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# A New Path for Oregon: System of Assessment to Empower Meaningful Student Learning



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*Oregon Education Investment Board*

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***Working Document***

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# Acknowledgments

Governor John Kitzhaber requested Dr. Nancy Golden, Chief Education Officer, Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) to convene a group of teachers from the Oregon Education Association (OEA), to collaborate with the Governor's Office, the OEIB and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to propose an "ideal" system of assessment which makes sense for both students and educators. This document is the result of the work of educators from across Oregon who have given countless hours learning together and sharing their expertise as classroom teachers and school district advisors in proposing a different way to assess Oregon students. Their commitment to helping each and every student in their classrooms and schools learn, grow and realize their full potential is reflected throughout this proposal. We are forever grateful to Dr. Rick Stiggins for the expertise, guidance and support throughout the development of this proposal. He truly helped each of us envision the possibilities of an assessment system that supports learning.

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# A New Path for Oregon

## System of Assessment to Empower Meaningful Student Learning

### *Working Document*

## Executive Summary

Good education inspires students' natural curiosity and supports their desire to learn. When utilized to its full potential, good assessment can do the same. This new proposed system of assessment will increase time for learning, emphasize the use of assessment in support of learning, and rely on the most authentic balance of assessments to encourage student success. When we believe all students can learn, and we create systems of support and provide appropriate tools to encourage their success, we will finally move toward the future that all Oregon students deserve.

### *A Time of Opportunities and Possibilities*

Governor John Kitzhaber requested Dr. Nancy Golden, Chief Education Officer, Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) to convene a group of teachers from the Oregon Education Association (OEA), to collaborate with the Governor's Office, the OEIB and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to propose an "ideal" system of assessment which makes sense for both students and educators. The process of developing such a vision began with a team of teachers articulating a set of values and beliefs that should underpin the uses of assessment. Those involved agreed that assessments need to support student learning - the need to balance *assessment for learning* (i.e. formative assessment) and *assessment of learning* (i.e. summative assessment) in the future is critical for student success.

While advocating for an increase of *assessment for learning* we understand that different decision makers (e.g. students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, community members, policy makers, etc.) need different kinds of information about student learning in different forms at different times if they are to make their unique contributions to supporting student success. No single quality assessment can meet all needs, and thus this proposal looks at balancing the following assessment sources:

- Continuous evidence from classroom assessment to support student learning;
- Periodic evidence supplied by progress monitoring and interim benchmark assessments; and
- Results of annual assessments to verify what has been learned.

This balance acknowledges that using tests that happen once a year, while helpful in setting resource priorities, are of little value to those who must make instructional decisions every three or four minutes - our students and our teachers.

The future effectiveness of assessment in Oregon schools and student learning will rely on our ability to move from an assessment system historically devoted to summative applications using annual test scores to meet the needs of all the users to one that clearly defines the type of assessment and the appropriate use of the assessment for student engagement in learning. The key to this transition and to the success of the new system of assessment is for all stakeholders to develop and continually foster assessment literacy. Assessment literacy is the ability to understand the assessment process in order to best meet the needs of students. It is also the method of gathering accurate information about student learning and using the assessment cycle and its results effectively to improve student learning and success.

### *A New Vision of Excellence*

In order to achieve balance and excellence in our system of assessment, those engaged in this reflective process propose a new vision that weaves assessment more deeply than ever before into the teaching and learning process. Used appropriately, assessment can be a powerful tool to help both teachers and their students know where they are now in their learning progression and determine where students need to go next. With consistent ongoing teacher support and engaged students, *assessment for student learning* can provide individualized support to meet the needs of each learner. Therefore, we recommend a new vision based on following guiding principles:

- All assessments must arise from and promise to serve a clear purpose.
- They must be designed and developed to reflect developmentally and academically appropriate learning targets.
- Each assessment must accurately reflect student learning.
- Results must be effectively communicated to all intended users.
- Our mission must be to use assessment to encourage students to keep striving for learning success.

### *Transition to the New Vision*

Transitioning to a new system of assessment requires time and collective work among education stakeholders and communities across Oregon. We hope you find this proposal as a place to start thinking about the actions necessary to transition from an

assessment system that relies too heavily on summative, standardized assessment to a new system in which assessment and learning work together for students' benefit, one in which all educators and stakeholders become assessment literate, and every Oregon student can reach his or her full potential. In the words of Chappuis (2009).

*"Assessment for learning is a gift we give our students. It is a mirror we hold up to show them how far they have come. It is a promise that we will use assessment, not to punish or reward, but to guide them on their learning journey."*

# A New Path for Oregon

## System of Assessment to Empower Meaningful Student Learning

### *Working Document*

## Introduction: A Time of Opportunities and Possibilities

*“Used with skill, assessment can motivate the reluctant, revive the discouraged, and thereby increase, not simply measure, learning and achievement” (Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis & Arter, 2012).*

Good education inspires students’ natural curiosity and supports their desire to learn. But good education can only occur in the presence of sound assessment practice—and that in turn begins with the recognition that students are individuals with diverse needs.

Acknowledging that not all students fit into the same mold and may not follow the same path to learning success frees us to accommodate learning differences and thus help every student fulfill his or her highest potential. Such differentiation requires attention to language differences, cultural diversity, learner rights inherent in Individualized Education Plans, or any other academic or social emotional support needed to foster student success. We must meet each student at his or her current level, understand where that student is excelling—or struggling—and identify what each student needs to take the next step. Such a tailored approach demands the skillful application of sound assessment practices at all levels and by all educators.

At this moment in time, Oregon has the opportunity to improve its assessment system by creating local and state practices that truly support universal learning success. Empowered by state leadership, Oregon educators have teamed up to propose a dynamic new way of assessing student performance, one that makes learning meaningful for both students and educators, shows how students’ academic success can soar when assessment is made an integral component of instruction, and provides a system of support for educators to facilitate this success.

