GORDON COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION

Edmund W. Gordon, Chairperson

In the 20th century in the United States we saw remarkable changes occur in the conduct and experience of education. We have seen the processes of education move from a focus on transferring knowledge and techniques from more sophisticated to less experienced and sophisticated learners to the encouragement of knowledge and technique construction by students themselves. We have seen our schools move from an essentially sorting function to a concern with the development of the differential characteristics of a diverse student body to the possibility of the achievement of “common core” standards of academic mastery. These common standards will increasingly need to be met, through education, in the face of an increasing shift in social demographics and cultural cartography that pose challenges and tensions in educational assessment. The constantly encroaching force of anti-positivist and post-modernist thought has challenged the authority of the expertise and the validity of the knowledge which for so long were the currency of educated persons. Advances in the sciences of pedagogy and the technologies of education continue to foster revolutionary changes in educational policy and practice. While being threatened for space in the curriculum by the demand that the STEM subjects be privileged, the Arts and Humanities continue to compete for attention as reminders of the importance of the affective domain, and the aesthetic, agentic and character logical ends of education. Some observers predict that this proneness to change will continue in education as we move through the twenty first century. Sir Kenneth Robinson sees the “three Rs” (“reading, riting and rithmatic”) being replaced by the “three Cs” – conceiving, communicating and collaborating, as the paradigms for education shift. Professor Herve Varenne sees the institutional focus of education shifting from schools to economic, political and social intercourse, where the outcomes of education are considerably more diverse, but equally facilitative of adaptive competence. Professors Lauren Resnick and Michael Martinez envision emerging academic curriculums where the cultivation of intellect and the nurturance of knowledge acquisition skills, critical comparative analysis, hermeneutical thought and knowledge production compete with content mastery as the ends of pedagogy. Should these predictions and others prove to be only partially accurate, the best of what we currently know how to do in psycho-educational assessment will be insufficient to the changing demands of education by mid-twenty first century.

Such speculation concerning future changes in education, some of which we see good reason to anticipate, have led us to endorse the notion of a special ETS initiative focused on the future of educational assessment in mid-21st century. The idea is complementary to some of the planning and projects currently underway at ETS. We are agreed that the new initiative and the work should be conducted in collaboration between the several operating units of ETS, but independent of all of the production units of ETS. Every effort should be made to establish and maintain the autonomy of the implementers of this idea independent from the production and marketing operations of ETS, so as to avoid any sense that this work serves the private or special interests of the Educational Testing Service. Given the critical importance of this initiative, we are in agreement that it should be identified with the Office of the President of ETS.

Proposed is the creation of a two years study group on the future of assessment in education. It is proposed that the study group be convened as the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in K-12 Education, with the charge to consider what educational assessment

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1 In consultation with Pascal D. Forgione, Scott F. Nelson and Michael T. Nettles
should be and be capable of doing now and through the mid 21st Century. The Commission should decide and recommend how educational tests and assessments in the 21st Century should be the same as and different from the past and present in terms of:

- Purposes
- Structure and design
- Modes of delivery and scoring
- Uses of the instruments and assessment data
- Management and interpretation of the program, student and assessment data.

Mission

The mission of the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in K-12 Education is to: 1) study the best of extant policy, practice and technology in educational assessment; 2) consider our best estimates of what education and assessment in K-12 education will become and will need; and 3) generate recommendations concerning the design of future models for and uses of K-12 educational assessment to support the demands and needs of education as these varied needs can be anticipated to be in the next quarter century and beyond. The Commission will evaluate the current state of K-12 educational assessment and the uses of its data, and explore ways in which emerging developments in pedagogical, cognitive and technological sciences can be leveraged in the design of educational assessment instruments, procedures and systems that are more powerful accelerants of student learning, effective teaching and educational system management. The Commission is asked to review and critique the best of what we know and know how to do even as we anticipate what we will need to know how to do in service of the goal of educational excellence and equity by mid 21st century. The Commission is expected to conduct its inquiries and deliberations with wide public participation and complete transparency.

Suggested members of the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment

1. Aber, Lawrence
2. Albert, Bruce
3. Berliner, David
4. Bollinger, Lee
5. Frist, Robert (Co-chair)
6. Gomez, Louis
7. Gordon, Edmund (Chair)
8. Beverley Hall
9. Jackson, Shirley (Co-chair) or Freeman Hrabowski or Colin Powell
10. Martinez, Michael
11. Moll, Louis
12. Negroponte, Nicholas
13. Petz-Paget, Nancy
14. Paysant, Thomas
15. Price, Hugh
16. Ravitch, Diane
17. Shalala, Donna
18. Sheppard, Lorrie
We have in mind a second group of consultants to the Commission, most of whom will represent specialized areas of expertise and/or special approaches to or models for change. Examples are:

1. Jamal Abedi
2. Russell Almond
3. Eleanor Armour-Thomas
4. Eva Baker
5. Henry Braun
6. Tony Bryk
7. Madhabi Chatterji
8. Dennis Culhane
9. Linda Darling-Hammond
10. John Fantuzzo
11. Roy Freedly
12. Angela Glover-Blackwell
13. James Greeno
14. Kris Gutierrez
15. Andrew Ho
16. Charlie Lewis
17. Robert Linn
18. Raymond McDermott
19. Shael Polakow-Suransky
20. Steven Raudenbush
21. Claude Steele
22. Robert Sternberg
23. Herve Varenne
24. Randi Weingarten
25. John Willett
26. Dillon Willms (Spelling needs to be checked)
27. Mark Wilson
28. Dennie Palmer Wolf
29. Constance Yowell

Questions

The work of the Commission could be guided by such questions as the following:

1. What purposes need be served by educational assessment in the 21st Century?
2. What is the current state of the art with respect to the capacity of the assessment enterprise to address these purposes?
3. Limitations of what we know how to do and what problems in pedagogy lend themselves to better solution through the application of psychometric and socio-metric theory and technology?
4. What potential capacities can be made possible by the combined powers of technologic tools for addressing persistent and emergent problems in the design, management and supervision of teaching and learning transitions?

