



Assessment Working Committee

Georgia's State Plan: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Meeting Summary Thursday, September 1, 2016

Committee Members Present: Melissa Fincher (Chair); Steve Barker (Co-Chair); Juan-Carlos Aguilar; Steve Flynt; Lynn Holland; Rustin Howard; Beth Kieffer; Michael Lamont; Rochelle Lofstrand; Cecelia McLoon; Allan Meyer; Claire Miller; Anthony Pack; Michelle Purvis; Judy Monsaas (for Jennifer Rippner); Katesa Walker

The meeting began with introductions, a review of the goals for the day's discussion, and a quick review of the July 19 meeting outcomes.

The goals for the meeting included the following:

- Building a common understanding of ESSA requirements for assessment;
- Discussing goals for assessment in Georgia; and
- Identifying topics for future conversations.

To help achieve these goals, Allan Meyer, committee member and the Assistant Director of Policy at the Georgia Department of Education, provided an overview of the current state requirements for assessment and accountability, as required in both state law and State Board of Education Rule. Additionally, a review of assessment fundamentals was provided, including discussion of comprehensive assessment systems (a coordinated and articulated system of multiple assessments) and their components – formative, interim, and summative assessments. It was pointed out that the Georgia Milestones Assessment Systems is not a comprehensive assessment system, but rather a system of summative assessments that have been designed to fulfill certain articulated purposes.

Articulated purposes of the Georgia Milestones End of Grade (EOG) are to:

- provide a valid measure of student achievement of the state content standards across the full achievement continuum;
- provide a clear signal of the student's preparedness for the next educational level;
- be suitable for use in promotion and retention decisions at grades 3 (reading), 5 (reading and mathematics), and 8 (reading and mathematics);
- support and inform educator effectiveness measures; and
- inform state and federal accountability measures at the school, district, and state levels.

Articulated purposes of the End of Course (EOC) are to:

- provide a valid measure of student achievement of the state content standards across the full achievement continuum;
- serve as the final exam for the course, contributing 20% to the student's final course grade;
- provide a clear signal of the student's preparedness for the next course and ultimately post-secondary endeavors (college and career);
- support and inform educator effectiveness measures; and
- inform state and federal accountability measures at the school, district, and state levels.

The committee undertook three topics of discussion in an effort to help achieve the meeting goals. Each discussion involved small-group consideration and then large-group dialogue. The three topics included:

1. ESSA requirements for academic assessment;
2. Reflection on current assessment practices in Georgia; and
3. Vision for Georgia’s assessment program.

ESSA Requirements for Academic Assessment

Committee members reviewed the sections of the Every Student Succeeds Act that include the requirements for academic assessments and were asked to identify the non-negotiables and the areas of flexibility.

Committee members reported the following non-negotiables for academic assessments:

- Same assessments for all students in grades 3 – 8 and once in high school (language arts and mathematics; science – once in elementary, middle and high)
- Assessments must be aligned to the full depth and breadth of the state content standards
- Assessments must measure higher order thinking skills and understanding
- Assessments must be technically sound to fulfill their identified purposes, including accountability
- Appropriate accommodations for ELs and SWDs must be identified and provided
- Alternate assessment not to exceed 1% participation at state

Committee members reported the following areas of flexibility:

- Opportunity to utilize multiple statewide interim assessments that result in a summative score;
- Opportunity for local districts to administer a nationally-recognized high school academic assessment (state must establish technical criteria for such assessments);
- Computer-adaptive assessments can be used;
- Opportunity for the development and scaling of innovation assessment through a limited pilot program

A sub-committee also reviewed the language in the law that authorizes an innovative assessment pilot. The group indicated this was an area for further discussion.

Current Assessment Practice

Committee members were asked to reflect on the state’s current assessment program and practices. Small groups discussed what is working, what is not working, and what questions they have.

In terms of what is working, the small groups identified the following areas:

- Quality of test has improved
 - Variety of item types
 - Inclusion of items that require and measure higher order thinking
 - Tighter alignment to standards and instruction
- Online administration
- Writing is assessed at every grade and is part of the ELA test, rather than separate

- Increased rigor reflects and informs better instruction

In terms of what is not working, the small groups identified the following areas:

- Testing fatigue
- Understanding of the test development process
- Understanding of test purposes and appropriate uses
- Articulating results to public and parents
- Timing of score reports
- Concern was expressed that science and social studies are no longer tested in all grades

In terms of additional questions, the small groups identified the following topics:

- Need for additional sample items and annotated student exemplars (anchors)
- Need for more interpretative guidance – for both educators and parents
- Clarification on the appropriate uses of the assessment results (both criterion- and norm-referenced)

Vision for Georgia's Assessment Program

The guiding principles for the Assessment Working committee recommended by the Advisory Committee, who meet the previous day, were shared. These principles included:

- Ensure summative assessments (i.e., Georgia Milestones) inform, rather than drive, teaching and learning.
- Ensure assessments are fair, credible, transparent, accessible, and useful.
- Ensure the assessment process effectively communicates to all stakeholders.
- Ensure the assessment results are appropriately used within accountability to mitigate unintended consequences.

The committee then discussed the vision for assessment in Georgia. Small groups were asked to discuss the following questions and then report to the full committee:

- What do we hope to accomplish with our state assessment system?
- What observable outcomes do we hope to realize if the assessment system works as intended?
- What are the threats that could prevent the realization of the identified goals and outcomes?

In terms of what Georgia should strive to accomplish with its testing program, the small groups identified the following goals:

- Clear and timely information that can be used to inform instruction, including strategic planning
- Areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed are clearly identified
- Stakeholders, including students, understand and value results

In terms of observable outcomes, the small groups identified the following goals:

- Increased student achievement and readiness - including higher reading levels
- Improved student success in college and career

- Improved instruction
- Increased understanding of local results

In terms of threats that could prevent the realization of the identified goals and outcomes, the small groups identified the following goals:

- Expecting too much of tests with limited uses
- Using the test for purposes other than those for which the test was designed to support
- Lack of media and public understanding
- Context and capacity of local districts, including technology, funding, and communication challenges
- The perceived punitive nature of accountability
- Delays in district/school access to the data emanating from the assessment process

Topics for Future Discussions

Throughout the day's discussion, the list of topics for future discussions was updated to include:

- Option for local use of national high school assessments
- Innovative assessment pilot
- Single summative vs multiple interims leading to a summative score
- Comprehensive assessment systems
- Federal, state, and local requirements for assessment
- Reporting schedule
- Communication
- Opt-out

Future Meetings

Monday, October 3, 2016: 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Monday, October 31: 9:30 am – 2:00 pm

Monday, December 5: 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm