

Assessment Literacy Communications Plan

The Assessment Literacy Work Group was formed in the fall of 2013 to increase the assessment literacy of parents, students, and policy makers. Chaired by Jim Popham, the Work Group consists of Board members Lucille Davy, Lou Fabrizio, Rebecca Gagnon, Andrew Ho, and Tonya Miles. Over the past year and a half, Governing Board and NCES staff and contractors have been working collaboratively with the Work Group to define the initiative and develop a communications plan for the target audiences, starting with parents.

During this session, the Work Group members will describe the assessment literacy initiative and the processes undertaken by the Work Group and staff/contractor group to define the content for each audience. Amy Buckley of Reingold Communications will present a brief overview of the recommended communications strategies for the parent audience and mockups of the proposed website. Finally, David Hoff of Hager Sharp will present video storyboards that serve as an example of how the assessment literacy content can be communicated to parents.

Board discussion will focus on the assessment literacy initiative and communications plan, including the content (“Understandings”), the role of NAEP, and the recommendation to create an independent brand.

The communications plan will be revised to incorporate feedback from this discussion. The Board is expected to take action on the plan during the August 2015 meeting.



NATIONAL ASSESSMENT GOVERNING BOARD

ASSESSMENT LITERACY INITIATIVE

PART 1: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR PARENTS

REVISED

(REFLECTS FEEDBACK RECEIVED FROM WORK GROUP ON MARCH 5, 2015)

April 24, 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2012, former National Assessment Governing Board Chair David Driscoll challenged fellow Board members to make a difference in education with the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). In response, at the Board's May 2013 meeting, Board member Jim Popham proposed increasing assessment literacy. The Board embraced this as a means to make data matter and, in August 2013, Chair Driscoll appointed an Assessment Literacy Work Group to develop a strategy to reach Board audiences.

The result of that effort, the Assessment Literacy Initiative Strategic Communications Plan for Parents, outlines the launch of a public awareness campaign to increase parents' understanding of educational assessments. The plan builds on years of Governing Board work to engage parents in learning about NAEP and is a key component of the strategic planning initiative led by current Board Chair Terry Mazany. The Governing Board is collaborating with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to leverage their respective positions as trusted conveners to reach parents with accurate, relevant facts about educational tests.

Goals

The campaign goal is to provide parents with information about assessments that will allow them to ask questions and evaluate, interpret, and use assessment results accurately. The campaign draws on external research as well as focus groups and expert interviews. It is designed to convey the Work Group's five Understandings, essential information about assessments that parents need to effectively support their children's learning. These are:

- **Evidence for Interpretations and Uses.** Educational tests are used for different purposes, and those purposes should be clear. Consumers of test information should be provided with clear descriptions of how to interpret and use test scores as well as evidence supporting the appropriateness of those interpretations and uses.
- **Accuracy of Test Scores.** Because test scores are only estimates of students' intellectual skills and knowledge, neither of which is observable, it is important to employ multiple sources of information when reaching a decision based on a student's test performance.
- **Fairness.** Assessments must be developed, administered, scored, and reported in ways that are fair for all students.
- **Variations in Test Quality.** Educational tests, both teacher-made classroom assessments and large-scale standardized tests, can vary in quality. Tests should be accompanied by persuasive evidence supporting their accuracy, appropriateness, and fairness.
- **Assessments to Improve Teaching and Learning.** Classroom assessments will substantially improve students' progress when used to help determine if adjustments are needed in how teachers are teaching or in how students are learning. Such assessments can provide useful feedback for both teachers and students by identifying knowledge and skills that have or have not been mastered.

As states adopt new academic standards for students, testing has become a divisive topic. Passionate public dialogue about testing that takes place on social media creates the potential for misinformation to spread, lending urgency to the assessment literacy campaign.

Parent Audience

Parents were selected as the first audience for this assessment literacy campaign because they are levers of academic change, vital connectors between students and teachers. Outreach to parents builds on the Board's current parent engagement efforts, and parents have expressed a desire to learn more about assessments. Based on lessons learned from the parent engagement campaign, tailored communications plans will be developed for the initiative's other priority audiences: policymakers and students.

The campaign will reflect parent preferences to receive assessment information from trusted educators or at school events such as parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, and PTA meetings. It will also appeal to parents by connecting assessment information to their community and to their child. Collaborator groups such as National PTA and the Data Quality Campaign can amplify and reinforce assessment literacy messages, which must be simple and direct, with a hook to grab parents' attention and convey relevance.

This campaign aims to meet parents where they are and move them along an engagement continuum from general awareness about assessments, to increased knowledge, to substantive understanding of assessment information. Parents prefer to learn about assessments through multiple formats, so the campaign will deliver information in diverse ways. The campaign will broadcast assessment information to parents through these seven communications strategies:

- **Strategy 1:** Develop an Assessment Literacy Campaign Identity
- **Strategy 2:** Create an Innovative and Engaging Online Presence
- **Strategy 3:** Develop Branded Materials and Tools
- **Strategy 4:** Launch a Collaborator Engagement Effort
- **Strategy 5:** Position the Governing Board and NCES as Thought Leaders
- **Strategy 6:** Cultivate Relationships With Key Media Outlets and Journalists
- **Strategy 7:** Engage Educators as Important Intermediaries to Parents

The Governing Board and NCES are considering which evaluation methods will most accurately measure parent understanding of assessment information. For example, this campaign can establish online communications metrics such as clicks, downloads, "likes," views, and shares to gauge outreach effectiveness. To the extent possible, efforts will be made to gauge parents' mastery of the campaign's five assessment-related Understandings.

The campaign will roll out over several years, with engagement increasing over time. Implementation will begin with finalizing messages, developing a website and toolkit materials, and conducting initial outreach to build relationships with collaborators. Subsequent phases will launch the campaign nationally and disseminate materials to parents through grass-roots networks, social media, and events with collaborator organizations.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2012, former National Assessment Governing Board Chair David Driscoll challenged fellow Board members to make a difference in education with the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). In response, at the Board's May 2013 meeting, Board member Jim Popham proposed increasing assessment literacy. The Board embraced this recommendation as a means to make data matter and, in August 2013, Chair Driscoll called for the creation of an Assessment Literacy Work Group, charged with developing a communications plan to reach the Board's audiences. Because a number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations are working to enhance the assessment literacy of America's teachers and administrators, it was proposed that our assessment literacy initiative focus on three target audiences: *parents* (and grandparents/guardians), *policymakers* (particularly local school board members and legislators), and *students* themselves.

