



## What is Performance Assessment?

Traditional paper-and-pencil tests provide opportunities to gauge what knowledge and skills students have learned. While these kinds of snapshot assessments are useful, they don't fully capture how well students have mastered the more demanding and sophisticated expectations associated with career- and college-readiness. To get a clearer picture of students' progress toward these important standards, we need assessments that provide more complete evidence of their learning.

In schools where education is personalized and students have opportunities to learn both in and outside of the classroom, teachers have turned to performance assessments to get this clearer picture. Performance assessments can be used to evaluate a student's performance of a complex task, such as a writing assignment, science experiment, speech, presentation, performance, or long-term project.

## What We've Learned

**Performance assessments can meaningfully and deeply change the ways students learn.** Unlike many traditional forms of testing, performance assessments prompt students to “transfer knowledge”—or take knowledge and skills learned in one context and apply them to solve a novel challenge or problem. Because performance assessments require that students engage in complex problem-solving akin to challenges they will experience in college and career, they can be a particularly effective method for preparing students for postsecondary endeavors.

**Performance assessments offer meaningful opportunities for students to develop their transferable skills.** When engaging in performance assessments, students are required to call on and hone their transferable skills—skills like problem-solving, communication, self-direction, and collaboration. For all students, these skills are critical to success in not only school, but also career, citizenship, and other arenas of adult life.

**Performance assessments also lend themselves well to discussions among teachers about what constitutes high-quality work.** Because many performance assessments encourage students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge using methods of their own choosing, teachers often develop common scoring guides that can be used to evaluate a variety of student work. This collaboration not only assures increased consistency across classrooms and schools but also serves as powerful professional development, especially when teachers score student work together.

**For performance assessments to work best, schools, districts, and states need to support educators and advance statewide performance assessment systems.** When districts and states build systems of performance assessment, educators can share resources and collaborate on the creation and refinement of rubrics and other measures of high-quality work, thus shoring up the reliability of performance assessment. Systematized performance assessment offers opportunities to reduce reliance on high-stakes standardized testing, and a number of states are moving in that direction.

## Want to Know More?

Visit the [Leadership in Action](#) website and download *I Want to Know More*, a selection of information and resources for those interested in reading more about the role of proficiency-based learning in performance assessments.

### **A high-quality education has never been more important than it is right now.**

The New England Secondary School Consortium hopes that our Leadership in Action series will spark conversations across the region about how students could be learning in today's high schools.

[newenglandssc.org/resources/leadership-in-action/](http://newenglandssc.org/resources/leadership-in-action/)