

Delaware Education News
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Grade-Level Tests Required by NCLB Fail to Show A True Picture of Student Growth, Delaware Study Finds

Congress Urged to Permit States to Use Multigrade-Level Adaptive Assessments

Intended to hold schools accountable for student achievement, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) actually is forcing states to mismeasure how large numbers of students are doing. That is the conclusion of a new study by a group of Delaware educators and community leaders looking for more accurate ways to use Growth Models, now being piloted under NCLB as a way to measure students' academic progress along with their absolute scores on accountability assessments. The Delaware study zeroes in on NCLB's requirement to use only *grade-level* assessments as a flaw that keeps Growth Models from documenting the progress they were supposed to track.

Designed for the pass-fail Status Model assessments originally mandated by NCLB, grade-level assessments contain questions tightly clustered around a student's current grade to measure whether the student is meeting standards for that grade on a given date. Growth Models, however, are intended to track student progress towards proficiency over time.

Convinced that assessments that have questions from multiple grades and adapt automatically to a student's skill level provide a more accurate measure of progress, in 2005 the Steering Committee of the Delaware Statewide Academic Growth Assessment Pilot began to test a such an assessment in almost four dozen public schools throughout the state. The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) analyzed the results. The CREP report compares results from the current Delaware state assessment, DSTP, with results from the adaptive tests. Their comparison clearly shows that multigrade, adaptive assessments document student progress that grade-level assessments miss — particularly for students identified as low-income, minority or English language learners.

“Grade-level assessments aren’t designed to capture the progress of students who are doing work well above or below their actual grade level,” says Pilot Coordinator Nancy Doorey, of the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League. “That means those students’ schools don’t get credit for their growth; states and communities don’t get accurate information about the amount of learning occurring in their schools; and, importantly, teachers don’t get the feedback they need to adjust their instruction to support their students’ learning.”

For example, the Delaware report points to a hypothetical student who enters 4th grade with only 1st grade skills. Even if that student made two years of progress in a single year — impressive gains by any common-sense measure — the student’s school wouldn’t get credit for those gains because the student remains below grade level. Gains by a 4th grade student who goes from a 6th- to an 8th-grade level also would go uncredited.

“This study illustrates that for states and communities to target their resources where they are needed most, we need better tools to differentiate between schools with students on track to reach proficiency versus those that need significant intervention,” says Dr. Paul Herdman, president and chief executive officer of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, which helped fund the pilot program and report.

As Congress considers reauthorizing NCLB, the Delaware group is asking lawmakers to drop NCLB’s requirement to use grade-level assessments exclusively. “Our request to Congress is quite simple,” Doorey says. “As the rules are changed to allow all states to use Growth Models, states also need permission to use assessments that are designed to measure growth along the full continuum of learning. This opens the door to a much more powerful vision for NCLB — that we measure and promote the growth of every student, whether below, at or above grade

level, while still requiring all students to reach proficiency.”

“I have found that parents, teachers and the public want to know how much learning is going on in a school and Growth Models are a major step in providing that information,” says Dr. Steve Godowsky, superintendent of New Castle County Vocational Technical School District and president of the Delaware Chief School Officers Association. “Now we need authority from Congress to use multigrade adaptive tests, so that we can accurately measure each student’s progress toward proficiency and beyond.”

*On behalf of the Steering Committee, the Rodel Foundation has posted the report on its Web site. Three supporting research studies are also available: one simulating a Growth Model as it could be used for measuring AYP in Delaware, one comparing Growth Models and current assessments and one exploring the validity of the NWEA test in Delaware. They are available at: **www.rodelfoundationde.org***

The full report:

<http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/pdfs/GrowthReportCongress102507.pdf>

Delaware Among Leaders in Longitudinal Analysis

The Data Quality Campaign and the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) conducted a survey in September 2007, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, about state data systems to determine the number of states that have built the infrastructure to tap into the power of longitudinal data. Similar surveys were conducted by NCEA in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. This website provides an overview of the findings of the survey in addition to a state-by-state analysis of the policy implications of each state's data system.

