

# Learning from the Past to Inform Assessment of the Common Core

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With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in states across the country, forward-thinking districts have begun building capacity and adapting instructional materials and practices to prepare students to master this new set of college- and career-readiness standards. Student assessment represents an essential component of the implementation process, both at the local level and through new multi-state assessments being developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

This is not the first time that states have transitioned to a new system of academic standards, instruction, and assessment; potential parallels exist between the efforts of the two assessment consortia and the assessment experiences of many other states over the last two decades. One such example comes from California, where the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS), implemented briefly in the early 1990s, also featured alignment to the content of instruction, a focus on assessment for formative (as well as summative) purposes, and an emphasis on assessing students' understanding and ability to apply their learning.

A new brief from the California Collaborative on District Reform, [\*Learning from the Past: Drawing on California's CLAS Experience to Inform Assessment of the Common Core\*](#), identifies lessons for districts implementing the Common Core today. While the brief draws on the specific experience of California, the lessons apply to any school system engaging in assessment efforts around the Common Core.

## Lessons for Common Core Assessment

The brief identifies four areas in which districts can build on promising practices from California's experience with CLAS while avoiding some of the pitfalls that undermined its effort:

- (1) **Implement immediate and sustained capacity-building strategies.** Teachers and students must adapt to a new set of academic expectations; exposure to (and involvement in the development of) new assessment tools can help build teacher understanding of these demands. At the same time, developing and using assessment tasks for formative purposes enables teachers to base their instructional decisions on robust information on student performance, while also preparing students for state summative assessments.
- (2) **Anticipate and respond to potential controversy surrounding assessment content and format.** Careful attention to the development of high quality items, supported with transparency and proactive responses to questions and concerns, can help parents and teachers adjust to new modes of assessment that include constructed response items and performance tasks.
- (3) **Understand technical and administrative challenges around assessment development, administration, and scoring.** Local educators should anticipate and prepare for technical challenges that may accompany the transition to a new large-scale assessment system, while attending to considerations around assessment development (e.g., testing of English learners) and administration (e.g., addressing resource constraints that might impede the widespread use of computer-adaptive and computer-administered testing).
- (4) **Build a constituency of support for new instructional and assessment efforts through a clear strategy of public engagement.** Communication efforts that educate the public, establish expectations for imperfection and improvement, and respond to confusion and controversy can create buy-in for new efforts and help sustain new approaches to assessment through the Common Core transition period.

The Common Core State Standards hold tremendous promise as a tool to better prepare students for success in college, career, and citizenship. By acknowledging the critical role of assessment in implementing the new standards, then using assessments effectively, districts can better position themselves to fulfill this promise for all students.

To access the brief, please visit <http://www.cacollaborative.org/publications/publications-briefs/>