

Assessment Task Force Update

Submitted June 9, 2015 by the Center for Assessment

The assessment Task Force met in Casper on June 1, 2015. Twenty-three of the 26 members of the Task Force were in attendance. Scott Marion and Joseph Martineau of the Center for Assessment, LSO consultants, partnered with Brent Young and Deb Lindsey of the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) to plan and facilitate the work of the Task Force. The agenda for the day was as follows:

8:30 AM	Introductions
8:50 AM	Task Force Charge
9:00 AM	Task Force Authority
9:15 AM	Establish Group Norms and Rules
10:00 AM	Break
10:15 AM	What We Know and Want to Know About Assessment
11:15 AM	Framing the Discussion on Big Picture Goals
12:15 PM	Lunch
1:00 PM	Purposes and Uses
2:00 PM	Report Out from Groups
3:00 PM	What is a Comprehensive Assessment System?
4:00 PM	Task Force Final Product
5:00 PM	Adjourn

As facilitators, we saw all Task Force members engaged in the work throughout the day, wrestling with difficult issues, and making contributions to the group. We are enthusiastic about the work in which the Task Force is engaged and the manner in which they are engaging.

Introductions

As Task Force members introduced themselves, they gave their areas of residence, their roles in education, and why they volunteered to serve on the Task Force. The facilitators and observers also introduced themselves. This was done to give the Task Force members and facilitators a broader sense of each other's backgrounds.

Task Force Charge and Authority

The charge given to the Task Force was reviewed by identifying key elements of the legislation authorizing the Task Force. Their authority was reviewed in a similar manner by identifying

requirements in the legislation, and the final product of the Task Force (recommendations to the State Board of Education and Legislature).

Task Force Group Norms and Rule

The Task Force reviewed proposed group norms (for how participants treat each other), altered some of those norms, and adopted revised norms. The Task Force then reviewed proposed group rules (for how the work gets done) and adopted those rules.

What We Know and Want to Know About Assessment

The Task Force split into four small groups to engage in an activity to identify topics in assessment that they felt they know about, and topics they felt they needed to know more about in order to effectively carry out their charge. They were given a “starter list” of assessment topics so that they would not be starting from scratch, but could ignore any item on the list, and could add any topic not on the list. The small groups shared their work with each other, asking clarifying questions. The facilitators provided explanations as needed.

Purposes and Uses of Assessment

Identifying High-Priority Uses and Purposes

The Task Force was asked to consider that assessment design is always a case of optimization under constraints. In other words, there may be many desirable purposes, uses, and goals for assessment. However, they may be in conflict, any given assessment and type of assessment can only serve a limited number of purposes well, and assessments always have some type of restrictions (e.g., legislative requirements, time, cost, etc...) that must be weighed in finalizing recommendations.

However, to begin this activity, Task Force members were asked to ignore constraints for the moment, and identify their desired purposes and goals for assessment and their desired uses of assessment data. The groups noted their highest priority uses, and then reviewed the work of other groups, asking clarifying questions. After each group’s highest priority uses and purposes were reviewed, each individual panelist identified their three highest priorities. The group then discussed possible patterns emerging from the activity. Task Force members were reminded that they could at any time adjust this preliminary work.

In general, Task Force members desire a new Wyoming assessment (system) that is capable of serving the following broad purposes:

- Providing instructionally-useful information to teachers and students (with appropriate grain-size and timely reporting)
- Providing clear and accurate information to parents and students regarding students’ achievement of and progress toward key outcomes, such as progress toward meeting standards and progress toward readiness for post-secondary education and/or training
- Providing meaningful information to support evaluation and enhancement of curriculum and programs

- Providing information to appropriately support federal and state accountability determinations

Identifying the Why and How for Specific Purposes

After identifying their highest priority purposes and uses, the Task Force engaged in another activity in which six small groups each selected one of their highest priority purposes/uses, specified the goal that should be accomplished from the purpose they selected, and developed a preliminary “theory of action” for how that goal could be accomplished. In short, a theory of action thoughtfully identifies the mechanisms and supports necessary to accomplish a goal. They were asked to specify the following in support of their intended use and goal:

- The nature of data needed
- How those data should be reported
- How often the data would be needed
- What claims they wanted to make on the basis of the data
- How quickly after completing an assessment the data would be needed
- Whether any special transformations would be needed (e.g., create growth scores from multiple achievement scores)
- What knowledge and skills would educators need to support the intended uses
- How educators will acquire the knowledge and skills if they do not already possess it
- Potential unintended consequences of designing an assessment to achieve the goal

This activity brought to light some changes that would be needed to many aspects of the Wyoming educational system to effectively support the uses identified by the Task Force as their highest priority uses. It also brought to light the difficulty of designing an assessment or assessment system to achieve the high priority goals, and to do so without considerable unintended negative consequences.

