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**REDESIGNING ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS:
EMERGING LESSONS FROM THREE STATES**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, states have engaged in an on-going debate of the limitations of a test-based accountability system enforced by No Child Left Behind regulations that focus narrowly on reading and mathematics, marginalizing other subject areas. The Innovation Lab Network of 14 states, sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), has experimented with new systems of instruction, assessment, and accountability that focus on providing students greater opportunity to learn the skills and competencies needed to succeed in college and career. Such innovations received an official boost when, in December 2016, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Specifically, ESSA encourages the states to make use of “competency-based assessments, instructionally embedded assessments, interim assessments, [and] performance-based assessments” that in combination can help to determine student progress, as well as “assessments that validate when students are ready to demonstrate mastery or proficiency and allow for differentiated support based on individual learning needs” (ESSA, 2015, Section 1204(a)). ESSA provides greater flexibility and authority to states in setting standards and establishing systems of assessment that serve the needs of their unique communities and students.

ESSA also supports a pilot program intended to foster innovation as states and districts establish assessment systems that support rigorous learning aligned with internationally benchmarked standards, and provide timely and useful information to teachers, students, and parents about student learning and school success. ESSA is designed to support and encourage local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators with input from parents, school and community leaders, and teachers. This increased focus on local participation and community buy-in signifies a shift in policy that places greater emphasis on the usefulness and relevance of assessments at the local level.

Emboldened by such provisions, state and local education leaders are increasingly interested in redesigning their systems of assessment to further align with college and career readiness and to support meaningful learning for all students. Although interest in moving beyond traditional assessments is high, states, education leaders, and practitioners face challenges in developing and implementing such reforms. The new legislation does not explicitly offer a set of underlying principles or goals. It will be left

up to districts and states, with broad-based community participation, to provide a vision of what the next generation of state assessments could or should be. Shared questions include how to integrate performance assessment (PA) into current assessment structures, how to develop the capacity of educators and leaders, and how to address issues of technical quality (e.g., comparability).

The ESSA focus on multiple data sources and the creation of a body of evidence—embedded in practice to support claims of student learning—lays important groundwork for change at the district and school level. It creates the potential to engage states and districts in developing actionable solutions by harnessing local expertise to support continuous improvement. Accomplishing this ambitious agenda will require more than top-down mandates and policy change. It will require addressing social, organizational, and cultural relationships that are needed to manage and sustain change—social dimensions too often absent from policy discussions and accountability decisions.

Section II of this paper presents three stories from states that are undertaking this work: Virginia, California, and Texas. All three states are activating promising ideas, practices, and policies with an emphasis on developing new systems of assessment that focus on local participation in design and development. Taken together, these states offer important early lessons and guideposts for other states, which are summarized in Section III. The paper highlights both the commonalities across the three states in the types of new assessments they are introducing and how they are introducing them, and the differences among the states in how they are building political will and developing scale-up plans, including the policies to sustain the changes.

CASE STUDIES OF REFORM IN PROCESS

The work to reform accountability and assessment in Virginia, California, and Texas offers a window into how three states with very different political and policy contexts are combining state leadership and bottom-up momentum to introduce new, more equitable, and learning-centered educational accountability systems aligned with the goal of all students developing the deeper learning competencies necessary for success in college and career. In particular, the stories illustrate how these states are each preparing educators and leaders to introduce performance assessment into their schools.

In Virginia, then-Governor Terry McAuliffe, responding to concerns about over-testing, spearheaded changes in state policy supportive of less reliance on standardized tests. With his Secretary of Education, he launched the Standards of Learning (SOL) Innovation Committee to review state-mandated exams and determine new ways to get Virginia students ready for college and the workforce. Encouraged by state policy changes, numerous districts are now working to change teaching, learning, and assessment practices in ways that will lead to deeper learning and reflect 21st-century skills. There currently are simultaneous top-down and bottom-up pressures to keep the work moving forward statewide.

In response to ESSA as well as to anticipated changes to the state accountability system, California, through its County Offices of Education, is building on nearly a decade of work by reform networks partnering with innovative districts and schools. The California story highlights the role of the Los Angeles County Office of Education in catalyzing changes in assessment practices by networking and partnering with reform organizations to provide professional development for innovative districts in their region.

The genesis of the Texas reforms described in this paper grew out of the efforts of the Texas Association of School Administrators to move beyond the one-size-fits-all standardized assessments at the core of the state accountability system and to replace it with a community-based system of accountability that respects local context and community expectations. The Performance Assessment Consortium is a group of superintendents and principals from 44 school districts throughout the state, catalyzed by a visioning process sponsored by TASA, who have come together to define the principles and actions involved

Why so many tests?

When Governor McAuliffe took office in 2014, Virginia's K-12 system mandated students take 32 "Standards of Learning" (SOL) tests throughout elementary, middle, and high school. Since the governor made testing reform a priority, establishing the SOL Innovation Committee and enacting a number of statewide changes, that number has been reduced to 27.

Virginia SOL tests correspond to the state's academic standards. Unlike most states, Virginia never adopted the Common Core Academic Standards. Instead, it maintained state standards that had been developed in the late 1990s. After completing a crosswalk between the two sets of standards, the state determined their SOLs were more rigorous and robust than the Common Core.

SOL tests cover all Virginia state standards, resulting in more assessments than other states. Over time, provisions were made for nationally normed college-readiness exams, such as AP exams, the SAT, and ACT, to serve as substitutes. In some cases, this led to "double-testing." Districts would administer both the SOL test and the nationally normed one (e.g., SAT), out of fear that national scores would not arrive in time for graduation.

in answering such questions as, What do we want to be accountable for? And what evidence do we need that the reforms are having a positive impact on learning?

In each of these states, the catalyst to reform has been somewhat different, and different established organizational structures and networks have been engaged to carry out the work. But all three share a common vision that real change occurs at the local level and that a system of assessment must be adapted to best fit the local context and the community it serves. And all three are building on a foundation of trust and social relationships to implement new performance assessments and ensure sustainability.

