

# The Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force (HB14-1202)

## Report of Findings and Recommendations

Presented to the  
Joint Education Committee  
Colorado General Assembly  
January 28, 2015

**HB14-1202 Standards and Assessments Task Force  
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## **Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force Members**

- Adele Bravo, Colorado Education Association (CEA), Broomfield, Public School Teacher Representative
- Jay Cerny, Cherry Creek Academy, Englewood, Charter School Representative
- John Creighton, St. Vrain Valley Schools, Longmont, School Board Director Representative
- Bethany Drosendahl, Cheyenne Mountain School District 12, CO Springs, Parent Representative
- Lisa Escárcega, Aurora Public Schools, Aurora, District Administrator Representative
- Bill Jaeger, Colorado Children's Campaign, Denver, Organization that represents low performing students
- Tony Lewis, Donnell-Kay Foundation, CSI Board, Denver, Charter School Institute Representative
- Donna Lynne, Chair, Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, Business Representative
- Syna Morgan, Jefferson County Schools, District Administrator Representative
- Luke Ragland, Colorado Succeeds, Denver, Business Representative
- Dan Snowberger, Durango School District, Durango, District Administrator Representative
- Ilana Spiegel, Supportive Parents, Educators and Students (SPEAK), Centennial, Parent Representative
- Dane Stickney, Strive Prep Charter School, Denver, School Teacher Representative
- Nancy Tellez, Poudre School District Board of Education, Fort Collins, School Board Director Representative
- Susan Van Gundy, Golden, Eduvate, PARCC Representative

The Task Force was facilitated by Laura Lefkowitz, President, Lefkowitz Consulting.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Task Force wishes to extend its deepest appreciation to the following individuals and organizations that supported our work.

- Jill Hawley, Joyce Zurkowski, Elliott Asp, and Alyssa Pearson of the Colorado Department of Education prepared and presented extensive background information on the Colorado Assessment System and responded to all questions and requests for information posed by the Task Force in a timely, thorough and accurate manner. CDE was a critical partner in the work of the Task Force, seeking out information from the U.S. Department of Education and the Center on Assessment on behalf of the Task Force.

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- Michele Sobczyk, Executive Assistant to Associate Commissioner Jill Hawley, provided expert administrative support including establishing and updating the Task Force web page, securing meeting locations, preparing public comment for dissemination, and performing countless other administrative tasks.
- The Colorado State Capitol, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, Jefferson County Public Schools, Cherry Creek Public Schools, and Aurora Public Schools provided meeting facilities.

The Task Force also wishes to acknowledge the Colorado General Assembly for recognizing the need for a review of the statewide assessment system, establishing this Task Force, and for its thoughtful consideration of these recommendations.

## **Executive Summary**

The Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force was established by the Colorado General Assembly in 2014 (HB14---1202) and charged with studying the implications of Colorado’s State and local assessment system for school districts, public schools, charter schools, educators and students. State assessments refer to tests that are mandated by the State or Federal governments. Local assessments refer to all other assessments administered by districts, charters, schools, or classrooms at the discretion of local authorities. The Task Force was required to prepare a report of findings, including legislative recommendations, by January 31, 2015.

This report provides a description of the organization of the Task Force; the process of selecting and working with Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (APA) to conduct the research study called for in the legislation; the process of soliciting, listening to, and synthesizing stakeholder views; the information and documents reviewed by the Task Force before developing recommendations; key findings underlying recommendations; and recommendations for consideration by the Colorado General Assembly. Major documents reviewed by the Task Force, including the final study by APA, are provided in the Appendix and can also be found online at <http://www.cde.State.co.us/cdedepcom/taskforce>.

Early on in Task Force deliberations, members agreed that assessments provide valuable data for the purposes of holding schools and districts accountable for student performance, comparing groups of students to one another, improving instruction, and measuring student growth and proficiency. However, findings from research studies and public input made it clear that Colorado’s current system of State and local assessments has created far too many demands on time, logistics, and finances that are impacting the teaching and learning process in schools and undermining public support for the assessment system as a whole. Thus, the consensus of the Task Force is that, where possible, changes must be made to the type, frequency, and use of various assessments.

In addition, the Task Force recognizes that the State’s ability to change the current assessment system is severely restricted by the current Federal testing requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). There was consensus that, in the short term, the State must adhere to these Federal requirements in order to avoid the fiscal and other consequences of non-compliance. The recommendations related to federally required assessments are offered in the context of this current limitation.

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Recommendations for the current assessment system, described in full in the report, are as follows:

**1. Recommendations for the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS): Grades 3-8 and High School**

- a) Eliminate State-mandated tests in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- b) Eliminate State-mandated tests in 11<sup>th</sup> grade except for a college entrance exam and offer state-funded CMAS English Language Arts (ELA) and Math exams as an option for districts and schools.
- c) **Fulfill high school Science assessment requirements with an augmented college entrance exam**, such as the ACT.
- d) Consider whether to continue State-mandated ELA and Math exams at 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This is an area in which Task Force members were evenly split and could not reach a consensus. Some believe the State should fund *optional testing* for 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and Math exams. Others believe the State should continue to fund and mandate 9th grade ELA and Math assessments.
- e) Consider whether to continue State-funded Social Studies tests in 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. This is another area in which Task Force members were evenly split and could not reach a consensus. Some believe the State should fund optional testing for 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies exams. Others believe the State should continue to fund and mandate 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies exams.
- f) Administer ELA and Math CMAS assessments at 10th grade to fulfill State and Federal requirements.
- g) Hold all schools and districts harmless from the consequences associated with School and District Performance accountability frameworks (including for low participation rates) through 2015- 2016 school year.
- h) Provide paper and pencil options for all tests.
- i) Proactively address parent and student opt outs.