The new Oregon model of assessment proposed herein will increase time for learning, emphasize the use of assessment to support that learning, empower students and teachers, increase assessment literacy among all educators—as well as parents and the broader community—and make assessment more efficient by ensuring that assessment and instruction are aligned.



The goal of this proposal is to open the doors to the following possibilities:

- Moving away from our historic over-emphasis on summative standardized assessment.
- Renewing focus on the classroom, where the majority of assessment affecting students' daily lives actually occurs.
- Creating a foundation of, and ongoing support for assessment literacy for all assessment users.

## Values and Beliefs: Assessment as a Foundation for Student Learning

Any strong assessment system must rest on a foundation of values regarding assessment itself and the role it can and should play in fostering learning, supporting users, and improving educational opportunities for students. The following values and beliefs provide the foundation for this proposal.

**All students can learn and realize their full potential.** The future of Oregon's assessment practices must embody the belief that all students can learn and achieve at high levels when assessments are used appropriately. College or career readiness requires that students become lifelong learners who can read, write, solve math problems and engage in critical thinking. However, a one-size-fits-all approach to assessing such skills serves no one because it provides only limited information about individual performance and progress. A successful system of assessment is not designed simply to highlight problems or to generalize about groups while ignoring conditions that influence performance. Instead, a successful system of assessment recognizes the myriad strengths of various learners within their respective communities and within the collaborative nature of the classroom. In addition, such a system is culturally sensitive and implemented by educators who are assessment literate. It can also serve multiple purposes, giving us information not only about students themselves, but also about the effectiveness of the schools and districts that serve those students. Such information, in turn, can help us create improvements that expand learning opportunities for all.

**Assessments must support or verify student learning.** All assessments must address a pre-established need for information and provide evidence that is dependable, instructionally useable and accessible to intended users. Assessments serve two general purposes: (1) they inform and enhance teaching and learning, or (2) they verify or certify the level of student learning. Both purposes are important but they

are different. The first takes place during learning and second takes place after learning has occurred. Any assessment that does not serve one of these purposes should not be conducted. Further, users should have a clear purpose in mind before determining what sort of assessment to choose or administer.

**Assessments must inform all important users.** Students must be seen not merely as the subjects of assessment, but as important members of the assessment user network. Traditionally, assessment has been seen as something teachers and school leaders *do to students*. This is unfortunate because assessment has far more power to influence learning when educators help students understand where they are at any given time in their journey toward success. Seeing how far they have come and what steps remain can be highly motivating. It makes students aware of their progress and growth, and this awareness gives them confidence. It also shows them where they are headed, thus making them feel in control of their learning. And finally, it shows which goals are within immediate reach, making progress feel manageable, and giving students the motivation and encouragement they need to overcome challenges and continue their efforts.

Student success depends on decisions made by numerous individuals and groups, among them parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, community members, policy makers, and of course, the students themselves. It's important to recognize that these various decision makers need different kinds of evidence in different forms at different times if they are to make their unique contributions to student learning. No single assessment can meet all of their informational needs. Depending on the context, assessment users may require—

- Continuous, ongoing evidence from *classroom assessment*
- Periodic evidence supplied by progress monitoring and *interim benchmark assessments*
- Results of *annual assessments* to verify what has been learned over a given period

While day-to-day classroom assessment has the greatest impact on students' engagement in their own learning, assessment in many forms and at many levels will support decision making throughout a broader network.

**Assessment results must inform instructional goal setting.** All assessments must address clear instructional targets, show how close students have come to meeting their instructional goals, and help educators and students make sound decisions about next steps. Quality assessments must provide useable information on student performance that goes beyond mere summary test scores. Single scores are limited in their capacity

to inform us about student performance, and to understand why, we have only to consider how tests are constructed. Traditionally, assessments have clustered many standards together into groups or domains; test scores that reflect performance across these domains make it impossible for students or teachers to know which specific targets within the domain were or were not mastered. This means they don't help teachers know what comes next in the learning; they provide no instructionally actionable information. On the other hand, assessments built to give information about specific achievement standards or proficiencies offer far greater instructional value because they show teachers (and students) where students are excelling and struggling, and hence where to focus their efforts. Whenever possible, assessments should tell us how each student did with respect to each standard tested.

**Assessments must be valid, reliable, and unbiased.** Regardless of purpose, assessments must be valid (measuring what they intend to measure), reliable (measuring accurately time and time again), and unbiased (measuring learning equally regardless of cultural background). Anything less is not acceptable for Oregon's students. Only quality assessment has the potential to support individual growth for all students. To satisfy these standards of excellence, we must invest in immediate and long-term professional development in assessment literacy for Oregon educators.

**Local district assessment systems must become the priority.** Over the decades and even in current professional literature, accountability is defined in terms of state systems. This has created a narrowed focus on statewide assessments for public accountability. Yet, virtually all instructional decisions that affect teaching and learning (and promise to narrow achievement gaps, for example) are made at the local level by district instructional leaders, building leaders, classroom teachers and students. While some evidence that informs local decisions may come, in part, from assessments conducted outside the district (such as statewide tests), instructional responsibility resides with a community's educators. Local district assessment, therefore, must be the focus of any vision of excellence that hopes to improve student learning in Oregon.

**Assessing and tracking student growth must** be a priority. Traditionally, assessment has been seen as occurring *after* teaching as a way of measuring what students have learned. An alternative approach weaves assessment into teaching itself. The student and teacher work together to see where the student is along a continuum of success, and to determine what should come next. This initial assessment is followed by focused instruction, another check of achievement, more decisions about what to do next, more opportunities for learning, and so on in a cycle where instruction is always determined by assessment, and assessment has a real and *immediate* impact on instruction. Ongoing, continual assessment of student growth over time gives educators and students more frequent opportunities to adjust the course of learning to meet each

student's needs. Research has revealed that such an approach yields profound achievement gains, with the largest gains *accruing for struggling learners* (Black & William, 1998a; Black & William, 1998b). By following this approach, Oregon has the opportunity to ensure growth *for all students*.