THE VIRGINIA STORY

Over the past four years, Virginia has moved away from its reliance on standardized exams and toward a more balanced approach, including an infusion of performance assessments with a reduction in multiple-choice tests. A combination of gubernatorial championship, growing public and political concerns about over-testing, and committed, pioneering school leaders has led to changes in state policy, widespread local innovations, the establishment of a statewide taskforce, and school district participation in national assessment reform networks. While the future of these efforts may be affected by new state leaders, as well as the continuing roll-out of ESSA under the Trump administration, Virginia's school leaders continue to forge ahead, with the goal of building further capacity, ownership, and expertise across the state.

A Quest for Fewer Tests and More Learning: 2013-2015 Reforms

When Terry McAuliffe ran for Virginia governor in 2013, he repeatedly heard from parents and educators about how frustrated they were by the number of standardized tests Virginia students had to take—a concern that became a flash point in the campaign. While NCLB required students to take 17 standardized tests over their K-12 academic career, Virginia required more than 30. McAuliffe promised that if he were elected, Virginia students would take fewer standardized, multiple-choice tests. This promise won praise from families and school leaders across the state.¹

Once elected, and with the support of broad public will and many school leaders, it took Governor McAuliffe only one legislative session to usher in new statewide testing reforms. In the first legislative session following his inauguration, changes to the number of tests and type of tests students were required to take were codified in new state laws. This legislation, passed in July 2014, removed five mandated exams and included recommendations to incorporate “age appropriate, authentic assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies” into Virginia's K-12 accountability system. This landmark legislation also required the Secretary of Education to establish a Standards of Learning (SOL) Innovation Committee, tasked with reviewing state-mandated exams and determining new ways to get Virginia students ready for college and the workforce.²

Made up of school board members, superintendents, professional association representatives, academics, and community leaders, the SOL Innovation Committee launched in July 2014.³ With bipartisan backing,⁴ the committee began thinking about the future of Virginia's K-12 systems of learning, assessment, and accountability. This included finding mandatory multiple-choice tests to remove, ways to spur local innovation, and strategies to better align testing with students' academic growth and the state's graduation requirements.

At the helm of this committee⁵ was Secretary of Education Anne Holton and her newly appointed state superintendent of public instruction, Dr. Steven Staples, a former superintendent and previous executive director of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS). Like the governor, Staples was respected by Virginia's education community and well known as an advocate for testing reform.⁶

Within four months, the SOL Innovation Committee issued its first set of recommendations to the State Board of Education and Virginia's General Assembly. Its report, released in November 2014 to the Secretary of Education, issued 12 recommendations for improving Virginia's K-12 assessment and accountability systems, with the aim of making them more responsive to student needs and a changing world. Recommendations helped state leaders pursue the following changes:

- > Revisions to related school accreditation standards
- > Increasing flexibility in how to determine school accreditation ratings
- > Offering innovation grants to regions and school districts to develop alternatives to standardized assessments (“alternative assessments”)
- > Waiving seat-time graduation requirements
- > Encouraging the development of interdisciplinary “alternative assessments”
- > Supporting more professional learning opportunities on alternative assessments and school quality.

A Focus on College and Workforce Preparation: 2015-2016 Reforms

A year later, the committee followed up with several broader and longer-term recommendations.⁷ Looking toward the future and sustainability, the committee called for less attention on test reduction and more attention on getting students ready for life and the workforce. The committee suggested the board develop a Profile of a Virginia Graduate⁸ in support of the New Virginia Economy,⁹ detailing the full range of knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences Virginia high school graduates need for college, work, and life. The committee called on the board to ensure test performance never act as proxy for students' academic growth and achievement.¹⁰ This report also highlighted the ongoing need to foster local support and build educator capacity around these new forms of assessment and proposed a framework to assess student learning.

“Standardized tests are great for some things, but they are only one tool to measure student learning, and that’s not enough. We have a lot of skills we want to measure, and therefore we need to develop more tools. I’m so glad Virginia teachers are leading this reform work, which will help ensure it succeeds.”

Retired Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Steven R. Staples

Between 2014 and 2016, the SOL Innovation Committee—in partnership with Superintendent Staples and key state department staff—met to identify ideas for moving the work forward and to tighten the focus on preparing Virginia students for life after high school. These ideas were fueled by the need to refresh the state’s understanding of what college and career readiness require. These conversations spurred efforts to create balanced literacy assessments, fund pockets of innovation, update graduation requirements, and establish a process for implementing performance assessments across the state. A powerful contributing dynamic was the 2015 VASS publication entitled “The New Blueprint for the Future of Public Education.” Virginia superintendents repeatedly advocated for policy reform and were leaders in the need for

changes in instruction and assessment practices.

As these policy changes went into effect, Superintendent Staples tasked key department staff with overseeing these reforms. Together, these leaders engaged with SOL Innovation Committee members and superintendents to better understand the landscape and various school district needs.¹¹ School administrators requested regular communications on SOL testing and professional development on authentic alternative assessments. Grant-funded districts formed a “think tank” and, facilitated by Professor Christopher Gareis of the College of William and Mary, developed a practical framework for implementing performance assessments.¹²

As the SOL Innovation Committee made headway, so did a select group of Virginia school districts. These districts either were funded by state innovation grants, were chosen to participate in various national efforts, and/or had focused—on their own—on the need for teaching, learning, and assessment practices to reflect deeper learning and 21st-century skills.

