

in subject areas and as teaching practices change and evolve, pressures arise to change the test frameworks and tests to keep them current. But, if frameworks, specifications and tests change too frequently, trends may be lost, costs go up, and reporting time may increase.

Recommendations

- Test frameworks and test specifications developed for the National Assessment generally should remain stable for at least ten years;
- To ensure that trend results can be reported, the pool of test questions developed in each subject for the National Assessment should provide a stable measure of student performance for at least ten years;
- In rare circumstances, such as where significant changes in curricula have occurred, the Governing Board may consider making changes to test frameworks and specifications before ten years have elapsed;
- In developing new test frameworks and specifications, or in making major alterations to approved frameworks and specifications, the cost of the resulting assessment should be estimated. The Governing Board will consider the effect of that cost on the ability to test other subjects before approving a proposed test framework and/or specifications.

Use an Appropriate Mix of Multiple-Choice and "Performance" Questions

To provide information about "what students know and can do," the National Assessment uses both multiple-choice questions and questions in which students are asked to provide their own answers, such as writing a response to an essay question or explaining how they solved a math problem. Questions of the latter type are sometimes called "performance items." The two types of questions may require students to demonstrate different kinds of skills and knowledge.

Performance items are desired because they provide direct evidence of what students can do. Individuals confronted with problems in the real world are seldom handed four possible answers, one of which is correct. Although they may be desirable, performance items are more expensive than multiple-choice to develop, administer, and score.

Multiple-choice questions are desired because conclusions are more practical to obtain about the kinds of skills and knowledge assessed by these items, given the time available for testing. However, multiple-choice questions are more subject to guessing than are performance items.

Currently, all students tested by the National Assessment are given both types of questions. Generally, about half the testing time is devoted to each type of question, but the amount of time for each differs based on the skills and knowledge to be assessed, as established in the National Assessment test framework. For example, in a writing assessment, all students are asked to write their responses to specific "prompts." In other subjects, the appropriate mix of multiple-choice and performance items varies.

Recommendations

- Both multiple-choice and performance items should continue to be used in the National Assessment;
- In developing new test frameworks, specifications, and questions, decisions about the appropriate mix of multiple-choice and performance items should take into account the nature of the subject, the range of skills to be assessed, and cost.

Objective 3: To help states and others link their assessments with National Assessment and use National Assessment data to improve education performance.

The primary job of the National Assessment is to report frequently and promptly to the American public on student achievement. The resources of the National Assessment must be focused on this central purpose if it is to be achieved. However, the products of the National Assessment—test questions, test data, frameworks and specifications, are widely regarded as being of high quality. They are developed with public funds and, therefore, should be available for public use as long as such uses do not threaten the integrity of the National Assessment or its ability to report regularly on student achievement.

The National Assessment should be designed in a way that permits its use by others while protecting the privacy of students, teachers, and principals who have participated in the National Assessment. This should include making National Assessment test questions and data easy to assess and use, and providing related technical assistance upon request. Generally, the costs of a project should be borne by the individual or group making the proposal, not by the National Assessment. Examples of areas in which particular interest has been expressed for using the National Assessment include linking state and local tests with the National Assessment and performing in-depth analysis on National Assessment data. States that link their tests to the National

Assessment would have an unbiased external benchmark to help make judgments about their own tests and standards and would also have a means for comparing their tests and standards with those of other states.

Recommendations

- The National Assessment should develop policies, practices and procedures that enable states, school districts and others who want to do so at their own cost, to conduct studies to link their test results to the National Assessment;
- The National Assessment should be designed so that others may access and use National Assessment test questions, test data and background information;
- The National Assessment should employ safeguards to protect the integrity of the National Assessment program, prevent misuse of data, and ensure the privacy of individual test takers.

Dated: May 13, 1996.

Roy Truby,

Executive Director, National Assessment Governing Board.

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National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board; Meeting

AGENCY: National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board; Education.

ACTION: Notice of cancellation and rescheduled closed committee meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice amends a notice originally published in Vol. 61, No. 67, April 5, 1996, p. 15232 of a closed meeting of the Search Committee of the National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board. The meeting has been rescheduled.

DATES: June 5 and 6, 1996.

TIME: June 5, 1 to 6 p.m.; June 6, 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

LOCATION: First Floor Conference Room, 80 F Street NW., Washington, D.C. 20208.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Charles E. Hansen, Designated Federal Official, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20208-7579, Telephone: (202) 219-2050.

Sharon P. Robinson,

Assistant Secretary.

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