

DPI's Response to "Framework for Change – Next Generation of Assessment & Accountability"

(A Brief Synopsis of Presentation to the State Board of Education 10-2-08)

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History

- The ABCs model, which has been a key part of public schooling in North Carolina since 1995-96, depends on end-of-grade tests in grades 3-8 and on end-of-course tests in high school courses. The goal of the ABCs was to improve student performance and the tests showed us how well we had met that goal.

- Since the ABCs began, other purposes have been overlaid onto these same tests. These include: measuring adequate yearly progress for federal No Child Left Behind purposes, individual Student Accountability Standards, graduation requirements and others. In addition, North Carolina's Standard Course of Study has undergone several revision cycles since the first tests were developed, and we have revised tests, produced new tests and reset standards several times. There were technical and reporting challenges with all of these efforts.

New Generation of Assessment and Accountability

- At this point, it is clearly time to move ahead with a new generation of curriculum, assessment (testing) and accountability in North Carolina. The model we have now is an artifact of the early 1990s in terms of performance, format and capacity to measure student knowledge and skill. It does not provide diagnostic information to teachers and is based on the ongoing cycle of Standard Course of Study revisions. It is really, at its heart, designed to provide a snapshot of student performance each year when North Carolina's schools need more than that to be effective in preparing students for the challenges they face today.

- In 2007, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Testing and Accountability made recommendations concerning the testing program in our state. As a result of those recommendations as well as input provided over time by many stakeholders and educators, the State Board approved a Framework for Change in 2008. That framework included 27 recommendations to dramatically change the scope of the Standard Course of Study, to make the state's testing program more transparent and to improve testing to make it more useful to learning.

- At its October meeting, the State Board of Education received the NCDPI's plan to implement the 27 recommendations of the Framework for Change.

- Eleven of these changes can be addressed right away:

Short-Term Changes

1. **Release one form of each test on an annual basis.** *At the conclusion of the 2008–2009 testing year, one form of the 2008–09 tests for each grade level and subject tested will be released to the school districts and the public to provide transparency of the state's testing program.*
2. **Enact a moratorium on the content standards revision/test development cycle.** *The NCDPI content standards revision cycles are on hold. The NCDPI is developing a plan to identify essential standards in each content area. Once the essential*

standards are identified and approved, test development will begin work on new test editions.

3. **Make results from new tests comparable to prior tests.** *The NCDPI will begin this action step in fall 2008 with the release of spring 2008 reading assessment results for grades 3–8. Scale scores and proficiency in both the old standard and the new standard are scheduled to be released in November/December 2008.*
4. **Move to a five-year graduation rate for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) purposes.** *The U. S. Department of Education (USED) did not grant permission to the NCDPI for a five-year cohort graduation rate. Therefore, the NCDPI will continue to use the four-year cohort graduation rate for AYP. However, the NCDPI is looking at how to implement the five-year graduation rate for use in the ABCs.*
5. **Count retest scores in performance composites.** *The NCDPI is having discussions with the USED to determine if retest scores can be used at all grade levels or just in those grades that are part of the student accountability standards and high school exit standards (i.e., grades 3, 5, and 8; English I, Algebra I, Biology, Civics and Economics, and U.S. History).*
6. **Eliminate the redundancy in end-of-course (EOC) and end-of-grade (EOG) testing by allowing EOC scores to count as EOG scores in middle grades.** *The NCDPI is having discussions with the USED to determine feasibility with respect to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and regulations.*
7. **Change the current approach to writing assessment.** *During its August 2008 meeting, the SBE approved the NCDPI's proposed 2008–2009 Writing Assessment System Pilot. All students at grades 4 and 7 will participate in the Writing Assessment System Pilot. During the 2008–09 school year, all students at grades 4 and 7 will complete two content specific writing tasks/assignments and two on-demand writing tasks/assignments. Grade 4 students will complete their writing tasks/assignments using paper and pencil with the use of word processing tools as a local or an accessibility option. Schools will store their work in local portfolios. Grade 7 students will participate in the Writing Assessment System Pilot using word processing tools in order to complete their writing tasks/assignments. Schools will store their work in local portfolios. In addition, grade 7 students from ten selected LEAs will participate in an Electronic Pilot. These students will store their work in an electronic portfolio centrally hosted by the NCDPI. To assist educators in understanding and implementing the new Writing Assessment System Pilot at Grades 4 and 7, visit www.ncpublicschool.org/sbe_meeting/revisions/2008/pdfs/gcs2rev.pdf.*
8. **Replace the current English I EOC with a high school English assessment given at grade 10.** *The NCDPI is in the process of determining which essential standards in English will be measured at grade 10. As soon as the essential standards are identified, a test development plan will be established. The test development plan will include an item format tryout during the 2008–09 school year. Schools will have an opportunity to volunteer to participate.*
9. **Revamp the current computer skills test to ensure it measures 21st century Information Communication Technology (ICT) literacy.** *The current test has been reviewed and measures the strands set forth and specifically defined in the North Carolina Computer/Technology Skills Standard Course of Study adopted by the SBE in February 2004. To ensure the test measures 21st century Information Communication Technology (ICT) literacy, the SBE will need to adopt a new curriculum. Students are required to meet computer skills proficiency requirements in order to receive a North Carolina high school diploma. The year of the Standard Course of Study the student was required to be instructed on determines the test*