- › The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) awarded innovation grants across Virginia, focusing on eight geographic regions, to support the development of local assessment pilots, inclusive of the design and implementation of alternative assessments.
- › The VDOE also awarded high school innovation grants to allow selected districts to develop new approaches to school governance, teaching, and assessment. Grants were awarded to three school districts and one ten-district consortium. In 2016, a second set of grants were awarded to an additional five school districts.
- › Through the Assessment for Learning Project (ALP), two school districts joined a national network of school districts that are reimagining the role of assessment in supporting and advancing student learning.¹³ As part of this effort, one of those districts now serves as the lead of a multidistrict community of practice, including other Virginia districts, while the other co-leads a consortium of suburban districts.¹⁴
- › EdLeader21 engaged 11 school districts in a national network working to develop student-led assessments, and integrating critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity more seamlessly into teaching, learning, and assessment practices.¹⁵

The school districts participating in these various initiatives emerged as clear leaders in how to design student-centered, performance-based assessments. Today, many are active on the national scene, speaking and presenting on their innovations and this work. This has generated even more interest in Virginia's story.

In September 2016, 400 Virginia education leaders gathered for a first-ever statewide summit on "Innovations in Student Assessments".¹⁶ Teachers and school leaders joined national partners and funders, along with policymakers, superintendents, and professional state associations for a day of presenting and discussing the work to date. This event marked a turning point. As now-retired Superintendent Staples outlined in opening remarks, the first few years of the work were exploratory, with an emphasis on innovation grants to districts and initial professional development on new and better ways to test students. Now, the state would expect all teachers to use performance assessments and for these assessments to continue to improve across communities, making use of shared rubrics and expectations. Furthermore, education reforms would increasingly need to be integrated and connected to other statewide priorities, especially those focused on the workforce and economy.

Since the summit, the VDOE has continued to push forward with bringing this reform work to each of the 132 school districts and 1.3 million students across the Commonwealth. Local, state, and national partners have aligned professional development around deeper learning and performance assessment. The state is engaged in developing common rubrics to ensure consistency statewide and developing leadership competencies for teachers and leaders of this work. Support from national funders and partners maintains and fuels ongoing public and political will-building, communications, regional convenings, and professional development opportunities for local school districts. The VDOE now has staff appointed to oversee this work.

Since the beginning, the work in Virginia has been both top-down and bottom-up. The appointment of an interim superintendent following the retirement of Dr. Staples, and the fall 2017 election of Ralph Northam as governor will likely result in some changes. As the work of the past four years sits at the confluence of national attention and state transition, educational leaders in Virginia are aware that the role of local districts is more important than ever. At a time when so much is in flux, it will be the continued commitment and leadership

of early adopters who will pave the way forward. To ensure that happens, VDOE is focusing on sustainability, equity, and quality by building out local leadership and capacity.

THE CALIFORNIA STORY

The impetus to growing interest in assessment reform in California comes from a synergistic combination of policy and practice innovations, spearheaded by state lawmakers, local innovators, County Offices of Education, and statewide school reform organizations and networks. In 2013, state lawmakers signed the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) into law, establishing priority areas for districts to begin to redesign their assessment priorities based on the development of a new state system of accountability. The new local, state, and federal accountability system uses an explicit set of state and local indicators to demonstrate the progress of County Offices of Education, districts, and charter schools toward meeting the academic and social needs of all their students.

Further, the LCFF required the State Board of Education to develop a framework that includes an evaluation rubric to enable local educational agencies (LEAs) to identify and monitor strengths, weaknesses, and areas in need of improvement across all LCFF priority areas. Adopted by the board after a series of public meetings in 2016, the new accountability system identified as the California School Dashboard, incorporates performance outcomes based on the evaluation rubrics to provide administrators, community leaders, parents, teachers, and the California public at large with a far more complete picture of the schools through the implementation of this multiple-measure policy. Starting in fall 2017, districts began reporting their progress on a dashboard that included a range of evidence-based measures beyond standardized test scores, such as high school graduation requirements, high school graduation rates, and college admission rates. In reporting on their progress, districts can use portfolios, locally designed performance assessments, and the products of project-based learning.

By California law, the County Offices of Education play an important role in supporting and helping local districts meet new state requirements. It is up to the 58 county offices, each containing numerous school districts, to build relationships with educational leaders and teachers who will lay a foundation for developing, removing barriers to, and implementing reforms to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In short, the county offices contract with districts

to address state and district policy initiatives that capitalize on regional expertise and a wide range of services provided by the county office to build local capacity and implement new directions in education. Specifically, county offices provide or help formulate curricula, staff development and training programs, and leadership training, as well as many other direct and operational services to meet district and state needs.

One of the most active county offices to begin developing new systems of assessment and transforming curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of 21st-century learning is the Los Angeles County Office of Education, serving 1.5 million students. This subsection of the paper focuses on how the LACOE, with its 82 school districts, has begun building on an established foundation of trust to develop and implement common performance assessments. It tells the story of how an LACOE-sponsored workshop on assessment literacy for teacher-leaders sparked their interest in broader assessment reform in their region, work that will now become the basis for reform at scale across the county. It suggests how other counties and, indeed, states could use a combination of existing organizational structures (such as county offices or Regional Service Centers) and partnering reform organizations to support assessment reform.

SEEDING REFORM IN LA COUNTY

The LACOE Project Director of Assessment and Accountability Jessica Conkle and her predecessor, Marci Perry, have created a framework for networking across school districts that work collaboratively on assessment-related projects. Acting as the gatekeeper and quality control for all vendors and expert partners, Conkle's office has worked to establish trust with individual school districts through consistency in providing high value-added services, professional development, and support as well as assisting to remove barriers or partnerships that no longer benefit the school district and students. To enable neighboring school districts to work collaboratively on projects and engage in cross-district learning, she has encouraged the formation of regional consortia (networks of districts).

In 2015-16, instructional leaders from across Los Angeles County participated in a two-day training with the Building Educator Assessment Literacy project of the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE)¹⁷ to strengthen their understanding of the connection between

the expectations of the state content standards and constructed response items on the state-adopted Smarter Balanced (SBAC) annual assessments in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The BEAL theory of action was to use a close examination of student work to demystify the expectations of the new assessment. Beyond a "scoring calibration" training, the BEAL project provided participants with tools to connect assessment to instructional practice. Subsequent training-of-trainer sessions were scheduled to equip instructional leaders to replicate BEAL workshops in their respective districts, with continued support from LACOE, including funding, materials, and staff.

