

Principles for Fewer and Smarter Assessments



Purpose: Calling on states to review their assessment systems and ensure that the assessments students take are rigorous, fair, non-redundant, and tied to improved teaching and learning.

The guidelines in the Testing Action Plan are intended to be received as such and there are no requirements of any kind. However, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) recognizes the importance of this work and the need to address testing concerns for students and schools. USED is committed to providing technical assistance to states and districts for the evaluation and improvement of assessment systems.

In reviewing their assessment systems, states and districts are advised to:

- Ensure that assessments are aligned with classroom content and used to inform teaching and learning
- Ensure that assessments are high quality—i.e., covering the full range of college- and career-ready standards, while also being an accurate measure of student achievement and growth
- Be cognizant of how much instructional time is taken up by testing and test prep, and then create a plan to review and eliminate unnecessary assessments; a 2% cap on statewide assessment testing time is a recommended stake in the ground, but not a mandate—the focus should be on effective, non-redundant, and high-quality assessments
- Ensure that assessments are fair and accessible to all students through the appropriate implementation of accommodations to meet individual students' testing needs
- Be fully transparent with students and parents about the purpose of the testing
- Ensure that assessments are not the sole factor in evaluating students, teachers, or schools

To support states and districts, the USED will be providing technical assistance and funding to support these efforts:

- On February 2, 2016, USED released further guidance on the Testing Action Plan and on the use of federal formula grant funds to improve testing systems, including for the following purposes:
 - ▶ Supporting audits of state and district assessment systems
 - ▷ States can use assessments funds available under section 6111 of ESEA (6111 funds) to conduct an audit of a state assessment system, or use the funds to support district audits of assessment systems
 - ▶ Supporting the development and implementation of high-quality assessments and related accommodations
 - ▷ States can use Title I-A state administrative funds of consolidated state administrative funds to develop improved statewide assessments
 - ▶ Improving understanding of test results for use in informing instruction and targeting resources
 - ▷ Districts can reserve Title I-A funds off top of its Title I allocation and use them to support educators in Title I schools in managing and analyzing student data for the purposes of improving instruction and decision-making in school improvement efforts
 - ▶ Enhancing the timeliness and quality of communication regarding the purposes, relevance, and quality of assessments
 - ▷ Districts can reserve ESEA Title I-A funds off top of its Title I allocation to present assessment results to educators and parents in a format that clarifies how assessment results are being used to improve instruction and meet student needs
- USED will provide flexibility and support in federal mandates so states can reduce testing while still meeting the required measures for student learning growth
 - ▶ USED will work with states to ensure flexibility and comprehension in regards to the weighting of statewide standardized test results in educator evaluation systems
 - ▶ To better support states and educators in identifying more effective and efficient assessment systems, the peer review of state assessment systems will include a focus on the alignment and validity of tests, as well as on test security and the measurement of higher-order thinking skills
 - ▶ The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes funding for assessment inventories and audits in FY 2017; further details about this provision in the law are forthcoming

USED's letter on testing under ESSA and the use of federal funds to audit and improve state assessment systems can be found [here](#). Additional resources, including links and resources from state and district initiatives to evaluate their testing systems, can be found on the CSAI web site's [Testing Action Plan Spotlight](#).