tools.

1. CDE recommends that the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) be updated to align with the PWR Colorado Academic Standards and that numeracy be added to reflect the same instructional values of progress monitoring and early intervention where needed.
2. The state will offer districts a menu of approved school readiness assessment tools.
3. In preschool through second grade school readiness assessments will rely on formative assessment practices and interim assessments.
4. In grades 1-2 mastery of the PWR Colorado Academic Standards will be measured.
5. Districts are encouraged to introduce developmentally appropriate end-of-year assessments.

English Language Learners assessments

Background:

The state assessment system will include an English language proficiency screener and an annual English language proficiency assessment that will be administered to PHLOTE, (Primary or Home Language Other than English), students and English Language Learners as provided by federal and state laws. The screener will be used to identify whether a PHLOTE student is Limited English Proficient and is eligible to receive English language development services. The screener will be offered to districts for use at any time. It will be administered to students new to a school district as provided by law. The annual assessment will be given to all Limited English Proficient students and to measure their language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing in English. The purpose of the annual language assessment is to provide a valid and reliable measure of proficiency and comprehension of English. Results will be used as part of a body of evidence to designate individual student English language proficiency and for district and state accountability purposes.

Agreement: SBE acknowledges that the English Language Learners assessments will include a screener and proficiency test aligned to the Colorado English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards.

1. The proficiency assessment window will begin after the October count and will close prior to the beginning of any other state annual summative academic content testing.
2. The proficiency assessment will be technically sound and administration practices will be consistent with the expectations of other high stakes state assessments (e.g., tests will be secure and students will not be exposed to the same form multiple times).

Other postsecondary and workforce measures

Background:

Individual and Career Academic Plan (ICAP) will capture a student's career and academic plans (per SB256), such as career exploration, interest inventories, academic progress, service learning, and college applications. Career and technical pathways toward a career may be captured in the ICAP. ICAP may also capture those 21st century skills/attributes that do not currently lend themselves to being assessed on the state summative assessment. The ICAP is a body of evidence that captures progression toward college and career readiness. The new assessment system would benefit from a state-wide, common visual display for the results and bodies of evidence collected in the new system. Concurrent enrollment credits earned will continue as Colorado statutes provide. State high school assessments will require Higher Education Admission Requirement (HEAR) alignment.

Agreement: SBE agrees that the priority of postsecondary and workforce readiness measures will be part of the new assessment system. The system will capture bodies of evidence for a student's academic progress, planning, preparation, and readiness competencies, which will not necessarily be used for state accountability purposes.

1. A dashboard will be a visual display for P-20 students to use as on-going documentation of their PWR progress, including ICAP documentation, student work exemplars, employer recommendations, and other relevant materials.
2. Results can be used for high school, as well as college and career eligibility and guidance. The body of evidence displayed on the dashboard can be used for graduation considerations or endorsed high school diplomas.