High-quality, comprehensive, and timely information about what students know and can do is critical to ensuring that schools and families can prepare each and every student for success in school, college, careers, and life. Multiple forms of assessments are a key source of this information for educators, students, parents, and the public. No single assessment or piece of student work can provide the robust information needed to inform teaching, learning, and supports, as well as public accountability and continuous improvement of education systems through families, policymakers, and other stakeholders. A high-quality system of assessments can facilitate this by providing aligned and coherent information from a variety of assessments about students’ college and career readiness—maximizing efficiency while reducing duplication, in a timely and rich enough manner to inform instruction, student self-direction in learning, and accountability.

A high-quality system encompasses a coherent array of assessments designed to address the multiple and diverse needs of stakeholders—from formative to summative, and possibly interim assessments—grounded in a theory of action that focuses on advancing the full range of knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed for success in college and careers. These assessments are compared, analyzed, and refined to remove duplicative testing. A high-quality system of assessments that include extended-performance tasks in particular can provide robust, comprehensive data throughout the year, ranging from demonstrations of learning through classroom work and projects to more standardized demonstrations of college and career readiness (e.g., district and statewide assessments, standardized performance assessments, etc.). When a high-quality system of assessments is coherent with curriculum, students can develop a range of cognitive and co-cognitive skills as they work intensively on their tasks, revise their work to meet standards, and display their learning to parents, peers, teachers, and employers. Additionally, teachers’ development, use, and even scoring of high-quality assessments in a balanced system has been shown to improve instruction and student learning.
By providing a coherent spectrum of information, a high-quality system of assessments can help balance providing comparable, disaggregated statewide information on student learning with providing actionable information for and from classroom learning and instruction aligned to college- and career-readiness. Such a system can enable improvements that lead to student mastery of the full array of college and career ready knowledge, skills, and behaviors, while minimizing assessments that are incoherent with this goal.

As states and districts begin to accelerate their adoption and evolution of a high-quality system of assessments, the undersigned organizations and individuals have expressed their support for the following ten principles for advancing such systems, to provide guidance and a more common language throughout this process. The principles draw collectively on expertise developed over decades of studying and designing assessments and assessment systems and efforts to advance the full array of college and career-ready knowledge, skills, and behaviors for all students. They also build on existing principles for high-quality assessments and systems of assessments developed by our organizations over the past several years.
10 Principles for Building a High-Quality System of Assessments

ONE
Capture the array of knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed for college and career readiness (i.e., deeper learning)

TWO
Balance assessment of learning with assessment for and as learning through a comprehensive set of tasks and measures

THREE
Advance equity and be inclusive of and accessible to all students

FOUR
Build educator and school capacity for designing and using assessments

FIVE
Align assessments to support learning and avoid duplication of testing

SIX
Convey clear, coherent, and continuous data on student learning

SEVEN
Include meaningful, ongoing input and collaboration from local communities and diverse stakeholders in the development and continuous improvement of the system

EIGHT
Encourage cycles of review, calibration, and continuous improvement of assessments individually and as a collective system

NINE
Employ high standards of coherence, validity, reliability, and fairness

TEN
Protect data privacy
we underscore our belief that if states and districts implement the enclosed ten principles for building and evolving a high-quality system of assessments, they will be taking impactful and much needed steps to bridge from current over-burdensome and incomplete assessment practices and policies to a system that puts each and every student’s learning at the center. Together, these principles lay out a vision for systems focused on continuous improvement and the full array of knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed for each student to succeed beyond high school, in the workplace, and throughout life. While individually our organizations and efforts may emphasize different principles, collectively we share the goal of advancing equity in college, career, and civic readiness. As such, we stand ready to support states, districts, schools, and their communities in working toward building and evolving systems that embrace all ten principles to foster high-quality systems of assessments for all students.

IN JOINING TOGETHER,

To add your organization’s name to the 10 Principles signatories, please contact Thor Blanco-Reynoso at tblancoreynoso@jff.org.

The Foundation for Excellence in Education
Great Schools Partnership
INACOL
Jobs for the Future
KnowledgeWorks
Learning Forward
Learning Policy Institute
MHA Labs
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
PAIRIN
Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity at the Stanford University Graduate School of Education
Teaching Matters

Photographs courtesy of Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action Desaturated from originals
JFF and EducationCounsel are grateful to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for its support of this effort.

Suggested Citation: Ten Principles for a High-Quality System of Assessments (2018). Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.
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