The Antelope Valley Advisory Council, one of the consortia that sent representatives to the BEAL training, requested a process be formulated to foster its understanding of the development of valid and reliable performance tasks. In 2016, AVAC and leadership at the county office agreed to incubate the initial assessment development work with the nine partnering districts of Antelope Valley. This created a fortuitous opportunity—coinciding with the launch of the California School Dashboard in LACOE—to create a proof of concept for common performance assessments developed by local educators in anticipation of scaling up the model across the county.

The Antelope Valley Common Assessment Project Expected Outcomes:

- a. Development, administration, and scoring of a performance task specific to each grade level for students in grades 1 through 12
- b. Capacity building of teacher-leaders in the development of new assessment items and the vetting of existing teacher-made and commercially developed assessment items
- c. Impact on student learning evidenced by the collaborative review of student work products with the intention of identifying and replicating best practices in teaching and learning
- d. Building a community of teacher-leaders across districts who can share best practices and work collaboratively to address issues of equity within and across school and district boundaries

The LACOE office brokered a partnership between members of the Antelope Valley Curriculum Advisory Council and SCALE to investigate the possibility of classroom teachers and instructional coaches from their districts working with SCALE experts to develop performance tasks to administer across participating districts. This project, named the Antelope Valley Common Assessment Project, included all local school superintendents, along with school administrators and 43 instructional leaders (teachers and instructional coaches) representing nine districts within the Antelope Valley and more than 30,000 students.

BUILDING ASSESSMENT LITERACY

The Antelope Valley team met four times during the 2016-2017 school year to learn how to develop high-quality on-demand performance assessment tasks. The professional development introduced practitioners to the art of writing common assessments and provided the opportunity for participants to deepen their understanding of the cognitive demands and classroom experiences their students need. Using an apprenticeship model, the trainers brought in expert performance assessment writers to model the development and refinement of a performance task and to guarantee the quality of all final products. This helped participants to feel a sense of security in the quality of the outcome, and enabled them to more freely explore and invest in the process of learning.

By the conclusion of the process, participants not only had a final product to try out in their schools, but had also increased their assessment literacy, from the construction, pilot testing, and refinement of on-demand tasks to calibration of the scoring of student work, using subject-specific rubrics and scoring guides. The expert writer worked with the LACOE to develop materials to further roll out this process to other consortia in the county. These materials include the information needed to support other teachers, educators, and/or districts to use the materials within their assessment system, to improve assessment literacy, to provide professional development by examining student work, and to make connections to instruction.

Due to the enormous success and interest in the Antelope Valley Common Assessment Project, four additional cohorts from Los Angeles County were added to the project in the 2017-2018 school year. The project evolved into the

Los Angeles County Performance Task Development Project (PTDP) with the intention of creating performance assessments in both mathematics and science (aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards). As a result of this collaboration, 60 mathematics and 27 NGSS performance assessments have been authored by five Los Angeles County consortiums.

During phase 3 (2018-2019), administrators will be more involved in the process and receive guidance on how to maximize the benefits of using performance tasks, scoring and analyzing student work within and across their districts to improve instruction and student learning. Another key development will be to transfer some of the writing responsibility to instructional coaches who participated in the first round of training. These coaches will continue to receive guidance from an expert, as they take over more and more of the expert's work in providing feedback to participants on their performance tasks and revising their documents to ensure the quality of the final product. The goal is to deepen capacity at the local level while continuing to ensure the quality of the final product. Increasing the involvement of local administrators will also help to ensure an impact on local assessment systems, professional learning, and increasing assessment literacy.

To support the expansion of this work, the county office hired Deb Atwell to facilitate this project as well as the BEAL initiative. Atwell provided additional support for the instructional coaches as well as the district administrators. The county office is already making plans for continuation and expansion of this project during the 2018-2019 school year, which could ultimately impact 1.5 million students.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR STATEWIDE REFORM

As an established institution with social and organizational capital established over many years with schools, districts, and communities, the county office can play a key role in supporting and rolling out state reform initiatives and in building and sustaining school and district capacity to implement reforms. The launch of the California School Dashboard in LACOE is one example. At the same time, California has benefited from many reform initiatives and networks supported by philanthropic dollars that have led the way in the design and development of new forms of assessment. Among the initiatives that have had a significant effect on school and district curricular and assessment policy

are a set of Deeper Learning Initiatives funded by the Hewlett Foundation, the George Lucas Education Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, the Sandler Foundation, and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. These include ConnectEd, New Tech High, High Tech High, Envision Schools, Expeditionary Learning Schools, and Summit Public Schools, among others.

However, in a state as large and diverse as California, there is a need to make the work of these innovative networks coherent, to connect the dots in ways that can inform state policy and assist in creating a momentum for change that results in state legislation that further supports bringing such practices to scale statewide. Two organizational entities have been critical to setting the stage for statewide reform in California:

- > The Promoting Authentic College, Career, and Civic Readiness Assessment Systems Working Group, representing key organizations and stakeholders across the state, has been formed to offer comments and shape California's draft ESSA State Plan. The working group comprises approximately 40 thought leaders from across the state, including stakeholders representing P-12, postsecondary, research, policy, advocacy, philanthropic, and educational support organizations.¹⁸
- > The Learning Policy Institute, a nonprofit group founded by Linda Darling Hammond, has built strong connections with nearly all the diverse and equity-driven education reform initiatives in California. True to its mission to conduct and communicate independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice, the LPI works with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning. See <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/topic/college-and-career-readiness>.

The state assessment and accountability plan put in place by the California Department of Education and State Board capitalizes on the foundational work of both the county offices and these key policy groups to create widespread district and public support for the development of a new system of accountability in California. The plan called for creating an integrated local, state, and federal accountability and continuous improvement system, rooted in reform-minded networks and activities and based on state statute.¹⁹

THE TEXAS STORY

Assessment reform in Texas has an unusual champion in the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), an organization comprising superintendents and other administrative leaders in the state and representing their interests. Like the former governor in Virginia, members of this group took on the issue of assessment reform with strong support from parents and teachers unhappy with the existing system. And as in California, the reform process involves careful attention to building the capacity of teachers, school administrators, and district leaders to understand and support the roll-out of new forms of performance and formative assessment.

