



MAXIMIZING ASSESSMENT FLEXIBILITY Pt.1

Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning: Policy Solutions for States September 2018

*While working with states to implement innovative student-centered learning policies and programs, ExcelinEd has identified policies and practices that hinder new student-centered learning models. **Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning: Policy Solutions for States** is a policy brief series dedicated to addressing these challenges.*

THE CHALLENGE OF STANDARDIZED STATE ASSESSMENT SCHEDULES

A hallmark of many new student-centered instructional models is a shift away from student progressions defined by age-based grade levels to individualized progressions predicated on mastery of key content and skills. Similarly, educators seek to break-free of traditionally-defined courses to package content in new and creative ways.

As momentum builds for new student-centered learning models so does the tension between the federal and state requirement to evaluate each student's proficiency on grade-level standards once a year and the desire to break free of the traditional paradigms of time, place and pace.

A [recent report](#) by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) noted that although the vast majority of principals interviewed felt they had ample flexibility to implement personalized learning, assessment requirements were frequently cited as restrictive.

“What [teachers] have done is to allow students to progress based on their ability within a unit, but because testing is at a specific time, especially in courses like algebra, they don't want them getting so far ahead. So we are working within the confines that are established by the state.”

School district leader quoted in CRPE's report
[Personalized Learning at a Crossroads](#)

One common “pain point” highlighted in [research from Bellwether Education Partners](#) is the presence of “year-end summative assessments that focus exclusively on grade-level content and limited end-of-year testing windows” which prevent students from demonstrating proficiency when they are ready. The potential solutions below echo the recommendations included in this research.

As more innovative, student-centered models emerge, our traditional, state-level standardized assessments will eventually need to adapt to reflect systems where “[age-defined grade-levels take a back seat to students' individualized progressions.](#)”

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO PROVIDE ASSESSMENT FLEXIBILITY

State assessment design is guided by a combination of federal and state mandates, appropriations, tight procurement regulations and test security concerns. An evolution of state assessments will be incremental and take time, but there are practical steps states can consider to begin the transition and provide more flexibility.

Recommendation: Explore Opportunities to Implement Flexible Testing Windows

- Beginning with any new assessment contracts, states should consider opportunities for more flexible test administration during the procurement process with the goal of allowing students to demonstrate mastery when they are ready. This may mean allowing districts or schools to administer the state summative assessment once per quarter or on demand once students have completed the content.
- Prior to contract expiration, states can consider issuing a request for information (RFI) to determine potential capacity, cost and test security concerns and communicating the results to the state board of education and legislature.