

School News & Notes

Putting Assessments To Work In The Classroom

by Kurt Landgraf
President & CEO,

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

(NAPSA)—The public conversation about the quality of American education evolved and intensified over the past two decades, and now real reform is being achieved. Some may want to continue arguing about standards, accountability and testing, but the real battle is over. National public policy has been set. We will have standards. We will have accountability. And assessments are going to be an important element in the equation.

ETS is ready to join with teachers and school leaders in taking the next essential step, to put assessments to use where they matter most: in the classroom. We must make much better use of tests and test results so that we can determine who's learning, who's not, and how classroom practice and professional development can be adjusted to ensure that no student is, in fact, left behind.

Unlike tests that are used for high-stakes decisions such as whether a student graduates, classroom, or "interim," assessments measure what students are learning during the course of the school year.

Do they work? Absolutely. As San Francisco's Bay Area School Reform Collaborative found, effective use of data produced by assessments of student achievement is instrumental in narrowing the achievement gap among students of widely different backgrounds. Schools that are successful in reducing the achievement gap use assessments more frequently, and are more likely to use the data produced by those assessments, than are less successful



schools. This may not be a surprising finding, but it certainly is an important one.

Too often, teacher education students as well as practicing teachers are shortchanged when it comes to learning how to make effective use of assessments.

At ETS, we are hard at work creating tools to bridge this unfortunate and avoidable gap. For example, our Understanding Standards-Based Assessments (USBA) series of professional development workshops for teachers demonstrates how to monitor each student's level of achievement, and how to collect and organize the information and feedback necessary to help shape effective instruction.

Timely, targeted assessments provide educators with the information they need to improve teaching and learning. High-quality assessments, properly used, help identify student-learning problems, their causes, and workable solutions.

At ETS, we're listening to educators, parents and policymakers. We're learning from sound research. And we're leading the effort to achieve both informed public policy and informed educational practice.