

Assessment Task Force Report

May 31, 2006

**Created by the State of Delaware
House Joint Resolution No. 4
with Senate Amendment No. 2**

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Executive Summary

During the 143rd General Assembly, Representative Nancy Wagner and Senator David Sokola were the prime sponsors of House Joint Resolution 4 establishing a task force that would review the best practices of educational assessments for the purpose of providing recommendations for the improvement and/or changes to the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP). The task force met eleven times beginning with the first meeting on December 15, 2005 and ending on May 25, 2006.

During the process, the task force discussed the current assessment program and considered what the assessment program might look like in the future. Various innovative approaches were brainstormed that included existing vendor-based assessments as well as customized comprehensive assessment systems. National experts were brought in at the request of the task force members to discuss core assessment requirements, such as the importance of aligning the assessment to Delaware's content standards; information on other state assessments; computer-based assessments; and test validity.

The task force decided that an assessment system will be recommended to the Governor and General Assembly that consists of two major components: locally-administered formative assessments and state-administered annual summative assessments. Reading, writing, and mathematics will be particularly emphasized in grades two through eight in both a formative and summative manner. Summative assessments will be given in grades three, five, and eight in science and social studies annually. Formative assessments in science and social studies will also be given periodically. As for high school, end-of-course assessments are the preferred choice for the summative piece and again, formative assessments to be given systematically in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. The summative assessments in all content areas will consist of both multiple choice and constructed response test questions. The constructed response test items will be given in the Spring and the multiple choice test items will be given as close to the end of the school year as possible in May.

Scoring and reporting are other important components. Scoring could be done through technological means; if possible, Delaware teachers could be used as scorers for constructed response questions. Results of the assessments are to be reported as quickly as possible. All of these areas should work to inform instruction and focus on professional development. Some components, but not necessarily all components, could be used to determine accountability status.

The full report from the Assessment Task Force follows, including a statement of purpose for the assessment system.

Background

During the 143rd General Assembly, Representative Nancy Wagner and Senator David Sokola were the prime sponsors of House Joint Resolution 4 establishing a task force that would review the best practices of educational assessments for the purpose of providing recommendations for the improvement and/or changes to the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP).

The task force membership consisted of the following:

1. Representative Nancy Wagner, Chairperson of the House Education Committee, Delaware House of Representatives;
2. Senator David Sokola, Chairperson of the Senate Education Committee, Delaware State Senate;
3. Vicky Cairns, Delaware State Education Association (DSEA);
4. Nancy Doorey, Delaware School Boards Association (DSBA);
5. Dave Sechler, Delaware Association of School Administrators (DASA);
6. Bruce Harter, Chief School Officers Association (CSOA);
7. Jean Allen, State Board of Education;
8. Cindy DiPinto, Delaware Business Roundtable;
9. Janine Sorbello, Representative, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce;
10. Emily Falcon, State Budget Office;
11. Martha Manning, Delaware Charter Schools Network;
12. Dorothy Shelton, District DSTP Test Coordinator;
13. Yvonne Johnson, Parent;
14. Noel Rodriguez, Parent;
15. Edie Corbin, Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League;
16. Valerie Woodruff, Secretary of Education
17. Jim Wolfe, President/CEO of the Delaware Chamber of Commerce was named to the committee; however, Janine Sorbello served as his proxy;
18. Bob Andrzejewski, Chief School Officers Association, attended the last two meetings of the task force

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For purposes of this document, these four terms have the following meaning:

Formative assessment: includes all activities that are used to provide information to teachers on the progress a student is making in a particular subject or course to help the teacher direct the learning activities toward mastery of the skills and knowledge intended to be learned in that subject at that time or in that course. The main purpose is to help the individual student master the content standards through course materials. The formative assessment will also be used to show growth in student achievement throughout the school year.

Summative assessment: includes any activities that are given at the conclusion of a course or an instructional period (such as Spring of Grade 5) to determine the success of the instruction up to that point in time. The summative assessment will also be used for student, school, district, and state accountability.

National norms: are established by testing a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students -- a "norm group." Students, schools, districts, and even states are compared or rank-ordered in relation to the norm group. The purpose of a norm-referenced assessment is usually to sort students and not to measure achievement towards some criterion of performance.

Infrastructure: for the purposes of this report, refers to the technology and personnel necessary for implementation of the assessment system.