Beginning in November 2013, Board members began working with the staff and contractors of the Governing Board and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to develop an assessment literacy communications plan by May 2015. The plan will be a key component of the strategic planning initiative led by current Board Chair Terry Mazany. Initial work on the plan included:

- Understanding the assessment literacy landscape through research and literature scans.
- Sharing assessment outreach efforts by the Governing Board, NCES, and related groups.
- Defining key audiences of the plan, specifically parents, policymakers, and students.
- Setting the goal to promote assessment understanding, not to spur audiences to take specific action.
- Developing core "Understandings" suitable for the three target audiences.
- Presenting a session, "Assessment Literacy for All," at the July 2014 National Conference on Student Assessment.

As the Work Group continued exploring assessment literacy and refining this campaign, it determined it would be best to focus initially on just one of the three audiences, with engagement of the remaining audiences to follow. In August 2014, the Work Group chose parents — long a priority audience for the Governing Board — as the first audience for its campaign. Policymakers and students remain important audiences, and lessons learned from engaging parents will be incorporated into an expanded communications plan to reach all three groups.

With this focus on parents, Governing Board and NCES staff and contractors deepened their knowledge through deliberate consultation and information-gathering, including:

- Interviews with assessment experts in summer 2014
- Two focus groups with parents in Baltimore in November 2014
- Numerous formal meetings and informal discussions throughout 2014 about potential strategies, collaborations, messages, and materials to reach parents

Materials created and referenced by the Work Group to inform this effort are listed in Appendix A.

This plan synthesizes the insights gained by the Work Group's collaboration up to this point. We recommend the strategies and communications tools below and propose evaluation metrics and

immediate next steps to launch the campaign. The time-phased action plan provides details on campaign rollout priorities, pending identification of roles, responsibilities, and budget.

Goals

The Work Group clarified the overarching goal of this plan: to increase the assessment literacy of parents by providing information that will allow them to ask questions and evaluate, interpret, and use assessment results accurately. Fundamental to achieving this goal is conveying the Work Group's five Understandings, essential information about assessments that parents need to comprehend test data and to effectively support their children's learning. They are:

- **Evidence for Interpretations and Uses.** Educational tests are used for different purposes, and those purposes should be clear. Consumers of test information should be provided with clear descriptions of how to interpret and use test scores as well as evidence supporting the appropriateness of those interpretations and uses.
- **Accuracy of Test Scores.** Because test scores are only estimates of students' knowledge and intellectual skills, neither of which is observable, it is important to employ multiple sources of information when reaching a decision based on a student's test performance.
- **Fairness.** Assessments must be developed, administered, scored, and reported in ways that are fair for all students.
- **Variations in Test Quality.** Educational tests, both teacher-made classroom assessments and large-scale standardized tests, can vary in quality. Tests should be accompanied by persuasive evidence supporting their accuracy, appropriateness, and fairness.
- **Assessments to Improve Teaching and Learning.** Classroom assessments will substantially improve students' progress when used to help determine if adjustments are needed in how teachers are teaching or in how students are learning. Such assessments can provide useful feedback for both teachers and students by identifying knowledge and skills that have or have not been mastered.

The Work Group's intended Understandings for policymakers and students can be found in Appendix B.

BACKGROUND

Key findings about the education assessment landscape, summarized below, affect how this communications effort will be developed and received. Based on research and observation, these findings point to opportunities to be seized and challenges to overcome.

There is strong parent interest in learning about assessments. At the Governing Board's Education Summit for Parent Leaders, during the National Conference on Student Assessment, and in focus groups, parents expressed strong interest in learning about assessments. They are primed for information on testing, especially when it is connected to their children. There is clear demand for this work.

Accurate information can dispel misperceptions about testing. Critics of testing often claim that standardized and high-stakes tests force educators to "teach to the test" and are unfair to schools and teachers that fail to meet prescribed performance levels. In some settings, these

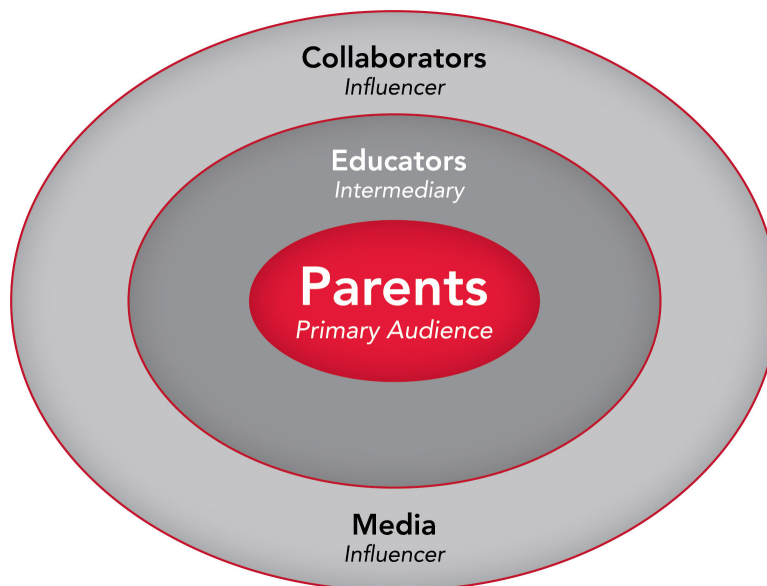
criticisms may be deserved. A basic understanding of assessments can help parents navigate the controversy and confusion. “Myth-busting” techniques can counter misinformation about tests.

NAEP is a strong asset in advancing assessment literacy. Among most members of the news media and policymakers, NAEP is a well-respected assessment, frequently cited as an important, impartial instrument for measuring student learning across groups and regions over time. NAEP’s strong reputation is an asset in working with the media, policymakers, and engaged and influential parents, lending authority to assertions about why assessments matter. The Governing Board and NCES strive to provide citizens with high-quality education data that inform a national conversation about improving learning for all children.

Prominent voices are engaged in similar work. Several major education and assessment organizations have disseminated assessment information to various audiences. In addition, organizations such as the Data Quality Campaign and National PTA have developed assessment guides for teachers or parents. There is a clear opportunity for the Governing Board’s campaign to build on the work of other organizations and join them as collaborators while establishing the unique contributions to be made by the Board and NCES to this broader conversation about assessments.

