

Brief #10: Community Conversations summary

Erika Landl & Juan D'Brot

Center for Assessment

In March of 2019, the New Mexico Department of Education (NMPED) conducted a series of Community Conversations as part of its assessment transition plan. The themes that emerged are important for the Task Force to consider as part of the deliberation and recommendation process for the transition plan. This brief provides an overview of common themes from across the Community Conversations. We begin by presenting the purposes and uses expressed by stakeholders as the highest priority for New Mexico's assessment *system*. Next we summarize the desired characteristic and features of the assessment system and the supports articulated by stakeholders as necessary to ensure the system is successful in providing information that can be used as intended.

Prioritized Purposes and Uses of Assessment System Results

Across the Community Conversations, stakeholders discussed what they believed to be the primary purpose of the state assessment system and the uses information coming from that system should support. Several of these high priority purposes and uses emerged repeatedly across locations and stakeholder groups, including:

- clearly identify specific areas of student need and provide detailed feedback that serves to inform instruction and help students improve
- evaluate student growth/progress over time (i.e., within and across years) on instructed standards
- inform instruction throughout the school year through the provision of actionable feedback tied to instructional resources
- inform the development of IEP's (e.g., establish appropriate goals)
- provide information about the whole child to help educators understand a student's strengths/needs beyond the standards
- inform decisions about professional development needs at the teacher, school and district level
- monitor trends in performance at the student and aggregate level
- predict performance on the end of year summative assessment

We would like to reiterate that these purposes and uses apply to the entire assessment system, as no one assessment can serve all of these purposes and uses. It will be important for us to further prioritize and refine these purposes and uses as they relate to different assessments within the system.

Desired Assessment System Features

In addition to the intended purposes and uses of assessment system results, the following themes emerged from the Community Conversations focused on desired assessment features. In addition to each of the themes, we present a summary of stakeholder comments that were representative across meetings and stakeholder groups.

Table 1. Desired Assessment System Features Themes and Representative Comments

Themes	Summary of Comments
Relevant and Useful	<p>Assessments within the system should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be meaningful and have value and purpose for students beyond high school • measure content/courses students have already been exposed to • provide for testing consistent with a student’s ability level, even if off-grade, so that accurate information about areas of need are identified • provide for relevant assessments of students with disabilities and IEP’s that produce useful information to inform progress toward IEP goals • be available on demand so that results are timely and specific
Fairness and Accessibility	<p>Assessments within the system should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • utilize content that is culturally, linguistically, geographically, and developmentally appropriate for all students; • provide the appropriate supports and accommodations to be accessible to all students (e.g., translation to multiple languages, assistance & accommodations in native language, supports that mimic instruction) • be untimed to reduce stress and provide more accurate information about student understanding of the standards
Alignment to Standards	<p>Assessments within the system should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • align to the expectations defined within the state content standards • provide consistent information about student understanding of the standards (i.e., be aligned to each other) • align with information provided in text books used for instruction
Growth/Progress	<p>Assessments within the system should support inferences about student and aggregate progress/growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • toward overall proficiency on the state summative • on instructed standards • in combination with status
Multiple Measures of Performance	<p>The assessment system should provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple measures of student performance throughout the year • information about life/work skills that are important after high school (problem solving, critical thinking, communication,) • multiple ways of demonstrating a student’s understanding of the standards (e.g., verbally, portfolio, performance tasks, other artifacts) • assessments that address the standards as well as foundational skills at the lower grade levels

- Comparability** Some assessments within the system should:
- allow for performance to be compared between schools and districts;
 - provide for comparisons at the state and national level;
 - provide for meaningful longitudinal data within and across years

Like the purposes and uses, many themes regarding desired assessment features cannot be met by any single assessment. Task Force members should consider these desired features of an overall assessment system as we engage in the deliberation and recommendation process.

Characteristics to ensure the Assessment System is Successful

Across the Community Conversations several themes emerged with respect to the supports stakeholders believed were necessary to ensure results from the assessment system are used effectively, efficiency and in the manner intended. For each support theme we provide a summary of the comments that were representative across meetings and stakeholder groups.

Table 2. Assessment System Success Characteristics Themes and Representative Comments

Support Themes	Summary of Comments
Clear, Useful Timely Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment results must be clear, meaningful and useful to stakeholders. • Score reports must provide meaningful, detailed (e.g., skill-based) information that helps teachers, parent and students understand how and where improvement is needed. • Assessment results must be reported in a timely fashion so they can be used by educators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ immediate feedback for anything machine scored ○ summative assessment results prior to the end of the year • Reports must be easy for teachers to access on-demand , provide detail about specific areas of need for students, classrooms and student groups • Assessment results should include normative information (national norms)
A Consistent Platform and Tools that Support the Use of Assessment Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A common platform should be used across all assessments to provide for consistency in administration, access, login, accessibility features, reporting features, etc. • A data dashboard should be available to facilitate support use of assessment data for instructional decision making • Information systems should provide detailed longitudinal/trend data for students, schools, districts – overall and disaggregated by student group. • The state should provide for tools and supports that help students understand areas of need and facilitate communication of progress/results with parents.

Professional Development/ Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development should be provided to educators to support the use of assessment results to improve instruction and communicate effectively with parents. • Provide training that improves assessment literacy for all stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, business community).
Reduced Testing Time and Frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter and less frequent assessments are necessary to ensure educators have the opportunity to use results for instruction • Assessments should be consolidated – fewer, better and aligned.
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators require greater transparency as to what students will be assessed on -- not just standards but specific skills • State must provide a clear and focused transition plan for the new assessment system
Local Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state should support the development of high quality local assessments that are aligned to the summative and interim assessments (e.g., provide an aligned item bank) • Consider providing a menu of assessment options that meet district’s individual needs.

The characteristics of a successful assessment system, as described by community members, are relevant to the state summative assessment and the assessment system overall. As the Task Force considers these comments from the Community Conversations, it will be critical to address the tensions among the desired purposes, uses, features, and characteristics while identifying what aspects of the assessment system can address the needs of students in New Mexico.

We at the Center are excited to engage with Task Force members and the NMPED to establish coherent recommendations for New Mexico’s assessment transition plan. We look forward to hearing your thoughts, concerns, and ideas for the state of New Mexico.