What is a Comprehensive Assessment System?

As noted above, the Task Force identified many purposes of assessment. Given this diversity of purposes, the facilitators led a discussion about comprehensive assessment systems as a potential approach for trying to serve multiple purposes and uses effectively. After this brief presentation, the Task Force members needed to determine whether they were interested in focusing their recommendations on a single assessment (and therefore only a subset of the purposes and uses they identified in the previous activity) or a comprehensive assessment system (to maintain a broader list of purposes and integrate the assessments used at the various levels of the Wyoming educational system so that they complement rather than compete with each other).

In the presentation, the facilitators noted that a statewide summative assessment used for school accountability is incompatible with informing daily instruction because such an assessment is by nature (of being useful for school accountability) too broad rather than targeted at informing student learning associated with daily instructional activities. The Task Force was reminded that one of the legislative requirements of the Task Force is that the assessment (system) must support school accountability uses. Therefore, if the Task Force determined that it desired to focus its

recommendations on only one assessment, it needed to support that required use. However, if the Task Force determined that it desired to include uses at the classroom level, it would need to explore a system of assessments.

In describing a comprehensive assessment system, the facilitators noted that there have been some notions of what a comprehensive assessment system could be, but that there is little agreement in the field regarding exactly what makes a system of assessments comprehensive with the exception that it is clear that “a collection of assessments does not entail a [coherent] system any more than a pile of bricks entails a house” (see Coladarci, 2002), meaning that all assessments at the classroom, school, district, and state level should complement rather than compete with each other.

Task Force members were introduced to the definitions of three types of assessment (summative, interim, and formative), where such assessments tend to be controlled (all levels from classroom to state, all levels, and classroom only, respectively), and their appropriate uses. Task Force members were asked to deliberate on whether a state can appropriately and simultaneously implement a comprehensive assessment system and respect local control, particularly in the classroom.

The facilitators shared with Task Force members that if they decide to continue with recommendations for uses of assessment that are more appropriate at the local level rather than focusing on a single state assessment, the work would be more difficult in two ways:

1. The Task Force would need to wrestle with how the information would flow coherently upward from classroom to school to district to state, and down from state to district to school to classroom.
2. The integration of the assessment information from all levels in the system is particularly important if they desire the school accountability system to incorporate not just state-level assessment data, but also local-level data.

Reference: Coladarci, T. (2002). Is it a house...or a pile of bricks? Important features of a local assessment system. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(10), 772-774.

Deciding Whether to Investigate a Comprehensive Assessment System

Task Force members were then asked to individually deliberate on any benefits they see a comprehensive assessment system offering to Wyoming, any challenges they saw in sound implementation of a comprehensive assessment system, and whether they individually felt the Task Force should explore a comprehensive assessment system. As a group, the vast majority of Task Force members wanted to explore a comprehensive assessment system (with a few indicating that they were doing so cautiously) and a minority expressing concern about *exploring* a comprehensive assessment system.

The concerns expressed about a comprehensive assessment system were centered on maintaining local control at the district, school, and classroom levels. The Task Force was very hesitant to have a state system trump local assessment systems. However, when the facilitators asked Task Force members whether the district assessment (systems) were being used for instructional improvement, it became clear that they are generally not functioning well in that role. If the Task Force continues to discuss more than just a state assessment, in future meetings, the Task Force will need to wrestle with what is the appropriate role of a district assessment (system), how it can be designed to

accomplish its purpose, and how it could fit coherently with a state system as required in federal and state statute.

The facilitators indicated that they would put together at least four vignettes for how a comprehensive assessment system could be designed with various levels of state “touch” and local control for their consideration at the next meeting to determine whether to move forward with recommendations for a comprehensive assessment system or just the state assessment(s).

Discussing a Final Report

The facilitators presented a proposed draft high-level table of contents. The Task Force reviewed the proposed draft and decided to move forward with the broad framework, with the understanding that they may revise the table of contents at any time as desired.

The Task Force then reviewed some very rough, potential outlines of various chapters to gain an idea of the kinds of topics that may be necessary to consider if the Task Force decides to focus their attention on a comprehensive assessment system.

Timeline

The timeline for completing the work of the Task Force is as follows:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Location</i>
June 1, 2015	8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Kickoff meeting	Casper, completed
June 29, 2015	9:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Meeting 2	Webex
July 28-29, 2015	8:30 AM – 5:00 PM	Meeting 3	Laramie
August 21, 2015	9:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Meeting 4	Webex
September 9, 2015	8:30 AM – 5:00 PM	Final Meeting	Rock Springs

In addition, Scott Marion and Paige Fenton-Hughes will give the State Board of Education a briefing on the Task Force report on September 23, 2015, and Joseph Martineau and Scott Marion will present to the Joint Education Committee on October 30, 2015.