5. What possibilities exists for making educational assessment data, instruments and processes more accessible to a broader range of users, such as, students, families, teachers, tutors, supervisors and lay person citizens.

6. What possibilities exist for making assessment technologies readily accessible for self-assessment through electronic devices such as computers, smart phones, PDAs and game consoles?

7. Assessment in education in this century will need to be appropriate to the increasing tendency to think of education comprehensively, i.e., as not coterminous with schooling and broadly inclusive of the variety of settings where teaching and learning transactions occur. This concern may require:

8. How do we best address the differentiated functions of assessment - accountability, inform instruction, inform learning, monitor progress, communicate to and with multiple audiences?

9. Can we reduce the demands on student time spent in assessment and the stress associated with high stakes assessment encounters by embedding assessment in teaching and learning and distilling data for accountability from records of teaching and learning transactions?

10. How can the data from educational assessment be managed relationally with educational program data, human services data, staff and student data and the use of real-time analytics to better inform teaching, learning and the pursuit of equity?

Organization, Operationalization and Staffing

The Commission, under the leadership of its chairpersons, will determine its agenda and the nature of its work, however, we anticipate that the work of the Commission will consist of:

1. Consultations between Chairperson, Commission members and consultants
2. Chairperson will develop an Issues and Propositional Inventory to guide the deliberations of the Commission
3. Commission Deliberations and Public Hearings
4. Chairperson will Commission Several Studies: State of the Art in Educational Assessment; A Vision of the Future for Education; Experimental and Emerging Uses of Technologies in Education and Assessment; and an Inventory of Implications of these Projections for Assessment in Education
5. Deliberations
6. Commission members and consultants will develop Position Statements and Recommendations concerning selected issues
7. Deliberations
8. Public Discussion of Recommendations
9. Deliberations
10. Chairperson will prepare Report, "Toward a System of Assessment in Education for the 21st Century"
11. Commission members will review, communicate in writing and consultation with Chairperson concerning the report and recommendations. Ultimately Commission will be asked to approve of the report and/or prepare dissenting opinions.

Getting started: It is anticipated that the first two months of this initiative will be utilized to recruit and confirm the participation of members of the Commission. During this period the Chair and the President of ETS or his designated representative will visit with potential members of the Commission to explain what we are about and to confirm their participation. These visits will be preceded by a formal letter of invitation and such phone calls as may be deemed appropriate. In these visits the Chair will also be soliciting ideas for the issues that will ultimately inform the agenda of the Commission. When the two Co-chairs have been confirmed and at least 12 members have agreed to serve, ETS will issue a press release to the public and an internal communication to the ETS community announcing the creation of the Commission. (The internal communication will have been preceded by consultations between Chairperson Gordon and McDonald, Lawrence and other senior members of the ETS staff.) During this period Chairperson Gordon will also consult with selected technical experts, many of whom will be asked to serve on the technical advisory committee to the Commission, and selected leadership persons in the field of education, i.e., Secretary of Education Duncan, Council of Chief State School Officers, Council of Great Cities Schools, the heads of the NEA, UFT and other leadership persons in education and measurement.

Within the first 90 days of initiation, a call to the initial meeting of the Commission will be issued along with a suggested tentative agenda of the issues that will shape the Commission’s work and a work plan which will guide the operation of the Commission. Care will be taken to communicate the Chair’s guidance to the Commission members in such a manner as to leave ample opportunity for input from the members and for changes in the plan of operation.

Staffing:
- Chairperson of the Commission and Study Director, Edmund W. Gordon
- Advisor to the Chairperson,
- Consultant Panel of Selected Experts in Relevant Areas of Specialization
- Executive Secretary to the Commission, Paola C. Heincke
- Administrative support and Recording of Proceedings
- Communication Specialist

We anticipate that the Commission's Report could include such items as the following:

1. What is the State of the Art of assessment in K – 12 Education and the Use of Such Data? A report from the ETS Research and Test Development Divisions;
2. What is the Knowledge Base of Emerging Policy and Practice? A review of the literature re experimental and emerging assessment policies, technologies and practices in assessment;
3. What is the Likely Pedagogical Context for Assessment in Education by Mid-Twenty First Century? A vision of the future of K - 12 education: Changing paradigms for K - 12 education
4. What are the Implications for the future of assessment in education in Mid-twentieth Century USA?
5. What are the Conclusions, Findings and Recommendations of the Commission re. Policy; Practice; and Technology (instrumentation and procedures)
In considering the possible impact of the Commission's work we can anticipate four possible areas of influence:

- Inform the field and the public about the need and possibilities for change in Education and change in the place and functions of assessment in education;
- Increase public awareness and knowledge about assessment as an integral component of education and the possibilities for change in assessment practice;
- Inform long term planning and product development at ETS and in psychometrics; and
- Ultimately change policy and practice with respect to the capacity of assessment in education to inform and improve the achievement of excellence and equity in education.

Budget Implications: See separate Excel document.

EWG: December 21, 2010