National Experts and Discussion Topics

The experts and the topic of discussion with the task force included:

National Expert	Credentials	Topic
Brian Gong	Executive Director, National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment	Federal Requirements and The Future of Assessment Programs
Ellen Forte	Independent Consultant, former President, edCounts, LLC, former Director of Student Assessment, Baltimore City Public Schools	What Other States are Doing/Planning How Delaware Can Operationalize the Purpose Statement
Ron Hambleton	Professor, Chairperson of the Research and Evaluation Methods Program, Co-Director of the Center for Educational Assessment, University of Massachusetts at Amherst	Computer Based Assessments
Lou Fabrizio and staff	Director, Accountability Services Division North Carolina Department of Public Instruction	North Carolina's Assessment System with a focus on End of Course Assessments
Steve Dunbar	Professor, College of Education, University of Iowa; Chairperson of the Delaware Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)	The Importance of Validity and Reliability in Assessments
Phoebe Winter	Independent Consultant, frequently works with Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)	Alignment Study for Formative Assessments

Statement of Purpose

It was very important from the discussions and information from the experts that the task force create a purpose statement. This statement would articulate why and how the assessment system should be used.

The following is the statement of purpose as decided by the task force:

The primary purpose of the next generation of the Delaware Student Testing Program should be the improvement of student learning.

The State of Delaware's student assessment program should be a system of assessments that fairly and accurately measure student achievement against state content standards.

The system should incorporate components that:

- Measure progress of student achievement toward the standards at regular intervals.
- Provide timely and definitive information to educators, especially teachers, to inform instruction.
- Provide timely information to parents and families regarding achievement of their children so that they are empowered to assist the children's learning.
- Provide information that will assist districts and charter schools and the state to measure the impact of instructional programs and practices.
- Allow for the establishment of individual student goals and accurately measure each child's growth over time based on the standards.
- Provide any required elements for federal and state accountability.

The system should measure individual student progress and have the necessary components to provide data to measure student and system performance. These data should also be used, with other measures, to inform evaluation of educator performance. Such information should be used to guide decisions regarding individual professional improvement as well as system wide improvement. It should provide the public with a fair evaluation about the growth in student achievement occurring in each school and district.

One assessment given at a single point in time during the school year cannot meet the goals outlined above. One component of the system should include assessments that provide periodic and timely feedback regarding the yearlong learning process, which is critical to the success of our children and our system. There must also be a component

that serves as an annual measure of system performance and that contains a measure of performance based on national norms.

The system shall be designed and implemented mindful of cost efficiencies and attentive to the amount of testing time necessary to obtain valid and reliable data. The Department of Education shall obtain feedback annually on the assessment system, provide such feedback to a broad based group of stakeholders to include district level educators, teachers, and families for the purpose of seeking the group's recommendations, summarize changes and enhancements to be made, and communicate this to various constituency groups.

Accountability – Federal and State

The task force was cognizant of the federal requirements as well as our current state student accountability requirements. As background, the state is required to be in compliance with the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, commonly referred to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. This Act requires that each state must have a valid and reliable assessment system that measures individual student progress towards the state standards in grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school (not grade 9) in reading and mathematics. Assessing students in science at least at the elementary, middle and high school levels must to be included by 2007--08.

In addition, all students are required to take the same assessments at the grade in which they are enrolled with the exception of a 1% cap of the students with the most severe cognitive disabilities. Another 2% of the students with disabilities may take an alternate assessment. At this time, the US Department of Education has not issued regulations governing this assessment; therefore, Delaware will not be able to develop such an assessment until such time as appropriate guidance is provided by USDOE. NCLB requires that states provide for "reasonable adaptations and accommodations for students with disabilities" and for "the inclusion of limited English proficient students who shall be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided reasonable accommodations." The accountability system is based on performance in the following subgroups: All students, each racial/ethnic group, students with disabilities, low income, and students who are English language learners. The overarching goal is that all students will be proficient in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

Each state is required to build a valid and reliable accountability system and to go through a peer review process to determine if the state's standards and assessments meet criteria as established by the USDOE. Delaware's current standards and assessments were approved by the federal USDOE in March 2006.

The task force was also aware of the student accountability provisions such as retention, summer school and the awarding of a diploma. The task force did not focus on these requirements as limitations. The intent of the task force was to provide a

system that would inform students, teachers, and families in the individual student learning process. The system would be designed to assist students, teachers, and administrators with curricular and instructional decision making.

The “Next” Assessment System

The task force decided an assessment system will be recommended to the Governor and General Assembly that consists of two major components: locally-administered formative assessments and state-administered annual summative assessments. Reading, writing, and mathematics will be particularly emphasized in grades two through eight in both a formative and summative manner. Summative assessments will be given in grades three, five, and eight in science and social studies. Formative assessments in these content areas will also be given periodically and will be embedded within curriculum units. As for high school, end-of-course assessments are the preferred choice for the summative piece and again, formative assessments to be given systematically.

