

## **Coalition of Essential Schools**

### **Launching National Exhibition Month, May 2006**

National Exhibition Month is a nation-wide campaign to promote and celebrate exhibitions as a preferred form of student assessment. Throughout the month of May, schools across the country will engage in activities that highlight exhibitions and showcase student work and achievements.

This is a step-by-step guide for participating in the campaign, which includes tips for creating a successful National Exhibition Month event, guidelines for students, and an advocacy action kit. Please use these ideas and sample documents as beginning points for devising events that suit your particular situations, resources, and opportunities.

You can help us execute a successful National Exhibition Month and contribute to the improvement of these materials by doing the following:

- Document your activities and send us summaries, photographs, outreach materials, or newspaper clippings from your events
- Evaluate how your activities went and complete an online questionnaire, which will be distributed by CES National in June
- Begin planning for National Exhibition Month 2007

Thank for you participating in this year's campaign and for supporting and promoting exhibitions as a preferred form of student assessment. Good luck with your National Exhibition Month celebrations and we look forward to seeing reports and photographs from your events.

CES National

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# National Exhibition Month 2006

## GUIDE FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL LOCAL EVENT

The following tips and guidelines can help you to create and promote a high quality, successful local event as part of National Exhibition Month 2006.

### Local Goals.

What makes a local event successful? For this inaugural year, a gratifying result is the following:

- Increased capacity of your school to do outstanding Exhibitions, and
- New audiences in your community agree that Exhibitions are a positive and compelling form of assessment.

### Chart your involvement

Time is short this year, so be realistic about what you can do. Nevertheless, to be in a better position for next year, you should stretch as far as you can.

The following participation guide offers suggestions for how your school might participate this year. National Exhibition Month will be an annual campaign, so we encourage you to start modestly this year, then think about how to plan for a bigger or more elaborate event next year.

We identify four phases of implementation with regard to exhibitions and suggest a number of public activities that correspond to each phase.

**Phase 1: Beginning Implementation** - Student learning is regularly assessed at the school, but exhibitions as an authentic assessment strategy are not currently being used. The school has plans to begin or has shown interest in developing structures.

**Suggestions for Phase 1:** Don't participate this year. Instead, monitor National Exhibition Month 2006 and make plans for next year.

**Phase 2: Partial Implementation** - Exhibitions are implemented by a select number of faculty as an authentic assessment strategy in some grades and disciplines. Exhibitions are completed by some students; some structures are in place.

**Suggestions for Phase 2:** Select some or all of Activities 1-3 below.

**Phase 3: Demonstrating Implementation** - Exhibitions are implemented by a majority of the faculty in most grades and disciplines as an authentic assessment strategy. Exhibitions are completed by many students; a majority of structures are in place.

**Suggestions for Phase 3:** Select some or all of Activities 1-6 below.

**Phase 4: Systemic Implementation** - Exhibitions are an integral part of the program school-wide using authentic assessment strategies in all grades and disciplines. Exhibitions are completed by all students; the school has developed the capacity to be self-sustaining and continuously improving.

**Suggestions for Phase 4:** Select some or all of Activities 1-9 below.

(Phases adapted from the Turning Points Guide, *Benchmarks to Becoming a Turning Points School*, <http://www.turningpts.org/guides.htm>)

### **Public Activities to Celebrate National Exhibition Month**

1. Document exhibition practices and achievements and send reports to CES National to disseminate via the CES website and its print newsletter (send summaries to Jacqueline Gross, [jgross@essentialschools.org](mailto:jgross@essentialschools.org)).
2. Document exhibition practices and achievements and send pictures and stories to local news organizations or community audiences after the fact.
3. Hold a school-wide or public event to recognize the exhibitions that have occurred and celebrate student achievements with community members.
4. Post a summary of exhibition activities during the national campaign on the school's website or in newsletters, blogs, or reports to community audiences
5. Write a letter to the editor or submit an Op/Ed piece to the local newspaper prior to any actual Exhibitions (after you've held exhibitions if you're in Phase 2).
6. Invite neighboring educators, community leaders, parents, legislators, city officials, reporters and other thought leaders to observe one or more Exhibitions.
7. Invite and prepare neighboring educators, community leaders, parents, legislators, city officials, or other thought leaders to sit on juries
8. Issue a local press release describing participation in the national campaign
9. Invite local media to cover an exhibition, interview students and staff, and write/produce a story

**If you are in Phase 3 or 4** and you choose to invite media to attend Exhibitions, you are operating on a different plane and need to take extra care to insure that your Exhibitions represent the best authentic assessment practices of your school. It is critical that the media perceive Exhibitions as genuine assessments with real consequences that are part of a larger instructional context. In other words, you should explain that as part of the on-going process, not all the Exhibitions will be exemplary. Make clear that in many cases, students can be asked to re-do and refine their work to meet the school's standards, and that one important purpose of Exhibitions is to help document student growth over time.

The important thing to remember is that no one controls the media. They may have agendas that have nothing to do with your school's desire to advance Exhibitions over standardized tests. Nevertheless, since local media are important conduits to greater public audiences, the risk is generally worth taking.

This warning is not meant to discourage you from including the media; rather it is to alert you to the necessity of presenting high-quality Exhibitions and the school structures that support them.

**If you're in Phase 2**, you may have a more forgiving audience, but you will be more likely to persuade them of the value of Exhibitions if what they see is exceptional. Forgiving or not, each observer has friends and relatives whose opinions can be shaped by what they hear from the observer.

**If you're in Phase 1** and would like to participate next year, consider what would be required to take your exhibition work to the next level and host an outside audience. Calibrate the distance between what you have in place currently and what you would need to be comfortable opening your Exhibitions to the public, and begin making plans to fill in those gaps.

**Other qualifiers.** To evaluate whether or not you have Exhibition candidates ready to meet the outside world, consider also the following:

- The enthusiasm and experience of teachers and students. For this year, people must “get it” quickly and immediately jump on board.
- The degree to which the Exhibitions are centered on “essential questions” that require critical thinking skills rather than simplistic linear reports with “yes” or “no” answers. The best Exhibitions are not just projects that motivate students; rather, they evoke fundamental questions that engage students in real intellectual work.

Visit [http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/137](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/137) to read a Horace article for an explanation of essential questions and how they are used.

- The use of an easily understood and observable scoring system (rubric), so that your outside guests can appreciate and support the system by which the Exhibition is being judged. Good rubrics require serious investments in development and training, so it is not a task to be undertaken at the last minute. Choose instead an Exhibition based on a rubric that has been tested and improved over time, can be stated in clear, plain language, and demonstrably does the following:
  - Helps teachers define excellence and plan how to help students achieve it.
  - Communicates to students what constitutes excellence and how to evaluate their own work.
  - Communicates goals and results to parents and others.
  - Helps teachers or other raters be accurate, unbiased and consistent in scoring.
  - Documents the procedures used in making important judgments about students.(List from Herman, Aschbacher & Winters, *A Practical Guide To Alternative Assessment*, 1992.)

- Availability of appropriate mentors and jurists. The jurists, in particular, will need to be available not only for the event itself, but for a thorough orientation to the scoring rubric prior to the Exhibition. Depending on the subject of the Exhibition, seek candidates through local Chambers of Commerce, civic groups such as Kiwanis and Rotary, arts organizations, and professional associations. Check in your Yellow Pages under “Associations” for a host of organizations in almost every imaginable field.

Ready? Great. Let's get organized.

## **Management of the project**

- Confirm dates, names, subjects and locations of Exhibitions with all participants: teachers, students, and jurists.
- For outside jurists, confirm availability for orientation prior to the Exhibition.
- Form your National Exhibition Month work team, including a Coordinator. As the “go-to” person, this individual will carry out or supervise most of the activities of National Exhibition Month. If your school has a Public Information Officer or outreach specialist you can call on, now is a good time to do so.

## **Advance Preparation**

### **Your Guest List**

- Prepare your guest list. It may include parents, subject matter experts, local congress-people, local government officials, school board members, the superintendent of your district, outside jurists, and college professors, among others.
- Meet with your outreach specialist and/or review Advocacy Kit for information about communicating with elected officials and members of the media.
- Continue to solicit and confirm outside jurists, both for the Exhibition and for orientation.

### **Invitations**

- Issue invitations (in setting time, allow time for briefing meeting prior to the Exhibition.)
- Record responses.
- Follow up “no responses” with phone or e-mail.
- Confirm positive responses with phone or e-mail.

### **Prepare handouts for guests**

- Folders with event and date listed on outside
- New York Times or local news articles about standardized testing
- CES Fact Sheet about National Exhibition Month
- Copy of news release (see Advocacy Kit) and clippings of any stories about your school
- Agenda – what you will see today
- Explanation and copy of scoring rubric
- Frequently Asked Questions

### **Host**

- Identify the individual who will act as host (this could be you, of course).
- With the host, prepare a briefing for visitors that includes the following:

- A description of what the guests will see that day (for example, a performance or a culminating exhibition that is required for graduation),
- An explanation of rubrics and how they work, particularly in this case
- An endorsement of Exhibitions as a superior means of assessing students knowledge and their ability to use it
- A question and answer session
- Rehearse the briefing

## **Documentation**

- Arrange for a photographer to cover the preparation for and the Exhibition itself
- Notify your web page editor and arrange for information and pictures to be put up on your site and to be sent to CES National (send to Jacqueline Gross, [jgross@essentialschools.org](mailto:jgross@essentialschools.org))
- Similarly, notify your school newspaper of the Exhibition

## **Signage**

- Prepare signage directing visitors from front door to presentation room, rest rooms, and front office
- Prepare parking lot signage if front door and/or handicapped access door is not obvious from the lot

## **Meetings**

- Hold orientation session for outside jurists several days prior to Exhibition
- Weekly, meet with outreach specialist and/or review Advocacy Kit to make sure promotion plan is in action
- Meet with student presenters to review Student Checklist (in separate document)

## **Day of the Exhibition**

### **Welcome your guests**

- Make sure signage is in place
- Greet visitors...(possibly a table with nametags, a sign-in sheet, and student hosts at door)
- Accompany visitors to briefing room
- Conduct briefing for visitors. Conclude promptly, but take questions if there is time before the start of the Exhibition
- Accompany visitors to Exhibition room (if different)

### **Seek feedback**

At conclusion of student Exhibition, ask your visitors to fill out and leave with the host a simple evaluation that can be used to improve the event next year. For example:

### Did the Exhibition

- Meet your expectations?
- Exceed your expectations. In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_
- Not meet your expectations. In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

### **After the Exhibition**

- The next day, review the Advocacy Kit and catch up on any tasks still remaining
- In about a week, phone or e-mail all visitors. Ask:
  - Has your evaluation or impression of the event changed since day of Exhibition? In what ways?
  - For media people – will they be running stories? What other information can you provide? If not, why not? What would persuade them to run stories in the future?
- Follow up with people who said they would come and didn't. Why not?
- Conduct post-mortem(s) with students, teachers and National Exhibition Month work team. What would they change? What worked?
- Compile report and answer CES National questionnaire, which will be available on-line in early June.
- Establish National Exhibition Month 2007 work team, and identify goals for 2007
- Begin preparations for 2007. Keep abreast of developments on the CES National website, [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)

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## National Exhibition Month 2006

### STUDENT GUIDELINES

Nearly everyone's had some variation of "the exam dream." You're running toward a classroom for your final exam, but you can't remember exactly where it is because you've never been to class or even read the book.

Don't let this happen to you in real life. A few hours of advance preparation can head off days of anxiety and make you look like a professional presenter, as well.

Begin by reviewing the following lists with your teacher/sponsor and making plans to check off those items that apply to you and your Exhibition.

#### Advance Preparation

1. List all the media and tools that will be part of your Exhibition and note the day you expect to complete that part of the presentation. Create additional rows if necessary.

	Date to be completed	Still need...	Comments
Display boards			
Written documents			
Script or notes for oral remarks			
Computer demonstrations			
Audio and or video products			
"Live" experiments or demonstrations			

2. If your Exhibition includes pictures, or computer or video support, you need to make sure that your audience can actually SEE them.
  - Make the visuals big enough. A good rule of thumb is that a picture or computer or video screen should be 1/6 the distance from your audience. Thus, if your audience is six feet away from you, the visual should be one foot wide. If the audience is 12 feet away, your visual needs to be two feet across.
  - Use big type and big pictures within your visuals. Another rule of thumb – Use no more than six-eight lines of type, and make each line of type no more than 28-30 characters.

- If you are using computer or video elements, you may need to turn off the lights and/or pull down shades so that the audience can see them (check out the actual room where you will be doing your Exhibition to find out). If it is permitted, enlisting a friend to handle these duties for you will make your presentation flow much more smoothly and will enable you to keep your focus.
3. Prepare and rehearse the opening and closing for your presentation. While many people feel that too much rehearsal takes away their “edge,” professional presenters, including actors, singers, speakers, even winners of American Idol contests, know that this is not true. There is plenty of adrenalin to go around without worrying about the words you’re going to say.
- At the very least, write down the first paragraph you will speak. It should include:
    - “Welcome” to the audience. Remember, they are your guests.
    - “My name is...\_\_\_\_\_. I’m a (grade level) at (name of school).”
    - “The purpose of my Exhibition is....”
  
  - Write also your LAST paragraph:
    - “That concludes my proof that....” (Refers to the “purpose” in the first paragraph)
    - “Thank you” for coming.”
    - “Now, may I answer any questions?”
  
  - Then, practice them over and over, making adjustments as necessary to make them genuinely “your words.”
4. You will also want to prepare and rehearse the entire presentation, using an outline or speaker’s notes.
- Draft a thorough outline of your Exhibition. Talk it through out loud, making notes and changes until you are fluent with it.
  - Time yourself making the presentation and adjust it to fit the time you are allotted.
  - Run through the actual presentation, paying attention to the “choreography” – that is, where you will stand for your opening statement, where you move next, what any machines or experiments require by way of movement, and where you will stand for your closing.
  - Readjust the length of the presentation if necessary to fit the time you are allotted.
  - Identify any elements that require you to stand with your back to the audience and fix them.
  - After you’re comfortable on your own, ask your “AV assistant,” if any, to rehearse with you.
  - Finally, if you have time, rehearse with different audiences until you are completely familiar with your material and can answer any questions they bring up.

## Day of the Exhibition

1. While you may have help from school services in setting up your room, it is nevertheless your responsibility to make certain that all the equipment you need is in the room, in the right place, and working. Giving yourself plenty of time to locate any missing items or to repair any non-working equipment, arrange to check out the room on the day of the Exhibition for the following:
  - A table or desk for any objects you may be using
  - A table or desk for any display boards
  - AV and/or computer equipment, plugged in and working (test with your media)
  - Chairs or desks for audience members. Check viewing angles from each chair to make sure the audience can see everything you want them to see
  - Drinking water for you
  - Anything else you have on your list
2. Dress for success. Dress codes vary widely and are sometimes controversial. The best advice is to remember who your audience is, and dress accordingly. Imagine, for example, that you are going on a job interview for a job you really want.
3. Welcome your guests. Take a deep breath, smile, and open your Exhibition with the enthusiastic welcome and introduction you have prepared.
4. Present with confidence. A little stage fright is normal. Use its energy to help you put on the best Exhibition you've ever done. You know the material and you've rehearsed the action. Go for it.
5. Close your presentation by restating your proof, by thanking your guests for coming, and by offering to answer any questions.

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## National Exhibition Month 2006

### ADVOCACY ACTION KIT

To achieve your goals for National Exhibition Month, successful outreach to the public through the media is essential. If you already have close relationships with local reporters, you are many steps ahead. If this is your first time soliciting coverage of your activities, you will find it a useful learning experience. Wherever you stand, National Exhibition Month is an opportunity to create and nurture positive relationships with the media by sharing information about your students and schools.

This Action Kit includes checklists and tools that can jump-start your outreach activities. Feel free to adapt the tools and use as much of the kit as you need to get the word out about your Exhibition program. See our Participation Guide for suggested activities that might involve outreach to the media and our Guide for Creating a Successful Local Event for tips about opening your school to the public.

Because inviting media or public figures to your school brings a higher degree of scrutiny and can be somewhat risky, we suggest that only schools in advanced phases of implementing Exhibitions engage in media outreach to cover an Exhibition event. Remember, no one controls the media and it is critical that you feel confident in your school's Exhibition program before inviting reporters or high-profile public figures to observe or participate.

This kit contains samples of a number of items that you can modify to fit your local context and circumstances. Use these templates as a guide in getting started, but insert your own names, dates, facts, quotes, or other information as necessary.

#### **As you work with these tools, keep your advocacy goal foremost at all times:**

To persuade new audiences in your community that Exhibitions are a positive and compelling form of assessment.

#### **Here are suggestions for how to go about developing your action plan:**

##### **Prepare your story**

The backbone of your outreach activities is your story.

- Start with a local "Fact Sheet" that contains the essentials about your event: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. Be thorough. Include contact name, phone number and e-mail; exact dates, times, places, and how your local event ties into National Exhibition Month. Pay particular attention to the "Why" question. "Why is this important to our children?" "Why is this important to the community?" "Why is this newsworthy?" Make it as concrete, colorful and dramatic as possible.

For a sample Local Fact Sheet, see pg. 16 in the Appendix.

- ❑ Because minors are the centerpiece of your story and could be interviewed, you may want to get talent releases signed by the student and a parent or guardian.
- ❑ Develop a strong visual element such as placing a big sign on your school’s marquee or over the front entrance, having an Exhibition performed outside, or putting on an Exhibition featuring a unique or strong element of your school’s program that will generate curiosity from the public and the media. As soon as practical, photograph this visual and use it at every opportunity.
- ❑ Write a news release appropriate to your level of participation in National Exhibition Month.

For a sample News Release, see pg. 17 in the Appendix.

### **Reinforce your story**

- ❑ Draft an Op Ed (opinion pieces placed “Opposite the Editorial” page) about the value of Exhibitions.

For a sample Op Ed, see pg. 19 in the Appendix.

- ❑ Draft a “letter to the editor” in support of Exhibitions. Enlist an enthusiastic parent or supporter to actually send it. You may also tailor it to be written by a staff member or student at your school.

For a sample Letter to the Editor, see pg. 21 in the Appendix.

- ❑ Write a short *Calendar Item* if you are hosting a public event. Look in your local newspaper for the format used and follow it precisely.

### **Prepare your “pitch”**

Before calling a reporter, make sure you know what you want to say.

For a sample Pitch to Media, see pg. 22 in the Appendix.

Of course, you will adapt your pitch depending on your level of public participation in National Exhibition Month. In the case of an event or celebration to which the public is invited, for example, you will want to talk to people at several media outlets and position your story for each one. Consider these examples:

- ❑ The local news Metro editor for a short announcement prior to the event and possible coverage of the event itself.
- ❑ A morning talk show producer for a mention as a “recommended event of the day” or for a live interview.
- ❑ An education reporter for a focus on Exhibitions as a better testing option.
- ❑ The Editorial Page editor, for both the Op Ed and letter to the editor. Letters do not normally have to be pitched, but you can increase the odds of getting a letter printed if

you talk to the editorial page editor in advance. Ask for desired word count, the best day to send something to increase its chances of being used, and how to follow up.

### **Use your story to help build relationships with local media**

If you have close media contacts, approach them as you normally would. If you are new to media relations, here are some tips.

- ❑ Draw up a list of talking points to help remind you of the main ideas you want to communicate to media or any other outside observers. Keep this list handy during phone calls, at the event itself, or in any follow-up conversations.

For a list of sample Talking Points, see pg. 24 in the Appendix

- ❑ Create your media list. Get the names, titles, phones and e-mail of all media people who cover the education beat in your neighborhood. You can often find these people listed on the newspaper or station website, or you can simply call the main number and ask for the person on the news desk, who in turn, can fill you in as to who's who. This individual can usually tell you if reporters like to get their news by fax or e-mail.
  - For print media -- ask for the news department and get the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of the editor, the managing editor, the education editor and/or reporters, the editorial page editor and the "Calendar" editor.
  - For broadcast media -- ask for the same information for the news director, the assignment desk, and the producers of the local morning talk shows, both television and radio.
- ❑ Send by e-mail or fax your news release and local fact sheet to all the promising names on your list.
- ❑ Call all contacts the following day to make sure they have received the information you sent. A surprising number will say they have not seen it. In any case, make your pitch and e-mail or fax the material again.
- ❑ Without becoming a pest, keep in touch with the reporters and keep them updated with new information to make sure the story doesn't simply die of lack of perceived interest.
- ❑ If you are staging a public event such as an open house, send the notice to the "Calendar" editor of all media, and to the local morning talk shows. Also, send invitations for the event to all relevant media contacts.
- ❑ Call each media contact about a week before the event and ask if they have any questions or if you can put them in touch with someone special. Specifically ask if they will cover the event or if they are planning to use the story. Don't be shy about this – it's not personal, it's just business. If they say "no," ask why. This will help in focusing your next story.

- ❑ If they do use the story or cover the event, it never hurts to send a thank you note, even if the story is not as long or as wonderful as you'd like it to be.
- ❑ If a station or reporter wants to interview you (or your principal, designated host, a student, or a teacher) review these basic guidelines with the interviewee:
  - Remember the main point of the exercise: to demonstrate that Exhibitions are a better way to test.
  - Consult your talking points and rehearse them before-hand
  - Know three stories that prove that point. Tell one of them as soon as you can.
  - Have a short concluding line that reinforces the premise.
  - Don't get sidetracked into discussing anything that's not your story. If a reporter wants to talk about another school or something otherwise unrelated, simply say that you can speak only for your own school. Then, tell the second story that proves that Exhibitions are a better way to test.
  - Don't argue with an editor or reporter. If they ask a quarrelsome or provocative question, tell yet another story that proves your point.
  - Conclude by emphasizing that exhibitions are a much more comprehensive and useful tool for assessing student progress and offer to provide them with further examples.
  - If you have time to role-play the interview before it actually happens, it can be extremely helpful.
  - If it's a TV interview, dress professionally, in flattering colors. Avoid stark black and white.

### **Document all activities**

- ❑ Take still film or digital pictures.
- ❑ Send pictures and a brief synopsis of your Exhibition activities to CES National. Send all correspondence to Jacqueline Gross, [jgross@essentialschools.org](mailto:jgross@essentialschools.org).
- ❑ Keep clippings and pictures in a file or scrapbook easily accessible for next year.
- ❑ Forward any links of news stories or digital images on the web to CES National.

###

(When distributing, attach to campaign Fact Sheet produced by CES National)

# FACT SHEET

(Name of your event)

For Further Information:    Name  
   Phone  
   E-Mail Address

WHO:                    (Name of School, and if possible, names of students)

WHAT:                (Celebration/Open House/Public Exhibitions... as part of National Exhibition Month)

WHEN:                (Date and time of your event)

WHERE:                (Name of location, address, cross streets, phone number)

WHY:                 To demonstrate that Exhibitions are a more comprehensive way to measure student progress than standardized tests (or your language).

HOW:                 (Description of your event in some detail, but do not run over into second page.)

## ABOUT NATIONAL EXHIBITION MONTH

### **National Exhibition Month**

- Is a nationwide celebration of student accomplishment. More than one hundred schools across 25 states will open their doors to parents and community members so students can showcase their work and achievements.
- Will highlight and promote Exhibitions as a more effective and comprehensive way of assessing student performance than standardized paper and pencil tests.
- Is sponsored by the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national non-profit organization working to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

###

# NEWS RELEASE

From (Your School)  
(Address)

For Immediate Release  
(Date)

Contact: (Name, Phone, E-Mail Address)

## **Exhibitions at (Name of School) Serve Students Better Than Standardized Tests**

### **Sit down or stand up?**

In a challenge to the year-end ritual of sitting for standardized tests, students at (name of school) will instead get on their feet, walk around, point, argue, and perhaps even cook or (something unique to your Exhibitions) in front of a very public audience.

“What they’re doing is called an ‘Exhibition,’ and it’s the way in which our students show what they know and what they have learned,” said (your name, title and school). “This year, we’re doing a special Exhibition activity on (date) as part of National Exhibition Month.”

(Your name) explained that National Exhibition Month was a campaign sponsored by the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national non-profit organization working to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools. “We will be joining more than 100 schools across 25 states in opening our doors to parents and community members so students can showcase their work and achievements,” (he/she) said.

“Our objective is to show that Exhibitions are a more effective and comprehensive way of assessing student performance than standardized paper-and-pencil tests,” (name) said. “They show students, parents, colleges, and employers how well students can do in real-world situations,” (she/he) said.

“We can demonstrate these results – (if you have data of any kind, fill in, otherwise delete.)  
(more)

## **What happens at an Exhibition?**

(Name) said that like their counterparts across the country, (name of school) students use all the presentation tools at their disposal to argue a premise that they have been exploring over a period of time, in some cases for as long as a year. This year's Exhibitions, for example, have titles such as \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

The audience is made up of students, parents, experts in the subject, mentors, community professionals, and other teachers. Some are observers; others are jurists who will help score the Exhibition.

"It's serious business," (Name) said. "The judges are not there to be entertained, although that may be an occasional side-effect. Instead, with the help of special scoring tools, they are there to determine whether the student has researched deeply, studied widely, mastered the material, applied critical thinking skills, and presented their data competently."

## **Stakes are high**

(Name) explained that if the students leap these hurdles, they earn the privilege of advancing to the next class, the next grade, or to graduation ceremonies. If they do not meet expectations, they are asked to repeat the Exhibition and are given advice and assistance on ways to do it better next time.

"We also use Exhibitions throughout the year to gauge a student's strengths and needs, and to plan for further support," (Name) said. "So what you see in every case may not be as sophisticated as an Exhibition done by a graduating senior, but it is equally valuable as a way of developing a plan to increase the student's competence over time."

(Name) said that Exhibitions have been used at (name of school) for \_\_\_ years, with good results. ("Some good statistics about attendance, graduation, retention, and/or college-going rates for your school,") said (Name)

For further information, call (contact person and phone number).

###

## **Proposed Op Ed**

**From: (Your Name)**  
**(Your School)**  
**(Address)**  
**(Phone Number)**  
**(E-mail)**

### **Exhibitions Better Serve Students and Community than Standardized Tests**

By (Your Name)

There's a better way of assessing student progress than standardized tests. It's called an "Exhibition."

An Exhibition is an in-depth presentation – an academic performance of sorts – in which students demonstrate to a public audience what they know and have learned over the course of a unit, a semester, or a whole year. Rather than being experimental, Exhibitions have been around for a long time and rely on the time-honored tradition of the PhD defense in which candidates orally present and defend their work to external assessors. In today's version, students present the results of months-long multi-disciplinary projects to panels of teachers and other jurists.

The stakes are high. If the students succeed in convincing the jurists that they have researched deeply, studied widely, mastered the material, applied critical thinking skills, and been "good on their feet" as presenters, the jurists will recommend that they be awarded a passing score, a promotion to the next grade level, or a ticket to graduation ceremonies. If they do not make a good enough case with their presentation, they will be asked to repeat it and are given advice and assistance on ways to do it better next time.

(Your school name) has been using Exhibitions for \_\_ years to measure students' ability to meet the demands of the real world in a way that paper and pencil tests cannot. We have found Exhibitions to be a challenging and accurate gauge of student achievement. They require students to develop and use a wide range of skills as they publicly demonstrate critical thinking ability and depth of understanding. They also offer schools and teachers real data on student learning and are used as a teaching tool to better understand a learner's strengths and needs.

Exhibitions also meet accountability standards and can be aligned with [your state's name] learning outcomes. Indeed, states like Nebraska and Rhode Island allow schools to use Exhibitions and other forms of performance assessment to show progress in meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, like other schools across the country that use Exhibitions, our school has fared well in conventional measures of success: (insert any good statistic about attendance, retention, graduation, or college-going rates that supports the statement).

This month, as a celebration of what our Exhibition program has accomplished, we are taking part in National Exhibition Month, a new campaign sponsored by the Coalition of Essential

Schools (of which we are a member). Our goal is to demonstrate to our community that Exhibitions are a more effective and comprehensive way of assessing student performance than standardized tests.

Organizing some (number of) Exhibitions over the course of the year is a huge task. It is time-consuming and difficult for everyone, including students, teachers, families, and the community. However, Exhibitions also generate high energy and creative thinking throughout the whole school that turns us all on.

Our students get it and like it, too. “Insert quote from local student,” said (student’s name).

We are proud of our students and proud to be a part of this nationwide campaign. If you would like to learn more about this campaign or about the Exhibitions program in our school, we encourage you to visit us and see for yourself what our students know and are capable of doing.

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## Letter to the Editor

(This letter should be written on the personal stationary of the one sending it.)

Name of Editorial Page Editor

Publication

Address

City, State & Zipcode

Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. (or To the Editor):

Given recent headlines about the problems scoring standardized tests, I think your readers might like to know that (Name of School) employs a way of “testing” that avoids these scoring disasters entirely. It is called an “exhibition,” and it is a better, fairer, and more complete way to measure student progress.

My child is in \_\_\_ grade at the school, and for the last \_\_\_\_ years, has performed exhibitions. These are presentations in which (he/she) demonstrates to a public audience what (he/she) knows and has learned over a unit, a semester, or a whole year.