In summary, the future of Oregon education must be built on a balanced assessment system that is capable of supporting student learning *and* verifying it, depending on the context. Such a balanced assessment system must—

- Confirm the belief that all students can learn and achieve at high levels;
- Serve a pre-set purpose and accommodate the informational needs of all decision makers (rather than occurring annually and serving only a few);
- Provide evidence of mastery on individual achievement standards, not merely a summative score spanning broad domains;
- Satisfy accepted criteria of assessment quality (e.g., all assessments must be valid, reliable, and unbiased);
- Communicate results in timely and understandable ways to intended users;
- Help educators and parents engage students in ongoing self-assessment, creating the confidence that only comes from helping to monitor their own learning and seeing success within their reach; and
- Reflect student growth over time as opposed to achievement status at a single point in time

## Contrasting Our Assessment Needs with Current Reality

Comparing our current assessment practices and priorities with the proposed values and beliefs articulated above reveals significant discrepancies between where we are now and where we could be. In order to get where we want to be, we need to address the following problems:

**Students are discouraged.** When classroom and large-scale assessment play their traditional role as a means of ranking and sorting students, major segments of our student population—particularly those who finish low in the ranking order—lose momentum, confidence, and motivation. These struggling learners may drop out of school or simply give up and thus wind up unprepared for higher education or career training. Recently, we have come to understand that this result affects more than the students themselves; it is society that loses in the long run, and both outcomes are unacceptable. Sound assessment practices can help turn this loss around.

**Unproductive use of resources.** In recent years, virtually all our assessment resources for school improvement have been invested in annual high-stakes standardized tests. The commitment to fixing schools by demanding higher annual test scores started with districtwide testing in the 1960s, extended to statewide applications in the 1970s, then to national assessment in the 1980s, and ultimately to international assessment in the 1990s. With the federal policy of *No Child Left Behind* passed in the early 2000s, the urgency and frequency of testing have only increased. The United States has invested billions of dollars in this ever-more frenzied testing over the past few decades, based on the belief that increased testing would drive school improvement. Yet opportunity gaps persist, graduation rates remain troubling, and when it comes to test scores, the U.S. ranks in the middle of the international pack. Unless our focus shifts to include new classroom assessment approaches, integrating assessment with instruction and making students partners in their own instructional process, student outcomes will not improve.

**Unmet information needs.** Our current reliance on accountability testing in which everyone must await the delivery and distribution of annual scores has left all decision makers (students, teachers, principals, parents, district leaders, community members, legislators, policy makers) without the information they need to support student learning. Standardized assessments happen once a year; students and teachers in the classroom make decisions every three to four minutes. Further, intermittent test results fail to meet the informational needs of instructional leaders working outside the classroom to support and improve student learning. These across-the-board results lack both the depth and frequency to make a serious difference.

**Lack of opportunity to develop assessment literacy.** With the over-emphasis on high-stakes, standardized assessments, effective assessments at the classroom level are often devalued. When that happens, there is less impetus to provide training that would enable educators to design quality assessments or use them in an effective and timely way. Given that teachers typically spend a third of their professional time engaged in assessment-related practice, the lack of opportunity for in-depth assessment training is troubling indeed (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). Almost without exception, teachers lack the allotted time to access this learning even if it were available. To compound the problem, relevant assessment training is extremely limited in most pre-service teacher or administrator preparation programs. Under the new vision, educators would have an opportunity to increase their assessment literacy while simultaneously taking back some ownership of assessment practice. Oregon needs to ensure that this vision includes both universal foundational training (e.g., in teacher and administrator preparation programs) and ongoing support of classroom assessment literacy for all decision makers and users of assessment information.

**Proposed misuse of annual test scores in educator evaluation.** Recently, federal and state policy makers have deemed it appropriate to factor growth in student achievement into the educator evaluation equation. Often, growth is naively defined by policy makers as year-to-year change in annual standardized test scores. This represents an indefensible use of these test results. The tests involved have not been validated for this purpose; that is, they have not been shown to be capable of detecting differences in the quality of instruction. The nature of the tests often keeps them from sampling individual teacher impact with sufficient precision. The tests cannot distinguish to whom the growth can be attributed as there are multiple educators (and other factors) who impact students in the subjects of reading and math. The year-long pre/posttest time span assures a confounding of instruction with factors that influence learning that are beyond educator control, thus rendering this basis for evaluation unfair. For all of these reasons, qualified psychometricians have almost universally rejected this source of evidence for the evaluation of individual teachers or school leaders.

There are better options for estimating student growth in this context that arise from classroom assessments. If teachers and principals develop and enhance their assessment literacy, they can generate dependable evidence of their impact on student learning in sharp detail. The quality of educator evaluation can be enhanced and, as a crucial side benefit, student learning can be measurably improved.

In summary, as we learn to use assessments more productively and expand our understanding to include a new vision of all assessment can be and do, these current realities will be replaced with learning that is driven by student need. Reactive assessment is insufficient and outdated. Oregon students and teachers need assessments that are proactive, inclusive, and empowering. *Assessment for learning* is practical and functional. It can become an embedded part of everyday learning for students, teachers, and parents, and when that happens, it will cease to feel like assessment. We do not need to do away with summative, standardized tests, which are currently the policy priority; but we do need to bring such testing into balance with formative and interim assessments that can drive student learning.

## Oregon Assessment: A New Vision of Excellence

Used appropriately, *assessment for student learning* has the potential to propel instruction forward productively by considering the learning needs of individual students and helping them know at any given time (not just annually) how far they have come along the path to success. With consistent and ongoing teacher support, *assessment for student learning* provides individualized support that allows learners to progress in a way and at a speed that suits their abilities and learning styles.

To understand this approach, we must appreciate that fact that assessment is a personal experience. It can enhance or detract from student learning and achievement. That's because assessment results affect how students see themselves. Those who fail repeatedly lose faith in themselves, and once they are convinced (largely by test scores) that success is beyond their reach, motivation declines. By contrast, consistently reaching for and attaining *achievable* goals (those "next steps" along the continuum) builds confidence and keeps students engaged in their own learning. Successful students not only gain faith in their own abilities, but gradually come to believe that they will continue to be successful in any or all future endeavors. They dare more, try more, persist more, and the results of that effort are not hard to infer.

Over the past half century, assessment has been seen primarily as a once-a-year, anxiety-driven, time-intensive, and high stakes accountability process. Schools are social institutions, so public accountability is important. But, particularly during the past two decades, Oregon and the nation have overemphasized statewide standardized assessment requirements to the systematic exclusion of assessment for learning. Policies have required ever more frequent testing and ever higher stakes—all under the assumption that this relentless focus on standardized testing will eventually improve schools. Yet, outcomes have largely remained unchanged. Standardized testing in and of itself has not been designed to inform instructional decisions that influence day-to-day learning. *Assessment for learning*, by contrast, is designed to influence precisely those kinds of decisions; such assessment has the potential to profoundly transform learning in Oregon classrooms.

## Guiding Principles

This new vision demands first, a universal commitment to the use of assessment to promote meaningful learning, and second, adherence to the following five guiding principles.

1. All assessments must arise from and serve a clear purpose.
2. They must be designed and developed to reflect developmentally and academically appropriate learning targets.
3. Each assessment must accurately reflect student learning.
4. Results must be effectively communicated to all intended users.
5. Our mission must be to use assessment in ways that encourage students to keep striving for learning success.

If these principles are not followed at all levels and by all users, Oregon students will continue to struggle in meeting achievement standards due to the mis-measurement of their learning or the misuse of assessment results. These five guiding principles, however, can change Oregon's educational future.

**Principle #1: All assessments must have a clear purpose.**

Effective assessment begins with a clear sense of why we are assessing in the first place. Who will use the assessment results and what will that user accomplish? Without a clear sense of purpose, it is impossible to develop an assessment that will serve users in productive ways. Since assessment is the process of gathering evidence to inform instructional decisions, a good place to begin is by answering three critical questions:

- 1) What decision needs to be made?
- 2) Who is making the decision?
- 3) What information do they need?

The answers will vary profoundly depending on the context within which the questions are posed. In schools, instructional decisions are made at three levels:

- *Classroom assessments*: On an ongoing basis during instruction
- *Benchmark interim assessments*: Periodically throughout the school year
- *Summative assessments*: Yearly assessments that have mostly been standardized

At each of these three levels, some assessments support learning. They are known as *formative assessments*, and are built to identify specific learner needs during the learning process. Other times, assessments serve to verify what has been learned and are termed *summative assessments*. Summative assessments judge what skills or knowledge students have acquired over a specified period of time, typically for accountability purposes. They can also measure how the larger system is performing and may offer clues for needed improvement. Some summative assessments are external. Both formative and summative assessments are important, but they are different.

To understand the true meaning of a *balanced* system of assessment, it is helpful to examine the wide range of important questions teachers and administrators ask—questions they can only answer with assessment results from diverse sources. As the following table, *A Summary of Assessment Users*, clearly shows, the demands we place on assessment differ profoundly across contexts.



## A Summary of Assessment Users: Why different users require distinct assessments at varying times

Level of Assessment Use	Formative Applications of Assessment (to support learning) for Each User	Summative Applications of Assessment (to judge adequacy of learning) for Each User
<b>Using Classroom Assessment Results</b>	<p><b>Teachers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where are my students now in their learning?</li> <li>• What comes next for their learning and therefore my instruction?</li> </ul> <p><b>Students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I progressing up the scaffolding?</li> <li>• What is my hope of continuing to grow in this subject?</li> <li>• Where am I now?</li> <li>• What comes next for me?</li> <li>• What specific help do I need?</li> </ul> <p><b>Parents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where and how can I help my child?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teachers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What standards have each student mastered?</li> <li>• What grade has each student earned on her or his report card?</li> </ul> <p><b>Students/Parents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I/Is my child progressing in a satisfactory manner?</li> </ul> <p><b>Principals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the teacher able to use assessments to provide evidence of student growth?</li> <li>• What support can I offer to this teacher?</li> <li>• Is there any change or support we need to implement on a school-wide basis?</li> </ul>
<b>Using Interim/Benchmark Assessment Results</b>	<p><b>Instructional Leaders and Educator Teams:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which standards do our students tend to struggle in mastering?</li> <li>• Which students seem to be struggling right now?</li> <li>• Where can we improve instruction immediately to increase student success?</li> <li>• What can we learn from peers?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Leaders and Educator Teams:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this adopted instructional program delivering learning as promised? Should we continue, refine, or end it?</li> <li>• Do teachers need professional development to enhance their instructional knowledge?</li> <li>• Do we have the systems in place to support teachers and students to maximize learning?</li> </ul>
<b>Using Annual Results</b>	<p><b>Instructional Leaders and Educator Teams:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From year to year where do students show strengths and weaknesses?</li> <li>• What supports can be offered to change the year to year trend?</li> <li>• How can we support students vertically?</li> <li>• What can we learn from other schools and districts?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Leaders, Policy makers and the Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are our students meeting standards?</li> <li>• Are there certain segments of our student population who need more support?</li> <li>• Is the curriculum and delivery model meeting the needs of the students?</li> <li>• Are there system improvement needs and efforts that will improve student learning outcomes?</li> </ul>

The future quality of education in Oregon schools relies on our ability to move from an assessment system overwhelmingly focused on summative testing and the gathering of annual data to one that relies on multiple forms of assessment and thereby serves the informational needs of *all* decision makers. We must set new priorities and allocate the resources needed to assure effective use of both formative and summative assessment at all three levels outlined in the chart above.

Principle #2: All assessments should reflect developmentally and academically appropriate learning targets.