Scoring and reporting are other important components. Scoring could be done through technological means; however if possible, Delaware teachers could be used as scorers for constructed response questions. Results of the assessments are to be reported as quickly as possible. All of these areas should work to inform instruction and to focus on professional development. Some components, but not necessarily all components, could be used to determine accountability status.

Description of Proposed Delaware Assessment System

To meet the purposes identified by the task force, the new statewide assessment system would comprise two major components:

- 1) For the purpose of informing instruction, the state would provide an infrastructure* for locally-administered formative assessments.
- 2) For accountability purposes, the state would administer annual summative assessments in grades three through eight and end-of-course assessments at the high school level.

This new assessment system would be customized for Delaware so that our stakeholders retain control over the content, structure, administration, scoring, and reporting of our tests. Our assessment process would help close the gap between our tests and our classroom practices by engaging Delaware educators in the design and construction of tests that are truly aligned with our standards and their curricula. Our new system would represent a comprehensive, integrated approach to instructionally-supportive assessment that brings together curriculum, instruction, and measurement of

* Infrastructure refers to the technology and personnel necessary to implement the assessment.

learning that enables continuous improvement in the implementation of standards in classrooms across the state.

Together, the formative and summative accountability assessments would balance high stakes performance expectations with the information necessary to support teaching and learning. By designing these two components as parts of a single system, we would provide more consistency across testing circumstances. In addition, students, educators, and families would receive coherent information about student performance throughout the year rather than statewide assessment reports that seem to be unrelated to reports of student progress during the school year. Although the content of formative and summative accountability reports would differ in detail, the structure, language, and format of the reports would be consistent.

The elements that would be common across these components are described first below. Each component is then described in further detail in the sections that follow.

Common Elements

While the two components of the new statewide approach to assessment would be designed to serve different purposes, they would share several elements:

- **Alignment to Delaware Content Standards in English Language Arts (Reading and Writing), Mathematics, Science and Social Studies**
We have chosen not to narrow our educational focus in Delaware. Including assessments in these four core content areas supports the high value we place on each of these areas. Alignment with standards ensures that our assessments reflect the full breadth, depth, and patterns of emphases of our expectations.
- **Use of multiple-choice and constructed-response types of questions**
We value students' higher-order thinking and communication skills. To enhance alignment with our grade-level expectations and assess these types of skills appropriately, our assessments will include constructed-response questions as well as multiple-choice questions.
- **Use of computer-based technology for test administration**
We encourage the use of assessment data for educational decision-making and must, therefore, return assessment information to educators, parents, and students as quickly as possible after testing. Using computer-based technologies for administering our assessments will reduce the time necessary for scoring students' responses and returning results to schools. In addition, testing by using technology will better match the growing use of computers in our classrooms and the educational and professional contexts our students will enter upon graduation from high school.
- **Involvement of Delaware educators in the assessment process**
We value the expertise of Delaware educators and view all assessment as serving instruction directly or, through accountability mechanisms, indirectly. We

understand that involving educators in the assessment process for our statewide tests draws upon our teachers' content and instructional knowledge and helps to broaden their assessment literacy. While the task force believes educators' scoring of students' responses is valuable, it is not a mandatory component of the system. The task force would like to explore continuing the practice of involving our teachers in item development and benchmarking, and considerations should be made for involving teachers in scoring. Serious concerns were raised by task force members about the advisability of teacher involvement in scoring that would encroach upon instructional and professional development activities.

- **Reporting designed to support interpretation and use by educators, families, and students**

We believe that the primary purpose of testing is to provide educators, families, and students with meaningful information that they can use to understand and support academic achievement. Therefore, we must communicate test results clearly, accurately, and as soon as possible after each test administration.

Formative Assessment

In Delaware, as in most other states, school districts and charter schools are responsible for the instructional, curricular, and professional development programs that directly impact teaching and student learning. While many large districts are able to direct resources into buying or developing academic assessments that support their work, some smaller districts and charter schools are not able to capitalize on assessment options that require extensive investments of time and money. In addition, assessment options that are commercially available to districts are generally not well-aligned with Delaware's grade-level expectations; thus, the results of these assessments may not provide information that is directly relevant to educators' curricula and decision-making needs. The formative component of our system is intended to address these issues by offering equity of access to aligned assessment options for all districts and charter schools across the state.

Our approach would not dictate the tests or test questions that districts and charter schools administer to their students. Rather, state-supported formative assessment would encompass the following:

- Formative assessments that would be built and would include items purchased from commercial sources, developed in collaboration with other states and/or items developed by teachers from across Delaware. Districts and charter schools retain control over when and how to use this component. The state will ensure availability for all districts and charter schools;
- Formative assessments that measure growth in individual student achievement from fall to spring and year to year while measuring their performance along the continuum of our grade level expectations.

- Computer-based as well as computer-adaptive administration of these assessments to provide immediate feedback in the detail necessary to support specific instructional actions for individual students and to show individual student growth;
- Availability of these assessments in paper and pencil version for students who need such accommodations;
- Assessments for Science and Social Studies embedded in the Science and Social Studies Units – Statewide Recommended Curriculum;
- Immediate computer-scoring and feedback from multiple-choice items;
- A variety of local options can be used for scoring constructed response items that are embedded in the curriculum units, from individual teachers scoring their own students' responses to the creation of school-wide or district-wide grade level teams that build consensus on performance criteria;
- Access to professional development programs for assessment literacy designed and delivered collaboratively by the districts and charter schools and the state to support the creation of high quality questions for both classroom and statewide use, the construction of tests, and the appropriate interpretation and use of results.

Statewide Summative Assessments

The purpose of Delaware's summative assessments system is to ensure that programs are effectively supporting student achievement and that resources are directed to schools and districts or charter schools appropriately. The results of our annual statewide summative assessments are critical indicators in the state and federal accountability system as they provide a single, common yardstick for measuring our grade-level expectations for all Delaware students.

The statewide summative assessments would encompass the following:

- Assessment of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics grade-level expectations at grade-levels two through eight;
- Assessment of Science and Social Studies end-of-cluster expectations of the content standards at the end of grades three, five, and eight;
- Assessment of achievement expectations in Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies at the end of specific courses at the high school level (specific courses to be determined later);
- Administration of multiple-choice questions as close to the end of the school year as possible while allowing adequate time for re-takes and the ability to produce reliable, valid scores for every student and school and make subsequent accountability decisions;

- Administration of constructed-response questions in the spring of each year to allow necessary time for scoring these assessments while still returning reports back to educators, families, and students by the end of the school year;
- Administration of assessments via computer, but with paper-and-pencil versions available for students who need such accommodations and for some constructed-response questions;
- Scoring of constructed-response questions by involvement of a combination of Delaware educators and external scorers to balance cost and time efficiencies with the benefits of local insight and involvement with the high stakes scoring processes;
- Annual release of some multiple-choice and some constructed-response questions along with each student's responses for professional development purposes and to enhance families' and students' understanding of test content and format; and
- Administration of re-takes of the assessment in the summer, as appropriate.


Together, these components would provide the multiple types of information we need to make important decisions about student achievement and how to support it. We recognize that tests themselves cannot improve achievement. Rather, we effect change only when we place primary focus on our standards and grade-level expectations, understand how to build aligned items and tests, and learn how to score and appropriately use information from these tests.

Closing Comments


The task force recommends that the next step should be the development of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the next generation of the Delaware Student Testing Program that encompasses the components as described in this final report. The task force also would like to express to the Governor, the General Assembly and citizens of Delaware that the new system may take additional time and funds for full implementation. It is the intent of this task force to provide the framework for an assessment system that will ultimately provide educators, families and students the information needed to make sound instructional decisions and that provides information on where students stand against the state content standards over time.





Next-Generation State Assessment System Update

G/B Formative assessments that measure growth in student achievement: 45 – 60 minutes

 Constructed response items

EOG Summative End of Grade/End of Course assessment: computer-based, 45 – 90 minutes

 Writing assessment

Grade	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec/Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May/June	
2 – 8	G/B	← Available on demand up to three times per year →				G/B	 	Up to mid-April	EOG G/B
9-12	G/B Optional, available in reading and math, up to 3 times per year				EOC	 	Up to mid-April	EOC	

Grades 2-8: Formative assessment in reading and math given on demand at beginning of school year and up to two more times.
 Grades 3, 5 and 8: Science and Social studies EOG tests given in final month of school or in fall of grades 4 and 6, final months of school in grade 8
 Constructed response items: short response items in each content area, plus writing assessment, given in spring

Grades 9 – 12 Formative assessments available for use in reading and math
 At least 5 EOCs required before graduation: courses TBD, but at least 1 writing, 1 math, 1 reading, 1 science, 1 social studies
 Taken as close to end of year as possible, with 2nd version available in final weeks for those who do not pass on first try
 Results available as quickly as possible
 Constructed response items: short response items per content area, plus writing assessment, given in spring

NOTE: EOC to be given at grade in which student takes the course (e.g. Algebra I in grade 8)