



Beyond Standardized Testing **December 12, 2012**

Learning Circle Notes

How We Currently Assess: Looking at State and National Models

Presentation by Gabriella and Tory

- In New Mexico:
 - Standards Based Assessment or the NM Graduation Exam
 - Standardized short cycle (3 times per year)
 - State has recommended the use of two short cycle assessment
 - Low stakes
 - Intended to inform instructional practice
 - PARCC is the new state assessment that will replace the SBA – will be aligned to the new common core standards.
 - Will still be used as a high stakes test.
 - School grading is tied to the SBA (and eventually PARCC)
 - In high schools, the only scores that are applied toward the school grade are the third year scores.
 - All of these assessments and standards drive instruction in schools, resulting in learning (and teaching) that is in the same format as the assessment.

Student Perspectives on Assessments

Presentation by Two Students at ACE Leadership High School

- One student has ADD/ADHD, and taking the SBA at his last school was very difficult because it required him to sit still for two straight weeks, all day.
 - He also had a lot of teachers and other people telling him that he might end up dropping out.
 - Here at ACE, he's able to engage in projects that are much more meaningful than the kind of instruction he received at his previous school.
- The other student was told that he wasn't going to make it through high school.
 - During his three years at ACE, he has only had to take one bubble test. All of his other tests involved standing up and talking to a group of people. His biggest test was the gateway, which involved presenting all the work he had done over the past three years.
 - He was a very shy person his first year, but he found a way to break out of his shell by standing up in front of the school each day to ask a riddle.



A Vision of Possibilities for Alternative Assessments

Presentation by Tony Monfiletto

- Continuum of assessments
 - There are a lot of people around the country who are thinking about how we can move from left to right on the continuum – from traditional, standardized state assessments at one extreme to student-designed projects at the other extreme.
 - In New Mexico, we are on the far left side of the continuum. The vision is to begin pushing our state toward the right side, with a greater focus on student-generated learning. These assessments would still be aligned to the state standards.
- The reason this matters is because this state and the people in it know what students should know and be able to do.
- Our anxiety and fear about validity and reliability and cheating just prevent us from doing what we need to do to support student-centered learning.
 - There is no cheating when students design their own projects. They do require coaching, but they still have to demonstrate mastery about what they learned.
 - We have a compliance mind toward accountability right now. We could get so much more out of our kids if we can figure out what we want them to demonstrate.

How do you define student success?

Responses as written by participants:

- Efficient preparation for life after high school
- Maintaining the motivation to finish and continue school, education
- Being open-minded
- Students have the skills and competencies to pursue their dreams in life
- Students build the resiliency needed to overcome whatever obstacles they may encounter in life.
- Students learn how to build strong and healthy relationships with peers and adults.
- Student success as demonstrated by:
 - Confident to explore
 - Unafraid of adversity
 - Challenged by struggle to the point of elation
 - “Curiouser and Curiouser” – Dr. Seuss
 - Demonstrate empathy toward others and willingness to support others in their struggles.
- Find their interests and gifts.
- Learn about what matters to them and pursue learning and action
- Communication ability- writing and or speaking be it old fashioned and or technical.
- Contribute to community locally and globally
- Understand how to make decisions, form opinions, analyze evidence
- Problem-solving- self or outside



- Identity- know where they come from
- Empowerment
- Holistic Wellness
- Leadership, Mentor
- Confidence
- Language
- Multi-Sensory teaching (hands-on using community)
- Physical, social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, community
- Using the outdoors
- Students environment of stories, songs, ceremonies, prayer
- That students care about each other, students are critical thinkers
- Students have confidence to pursue their dreams
- Students are engaged in making their communities and world a better place.
- Critical Thinking
- Goal-setting, apply, evaluate
- Self-reflection
- Strengths-based
- Students involvement in Community
- Sense of belonging
- Ability to learn
- Strategies for positive decision-making
- Apply knowledge to life
- Sense of self, self-identity
- Holistic
- Thriving
- Students are prepared emotionally, cognitively, whole person
- To begin a life as a fully contributing member of society in a career of their dreams!
- Students do not feel stopped in their quest for knowledge or in their creativity
- Clear on their passions and strengths
- Have strategies for resilience can bounce when things go wrong
- Can navigate systems in this world: network, apply, and interview for jobs, understand politics on the job
- Take responsibility for their own happiness
- Self-directed
- Belief in own success
- Peer views of students critical reasoning
- Demonstrated integration and appreciation of basic intermediate challenging concepts
- Examples – application in simulated real environments
- Ability to respond to feedback – adapt and integrate
- Active learning – not passive
- Learners understand and can talk about own learning, potential
- Self and community reliant learners

- Understand what dynamic assessment means to themselves and their family, community, etc.
- Have vertical tools that express innovation and creativity
- Know own sense of competency, meaning, reciprocity
- Are able to perform the task they are given
- Able to learn more that is needed to learn
- Learn skills that are needed and/or used in real life situations
- Proud of what they have done.
- Being able to relay educational content in their own words
- Being able to apply educational content to the real world and to problem-solve
- Remembering information throughout years in school, not just for a short period of time
- Expression the interest to be lifelong learners through constant inquisition
- Commitment to community
- Wisdom (applied values)
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 - Knowledge (integrating info and life experience)
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 - Information (facts)
- Intellectual, Emotional, Social and Spiritual Health
- Student internalized the desire to be excellent and is persistent about getting there being that
 - Take responsibility
 - Ask good questions
 - Work well alone and with others
 - Find several possible solutions to issues
 - Be smart consumer
 - Be a good neighbor
 - When a student can leave school and feel positive about themselves and the work they have done in school
 - Not having fear of failure
 - Compassionate, caring
 - Critical thinkers
 - Self-aware
 - Strong communication skills
 - Sense of justice, concern, about injustice
 - Life-long learners
 - Employable
 - Ability to learn
 - Self esteem
 - Pride in self
 - Pride in their work
 - Family pride
 - Peer acknowledgement