**2. READ Act Recommendations**

- a) Kindergarten students should be allowed take the first READ Act assessment within 90 days from the beginning of the school's calendar year rather than immediately upon enrollment in the fall.
- b) A student who demonstrates grade-level proficiency on the initial READ Act assessment should not be required to take further READ Act assessments for the remainder of that school year.
- c) A student who does not demonstrate grade level proficiency on the initial READ Act assessment should be required to take a second assessment within 60 days prior to being designated as having a significant reading deficiency.

### **3. School Readiness Assessment Recommendations**

- a) School Readiness Assessments should only require the assessment of the 6 domains included in SB 08-212 (CAP4K): social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics.
- b) The School Readiness Assessment should only be required to be administered in the fall rather than three times per year as is current practice. While there should be no requirement to further administer the School Readiness Assessment in the middle or end of the year, the State should fund the optional administration of further assessments by a district or school.
- c) As noted in the recommendations regarding the READ Act, a school or district should not be required to administer both the literacy component of a School Readiness Assessment and the READ Act to Kindergarten students in the fall and, instead, should only administer one of the two.
- d) Schools and districts should not be required to create both a School Readiness Plan and a separate READ Plan for the same child.
- e) Schools and districts should continue to be allowed to choose a School Readiness Assessment from the menu of valid, reliable, developmentally appropriate tools approved by the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education should actively work to continue to expand the menu available choices for schools and districts.

### **4. ACCESS Recommendations**

- a) Beginning English language learners who have been in a Colorado school less than one year should not be required to take the State-mandated ELA assessments. These students should take the ELA assessment in their second year, but their performance should not be included in accountability measures for both of their first two years in school.

### **5. Technology Recommendations**

- a) Continue to allow districts, charters, and schools within districts to choose non-technology based (paper and pencil) assessment options K-3 and for READ Act.
- b) Beginning in 2015-16 school year, allow districts, charters, and schools within districts to choose non-technology (paper and pencil) based options for all tests, as appropriate.
- c) Consider funding for assessment technology infrastructure. Although it was clear from the public input and surveys that funding for technology infrastructure to support assessments is viewed as an obstacle to many, the Task Force was divided on how to address this issue. Some believe that the legislature should provide designated funding for technology infrastructure. Others believe that technology funding is part of the larger issue of school funding and should not be addressed through a separate funding stream.

Task Force members recognize that the short-term actions recommended above neither fully address the depths of public concern about the current State and local assessment system nor fully capture the potential of a balanced and aligned system. Therefore, the Task Force

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recommends establishment of an Advisory Board that includes greater direct representation from the racially and socioeconomically diverse populations of the State and that is provided the necessary time and resources to consider what components should be included in a future system of State and local assessments.

The Task Force identified difficult tensions that the Advisory Board should strive to resolve as outlined below:

1. To what extent should emphasis be given to State assessments relative to locally chosen/designed assessments? What's the appropriate balance?
2. To what extent should State assessments focus on district and school accountability? To what extent should State assessments be used to identify individual student growth and proficiency? To what extent are local assessments and processes able to achieve this task?
3. How much flexibility can districts and schools have to choose their own assessments and still retain the principles of accountability, comparability, growth and equity?
4. When a parent or guardian exercises his or her right to refuse to have their student participate in an assessment, how should this be managed by districts and schools? How should this be factored into district and school accountability?
5. In light of concerns about technology-based tests including equity, access, and developmental appropriateness, to what extent should future assessment systems be technology-based versus administered through paper and pencil?



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## **Introduction**

The Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force was established by the Colorado General Assembly in 2014 (HB14---1202) and charged with studying the implications of Colorado’s State and local assessment system for school districts, public schools, charter schools, educators and students. State assessments refer to tests that are mandated by the State or Federal governments. Local assessments refer to all other assessments administered by districts, charters, schools, or classrooms at the discretion of local authorities. The Task Force was required to prepare a report of findings, including legislative recommendations, by January 31, 2015. The Task Force was comprised of 15 members appointed by the Speaker of the House, the House Minority Leader, the President of the Senate, the Senate Minority Leader, and the Chairperson of the State Board of Education, as stipulated in the statute. The Task Force represented parents, teachers, administrators, school board members and the business community.

This report provides a description of:

- > The organization of the Task Force
- > The process of selecting and working with Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (APA) to conduct the research study called for in the legislation
- > The process of communicating with stakeholders
- > The information and documents reviewed by the Task Force before developing recommendations including:
  - o Task Force Process Documents
  - o Colorado Assessment Implementation Study by WestEd
  - o Study of Assessment Use in Colorado Districts and Schools by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) and associated materials
  - o Information provided by Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and U.S. Department of Education (USDOE)
  - o Public Input Received by Email and through Public Hearings
- > Recommendations for consideration by the Colorado General Assembly

Major documents reviewed by the Task Force are provided in the Appendix and can also be found online at <http://www.cde.State.co.us/cdedepcom/taskforce>.