The foundation of any assessment rests with the learning expectations or standards to be assessed. To ensure that Oregon's system of assessment is supportive of meaningful student learning, local expectations should be —

- Anchored to a broad range of standards addressing the skills needed to prepare students for pursuing a career and/or post-secondary education.
- Guided by a community vision of lifelong learning that promotes productive problem solving and encourages strong citizenship (See the State of Oregon's college, workplace and career readiness standards for one example).
- Reflective of the current best thinking in each field of study.
- Clearly and unambiguously stated using language that promotes universal understanding.
- Written in student- and family-friendly language that invites students and their families to be active participants in the assessment network.
- Organized to show educational progress within and across grade levels, ensuring that everyone involved can know what a student has mastered, what learning will be required next, and how best to facilitate those next steps.
- Thoroughly mastered by teachers, who will thus be better prepared to help their students meet these same expectations.

Only when these seven requirements are met will quality assessment and instruction be within reach in every classroom.

Principle #3: All assessment results must accurately reflect student learning.

All assessments (regardless of context) must meet accepted standards of quality so as to assure the dependability and usefulness of the results they yield. This means that each assessment must—

- Rely on an appropriate assessment method (e.g., multiple choice, short answer, essay, performance assessment) capable of measuring the learning target in question;
- Provide an appropriate sample of student performance: that is, enough evidence to allow a confident conclusion about the level of achievement attained;
- Rely on high-quality assessment items, exercises and tasks, and methods of scoring; and
- Minimize bias that can distort assessment results and provide misleading information about a student’s learning success.

The troubling reality in Oregon (and across the nation) is that these standards of quality may not currently be met across many levels of our school systems, thanks to over-reliance on high stakes standardized testing and a lack of assessment literacy among all users. A renewed emphasis on assessment for learning within the classroom brings with it new responsibility for teachers and other local educators, making the need for universal assessment literacy urgent. If the current gap in assessment literacy is not addressed, the new vision of excellence in assessment proposed here will be unattainable.

**Principle #4: All assessment results must be communicated effectively to intended users.**

We have established that the list of important users is long (e.g. students, teachers, parents, principals, and others), and that they need results from both formative and summative assessment at all levels (ongoing classroom, periodic benchmark, and annual). Because important decisions are made based on the results, those results must be delivered to users in an understandable format and timely manner. Strategies for accomplishing this vary, so the communicator must be prepared to select an option that best meets the needs of the intended user.

To help students close the gap between where they are now and where they need to be, feedback delivered from teachers on formative assessment results must—

- Focus on characteristics *of the work* rather than on attributes *of the student*.
- Describe the work in terms that show clearly how to do better next time.

- Be understood by the recipient.
- Be manageable in scope so that next steps do not feel overwhelming.
- Arrive when there is still time to adjust the work and learning, thereby improving performance.

Programs around the world that rely on the consistent application of these guidelines have reported impressive achievement gains (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). The same will be true in Oregon if all educators are given the professional development they need to deliver feedback that meets these criteria.

Effective communication about the sum of student learning must—

- Clearly state the learning requirements/standards being judged in terms understandable to everyone involved from the beginning of the learning.
- Rely on dependable evidence from quality assessments to reflect levels of student success.
- Compile and summarize evidence over time, using appropriate and transparent procedures.
- Clearly communicate what standards the student has mastered.

Professional development in assessment literacy would provide the opportunity for educators to learn about effective recordkeeping and communication processes in summative classroom assessment contexts.

## Student's Assessment Bill of Rights

### **A Students' Bill of Assessment Rights**

The rationale for reconsidering the student's place in the assessment process extends beyond the fact that their learning can benefit from their involvement. Ethical standards of fair and equal treatment of each and every student require adults to re-evaluate the student's place in the assessment process. Students can be seen as the holders of certain inalienable rights related to the collection and use of achievement information (Stiggins, 2014). Those rights are articulated below and they align with the five Guiding Principles spelled out above.

1. Students are entitled to know the purpose of each assessment in which they participate; that is, they have a right to know specifically how the results will be used.
2. Students are entitled to know and understand the learning target(s) to be reflected in the exercises and scoring methods that make up the assessment.
3. Students are entitled to understand the differences between good and poor performance on pending assessments and to learn to self-assess in terms of that performance continuum in tracking their progress toward mastery.
4. Students are entitled to dependable assessment of their learning using quality assessments.
5. Students are entitled to effective communication of their assessment results, whether to themselves, their families or others concerned with their academic success.

Principle #5: Users must always attend to the relationship between their assessment practices and student motivation.

Given society's demand for higher achievement for all students in all subjects, we must do everything in our power to keep students believing that success is within reach if they keep striving. We must prevent students from giving up—ever. We can accomplish this by making sure that throughout the time they are learning students always know and understand—

- What we want them to learn.
- Where they are now in relation to those expectations.
- What they need to do to close the gap between the two.

As students move through their various learning progressions, we must help them engage in self-assessment so they can monitor their growth and thus feel in control of their own learning. Specific classroom *assessment for learning* strategies have been formulated by Chappuis (2013) and woven into readily available professional development for teachers. Two decades of international research have revealed significant achievement gains for students when teachers consistently apply principles of assessment for student learning, with the largest gains demonstrated for students identified as low achievers (Black & William, 1998).

## Positive Impacts of the New Vision

When the *Guiding Principles* and the *Students' Assessment Bill of Rights* are followed consistently, all assessment users will understand their various roles in fostering maximum learning for all students. Following are brief descriptions of these various roles.

