

# Assessment Content Quality

## Setting the Stage

The accountability requirements of federal education law are such that states must establish their own content standards, specifying what students should know and be able to do; develop assessments linked to those content standards; and establish performance standards, specifying the level to which the content standards should be mastered. Across the states there is considerable variability in the specificity and number of content standards. States typically include more content standards to guide instruction than are included in the assessments. There are a variety of reasons for this. Some content standards are more appropriately assessed through extended project work and/or classroom-based assessments. Others may require periodic teacher assessment or teacher observation. There must be a clear and unequivocal alignment between test questions and content standards. High-quality content is essential to valid and reliable measurement of learning standards. A common understanding of what each content standard means is the starting point for the development of high-quality, instructionally valid assessments that meet industry standards for excellence.

## Discussion

As test publishers work with customers to meet their needs, the quality of the test questions and the extent to which each test question aligns to a content standard are paramount. Once the purpose of the assessment has been established, the processes of building a test include deciding the following:

- Which content standards to measure,
- What reporting categories are needed to support effective instruction,
- What kinds of test questions best address a particular content standard and
- How challenging the test for a particular grade level should be.

These decisions are made collaboratively, ensuring that customers' needs are fully supported. To further ensure instructional validity, these decisions are then reviewed and approved by educators. Many states invite classroom teachers to review test questions for appropriateness. Many states also involve classroom teachers in setting performance level standards. The procedures followed are documented and made public, reflecting best practice in the testing industry. Further, documentation of the process ensures quality and validity.

## Conclusion

The intent underlying the development of standards-based assessments is to provide information to support instruction and optimize student learning so that student achievement on those standards will be reflected in the assessment results.