In 2006, TASA began facilitating what has become an ongoing conversation about the limitations of the current standardized test-based accountability system, and how such a system distorts the evaluation of district impact on equity, teacher quality, and student learning. To establish a more fair, equitable, and comprehensive way to measure educational outcomes, TASA convened 35 public school superintendents from across Texas to author the guiding document, *A New Vision for Public Education in Texas*.

This subsection of the paper describes how TASA has moved from a visioning process to catalyze support for a more community-based and equitable system of accountability in Texas. It describes the work that the Texas Performance Assessment Consortium—facilitated by TASA, and in partnership with SCALE, Envision Learning Partners, and the Institute for Learning (IFL)—is doing to bring this vision to reality.

A New Vision for Community-Based Accountability
During the visioning process, which spanned 21 months, the TASA membership offered eight workshops to build district knowledge and understanding of new approaches to accountability and support for teaching and learning. Superintendents and other district leaders conducted community outreach to such constituencies as parents and community-based organizations with a stake in education through such mechanisms as town halls, as well as specific outreach to various organizations that represent potential supporters. Throughout, TASA has provided support, materials, and other resources.

The process of imagining more equitable and community-based systems of support and accountability was captured in the document “Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas: A Work in Progress and Further Development” (published by TASA 2008):

“The schools we need are community-owned institutions. They are designed and established as learning organizations, treating employees as knowledgeable workers and students as the primary customers of knowledge work. They are free of bureaucratic structures that inhibit multiple paths to reaching goals. Reliance on compliance is minimized and generating engagement through commitment is the primary means to achieve excellence. Leadership at all levels is honored and developed. . . . The evaluation, boundary, and authority systems are submissive to the directional system, allowing for major innovation to flourish, new capacities to emerge, missions to be accomplished and the vision to be realized in an increasingly unpredictable world.”

The process of creating this bold vision also served as the launch pad for the Texas Performance Assessment Consortium. Facilitated by TASA, the TPAC is a group of superintendents, central office leadership, and principals from 44 school districts throughout the state who have come together around the need for a mind shift among school leaders, parents, and the general public about the meaning of accountability. Simply put, the Texas Performance Assessment Consortium put forward two core questions: What do educators and the community at large want to be accountable for? What evidence is needed to make claims about district and school impact on teaching and learning?

TASA's goal is to provide support for Texas schools and districts to move their educational approach from dependency on a purely test-based accountability system (the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR) to a multiple-measure student-centered system focusing on continuous learning and student growth. The initial step in that process is to empower and enable teachers and administrators to design and develop assessments that are instructionally embedded in their curriculum and adapted to meet the diverse needs of their students.

TASA, in alliance with the TPAC network, is committed to influencing current state accountability policies to move beyond the A-F report card that is used to grade districts and schools, based entirely on standardized tests. If successful,

this could require amending the public school accountability system as well as certain district and campus improvement requirements codified in the Education Code. House Bill 22, passed during the 2017 legislative session, reduces the accountability system from five domains to three—Student Achievement, School Performance, and Closing the Gaps—and specifies a broader set of indicators to use within the domains to evaluate the performance of school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and public school campuses. The legislation puts forward the state's policy plans to create an integrated local, state, and federal accountability and continuous improvement system rooted in reform-minded networks and activities and based on state statute.

DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT DESIGNS

Development of new systems of accountability, through TASA's support of and partnership with TPAC member districts, would serve as proofs of concept that support the feasibility and desirability of moving beyond the current state accountability regulations. While gaining relief from the state accountability requirements is a key part of the agenda, it is not the ultimate goal. The viability of TPAC is grounded in the creation of standards of success that are locally developed and commonly understood and enforced—in other words, a Community-Based Accountability System. The impact of such a system will be judged by both the credibility of the evidence in relationship to district learning targets established through the CBAS process and the relative performance of the district on the established metrics used for both district and state accountability.

Launching the development of the new accountability system begins with building the assessment literacy of educators, parents, and community leaders around new conceptions of accountability, and particularly using performance assessment as a high-leverage practice to prepare all students for college and career success. Organizationally, CBAS is a program within the Texas Leadership Council, a Texas-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. TASA is a core partner to this effort, overseeing governance and providing a number of key support functions, such as fundraising, planning meetings, and administrative support. After the initial pilot phase of the initiative, TPAC will offer a basic membership available to all Texas districts, regardless of where they are on the path to performance assessment and the development of a CBAS.

To support the implementation of performance assessments at the local level, TPAC organizes Performance Assessment Design Groups focused on developing formative assessments and summative performance assessments to build a new community-based system of assessment customized to meet community/district needs and learning goals. As in both Virginia and California, Texas administrators are opposed to accountability systems that rely solely on the use of a single standardized test to evaluate student learning and school/district performance. The TASA Design Groups actively involve local teacher-leaders and administrators in building a multiple-measures system of assessment that provides a comprehensive picture of school/district impact on student learning.

In particular, the Design Groups are focusing on the roles that performance assessments can play within a CBAS. The guiding principle is that the primary source of actionable information on teaching and learning should come from classrooms and support teachers in making the best possible decisions for the students. To support the work of the Design Groups, TPAC will provide tools and methodologies capable of producing both actionable information and data that can figure into each district's CBAS. The explicit intent is to show that a well-crafted community-based system has the necessary explanatory power and validity to either augment or possibly supplant the current system of accountability in Texas. Three subgroups will work on related but distinct tasks to accomplish in building CBAS:

1. District/Superintendents—Determine what accountability at a district level should look like and how it goes beyond merely rolling data up from the school and classroom level. What are the criteria, structure, process, and metrics needed to adequately inform the community about the impact of district practices on teaching and learning?
2. Campus/Principals—Develop metrics (or dashboards) of indicators, including performance assessments of learning to assess the impact of the school on learning across all subgroups, while paying attention to how each campus system will figure into the overall district system.
3. Administration/Teacher and School Leaders—Build the assessment capacity of building leaders and teachers. In particular, build capacity around formative and summative performance in literacy, writing, math, science, and other disciplines.

