

Oregon Quality Assessment Practices: Networked Improvement Community

Narrative

“Behind every assessment experience is a living, breathing student.” – Rick Stiggins

Assessment systems under NCLB ignored the children at the center of the one-size-fits all accountability model, falsely believing that if we just tested students, learning would follow. Students were left behind in the wake of high stakes tests that sorted and ranked them rather than empowered them. Too many were resigned to an educational career of losing streaks, feeling defeated by each assessment as just one more opportunity to fail. We focused too much on what students couldn’t do and our students, teachers, and families resigned themselves to hopelessness.

In 2015, the state teachers’ union, department of education, Governor’s office and other stakeholders came together to craft a new vision for assessment, one that put students first and leads to meaningful learning, not just a top to bottom ranking of schools. We asked, how can we start putting students back at the center of assessment? How can we help students know where they are in their learning, where they need to go, and how to get there? How do we embody the very definition of assessment – to sit beside – to empower student learning?

In 2017, led by the Oregon Education Association, these organizations took their work a step further by forming a Networked Improvement Community to bring together their individual efforts to transform assessment to learn faster together.

Five school districts and a team representing three colleges of education comprise the Oregon Quality Assessment Practices Networked Improvement Community (Or-QAP NIC). The hub includes the Oregon Education Association (OEA), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the Chief Education Office, the Chalkboard Project, and Portland State University (PSU).

We have a vision to reclaim classroom assessment to propel meaningful teaching and learning. Rather than students as passive participants in an assessment event, we want to empower students to be active users of assessment processes to learn and grow. Rather than employ “mystery” assessments that confuse and disenfranchise students, we want to create transparency in assessments, where students know what they are accountable for learning and how to use assessment information to inform their next steps.

A secondary goal of our NIC is to inform other school improvement efforts in Oregon. Each organization in the Hub also leads other projects: performance assessment pilot sites, chronic absenteeism pilots, culturally responsive practice efforts, formative assessment for learning, or school improvement. Our organizations are collectively embracing a mindset shift to use improvement science and networked communities to accelerate improvement across our endeavors.

Oregon has decided to put aside traditional barriers to collaboration – labor vs. management, K-12 vs. higher education, advocacy organizations vs. state departments – to form this NIC. At the core of all our organizations, we hold students and public education as paramount to a healthy society. In this spirit, we forge ahead as a collective whole to put the Oregon on a new path for meaningful student learning.