edition the student must take in order to meet the requirement for graduation. Students who entered grade 8 for the first time in the 2005–06 school year and beyond, take the Online Test of Computer Skills (test edition 3). Effective for the 2008–09 school year select students are allowed to take the online computer skills test as early as the fall of the sixth-grade year. Allowing this option to sixth- and seventh-graders is solely at the discretion of the LEA. If allowed, prior to registering any students (i.e., students at grades six and seven) to take the online test of computer skills, students and their parents/guardians must be made aware and understand that the North Carolina Online Test of Computer Skills is a test designed to measure the competencies of the K–8 Computer Skills Curriculum adopted by the State Board of Education in 2004 and is intended for grade-eight students.

10. ***Eliminate the misalignment of assessment for the integrated math courses.*** *The NCDPI is in the process of determining which essential standards in the Integrated Mathematics courses will be measured. As soon as the essential standards are identified, a test development plan will be established. The test development plan will include an item format tryout during the 2008–09 school year. Schools will have an opportunity to volunteer to participate.*
11. ***Shorten the timeframe for reporting results after new tests are administered.*** *The NCDPI is currently exploring options to shorten the timeframe for reporting results after new tests are administered.*

Long-Term Changes

- The other recommendations are longer term and will require more planning and work to implement. While we will have to wait longer for these to occur, their potential impact is even greater than the impact of the short-term changes. Work has already begun on this effort, which will continue through 2013. Each year, products will be completed along the way, but it will take time to complete the entire scope of work.
- The key elements of our work will be: creating a set of essential standards, creating and improving assessments and building a new accountability model for schools.
- Essential Standards – this effort will not be easy and, in fact, North Carolina is the first state in the nation to attempt to identify essential standards while also overhauling our accountability and testing models. Essential standards means identifying the most important “must have” goals of the curriculum and identifying the “nice to have but not critical” goals of the curriculum. This counters the “inch-deep and mile-wide” concern about the scope of North Carolina’s current Standard Course of Study. The idea is to help teachers focus in on the most important skills and knowledge that all their students should master.
- Creating and Improving Assessments – Current state tests in public schools are focused on summative tests. That means end-of-year tests that sum up the entire year’s learning and are usually taken on one or more days near the end of the year. These tests are important for school accountability, but don’t come at a time to provide much useful information for teachers to use in adjusting teaching or helping students overcome problems. New summative assessments need to be created once the essential standards are in place, but these would be more transparent to the public and to teachers and would be used just to take the snapshot of school performance. Other purposes would no longer be overlaid on these tests as they are today.

To provide better information about student learning all along the way, NCDPI proposes to support the development (by classroom teachers) of better formative assessments and to provide a bank of benchmark testing that can be used at key points throughout the year by classroom

teachers to make sure students are on track. Formative assessments are assessments that can inform teaching and learning – they give back information to teachers and students about what they have and have not mastered in order to help them address their shortcomings. Some larger and wealthier school districts are already able to provide these in a consistent way to their teachers, but most districts are not. This would provide this service to all districts and schools.

Better formative assessments and better benchmark assessments will mean strong professional development efforts and the use of technology tools to deliver these assessments. Some of these tools are already in place and can be expanded and scaled out to meet statewide needs.

- **Creating Better Tests** – Today’s tests are still mostly paper and pencil, bubble-sheet multiple choice tests. These have advantages of being relatively inexpensive and fast to grade at the end of the year. But, with technology and the demands of the 21st century, it is possible to build tests that also include open-ended opportunities for students to answer questions and better demonstrate what they know and can do. As we move forward, it is important to move into tests that are more real-world and less dependent on bubble sheets.
- **Building a New Accountability Model** – The ABCs model has served North Carolina well for a long time, but we have more information today than when we originally built the model and, most importantly, we have technical capabilities that were not available to us in the beginning of the school accountability. Our goal is to move to a new way of considering school accountability that would move away from a year-to-year growth focus and move toward a model that predicts what is challenging and attainable for every child. This is possible with reading today, and offers us a more powerful tool to make sure that all students are growing academically as they should. In addition to this developmental growth model, K-12, we are interested in developing a new high school accountability model that would include graduation rates, student success with the new Future Ready Core graduation standards and student readiness for college/university/work. The details of these new models are not in place yet, but this is the direction we want to take.
- All of this work is beginning now and the SBE will hear regular updates about progress to accomplish these goals.
- Our commitment is to provide an assessment and accountability system that serves the needs of the public to know how their schools are doing, that serves the needs of teachers so that they can target their efforts to student needs and that serves the needs of students. We want testing to matter and to be appropriate – just enough to show what students know and to be fair and not so much as to distract from the important learning that takes places in classrooms statewide.