PARENT-FOCUSED AUDIENCES

This communications plan identifies messages, materials, and communications methods tailored to parents, a group that includes grandparents and legal guardians of school-age children. The plan also spotlights the role of intermediaries and influencers, including educators, collaborator organizations, and the news media, groups that will be instrumental in building assessment literacy among parents. This important dynamic is illustrated below. Although these intermediaries and influencers are not target audiences, they will be the focus of some outreach and materials development to equip them to support campaign goals.



Below, we have summarized the importance of each group; identified the role of each in supporting the campaign; and suggested what each needs to help achieve campaign goals.

Parents: Parents have the greatest stake in their children’s education, acting as monitors, advocates, and motivators. Focus group respondents confirmed research indicating that many parents are confused about assessments. “What do they do with that information that they get?” asked one focus group participant. We believe that once parents gain an understanding of assessments related to their own children, they may be inclined to learn more about the overall topic, apply knowledge to improving their child’s education, and ask teachers, principals, school board members, and other leaders about education policies and practices that impact all students. In addition, well-informed parents can share their knowledge with fellow parents, fostering peer-to-peer engagement. Discussions with parents reveal a preference for receiving assessment information from educators, at school events, and online, delivered through easily digestible and useful formats.

Educators: Educators are a critical intermediary to parents and must be part of the assessment conversation as this campaign begins. As a psychometrician observed in an interview, “Teachers are the resources parents often turn to for information.” Experts agree that educators must understand assessments to communicate the purpose and value of tests and to articulate how they use assessments in classroom instruction. Educators need basic assessment information, delivered in convenient formats, to answer parents’ questions.

Collaborators: Studies have shown that members of the public generally rely on authoritative voices when forming opinions, adopting new ideas, and trying new products. Strategic alliances with complementary organizations will allow the campaign to extend the reach and impact of assessment literacy messages. Numerous and varied organizations such as National PTA, teachers unions, and the Data Quality Campaign have interests that align with campaign goals. These groups have members and communications platforms, including websites and newsletters they can use to advance key messages and perform outreach. These are potential champions for assessment literacy, and the campaign can provide them with materials for easy access and dissemination at state and local levels.

News Media: Through our experience, we know that education journalists have a strong interest in reporting on assessments, and they welcome reliable assessment information. Journalists are influencers of parents with the power to make assessments a top-of-mind issue through wide-reaching articles and reports. Responsible, accurate reporting can clarify misperceptions about assessments and elevate facts. Beyond that, coverage of assessment literacy will validate the topic among parents and the public. Journalists respond well to training that helps them prepare to effectively cover related breaking news. They need simple, timely, accurate information, supporting statistics, and access to knowledgeable spokespeople.

APPROACH TO REACH PARENTS

The Governing Board and NCES are uniquely positioned to serve as conveners on assessment literacy, educating parents, policymakers, and students about assessments. NAEP is a strong brand, and increasingly relevant as the gold standard of assessments amid standards and testing debates.

The Board also brings credibility by offering the perspectives of the teachers, policymakers, psychometricians, parents, and community leaders who comprise its unique membership. These diverse members foster thoughtful dialogue between those who are engaged in assessment work and those affected by it.

The Governing Board and NCES also can reach parents who are grappling with information overload, using dynamic, interactive digital content that breaks through the online clutter. To reach parents, we propose a comprehensive, locally based approach that engages them through fellow parents, educators, and other trusted grass-roots organizations as well as direct digital and media communications and outreach from national collaborators. The campaign will deliver high-impact messages that convey the essence of the Understandings through the strategies and communications tools detailed here.

Messages That Resonate With Parents

Assessment messages need to convey information and connect with parents' emotions, first resonating with their needs and values and then providing information that connects to those values. In general, messages should answer the questions: What? So what? And now what? For this campaign to effectively reach parents, the messaging should answer: Why should I care about assessments? What is their value for my child? How can I use them to help my child?

When Governing Board and NCES staff and contractors translated the Understandings into plain language, incorporated input from the Work Group, and presented the plain language versions to focus groups for feedback, the findings revealed the messaging needs and preferences of parents. We have used that information to articulate three core messaging principles that will guide final message development and prioritization.

Assessment information must use plain, accessible language. Experts and focus group participants agreed that eliminating jargon and providing definitions and examples are essential to sparking parent interest. This encourages them to learn more so they can gradually process increasingly complex information that eventually encompasses all of the Understandings.

Assessment information for parents must center on benefits for their children. Messages and attention-grabbing hooks must connect to their own children, identify the uses and implications of test scores, and include benefit statements that specify how test results are used to help children.

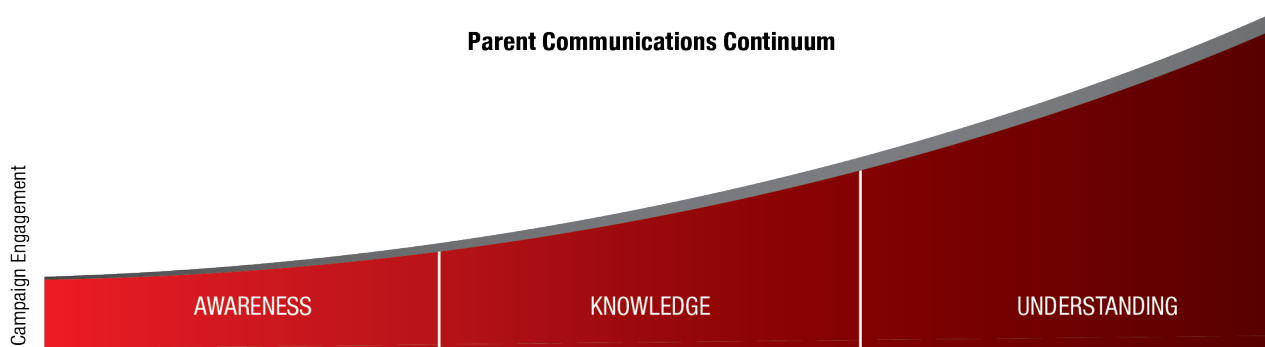
Leading assessment messages must align with parent priorities. Understandings that focus on (1) the purpose and use of tests, (2) how tests can improve teaching and learning, and (3) fairness in testing are most attuned to parent needs and interests. This information allows parents to grasp the “why” of their children’s assessments and apply assessment literacy to their children’s classroom experience. Conversely, Understandings that focus on evidence, quality variation, and reliability are more challenging to communicate effectively to parents, and should not be introduced as the leading messages about assessment.

