



Advocating for Inclusive Assessments to Supportive Audiences

Many advocates and decision-makers who are supportive of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts generally may be unaware of the need for inclusive assessments or require additional information to be convinced of the importance of advocating on this issue. They may not know, for instance, that previous attempts to make assessments more inclusive, though well-intentioned, eliminated any cultural references and defaulted to Whiteness. The following guide will help advocates make the case for inclusive assessments to a generally supportive audience.

Crafting Your Message

When developing your message, there are three core principles to keep in mind:

1. Connect Your Argument to Your Audience's Values

In engaging with any audience, it is important to speak their language. Tailor your argument directly to your audience's values, keeping in mind that they may differ from group to group. For example, a business group that is supportive of assessments as a tool for a better-educated workforce may be unaware of the inherent biases in current tests and be amenable to arguments about more accurate results. A policymaker who is supportive of inclusive curriculum, but opposed to assessments generally, may be open to arguments that cast inclusive assessments as the next step in providing an inclusive curriculum. Those primarily concerned with other education issues may be receptive to information about how the more accurate information provided by inclusive assessments can support advocacy on all education issues.

2. Define the Problem by Making It Personal

In addition to general arguments about the need for inclusive assessments, advocates should have at the ready stories about what a lack of inclusivity looks like. Personal stories are more memorable than general arguments. Students can discuss how non-inclusive assessments have affected their ability to demonstrate their knowledge in school, while parents and teachers can outline how non-inclusive assessments have impacted their faith in the quality and usefulness of assessment data. Having students, parents, or teachers speak about their experiences can be a powerful way to make the problem real and local for your audience.

3. Have a Clear Call to Action

Recognize that previous attempts at inclusivity in assessments were well-intentioned but didn't work; by stripping cultural references from assessments, they defaulted to the dominant White culture. Your argument should end with a call to action that is clear, precise, and relatively simple to implement. Examples can be found in the report on inclusive assessments. Your specific call to action will depend on your audience's priorities and decision-making power.

Sample Arguments

- **Inclusive assessments are an important tool to further educational equity goals and support an inclusive curriculum**
 - Students of color deserve to see themselves in assessments. This is already true for White students, and what's done for some students should be done for all students.
 - Students are more engaged when they see people like themselves in school materials. That leads to sharper critical thinking skills and state assessment scores; higher rates of course completion, graduation, and school attendance; and improved self-esteem and well-being.
 - Inclusive, culturally affirming assessments similarly make students feel more engaged, which allows them to better demonstrate the full scope of their knowledge and abilities.
 - Inclusive assessments should be a goal in addition to, not in lieu of, having a culturally representative curriculum and teaching honest history.
 - The student population of the United States has been majority non-White for about a decade. Inclusive assessments serve as a mirror for those represented in the assessment content, validating their personal experiences and enhancing feelings of belonging. They also serve as a window for other students to learn more about the people they will encounter in an increasingly diverse country.
- **Previous attempts to make assessments more inclusive, while often well-intentioned, have fallen short**
 - Many states and assessment companies have attempted to make their assessments inclusive by removing or severely limiting cultural references.
 - Culture impacts how students learn, as they build knowledge and understanding into existing experience and awareness.
 - If the goal is to prepare all students to read, write, and meaningfully engage in an increasingly diverse and multicultural society, a test that only assesses whether students can demonstrate knowledge within White norms and parameters severely misses the target.
 - In attempting to provide an even playing field for all students, existing bias and sensitivity guidelines remove assessment items that feature culture-rich content that is relevant to students of color.

- **Inclusive assessments provide policymakers with more accurate data on student achievement, which allows schools, districts, and states to more effectively target resources toward the students who need them most**
 - Research shows that students are more engaged when they see people like themselves in school materials, including testing materials. This increased engagement produces summative assessment scores that paint a more accurate picture of students' abilities.
 - Having more accurate data will help advocates make the case for other needed improvements, like statewide funding formula changes, school interventions, and the like.
 - Statewide assessments provide valuable data that enables policymakers to compare student achievement across the state and within districts.
 - Policymakers rely on this data to identify communities and student groups that need additional support and target additional resources toward them, thereby ensuring that all students have the support they need to succeed. These additional resources can only be effective if they go to the students who need them.
 - If students cannot understand, or do not fully engage with, assessment content, their scores on statewide assessments are less likely to reflect their true knowledge and abilities. Inaccurate data can undermine good decision-making and lead policymakers to allocate public education resources ineffectively.
 - By providing a more accurate picture of student achievement, inclusive assessments help policymakers and educators more effectively utilize public resources to support those most in need.

What to Emphasize When Crafting Arguments

1. Emphasize the ties to other educational equity goals, including a diverse, representative curriculum, equitable student supports, and others.
2. Showcase the impact of non-inclusive assessments on students in your community. Those closest to the issue (parents, students, and teachers) are often the best advocates to relay this message to audiences.