

We have designed each “White Paper” to explore a fundamental educational principle and key issues engaging the education community we serve. It is our goal to partner with our readers as they meet the challenges they face.



Student Review, Testing & Assessment
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Criterion- and Norm-Referenced Assessment & Castle Learning Online

The student who enters any classroom in America today, will traditionally experience the same thing: course content that must be learned; a teacher, dedicated to his/her field; multi-faceted students with differing backgrounds, abilities and learning styles, and eventually, the experience of being evaluated either for their own knowledge or in relation to how he/she compares with others. Over the past 30 years, an increasingly sharp distinction has been drawn between these two forms of assessment. **Norm-Referenced Assessment**, as educators understand the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) for example, focuses on comparisons among students, “where student performance was compared to a larger group or ‘norm group’ with a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students.” These tests sorted students or rank-ordered them in relation to the norm group. (See *The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing*, 1996) On the other hand, **Criterion-Referenced Assessment** measures what a student understands or knows, his or her specific strengths and weaknesses in relation to skills defined as the goals of the instruction, but it does not compare students to other students.

In an *Education Week* study published December 10, 2003, the names and types of tests for every state disclosed that 41 out of 50 states focused on **Criterion-Referenced Assessment**. Several examples include:

State	Test name	Test type
Maine	Maine Educational Assessment	Criterion-Referenced
New Jersey	NJ Assessment of Knowledge & Skills (NJ ASK – grades 3 and 4)	Criterion-Referenced
New Jersey	NJ Grade 8 (GEPA) and HS (HSPA) Proficiency Assessment	Criterion-Referenced
New York	NYS Assessment Program and HS Regents Exams	Criterion-Referenced
North Carolina	NC End of Course (EOC) and End of Grade Tests (EOG)	Criterion-Referenced
Pennsylvania	PA State System of Assessment	Criterion-Referenced
Texas	TX Assessment of Knowledge & Skills (TAKS)	Criterion-Referenced
Virginia	VA Standards of Learning (SOL)	Criterion-Referenced

While most states have opted for **Criterion-Referenced Assessments**, *Castle Learning Online* provides dual applications:

- For a long time, *Castle Learning Online* has been seen as an excellent **Norm-Referenced Assessment** where each student can be compared with the whole class or where scores can be used by the district/county administrator as a benchmark to compare that student with the entire group being tested.
- When used by teachers as a supplement to their regular instruction *Castle Learning Online* provides an exceptional **Criterion-Referenced Assessment**. Teachers must constantly have a way to evaluate how well a student understands course content and to build lessons that address weaknesses, perhaps requiring remediation for one or all students in the class. One of the teachers I met with stated that with *Castle Learning Online* “I can analyze a student’s weaknesses or compare the student with the whole class,” and it is a “good way of finding out what topics I need to review in class before state tests.” She also remarked that “I can assess the areas that need to be re-taught or reviewed and I can tell quickly and easily which students are having troubles with a topic. I can learn what is working and what isn’t with regards to how I present material.” With *Castle Learning Online* teachers have **Criterion-Referenced Assessment** in their “tool bag for learning.”