

Some Background Information about the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)

During 2005-2006, the NECAP science content committee, using existing research in science learning and a variety of national curriculum, assessment, and research resources, worked to clarify how science inquiry would be assessed at three targeted grade levels. Four broad areas of inquiry and specific related inquiry constructs were identified for assessment in the NECAP Science Assessment at grades 4, 8, and 11. Each broad area provides a unifying thread of inquiry learning, with the specific constructs (evidence) “looking” somewhat different (as appropriate to grades 4, 8, and 11). These constructs are assessed as part of an inquiry performance task or an extended response task on the NECAP Science Assessment.

The Science Inquiry Learning Progression and resulting Student Profile were developed in support of schools participating in the NECAP Science Assessment (New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). The PreK- 4 Profile was designed starting with the specific inquiry constructs assessed in the NECAP Science assessment at grade 4 (NH, RI, & VT , 2008). The descriptors of the grade 4 inquiry constructs were then “extended down” through grades 3 to PreK levels for each of the four broad areas of inquiry. Descriptors were informed by state and national curriculum content standards, science and language learning research documents, and findings from a VT action research project (2002-2003) involving scientific drawings and observation skills.

Placement of specific inquiry skills *at particular grade levels* PreK-3 is somewhat “arbitrary” in that while they do represent a defensible learning continuum of skills, the grade level designations should be confirmed with each school district’s science curriculum committee. In other words, all grade 4 students will be assessed on the same inquiry learning expectations on the NECAP science assessment; however, each school team will determine how to align new and existing science curriculum units and related skills along the continuum and in consideration of various classroom configurations (e.g., single grade versus multi-grade classrooms). In some cases, a skill might be moved to the adjacent grade level to indicate when mastery is expected for all students at that grade. These decisions of grade-specific expectations should be made school-wide or district-wide, but would not change what is expected for grade 4 students if assessed on the grade 4 science NECAP assessment.

For more detail about the NECAP science inquiry constructs at grades 4, 8, and 11, see “NECAP Science Assessment: [Guidelines for the Development of Science Inquiry Tasks](#).” (2008). Available online at NH, RI, and VT Departments of Education websites.

Sample units of study and common assessments included in the sample Student Profile are *used for illustration purposes ONLY*. School-based science teams should determine which units of study and which assessments will provide the most meaningful information about student learning.