

## Building Capacity in Educational Assessment in Eurasia

American Councils for International Education (American Councils) is an international 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. A leader in educational testing services, web-based assessment design, and educational capacity building, American Councils conducts formative as well as high stakes standardized assessments in the U.S. and abroad. American Councils supports institutional partners in Eastern Europe and Eurasia in enhancing their capacity in educational assessment. American Councils' multilingual staff includes full-time psychometricians, test developers, survey researchers, statisticians, and technology experts experienced in developing and administering standardized and customized computer-based assessments. For nearly 50 years, American Councils has worked throughout the Eurasian region to provide technical assistance and materials in Russian and other local languages.

### **SUPPORT FOR TESTING – RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

For more than three decades, American Councils' President Emeritus Dan E. Davidson led developmental initiatives focused on the improvement of humanities, foreign language, and social science curricula, as well as the introduction of competency-based assessments in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

American Councils supported the Russian Ministry of Education's development and roll-out of Russia's Unified State Entrance Exam (EGE), which is now required for all applicants

to Russian institutions of higher education. Under the World Bank-funded project, Development of a National Examination System, American Councils engaged a range of experts across the U.S. education system, including representatives of The College Board and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for collaboration with the Russian Ministry of Education, the Federal Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Rosobrnadzor), and the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurement (FIPI) to strengthen EGE implementation and promote public understanding of standardized testing in Russia.

### **THE NATIONAL TESTING INITIATIVE – KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

At the invitation of the government of Kyrgyzstan and with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), American Councils founded a local independent educational assessment center and provided the technical lead for the creation of a new university admissions system in the Kyrgyz Republic from 2002 to 2005. Now overseen by an independent governing board, the Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM) is the only independent, non-government educational assessment center in Eurasia.

CEATM designs, develops, and implements the "All-Republic University Examination" (ORT), which remains to the present day, the Kyrgyz Republic's first and only country-wide, high-volume university admissions examination. Launched at the request of the president of Kyrgyzstan to provide educators with an objective measure of all prospective students' knowledge and skills, ORT results

provide the primary basis each year for the allocation of government-sponsored scholarships for higher education.

American Councils provided CEATM the technical support to sustain institutional capacity growth in psychological and subject-based assessment. The ORT assesses verbal and mathematical reasoning skills in three languages and includes optional subject-based tests. CEATM has also produced copyrighted study guides for all CEATM tests available in the Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek languages.

With support from the World Bank, CEATM has also conducted 12 nationally representative assessments of educational quality at grades four and eight. Based on the high level of public support it enjoys, CEATM was also selected to lead the implementation of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2006 and 2009.

#### **THE UKRAINIAN STANDARDIZED EXTERNAL TESTING INITIATIVE (USETI) – UKRAINE**

With funding from USAID, American Councils led comprehensive reforms in university admissions in Ukraine from 2006 to 2017, providing technical assistance to the newly created Ukrainian Center for Education Quality Assessment (UCEQA). Known as the Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative (USETI), program goals were to:

- Build UCEQA capacity in testing processes;
- Create legislation to support external testing, monitoring, and university admissions;
- Increase support for national testing through public outreach;

- Develop and distribute test preparation materials via schools, registration sites, and the internet to ensure equal access to opportunities; and
- Work with key stakeholders to analyze various models of university admissions.

American Councils assisted UCEQA in test design, test development, test administration, data analysis, and results reporting. Thanks to the USETI project, UCEQA now annually prepares, administers, scores, and reports on more than 800,000 tests in 12 subjects for approximately 250,000 test takers and 56,000 educators participating in test administration. American Councils also supported the launch of assessment training modules and facilitated the creation of a graduate degree in educational assessment for Ukrainian universities.

The USETI program supported an education law and policy expert group that helped strengthen understanding of testing issues among Ukrainian lawmakers and across the higher education community. To date, the university admissions reform is regarded as one of the most successful internationally supported anti-corruption efforts in Ukraine. The initiative sparked a larger movement for academic integrity, authentic learning, school and university oversight, and accreditation reform.

#### **THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION CENTER (NAEC) – REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA**

American Councils provided capacity building assistance for the National Assessment and Examination Center (NAEC) in Georgia and its

development of quality assessments for the nation's K-11 educational system.

Supported by a multi-year grant from the World Bank, American Councils' work included consultation in assessment design, data analysis, psychometrics, test administration, test security, policy development, advocacy, and public relations.

In 2004, at the request of the Georgian Ministry of Education, American Councils provided technical assistance to NAEC to roll out that nation's first universal university entrance examination. The success of the 2005 examination marked a major turning point in Georgian educational reform. In 2006, the Ministry again turned to American Councils for assistance in working with NAEC to develop a new generation of graduate and professional school admissions examinations.

#### **CERTIFIED INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANT (CIPA) AND CERTIFIED ACCOUNTING PRACTITIONER (CAP) INITIATIVES – EURASIA**

In 2002 and 2003, American Councils established standards and administered exams for the Certified International Professional Accountant (CIPA) and Certified Accounting Practitioner (CAP) initiatives in Central Asia and Ukraine. These high stakes exams test accountants' professional knowledge and their ability to apply new concepts in practical situations.

In 2002, the CIPA Examination Network was formed to serve as a centralized independent examination administrator for CAP and CIPA exams for members of the Eurasian Council of Certified Accountants and Auditors, an Almaty-based umbrella organization of 13 professional

associations from Central Asia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.

CIPA was the first to offer these certification exams in the Russian language. Test security and uniformity in testing procedures were crucial components of the project, which also delivered trainings and an official certification program in international accounting standards.

#### **THE EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT-TAJIKISTAN AND THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

From 2015-2017, American Councils' Director of Assessment, Todd W. Drummond, Ph.D., conducted workshops for the National Testing Centers in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic on the implementation of USAID's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). These capacity building workshops covered topics such as basic literacy assessment design, item writing, construct and data analysis, survey design, and descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### **U.S. STANDARDIZED ACADEMIC TESTING IN RUSSIA, EASTERN EUROPE AND EURASIA**

Over the last 30 years, American Councils has administered more than 100,000 U.S. academic examinations across Russia, Eurasia, and the Balkans. Approximately 30,000 of these standardized tests have been conducted on behalf of the Educational Testing Service in both paper-based and computer-based formats. American Councils-operated U.S. testing centers have administered paper-based exams in more than 200 locations. Currently, or in the recent past, American Councils has offered computer-based U.S. tests in five cities in Eurasia (Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia; Almaty, Kazakhstan; Tbilisi, Georgia; and Tashkent, Uzbekistan) through contracts with Prometric. American

Councils' cadre of approximately 500 trained exam proctors offer expertise in standardized test administration. Many professional exams are administered on behalf of associations that govern certification of professional knowledge, including CAP, CFA, CIPA, GRE, GMAT, ITP, LSAT, MCAT, SLEP, TOEFL, CGFNS, and TOEIC.

## Approach to Capacity Building in Educational Assessment

### 1. Learning from Assessments

American Councils is strongly committed to assisting governments and educational institutions in their efforts to 1) develop learning assessments which meet international standards, 2) improve data collection processes, 3) enhance analytical expertise, and 4) build capacity in the use of assessment findings to improve instruction and education policies.

American Councils' overall approach to developing assessment capacity is based on the idea that standardized assessments must be linked with formative assessment systems. American Councils' team is skilled at leading data-driven dialogues to improve instruction and designing formative assessments to support teacher and policy maker learning.

American Councils recommends the development of performance-based standards for reporting test results as a meaningful way to interpret learning outcomes, while also serving as a useful tool for setting targets to improve learning. Performance standards allow for comparison of students' demonstrated skills,

providing insight into the type of pedagogical support needed to raise student achievement.

In managing and disseminating assessment information, American Councils bases its recommended action steps on user needs.

*Action steps are informed by questions, such as:*

- What information do users need at each level?
- What are the implications of test results for instruction and policy?
- How can assessment institutions ensure that new learning will reach targeted users and be translated into practice?

*For Teachers:*

- Which of the standards are students mastering in each content area?
- Which content areas need the most attention?

*For Policy Makers:*

- Which standards have students mastered across schools, districts, and nationally?
- What percentage of students met the standards this year?
- What improvements can be made through institutional adjustment in priorities such as changes in teacher training or curricula?

### 2. Collaboration in all Stages of the Assessment Process

All aspects of American Councils' work are reflective of the needs of partner stakeholders, including students, teachers, school directors, local district education authorities, parents, and employers. American Councils considers capacity building to be the foundation of its

approach to collaboration on international assessment projects and team members work closely with counterparts to develop cadres of assessment professionals capable of sustaining the work.

American Councils' capacity building initiatives promote collaboration with assessment, curriculum, education, technology, monitoring and evaluation, and data systems specialists.

### 3. **Quality and the Use of Technology**

American Councils emphasizes quality in all its products and throughout the process of test development. Poor quality leads to measurement error, inaccurate interpretation of results, and misinformation, all of which can render inferences based on assessments invalid.

Quality begins by ensuring that assessments are aligned with the curricular content via standards. Other critical quality control steps include selection of qualified team members and content specialists; strong oversight of test assembly and administration; comprehensive training for all actors in the system involved with handling and analyzing data; and meticulous attention to how results are presented and disseminated to educators.

American Councils utilizes technology to enhance quality and efficiency in test development. American Councils has developed proprietary end-to-end computerized support for developing, administering, and analyzing language proficiency assessments. American Councils' Language Assessment Support Systems (ACLASS) services are web-based

and customizable for low and high stakes exam administration.

To date, ACLASS has been employed to administer proficiency-based foreign language exams in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Kazakh, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, Urdu, and Yoruba. Collaborative item development for the item bank is a key feature of ACLASS, and is accessible to item writers, reviewers, and language specialists. The ACLASS service features robust support for:

- Test center set-up and certification
- Collaborative, team-based item development and test form assembly
- Registration of examinees
- Proctored test administration (including real-time proctor support and monitoring)
- Voice capture to assess speaking skills
- Online rating of written and spoken samples
- Item data review and standard setting
- Scheduling of Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs)
- Score reporting and data output for statistical analysis.

## Building Capacity in Educational Assessment in the United States

For the past decade, American Councils has developed tests and assessment programs for clients in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Defense (National Security Education Program), The College Board, and state-level assessment programs, such as the Seal of Biliteracy. American Councils' language and assessment experts also created the Prototype-Advanced Placement Russian Examination, the first nationwide proficiency-based, standards-referenced, four-skill exam established in the U.S. at the secondary school level.

American Councils conducts foreign language exams at the high school level through the National Examinations of World Languages (NEWL®). Developed by American Councils, NEWL® is an online language assessment in four critical languages: Arabic, Korean, Portuguese, and Russian. The exams measure functional language proficiency in reading and listening comprehension, speaking, and writing. The examination's AP®-style score reports are endorsed by The College Board for credit by examination and advanced placement by its member universities.

### **ADDITIONAL TESTING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

American Councils assesses language proficiency in several university-level educational programs. Pre- and post-program proficiency testing provides a comprehensive

empirical basis for the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of training programs. These reports are useful to participants, home universities, and employers in evaluating functional ability in the target language. American Councils conducts testing for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students engaged in summer, semester, and academic year study abroad programs. American Councils has conducted assessments for these purposes in Arabic, Azerbaijani, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Persian, Portuguese, and Turkish.

## What American Councils Offers

American Councils' portfolio includes assessment design, development, and administration for the K-12, tertiary, and professional levels in the U.S. and overseas. The core assessment team based in Washington D.C. includes Ph.D.-level specialists with extensive international experience in the development of national testing systems, test development, psychometrics, online testing, computational linguistics, selection testing, test security, and the Early Grade Reading/Math Assessments (EGRA/EGMA). American Councils is privileged to be able to draw on an extensive network of subject-area experts and assessment and measurement specialists through its decades-long partnership with The College Board and the Educational Testing Service, more than 250 higher education institutional partners, and individual assessment experts across the U.S., Europe and Eurasia.

**AMERICAN COUNCILS TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE INCLUDES:**

- Managing large-scale assessments, including computer-based testing
- Test design and development (summative, formative, diagnostic)
- Test blueprints and specifications
- Item writing and item banking
- Test security and quality control
- Test administration and data collection
- Use of electronic tools for data collection
- Data cleaning and data preparation
- Data analysis (descriptive and inferential statistics)
- Test form equating
- Survey and sampling design (e.g., student, parent, teacher, principal)
- Standard setting (performance standards, setting cut scores)
- Alignment of standards and assessment
- Developing content standards
- Analyzing PISA and TIMSS data
- Reporting assessment results
- Using data to improve instruction