These are more than just book reports or show-and-tell sessions. My child spent significant time (insert number of months) researching, writing, doing experiments, rewriting, creating artwork, and practicing (his/her) delivery for a panel of judges. The whole family has been involved and has learned a lot about (student’s subject matter) as well as how well my (son or daughter) can do in real-world situations.

I believe that exhibitions are the wave of the future and I hope that more and more schools will use them as a measurement of student achievement. They have made it possible for my (son/daughter) to really explore a subject in depth, to think hard about the what (he/she) is learning, and to “connect the dots” in ways that really make me proud. I urge you and other parents to learn more about exhibitions and to call for their widespread use.

Sincerely yours,

(Name)

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## National Exhibition Month 2006

### PITCHING YOUR STORY

(Make this call the day after you e-mail or fax the news release and local fact sheet.)

Hello, Mr./Mrs./Ms, \_\_\_\_\_. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm the \_\_\_\_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_ School.

I'm following up on a release I sent to you on \_\_\_\_\_. Our school is sharing with the public the way we prefer to assess our students – using exhibitions, rather than standardized tests.

(The chances are good that the reporter will not have seen the material you sent. If he/she has, that's a positive sign. In either case, just continue.)

We're inviting community members, business leaders, and others to come to our school to watch students demonstrate what they've learned. It goes way beyond just pencil and paper. Students actually have to stand in front of a public audience and make in-depth presentations – what we call “Exhibitions” – to defend their work and to show what they know.

It's something like the road test you have to take to get a drivers license. Sure, you have to pass a written test, but the state won't let you on the road if you don't pass the practical driving test, too. So that's what we're doing... asking our students to show that they know how to put knowledge into practice under real-world conditions.

Our public event is scheduled for (date), at (place and time) and we'd like to extend an invitation to you to cover it, or just to observe on background if you'd like to do that. There's a lot of variety in these presentations, from video to \_\_\_\_\_, and it's a real “good news” piece of what's going RIGHT in our schools.

(If the reporter has NOT received your material, continue.)

Let me resend you the release and fact sheet. And, is there anyone else on the staff who covers this beat who might be interested in this story?

Do you prefer it e-mailed or faxed?

(Be sure to get correct contact information and UPDATE YOUR DATA BASE if necessary.)

(Regardless of the response, ask outright.)

Does this story hold any interest for you?

(If not, ask what kinds of education stories are of interest to him/her, and be sure to ask if there is another reporter who would be interested right now. Document the answers so that you can call back another time or redirect the current story to the right person.)

(If yes, ask what further information you can provide, and how otherwise you can be of assistance.)

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## National Exhibition Month 2006

### TALKING POINTS

(Keep this list handy for conversations with media, outside jurists and observers.)

- Exhibitions are like road tests for obtaining driver's licenses. Both demonstrate that the student knows how to put knowledge into practice, and they're both better ways of certifying competence than are written tests.
- Exhibitions are traditional rather than experimental. They rely on the time-honored tradition of the PhD defense in which students orally present and defend their work to external assessors
- Exhibitions are a more challenging and accurate gauge of student achievement than standardized tests. They require students to develop and use a wide range of skills as they publicly demonstrate mastery of an entire curriculum; they reflect progress and competence gained throughout years of schooling, and demand refinement, revision, attention to detail, and higher-order thinking skills.
- Exhibitions promote accountability. Students demonstrate their accountability to the community by showing what they know and what they have learned to parents and community members who have not taught them
- Exhibitions are school-based rather than top-down assessments. They offer schools and teachers real data on student learning, and are used as a teaching tool to better understand a learner's strengths and needs and to plan for further assistance.
- Exhibitions are rigorous. Students explain and defend the thesis underlying their Exhibitions, showing critical thinking skills and depth of understanding.
- Exhibitions measure competence. They serve not as a final judgment, but as an indicator of where the student needs extra attention.
- Exhibitions meet accountability standards. States like Rhode Island and Nebraska include exhibitions and other forms of performance assessment in their accountability systems; New York state allows a consortium of 28 schools to evaluate its students on a portfolio of work in place of five of the six state Regents' exams
- Schools that use exhibitions fare well in conventional measures of success. Specific schools in New York and Boston have shown higher graduation and college-bound rates than counterparts that don't use exhibitions.

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