Building the Next Generation of Assessments in Education

Posted on 10/07/2016

In October 2015, in a Testing Action Plan, President Obama called for a new approach to testing and assessment to better serve students. The plan outlines a set of principles to reduce the time spent on standardized tests, and improve the quality and usefulness of tests for students and educators, including building new and more innovative technological-based assessment tools. More recently, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released its proposed regulations on assessments under Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which the President signed in December 2015, to clarify how states can utilize a number of innovative approaches to assessment, including better integration of technology. ED also published draft regulations for public comment on the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority under Title I part B of the ESSA, which will allow states to pilot new approaches in a subset of districts as an alternative to statewide tests as they work to scale innovative tests statewide.

These steps by Congress and the Administration are creating conditions whereby educational technology can help transform how tests are delivered while reducing the amount of classroom time spent on assessment. With the emergence of next-generation web- and app-based assessments, students are now engaging in activities and games that measure knowledge and performance in real time and provide immediate results. These new forms of technology regularly track progress toward mastery of grade level content, adapt and support learning to meet individual needs, and generate teacher reports to inform instruction. The best learning games allow students to play through hard, complex challenges and demonstrate mastery by succeeding at the game itself, making assessment engaging and rewarding.

The Small Business Innovation Research program at ED's Institute of Education Sciences provides funding to entrepreneurs to create commercially viable technology products and learning games, including assessments. The program emphasizes a rapid research and development (R&D) process, with rigorous research informing iterative development and pilot studies at project end to evaluate the promise of products for improving student outcomes. Recent advances under the President's ConnectED initiative are helping bring high-speed internet access and devices to schools across the country to take advantage of these emerging tools, and making it all the more important robust research is conducted on the effective use and impact of educational technology.

In the past three years, ED/IES SBIR has provided awards for many projects that are building innovative assessment approaches. Read a brief description of eight of the assessment projects currently in development at ED/IES SBIR on the White House Web site.

Source: White House Blog post on July 27, 2016