The Work Group plans to conduct additional parent focus groups to receive feedback on sample campaign materials. To further develop messaging that reflects our original findings, messaging should also be tested with focus groups. In addition, the Work Group will share this draft communications plan with key experts and potential collaborators to ensure that the final plan

reflects their insights and recommendations. We believe campaign messages and priorities should be included in that feedback-gathering process.

Parent-Centric Communications Strategies

Reflecting parents' stated needs, the campaign must provide them with a variety of access points to information that appeals to parents at every level of understanding. Amid testing controversy, the campaign must build trust as a source of reliable and useful information and then demonstrate its value through "myth-busting" materials and information that enable parents to confidently discuss assessments with their children's teachers. This strategic communications plan aims to meet parents where they are, moving them along a continuum from basic awareness to knowledge and finally deeper understanding of student assessments. Each strategy supports the information needs of parents in one or more stages of the continuum and helps move the parent toward the campaign goal of attaining assessment understanding, as illustrated with a graphic and examples on the next page.



Communications Activities to Create Awareness	Communications Activities to Impart Knowledge	Communications Activities to Foster Understanding
<p>Strategy 1: Develop an Assessment Literacy Campaign Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a memorable campaign name, “Let’s Talk About Tests” ▪ Design an eye-catching campaign logo <p>Strategy 2: Create an Innovative and Engaging Online Presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote social media activity, such as a hashtag campaign on social media with #LetsTalkAboutTests <p>Strategy 3: Develop Branded Materials and Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce parents to the campaign with a compelling overview fact sheet <p>Strategy 4: Launch a Collaborator Engagement Effort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Link to the campaign website from collaborator sites, such as PTA.org 	<p>Strategy 2: Create an Innovative and Engaging Online Presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educate parents about the Understandings through simple digital flash cards ▪ Hold online events for parents to engage on the issue with experts and peers <p>Strategy 3: Develop Branded Materials and Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Equip parents and teachers with a discussion guide to engage in an informed conversation about assessments <p>Strategy 4: Launch a Collaborator Engagement Effort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Author a guest post, highlighting one of the Understandings, to appear on a collaborator organization’s blog <p>Strategy 6: Cultivate Relationships With Key Media Outlets and Journalists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore assessments through op-eds and other earned media 	<p>Strategy 2: Create an Innovative and Engaging Online Presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ House in-depth assessment information on the campaign website <p>Strategy 3: Develop Branded Materials and Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create fact sheets and videos that thoroughly explore each Understanding <p>Strategy 4: Launch a Collaborator Engagement Effort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Host webinars and online trainings with collaborators to train engaged parents on the nuances of assessments <p>Strategy 5: Position the Governing Board and NCES as Thought Leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convey assessment information through speeches and conference presentations

Strategy 7 — Engage Educators as Important Intermediaries to Parents — will be implemented in tandem with the parent engagement activities detailed above, which are intended to move parents along the communications continuum.

Assessment information will be delivered two ways: (1) directly to parents through videos, meetings, fact sheets, and social media posts, and (2) indirectly through trusted intermediaries and influencers. We recommend integrating the seven strategies summarized below — for which we have suggested specific activities and examples — to produce a comprehensive roadmap for engaging parents and sharing the Understandings. To gather the feedback necessary to define, prioritize, and sequence outreach strategies and finalize the communications plan, we believe the strategies should be discussed in the parent focus groups and in interviews with collaborators, as appropriate.

Strategy 1: Develop an Assessment Literacy Campaign Identity

The first step in sustaining high-impact outreach is establishing a compelling and trustworthy brand that unites communications across media. This campaign needs to appeal to parents with a unique identity. While references to the Governing Board, NCES, and NAEP will be helpful in engaging collaborators and journalists, lack of familiarity with these three entities may create unnecessary barriers in reaching parents and educators.

A memorable brand features a distinct name that captures the campaign mission and resonates with audiences, with the option for a tagline to provide additional detail. We recommend a straightforward campaign name that clearly articulates its purpose. For example, “Let’s Talk About Tests” immediately asserts the importance of discussing testing while making the topic accessible. Other potential campaign names (with corresponding website addresses available for use by the campaign) include “Assessment 101,” “Test Knowhow,” “Testing Toolbox,” and “Understanding Tests.”

A campaign logo, fonts, and graphics in the blue and gold color family that complement the Governing Board and NCES brands would subtly suggest a connection that is important for audiences who already perceive them positively. All materials must state that this campaign was the result of collaboration between the Governing Board and NCES.

Strategy 2: Create an Innovative and Engaging Online Presence

We recommend creating a dedicated website that establishes the unique campaign identity and serves as a resource-rich home base for campaign information. This clean, modern website will be divided into distinct areas that invite parents and other audiences to take specific actions: learn about the Understandings; download materials such as fact sheets or informational videos; review a sample test; explore testing of all kinds in their community with an interactive map; and learn more about both formative and summative assessments

An innovative feature of the website will be an interactive U.S. map that features dynamic data visualizations and links to key assessment information, such as graphs indicating the percent of students at the *Proficient* level in a given state; a “heat map” of where social media conversations labeled with the hashtag #LetsTalkAboutTests are occurring; and links to state department of education websites. The website also could walk parents through a parent-teacher conference scenario, in which a parent dissects the “anatomy of a summative test” that could represent a district, state, or other assessment, with a teacher’s guidance. The website would connect to relevant links on the Governing Board, NCES, and NAEP websites.

A design mock-up accompanying this plan depicts these website recommendations in more detail. Other aspects of developing an effective online presence include the following:

Web Address. To maintain the campaign’s unique branding, we recommend a catchy URL like LetsTalkAboutTests.org. This will establish an online destination coordinated with the campaign’s identity that features a clear explanation of the connection to the Board and NCES. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website StopBullying.gov follows a similar model.