Longitudinal data matches individual student records over time, from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and into post secondary education. States are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to improve student achievement. But without quality data, they are essentially flying blind. Policymakers need to act now to put in

place the policies and resources to ensure that each state has a longitudinal data system and the culture and capacity to translate the information into specific action steps to improve student achievement. When states collect the most relevant data and are able to match individual student records over time, they can answer the questions that are at the core of educational effectiveness.

The Data Quality Campaign believes that there is a set of 10 essential elements that are critical to a longitudinal data system. Currently, only 4 states' data system including Delaware.

See complete article:

http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey_results/

A Science Experiment Teacher Resource Offered by Rohm and Haas Company

Easy and Cool Science Experiments Developed by Teachers for Teachers

Rohm and Haas Company (<http://www.rohmhaas.com/>) is relaunching its popular Project Labs website (www.projectlabs.com). This site provides a valuable online teacher resource that offers free downloadable easy and cool science experiments and teacher lesson plans.

Project LABS (Learning About Basic Science) introduces students to fun, educational and engaging science experiments that teaches them about environmental science, natural habitats, plant biology, insect morphology, polymer chemistry, separation technology ...and more that students use in the classroom throughout the year. Lessons suitable for school children of all ages - from elementary school to high school are found on the site.

Science is essential in everyday life. For more than 10 years, Rohm and Haas sponsored Project LABS, a program that paired teachers with Rohm and Haas research scientists. Working in small teacher-scientist teams during the summer months, their efforts resulted in more than 110 innovative science lessons in a variety of disciplines; some science experiments even published in national journals.

American Education is co-sponsored by the National Education and the U.S. Department of Education.

MIT Launches Web Site for High School Students

MIT President Susan Hockfield announces today the launch of a new web site, **Highlights for High School**, that will provide resources to improve science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) instruction at the high school level.

The website is: <http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/hs/home/home/index.htm>

The web site builds on the success of MIT's revolutionary OpenCourseWare initiative and is designed to inspire the next generation of engineers and scientists and to be a valuable tool for high school teachers.

"Strength in K-12 math and science will be increasingly important for America if the nation is to continue to lead the innovation economy," Hockfield said.

"Highlights for High School will provide students and teachers with innovative tools to supplement their math and science studies," she added. "We hope it will inspire students to reach beyond their required classwork to explore more advanced material through OCW and also might encourage them to pursue careers in science and engineering."

Highlights for High School features more than 2,600 video and audio clips, animations, lecture notes and assignments taken from actual MIT courses, and categorizes them to match the Advanced Placement physics, biology and calculus curricula. Demonstrations, simulations and animations give educators engaging ways to present STEM concepts, while videos illustrate MIT's hands-on approach to the teaching of these subjects.

Thomas Magnanti, former dean of the School of Engineering at MIT, chaired the committee that developed the site. "As has been well documented, the U.S. needs to invest more in secondary education, particularly in STEM fields. MIT, as a leading institution of science and technology, has an obligation to help address the issue," he

said.

Highlights for High School represents MIT's first step in adapting the successful OpenCourseWare model to secondary education. The web site organizes the course materials currently featured on OCW--including syllabi, lecture notes, assignments and exams--into a format that is more accessible to high school students and teachers.

An estimated 10,000 U.S. high school instructors and 5,000 U.S. high school students already visit MIT OpenCourseWare each month, and MIT expects Highlights for High School to make MIT's course materials even more useful to these audiences.

Highlights for High School continues MIT's tradition of supporting science, technology and engineering instruction at the secondary level. One of the most prominent previous efforts was the Physical Science Study Committee, a program begun in 1956 as a collaboration between MIT physics professors and high school physics teachers, which dramatically changed the way physics was taught in high schools. MIT has more than 40 K-12 outreach programs, including the Edgerton Center, MIT's Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science and MIT's Educational Studies Program.

With Highlights for High School in place, a broader plan proposed for a secondary education program--OCW SE--may include creating a teacher-in-residence program to develop new open curricula with high school educators and organizing an MIT secondary-education mentor corps.