To assist in the building of assessment capacity, the Administration/School Leaders subgroup works closely with SCALE, Envision Learning Partners, IFL, and other consultants in providing support to a set of design teams:

- > Formative Assessment Design Group—Create systems, capacity, and tools that focus on the learning process.
- > Performance Assessment Design Group—Create systems, capacity, and tools that can produce valid and reliable information that can be included in a CBAS.
- > Writing Assessment Design Group—Continue the work started by a cadre of districts attempting to create more rigorous and relevant writing assessments that are better aligned to college and career success. Currently, the state of Texas administers a writing test that limits a student to 26 lines on one page, encouraging a test-driven instructional focus and formulaic writing to meet testing standards.

As a whole, these teams are all working to answer the question: What role do performance assessments play within a CBAS? The guiding principle is that the primary source of actionable information on teaching and learning should come from classrooms and support teachers in making the best possible decisions for students. The information gathered from assessments should be intertwined with instruction and support continued professional learning.

Specifically, the Performance Assessment Design Group is working to accomplish the following objectives:

- a. Establish a common architecture for the design and use of performance assessments.
- b. Establish a process in which educators can contribute to the bank of performance assessments through a vetting process.
- c. Curate a portfolio of performance assessments that educators can select from to gather evidence of student learning within an instructional practice without interruption to the learning.
- d. Develop scoring protocols that support reliability (norming process), provide immediate information to students, parents, and teachers, and support growth and continuous improvement as well as data that can be aggregated and/or analyzed to report on student progress.

- e. Create and pilot a readiness survey (self-evaluation) regarding a district, campus, or school's readiness to transition to using performance assessments.
- f. Develop a suggested implementation/transition plan based on the results of the self-evaluation.
- g. Develop a communication protocol for all stakeholders on the benefits, demands, challenges, and expected outcomes of using performance assessments.

The uniqueness and strength of this work derives from the diversity among the 44 district representatives. They range in experience as well as roles within their districts, representing teachers, instructional coaches, school administrators, and district-level administrators such as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction as well as district Directors of Assessment and Accountability. This role diversity is designed to provide a 360-degree perspective of the indicators of success that will form the foundation for the development of the CBAS.

Building a Common Architecture and Vetting Process

Similar to the model developed with Virginia and the Los Angeles County Office, the theory of action guiding this work is to develop common knowledge and language through hands-on experience in an assessment development process. Participants bring their own prior experience to inform plans of action for each aspect of using performance assessments to support instruction, build evidence of student learning, and support equitable outcomes for all students.

These groups meet once per month with activities to complete between each session, specifically taking the work back to their local teams to develop capacity and ownership. In phase 1, the design groups met five times. The current phase of workshop sessions (2017-2018) is working to further develop local capacity and build and scale up the CBAS system across districts. The most immediate success has been to finalize the common architecture for designing and curating the development of innovative instructionally embedded performance assessments customized to meet district and community learning goals.

Individual districts are likely to approach the process of developing a community-based accountability system in somewhat different ways, depending on how they answer the basic question, What do we want to be accountable for? At the same time, the capacity building aspect of the initiative

will help to create a common spine in the way performance assessments are designed, developed, and used—to allow for variation in how the community structures the district-based accountability system as well as for a customized mix of indicators that best represents the learning outcomes for all students established by the local community engagement and standards.

The common architecture and vetting process for Texas is informed by a nationally recognized model developed by SCALE that allows and respects the need for bottom-up participation in the design and development of new systems of assessment. The benefit of establishing and publishing the common architecture is that all educators within TASA can begin to review, modify, and make improvements to their performance assessments to optimize its impact on student learning. In this manner, all educators have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the performance assessment bank that will be used for accountability. Once established, the vetting process will be conducted by a panel of trained content experts (selected Texas educators) that will ensure that all performance assessments within the task bank meet and/or exceed the common architecture and provide a positive context for student learning. Eventually, the team hopes to curate a rich task bank that will allow ample choices for teachers and will support multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate continuous growth and meet or exceed state proficiency standards.

Giving educators the authority to determine which assessment to use, and to determine when students are ready to demonstrate their learning, enables timely feedback for both students and teachers. Teachers bring a sensitivity to the learning demands of the local curriculum, aligned to the developmental needs of the students and content standards. In this context, the connection between learning and assessment becomes seamlessly embedded in curriculum and is an integral part of the instructional process (Figure 1).

This stands in contrast to the common school practice of establishing administrative timelines put in place to serve testing windows and the loss of instructional time associated with standardized testing—practices that have led to a national backlash against the sole use of externally developed standardized tests to assess learning (the “opt-out” movement) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Future Assessment Model

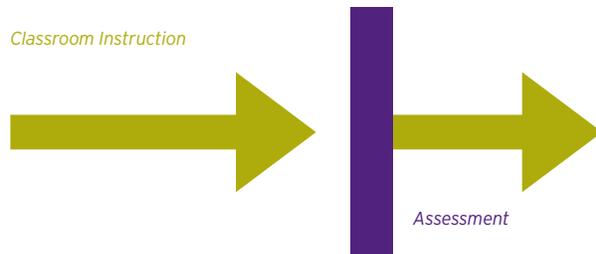
Classroom instruction and assessment are intertwined



Instruction, assessment, and feedback are intertwined and continuous—gathering evidence of student learning while providing immediate information for instructional shifts and learning needs.

Figure 2: Current Assessment Model

Classroom instruction is interrupted by assessment.



When an annual assessment event disrupts teaching and learning, feedback is significantly delayed and does not provide information for instruction shifts or learning within the current academic year. Much of instructional time prior to the assessment event focuses solely on the assessment rather than a broader set of learning goals, including real-life applications.

EARLY LESSONS FROM THE STATES

The three states featured in this report—Virginia, California, and Texas—have all taken important steps in designing, piloting, and developing scale-up plans for new, more equitable and learning-centered educational accountability systems. This subsection names some of the emerging lessons and looks at commonalities across these states both in the types of new assessments they are introducing and how they are introducing them, as well as differences among the states in how they are building political will and developing scale-up plans, including the policies to sustain the changes. While all are at an early stage of this work, their stories offer important lessons and ideas for other states interested in taking advantage of the current openings promised by ESSA.

State-Level Leadership and Political Capital Can Pave the Way

State leaders can play an important role in fostering momentum to move from multiple-choice standardized tests to a broader range of assessments. In two of the states in our study, leaders have provided innovation funds, policy permissions, and political support—as well as a level

of credibility that helps invest in innovation and appeals to regional and national reform funders and partners. Policy leaders in the third state are working to make changes in the education code to allow for more community-level accountability.

- > In Virginia, the governor spread the message that students were tested too often and that too much time in schools was going into “test prep” for multiple-choice tests. The call for testing reform as part of his stump speech gave policymakers, civic leaders, and educators a concrete message to rally around. Legislators sponsored bills that made more student-centered assessments possible, emphasizing that more authentic and performance-based assessments would make schools more accountable for helping prepare students with the deeper learning skills needed beyond K-12. The recommendations from the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee set a path for implementation. This, in addition to the ongoing attention and efforts of the state superintendent of education and his team, provided the permissions, dollars, and partnerships needed to move Virginia’s testing reform agenda into action.

Having trusted organizations lead and manage expectations and social exchanges enables emerging networks to surface common problems of practice and test solution strategies across different school cultures and boundaries. This, in turn, enables a more nuanced and nimble approach to implementation that helps to increase the sustainability and scalability of the innovative work. Context matters, and the commitment of trusted organizations to build understandings and share practices that respect and honor cultural and organizational differences is essential.

Each of the three states has found a different route to developing and spreading assessment reform. These include making use of regional service centers, a statewide organization of school administrators, and/or national reform initiatives with high visibility.

- > The county office system in California provides a regionally based operational system of support statewide to implement new state accountability requirements. Whether or not other states have county offices, many have regional service centers (there are more than 500 such centers in 45 states). The LA County Office of Education has taken on this challenge and, in turn, developed a roll-out plan that involved starting with one regional consortium of districts (Antelope Valley) that is most primed to do the work, and then using this proof of concept to expand to four additional consortia throughout the county.
- > The Texas Association of School Administrators has played an important catalyst role in Texas, both in developing the vision for reform and in the formation of the Texas Performance Assessment of 53 school districts throughout the state that are committed to building the assessment literacy not just of educators, but also of parents and community leaders. These districts are particularly committed to using performance assessment as part of determining accountability and as a tool in preparing all students for college and career success.
- > The district reform work in Virginia has benefited from the credibility and support provided by the various national reform networks some districts have joined. Participation in these networks has enhanced the work in a variety of ways—from providing frameworks to offering communities of practice to providing strong messaging and talking points.

ATTENTION TO CONTEXT AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS LAYS THE GROUNDWORK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

The very aspects of a new assessment system that make it more useful to teaching and learning also make it more complicated to carry out. Capacity to execute, horizontally (across the state) and vertically (local to state), is an ongoing challenge in the still-emergent stories of these three states.

The transition to using a portfolio of performance assessments means moving from a mechanical to a more organic system. Each teacher now has more control, ownership, choice, and the responsibilities of scoring and reporting student progress. In the prior system of administering one summative assessment, all students in the same grade took the same test within the same testing window. The teachers' tasks were clear-cut: keep the assessment secure, administer the assessment following the script and guidelines, ship off the completed test booklets to an unknown group to score the assessments and generate reports—which generally occurred well after the information would be useful to inform instructional practices.

In the new system, not only may students take different assessments, but they may do so at different times. This flexibility requires different oversight, reporting, justification, and a set of checks and balances to verify the validity and reliability of the results. Additionally, this new system requires the analysis and synthesis of student work to generate a report and collect appropriate data to be incorporated within the accountability system and shared with stakeholders.

In preparing instructional leaders and teachers for such an effort, state leaders in the three states featured in this paper have tried to manage risk and create a safe space to try out new approaches to curriculum and instruction, while both minimizing disruption of the school culture and optimizing learning. They have established strategic partnerships among known and trusted providers (e.g., county offices, regional service centers, membership organizations for school professionals) coupled with the specialized expertise of university centers (e.g., SCALE, Envision Learning Partners, IFL, and UCLA CRESST) and nonprofit partners (e.g., JFF, ConnectEd, Assessment for Learning Project) to help create a climate in which shared experiences across school and district networks fuel optimal opportunities for sustainable impact.

The earned relational trust of well-known technical assistance providers helps to open the door for partners who bring special expertise (e.g., on assessment, tool development, professional development). The states are using such partnerships to help create communities of practice and a climate in which shared experiences (positive and negative) across school and district networks work together to fuel continuous improvement and support the sustainable implementation of new reforms.

