

Session B-3: Locally Selected, Nationally Recognized High School Assessments

Panelists: *John Olson, Tammy Howard, Vince Verges*

Moderator: *Deborah Spitz, U.S. Department of Education, Office of State Support*

This session addressed one of the assessment flexibilities in the ESSA, i.e., the use of nationally recognized high school assessments by LEAs in lieu of the state high school assessment (optional section 7 of the Guide). If states use this flexibility, the nationally recognized high school assessment is subject to peer review. Panelists discussed the evidence that states should submit and key issues for consideration.

Ms. Spitz provided a basic outline of this new flexibility and emphasized that it is a state's choice as to whether to use it. The state can set certain criteria, and LEAs can apply to use specific assessments that meet the state criteria. This flexibility is not for an individual school or student within an LEA. If an LEA chooses to offer the assessment, it must be used across the LEA. If it is a high school assessment, it is for all high school students. This allows for direct comparisons across schools within an LEA.

Ms. Spitz provided the following definition: "Nationally recognized high school academic assessment means an assessment of high school students' knowledge and skills that is administered in multiple states and is recognized by institutions of higher education in those or other states for the purposes of entrance or placement into courses in postsecondary education or training programs."

When discussing peer review for these assessments, states must submit evidence based on section 7 of the Guide and all other sections that apply. The process includes monitoring and parental notification requirements.

Ms. Spitz introduced the panel, and Ms. Tammy Howard began with a discussion of the evidence states are responsible for when choosing to implement locally selected, nationally recognized assessments. Her presentation included a look at possible challenges.

North Carolina develops its own assessments through a partnership with North Carolina State University. The state therefore maintains responsibility for all aspects of the assessments, as well as for reporting on all assessment findings.

Ms. Howard noted that national assessments are packaged products for which states are required to address the first six sections of the Guide in the same way as any assessment. For section 7, however, states must identify the steps they will take to address any issues that the vendor of a nationally recognized assessment might not have covered. For instance, has the vendor looked at the larger context of how this assessment will have input in a state or an LEA?

North Carolina continues to return to the issue of making comparisons across LEAs related to student performance. When an LEA uses a different assessment, how can the state make comparisons? This is an important consideration for the states.

Looking closely at 7.1 and 7.2, Ms. Howard discussed alignment studies. When conducting alignment studies for all assessments, states must consider assessments that vendors have already built with defined content standards and specifications. What is the degree to which these vendor assessments

align with state-adopted content standards? What will happen if that degree is closer or farther away than anticipated?

For instance, North Carolina has had to change some items on a state assessment to address observations that made about an alignment study. A state might not have the opportunity to go back and make changes to an assessment that is already built. This is another important consideration for states. If there are any differences between the alignment study results and an assessment, how would the state respond? How would that be communicated for peer review and to a public that expects measurements of state content standards?

States also must have a process for including all students in the assessment, except those taking alternate assessments aligned to AAAS. With more district latitude, states might need to think about the evidence that will be provided to show that alternate assessments are being monitored. If an LEA administers a nationally recognized assessment, what will happen to alternate assessments and assessing all students? The state still maintains that responsibility. Peer reviewers would expect to see evidence that states are still assessing all students; therefore, states must have a process in place.

Section 7.1 also addresses accommodations and equal benefit. How do states make sure students have equal benefit from participating in a national assessment? These assessments are prepackaged and have been built to certain criteria. This could create accommodation issues and situations where students may not have the same benefit. A state must determine how to handle this issue. That point leads into parental notification, i.e., providing evidence that parents have been informed. Section 7.1 says the notification process must occur before an LEA administers the national assessment. Sharing information with parents frequently remains critical. States must have systems in place to provide consistent communication over time. The peer review evidence could include letters for parents that clearly explain all options.

In LEAs that participate in the flexibility, all schools in an LEA must participate, and evidence of this must be made available during peer review.

Section 7 is the beginning, not the end, noted Ms. Howard. States must map out all these details before an LEA makes a decision. States also should share the peer review requirement with LEAs, because once peer review begins, something might need to be corrected. LEAs must understand up front that this is not just a matter of signing up for a nationally recognized assessment. This effort will require evidence that all the steps are met consistently from one LEA to another. The goal is to see how LEAs and schools are performing and to have comparability at the state level.

Ms. Spitz stated that the peer review requirement for this flexibility is different than other peer review requirements. For locally selected national assessments, a state must come in to ED for peer review before implementing the process in the LEAs. States that are considering this issue should talk with ED.

Mr. Anton Jackson asked about the difference in the peer review process for national tests. Ms. Spitz said that if something has already been peer reviewed, it will be treated as a consortium assessment. The ACT test, for example, may have been through peer review, but not for a specific state. That state would therefore be responsible for meeting all the requested peer review elements. She reiterated that states must be peer reviewed before releasing the process to the LEAs.