## **Task Force Organization**

The first meeting of the Task Force was called by Speaker of the House Mark Ferrandino and held at the State Capitol on July 15, 2014. Speaker Ferrandino conducted an election for chair of the Task Force and Dan Snowberger, a representative of school district administrators, was elected by a majority of the members. The Task Force then agreed upon the roles and responsibilities of the Task Force chair, members, facilitator, and Colorado Department of Education (CDE) staff and clarified that the Task Force would operate independently from CDE. Laura Lefkowitz of Lefkowitz Consulting was asked to serve as facilitator.

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Organizational activities at subsequent meetings included the establishment of three subgroups with designated chairs: Local Assessments, Syna Morgan, Chair; State Assessments, Adele Bravo, Chair; and Systems Considerations, Luke Ragland, Chair. Monthly meetings of the entire Task Force included time for information gathering and deliberation by each subgroup as well as whole group work. The subgroup chairs also worked with Chairman Snowberger and Ms. Lefkowitz to set the agenda for each meeting. In all, the Task Force met as a whole group in public on 10 separate occasions between July 2014 and January 2015.

The Task Force collaboratively developed Ground Rules for meetings and Shared Agreements about the nature of the recommendations that would ultimately be made to the legislature.

**HB14-1202 Ground Rules:**

- Be honest about your own perspectives, opinions, and values and be respectful of those of your fellow Task Force members.
- Be courteous, allow all voices to be heard, and do not dominate the discussion.
- Strive for consensus by maintaining an open mind, basing decisions on factual information, seeking to understand all points of view, and assuming that all members approach the work with positive intentions.
- Commit to producing a useful, high quality report.
- Ensure transparency in the Task Force's work.

**HB 14-1202 Shared Agreements:**

Task Force recommendations should:

- Be supported by all Task Force members after Task Force ends (for consensus items).
- Consider broad and diverse public input and educational expertise.
  - Connect to the broader community, business, and public.
  - Be representative of research studies considered by the Task Force and reflective of best practice.
- Be feasible and realistically implementable while seriously considering cost factors and balancing assessments and instruction.
  - Be actionable for legislators during the 2015 legislative session.
  - Be affordable and fiscally responsible.
  - Provide districts with stability.
- Align with higher education/workforce development priorities.
- Recognize and, where possible, accommodate the different needs of students, schools, and districts.
- Reduce the burden on teachers, students, schools, and districts, not add to it.
  - Should align 1) intended purposes, 2) impact at all levels, and 3) return on investment.
- Allow new thinking and flexibility.

## **Selecting and Working with Study Vendor**

Prior to the first meeting of the Task Force, CDE developed and released a Request for Proposal to perform the study described in the legislation. The RFP was released on June 6, 2014. The deadline for responses was June 26, 2014. Only one firm, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), responded to the request. After discussions with other potential bidders, CDE elected not to reopen the bidding process.

At the first meeting of the Task Force, Eva Reynolds, CDE Purchasing Agent, described the process for selecting a qualified bidder to perform the study and asked for volunteers to serve on the selection panel to review the bids received and select a qualified bidder. The following Task Force members volunteered to serve: Bethany Drosendahl, Syna Morgan, Luke Ragland, Ilana Spiegel, Nancy Tellez, and Susan Van Gundy.

Ms. Reynolds provided each volunteer with the proposal for review. The panel met at the CDE offices on July 25 to review evaluations of the proposal. At that time, the panel agreed that a meeting with APA was advisable. That meeting took place on August 6, at CDE. Panel members queried APA about their bid and APA was awarded the contract.

At the next meeting of the Task Force, representatives from APA described their proposed approach and discussed various alternative approaches with the Task Force members. The Task Force agreed to identify one member from each subgroup to provide guidance to APA as the study proceeded. These members were: Adele Bravo, Lisa Escárcega, and Syna Morgan. Chairman Snowberger also participated in this group. Laura Lefkowits facilitated the interaction.

Throughout the study period, APA requested and received input from the entire Task Force to ensure that APA collected and analyzed the information needed. Changes were made to the scope of work identified in the original bid according to guidance provided by the Task Force. For example, because of the short timeline available for the study and the funding amount, the Task Force agreed to eliminate focus groups from the scope of work and expand the survey sample. Members also agreed that cost estimates would be derived through interviews with up to 8 school districts. Further, a list of definitions of terms was agreed to so that the survey questions were clear to respondents and Task Force members. The final scope of work and other documents relating to the selection of APA can be found in the Appendix.

## **Communicating with Stakeholders**

The Task Force was aware of the high degree of interest in its work by members of the public. Task Force members also were aware that, although they represented the stakeholder groups identified in the legislation, their racial, ethnic, and geographic makeup was not fully reflective of the State. In order to provide as much transparency as possible and to ensure that the views of diverse groups informed their deliberations, the Task Force agreed to a number of procedures.

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From the beginning, all meetings were held in locations that could accommodate as many members of the public who wished to attend. A web page (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/taskforce>) was established on which all notices of meetings, meeting materials, notes, and other reports considered by the Task Force were posted. Meetings that occurred by conference call were also posted and the public was invited to call in. The public was also invited to participate in subgroup meetings that occurred during the regular Task Force meetings. Whenever possible, meetings were broadcast live or recorded for later listening.

In addition, an email address was established for receiving written input from the public. This address was publicized broadly throughout the State through a public advisory sent to media lists provided by CDE. The Task Force asked for general input of any kind and also identified three questions of particular interest to them:

- What would an effective statewide assessment system include?
- How could Colorado improve its assessment system? Please provide specific examples.
- Are you familiar with the local assessments that are administered to students according to requirements for your district? If so, do you believe these assessments are valuable? Why?

Time was allotted on each regular meeting agenda for the Task Force to review input that had been received.

Finally, Task Force members volunteered to host nine public meetings throughout the State. Two meetings were held in Denver, two in Colorado Springs, and one each in Edwards, Monte Vista, Grand Junction, Fort Collins, and Loveland. At each meeting, several members of the Task Force attended, facilitated, and took notes. Approximately 610 people attended the hearings and over 500 emails were received. All of the input received from the email account and the public hearings can be found in the Appendix.

## **Resources Informing Recommendations**

The Task Force utilized a wide range of materials during its deliberations. Information was provided by research studies, in response to requests from CDE, and through public input. A description of these materials is below. All of these materials are included in the Appendix.

### **Colorado Assessment Implementation Study by WestEd**

Prior to HB 14-1202 being passed, the Colorado Department of Education worked with the Regional Comprehensive Center, also known as West Ed, to design a multi-phase study. The purpose of the study was to examine issues and concerns associated with implementation of the new State assessment system, and provide feedback that would inform policy, practice, and future directions. The first phase of the study captured perceptions and sentiments about current and new State tests, challenges and needs associated with transitioning to the new

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assessment system, proposed solutions to address key challenges, and ideas for implementing a high-quality assessment system. The second phase of the study, which began in May 2014, included a brief, follow-up survey of district assessment coordinators; follow-up conversations with district focus groups; and a focus group of large, metro-area districts.

West Ed presented its final report to the Task Force at its second meeting on August 18, 2014. There were several cross-cutting themes and common challenges that emerged in their report:

- Impact on instructional time
- Moderate levels of readiness (i.e., management, devices, and capacity)
- Quantity, frequency, and length of assessments
- Need for timely, relevant, and useful results
- Burden and utility of assessments at the elementary and secondary levels
- Recognition of local assessment systems and practices

**Study of Assessment Use in Colorado Districts and Schools, by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA)**

As part of HB 14-1202, the legislature provided funding to the Task Force to commission a study to assist in developing its findings as charged in the Act. Because the Colorado Department of Education had just completed a study by WestEd, the Task Force was careful in its consideration of what information was needed to deliver recommendations requested in the Act. The process for securing the vendor and conducting the study is outlined above. The vendor selected was Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA). Considering the findings in the West Ed study, the Task Force asked the APA to focus on the following:

- Assessment timelines
- Annual costs to the CDE and districts to prepare for and administer assessments
- Time spent to prepare for and administer assessments
- Opportunity costs to school districts and charter schools of diverting time and resources to preparation and administration of assessments and away from instruction
- Perceived benefits and impacts of assessments
- Suggested changes to State assessment system

**Background Information and Responses to Questions by CDE**

The Colorado Department of Education provided a detailed overview of all State assessments required by statute, both State and Federal. They remained very helpful in responding to a variety of questions throughout the time that the Task Force was engaged in its work. Members of the department were readily available to not only respond in writing but also to engage in discussions at all meetings of the Task Force. CDE also requested information from the U.S. Department of Education in response to requests from the Task Force. Specific information was sought on consequences should a district or State not meet the requirements outlined by the Federal government. These requirements – often referred to as Federal minimums - guided short-term recommendations of the Task Force, however did not prevent the Task Force from

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thinking beyond these current requirements. Documents provided by CDE are included in the Appendix.

### **Stakeholder Input**

As already outlined, the Task Force established a variety of ways for stakeholders across the State to provide input. In total, the Task Force received over 500 comments by email and over 600 individuals participated in public hearings. Attendance at regular Task Force meetings ranged from 15 to 50 people. The Appendix includes sign in sheets for each meeting and all public comments received.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

The process of developing recommendations was grounded in the desire of the Task Force to reach as much consensus as possible. Members agreed to focus their discussion on recommendations that they “could live with” rather than on parsing out every individual nuanced view. No actual votes were recorded. When the group could not reach consensus, the different views are fully articulated for the Joint Committee to consider.

Early on in Task Force deliberations, members agreed that assessments provide valuable data for the purposes of holding schools and districts accountable for student performance, comparing groups of students to one another, improving instruction, and measuring student growth and proficiency. However, findings from research studies and public input made it clear that Colorado’s current system of State and local assessments has created far too many demands on time, logistics, and finances that are impacting the teaching and learning process in schools and undermining public support for the assessment system as a whole. Thus, the consensus of the Task Force is that, where possible, changes must be made to the type, frequency, and use of various assessments.

In addition, the Task Force recognizes that the State’s ability to change the current assessment system is severely restricted by the current Federal testing requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). There was consensus that, in the short term, the State must adhere to these Federal requirements in order to avoid the fiscal and other consequences of non-compliance. The recommendations related to federally-required assessments are offered in the context of this current limitation.

The next sections of the report discuss the value of State assessments, the value of local assessments, the key findings underlying the recommendations, and specific recommendations regarding the current assessment system. Finally, a recommendation for the future is provided for consideration by the legislature.

