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## Good Tests Must Include Student Work, Groups Argue

By Catherine Gewertz on [February 20, 2018, 4:58 PM](#)

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By guest blogger Catherine Gewertz

A good state testing system must be based in part on students' projects or classroom work, or on complex "performance tasks" designed to measure learning, a coalition of groups argued in a paper released Tuesday.

The [vision statement represents an attempt by 19 groups and individuals to reshape assessment](#) so that it is a less burdensome and more meaningful representation of what students are learning.

The coalition argues that good assessment systems shouldn't hang solely on standardized tests, but on a more nuanced variety of measurements, such as:

- Performance items or tasks as part of traditional "sit down" tests;
- Curriculum-embedded tasks carried out in the classroom during the school year;
- Portfolios or collections of evidence that display a broad set of competencies;
- A combination of traditional sit-down tests, curriculum-embedded tasks, and portfolios and exhibitions leading to a student defense.

Among the coalition's [10 principles for good testing](#) are things other groups and activists have long advocated, such as using "high standards of coherence, validity, reliability, and fairness," making sure tests actually support learning (instead of just imposing an unrelated burden), and building assessments that capture "deeper learning" (not just fill-in-the-bubble factoids).

The new statement reflects an effort to build cross-sector agreement on what constitutes good testing as policymakers increasingly focus on ways to get students ready not just for college, but for the world of work. Jobs for the Future, which focuses on connecting education to work, led the project.

The 19 signatories see the new paper as a "roadmap" to better ways of measuring learning, including students' "academic proficiency, career skills, and civic aptitude."

Gail G. Norris, who helps lead industry learning services at Siemens Industry, said in a statement that getting the work world and educators to collaborate on "compelling and meaningful assessments for students and job seekers is a critical aspect of closing our current skills gaps."

The Jobs for the Future coalition isn't the first group to try to reshape U.S. testing policy. In the wake of the widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards, [state education chiefs issued their vision in 2013 for high-quality assessment](#). Earlier that same year, a group of [scholars who focus on assessment outlined their own ideas of what high-quality testing systems](#) should look like.

Only a few years earlier, two grand projects for better tests got their start: the Smarter Balanced and PARCC tests, funded with federal dollars to reflect the common-core content standards. Both of those assessments had to downsize their ambitious plans in the wake of objections to their cost and length.

Many states, too, refused to use them—or dropped them—because of political blowback. Opponents argued that federally funded tests, with their curriculum-shaping power, were a violation of the cherished local-control principle that undergirds U.S. education.

Bottom line? It's anything but easy to make profound changes in K-12 assessment systems.

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