Website Traffic Drivers. Initially, we believe parents visiting the campaign website will arrive as the result of seeing the website address on materials distributed by peers or collaborators, at school meetings, and on social media. Innovative strategies to engage parents through local networks and drive them to the campaign website are essential to build and sustain website traffic. In parallel, we must work to establish the website’s credibility and visibility by increasing its presence when parents conduct an online search, visit a collaborator website linked to the campaign website, and view targeted advertising. Methods to boost website traffic include:

Search engine optimization (SEO). SEO is the practice of building up a website’s credibility in search engines by infusing website content with the relevant keywords that its audiences search for most frequently. This causes the website URL to move up in search engine results for those keywords, increasing the number of visitors directed to the site from search engines.

Link-building. In the eyes of search engines such as Google, a website’s links to other credible, relevant websites increases its “authority” and thus boosts its rankings. We can contact the administrators of relevant websites to increase the number of links from other sites to the website.

Advertising. Online advertising includes ads that appear on search engine results for relevant keywords, social media, and website banners. Highly targeted online advertising can appear where campaign audiences will see it and drive traffic to the assessment literacy website. The campaign’s inclusion of advertising will depend on the budget and expectations for how quickly the website should grow.

Social Media. Social media is built on peer-to-peer interaction, creating the opportunity to share content and shape the conversation by delivering focused, timely messaging. Once campaign materials are developed and a website launched, audiences can more readily engage with the campaign and shareable materials. This strategy is designed to inspire parents to share assessment information across their networks and engage them in a two-way conversation. To build an effective social media presence, we recommend the following activities:

Branded social media presence. The campaign should develop branded social media pages on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to showcase assessment literacy news and related conversation. We recommend using paid advertising on Facebook to maximize the campaign page’s reach and

visibility. These pages would provide an easy way to exchange information while driving users to the campaign site to learn more.

Content calendars. The campaign should employ monthly content calendars for its own social media platforms and those of collaborators, featuring messages and multimedia products for the Board and NAEP social networks to share. Relevant content can tie into education events such as assessment season and engage readers on topics they already discuss.

Online event series. Online events present an opportunity for discussions with parents. They are particularly effective when built around a milestone or topic, such as back-to-school time, assessment season, the release of NAEP data, or a similar milestone related to the five Understandings. The campaign should host events, such as Facebook or Twitter chats or Google Hangouts, with the option of co-hosting with collaborators.

Successful online events feature high-profile voices and join forces with existing conversations. Examples include @EducationNation's monthly #ToolkitTalk for parents, and the Google Hangout between the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics and Teach For America Latino leaders. Other relevant Twitter chats include #edchat, the ptchat, or Parent-Teacher Chat, used by parents and educators worldwide.

Call-to-action hashtag campaign. Hashtags create critical mass around a conversation, increasing the likelihood that content will be viewed by more Twitter users. Calls to action could be to pledge support or provide a testimonial that reflects a personal investment and spurs collective action. Parents would pledge to "know their tests" by taking a simple action tied to an Understanding, and challenge their social media followers to do the same. For example: "I pledge to #AcetheTest by discussing test score data with my daughter's teacher." Parents could submit responses to the prompt "Assessments matter because..." and include #AssessmentMatters, sharing how formative tests have made a difference to their children.

Thunderclap. We recommend inviting parents to participate in a Thunderclap, which blasts out a message simultaneously on a multitude of social networks, amplifying its reach. Parents sign up in advance for the Thunderclap and, at the appointed date and time, participants' social media accounts automatically blast a prewritten message to a mass audience. This strength in numbers allows the message to break through online noise. The Thunderclap would occur in conjunction with an assessment milestone. For example, a Thunderclap pegged to the start of the school year would urge parents to "Kick off the school year right and talk to your child's teacher about tests." A Thunderclap last September for parents, teachers, and education experts trying to recruit STEM teachers reached 13 million people.

Website analytics and media monitoring. Both the Governing Board and NCES monitor their website traffic, social media engagement, and traditional media coverage; we recommend coordinating this monitoring for the campaign.

Strategy 3: Develop Branded Materials and Tools

Branded materials are essential for a campaign that relies heavily on the influence of collaborators who can share information on the campaign's behalf. It is important to customize materials and tools for the knowledge levels, needs, interests, and preferred dissemination channels of distinct audiences while retaining a consistent look and feel that reinforces trust in the brand with every piece. A plan for each product's development will specify the desired audience response and how success will be measured. We recommend an initial audit of existing Governing Board, NCES, and NAEP materials to determine what could be readily adapted or repurposed for this assessment literacy campaign. To further support this strategy, we recommend the following:

Parent Toolkit. A toolkit of materials available in print and online will allow parents, educators, and collaborators to use these materials flexibly. Print materials can be adapted to a wide range of dissemination methods: distributing at school meetings, downloading by parents, sharing by collaborator groups, and being featured at conferences. The toolkit pieces may include a fact sheet that introduces the campaign, a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document based on common parent questions, and one-pagers that expand on each of the five Understandings, with tangible examples.

Many assessment organizations feature assessment definitions on their websites; we recommend including this as an important tool to reduce confusion about assessments. In addition, an eye-catching infographic can translate assessment literacy facts and figures into easily digestible graphs, diagrams, and images. For example, an infographic can break down the anatomy of a quality test, or explain different types of formative assessments and how they can be used to improve student learning.

Example of a Governing Board Infographic:



Another useful toolkit product would be a parent-teacher discussion guide that prompts parents and educators to discuss how formative assessments are used in the classroom and how to interpret and use results of standardized tests. A sample discussion guide accompanies this plan.

Multimedia and Digital Materials. These materials are dynamic online resources parents can learn from, interact with, and easily share. Shareable products with the potential to spread virally online are critical to reach parents, who are more likely than nonparents to use social media sites such as Facebook, a

Assessment literacy topical videos. Parent focus group participants expressed an interest in receiving information through videos. A video featuring parent and teacher testimonials can offer parents a powerful overview of assessment literacy — “Assessment Literacy 101” — and convey the importance of assessment understanding to aid their children’s learning.

We also recommend developing videos spotlighting each Understanding to offer a deeper dive into its content, facilitate sharing through specific news and collaborator opportunities, and aid campaign evaluation efforts when they are combined with a quiz at the video’s conclusion. A storyboard of a video on the topic of formative testing accompanies this plan.

