



# A DCI Deliberation Guide

## Grades and Standardized Tests:

*How should student learning and excellence be assessed and measured, if at all?*

### Format for Deliberation

---

#### Before the Deliberation

- I. Read this Deliberation Guide (required)

#### During the Deliberation

- I. Setting Expectations (5 min.)
- II. Getting to Know Each Other (15 min.)
- III. The Goals of Education (15 min.)
- IV. Assessing Educational Progress (20 min.)
- V. Break (5 min.)
- VI. The Pros and Cons of Different Assessment Methods (30 min.)
- VII. Applying and Improving Assessment Methods (20 min.)
- VIII. Reflections (10 min.)

### Background

---

#### 1. Goals of Education

The history of education is replete with debates about grading and testing. Proponents of these forms of assessment assert they are necessary for us to know whether our educational efforts are successful. Likewise, concerns about the side effects of grades and tests – from grade inflation to teaching to the test – have ebbed and flowed ever since they were first introduced.<sup>1</sup> To engage effectively with these debates, we must first consider an even more fundamental question. What are the proper goals of education – public or private? Once we have a better understanding of these objectives, then we can assess what are the best mechanisms for identifying whether and how we can determine if we are achieving these goals.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schneider, Jack and Ethan Hutt. [“Making the Grade: A History of the A-F Marking Scheme.”](#) Curriculum Studies. 2024.

Education has many different objectives. At times, achieving some of these goals can cut against achieving others, and so balancing all of them may be difficult. But to understand the purpose and value of assessment strategies, we need to articulate the possible objectives of education.

Consider the following list:

- **Education should aim at developing students with a good character.** To that end, education should help students develop the habits and skills that will lead to a successful life as a private individual and public citizen.<sup>2</sup>
- **Education should cultivate general knowledge in students.** The primary aim should be to provide students with the knowledge that will enable them to live productive and meaningful lives.<sup>3</sup>
- **Education should cultivate general skills in students.** We should teach students how to acquire new knowledge and skills so that they are effective lifelong learners. This affords them a variety of opportunities in life and helps meet society's pressing needs.<sup>4</sup>
- **Education should produce students with specialized knowledge and skills.** We should focus on preparing students for specific trades and careers by teaching them specific skills and knowledge so they will be able to contribute to society and their own welfare.<sup>5</sup>
- **Education should aim at creating students who can further intellectual progress though academic specialization.** Our goal should be to train the best minds in the fields they are most suited for so they can make outstanding contributions to the advancement of knowledge in those fields.<sup>6</sup>

These and other goals of education may all be laudable, but they can nevertheless sometimes conflict. For example, the more time students focus on specialization, the less time they have left to cultivate other interests and become generalists. At other times these goals may dovetail; for example, students can simultaneously practice the skills of good citizenship while learning about democratic processes.

## 2. Goals of Assessment in Education

The primary aim of assessment is ostensibly to gauge the extent to which the diverse objectives of education, such as developing good citizenship, acquiring general knowledge, and mastering specific skills, are being met. This evaluation process serves not only as a feedback mechanism for the students themselves but also provides valuable information to various stakeholders,

---

<sup>2</sup> Betowski, Ashley. ["Character and Citizenship Education: A Coherence."](#) Grand Canyon University. 2023.

["How to incorporate character development in the classroom."](#) North Central College. 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Austin, Michael W. ["The Value of General Education."](#) Psychology Today. 2011.

Hoxworth, Laura. ["Q&A: 'General Knowledge' May Be the Key to Improve Student Learning."](#) UVA Today. 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Kate Parker. ["Why Learning Lifelong Skills in School is so Important."](#) Tes Magazine. 2021.

London, Manuel, ["Lifelong Learning: Introduction."](#) In *Oxford Handbook of Lifelong Learning*. Oxford University Press. 2012.

<sup>5</sup> ["The Future of Education and Education Skills: Education 2030."](#) OECD. 2018. P. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

including parents, educators, and policymakers. It helps in communicating a student's progress and areas needing improvement, thereby guiding the next steps in their educational path. Assessments also play a significant role in facilitating decisions related to student placement, transfers, and promotions. Later in life, assessment can directly impact a student's career prospects, where entry into certain professions like law and architecture requires passing formal assessments.<sup>7</sup>

But critics of traditional assessment strategies argue that assessments can serve ulterior motives that undermine equal public participation in certain educational systems.<sup>8</sup> Others argue that traditional methods of assessment create inequitable educational outcomes and should therefore be replaced by other methods.<sup>9</sup> Still others respond to these criticisms by arguing that the traditional methods are indeed fraught but can be fixed so as to avoid the pitfalls while providing valuable information about student and school performance.<sup>10</sup>

This position acknowledges that while the issue of assessment is fraught, it may be most productive for students and for society to find some form of assessment in education rather than give up on assessment altogether. When students are allowed to pass entire courses without regularly attending school, completing any significant work, or even turning in assignments, it likely hurts their own future prospects as well as the integrity of schooling more generally.<sup>11</sup> Practices like these may also harm society; when seventh grade students perform at a fourth-grade level, it becomes extremely difficult for them to catch up with their peers and contribute to any of the above listed social goals education is meant to aim at.<sup>12</sup>

This Deliberation Guide will explore arguments for and against two traditional (though still relatively modern) types of assessment: standardized testing and grades in K-12 schools and, to some extent, higher education. It will survey arguments for and against these types of assessments. It focuses primarily on the United States education system but references some international examples and may be relevant to pedagogical debates in other countries as well.

### **3. The Options for Assessment**

In this section, we will survey a variety of assessment methods that have been used historically and that are more contemporary.

---

<sup>7</sup> Schinske, Jeffrey, and Kimberly Tanner. [“Teaching More by Grading Less \(or Differently\).”](#) CBE—Life Sciences Education, Vol. 13, No. 2. 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Rosales, John and Tim Waler. [“The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing.”](#) NEA Today. 2021.

<sup>9</sup> [“Training Tools for Curriculum Development: Inclusive Student Assessment.”](#) UNESCO International Bureau of Education. 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Grose, Jessica. [“Don’t Ditch Standardized Tests. Fix Them.”](#) New York Times. 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Grose, Jessica. [“Teachers Can’t Hold Students Accountable. It’s Making the Job Miserable.”](#) New York Times. 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

### 3.1 Class Ranks

One commonly used system of assessment in schools is the method of ranking students in descending order according to their accomplishments. This practice dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Cambridge University instituted a ranking system for students completing the Mathematical Tripos Examination.<sup>13</sup> The idea of student ranking was later adopted by then Yale President Ezra Stiles in 1875, when he proposed ranking students according to their academic performance.<sup>14</sup> These ranks, which were initially inflexible, were soon replaced by a system of honors ‘appointments.’ Soon thereafter, Harvard introduced an honors system which will be familiar to contemporary audiences as replacement of class ranks; this system ranked students in the categories *summa cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *cum laude*. William and Mary adopted four ranks to distinguish students even earlier, in 1817. Students were categorized as “‘first in their respective classes’; those who were ‘orderly, correct and attentive’; those who made ‘very little improvement’; and those who learned ‘little or nothing ... on account of excessive idleness.’”<sup>15</sup>

We still use class ranking systems today in higher education, and recent graduates frequently report them on CVs and resumes. However, some evidence shows that class ranks in high school are not used as a factor in college admissions decisions as much as they used to be. New data suggest that “among the nearly 1,400 ranked colleges that reported this data to U.S. News in an annual survey, only about 37% considered class rank ‘very important’ or ‘important’ in their admissions process.”<sup>16</sup> Current data suggest that only about half of all high schools in the U.S. still use class ranks.<sup>17</sup> There is a split between the approach to rankings in private and in public schools in the U.S.; although most public high schools still rank students, only half of all high schools use them, partly because private schools are doing away with them in an attempt not to disadvantage some students over others for competitive scholarships.<sup>18</sup> Another factor in the decision not to use class ranks is a concern that they put pressure and stress on students, and some school counselors are concerned that this negatively impacts students’ wellbeing.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2 Grades

Grading is perhaps the most familiar assessment tool, but the practice has many varieties and continues to undergo significant changes. The most commonly used grading system, historically, has been standards-based grading, which awards students a grade that signifies the level of achievement they have attained relative to standards of excellence. Initially, in the U.S. context, grades served as a way for educators, students, and parents to communicate effectively about

---

<sup>13</sup> Schneider, Jack and Ethan Hutt. [“Making the Grade: A History of the A-F Marking Scheme.”](#) Curriculum Studies. 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Wood, Sarah. [“Is High School Class Rank Still Important?”](#) U.S. News. & World Report. 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Skillings, Zach. [“How Important is Class Rank in High School?”](#) Scholarships360. 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Wood, Sarah. [“Is High School Class Rank Still Important?”](#) U.S. News. & World Report. 2022.

student success.<sup>20</sup> Grading practices began to change when the U.S. instituted mass compulsory schooling in the mid-nineteenth century. At this point, grades became a central way to measure student and school performance in a systematic way. Standardized grading systems replaced more long-form tracking that teachers formerly did of students' abilities and work.<sup>21</sup>

Grading is often seen as an indispensable way to measure both student and school performance. However, what kind of grading system should be used is a fraught issue; educators disagree not only about how to grade, but about whether we should be concerned about grade inflation, and how grades impact students beyond their time in class.<sup>22</sup>

There are many ways to grade in accordance with standards of excellence or achievement. One such way is **absolute or criterion-referenced grading**, which measures student performance against a set of fixed criteria. In this system, all students could in principle get an A, or all students could in principle earn a failing grade, based on whether they achieved the learning goals of the assignment or course.<sup>23</sup>

Another system is called **grading on a curve**. In this system, teachers adjust a student's grade based on how well the other students in the class performed.<sup>24</sup> Grading on a curve can be used to boost student grades, if grades are adjusted so that they end up being higher after curving.<sup>25</sup> Grading on a curve can also be used to combat grade inflation by restricting the number of students who earn As.<sup>26</sup> For these and other reasons, many laws schools require that students be graded on a curve.<sup>27</sup>

**Contract/specifications grading** is a form of nontraditional grading that emphasizes mastery of skills and provides students with multiple opportunities to meet the "specifications" of a particular assignment.<sup>28</sup> **Ungrading**, another form of nontraditional grading, focuses on learning, feedback, and self-reflection. It is intended to offer actionable and qualitative feedback for students and is motivated by concerns that traditional grading is an inequitable practice.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Schneider, Jack and Ethan Hutt. ["Making the Grade: A History of the A-F Marking Scheme."](#) Curriculum Studies. 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> ["Grading Systems."](#) Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Roell, Kelly. ["What is Grading on a Curve?"](#) ThoughtCo. 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Summers, Emily. ["How Does Grading on a Curve Work?"](#) Through Education. 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Volkoh, Eugene. ["In Praise of Grading on a Curve."](#) The Washington Post. 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Summers, Emily. ["How Does Grading on a Curve Work?"](#) Through Education. 2019.

<sup>28</sup> ["Beyond 'The Grade': Alternative Approaches to Assessment."](#) The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. Accessed 2024.

<sup>29</sup> ["Ungrading: Reimagining Assessment of Student Learning."](#) Center for Teaching and Learning, Columbia University. Accessed 2024.

### 3.3 Tests

The history of standardized testing dates back to at least 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Imperial China, where the earliest known standardized tests were administered to would-be government officials who were tested for proficiency in music, calligraphy, horsemanship, and more.<sup>30</sup> In 1219 and 1636, the University of Bologna and Oxford University, respectively, instituted examinations for degree conferral. The ostensible motivation for these tests was to test for excellence in various fields. Modern testing practices are about 150 years old and have focused on a range of goals.<sup>31</sup> In 1880, Francis Galton began studying human intelligence and developed statistical methods to analyze the results of identical tests taken by large groups of people.<sup>32</sup> Galton also invented the term ‘eugenics’ and his work has been staunchly criticized because he argued for monetary incentives for marriages between families of ‘merit’ as well as a racial hierarchy according to which white people were purportedly superior.<sup>33</sup> Some critics of standardized testing point to the racist and eugenicist history of intelligence testing as evidence of their limitations and biases and as a warning to avoid following in the footsteps of figures like Galton.<sup>34</sup>

Early testing practices also sought to make education a more efficient system and tests for intelligence and requirements for admission to selective schools were the focus, whereas later testing practices focused on the equitable distribution of resources and accountability measures for schools and teachers.<sup>35</sup> In recent American history, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and the updated act, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, were grounded in the idea that standardized testing of K-12 students could ensure that school leaders and teachers were being held accountable for the performance of the students in their schools and classrooms, respectively.<sup>36</sup>

One recent effort to make testing practices more equitable is in college admissions. In 2020, 600 higher education institutions, including all of the Ivy League, chose to make admissions “test optional,” meaning that applicants were not required to submit standardized test scores for admission.<sup>37</sup> The goal was to make admissions practices more equitable in the sense and expectation that the admitted student body would be more diverse if standardized tests were

---

<sup>30</sup> Himelfarb, Igor. [“A Primer on Standardized Testing: History, Measurement, Classical Test Theory, Item Response Theory, and Equating.”](#) The Journal of Chiropractic Education. 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Geisinger, Kurt F. and Betty Jean Usher-Tate. [“A Brief History of Educational Testing and Psychometrics.”](#) In *Educational Measurement: From Foundations to Future*. Guilford Press. 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> [“Francis Galton.”](#) Wikipedia. Accessed 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Rosales, John and Tim Waler. [“The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing.”](#) NEA Today. 2021.

<sup>35</sup> “When they are well built, standardized and nonstandardized assessments play a useful role in providing educational equity—that is, helping all students achieve at high levels.” See: [“Future of Testing in Education: Effective and Equitable Assessment Systems.”](#) Center for American Progress. 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Roach, John C. [“Is the No Child Left Behind Act Actually Helpful to Students?”](#) Monthly Labor Review, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Selingo, Jeffrey. [“What Does an SAT Score Mean Anymore? The Mass Pivot to a Test-Optional Approach Reshuffled College Admissions. MIT Decided It Was Done.”](#) New York Magazine. 2024.

made optional.<sup>38</sup> Opponents of these tests assert that they are better measures of family wealth than academic merit.<sup>39</sup>

Some of these same institutions, however, have recently chosen to reverse course. For example, Dartmouth stated that its 2024 reversal of its test-optional decision “is based on research the college did that shows including a test score might have actually helped disadvantaged students get in.”<sup>40</sup> The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) similarly stated in 2022 that “our research shows standardized tests help us better assess the academic preparedness of all applicants, and also help us identify socioeconomically disadvantaged students who lack access to advanced coursework or other enrichment opportunities that would otherwise demonstrate their readiness for MIT.”<sup>41</sup>

### 3.4 Narrative Evaluations

Narrative evaluations are qualitative ways of measuring and communicating about a student’s achievement. Narrative evaluations focus on teacher-student communication, and though they have their roots in the early educational assessment history as noted above, are currently seen as a nontraditional form of assessment. Narrative evaluations are just that—evaluations in which teachers explain at length where a student is excelling, where that student has room for growth, and how that student can improve their performance.<sup>42</sup> Narrative evaluations also tend to focus on the student’s own learning journey, and do not compare one student’s success with another (unlike grading on a curve, for example).<sup>43</sup>

Interest in narrative evaluations reflects a recognition of the complexity of learning and the diverse ways students can demonstrate understanding and mastery. By focusing on individual achievements and challenges, narrative evaluations encourage a more holistic approach to education, where the emphasis is on continuous learning and self-improvement.<sup>44</sup> This method allows educators to tailor their feedback to each student’s unique learning journey, potentially fostering a more meaningful and engaging educational experience. However, implementing narrative evaluations can be time-consuming for educators and may require a significant adjustment for students and institutions accustomed to traditional grading systems. Despite

---

<sup>38</sup> Heubeck, Elizabeth. [“Dartmouth and Yale Are Backtracking on ‘Test-Optional’ Admissions. Why That Matters.”](#) EdWeek. 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Nietzel, Michel T. [“More Than 80% of Four-Year Colleges Won’t Require Standardized Tests for Fall 2023 Admissions.”](#) Forbes. 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, Michael, Elissa Nadworny. [“After a Pause for the Pandemic, Dartmouth Will Again Require SAT and ACT Scores.”](#) NPR. 2024.

<sup>41</sup> Miltimore, Jon. [“Why MIT Is Reinstating Its SAT/ACT Requirement.”](#) Foundation for Economic Education. 2022.

<sup>42</sup> [“Narrative Evaluations and Educational Culture.”](#) Students for Evaluations Reform. University of California Santa Cruz. Accessed 2024.

<sup>43</sup> [“The Role of Narrative Evaluations.”](#) Johnston Center for Integrative Studies, University of Redlands. Accessed 2024.

Lang, George. [“The Benefits of Narrative Grading.”](#) Metro Family Magazine. Accessed 2024.

<sup>44</sup> Wallace, Miriam. [“The Model for the Narrative Evaluation System.”](#) The Honors College, New College of Florida. 2019.

these challenges, advocates for narrative evaluations have argued that this assessment approach represents an important move towards more inclusive and reflective educational practices, arguing that it can help disadvantaged students, reduce anxiety, and increase intrinsic motivation to meet the learning goals.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.5 Portfolio Assessments

Portfolios are collections of assignments that are evaluated as a group and are intended to serve as a way to comprehensively assess a student's work over time.<sup>46</sup> To create a portfolio, students compile their work in a particular series or for a particular class. It can include papers, artwork, test results, photographs, and other media that demonstrate the students have accomplished the goals of the course.<sup>47</sup> They can include reflections about what the students have included in their portfolios. Portfolios can be summative, in the sense that they highlight a student's best work only and thereby showcase the student's mastery, or they can be formative in nature and demonstrate the student's improvement over time.<sup>48</sup>

Advocates of portfolio assessments argue that these can capture a student's aptitude better than a single test, which measures how well a student can perform on a particular day.<sup>49</sup> Portfolio assessments also require a high level of interaction between student and teacher.<sup>50</sup> To use portfolio assessments well, teachers may have to decide exactly how they want to use them—to show amount of work completed over time, improvement over time, and so on.<sup>51</sup> Portfolio based assessments can come with challenges, such as making it difficult for students to know how well they are doing in a class that is primarily graded based on a final portfolio.<sup>52</sup>

### 4. How should we evaluate these different assessment options?

In order to decide which of these assessment methods are most appropriate in different contexts (if ever), it is helpful to first discuss some potential criteria for evaluating the variety of assessment options in education. These criteria include:

- **Validity**, or the ability to measure what is really intended to be measured by the assessment strategy. An assessment strategy that scores low on this metric could succeed in measuring something, but not necessarily the thing we wanted to know.

---

<sup>45</sup> Limmer-Lai, Mia. [“Narrative Evaluations’ Offer an Alternative for Students at Fairhaven College: nontraditional Grading Gains Traction in Higher Education as Professors Aim for Equity.”](#) The Front, Western Washington University. 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, Kathleen. [“Portfolio Assessment as an Alternative to Grading Student Writing.”](#) WAC Clearing House, Colorado State University. 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Meador, Derrick. [“The Purpose of Building a Portfolio Assessment.”](#) ThoughtCo. 2019.

<sup>48</sup> [“Assessment Design Toolkit Overview.”](#) Center for Standards, Assessment, and Accountability. Accessed 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Meador, Derrick. [“The Purpose of Building a Portfolio Assessment.”](#) ThoughtCo. 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> [“Student Portfolios as an Assessment Tool.”](#) Education World. 2011.

<sup>52</sup> [“The Disappointment of Portfolio-based Teaching.”](#) Inside Higher Ed. 2007.



- **Comparability of achievement** within and across classes and schools. This metric may be important in contexts where we want to know why some students or schools are outperforming others.
- **Scalability**, or ease of use for assessing large numbers of students, which requires usability, intelligibility, legibility, and accessibility. This measure is especially important in contexts where assessments are used to measure the performance of school systems or whole populations.
- **Ability to motivate students**. Assessments can provide extrinsic motivation to students who do not yet have internal motivation to pursue a particular subject area; this incentive can lead students to better learning outcomes.<sup>53</sup>
- **Ability to promote outstanding and groundbreaking work** by the most advanced students in a course. Assessments may be used to discover which students are performing at the highest levels in a subject area and to set the standards for excellence in a particular class.<sup>54</sup>

The sections below explore two particular sets of criteria and some of the disagreements about them.

#### 4.1 Assessment, Fairness, and Equity

This section explores a key disagreement between two views of assessment, one that posits traditional assessment are a good idea because they can fairly evaluate student performance and one that asserts they are not because they are fundamentally unjust. Since much of the criticism against traditional assessment methods is rooted in these ideas, this guide explores them briefly here.

On one conception of fairness, whether a process is fair is indicated by how equitable the impact of that process is. Critics of traditional methods of assessment argue that these methods are unfair because their use has led to unequitable distributions of students in various classes or tracks. For example, some argue that the use of standardized tests has a disproportionately negative impact on how competitive black students are perceived to be by educators, and that the use of these tests exacerbates existing inequities in unjustifiable ways.<sup>55</sup> Standardized tests can exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds and don't really measure objective standards, because human beings decide what gets put on the test. Therefore, these tests reflect human and cultural biases, which can disadvantage some students.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Lang, James M. and Kristi Rudenga. [“How to Embrace the Power of Extrinsic Motivation in Class: Grades and Deadlines Don’t Have to Be the Bad Guys of College Teaching.”](#) The Chronicle of Higher Education. 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Schneider, Jack and Ethan Hutt. [“Making the Grade: A History of the A-F Marking Scheme.”](#) Curriculum Studies. 2024.

<sup>55</sup> Rosales, John and Tim Waler. [“The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing.”](#) NEA Today. 2021.

<sup>56</sup> [“What’s Wrong with Standardized Tests? \(Updated October 2023\).”](#) FairTest. 2012/2023.

Others argue that standardized testing can be used to drive excellence in education without being unfair or biased against students from underprivileged backgrounds.<sup>57</sup> The key here is to understand the limitations of current assessment strategies and to improve upon them. For example, Finland uses a system of tests that are developed by teachers themselves, which enables educators to use their expertise in designing and administering tests.

On another conception of fairness, fairness amounts to equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome (which is how some define equity).<sup>58</sup> On this view, standardized testing and grades can actually increase fairness, because they can provide a path to success for underprivileged students who do not have the additional opportunities that help most students attain success—extracurriculars, leadership opportunities, educational summer camps, and other experiences like these.<sup>59</sup> Still others argue that standardized test scores can provide a better understanding of student achievement and learning precisely because grading practices vary widely between teachers and between schools.<sup>60</sup> Proponents of standardized testing also argue that they increase school accountability to measures of success, and that this is important because public schools are otherwise not accountable to students and parents (at least not in the way private schools are, as they compete for funds from parents who can choose to take their children out of those schools).<sup>61</sup>

## 4.2 Impacts of Testing and Grades on Students

Another key point we may need to consider when evaluating assessment strategies is their overall impact on the students themselves. We should not thoughtlessly lose sight of learners even if we wish to measure the efficacy of a school system, for example.

In college admissions, both grades and test scores play significant roles, though their importance can vary among institutions and over time. Admissions officers evaluate transcripts in the context of the high school's competitiveness and course offerings, often recalculating GPAs to a standard scale for comparison across different schools.<sup>62</sup> Traditionally, grades in college preparatory courses have been the top factor considered by admissions officers, with the overall strength of the curriculum closely following. Between 2007 and 2017, there was a notable shift, with grades in all courses becoming more important than college prep course grades, and standardized test scores becoming as important as the strength of the curriculum.<sup>63</sup> However, with the introduction of test-optional policies during the pandemic, the factors admissions officers consider important shifted again. In Fall 2023, 77% reported college prep

---

<sup>57</sup> Jimenez, Laura and Jamil Modaffari. [“Future of Testing in Education: Effective and Equitable Assessment Systems.”](#) Center for American Progress. 2021.

<sup>58</sup> [“Equity vs. Equality: What’s the Difference?”](#) Marin Health and Human Services. Accessed 2024.

<sup>59</sup> Pigeon, Sean-Michael. [“Don’t Blame the Tests: Getting Rid of Standardized Testing Means Punishing Poor Students.”](#) USA Today. 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Churchill, Aaron. [“Bless the Tests: Three Reasons for Standardized Testing.”](#) Fordham Institute. 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> [“The Role of Grades in College Admissions.”](#) Collegiate Gateway. Accessed 2024.

course grades, 74% reported total high school grades, 64% reported the strength of high school curricula, and only 5% of colleges and universities reported admission test scores as having “considerable importance.”<sup>64</sup>

The traditional grading and testing systems that these higher education institutions are relying on can have negative psychological impacts on students, affecting their self-esteem, confidence, and mental health. The stress associated with academic performance can lead to short-term issues like anxiety and depression, and long-term effects may include chronic stress and a persistent sense of inadequacy. This stress can be exacerbated by high-stakes testing environments and the pressure to perform well for college admissions or future employment opportunities.<sup>65</sup> The concern about high-stakes testing is not simply that students experience a difficult emotion, but also that disparities in students’ home lives impacts their ability to perform equally well on tests, and those with high stress responses tend to score lower than expected on tests because of that stress response.<sup>66</sup>

Others argue that standardized testing practices actually offer several benefits to the test-takers, such as helping them develop their time management skills and problem-solving skills. Likewise, preparation for standardized tests can also build resiliency, because there are setbacks in preparation that students must overcome.<sup>67</sup> Tests and, more generally, any assessment that has a score attached, can also activate a student’s extrinsic motivations, which can be helpful in motivating students to achieve where they do not yet have intrinsic motivation.<sup>68</sup> Standardized testing can also offer the opportunity for a sense of achievement and even a greater capacity to focus.<sup>69</sup> Overall, standardized testing has a variety of pros and cons, like any assessment tool.<sup>70</sup>

## 5. Overview of pros and cons of different assessment methods

The various assessment methods in education each have their distinct advantages and disadvantages, tailored to different educational needs and philosophies. In this section, we will survey some of the main considerations for and against the varieties of assessment strategies

---

<sup>64</sup> Factors in the Admission Decision - National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) <https://www.nacacnet.org/factors-in-the-admission-decision/>. 2023.

<sup>65</sup> Högberg, Björn, Joakim Lindgren, Klara Johansson, Mattias Strandh & Solveig Petersen. “Consequences of School Grading Systems on Adolescent Health: Evidence from a Swedish School Reform.” *Journal of Education Policy*. 2019. Dean, Ashley. “More Testing Means More Stress for Teens—And There’s No Solution in Sight.” *CPR News*. 2019. Burstein, Rachel. “Stanford Studies Show Benefits of Forgoing Traditional Grading During Pandemic.” *Stanford Digital Education*. 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Heissel, Jennifer A., Emma K Adam, Jennifer L. Doleac, David N. Figlio, Jonathan Meer. “Testing, Stress, and Performance: How Students Respond Physiologically to High-Stakes Testing.” *Education Finance and Policy*. 2021.

<sup>67</sup> McCorkle, Matt. “More Than Just a Score: The Unsung Benefits of Standardized Testing — SAT and ACT Test Prep Curriculum with Your Brand.” *Clear Choice Test Prep*. 2022. “The Value of Test Preparation.” *National Test Prep Association*. 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Lang, James M. and Kristi Rudenga. “How to Embrace the Power of Extrinsic Motivation in Class: Grades and Deadlines Don’t Have to Be the Bad Guys of College Teaching.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 2024.

<sup>69</sup> “The Effects of Standardized Testing on Students’ Mental Health.” *Adult Learner’s Guide*. 2023.

<sup>70</sup> “Do Standardized Tests Improve Education in America?” *Brittanica ProCon*. 2024.

outlined above. Building on the criteria discussed above, what are the pros and cons of these different assessment methods? Which assessment methods are most appropriate in which contexts? And how can each assessment method be improved when it is used?

**Ranking** serves as a straightforward method to compare student performance, but the coarse-grained nature of its approach may overlook the nuances of individual student success. Ranking can create competition between students, which can serve both to further intellectual growth and can also create a negative experience for students. Since grading systems are also not universal (one teacher’s A is not another teacher’s A), if a student’s rank is determined by their grade, then it is difficult to exactly compare the success of a student at one school with the success of another student in a very different school.<sup>71</sup>

**Grades**, particularly **standard-based grades**, offer a familiar and widely understood metric for evaluating student achievement. They can motivate students through clear benchmarks and provide a straightforward way for external parties to assess student performance. Nonetheless, they can also contribute to stress, exacerbate inequities, and sometimes discourage risk-taking in learning due to their permanent nature (see the sections above for more on these points).

**Curved-Based Grades** introduce a competitive element to grading, which can curb grade inflation and ensure a distribution of grades that reflects relative performance. They can help identify the students who have the most potential to excel in a subject area. Advocates for grading on a curve argue that it allows teachers to design assessments that are “sufficiently difficult to challenge all students in the class to their fullest potential, even the most talented,” while not overly penalizing students who perform poorly on any particular assignment.<sup>72</sup> This approach assumes that students have different aptitude levels and that assessments should “push the limits of human achievement and produce brilliant critical thinkers.”<sup>73</sup> However, this method can also foster a hyper-competitive environment in which students are highly anxious about exams and seek to undermine one another’s performance on them.<sup>74</sup> Critics also claim that curved grades may not “communicate any information whatsoever about a student’s mastery of course knowledge” and can “exaggerate very fine degrees of differences in performance.”<sup>75</sup>

**Specifications Grading** and **Ungrading** represent more recent innovations, focusing on mastery and learning over traditional point-based systems. They can enhance intrinsic motivation and provide more meaningful feedback but may face challenges in widespread acceptance and implementation. **Specifications grading** uses pass/fail assignments that are designed to assess specific skills, are bundled to earn different course grades, and can be re-submitted to

---

<sup>71</sup> Skillings, Zach. [“How Important is Class Rank in High School?”](#) Scholarships360. 2024.

<sup>72</sup> [“Why Grading on a Curve Makes Academic Sense, Part I.”](#) American Public University Edge. 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Summers, Emily. [“How Does Grading on a Curve Work?”](#) Through Education. 2019. Grant, Adam. [“Why We Should Stop Grading Students on a Curve.”](#) New York Times. 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Schinske, Jeffrey, and Kimberly Tanner. [“Teaching More by Grading Less \(or Differently.\)”](#) CBE—Life Sciences Education, Vol. 13, No. 2. 2017.

demonstrate mastery.<sup>76</sup> When designed well, advocates of this system claim that it increases the transparency of the grading process to students, gives them more agency, and focuses them on learning skills.<sup>77</sup> Potential drawbacks include that it can also require additional up-front and continuing investments of time by faculty members to set-up the system and grade multiple versions of assignments that are re-submitted by students. Additionally, the approach may not always differentiate between satisfactory and exceptional work and may not provide detailed and personalized feedback to students.<sup>78</sup>

**Ungrading** is a form of assessment in which “students complete assignments but aren’t graded on any of them.”<sup>79</sup> Instead, they revise their work based on feedback from the instructor and make a case at the end of the semester for the grade they should receive (instructors usually reserve the right to revise the grade they suggest). Proponents argue that this approach encourages meta-cognition by students and removes the distraction of assignment grades.<sup>80</sup> Potential downsides include concerns that it depends on students’ ability to assess their own work, might contribute to equity gaps if it takes away the “guideposts” that students from less privileged backgrounds rely on, and shifts more work onto the students.<sup>81</sup> Questions have also been raised that ungrading and specification grading may be influenced by the implicit biases of both instructors and students, which can be embedded in how they evaluate the students’ ability to perform well in a course.<sup>82</sup>

**Testing**, especially **standardized testing**, offers a uniform measure of assessment across diverse educational contexts, potentially benefiting underrepresented students by providing a common yardstick for evaluation. However, the emphasis on standardized tests can lead to teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, and perpetuating socio-economic disparities (see the related sections above for more on these points).

**Narrative Evaluations**, as discussed above, offer a detailed and personalized account of student progress, providing in-depth feedback that can be more meaningful to both students and educators. However, as discussed above, they can be time-consuming to create and may lack the quantitative clarity that some educators, parents, and external evaluators are seeking. They also often end up being coupled with traditional grades.

**Portfolio Assessments** stand out for their comprehensive nature, allowing students to showcase a breadth of work and learning over time. They highlight the substance of learning and can encourage revision. However, implementing portfolio assessments can be resource-intensive and may require significant adjustments in teaching and assessment strategies. Like narrative

---

<sup>76</sup> [What is Specification Grading?](#) University of Nebraska, Lincoln Center for Transformative Learning.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Rosen, Amanda. [Specifications Grading](#). *Active Learning in Political Science*. 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Talbert, Robert. [What I’ve Learned From Ungrading](#). *Inside Higher Ed*. 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Dyer, Jayme. [Ungrading Has an Equity-Related Achilles Heel](#). *Grading for Growth*. 2024.

evaluations, they are difficult to scale and to employ in order to evaluate our educational system. They also often utilize traditional grades to assess the final portfolio.

Each assessment method carries its unique set of implications for teaching, learning, and educational policy, making the choice of assessment a critical consideration in shaping educational experiences and outcomes. The table below summarizes some of the potential pros and cons of each method, although it does not capture all of their nuances and dynamics. It is designed to highlight their key strengths and limitations but is not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive. It is presented as an initial overview for reflection, discussion and revision rather than as a definitive and final list.

Assessment Method	Pros	Cons
<b>NON-GRADING METHODS</b>		
Class Ranks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can foster healthy competition</li> <li>• Can provide a holistic assessment</li> <li>• Can promote and identify outstanding work</li> <li>• Can foster sense of accomplishment</li> <li>• Can extrinsically motivate students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can foster unhealthy competition</li> <li>• Can be difficult to scale and apply across large numbers of students</li> <li>• Can be difficult to compare across institutions</li> <li>• Can reinforce inequalities</li> <li>• Can fail to activate students' intrinsic motivation</li> </ul>
Narrative Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide very tailored feedback to students</li> <li>• Can be intrinsically motivating</li> <li>• Can promote outstanding work</li> <li>• Can reduce unhealthy competition</li> <li>• Can reduce stress and distractions from assignment grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be difficult to scale and apply across large numbers of students</li> <li>• Can be burdensome for instructors</li> <li>• Can fail to be extrinsically motivating</li> <li>• Can remove healthy competition</li> <li>• Can be affected by implicit biases</li> </ul>
Portfolio Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can showcase a student's best work or their learning journey</li> <li>• Can provide a holistic assessment</li> <li>• Can provide tailored feedback to students</li> <li>• Can be intrinsically motivating</li> <li>• Can promote outstanding work</li> <li>• Can reduce unhealthy competition</li> <li>• Can reduce stress and distractions from assignment grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be difficult to scale and apply across large numbers of students</li> <li>• Can fail to be extrinsically motivating</li> <li>• Can remove healthy competition</li> <li>• Can be burdensome for instructors</li> <li>• Can fail to be extrinsically motivating</li> <li>• Can be affected by implicit biases</li> <li>• Can increase stress for students if grade is given only at the end of the course</li> </ul>
Ungrading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide very tailored feedback to students</li> <li>• Can involve the student in the grading process</li> <li>• Can allow for multiple tries before a student demonstrates mastery</li> <li>• Can be intrinsically motivating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be burdensome for instructors</li> <li>• Can depend on students' self-assessment abilities</li> <li>• Can be difficult to scale and apply across large numbers of students</li> <li>• Can remove healthy competition</li> <li>• Can be affected by implicit biases</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can reduce unhealthy competition</li> <li>• Can reduce stress and distractions from assignment grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not differentiate between satisfactory and exceptional work</li> </ul>
<b>GRADING METHODS</b>		
Standards-based Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide clear benchmarks of success</li> <li>• Can be scaled and applied to large numbers of students</li> <li>• Can be compared across classes and institutions if standards are clearly applied</li> <li>• Can foster sense of accomplishment</li> <li>• Can extrinsically motivate students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be difficult to compare across institutions if based on individual teachers' standards</li> <li>• Can fail to activate students' intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Can reinforce inequalities</li> <li>• Can discourage risk-taking</li> <li>• Can contribute to grade inflation and/or grade deflation</li> </ul>
Curved-Based Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can foster healthy competition</li> <li>• Can extrinsically motivate students</li> <li>• Can promote and identify outstanding work</li> <li>• Can foster sense of accomplishment</li> <li>• Can limit grade inflation and/or boost lowest grades in a class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can foster unhealthy competition</li> <li>• Can be difficult to compare across institutions if based on individual teacher's standards</li> <li>• Can fail to activate students' intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Can reinforce inequalities</li> <li>• Can discourage risk-taking</li> </ul>
Specifications-Based Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide clear benchmarks of success</li> <li>• Can provide very tailored feedback to students</li> <li>• Can involve the student in the grading process</li> <li>• Can allow for multiple tries before a student demonstrates mastery</li> <li>• Can be intrinsically motivating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be burdensome for instructors</li> <li>• Can depend on students' self-assessment abilities</li> <li>• Can be difficult to scale</li> <li>• Can be affected by implicit biases</li> <li>• May not differentiate between satisfactory and exceptional work</li> </ul>
<b>TESTING METHODS</b>		
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide clear benchmarks of success</li> <li>• Can be scaled to be applied in many contexts and to many students</li> <li>• Can provide extrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Can promote outstanding work</li> <li>• Can benefit students from less-privileged backgrounds by providing a common yardstick for evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can sometimes fail to measure what is intended to be measured (related to the "teaching to the test" criticism)</li> <li>• Can contribute to narrowing of curricula</li> <li>• Can fail to activate students' intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Can reflect human and cultural biases</li> <li>• Can reinforce inequalities</li> </ul>

## 6. Improving Existing Assessment Methods

The conversation around grading in educational institutions has been evolving, with some advocating for innovative approaches to better capture and reflect students' academic performances. The idea of "contextual transcripts," as explored by various institutions, offers a potential pathway towards a more nuanced understanding of student achievement. Contextual transcripts go beyond traditional grading by providing additional information that helps contextualize the grades a student receives. For instance, Dartmouth College includes median grades for courses on transcripts, along with a comparison of how a student's performance relates to these medians. This approach offers a clearer picture of a student's performance relative to their peers, potentially offering more insight to graduate schools and employers than traditional grades alone.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, institutions like Columbia University have taken steps to include the percentage of students receiving an 'A' in each course on transcripts, directly addressing concerns about grade inflation and providing a more transparent measure of student achievement. This method acknowledges the complexity of academic performance and the need for a more comprehensive evaluation system that goes beyond a single letter grade. Proponents of these innovations argue that by adopting such practices, educational institutions can create a more equitable and accurate system that recognizes a wide range of student achievements and abilities. They suggest that these approaches encourage a shift from a purely outcome-based assessment to a more holistic view of learning and development, thereby fostering an environment where education is not just about grades but about meaningful learning and personal growth.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Hartmann-Villalta, Laura. ["Alternatives to Grading."](#) University Writing Program, Johns Hopkins University. Accessed 2024.

Schinske, Jeffrey, and Kimberly Tanner. ["Teaching More by Grading Less \(or Differently\)."](#) CBE—Life Sciences Education, Vol. 13, No. 2. 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Schinske, Jeffrey, and Kimberly Tanner. ["Teaching More by Grading Less \(or Differently\)."](#) CBE—Life Sciences Education, Vol. 13, No. 2. 2017.

["Alternative Grading Frameworks."](#) Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning. Accessed 2024.

Dolan, Erin L. and James P. Collins. ["We Must Teach More Effectively: Here Are Four Ways to Get Started."](#) Molecular Biology of the Cell. 2015.

Allen, Deborah and Kimberly Tanner. ["Rubrics: Tools for Making Learning Goals and Evaluation Criteria Explicit for Both Teachers and Learners."](#) CBE—Life Sciences Education, Vol. 5, No. 3. 2017.



## Setting Expectations (5 min)

---

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

### Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to deepen our understanding of assessment methods in education and how we may improve them in the future. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own thoughts and deliberate together. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, our areas of agreement and disagreement, and what we have learned from our time together.

### Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

### Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators’ stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., “All people think this,” or “No educated people hold that view”)

## **Getting to Know Each Other (15 min.)**

---

In this section, we will take less than a minute to share our names and answer one of the questions below. We encourage you to choose a question you may not have answered at a previous deliberation.

1. What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or country?
2. What would your best friend say about who you are?
3. What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

## **The Goals of Education (15 min.)**

---

In this section, we will each take 1-2 minutes to answer the questions below, without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered these questions, the group is welcome to take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions and responses. Continue exploring the topic as time allows.

1. In our last conversation, we talked about the central purposes of education. This guide discusses related but more specific objectives of an education system. Building on our previous discussion, what are the most important goals of education, in your view?
2. In what contexts are these goals most and least appropriate? What about at Davidson?
3. How can we achieve these goals? What are some challenges to doing so?

## **Assessing Educational Progress (20 min.)**

---

In this section, we will each take 1-2 minutes to answer the question about assessment below, before engaging in open discussion.

1. How should we evaluate these different assessment options?
2. What criteria should we use to assess them? (For example, validity, fairness, scalability, etc. For a complete list of criteria, see p. 8-9 of this guide.)
3. Which criteria are most or least important?

*Break (5 mins)*

## **The Pros and Cons of Different Assessment Methods (30 min.)**

---

We will now address the variety of assessment methods together.

1. What are the pros and cons of the different assessment methods?
  - i. Non-Grading Methods: Class Ranks, Narrative Evaluations, Portfolio Assessments, Ungrading (10 min)
  - ii. Grading Methods: Standards-Based Grades, Curved-Based Grades, Specification Grading (10 min)
  - iii. Testing Methods: Standardized Tests (10 min)

Once we have all had a chance to address this question, discuss our answers together, and note where we agree and disagree, please move on to the next section.

## **Applying and Improving Assessment Methods (20 min.)**

---

We will now discuss how the different assessment methods we have explored so far may be improved. We will each address one of the questions below individually before moving on to discussion.

1. Which assessment methods are most and least appropriate in which contexts?
2. How can each assessment method be improved when it is used?

## **Reflections (10 min)**

---

While today's conversation is an important step in the journey, effectively assessing the performance of students and school systems is necessarily an ongoing effort. Please reflect on the insights from your discussion today, and then answer one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group is welcome to continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
2. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
3. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problem and its potential solutions?
4. Was there anything that was said or left out from the discussion that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
5. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations about educational assessment?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

## About This Guide

---

**Writer:** Sara Copic

**Executive Editor:** Graham Bullock

© Copyright 2024 Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (First Edition)

### The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics and organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit [www.deliberativecitizenship.org](http://www.deliberativecitizenship.org).

### DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathways Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

### DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue, or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email [dc@deliberativecitizenship.org](mailto:dc@deliberativecitizenship.org) to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathways Guides and other resources, visit [www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources](http://www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources).