



Assessment Viewpoints

A closer look at the people and ideas that drive meaningful change in assessment.

spotlight

Edward D. Roeber



Edward Roeber currently serves as adjunct Professor of Education, Measurement and Quantitative Methods, in the College of Education at Michigan State University. Previously, he was Senior Executive Director, Office of Educational Assessment & Accountability in the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) where he oversaw assessments of general education students, students with disabilities and English language learners, as well as the accreditation and accountability programs.

Prior to that, he served as Vice President, External Relations for New Hampshire-based Measured Progress, a non-profit educational assessment organization; and as Director, Student

Assessment Programs for the Council of Chief State School Officers, where he developed and implemented various collaborative assessment development activities among states in the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS).

Ed was also a consultant and supervisor of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program in MDE. Michigan was the first state to implement criterion-referenced tests, and to conduct individually-administered assessments in areas such as music, visual arts, mathematics, and science education. He began his career as a consultant with the Education Commission of the States, working on the National Assessment of Educa-

tional Progress in the areas of mathematics, music, reading, science, visual arts, and writing.

Edward Roeber received his Ph.D. in measurement and evaluation from The University of Michigan in 1970. He has consulted with a number of states and national organizations on the design, development, and implementation of large-scale assessment programs. He has authored numerous articles, reports, and publications, particularly on the development of innovative assessment programs and the use and reporting of student achievement information. He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and forums.

Q What do you see as the most significant trends in alternate assessment?

Every state has been alternately assessing students with significant disabilities for over a decade now, something that was required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA-97). Different states have used different methods for carrying out this assessment, with the most popular ones including portfolios or collections of student evidence, performance assessments, or use of multiple-choice and written-response items. States are required to measure their states' academic content standards, albeit at extended or expanded levels. Now that the nation has created Common Core State Standards, states are looking at the possibility of developing common state assessment programs, including common approaches to the alternate assessment of these students.

Q How do educators prepare for these changes?

One of the major tasks that the two consortia of states working on revamping their alternate assessment systems will face is to create improved approaches to alternate assessment, as well as to prepare educators adequately for these changes. In essence, one issue that these two consortia will need to consider is how can educators be prepared not only to administer these revised assessments, but more importantly, to use the results of the assessments to improve student learning. This will be quite a challenge.

Q Does the consortium approach make sense? What are the benefits and pitfalls?

The consortium approach has the advantage of bringing a large number of states, as well as experts together to work on the issues in alternate assessment. Thus, more experts and others will be engaged in the work than any one state could afford. On the other hand, large groups of states may make it difficult to determine the best approaches to alternate assessment or to make decisions suitable for each participating state.



Q What is the most significant error or misperception currently existing in alternate assessment?

One of the largest challenges in state alternate assessments is that the students being assessed, by virtue of being labeled as students with significant or severe disabilities, are perceived to be unable to learn or to show evidence of learning. The result for alternate assessment is teachers who "go through the motions" of the assessment, but do not provide students a fair chance to show what they know and can do.

Q Are states responding adequately to the increase in students with special needs? If not, what will it take to gain an appropriate level of resources?

State funding of education, including that for special education programs has been and probably will continue to be under pressure. Mandatory special educa-

tion has been a federal requirement for decades, but remains underfunded. Given the current discussions about budget reductions at the federal and state levels, it is difficult to see that this will improve in the near future.

Q What impact, if any, do economic conditions and issues related to teaching, such as tenure, public employee pensions, have on alternate assessment?

There are issues related to educator tenure and evaluation that could affect states' alternate assessments. For example, a number of states have adopted policies or legislation requiring student achievement to be used as part of the evaluation of teachers and school leaders. Presumably, these policies and legislation include the educators who work with students with significant disabilities. If this is true, then states will need to use alternate assessments where teacher judgments about student achievement are externally verified through the collection of evidence of student achievement (student written work and/or videos of students' performance) and scoring by educators outside of the district that the students attend.



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