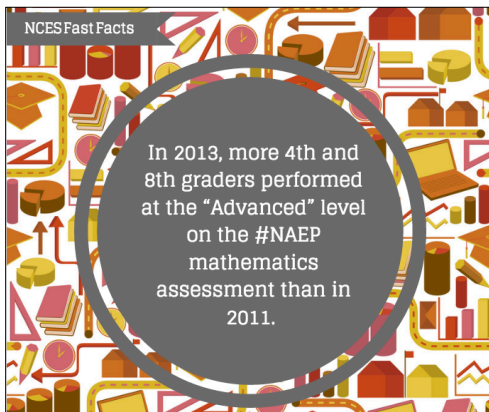
Myth-busting flash cards. Written in a simple myth/fact format, these mobile-friendly digital “index cards” would feature a single common misperception about assessments. The correct information could either be featured beneath the myth or appear when users click to “flip” the card over to see the fact. This familiar, engaging format would allow parents to absorb a single assessment fact, while encouraging them to click through multiple cards. Content could be divided into various levels of difficulty that prompt parents to learn more. The flash cards could also be easily adapted to share on social media or for use as paid advertisements. This format and the fact graphics described below are particularly well-suited to rapid online sharing.

Example: Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy on Facebook



Fact graphics. Simple assessment literacy facts and statistics that span the Understandings, or a powerful quote, should be graphically displayed on a photo or illustration. For example, a design should be created for the Variations in Test Quality Understanding with a message such as, “Not all tests are created equal.” Fact graphics would provide users with a bite-size chunk of information — in contrast to a larger, more complex infographic — that is presented in a visually appealing, highly shareable format.

Example: Governing Board



Example: College Summit



Interactive quizzes. Parents would take quizzes about assessments hosted on the website, and share quizzes and their scores via social media. Participants would earn a virtual assessment literacy certificate or badge after mastering a topic. Quizzes would be divided into levels of difficulty that prompt parents to progress through them.

An initial quiz would test a parent’s base-level assessment knowledge before he or she has read campaign materials. Parents would take subsequent summative quizzes focused on each of the five Understandings once they had viewed, read, or interacted with campaign materials. Such quizzes convey information in a surprising, memorable format and serve as an additional “myth-busting” tool for dispelling misperceptions about assessments. Quizzes can provide a rough metric of parental understanding of assessment concepts. The Pew Research Center offers interactive quizzes on diverse topics; these quizzes also gather broad demographic data, allowing users to compare results with various demographic groups.

Assessment literacy PowerPoint. This high-level slide deck would provide parents with a compelling overview of assessments, covering the basic Understandings while making the topic relevant to their children and schools. Such a deck would provide a customizable foundation for developing presentations to groups of parents, educators, and other audiences in schools and at community events.

Online Media Kit. The campaign must develop a downloadable media kit with background information on the initiative, fact sheets covering the Understandings, biographies of campaign spokespeople, multimedia content, and story templates for their use.

Strategy 4: Launch a Collaborator Engagement Effort

No single organization with limited resources can reach all of its audiences. Identifying and cultivating opportunities to collaborate with organizations engaged in assessment work or with parents is vital to the campaign's success. Collaboration will augment the campaign's communications reach while enhancing the credibility of this effort and the information it provides. The Work Group has offered support for engaging collaborators throughout the development and execution of the campaign. Collaborator engagement may consist of participation in conferences, co-hosting online events, and contributing content for distribution through social media. While the Governing Board and NCES would be wise to leverage a wide variety of opportunities, we recommend that the Work Group consider making collaboration with the following organizations a priority, and have included examples of opportunities for engagement with each.

Sample Collaborator Groups and Suggested Collaborations

Collaborator Group	Example Collaboration
American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA)	Collaboration is intended to inform them about the initiative and provide useful information from the educator toolkit they may share with their members in anticipation of questions from parents. Pursue serving as a guest author on the topic of formative assessment for the NEA's Parent's Voice blog or AFT's American Educator magazine.
Council of Chief State School Officers	Build on the existing partnership with this nonpartisan nonprofit by presenting and distributing sample campaign materials during the Governing Board- and NCES-led assessment literacy symposium at the National Conference on Student Assessment. Write a blurb for the monthly Education and Data Information Systems newsletter that summarizes the campaign and directs readers to the campaign website.
Data Quality Campaign	Co-host an online event as part of its "Don't Make Decisions in the Dark" feature for parents, focusing on using multiple measures to assess your child's performance. Author a perspective on assessment data for its Flashlight blog.
Education Nation	Include the parent-teacher discussion guide in the "Tips & Guides" section of the Parent Toolkit website. Promote the campaign on the website's resources page. Share multimedia materials such as fact graphics and flash cards through its regular #ToolkitTalk Twitter chat.
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards	Approach this network of influential teacher-leaders to write a guest post for "The Standard" blog at BoardCertifiedTeachers.org. Request that a link to the campaign website be included in regular email communications to Board-certified teachers.
National Council on Measurement in Education	Make a presentation at its annual conference to introduce the campaign. Co-author an op-ed on the importance of accurate test scores for placement in Edutopia or Education Week.

Collaborator Group	Example Collaboration
National PTA	Promote the distribution of the campaign’s parent toolkit to National PTA local chapters at back to school. Co-host a webinar as part of its E-Learning for PTA leaders to learn about the campaign. Encourage members to participate in an #AssessmentsMatter social media campaign tied to back-to-school season that highlights the importance of parent-teacher dialogue and formative assessments.
National School Boards Association (NSBA)	The NSBA is primarily a policy organization, but many of its members are parent leaders, occupying a unique role. Lead a presentation about parent engagement and assessments at the association’s national conference. Provide printed campaign materials, particularly “myth busters,” for distribution.
Parents for Public Schools	Host a webinar with local chapters to discuss assessment literacy myths and obtain feedback through a moderated chat. Provide materials for its parent leadership and parent engagement offerings.
Project Appleseed	Include the parent-teacher discussion guide on its Parent Resources webpage. Serve as the organization’s leader on assessments for National Parental Involvement Day; the Centers for Disease Control is a partner on student health.

In addition, we strongly recommend discussing how NAEP state coordinators can support the campaign, including providing campaign information to their teacher and parent networks.

