Center for
K–12 Assessment
& Performance Management

An independent catalyst and resource for the improvement of measurement and data systems to enhance student achievement.

Exploratory Seminar:

Measurement Challenges Within the Race to the Top Agenda

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Comments on Papers Presented by Margaret Heritage and Lauren Resnick: Recommendations for High-Quality Instructional Assessment Systems

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Created by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to forward a larger social mission, the Center for K–12 Assessment & Performance Management has been given the directive to serve as an independent catalyst and resource for the improvement of measurement and data systems to enhance student achievement.

Comments on Papers Presented by Margaret Heritage and Lauren Resnick: Recommendations for High-Quality Instructional Assessment Systems

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This paper is based on a reaction by Cheryl Krehbiel to presentations by Margaret Heritage and Lauren Resnick at the Exploratory Seminar: Measurement Challenges Within the Race to the Top Agenda, December 2009. Download copies of the papers presented at the seminar at http://www.k12center.org/publications.html.

The presentations by Margaret Heritage and Lauren Resnick shared a common thread: All assessments—formative, interim, and summative—should be grounded in a standards-based curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Both Heritage and Resnick spoke eloquently of the need to focus more attention on formative assessment quality, including the use of rich performance tasks, to ensure that students are exposed to rigor through high-quality tasks.

Focusing on progressions of content chunks, rather than curriculum, offers a fresh idea to improve assessments quickly and would likely gain wider support than building assessments based on a specific curriculum. This theory, presented by Lauren Resnick, warranted more conversation during the seminar.

Building assessments tied to a specific curriculum requires answers to questions that are unlikely to be determined quickly. What curriculum could be adopted that would perfectly align with the common standards? Adapting a curriculum or a variety of curricula resources to align with the common standards would take time to create. Should we invest in the creation of curriculum materials to align with the common standards? I imagine that is what numerous vendors across the country will set out to do. In my experience, using data to drive instructional classroom decisions does not mean that assessments must be closely built to a specific curriculum. Alignment to outcome standards proves sufficient to drive instruction and improve student learning.

Like Heritage and Resnick, I believe that data paints an important picture of student strength and needs and that formative assessment data is critical to drive instructional design and delivery and the continuous improvement process. For me, it is important that this formative data remain for instructional purposes only; using it for high-stakes purposes would be a misuse of the data.

The next generation of work in the area of assessments to inform instruction should include a significant investment in high-quality selected-response and constructed-response assessment items for both formative and summative use. Teachers and principals need improved items and systems that are ready to be used now, but could be improved over time. This urgency to improve the data available to teachers and principals to directly support improvements in instruction cannot be overlooked.

Both Heritage and Resnick spoke of the need for increased professional development for teachers in the use of data and for involvement of teachers at the classroom level in assessment design. Involving teachers in item development, while not practical for immediate national needs, is a tremendous professional learning experience that deepens knowledge of content. Creating perfectly crafted questions and distracters enables teachers to anticipate likely student misunderstandings and plan lessons to mitigate these. Supporting teachers' ability to analyze and use the data is an ongoing need. In my experience, teachers need help to analyze data and develop an instructional response to the data that either remediates or extends student learning. Professional development that helps teachers build strong "tool boxes" of teaching strategies is not only a preservice issue, but a capacity-building issue for current teachers.

Technology must play a large role. We must harness the power of technology to build, deliver, and score assessments, so that meaningful data is returned to teachers in real time, to inform instructional practice. Reports generated for use by teachers and principals must be easy to read and user-friendly. Technology must do much of the analysis and point teachers to specific student strengths and needs. Technology can provide teachers with "now what" tools—suggestions of specific strategies to target student needs. Technology should also point principals to teacher needs, so that principals can redirect human and other resources to support teachers, and ultimately students, in real time.

Data platforms that monitor both student achievement data as well as performance data need to be at stakeholders' fingertips. States and local education agencies need sophisticated data platforms that codify data from a variety of sources. These platforms need to be intuitive, eliminating hunting and pecking for information. Imagine a state platform that provides information about summative assessments, teacher effectiveness, and teacher professional growth training. This is information that could support recertification decisions. Imagine a local education agency platform that identifies professional development needs by grade level and content area, and a school- and teacher-level platform that really supports teachers to be highly effective in the classroom. This platform would capture class and student profiles in relation to a given standard at a glance and provide

- longitudinal data from a variety of sources—both formative and summative;
- ideas for teachers about *now what*, given the data;
- videos of what effective teaching looks like, snippets of engagement strategies, checks for understanding, and so on;
- samples of effective lesson plans;
- samples of student work, scoring tools, and feedback to provide to students;
- opportunities for teacher learning, both online and in traditional training venues; and
- space for professional networking of content and grade-like groups.

Using data to inform instruction for current teachers is only part of what the next generation of assessment systems must do. Teacher effectiveness is the most important factor in student

performance and must not be missed in conversations about data to improve instruction for our nation's children. Student achievement data must help us identify our best teachers so that we can reward them, keep them, and replicate their efforts. We must identify our teachers in need of greater support and align our professional development programs to target their needs, and we must be willing to remove teachers from the profession when trends in student achievement data suggest it. If we expect teachers to use data to inform their instructional practices, as stakeholders, we cannot shy away from using this data to inform our practices on teacher effectiveness, retention, support systems, and evaluation.

Race to the Top funding is asking us to think big and outside the box about what is possible. Our teachers and students deserve our being innovative and far-reaching in our dreams. Let's not waste the opportunity.