### **The Value of State Assessments**

The Task Force agreed that it was important to capture the values of a State assessment system as articulated by Task Force members and the public input received. Although State assessment should never be the sole source of student achievement information, it can provide information

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on student growth and achievement that is important to policymakers, educators, parents and the public at large.

It is important to note that there was a difference of opinion among Task Force members about the value of State versus local assessments in providing information about individual student growth. Some believed that local assessments can adequately provide information about individual student growth while others believed that State assessments could better serve that role.

The consensus of the Task Force was that State assessments support the following values.

- 1) Statewide assessments hold policymakers, districts and schools accountable for growth and achievement of students and provide information about the effectiveness of schools and districts.** The issue of accountability is a major driving force behind the statewide assessment system. Not only should this system provide information on improvement of effectiveness of districts and schools, but it should also provide valuable information to policymakers around effectiveness of reforms and initiatives directed at the State level.
- 2) Statewide assessments ensure that there is an infrastructure in place to inform all stakeholders of how students achieve compared to their peers, how school and district achievement compare to one another, and how specific subgroups compare to one another.** There are many perspectives on the issue of the intent of State assessments to measure achievement at the student level. Some Task Force members believe Statewide assessments provide a mechanism for system evaluation, while others feel that the comparability of student growth and proficiency levels are equally important.
- 3) Statewide assessments provide a way to measure academic growth.** The Task Force values the measurement of growth. Measuring districts solely on attainment of proficiency undermines districts' current efforts to improve and fails to recognize the progress underway to close achievement gaps. There are multiple ways in which to use assessments to measure growth. While Colorado has developed a growth model centered around Median Growth Percentile (MGP), many other models may exist and should be considered as a future assessment system is considered. There are various ways in which growth can be measured.
- 4) Statewide assessments provide a set of data points that can be included in a comprehensive body of evidence about student achievement to inform district and school programming.** Some Task Force members also find the State data to be extremely useful at the classroom level. The usefulness of the State assessment system to inform instruction for individual students depends upon how data are used and combined with other measurements at the local level. While the Statewide assessment system is an important measure, the Task Force recognizes how critical local initiatives are to ensuring that multiple data points are considered.

- 5) **State and local assessments have both unique and overlapping purposes. Both levels of assessment add to a comprehensive body of evidence that can be used to inform school and district programming and policymakers.** It is critical that policymakers understand the differences between summative and formative assessment data. State assessments provide summative data on student mastery and retention of skills taught during instruction. Formative data, gathered at the local level, allow for real-time adjustment of instruction and ensure that individual student needs are met. A balanced system recognizes the need for both types of data.
  
- 6) **Public input and surveys made it clear that something must be done to reduce the financial, time, and logistical burden of our statewide assessment system.** The overwhelming feedback was that the burden of the State and local assessment system was significant. The length of time, the financial costs, and the burden on districts and charter schools of the statewide assessment system is considered high. The Task Force acknowledged that the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments have yet to be fully implemented and therefore valid feedback on them does not exist.

### **The Value of Local Assessments**

As described above, local assessments play a critical role in capturing real-time student learning and must be part of any effective system. That being said, a balance must be achieved between both local and State assessments to limit the impact of testing on instructional time. According to surveys, there is a higher value placed on local assessments than State assessments for purposes of improving instruction. The following value statements reflect the consensus view of the Task Force.

1. **Local assessments can provide comparative information at the local level (classroom, students, schools).** Effective local assessment systems that provide comparable data across students, classrooms and schools can be useful at the State level.
  
2. **State and local assessments have both unique and overlapping purposes. Both levels of assessment add to a comprehensive body of evidence that can be used to inform school and district programming and policymakers.** As Stated above, it is critical that policymakers understand the differences between summative and formative assessment data. State assessments provide summative data on student mastery and retention of skills taught during instruction. Formative data, gathered at the local level, allow for real-time adjustment of instruction and ensure that individual student needs are met. A balanced system must recognize the need for both types of data.



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- 3. Local assessments are used to improve instruction for individual student achievement and growth as well as to improve programming and building design.** Local assessments are important to gaining timely information about student achievement and performance. It is through real-time assessments conducted at the local level that adjustments can be made to maximize student learning. Such information is critical to improving both instruction and programming within the school or district.
- 4. Local assessments provide timely results that can be used to inform instruction.** It is important to note that the time delay in receiving the results from State assessments increases the need for strong local assessments so that decisions can be made rapidly to adjust for student learning needs.
- 5. Public input and surveys indicated that local assessments are a part of the overall testing burden and we encourage local districts to examine the purpose and use of their local assessments.** It was clear from the public input that there exists a degree of misunderstanding about which assessments are mandated by the State, which are mandated by districts, and which are administered based on school-level decisions. The Task Force encourages local districts to consider the value of their local system and its benefits to ensure that balanced systems exist.
- 6. The State should not legislate what districts/charters should do in terms of local assessments.** The Task Force recommends that no State mandates exist on the issue of local assessments. It is critical that districts develop their own systems that provide them with the information they need to drive student learning and instructional improvements.
- 7. The Task Force supports using the mechanisms in place to provide resources and technical assistance to help districts analyze their use of local and State assessment data to improve instruction.** While many districts have effective systems of measuring students using formative, real-time data, CDE should continue to provide resources and technical assistance to support districts in effectively using both local and State assessment data to improve instruction.

### **Key Findings Underlying Task Force Recommendations**

As outlined above, the Task Force considered a wide range of research reports, input from CDE and USDOE, and public input in formulating recommendations. The following are findings from these materials that inform the Task Force recommendations.

- **Colorado's assessment system consists of State-mandated assessments, as well as local assessments that include district-mandated, school-level, and classroom-based assessments.** Each assessment has its own purpose, and each provides data that can be used to create a body of evidence for measuring the proficiency and growth of students, schools, and districts. The distinction among the types of assessments is frequently confusing to families, policymakers, and the general public.

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- **Stakeholder input reflected clear support for taking action to reduce the financial, time, and logistical burden of Colorado’s statewide assessment system.** Stakeholder input gathered during the Task Force process reinforced that the current system of State and local assessments creates financial, time, and logistical burdens on students, educators, schools, and districts. Stakeholders strongly recommended that changes be made to reduce these burdens. Public support for assessments in general may increase if current public concerns about testing can be addressed.
- **Stakeholder input indicated that local assessments are a part of the overall testing burden.** The Task Force encourages local districts to examine the purpose and use of their local assessments; however, the State should not legislate what districts/charters should do in terms of local assessments. The Task Force supports using State support mechanisms already in place to provide resources and technical assistance that can help districts analyze local and State assessment data to improve instruction. Stakeholder input indicated that a higher value is placed on local assessments than State assessments for the purposes of improving instruction.
- **Current Federal assessment requirements and the penalties for not complying limit the flexibility that can be offered to districts and schools in the short-term.** Stakeholder input reinforced the notion that flexibility should be built into the statewide assessment system where appropriate.
- **Stakeholder input indicated concerns about the implementation of new technology-based assessment system.** Computer-based testing presents both challenges and benefits for an assessment system. Providing adequate technology capacity at the school and district level is among the challenges of implementing a State assessment system.

### **Specific Recommendations on Current Assessments**

All recommendations that apply to schools and districts also apply to charter schools even if this is not specified in the language of the recommendation. There are no recommendations that apply only to charter schools or that exclude charter schools.

#### **1. Recommendations for the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS): Grades 3-8 and High School**

- a) **Eliminate State-mandated tests in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.** The 12<sup>th</sup> grade exam lacks relevance for students and the data provided on student performance is not available in time to be of benefit to instruction. This is a logical area in which to reduce the testing burden.

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- b) Eliminate State-mandated tests in 11<sup>th</sup> grade except for a college entrance exam and offer state-funded CMAS English Language Arts (ELA) and Math as an option for districts and schools.** One college entrance exam (currently ACT) should be the only State-mandated test in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. This will help reduce the testing burden and duplication of assessments. The Task Force understands that this recommendation includes a tradeoff between the amount of student achievement data available and the time spent on assessment but believes reduction in time outweighs the benefits of increased data.
- c) Fulfill high school Science assessment requirements with an augmented college entrance exam.** If possible, meet the high school Science assessment requirement with an augmented college-entrance exam (currently the ACT). This augmented exam would include additional questions aligned to Colorado Academic Standards that are not covered in the current exam. As a one-year exception, allow 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the class of 2016 to retake the ACT at State expense, inclusive of the augmented science assessment, as soon as it is available to ensure that this cohort of students complies with the Federal requirement.
- d) Consider whether to continue State-mandated ELA and Math exams at 9<sup>th</sup> grade.** This is an area in which Task Force members were evenly split and could not reach a consensus. The two points of view are detailed below.

  - i)** Some believe that the State should fund *optional testing* for 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and Math exams. Districts and/or schools should have the option of administering the State CMAS tests or using locally chosen assessments to measure ELA and Math growth.
  - ii)** Some believe that the State should continue to fund and mandate ELA and Math assessments to provide sufficient data to inform the Colorado Growth Model and to provide individual students and their parents comparable information on their individual growth and proficiency.
- e) Consider whether to continue State-mandated Social Studies tests in 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades.** This is also an area in which Task Force members were evenly split and could not reach a consensus. The two points of view are detailed below.

  - i)** The State should fund optional testing for 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies exams.
  - ii)** The State should continue to fund and mandate 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies exams.
- f) Administer ELA and Math CMAS assessments at 10<sup>th</sup> grade to fulfill State and Federal requirements.** The Federal government requires all students to be tested in ELA and Math once in high school. The Task Force believes this mandatory testing should occur in 10<sup>th</sup> grade in order to provide the greatest value to teachers and administrators.

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- g) Hold all schools and districts harmless from the consequences associated with School and District Performance (including for low participation rates) through 2015- 2016 school year.** During the move to a new set of tests, districts and schools should be allowed to provide information to the State through the current process to show that they have improved. As SB10-191 is out of the scope of the HB14-1202 Task Force, this recommendation does not refer to the requirements of the teacher evaluation law.
- h) Provide paper and pencil options for all tests.** Paper and pencil administration may result in more errors, stray marks, and bubbling of wrong answers, but this is a needed option for districts and schools who do not have adequate technology infrastructure. Testing vendors should provide practice materials for the paper and pencil option.
- i) Proactively address parent and student opt outs.** Legislation called for the Task Force to investigate the issue of parents/guardians opting their children out of State-mandated testing. There is a need for a statement regarding parent refusal, its implications for schools and districts, and how a parent may exercise it. We recommend that the Office of Legislative Services provide this factual information to the public.