Strategy 5: Position the Governing Board and NCES as Thought Leaders

Thought leadership is sharing knowledge with your audience and engaging its members in discourse relevant to their needs and interests. Promoting spokespeople as thought leaders will raise the campaign’s profile, reinforce the Governing Board’s and NCES’ authority on assessment literacy, and establish campaign representatives as a valued resource. Opportunities include:

Conference Presentations. We will identify relevant education and academic conferences and deliver talks on what constitutes fair assessments. Similarly, NAEP representatives should join panel discussions hosted by think tanks on related subjects or events such as NBC’s Education Nation. Such visibility among influencers raises the campaign’s profile and builds momentum for assessment literacy.

Educational Events for Journalists. Opportunities should be pursued with the Education Writers Association (EWA) and the Poynter Institute to reach journalists through assessment education events. Campaign leaders and EWA could co-host an assessment workshop with education reporters, or lead an assessment panel at EWA’s annual conference. The Governing Board and NCES should collaborate with The Glossary of Education Reform at EdGlossary.org to contribute to an unbiased resource for journalists to increase their assessment understanding.

Op-eds. Select Governing Board or NCES representatives, Board members, and Board alumni should author op-eds for national, local, and trade publications on topics that cover the

Understandings but also connect with a newsworthy topic or milestone, including the release of NAEP data. These narrowly focused pieces provide a megaphone for specific Understandings.

Governing Board Parent Newsletter Column. When the Governing Board launches its inaugural newsletter for parents this spring, we recommend creating a regular column addressing a broad array of timely assessment issues, and ultimately covering each Understanding.

TED Talks. A campaign spokesperson should deliver a short, high-impact presentation on the need for quality assessments in education as part of this well-regarded speaker series. TED is a nonprofit that works to spread ideas at conferences around the world through short speeches of 18 minutes or less. TED, which was launched in 1990 and originally stood for technology, entertainment, and design, covers a range of topics. This dynamic format will allow the campaign to showcase visuals as well as control the tone and content of the narrative. There are several opportunities to participate in TED programming, including local TEDx events and the education-centric Ted-Ed effort. The campaign should approach Ted-Ed, which features video lessons, to feature an assessment literacy video series under the “Teaching & Education” category.

Strategy 6: Cultivate Relationships With Key Media Outlets and Journalists

Mainstream media outlets can raise awareness of assessments among groups that are unfamiliar with the topic, and prompt those already engaged to learn more. The campaign can encourage influential media outlets to develop assessment-related stories based on the most accurate information. Outreach and education activities include the following:

Media Pitching and Content Creation. The campaign can develop story ideas for features that integrate assessment themes and pitch them to media outlets and reporters that cater to parent audiences, in addition to education-focused media outlets such as Edutopia, EdWeek, and Education Nation, plus national media outlets where appropriate. The campaign can also offer blog posts on assessment literacy topics to outlets, such as The Huffington Post, that accept pre-written content.

Relationship-Building With Key Education Journalists. Collaboration with reporters will help them understand the importance of assessment literacy, equipping them to write thorough, accurate, and meaningful stories. Outreach, such as a call between a Governing Board spokesperson and select education writers, will highlight the importance of the topic, educate reporters on its nuances, and generate interest.

Strategy 7: Engage Educators as Important Intermediaries to Parents

We do not want to burden teachers with this initiative, but we should leverage the important relationships that teachers have with parents. We recommend incorporating assessment information — and how to communicate effectively with parents about assessments — into existing communications aimed at teachers, which is critical to fostering productive parent-teacher dialogue about testing. The campaign should accomplish this through the following:

Educator Toolkit. Building on the parent toolkit, the campaign should create a branded suite of print materials, including one-pagers, fact sheets, and FAQs on assessment literacy framed with a distinct educator perspective. These materials would help teachers anticipate parents’ questions

linked to specific Understandings, such as: “How will this test help my child?” and “Why is this test important?”

Online Training. Sessions should be developed, featuring educator input and co-sponsored with collaborators, to reach current teachers in their networks. For example, there could be an interesting opportunity to invite the participation of teacher representatives to local PTA chapters. The curriculum would include the five Understandings, but with emphasis on those most aligned with the classroom experience and the purpose of tests administered at the school. Because most teachers must complete professional development, the campaign should explore designing online training modules to fulfill professional development requirements.

Teacher Training Programs. The campaign should reach prospective teachers in the formative stages of their careers by integrating assessment literacy training into existing teacher education and certification programs. We recommend connecting with major professional development and teacher training organizations such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

EVALUATION

The Governing Board and NCES are considering which evaluation methods will accurately measure parents’ comprehension of the five Understandings. Complementing a formal evaluation of parent understanding will be ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of this communications plan. Continually measuring reach, impressions, and impact is essential to making adjustments for ongoing improvement. Qualitative and quantitative metrics will enable us to assess campaign efficacy and refine the approach over time.

We intend to use early evaluations of key segments of the parent-focused assessment literacy campaign to inform the initiatives aimed at policymakers and students, as well as to assess parent-focused activities. We regard the rigorous formative and summative evaluation of this initiative’s various components as absolutely imperative, and we will develop an actionable evaluative strategy for this important initiative.

TIME-PHASED ACTION PLAN

The Governing Board and NCES together will execute this campaign through a coordinated multiyear rollout. When the communications plan is approved by the Board, a time-phased action plan must be developed to clarify roles, responsibilities, and timelines. Implementation of these strategies will lead to increasing levels of activity and stakeholder engagement over time.

Phase I: Launch

Immediately following plan approval, the campaign’s initial phase will launch with the following recommended activities:

Finalize messages to determine how the Understandings will be conveyed to parents.

Contractors will distill the Understandings into plain language and succinct messages that will be used in all campaign content and materials. To the extent possible, messages should be tested

among parents and refined.

Create a foundation of campaign materials. A successful campaign requires comprehensive materials, starting first with the design and development of a website to serve as the hub for campaign information. The website will be structured according to the site architecture in the Web prototype. The initial site should include the interactive map, a dynamic feature that will help attract visitors to the site and encourage them to return. Parent toolkit materials must be posted on the site when it launches so visitors can access substantive, shareable information from day one. We recommend designing and developing the fact sheets, discussion guide, FAQ document, and Assessment 101 overview video in tandem with the website so these introductory materials are immediately available for parents and educators to explore, download, and distribute.

Engage key collaborators. Campaign outreach — bolstered by clear, compelling campaign resources — will establish partnerships that amplify assessment literacy messages. This effort should include educator organizations and coordinate with the Governing Board’s current work to engage stakeholders and Board members. We recommend developing a specific plan to guide outreach activities through 2016.