**Students.** Instruction will begin with the open sharing of student-friendly versions of the learning target(s) that are the focus of teaching and learning. Students will pursue those targets through ongoing learning progressions that are familiar to students, teachers, and parents. Quality formative assessment will ensure that at any given time, students know where they are headed, where they are now, and how to close the gap. As necessary, accommodations will be made to provide instructional support. Students

will understand their level of learning in relation to the progression of standards, have time to reflect on their progress, and set realistic goals. In this way, teachers will make sure each student feels in control of and responsible for his or her learning success. Confidence and optimism will dominate the classroom environment for both teachers and students. Students will be able to articulate their learning goal(s), the relevance of those goals to a broader educational outcome, and their proposed methods for demonstrating learning. Thanks to increased confidence and a sense of control, students will no longer fear failure; setbacks will be (and will seem to the student) minor, temporary, and reversible. Indeed, students will be inspired to take the kinds of risks required to advance learning, and will go further than many dreamed possible.

What is more, students will become part of the larger assessment network, actually *using assessment results* in their personal planning. They will feel confident that the information they receive from various assessments accurately reflects their learning, and that evidence collected over time reveals real growth. Their confidence will come from the quality of the assessments themselves as well as the manner in which their teacher communicates the results—in ways that support learning when *that* is the purpose, or as a summative evaluation of learning when *that* is the purpose.

**Teacher Practices.** Teachers will recognize how instructional decisions based on dependable assessment results promote both the success of their students and their own success as teachers. They will form effective partnerships with students to advance learning, confident that immediate feedback from dependable formative assessment will allow them to adjust instruction in useful, appropriate ways. They will feel supported in development of their own assessment literacy, and will experience growing confidence in their assessment and communication practices, whether formative or summative. Their day will be structured in such a way that allows for the five guiding principles above to become a reality; there will be significant time within a work day to plan and conduct assessment, to thoughtfully analyze and share assessment results, offer feedback to students, and differentiate instruction as indicated. Teachers will have the ability to generate dependable, credible evidence regarding the impact of their instruction on students' growth. Finally, they will be able to achieve the kind of success with students that renews their passion for education.

**Instructional Teams.** Teachers, principals, administrators and district leaders will have the assessment literacy needed to successfully design and implement truly balanced assessment systems—systems that meet the informational needs of all assessment users. They will be able to count on classroom, interim and annual assessments to be of

high quality, all producing dependable evidence of student learning for all instructional decision making purposes. Administrators will know how to communicate assessment results effectively in their leadership contexts and will see student performance heading in a steady upward direction.

**Parents, Families, Community Members, Local and State Policy Makers.** All parents, families, community stakeholders and policy makers will have confidence that their children, grandchildren, and students in general are learning and succeeding. They will understand when and how to offer quality instructional support when called upon to do so. Policy makers at all levels will have the opportunity to become more assessment literate, thereby increasing their capability to make the kinds of policy decisions that promote effective use of assessment as an integral part of learning.

## Proposed Action Plan: Transition to the New Vision

The proposed action plan that follows recognizes the values and beliefs articulated in the preceding section. It also addresses the challenges inherent in transitioning from an assessment system focusing almost exclusively on summative assessment to a more balanced system. The plan suggests actions that support the informational needs of students, teachers, principals, other instructional decision makers and policy makers, while offering a balance of assessment *for learning* to inform the learning process together with periodic assessments *of learning* to measure student success.

***Goal:*** *Increased focus on Assessment for Learning*

### OLD/CURRENT SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT

Classroom & Formative	Interim	Annual Summative
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### NEW SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT LEARNING

Classroom & Formative	Interim	Annual Summative
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(adopted from Leather, 2013, as cited in Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, Pittenger, 2014)

# Recommendations for Creating a Highly Effective Assessment System

The following recommendations identify factors to consider in transitioning to a new system of assessment for student learning. These recommendations were developed by members from Oregon Education Association (OEA), Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB), Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and school district advisors, who worked more than a year on researching, studying and developing a white paper titled, ***A New Path for Oregon: System of Assessment to Empower Meaningful Student Learning***. These recommendations will be vetted with a diverse group of stakeholders and will be revised based on their collective feedback.

## PAVING THE PATHWAY: POLICY FOUNDATIONS

**Recommendation #1:** Advocate and prepare for reauthorization of ESEA that allows states to develop a system of assessment that truly supports student learning through greater emphasis on valid, reliable and unbiased high quality classroom, interim assessments and addresses the role of accountability in the system.

**Recommendation #2:** Support the “*Student’s Assessment Bill of Rights*” to ensure students know and understand the purpose of assessments, the learning targets that make up the assessment and how the results will be used; and also to ensure students understand the differences between good and poor performance on pending assessments and learn how to self-assess and track their progress.

## CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT TRANSITION AND SUCCESS

**Recommendation #3:** Develop, fund, and implement extensive professional development, with a commitment to a multi-year program, to develop and enhance assessment literacy of educators. The effort should focus on high quality classroom, interim, and annual assessments, both formative and summative uses that have a clear purpose and support state standards and well defined learning targets. Utilize federal funding as a result of Representative Bonamici’s recent bill that would advance funds to states around assessment practices. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr5807ih/html/BILLS-113hr5807ih.htm>

**Recommendation #4:** Create a taskforce to conduct an audit of the type and number



of assessments currently administered in Oregon schools. Include the amount of instructional hours being devoted to formative, interim, progress monitoring and summative assessments to determine the impact on teaching and learning time.

**Recommendation #5:** Advocate for state and federal funds to initiate and maintain statewide classroom and interim assessment banks for formative and summative use. These assessments will also be vetted as valid, reliable, and unbiased, and made available for districts and individual educators to use.

**Recommendation #6:** Invest in the technology necessary to administer high quality formative, interim and summative assessments focused on learning not just for administering standardized tests, and to ensure students have access to technology for college and career readiness.

**Recommendation #7:** Examine the current state of accommodations for special education students, English language learners, and other populations of diverse students to determine the impact of the additional testing and determine an appropriate level of assessment for every subgroup of students.

