

# Alternative Accountability in New Hampshire: Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE)

## New Hampshire is engaging in efforts to redesign their accountability system for a variety of reasons.

- ▶ Standardized achievement tests are designed to provide general information about student performance, but lack the depth of information required to inform instructional practice.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, most statewide assessment items are aligned with state standards, but the assessments' scores do not describe what students must know and be able to do to master the skills associated with each standard. As a result, teachers receive little useful information to help them adjust instruction to increase student performance.
- ▶ Educational experts and researchers have proposed alternative approaches to standardized high-stakes assessment for more than a decade, including the use of performance assessments to enable schools to focus their instruction on higher-order skills, provide more accurate measures of what students know and can do, facilitate deeper student engagement in learning, and provide more timely feedback to teachers, parents, and students in order to make appropriate adjustments to instruction.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Preliminary evidence suggests that schools that emphasize and assess deeper learning skills provide important benefits to students. A study of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, for example, suggests that students who attend Consortium schools are less likely than other NYC public school students to be suspended from school, and are more likely to graduate, enroll in college, and complete a college degree. In addition, early-career teachers in Consortium schools have lower rates of turnover than teachers in other NYC public schools.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ In addition to ongoing work with alternative approaches to standardized testing at the school level, several states involved in the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Innovative Laboratory Network (ILN) are in the process of creating alternative accountability systems to facilitate deeper and more meaningful learning for students.

## The Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) model is a pilot accountability system.

- ▶ The PACE model goes beyond the alternative assessment framework to create an entire accountability system that is rooted in students' acquisition of certain competencies during their academic careers.
- ▶ Competency-based systems are characterized by a set of clearly-described targets that are aligned with content standards and the skills necessary to meet or exceed the standards.
- ▶ Performance assessments are used as both summative and formative measures to support student progress in acquiring these competencies. The New Hampshire Department of Education (NH DOE) considers performance assessments to have the following characteristics:
  - Assessments are multi-step activities.
  - They can range from "quite unstructured" to "fairly structured."
  - They require students to either create a product/artifact of their learning or perform a specific task that is scored according to predetermined criteria.
  - Performance is generally scored using a rubric or scoring guide.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Ultimately, the goal of the PACE pilot is to equip educators with the ability to create and implement their own assessments in their respective classrooms, but the system will also include standardized assessments (e.g., Smarter Balanced). For example, Smarter Balanced will be used in selected grades to assess English language arts (3<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) and mathematics (4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>).
- ▶ The PACE model assumes that school accountability works best if it is based on a reciprocal relationship with districts and schools, in which the responsibility for assessment and reporting is shared (i.e., "reciprocal accountability").

## The plan for implementing the PACE model is multidimensional.

- ▶ The NH DOE has put a number of requirements and supports in place to ensure the successful implementation of the PACE model, including mandates for participating districts, technical assistance, and professional development.
- ▶ Participating districts were required to:
  - demonstrate the capacity of both teachers and administrators to implement the pilot effectively;
  - adopt the graduation competencies approved by the New Hampshire State Board of Education;
  - fully develop their course, grade, and assessment systems; and

- agree to participate in a peer and expert review process.
- ▶ Technical assistance and professional development are integral parts of the task development, scorer calibration, and peer review processes.

#### Additional considerations for the implementation of PACE include:

- ▶ **The ability of the NH DOE to develop an assessment system that makes student performance in the pilot districts comparable to the performance of students in non-pilot districts.** Smarter Balanced achievement level descriptors are currently used as the basis for narrative assessment descriptions to provide some comparability with students who are participating in standardized assessments. Additionally, all pilot districts have agreed to engage in a common standard-setting process.
- ▶ **Ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students.** The NH DOE believes that this accountability system affords educators the ability to address the needs of individual students in a manner that is not allowable with the use of systems based on a single standardized test score. Nonetheless, they intend to monitor and report the performance of student groups as outlined in New Hampshire's NCLB waiver.
- ▶ **The capacity to measure student growth adequately.** New Hampshire has used Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) to evaluate educators for a number of years. The NH DOE plans to continue use of SLOs and believes that an alternative system of assessment will enable them to provide more accurate SLOs than the methods currently in place.
- ▶ **Protecting the utility of PACE.** The NH DOE intends to monitor closely the extent to which PACE supports its intended goals and objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Supovitz, J. (2010). *Is High Stakes Testing Working?* Retrieved February 3, 2015 from <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/review/feature/supovitz>

<sup>2</sup> Wood, G. H., Darling-Hammond, L. Neill, M., Roschewski, P. (2007, May). *Refocusing Accountability: Using Local Performance Assessments to Enhance Teaching and Learning for Higher Order Skills*. Retrieved on February 26, 2015 from <http://www.fairtest.org/refocusing-accountability-using-local-performance>.

<sup>3</sup> Performance Standards Consortium. (unknown). *Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Data Report on the New York Performance Standards Consortium*. New York, NY. Retrieved February 24, 2015 from [http://performanceassessment.org/articles/DataReport\\_NY\\_PSC.pdf](http://performanceassessment.org/articles/DataReport_NY_PSC.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Marion, S. & Leather, P. (2015). Assessment and accountability to support meaningful learning. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23(9). Retrieved March 23, 2015 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.1984>. This article is part of EPAA/AAPE's Special Series on *A New Paradigm for Educational Accountability: Accountability for Meaningful Learning*. Guest Series Edited by Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond.