

# National Exhibition Month

## A 360° Approach to Assessment



### National Exhibition Month

National Exhibition Month is a nationwide campaign that occurs every May to promote and celebrate Exhibitions as a preferred form of student assessment. More than 100 schools across 25 states open their doors to parents and community members so students can showcase their achievements and demonstrate proficiency of essential knowledge and skills.

### A Powerful Assessment of Student Performance

National Exhibition Month highlights and promotes Exhibitions as a more effective and comprehensive way of assessing student performance than standardized paper and pencil tests. Whereas standardized tests may show a “slice” of what students have learned, Exhibitions reveal the whole pie, offering a 360° look at what students know and what they can do with that knowledge.

### Coalition of Essential Schools

National Exhibition Month is sponsored by the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national non-profit organization working to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

### Exhibitions Are Not Another Fad in Education

Exhibitions rely on the time-honored tradition of the PhD defense – students orally present and defend their work to external assessors.

Over the last 30 years, hundreds of elementary and secondary schools have adopted Exhibitions because they are more fair and complete than standardized tests.

Thousands more schools have been influenced by the movement and, as a result, use portfolios, senior projects, and other performance-based assessments.

### What Are Exhibitions?

- Exhibitions are an alternative way to assess student achievement.
- Exhibitions are presentations by students to teachers, parents, and other community members.
- Exhibitions offer a 360° view of a student’s academic performance
- Exhibitions demonstrate mastery of academic material, presentation skills, and critical thinking ability.
- Exhibitions are often held at the end of the school year—like final exams—to determine a student’s ability to complete a course, move to the next grade, or to graduate.
- Exhibitions are also held throughout the school year to better understand a learner’s strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance.
- Exhibitions show students, teachers, parents, colleges, and employers how well students can do in real-world situations.
- Exhibitions can be aligned to meet and exceed State Learning Standards.



### What Goes On at an Exhibition?

A student's Exhibition is just the tip of the iceberg.

- As early as nine months before Exhibition Day, students choose their subject matter, write proposals, get them reviewed by teachers and subject matter experts, and begin executing their plans.
- Exhibition Day arrives and the excitement and energy run high. Classroom walls are lined with large-scale maps, charts, or drawings. Display panels unfold to reveal pictures and reports. Samples of student work sit nearby on tabletops and ledges.
- The eager audience includes teachers, parents, students, and other community members. A few may be outsiders, invited because they are knowledgeable about the Exhibition topic. Some in the audience are observers; others sit as "jurists," who will actually make judgments about the Exhibition.
- The student makes a presentation that includes not only an oral component, but additional elements, such as displays, videos, slide shows, artistic performances, and scientific experiments.
- At the end of the presentation, the jurists ask questions designed to elicit the depth and breadth of the student's comprehension of the material as well as his or her ability to use critical thinking skills. Then, the jurists discuss their respective evaluations, usually leaving the final summary to the student's teacher.

### Exhibitions Meet Accountability Standards

Several states, including Nebraska, North Carolina, and Rhode Island, include Exhibitions and other forms of performance assessment as an integral part of their state accountability systems. In New York, a joint effort by concerned parents, teachers, and students persuaded the state to allow a 28-member consortium to evaluate its students on a portfolio of work in place of five of the six state Regents' examinations.

### Schools that Use Exhibitions Fare Well in Conventional Measures of Success

Specific schools that use Exhibitions have shown higher graduation and college bound rates than their counterparts. Schools in the New York Performance Standard Consortium have about half the dropout rate and a 17% higher college bound rate than public schools citywide. Members of the Boston Pilot Schools Network have higher rates of graduation and college bound students than do Boston Public Schools citywide.

### Assessing Students Fairly

Schools using Exhibitions carefully develop appropriate evaluation tools and train evaluators, or jurists, to use them fairly. In the educational world, these multi-faceted measurement tools are called rubrics. They provide a common frame of reference that represents the best thinking about what success and progress look like.

### Investing Time and Effort in Exhibitions

Exhibitions are time consuming and difficult, not just for students, but also for teachers, families, administrators, and even the community. Exhibitions are high-energy programs that encourage creative thinking and engage the entire school and community. Schools invest time and effort in Exhibitions because they provide a broad-based and fair way to determine how students are really doing. Exhibitions also provide a better indication of how well students are prepared to meet future challenges as employees, scholars, and citizens.

**To Learn More  
About National Exhibition  
Month and the Coalition of  
Essential Schools, Visit:  
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