#### **CONSTRUCTING A NEW SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT**

**Recommendation #8:** Research the feasibility of reducing the frequency of administering the Smarter Balanced Assessment while ensuring accurate yearly disaggregated data by subgroups through enhancing the use of valid and reliable formative and interim assessments. These formative and interim measures will be predictive of students' success on the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

**Recommendation #9:** Advocate for state and federal funds to develop and use high quality formative and interim assessments chosen by educators from a menu of options vetted at the state and district level that meet the needs of their students and high standards of quality. These assessments will be standards-based, vetted as valid, reliable, and unbiased. Students may also develop, in conjunction with educators and administrators, work samples to demonstrate their learning and progress toward common core and other academic standards.

**Recommendation #10:** Allow high school students to opt-in to the Math or ELA section(s) of the Smarter Balanced Assessment earlier than 11th grade so that they take the assessment as it coincides with their actual academic course load rather than the

current system which may have students taking a test on content they haven't studied for two or more years. In essence, allow students to "bank" portions of the test.

**Recommendation #11:** Enhance and expand options to demonstrate essential skills. Determine if other measures of essential skills exist and promote them as options for students.

#### **CREATING TIME TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation #12:** Suspend the use of Smarter Balance Assessment results during 2015 for school ratings on report cards, but allow students to use their 2015 Smarter Balance Assessment results to demonstrate Essential Skills for high school graduation and allow for comprehensive analysis of Smarter Balance to determine the value in relation to student learning. Continue to suspend the use of Smarter Balance Assessment results for educator evaluation during 2015-16 while developing a more balanced system of assessment.

## Proposed Timeline to Attaining Balanced Systems of Assessment

Transitioning to a new kind of assessment system requires time; stakeholders must become engaged in collectively working toward this important goal. Most of the actions recommended above will require multiple years, with some actions being completed on an ongoing basis. The following timeline details proposed implementation plans:

## Working Document Timeline

**Note:** The purpose of the following timeline is to identify potential steps that reflect the vision of the work group to transition to a new system of assessment that supports student learning. The work group looks forward to a broader discussion and suggestions for refinement.

	Immediate January – August 2015	Next 12 months 2015-16	Next 12 months 2016-17	Next 12 months 2017-18
<b>Policy Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Build Support:</b> Reach beyond the Work Group to teachers, instructional assistants, administrators, school boards, parents, communities of color, educator preparation programs, policy makers and others to refine and add other system concepts and build support.</li> <li>● <b>ESEA Reauthorization:</b> Create a process (e.g. coalition/work group of teachers, administrators, state education staff, parents) to identify critical elements for ESEA that allows Oregon to develop a system of assessment that supports student learning. Assessments would be valid, reliable and unbiased classroom and interim</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Continue Support:</b> Support generally complete, Partners are engaged in the assessment shift, and discussions continue to create understanding for new system of assessment used to support student learning.</li> <li>● <b>System Refinement:</b> Continued refinement and begin implementation of the new system of assessment. Key focus areas include implementation details and funding needed to transition from existing approach to proposed system.</li> <li>● <b>Oregon ESEA Priorities:</b> Continue work with Oregon Congressional Delegation to advocate for Oregon’s priorities for ESEA reauthorization.</li> <li>● <b>National Collaboration:</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Priority Focus:</b> Classroom and interim assessments (assessment for learning) emerge as the assessment priority across Oregon schools. Diminished use of standardized summative assessment to evaluate daily student learning</li> <li>● <b>System Refinement:</b> Continue refining methodology to reduce overall standardized summative assessments, but allows for disaggregation and identification of achievement gaps and identification of systems in need of support.</li> <li>● <b>Assessment Funds:</b> Additional funds are allocated to support the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>New Methodology:</b> Continue implementation of new methodology and use summative assessments only as appropriate to provide information regarding student outcomes in larger systems – schools and districts – and allow for disaggregation and identification of achievement gaps and systems in need of support.</li> <li>● The vision of the system of assessment is evolving to include the following summary of components:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assessment literacy is prioritized and mastered by stakeholders.</li> <li>○ There will be a significant shift from annual standardized summative assessments to classroom and interim assessments for</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<b>Immediate January – August 2015</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2015-16</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2016-17</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2017-18</b>
	<p>assessments and address the role of accountability in the system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Oregon ESEA Priorities:</b> Work with the Governor and Oregon Congressional delegation to advocate for Oregon’s priorities for ESEA reauthorization.</li> <li>● <b>Waiver:</b> Begin discussions with USED on a different approach to assessment. Advocate to continue the suspension of Smarter Balanced assessment results being tied to teacher evaluation while developing a more balanced system of assessment focused on student learning. Advocate for approval from USED not to use spring assessment results in rating schools or districts on the Oregon Report Card. The Smarter Balanced Assessment will be used as the summative</li> </ul>	<p>Collaborate with national organizations (e.g. CCSSO, National Center for Innovation in Education) to leverage support for Oregon’s proposed elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Waiver:</b> Create coalition of partners to gain approval from US Dept. of Education to transition to a new system of assessment and maintain waiver while ESEA is being reauthorized. This includes using Smarter Balanced or other equal or better summative assessment but not using the summative assessment for educator evaluation.</li> <li>● <b>Audit of Assessments:</b> Use the audit to determine if the system is balanced and meets the needs of all students,</li> <li>● <b>Smarter Balanced Analysis:</b> Use the analysis of Smarter Balanced to determine if the assessment is accurately measuring the common core standards and the appropriate</li> </ul>	<p>implementation of the new system of assessment.</p>	<p>learning, including using some method of targeting of Smarter Balance Assessment and local school districts choosing from a menu of high quality interim options for other grade levels. The methods provide for accurate disaggregated data of subgroups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Advocate for state and federal funds to develop or adopt and use high quality interim assessments, chosen by educators to meet the needs of their students from a menu of options vetted at the state and district level and that meet high standards of quality. These assessments will be vetted as valid, reliable, and unbiased.</li> <li>○ Students, in conjunction with educators and administrators, develop work samples to demonstrate their learning and progress toward</li> </ul>