- In brokering a partnership between the Antelope Valley Common Assessment Project and SCALE, the LA County Office of Education has from the beginning had the explicit goal of building local capacity, at both the administrative and instructional leader/coach levels for sustaining the work beyond the initial training workshops provided by SCALE. Instructional coaches, who apprenticed to expert writers of performance tasks in the first phase of the work, took on more responsibility in the second phase to develop and use the tasks and expand the impact within their respective schools. And, during the third phase, administrators will receive additional guidance on how best to support and use performance tasks, and how to score and analyze student work both within and across districts.
- The Texas Performance Assessment Consortium, with its focus on Community-Based Accountability Systems, is committed to developing the capacity of teacher-leaders, school administrators, and district leaders to carry out their distinctive roles in designing, building, and sustaining such a system. To support the capacity of school leaders and teachers, TPAC has engaged Envision Learning Partners in particular around formative assessment, performance assessment, and writing assessment.
- School districts in Virginia are participating in national networks, such as the Assessment for Learning Project (ALP), in which districts are reimagining the role of assessment in supporting and advancing student learning. Eleven Virginia school districts are engaged in EdLeader 21, a national network working to develop student-led assessments, and integrating “critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity” more seamlessly into teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

MOVING AHEAD

The past several decades of education reform in the United States have been dominated by centralized test-driven reforms. Such reforms were seen as key to closing basic skills gaps (in reading and math), establishing performance-based benchmarks of success, reducing dropout rates, and establishing high-stakes consequences for schools and districts that fell short of expectations. Recently, the emphasis of reform has begun to shift to a focus on new systems of instruction, assessment, and accountability that provide students greater opportunity to learn the skills and deeper learning competencies needed to succeed in college and career.

The passage of ESSA in 2016 has effectively decentralized the locus of reform from the federal government to the states. In short, states and districts now have greater responsibility in building their assessment and accountability system. At the same time, ESSA has broadened and deepened the definition of student learning to include assessments to measure higher-order thinking skills. Addressing real-world problems through incorporating performance assessments (e.g., curriculum-embedded classroom assessments, project-based learning tasks, and portfolios) is becoming a significant component of the development of new state systems of accountability and assessment.

The three states featured in this paper—Virginia, California, and Texas—have all taken important steps in building the foundation for new assessment systems that include multiple measures of student academic achievement and growth gathered throughout the school year. In this context, “test prep” becomes a worthwhile endeavor in pursuit of deeper learning. Students are expected to improve their work products until these products demonstrate that the students have developed the competencies being assessed. In doing this work, state and school leaders are guided by research that shows assessing student growth over time, with multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of standards, will produce more reliable evidence of learning that can also be used formatively within the school year to foster continuous improvement and growth.²⁰

All three of these states are taking a phase-in approach to implementing such game-changing innovations. Important lessons have already started to emerge: the combination of top-down and bottom-up leadership; what can be done to create a safe space to try out new approaches to curriculum and instruction while minimizing disruption of the school culture; and the key role of trusted organizations that can, in turn, bring in experts to help in the vital work of capacity building.

As this pioneering work continues, other states will soon join in this journey. In 2018, the United States Department of Education is slated to launch the innovative assessment pilot: selected through an application process, up to seven states will test alternatives to standardized exams in selected districts, and will commit to developing new statewide assessments inclusive of such alternatives. From this growing body of work, policy, and practice, leaders will be able to learn additional important lessons on how to iterate, enhance, and scale up this critical work.

ENDNOTES

1. Governor McAuliffe held office from January 11, 2014, to January 2018.
2. [HB 930](#) and identical [SB 306](#).
3. Committee members were elected to serve two- or three-year terms.
4. The committee was announced June 13, 2014. The governor was a Democrat and the legislature had a Republican majority. For more, see the Secretary of Education's press release: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/news/news_releases/2014/06_jun30_gov.shtml.
5. Holton and Staples both served on the committee as ex-officio members.
6. For more on Staples's appointment, see the Washington Post's coverage on May 31, 2014: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/steve-staples-to-become-virginias-next-superintendent-of-public-instruction/2014/03/31/37c5034a-b903-11e3-899e-bb708e3539dd_story.html?utm_term=.0f0784507b17
7. The 2014 interim report can be accessed here: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2017/01-jan/agenda-items/item-h.pdf>. The 2015 full report can be accessed here: <http://education.virginia.gov/media/4963/2015-standards-of-learning-innovation-committee-full-report.pdf>.
8. The board picked up this recommendation, and developed a "Profile of a Virginia Graduate" along with modified and aligned high school graduation requirements. Revised graduation requirements will go into effect in 2022. For more information, see this June 2016 board-issued briefing: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_standing/accountability/2016/06-jun/june-2016-profile-of-a-graduate-presentation-final-draft.pdf.
9. The New Virginia Economy is Virginia's economic and employment strategic vision and framework, developed by a steering committee chaired by the Secretary of Commerce and Trade. This committee guides the governor's economic strategic plan. The New Virginia Economy priorities are "project ready" infrastructure; diversified high-growth industries; preeminent business climate, innovation, and entrepreneurs; and a "credentials to careers" workforce. For more, see this report: <http://www.yesvirginia.org/Content/pdf/Executive%20Summary%20of%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf>.
10. These recommendations are laid out in the committee's 2015 report to the Virginia State Board of Education.
11. The state regularly worked with a former assistant superintendent of the Fairfax County Public Schools who is now on staff with the department to support the implementation of local alternative assessments. The constancy of her role at the state level, as an established and credible school administrator, has greatly assisted the roll-out of Virginia's various testing reforms.
12. The Framework for Local Alternative Assessment Implementation can be found here: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/local_assessments/framework-for-laa-implementation.pdf.
13. For more information on the Assessment for Learning Project (ALP), check out its website: <https://www.assessmentforlearningproject.org>.
14. See here for more details: <https://www.assessmentforlearningproject.org/grantees-fairfax>.
15. For more information on EdLeader21, check out its website: <http://www.edleader21.com>.
16. Jobs for the Future partnered with the Virginia Department of Education and University of Virginia to host this summit, with funding from the Hewlett Foundation. For more, see JFF's recap: <https://www.jff.org/points-of-view/jff-and-virginia-department-education-summit-highlights-innovation-student-assessments/>
17. The Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) is a national leader in piloting performance-based assessments. Since February 2018, SCALE has joined the Envision Learning Partners team.
18. The working group is chaired by Brad Stam of San Francisco Unified and Jennifer O'Day of the American Institutes for Research.
19. The website for the California Accountability and State Dashboard can be found at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/index.asp>.
20. National Research Council. 2012. Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/13398>

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