

# White Paper Summary: Addressing Assessment Issues

In “Re-Balancing Assessment: Placing Formative and Performance Assessment at the Heart of Learning and Accountability,” authors Hofman, Goodwin, and Kahl summarize the currently oft-mentioned concerns about educational assessment and then propose a new formula for assessment systems that truly eliminates any barriers between instruction and assessment. They propose a two-component accountability assessment system. One component, not new, is end-of-year, on-demand testing involving both machine-scorable item formats and human-scored tasks – constructed-response questions and short performance tasks. The second component consists of Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments (CEPAs). With the addition of the second component, there could be efficiencies in the implementation of the first, to include shorter tests, matrix-sampling, etc.

A CEPA is a multi-day, perhaps multi-week, instructional unit consisting of a series of instructional and assessment activities, some of which lead to student work that can be evaluated for formative purposes and some of which yield student work that can be scored for local summative and external accountability purposes. The paper describes how a state might develop and “phase in” the CEPA component. What follows is a brief example of a CEPA in science. A fully developed CEPA would identify the relevant content standards and learning targets, and include additional guidance for instruction and assessment, as well as scoring rubrics and sample student work.

As mentioned, there are many concerns about current assessment systems. There are also concerns, myths, and misconceptions about performance assessment. The authors believe that all of these are addressed by CEPAs as they describe them and their development and implementation. The table on the next two pages identifies the various concerns and issues and explains how they are mitigated by CEPAs.

## Sample CEPA: Heat Transfer

**Activity 1:** Students individually or in small groups research methods of heat transfer. They discuss what they have learned about conduction, convection, and radiation (*student-guided learning*).

**Activity 2:** Teachers check student understanding of methods of heat transfer via ungraded quizzes, interviews, or class discussion (*formative assessment evidence gathering, feedback, and adjustment*).

**Activity 3:** In small groups, students design and conduct an experiment to determine which of two fabrics better protects against the winter cold. Materials required include tin coffee cans of different sizes (with lids), two different fabrics (e.g., plastic and wool), fasteners, thermometers (thermal probes), timers, and hot water (*performance activity*).

**Activity 4:** Students individually write up a formal lab report of their experiment (*graded summative product*).

**Activity 5:** Teachers, via questioning, lead class discussion of how methods of heat transfer played a role in the design and implementation of the research (*formative assessment reflection and reinforcement*).

**Activity 6:** Students individually research how a home heating system works and write a paper describing a home heating system and how different methods of heat transfer are involved (*graded summative product*).

## CEPA Solutions

### CEPA Solutions to Concerns with Current Assessment and Accountability Systems

Issue/Concern	How Proposed Use of CEPA Addresses Concern
Current efficient accountability tests negatively impact local instruction and assessment, focusing both on low level knowledge.	CEPAs (instructional units) attend to both foundational knowledge and skills and deeper learning. Planned formative assessment addresses both. Performance tasks address deeper learning, requiring the application of foundational knowledge and skills to higher order tasks.
Current instruction is teacher-driven with students playing a passive role.	Educational reformers are calling for significant changes in how teachers and students spend their time. Formative assessment and curriculum-embedded performance assessment, done right, accomplish that.
Student engagement is lacking and motivation to learn is low.	CEPAs involve students in engaging, real-world tasks both in and outside the classroom. CEPAs can allow choice on the part of students with respect to roles they play in group and individual activities.
Teacher-made tests are often of low quality, and teachers' capacity to evaluate student work is often inadequate. Thus, performance assessment results are unreliable.	Gathering evidence of student learning for both formative and summative purposes is planned in CEPAs. The tools/measures are tried-and-true, having been reviewed and tested during the development process. The use of the CEPAs and associated supporting materials by teachers will enhance their assessment skills. The initial training and the scoring auditing we envision will build teacher capacity, as will ongoing teacher collaboration. Experience in many state assessment programs has shown that teachers can be trained to score consistently..
"Formative assessment" has been misinterpreted to mean frequent use of graded quizzes and tests.	CEPA directions clearly differentiate between formative assessment evidence gathering and summative assessment tasks. An appropriate balance of the two should be a CEPA feature.
There is too much testing.	Actual testing time for state accountability testing is not too much. Putting instruction and learning on hold in order to prepare for those tests is problematic. Also, research has shown that over testing that occurs pertains to the frequent local use of external interim assessments. The use of CEPAs as proposed could reduce or eliminate the need for such assessments.
There is inconsistency between what is tested for accountability and what is being taught.	State tests cover state standards – so should instruction. If the inconsistency is because the state tests cover only lower level knowledge and skills and local instruction also addresses higher order skills (not often the case), the two-component approach proposed for accountability assessment, with CEPA performance tasks tapping deeper knowledge, addresses this problem well. Also, because CEPAs are curriculum-embedded, if the curriculum is aligned with standards, then the CEPAs will be as well.
There is no teacher ownership in the accountability assessment.	As proposed, CEPAs are initially drafted by teachers. Teachers can be involved in the selection of the state-approved CEPAs to be used in their schools, and they are totally responsible for the implementation of them, including the scoring of their students' work, which is audited by the state.
Teacher-developed performance tasks are of low quality.	The CEPAs used for accountability assessment, while drafted by teachers, undergo the same committee review and piloting steps as other state assessment tools to assure alignment to standards and technical