Phase II: Milestone

An intermediate phase will build on the activities executed at the launch of the campaign. Developing additional parent toolkit materials, particularly those tailored to social media, will expand the campaign’s online presence and power a social media call-to-action campaign. Once a number of assessment resources have been created, thought leadership and external engagements with collaborators will begin in earnest. Governing Board and NCES experts will be featured on panels and at conferences, and outreach efforts will extend to journalists. This phase will potentially leverage an education milestone — such as back-to-school time in the fall, large-scale assessment season in the spring, or a collaborators conference in the summer — to introduce and intensify outreach.

Phase III: Connections

The third phase of the campaign rollout will be a major public push undertaken with the help of collaborator groups, educators, and the media. In this outreach phase, strategic collaborations forged in the Launch and Milestone phases will culminate in high-profile joint activities. These include continuing to hold events with collaborators; pitching targeted journalists about assessment literacy; and training educators in assessment literacy.

Rollout timing and scope will depend on the priorities, constraints, and available budget of the Governing Board and NCES. On the next page, we have identified specific strategies and activities that could be layered from Phase I to Phase III.

Phased Implementation of Assessment Literacy Initiative
Part 1: Strategic Communications Plan for Parents

Strategy	Phase I: Launch	Phase II: Milestone	Phase III: Connections
Strategy 1: Develop an Assessment Literacy Campaign Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select campaign name Design campaign brand and identity 		
Strategy 2: Create an Innovative and Engaging Online Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and develop website featuring parent toolkit, Assessment 101 video, and an interactive map Perform SEO analysis Create campaign social media properties Develop content calendar for website and social properties Begin monitoring of news and social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue website link-building Organize call-to-action social media campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch online advertising Launch Thunderclap Execute online event series
Strategy 3: Develop Branded Materials and Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create parent toolkit Create campaign PowerPoint presentation Develop Assessment 101 video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create flash cards Develop individual topic videos 	
Strategy 4: Launch a Collaborator Engagement Effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify campaign representatives Compile event and opportunity calendar Engage key collaborators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Execute full-scale external engagement with collaborators 	
Strategy 5: Position the Governing Board and NCES as Thought Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify campaign spokespeople Compile a conference calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to Governing Board newsletter Begin full-scale conference and event participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host Poynter or EWA education events for journalists Pursue TED Talk

Strategy	Phase I: Launch	Phase II: Milestone	Phase III: Connections
Strategy 6: Cultivate Relationships With Key Media Outlets and Journalists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify priority journalists and publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage priority journalists Develop pitching and content creation strategy and calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue strategic pitching and develop blog content
Strategy 7: Engage Educators as Important Intermediaries to Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage educator organizations Develop toolkit materials 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop training modules and events Pursue opportunities with teacher training programs

Appendix A

Source Documents Developed and Referenced

- Assessment Literacy Report of Focus Groups Among Parents, Dec. 19, 2014
- Assessment Literacy Potential Actions for Parents, Jan. 7, 2015
- Potential Short- and Long-Term Collaboration and Engagement Activities, Oct. 23, 2014
- Search Engine Optimization Analysis, Jan. 15, 2015
- Assessment Literacy Work Group: Draft Understandings and Consequences, Jim Popham, Dec. 1, 2014
- Assessment Literacy Work Group: Materials and Notes from the Assessment Literacy Work Group Meeting, Nov. 20, 2014
- Potential Collaborations, Nov. 20, 2014
- Assessment Literacy Work Group: Understandings in Plain Language, Oct. 2, 2014
- Round 2 Expert Interviews on Assessment Literacy, Sept. 26, 2014
- NCES Expert Interviews on Assessment Literacy, Aug. 24, 2014
- Expert Interview Notes, July 25, 2014
- Meeting Notes and Feedback from June 25, 2014 NCSA session, “Assessment Literacy for All,” July 7, 2014
- Assessment Literacy Work Group: Draft Messages for Parents, May 10, 2014
- Assessment Literacy Background Text, Feb. 27, 2014
- Compilation of Parent Questions about Educational Assessment from Jan. 2014 Education Summit for Parent Leaders
- Parent Leader Engagement Strategy, July 2013
- Parent Engagement Outreach Strategy, April 22, 2013
- Assessment Literacy Work Group: Examples of Messages and Strategies for Parents, March 2014

Appendix B

Understanding Definitions for Policymakers

- **Evidence for Interpretations and Uses.** Educational tests are used for different purposes and those purposes should be clear. Consumers of test information should be provided with clear descriptions of how to interpret and use test scores as well as evidence supporting the appropriateness of those interpretations and uses.
- **Accuracy of Test Scores.** Because test scores are only estimates of students' knowledge and intellectual skills, neither of which is observable, it is important to employ multiple sources of information when reaching a decision based on a student's test performance.
- **Fairness.** Assessments must be developed, administered, scored, and reported in ways that are fair for all students.
- **Variations in Test Quality.** Educational tests, both teacher-made classroom assessments and large-scale standardized tests, can vary in quality. Tests should be accompanied by persuasive evidence supporting their accuracy, appropriateness, and fairness.
- **The Need for Interpretable Analyses.** Understandable and relevant information about the function and quality of tests can help policymakers create useful and appropriate policies, and also help them explain the reasons for those policies. Everyone should be able to decipher test reports, not just assessment experts.

Understanding Definitions for Students

- **Accuracy of Test Scores.** Because test scores are only estimates of students' knowledge and intellectual skills, neither of which is observable, it is important to employ multiple sources of information when reaching a decision based on a student's test performance.
- **Fairness.** Students should justifiably expect that the tests they take will be developed, administered, scored, and reported fairly for all students.
- **Predictive Tests and Student Effort.** Although students' performances on educational tests are often moderately predictive of those students' later test scores and grades, the level of effort students expend in continuing to try to master the skills and knowledge being assessed can be important in determining students' subsequent academic success.
- **Tests' Contribution to Learning.** Classroom assessments will substantially improve students' progress when used to help determine if adjustments are needed in how teachers are teaching or in how students are learning. Such assessments can provide useful feedback for both teachers and students by identifying knowledge and skills that have or have not been mastered.
- **Preparing to perform well on tests.** Familiarity with the test purpose and format — and how best to prepare for and take a test — can lead to more accurate measurement. However, it is not a substitute for mastering the knowledge and skills being assessed.