Group Dialogue: Designing New Assessment Models for New Mexico

- Question prompts:
 - What are your experiences with different types of assessments?
 - What do they tell us about our definitions of student success?
 - How are children and their learning impacted by the assessments used?
 - Colonization
 - A few families didn't pass the high school exit exam and they wanted to drop out. That was a traumatic experience. The only reason they were able to pass a second time is because the family came together to support them.
 - Consequences for the children can be very real because of the tracks they are placed in.
 - Tests are affecting the teachers in terms of how they are teaching students. We are losing a lot of good teachers because they don't want to teach to the test; they want to teach the student to learn.
 - Perception by some that if you don't agree with standardized testing, you're not serious about accountability. It's hard to get past this narrative.
 - Time commitment: 20-30 out of 180 days might be committed to just assessing students. Also, the timing of the testing makes it difficult for teachers to ensure that they have the time necessary to
 - Some students in one school tried to sabotage the SBA by answering every question incorrectly.
 - One person's stepdaughter had knots in her stomach about having to take the test.
 - Testing can place labels on communities that schools are failing students, when there may actually be a lot of good things happening in those schools.
 - Assessments can have very little to do with who we are as a people.
 - Inflating capacity with a test score: one young man had a coach who was encouraging him to keep going, but he dropped out of school because he thought he could never pass the test.
 - Students are being given tests that are above their grade level.
 - Many students act out because they know that their functions are not high enough to be able to pass the test. Juvenile justice system gets busier during test time for this reason.
 - In the medical school, there's a monopoly that creates their tests. Students who get into med school are there because they do well on the tests. Med schools are hostage to monopolistic tests for licensure.
 - Three biggest test makers in the country are also providers of textbooks, remedial programs, etc. It's a closed loop.



How might assessments in NM be designed to best support the learning of students in NM?

Small group activity written responses using Learning Alliance Values:

World View:

- Space in curriculum for cultural diversity state by state
- Learning to teach through different cultural lenses
- Demonstrating analysis or understanding of how would come to be – multiple stories understanding their own bias – self reflective
- Start with local
- Teach and assess, compare/contrast
- Empathy
- Assessing for school or assessing for life? More Experiential than grounded in abstract

Asset-based Approach to Innovation:

- Asking students what they want to learn. Those things they want to learn can be assessed
- Learning with a personal context “story-telling” a sense of place
- Relevant to real life, actual context

Achievement and Equity:

- Involve young people in process, asked these questions draw on students from all walks of life.
- Embrace communities of learners, address needs of all kinds of students
- Explicitly focus on students helping others: peer mentoring, service
- Have students find their interest in the real world and authentically assess in those sites, work
- Students decide what is important to know and do, and the student has to defend it
- Use portfolios to document individualized work
- Assess cultural responsiveness, design assessments to be culturally relevant (topics, questions)
- Broaden use of portfolios for students to identify their competencies, strengths
- Talk to students about their choice in including portfolios
- “entrustable professional activity” – may not have to assess it but need to know you have it
- Competencies without time limits
- We don’t hold doctors responsible for health outcomes

Holistic:

- Project-based with demonstration can see how they began and how the result turned out and they demonstrated it
- Projects that get them out of the classroom to apply their learning in real-world contexts.
- Projects that can get students excited
- Students showing up without basic needs being met

- Hungry – provide breakfast
- Mental Health Challenges – provide counseling
- Need to provide flexibility for students who are having a bad day, who have a hard time sitting still, who need more time
- Tests being used to measure teachers and schools more than students
- What’s being assessed?
 - Need to look at science, art, social studies
 - Need to look at non-academic, non-cognitive factors
 - Resiliency
 - Relationships
 - Self-efficacy
 - Communication
 - Problem-solving
 - Character
 - Passion and compassion
- Menu of choices based on learning styles
- We need:
 - Differentiation
 - Dynamic formats
 - Flexibility
 - Comprehensive: academic (more than reading and math) and non-academic
 - Clear intent: Why are we assessing → needs to be truly student centered

Urgency:

- If the child wins, we all win
- Increase in testing over the years
- Tasks not always designed to capture what people are really doing
- One stage fits all doesn’t fit anybody
- If we are testing more and more, why are our kids achieving less

Evaluation- What is something you learned today?

Written responses-

- I learned that there is a group in NM fighting for alternative assessments in NM schools (NM Center for School Leadership)
- I learned that juvenile courts spike around state assessments.
- Standardized assessments lead some students to act out and the juvenile justice system sees an increase in activity
- I learned that ACE Leadership is working to pilot performance assessment
- I learned that other people also believe values is the best approach
- I learned about what happens at ACE Leadership HS. It is good to know about this type of education in NM after reading about so many other examples from around the country.
- Learned more clarity about difference between standards and assessments.



- I learned and confirmed how myopic the testing regime really is and how it continues to be an instrument of colonization and assimilation
- I learned that there is a collaborative of individuals with whom we might work to develop alternative assessments for schools across NM.
- I learned the challenge before this effort to reform the teaching and learning experience is pervasive and well funded but the advocates for change are unfazed- stay tuned.
- Learned number of days of testing in relationship to school year out of balance.
- Learned about interesting innovation efforts in medical education.
- Learned that NM waiver from NCLB is very NCLB-like.
- Learned aspects of the SBA and PARCC.
- I learned how many feel that SBA/HSGA is not working and change is needed.