



Policy Statement

HIGH-STAKES TESTING

Issue 3, July 2002

With public demand and recent federal legislation calling for high standards and improved student performance, virtually every state in the nation has created and administered statewide tests that measure student progress over time. The requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 will result in increased use of these tests. After careful deliberation, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform has endorsed the following statement of policy.

The National Forum believes in standards and assessments that lead to high expectations, foster high-quality instruction, and support higher levels of learning for every student. At the same time, the National Forum believes that **no single test should ever be the sole determinant of a young adolescent's academic future**, whether it be promotion to the next grade, special placement, or transition from the middle grades to high school. Rather, the National Forum encourages diverse approaches to curriculum and instruction and supports the use of multiple measures to make decisions about a student's progress. These may include portfolios, exhibitions, performances, demonstrations, and tests that measure how well students achieve state standards.

This policy statement is grounded in the National Forum's vision of high performing middle-grades schools, which use multiple sources of assessment information to make decisions about teaching and student learning. According to the National Forum:

- **Academically excellent** middle-grades schools challenge all students to use their minds well, providing them with the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support they need to meet rigorous academic standards. Students in these schools learn to understand important concepts, develop essential skills, and apply what they learn to real world settings. **Teachers use a variety of methods to assess student performance, including exhibitions, projects, and performance tasks. They give students ample time and the support they need to meet the standards, including multiple opportunities to revise their work.**
- **Developmentally responsive** middle-grades schools use a wide variety of instructional strategies to foster curiosity, exploration, creativity, and the development of social skills, as well as academic achievement. **These schools provide multiple opportunities for students to discover and demonstrate their own competence. Students have opportunities for voice—they pose and research their own questions, reflect on their experiences, help to develop scoring rubrics, and monitor their own progress over time.**
- **Socially equitable** middle-grades schools keep positive options open for all students, and they work to over-

come systematic variation in resources and outcomes related to race, class, gender, and ability. Faculty and administrators expect high-quality work from all students and are committed to helping each student produce it. **Students may use many and varied approaches to achieve and demonstrate competence and mastery of standards.**

In addition, the National Forum believes that statewide assessments should support both instruction and accountability. Therefore, it is imperative that quality tests be designed and implemented in a way that helps improve both teaching and learning. As stated by the American Education Research Association, "Both the content of the test and the cognitive processes engaged in taking the test should adequately represent the curriculum. Statewide tests should not be limited to the portion of the relevant curriculum that is easiest to measure" (July 2000).

The Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment, an independent commission of leading test experts, has identified nine requirements for creating state tests that support both instruction and accountability. The Commission was convened by the American Association of School Administrators and four members of the National Forum: the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Education Association, and the National Middle School Association. The Forum encourages state policymakers and test developers to review these recommendations, found in the references that follow.

References

American Educational Research Association. (July 2000). *AERA Position Statement Concerning High-Stakes Testing in PreK-12 Education*. On-line at www.aera.net/about/policy/stakes.htm.

The Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment. (October 2001). *Building Tests to Support Instruction and Accountability: A Guide for Policy Makers*. On-line at www.nmsa.org, www.nassp.org, www.naesp.org, and at www.nea.org.

For additional resources, visit: www.mgforum.org

THE NATIONAL FORUM TO ACCELERATE MIDDLE-GRADES REFORM

is an alliance of educators, researchers, national associations, and officers of professional organizations and foundations, dedicated to improving education in the middle grades. The Forum seeks to improve student learning dramatically by advocating that schools provide strong academics, respond to students' needs and interests, and ensure equal access to high-quality classes.

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