

# NEA'S PRINCIPLES FOR THE FUTURE OF ASSESSMENT

## Our Vision

**Every student—regardless of where they come from, what they look like, or where they live—deserves access to an excellent education that empowers them to achieve their dreams.** We believe, to reach that end, we must employ quality assessment practices that generate accurate, useful evidence of student learning to support instruction and student success.

“Assessment” is the process of gathering information to inform education decisions. For educators, including more than 3 million members of the National Education Association, the primary purpose of assessment is to support and strengthen professional practice in order to understand student progress and guide instruction. Our education system includes a wide variety of decision-makers and decisions, all of which bear directly on the quality and impact of instruction in our schools. Education stakeholders—including students, families, caregivers, educators, policymakers, and community members—rely on assessment to inform these decisions. Through quality assessment practices, we can identify students’ strengths and areas for growth; encourage students to become lifelong learners; measure a program’s effectiveness; provide a basis for determining instructional strategies; and create developmentally appropriate, high-quality learning experiences for students.

All stakeholders need and deserve access to information from systems built on sound assessment practices. Our current assessment systems continue to over-rely on high-stakes standardized tests, which are more effective at sorting and harming students than they are at ending disparities in resources and access. They fail to deliver the quality and variety of information needed to accomplish these purposes. In response to the need for an assessment framework that can inform a diversity of decisions about our students and schools, the NEA Task Force on the Future of Assessment presents this document, *NEA’s Principles for the Future of Assessment*. The *Principles* outlines five guiding value statements for ensuring all students have access to an equitable, robust, asset-based assessment system.<sup>1</sup>

By enacting these *Principles*, we can see to it that how and what we assess accurately informs all stakeholders to drive student learning. We believe that by reconceptualizing the values that underpin how we understand students’ full identities, assets, and strengths and how we assess students’ knowledge and skills, we can engender equitable, well-rounded assessment systems that will inform and support student success. Herein, the *Principles* describes our vision for collaborating with the community, championing expertise of educators, prioritizing student self-efficacy, generating and employing well-rounded evidence, and ensuring all students opportunities to participate in culturally relevant and responsive assessment.

As educators, we know that students learn best in caring, challenging, and inclusive environments that support and engage each learner and have high expectations for every student. Individual students deserve learning opportunities that are differentiated and responsive to their needs, interests, and learning styles. Accordingly, how we assess students should reflect these priorities and be designed by educators, in partnership with stakeholders, to allow all students to demonstrate the full breadth of their knowledge and skills.

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<sup>1</sup> "Asset-based" means grounded in the strengths that students bring to the classroom as opposed to deficits.

Transforming assessment systems to be student-centered requires that educators have the professional autonomy, knowledge, and skills to use a variety of measures to assess student growth accurately.<sup>2</sup> That variety should include empowering students with voice and choice in how they demonstrate proficiency and competency. We embrace our responsibility for cultivating and broadly applying skills in assessment literacy for all educators.<sup>3</sup> By doing so, we can create quality assessment processes that inspire and support student learning, advance inclusion and equity in our assessment practices, render valid results, and communicate clear, useable results to students, families, and other stakeholders.

Fulfilling *NEA's Principles for the Future of Assessment* will reconceptualize how we assess and secure a more just learning environment for each and every student across our classrooms, districts, and beyond.

## Our Principles

### 1. Create community-based and student-centered processes for assessing student growth, learning, and development.

- a. Engage the community—including students, families, caregivers, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders—in a process to grow knowledge about assessing what students know and can do.
- b. Collaborate with stakeholders to establish shared beliefs and values about the various purposes, methods, and outcomes of assessment.
- c. Rely on educator expertise to guide the community in establishing consensus on appropriate assessment for various purposes.
- d. Together, with the community and students, contribute to determinations about what is assessed by identifying shared values and determining how we define and measure “success.”
- e. Share high-quality, contextualized information about individual and schoolwide student achievements in a way that informs stakeholders and provides the data needed in order to make informed decisions to support student learning and success.

