

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS



N2KN: Need to Know Now

Volume I-2019: Issue 7 Model Cornerstone Assessments

How can Model Cornerstone Assessments Inform Teaching & Learning?

In education, what is chosen for assessment signals what is valued. In other words, the evidence that is collected tells students what is most important for them to learn. What is not assessed is likely to be regarded as unimportant. Sample model cornerstone assessments are provided within the standards to illustrate the type of evidence needed to show attainment of desired learning. Standards-based curriculum and associated instruction can then be designed “backward” from key assessments that reflect the desired outcomes.

Jay McTighe (2011), describes the characteristics of cornerstone assessments as follows:

- curriculum embedded (as opposed to externally imposed);
- recur over the grades, becoming increasingly sophisticated over time;
- establish authentic contexts for performance;
- assess understanding and transfer via genuine performance;
- integrate 21st century skills (e.g., critical thinking, technology use, teamwork) with subject area content;
- evaluate performance with established rubrics;
- engage students in meaningful learning while encouraging the best teaching;
- provide content for a student’s portfolio (so that they graduate with a résumé of demonstrated accomplishments rather than simply a transcript of courses taken).

The term cornerstone is meant to suggest that just as a cornerstone anchors a building, these assessments should anchor the curriculum through the assessment of important performance tasks demonstrating acquired content knowledge and skills. Their authenticity and complexity is what distinguishes them from the selected-response items found on many tests. The model cornerstone assessments are intended to engage students in applying knowledge and skills in authentic and relevant contexts. They call for higher-order thinking and habits of mind in order to achieve successful results.

Cornerstone tasks serve as more than just a means of gathering assessment evidence. These tasks are, by design, “worth teaching to” because they embody valuable learning goals and worthy accomplishments. The illustrative cornerstone assessments included in the standards reflect genuine and recurring performance tasks that become increasingly sophisticated across the grades. Just as keels protect boats from aimless drift, these tasks are designed to prevent “curriculum drift” by helping educators and learners always keep the ends—lifelong goals—in mind.

The standards are built with the expectation that schools or districts will value the understanding and transfer of knowledge and skills that will come with a standards-based curriculum in the arts and therefore, acknowledge that they are important curricular goals. The goal of NCCAS is to promote the inclusion of cornerstone assessments so that the great majority of classroom- and district-level assessments focus on rich performance tasks that demand transfer.

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Why It Matters to You

This paradigm shift in measuring student learning in the arts offers a method of collecting relevant and reliable evidence of what students truly understand and know how to do, for it is only when students are able to apply their learning thoughtfully and flexibly to a new situation that true understanding of the content is demonstrated.

Things to Consider

Model cornerstone assessments are examples of ways that students:

- bring the standards to life by illustrating the demonstrations of desired learning and the criteria by which student performances should be judged.
- utilize authentic performance tasks which require that students engage deeply with content knowledge and skills.
- require that students apply the cognitive and physical actions by which arts learning and artmaking are realized (i.e., Creating, Presenting/Performing/Producing, Responding, and Connecting).
- provide the basis for collecting benchmarked student work, which illustrates the nature and quality of student achievement along the continuum envisioned in the standards.

Reflection Questions

- In what ways do the model cornerstone assessments help illuminate student achievement within standards-based instructional practice?
- How can model cornerstone assessments be used to anchor the curriculum in key learning embedded in the standards?

Resources for Attending to Access

The central purposes of education standards are to identify the learning that we want for all students and to drive improvement in the system that delivers that learning. Every student should have access to instruction in all art forms, which should be represented within the curricula of every school across the nation, and students should develop competence in all four Artistic Processes through instruction in each art form. [Opportunity to Learn standards](#) help encourage equitable delivery of arts education by outlining the resources necessary for students to succeed, illustrating a continuum of programming, allowing for program review, and articulating the basis for a comprehensive arts education.

In addition, the National Core Arts Standards website provides guidance on attending to the instructional needs of all learners with resources for teaching [exceptional children](#). Additional resources may be found on the National Association for Gifted Children website; which offers a [Position Statement](#) on Arts Education for Gifted and Talented Students.

Recommended Actions You Can Take

- Develop assessment strategies that enable students to demonstrate arts literacy and fluency following the example of model cornerstone assessments.
- Advocate for professional learning about model cornerstone assessments as a pedagogical tool.
- Ensure that arts educators understand the importance of well-designed assessments to anchor the curriculum around demonstrations of key learning.
- Utilize student performance data collected through model cornerstone assessments to inform instruction and re-instruction.

“What is assessed signals *what* is important to learn. How it is assessed signals *how* it should be learned.”

- Jay McTighe

Links

Use the links below to explore examples of model cornerstone assessments for Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts.

- <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/mca/dance>
Model cornerstone assessments for dance
- <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/mca/media-arts>
Model cornerstone assessments for media arts
- <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/music-mcas>
Model cornerstone assessments for music
- <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/mca/theatre>
Model cornerstone assessments for theatre
- <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/mca/visual-arts>
Model cornerstone assessments for visual arts



National Coalition for **CORE ARTS** Standards