Mr. Vince Verges discussed the assessment process for the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). He stated that, following a discussion of national assessments, Florida legislators agreed to conduct studies, research, analyses, educator and expert meetings, and to develop a final report that examined the effects of LEAs that wanted to use the SAT or ACT in grade 10 while other LEAs used the statewide assessment. Mr. Verges wrote the request for proposal (RFP) for the study. He suggested that states considering this issue review the study, called the Feasibility of the Use of the ACT and SAT in Lieu of Florida Statewide Assessments.

Mr. Verges shared information on resources from CCSSO that addressed the following issues:

- How does a state help its LEAs communicate with parents?
- Will the state buy the test, or will the LEAs buy the test?
- What should policymakers consider?

Another document provides an implementation framework, as well as details on procurement and LEA capacity. Ms. Spitz said link to these resources would be posted on the conference website.

States also should consider the timeframe when using national assessments in an accountability system. When do students usually take national assessments? How will this factor into a state's accountability plans?

Mr. John Olson presented on what states need to understand about the new flexibility, focusing on critical element 7.3. The flexibility requires that the national assessment must be equivalent to, or more rigorous than, the statewide assessment and must produce comparable data.

Mr. Olson is president of Olson Educational Measurement and Assessment Services (OEMAS) and senior partner for the Assessment Solutions Group. OEMAS won the bid on the Florida RFP written by Mr. Verges. Mr. Olson's organization is working on a report for the Florida legislature and FDOE, to be completed by January 2019. The group accomplished a great deal within a short time using existing data and the parameters of the RFP. Comparability issues required alignment studies, review of accommodations, review of test data, a comparison of scores for students based on best samples, and a determination of how students would perform using various statistical methods. States considering this flexibility would have to take similar steps.

The goal is to empirically evaluate evidence and run analyses on the rigor and quality of the various assessments under consideration. The state assessment serves as the baseline. The other two or three assessments would then be compared. This work must show that the national assessments provide data comparable to the state assessment.

Another requirement is that states conduct analyses to determine whether the tests under consideration provide unbiased data results and can fairly differentiate among students and schools across the state assessment system. Each subgroup of students must be fairly assessed by the different tests. States must then determine where performance lands.

Mr. Olson noted five aspects of the comparability study:

- Alignment;
- Accommodations;

- Comparability;
- Impact on accountability reporting; and
- Peer review.

Mr. Olson also recommended that states focus on the following steps:

- Evaluate the technical characteristics of the desired assessments. This includes looking at content coverage, items provided, range of difficulty, and distribution of performance by subgroup.
- Develop concordance tables to determine where students would fall depending on the test, and develop tables to summarize how close they would be. Even with almost perfectly correlated tests, there isn't 100 percent agreement. States will encounter measurement errors, especially at cut points. Even so, this information will help states evaluate comparability.
- Determine interchangeability of the test scores from the various tests.

Mr. Olson's group created a mock internal peer review. Florida provided its peer review submissions and results from the previous two years as a baseline. The vendors submitted information. The assessments passed for most, but not all of the critical elements. Mr. Olson said states should go through this process before contacting ED.

Questions and Comments

- Mr. Verges said Florida slowed down its plan to shift to a national assessment. The legislators "love" the current state accountability system and don't want to upset the process. He said they will find out what happens next year.
- Mr. Rob Bauer asked what states should submit if they are not part of a consortium. Ms. Spitz recommended reviewing notes for an assessment that already has been peer reviewed. She emphasized, however, that ED does tell states what kind of evidence to submit, as there are a variety of ways to submit this evidence.
- Mr. Olson said states could begin by reviewing technical reports and summaries and assume that data are appropriate for a particular state. It may or may not be valid based on state demographics but will likely be more comparable than not. He said accommodations, which were a problem a few years ago, are currently not as difficult, but the issue is still worth reviewing. Interchangeability of test scores remains "tricky."
- Mr. Verges added that the timing of student testing matters. Students who took a state test scored very well on the SAT and/or ACT the following year.
- States also should consider the information the standard-setting panel used, because that forms the basis for the tests.
- Mr. Olson said the state assessment served as the baseline for the Florida studies. If the state assessment isn't part of the mix, and the option is to allow the LEAs to use one of the two college entrance exams, it affects comparability.

Ms. Spitz invited the panelists to provide any final thoughts.

- Ms. Howard encouraged states to go back to the content standards. It is critical to maintain the expectation for alignment. Do national assessments uphold the expectations of the state? The state must be able to monitor and show this process clearly.

- Mr. Verges said states can make change happen, but comparability is the biggest issue. States will need to find ways to bring achievement levels and cut scores into alignment.
- Mr. Olson said a practical approach is to think carefully. If a state wants to go down this road, it should be clear on a design that meets all peer review critical element requirements. Flexibility might be needed as well. Current achievement levels, for instance, might require tweaking. A mock exercise will provide internal information prior to the official peer review. ED is available for support, and states should reach out early in the process.