### 2. Prioritize assuring all educators are trained in assessment literacy and are able to ensure racially and culturally relevant and responsive assessment that meets the needs of all students and centers their full identities.

- a. Implement high-quality systems that make equity and the expertise, knowledge, and experiences of educators inherent in the creation of classroom, local, and statewide assessment.
- b. Utilize local knowledge and resources to integrate assessment systems that encompass both globally recognized competencies (knowledge, skills, and values that allow students to thrive in a diverse and interdependent world) and learning goals as well as local practices, values, and contexts.
- c. Design assessment at all levels—including classroom, district, and statewide assessment—with educators who are steeped in assessment literacy and antiracist assessment practices.<sup>4</sup>
- d. Ensure that educators have the time, support, resources, and knowledge to create, implement, evaluate, and communicate a full array of assessment methods and assessment results, including deepening the use of low-stakes, curriculum-embedded, and formative assessment practices.

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<sup>2</sup> “Student-centered” means ensuring each student has opportunities to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills through relevant, collaborative, student-directed, and authentic learning approaches. Student-centered learning environments embrace policies and practices that foster collaboration between students and educators and cultivate student self-efficacy.

<sup>3</sup> “Assessment literacy” is the possession of knowledge and skills requisite to conducting sound assessment practices to support student learning and achievements.

<sup>4</sup> “Antiracist” means opposing racism in all its forms (individual, interpersonal, and structural) by consistently making equitable choices that help end racial inequities in our everyday lives.

**3. Design assessment that inspires learning. Assess what is meaningful to student well-being, learning, and individuality.**

- a. Place students at the center of our transformation of assessment systems to focus on assessing as a form of learning, increase student self-evaluation, and support student self-efficacy.
- b. Increase the use of appropriate assessment methods, given the intended learning goals and purposes, which fit the context to gather holistic information about individual and institutional opportunities for student learning, growth, and success.
- c. Ensure that all students have opportunities to develop and demonstrate higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, including, but not limited to, self-evaluation and peer-evaluation methods.
- d. Communicate and discuss assessment results with individual students in a language and format that is clear, understandable, and actionable in order to foster student self-efficacy and ownership of learning.

**4. Utilize multiple sources and kinds of evidence of student learning to contribute to decisions on student promotion, retention, course grades and enrollment, and graduation.**

- a. Value the assets that students bring to school.
- b. Ensure an antiracist approach in the design and administration of assessment to ensure fairness in the creation, administration, and evaluation of assessment for student learning.
- c. Decouple federally mandated statewide student assessment from high-stakes consequences for students, schools, and educators to help ensure that no one measure should be used to determine a student's performance or access to supports and opportunities.
- d. Make student promotion and retention decisions based on a combination of evidence from a variety of sources. Potential sources include educator recommendations; a representative sample of student work, which may include assessment; and conversations with students, families and caregivers, specialized instructional support personnel, and other stakeholders.

**5. Provide students, educators, and schools with the resources needed to put these *Principles* into action, with opportunities for all students to demonstrate their knowledge, creativity, and skills.**

- a. Equip facilities and personnel with ample and equitable resources, materials, funding, tools, etc. to ensure that results are comparable and accurately reflect the knowledge and skills of all students across school sites.
- b. Provide equitable opportunities to expand student assessment systems to include a diverse variety of assessment methods. All methods of assessment should be free of cultural, racial, gender, and other biases, and they should be evaluated regularly to prevent negative impacts based on identities.
- c. Support the administration of a well-rounded system of assessment by assuring accommodations, adaptations (including appropriate time and technology, for example), exemptions, and ample flexibilities to give all students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- d. Assess with full and appropriate accommodations, modifications, exemptions, and flexibilities for multilingual students and students with disabilities.
- e. Ensure that methods of assessing do not disrupt learning for extended periods, especially for multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

**The NEA Task Force on the Future of Assessment is dedicated to ensuring that the *Principles* is a living document that incorporates input from stakeholders who are invested in our vision.**

**To share your feedback, please email [futureofschools@nea.org](mailto:futureofschools@nea.org).**

\* Last updated February 4, 2022.