**2. READ Act Recommendations**

- a) Kindergarten students should be allowed take the first READ Act assessment within 90 days of the beginning of the school’s calendar year rather than immediately upon enrollment in the fall. In the situation where a school or district chooses to wait until the middle of the year to administer the first READ Act assessment, then the literacy component of the School Readiness Assessment should be given in the fall. In either case, a school or district should not be required to administer both the literacy component of a School Readiness Assessment and the READ Act assessment to Kindergarten students in the fall and, instead, should only administer one of the two.** Requiring both the READ Act assessment and the literacy component of the School Readiness Assessment of Kindergarten students in the fall is burdensome to the child as well as the educator. In addition, information gained from the READ Act assessment and the School Readiness assessment may be redundant. Finally, because Kindergarten is the introduction to formal schooling for our youngest learners, it is essential that we provide these students with time to acclimate to the expectations and culture of a classroom.
- b) A student who demonstrates grade-level proficiency on the initial READ Act assessment should not be required to take further READ Act assessments for the remainder of that school year.** Once a student demonstrates grade-level proficiency, he or she is unlikely to fall below grade level during that school year. Local and classroom assessments should be used to monitor the growth and achievement of those students who are already working at grade-level and for whom the READ Act assessments are less relevant for their growth and achievement.

- c) **A student who does not demonstrate grade level proficiency on the initial READ Act assessment should be required to take a second assessment within 60 days *prior to being designated as having a significant reading deficiency*.** Currently, students who do not demonstrate grade level proficiency must be retested within 30 days. This short time frame does not provide adequate instructional time for the student and is a significant burden to the educator. This recommendation maintains the expectation that a school team will have two data points prior to designating a significant reading deficiency, but also provides a more realistic assessment administration window.

### **3. School Readiness Assessment Recommendations**

- a) **School Readiness Assessments should require only the assessment of the 6 domains included in SB 08-212 (CAP4K): social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics.** Some current tools on the assessment menu available for districts and schools cover more domains than named in statute and can include up to 11 domains for assessment. While the information for all domains can be valuable, the reduced assessments will increase instructional time.
- b) **The School Readiness Assessment should be required only in the fall. Additional administrations of the assessment should be optional for districts or schools and funded by the State.** Schools can administer the READ Act assessments and other tools to monitor growth and achievement in literacy and other local assessments for the remaining domains throughout the school year. Understanding children’s readiness across multiple domains that reflect the needs of the whole child is vital information upon entry into Kindergarten. Best practice is to progress monitor using a valid, reliable and developmentally appropriate assessment tool throughout the year and, therefore, districts and schools that choose to use the school readiness tools throughout the year should be supported. That said, progress monitoring and supporting growth over the course of the school year is something that does not require a mandated administration of the school readiness assessment multiple times throughout the year and, therefore, districts and schools should only be asked to administer the assessment in the fall of Kindergarten.
- c) **As noted in the recommendations regarding the READ Act, a school or district should not be required to administer both the literacy component of a School Readiness Assessment and the READ Act to Kindergarten students in the fall and, instead, should only administer one of the two.** Requiring both the READ Act assessment and the literacy component of the School Readiness Assessment in the fall of Kindergarten is burdensome to the child as well as the educator. Information gained from the READ Act assessment and the School Readiness assessment may be redundant. Kindergarten is the introduction to formal schooling for our youngest learners. It is essential that we provide these students with time to acclimate to the expectations and culture of a classroom.

- d) **Schools and districts should not be required to create both a School Readiness Plan and a separate READ Act Plan for the same child.** Streamlining this information will avoid the challenge of asking educators to create two separate plans and will provide parents with a single plan to help guide their child's growth in the Kindergarten year.
- e) **Schools and districts should continue to be allowed to choose a School Readiness Assessment from the menu of valid, reliable, developmentally appropriate tools approved by the State Board of Education. CDE should actively work to continue to expand the menu available choices for schools and districts.** A menu of developmentally appropriate, approved assessments will support the diverse needs of our districts and schools. Creating a State Board-approved menu reflects an approach to assessment that provides choice and flexibility without sacrificing validity, reliability and fidelity when assessing the whole child.

#### **4. ACCESS Recommendations**

- a) **Beginning English language learners who have been in a Colorado school less than one year should not be required to take any of the State-mandated ELA assessments. These students should take the assessment in their second year of attending a Colorado school, but their performance should not be included in accountability measures for both of their first two years in a Colorado school.** Beginning English language learners require time in school to acquire language. They should be allowed this time without assessment and/or accountability measures for the specified timeframes. Including them in the assessment program in their second year (but exempting their performance from accountability measures) allows for a baseline to be used for growth metrics in subsequent years without unintentionally penalizing schools and districts for student performance too early in an English language learner's formal schooling experience in this country.