	quality. These CEPAs serve as good models for other CEPAs teachers develop, and states should provide training in the development and use of CEPAs.
Performance assessment is unreliable.	Often, the reliability of a single performance task is compared to that of a test of 50 or more multiple-choice items. The proposed approach to the CEPA component for accountability is for student work from multiple CEPAs to be counted toward accountability results. That could result in the CEPA component alone being as reliable as a 50-item multiple-choice test. In combination with the on-demand component, even one CEPA student work product would suffice for a reliable total score, but the intent is for multiple high quality CEPA summative measures to account for much more of the total score.
Performance assessment takes too much time.	CEPAs, instructional units, address important curricular standards and should replace other units covering those standards. They are not an add-on. The performance tasks and other summative measures within CEPAs take the place of end-of-unit tests associated with the units the CEPAs replace.
It takes too long for accountability assessment results to be delivered to the schools.	The on-demand components of state accountability assessments are not designed to provide immediate feedback to teachers and students regarding the content of instruction at the time of testing. However, the student work from CEPAs is to be scored immediately by the teachers themselves. Those scores can be used by the teachers for their own instructional and grading purposes, even though subsequent audit activities might lead to score adjustments for school accountability results.
Scoring performance assessments is expensive.	Student work from CEPAs is scored by teachers as part of their regular instructional programs. Costs of auditing processes for accountability purposes, including some central scoring done on a sampling basis, can be offset by savings from shortening the on-demand tests or by the use of matrix-sampling techniques for the on-demand component.
The contribution of performance components to accountability results is too little to be worth the time, effort, and expense.	The proposed system calls for the CEPA component to count significantly toward accountability results.
Achievement gaps are not diminishing fast enough, if at all.	Formative assessment as implemented in conjunction with CEPAs represents the instructional process that research shows can be especially effective in enhancing student learning. It has been shown to be more effective with disadvantaged and underachieving students, thus capable of reducing achievement gaps. Also, the engaging, highly motivating activities in CEPAs are intended for <u>all</u> students. This is in contrast to enrichment tasks in traditional curriculum materials that are typically reserved for only the highest achieving students.
U.S. students are falling farther and farther behind the students in other nations in terms of achievement and are unprepared for college and careers.	This expressed concern often pertains to higher order skills which various international tests are purported to measure. Performance tasks within CEPAs tap higher order skills. At the same time, CEPAs do not shortchange the foundational knowledge and skills that must be applied by students to succeed on the higher order tasks.

Ultimately, the promise of CEPAs is that they provide a more motivating, robust, and balanced way to measure student learning. If we believe the maxim that what you test is what gets taught, then these new measures hold the promise of driving many positive changes throughout the system—from better engaging students to supporting deeper learning to encouraging new classroom practices to supporting greater teacher collaboration. Although better measures alone won't address all of the challenges facing schools, the authors believe a new formula for measuring student success may be what is most needed to put our nation's schools on a path that breaks through performance ceilings and creates a generation of highly motivated students engaged in deeper learning.