	<b>Immediate January – August 2015</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2015-16</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2016-17</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2017-18</b>
	<p>assessment with USED and Oregon Legislature until such time as other assessments are developed as appropriate measures and with the understanding that the results of the standardized summative assessment will not be used to evaluate teachers or rate schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Audit of Assessments:</b> Create a taskforce to conduct an audit of the type and number of assessments currently administered in Oregon schools. Include the amount of instructional hours being devoted to formative, interim, progress monitoring, and summative assessments.</li> <li>● <b>Analysis of Smarter Balanced (SB):</b> Complete a comprehensive analysis and report on the results of the 2015 Smarter Balanced assessments to determine</li> </ul>	<p>use of a standardized summative assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Target Smarter Balanced:</b> Research the feasibility of reducing the frequency of administering the annual state summative assessment while ensuring accurate yearly disaggregated data by subgroups. Research a valid and reliable growth measure methodology for the intervening years.</li> <li>● <b>Scale Back Smarter Balanced:</b> Research administering a scaled down version of Smarter Balanced.</li> </ul>		<p>academic goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A statewide bank of high quality assessments at the interim and classroom levels for summative and formative use will be available for educators.</li> </ul>

	Immediate January – August 2015	Next 12 months 2015-16	Next 12 months 2016-17	Next 12 months 2017-18
	the value in relation to student learning.			
<b>Practice Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Assessment for Learning:</b> Advocate for a balanced system of assessment with the emphasis and action on classroom-based assessments for learning.</li> <li>● <b>Assessment Expenditures:</b> Provide appropriate expenditures for annual accountability testing with expenditures for quality and effective use of classroom and interim assessments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Fund Assessment Literacy Professional Development:</b> Seek state funds to support multi-year professional development for educators on assessment literacy.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Assessment Literacy Opportunities:</b> Expand professional development focused on developing and enhancing assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Assessment Options:</b> Research other assessment options for generating system level evidence (e.g. portfolios, work samples, others)</li> <li>● <b>Assessment Literacy:</b> Use new funds to provide time for educators to engage in professional development opportunities that support the unique needs of teachers and administrators in large, medium and small districts.</li> <li>● <b>Classroom Assessments:</b> Identify and develop high quality local and classroom assessments for formative and summative use.</li> <li>● <b>Interim Assessments:</b> Evaluate existing high quality assessments for interim use and develop or adopt high quality interim assessments</li> <li>● <b>Preparation of Educators:</b> Work with Oregon higher education and pre-service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Assessment Literacy:</b> Seek funds to expand professional learning opportunities to parents and local school board members. Continue assessment literacy for educators as needed.</li> <li>● <b>Assessment Bank:</b> Initiate a bank of high quality assessments. Add high quality interim and classroom assessments to the statewide bank as appropriate for formative use. Build the bank over time.</li> </ul>	

	<b>Immediate January – August 2015</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2015-16</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2016-17</b>	<b>Next 12 months 2017-18</b>
	<p>literacy of teachers and administrators through partner efforts and ODE professional learning team conferences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Fund Interim Assessments:</b> Advocate for state and federal funds to develop or adopt and use high quality interim assessments chosen by educators from a menu of options that meet standards of quality and vetted at the state and district level.         </li> </ul>	<p>programs for teacher and administrator preparation to strengthen assessment literacy into standards of preparation.</p>		



# Planning for the Needs of Stakeholders

Planning for, and implementing the transition into Oregon's new system of assessment requires long-term collaboration and partnership among education agencies, community based organizations and associations (e.g. COSA, ODE OEA, OEIB, OSBA, PTA, Chalkboard, Coalition of Communities of Color, Portland African American Leadership Forum, Latino Family Network, League of United Latin American Citizens, Confederated Tribes of Oregon, and other partners) to leverage and utilize resources that can make assessment for learning a reality. These organizations offer considerable expertise to help meet the needs of stakeholders during the transition. As these groups work together, certain needs must be met, and other stakeholders have needs as well. Following is a summary of those needs, by group.

## Needs of Educators

- Increased professional learning time for teachers and principals to collaboratively develop and enhance their assessment literacy
- Professional learning time to develop or adopt assessments for student learning that align with learning targets
- Development and sustainability of a statewide bank of high quality classroom and interim assessments
- Funds to support effective use of quality classroom and interim assessments
- Changes to schedules and the school year that would allow educators the time they need to use data in planning and to communicate assessment results to students, parents and other instructional partners

## Needs of Parents

- Opportunity to learn and enhance skills related to assessment literacy
- Opportunity to partner with educators to understand sound and unsound assessment practices
- Opportunity to be engaged and included in a manner that meets their cultural norms and allows for comfortable involvement in setting goals and determining next steps for their students' learning

### Needs of Community Members and Local School Boards

- Increased understanding of assessment results, including the trends of data at program, school and district levels
- Increased understanding of the vital and integral role assessment plays in learning, as well as differences between assessment *of learning* and assessment *for learning*

### Needs of Policy Makers and Legislators

- Increased understanding of assessment results, including the trends of data at program, school and district levels
- Increased understanding of what is required to ensure assessment literacy among educators, parents and community members
- Increased understanding of what is needed to transition from a system focused on standardized summative assessment to a system focused on assessment *for learning*

## Conclusion

As educators, we entered this profession with the desire to help all students learn, grow, and realize their full potential. As we highlight our foundational values and beliefs, we recognize the gap between a system of assessment *for learning* that can access every student's infinite potential and the system of assessment we presently have. It is time to build a bridge to our new vision. Let's leave the current system that relies too heavily on summative, standardized assessment as a basis for instructional decisions it was never designed to support, and build a new system in which assessment and learning work together for students' benefit, one in which all educators and stakeholders become assessment literate, and *every Oregon student* can reach his or her full potential. Let's join together to create this new system of assessment. In the words of Chappuis (2009),

*"Assessment for learning is a gift we give our students. It is a mirror we hold up to show them how far they have come. It is a promise that we will use assessment, not to punish or reward, but to guide them on their learning journey".*

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