



center for
Educational
Performance
& Accountability

BRIEFING

Selecting the Assessments for
Florida's New Education Standards

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Florida TaxWatch has released several publications related to Florida's new education standards and their implementation. Among these are recent Briefings, "CCSS Implementation: The Importance of Getting it Right," and "Professional Development for Teachers is Essential for Success," both of which detail specific aspects of implementation, and what Florida must do to enable student success across the state.

Students in primary grades have been immersed in the new standards since in the 2011-2012 school year, and the standards are scheduled to be fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year for all K-12 students in Florida.

This Briefing focuses on what considerations the Florida Department of Education should utilize in selecting Florida's new assessments.

ASSESSMENTS ARE VITAL

Florida is at a crossroads in deciding how best to incorporate and assess the state's new educational standards. The Florida Department of Education is in the process of identifying any necessary changes to the new standards, and will soon be determining which assessment will be the new measurement of our students' progress.

Florida TaxWatch has consistently expressed the importance of measurable standards for our public school students and has published extensively on this issue for many years. At the most basic level, standards ensure that all students have access to high-quality educational content—at all grade levels and in each content area—regardless of zip code or income.

Adopting and implementing rigorous and highly-vetted state standards is only the first step. Parents, educators, policymakers, and taxpayers must be well-informed as to how individual students, individual

schools, and the state K-12 system as a whole are succeeding in meeting the standards, and effectively educating Florida students for global competition.

Effectively measuring students' grasp and mastery of content can only be accomplished using valid assessments. *Test validity* (in this case) is the extent to which inferences, conclusions, and decisions made on the basis of test results are appropriate and meaningful, and whether the test actually measures what it claims to measure. Valid assessments serve as a barometer of individual student achievement, and when used effectively, will guide classroom instruction and allow instructors to continuously fine-tune their teaching.

The success of the investment made by each and every taxpayer depends on these assessments, which will define the next chapter of our state's public education system. Taxpayers must feel confident that sound decisions are made with regard to their selection.

ALIGNMENT WITH STANDARDS

The new standards are a major shift from the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* in that they require students to master content at a much deeper and more meaningful level and to apply what they have learned to more realistic applications.

Consequently, the assessments selected must be a substantial departure from the multiple choice assessments currently used. Although many considerations must be made in determining the best assessment for Florida's students, as assessment that forces our students to "show what they know" must be paramount.

DEFINING THE PARAMETERS

Based on input from business, education, policy, and community leaders at the Governor's Summit on Education in August 2013, the following criteria

were established as tenets for selection of the state's new assessment:

Florida's new assessment must be aligned to Florida's new standards and should provide meaningful results in a timely manner regarding student mastery of content. It should consider testing time, comparability with other states, expense and excessive involvement by the federal government.

Additionally, there are a number of considerations that should be included in the decision:

- To provide results in a timely manner, our schools must be equipped with the *necessary technology*. This will require an investment in the infrastructure needed, and must be considered, first and foremost, a non-negotiable instructional tool for our students.
- Time devoted to testing must be an integral consideration, but must also provide for *extended student responses* in the spirit of applying what they've learned. This cannot be accomplished using multiple choice "bubble tests."
- The assessments must afford Florida the ability to compare Florida's students with other states on student achievement and learning growth, which requires assessments field-tested in and developed *with input from multiple states*.

CURRENT OPTIONS

The State Board of Education is currently considering multiple options for the new assessment. These include:

- *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* – Assessments developed by a consortium of states with input from local and state educators. Field testing is scheduled in PARCC states in the current academic year, followed by full testing in the 2014-2015 school year.

- *Custom Assessments* – This option would allow Florida to develop, field test, and employ its own assessment; however, student achievement results would not be directly comparable with students in other states, a necessary outcome of the new standards. Furthermore, independently designing an assessment may be cost prohibitive and the time needed to develop and field test would delay its initial use considerably.
- *Partnership with Other States* – This would entail working with other states currently developing their own assessment(s). This would allow for comparability of student achievement scores (among a small number of states) and the ability to negotiate costs to some extent. Florida would be limited (if not prohibited) in making any adjustments to these assessments.
- *"Shelf" or "Semi-Shelf" Assessments* – This option would allow the state to purchase existing and widely recognized tests (like the ACT or SAT for high school); or a hybrid option, which would entail the use of a shelf assessment customized to meet specific needs and wishes of the state. Although these tests potentially provide for state-to-state comparisons and measure for college readiness, they are not aligned to the new standards, and would require additional tests to measure young students' progress.

CONCLUSION

As the decision is made on the new assessment, Florida's leaders must take in to account, at the very least, the issues raised above. The final and most critical of all considerations, however, must be the assurance that our students are provided an education that allows them—and Florida—to be globally competitive.

ABOUT FLORIDA TAXWATCH

As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and analysis of issues related to state and local government taxation, expenditures, policies, and programs. Florida TaxWatch works to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government. Its research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of fiscal and economic policies and practices on citizens and businesses.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by voluntary, tax-deductible memberships and private grants, and does not accept government funding. Memberships provide a solid, lasting foundation that has enabled Florida TaxWatch to bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the citizens it serves for the last 34 years.

THE FLORIDA TAXWATCH CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

The Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability (CEPA) was established to address the profound fiscal and economic impact that PreK-20 education has on Florida's competitiveness. CEPA works directly with Florida's business community and educational research organizations to advocate sound education policy to promote high academic achievement, develop and deploy reliable assessment tools, maximize the return on taxpayer investment, and help foster a more competitive Florida.

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The findings in this *Briefing* are based on the data and sources referenced. Florida TaxWatch research is conducted with every reasonable attempt to verify the accuracy and reliability of the data, and the calculations and assumptions made herein. Please feel free to contact us if you feel that this paper is factually inaccurate.

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