#### **5. Technology Recommendations**

- a) **Continue to allow districts, charters, and schools within districts to choose non-technology based options (paper and pencil) during K-3 and for READ Act.** Public comments and surveys indicated concern about the use of technology in assessments. Some districts already have adequate technology infrastructure for instruction and assessment, while other districts are still building that infrastructure. This recommendation supports the principle of flexibility.
- b) **Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, allow districts, charters, and schools within districts to choose non-technology based options for all tests.** The rationale for this recommendation is the same as for recommendation 5a.
- c) **Consider funding for technology infrastructure.** Although it was clear from the input and surveys that funding for technology infrastructure to support assessments is viewed

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as an obstacle to many, the Task Force was divided on how to address this issue. The two views are detailed below.

- i) Some believe that the legislature should provide designated funding for technology infrastructure. All districts should receive an allocation, regardless of their current need, because many districts have already funded this infrastructure through other means. Districts should be required to provide assurances that, with the additional funds, they can provide the necessary infrastructure to support the assessment system.
- ii) Some believe that technology funding is part of the larger issue of school funding and should not be addressed through a separate funding stream. There are many financial issues facing districts. Technology for assessments should not necessarily receive priority over other needs.

### **Future Policy Considerations**

The Task Force spent most of its time and energy focused on how the State legislature might take immediate action to reduce the burden of State assessments in the context of current Federal law and policy conditions. Task Force members recognize that the short-term actions recommended neither fully address the depths of public concern about the current State and local assessment system nor fully capture the potential of a balanced and aligned system. The time required to develop a robust set of long-term recommendations goes beyond that available to this Task Force. The Task Force recommends that long-term recommendations be tackled by a newly-established Advisory Board that includes greater direct representation from the racially and socioeconomically diverse populations of the State and that is provided resources to accomplish the task.

The Task Force identified difficult tensions that the Advisory Board should strive to resolve as it considers the appropriate components of a statewide assessment system. These are outlined below.

1. To what extent should emphasis be given to State assessments relative to locally chosen/designed assessments? What's the appropriate balance?
2. To what extent should State assessments focus on district and school accountability? To what extent should State assessments be used to identify individual student growth and proficiency? To what extent are local assessments and processes able to achieve this task?
3. How much flexibility can districts and schools have to choose their own assessments and still retain the principles of accountability, comparability, growth and equity?
4. When a parent or guardian exercises his or her right to refuse to have their student participate in an assessment, how should this be managed by districts and schools? How should this be factored into district and school accountability?
5. In light of concerns about technology-based tests including equity, access, and developmental appropriateness, to what extent should future assessment systems be technology-based versus administered through paper and pencil?

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## Appendix

A copy of the complete Appendix has been provided to the Joint Education Committee with this Report. A PDF version of these documents has been provided electronically to all members of the Joint Education Committee and is posted on the Task Force web page at <http://www.cde.State.co.us/cdedepcom/taskforce>.

1. Task Force Process Documents
  - a. HB14-1202 Legislation
  - b. Task Force Roles and Responsibilities
2. Colorado Assessment Implementation Study, WestEd
3. Study of Assessment Use in Colorado Districts and Schools, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) and associated materials
  - a. Solicitation DQ-ER-CDE-14-015
  - b. Response to Solicitation DQ-ER-CDE-14-015 by APA
  - c. Final Contract and Scope of Work
  - d. Associated Review Documents
4. Information provided by Colorado Department of Education and U.S. Department of Education
  - a. Background Information on State Assessment System
  - b. Responses to Task Force Questions from CDE and US DOE
5. Public Input
  - a. Comments and Reports Received by Email
  - b. Notes from Public Hearings
  - c. Sign-in Sheets from Public Meetings



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**This report is respectfully submitted by:**




Dan Snowberger, Chairman  
District Administrator



Adele Bravo, School Teacher



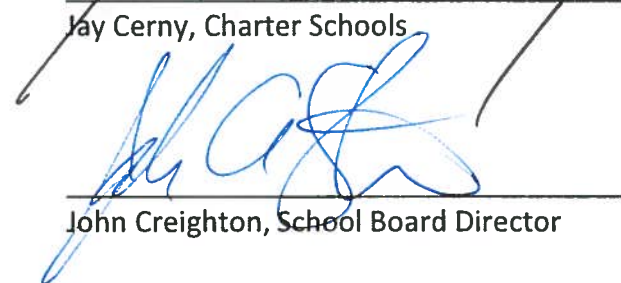
Donna Lynne, Business Representative



Jay Cerny, Charter Schools



Syna Morgan, District Administrator



John Creighton, School Board Director



Luke Ragland, Business Representative



Bethany Drosendahl, Parent




Ilana Spiegel, Parent



Lisa Escárcega, District Administrator



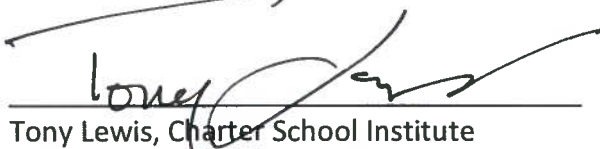
Dane Stickney, School Teacher



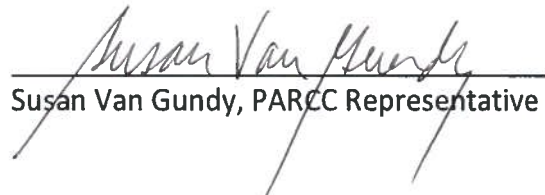
Bill Jaeger, Organization that represents low performing students



Nancy Tellez, School Board Director



Tony Lewis, Charter School Institute



Susan Van Gundy, PARCC Representative