PAINTING A FULLER PICTURE:

Leader Guide to Maximizing School and

District Assessment Systems

Leaders working to develop a coherent, balanced assessment system should understand the different types of assessments and their uses. Each type of assessment—diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative—gives families, educators, and administrators different grain sizes and types of information, each of which allow families to understand how their child is performing academically, educators to make informed decisions for improving student learning, and administrators to consider programmatic and staffing decisions to address student needs. No type of assessment is inherently better than the other. Instead, they work together to tell a story about the kind of supports students need to learn the skills and knowledge essential for their success in college and careers.

ASSESSMENT TYPES AND THEIR USES

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENTS

- *What They Are/Can Do*
  - Gauge student skills *prior* to instruction
  - Allow educators to determine what foundational skills may need review for students to access upcoming content
  - Can be teacher created assessments or standardized external assessments
  - Provide a baseline for determining student growth over the course of the year
- *What They Are Not/Can't Do*
  - May not be directly aligned to state academic standards
  - Provide comparable data across students in different classrooms, schools, or districts
  - Assess student growth, either within or across school years

What Tools They Provide Educators
  - What knowledge about the skills I'm planning to teach in the coming unit do my students already have?
  - What knowledge and skills do my students already have as they start the school year?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

- *What They Are/Can Do*
  - Gauge student understanding to directly inform instructional decisions
  - Focused on single skills or concepts

- o Can be administered as often as every day
- o Range from entrance or exit tickets to teacher-designed quizzes and tests
- o Allow teachers to make real-time adjustments to a lesson, determine small groups for targeted instruction, or prompt whole-class reviews of specific concepts or skills
- **What They Are Not/Can't Do**
  - ○ May not be directly aligned to state academic standards
  - ○ Don't provide comparable data across students in different classrooms, schools, or districts

> *What Tools They Provide Educators*
> FOR TEACHERS:
> - o Did my students understand the key points of today's lesson?
> - o What skills do I need to review with all of my students prior to our end of unit test?
> - o Which students would benefit from additional small group support to reinforce important concepts?

INTERIM ASSESSMENTS

- **What They Are/Can Do**
  - o Assessments conducted a few times throughout the year to ensure students are on track to and making progress, such as MAP or i-Ready
  - o Teacher-created mid-term or end-of-unit exams
  - o May focus on skills and concepts that may span multiple grade-levels
  - o Used to identify students for formal interventions or support services
  - o Track student growth or progress of interventions over the course of the year
  - o Used to make curricular changes based on gaps in student performance over time
- **What They Are Not/Can't Do**
  - ○ Don't directly inform day-to- day instruction
  - ○ Don't provide comparable data across different schools or districts
  - ○ Don't assess student growth from year-to-year

> *What Tools They Provide Educators*
> FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:
> - o What students or groups of students in our school need additional supports to access grade-level content?
> - o Are students in our school making adequate progress over the course of the year?
> - o What proportion of our students are on track to and making progress at this point in the year?
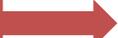
ANNUAL STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS

- *What They Are/Can Do*
  - o Measurement of student achievement against state academic standards, aligned to skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary success
  - o Focused on all the content and skills for current grade-level
  - o Common assessments across all students in the state, allowing for results to be compared between students, student groups, schools, and districts
  - o Measure of academic achievement of students over time
  - o Typically administered at the end of the school year, though some states are piloting "through-year assessments," which instead take place 2-3 times throughout the year
  - o Allow educators to make adjustments to curricula based on trends for students in the same grade over time
- *What They Are Not/Can't Do*
  - o Don't provide information to make direct, real-time changes to instruction
  - o Don't measure whether students are learning content that is above or below their grade level

What Tools They Provide Educators
FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:
  - o How are students in our school achieving compared to schools with similar students across the state?
  - o How are 6th graders in our schools performing compared to 8th graders?
FOR DISTRICT LEADERS:
  - o How are students of color in the district performing compared to their white peers? Are there schools where gaps in performance are smaller than others?
FOR STATE LEADERS:
  - o How are third grade students in the state performing compared to third grade students last year?

BUILDING A COHERENT, BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The below information will help you take stock of your current assessment and data practices, and identify opportunities for improving your assessment and data systems. Each section also includes relevant resources to explore each area in more depth and inform potential actions to build a more coherent assessment system in your school or district.

QUESTIONS TO ASK: What interim assessments are we currently using in our school/district? Are these assessments aligned to the state's academic standards and summative assessment?

WHY IT MATTERS: Interim assessments are designed to provide educators and administrators insight about how students are progressing towards year-end goals as measured by summative assessments, so it's critical they are assessing the same skills and content at each grade level.

RESOURCES:
- Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments | CCSSO
- Achievethecore.org: Assessment Evaluation Tool

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: Is our curriculum aligned with our summative assessment? Interim Assessments?

WHY IT MATTERS: Assessments are most useful as measures of learning if they are assessing the content and skills students are actually encountering in the classroom each day. Additionally, when curriculum and lessons are aligned to the content and rigor of assessments, there is little need to spend valuable class time on test prep.

RESOURCES:
- Achievethecore.org: Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool
- EdReports Curriculum Reviews
- ELA/Literacy Grade-Level Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: How often are students being assessed with interim and statewide summative assessments? What percentage of instructional time is this taking?

WHY IT MATTERS: Perceptions of over-testing are often linked to required federal and state assessments, but studies from 2014 and 2015 find that required testing takes just 2% or less of instructional time. By examining how much each type of assessment cuts into instruction, schools and districts can make informed decisions about changing which assessments are given in each grade and/or subject.

RESOURCES:
- Student Testing in America's Great City Schools

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: How much time are teachers in our school/district devoting to teaching students how to test (test prep) instead of teaching content? What percentage of instructional time is this taking?

WHY IT MATTERS: Taking time out from instruction to prepare students for taking assessments can add to perceptions of over-testing, and may, in fact, not actually improve student performance on the assessments. While giving students a basic primer on what to expect on an upcoming assessment is likely a good idea, test prep may lead to increased testing anxiety while not actually improving scores.

RESOURCES:
- [Testing and Test Prep: How Much Is Too Much? - Education Writers Association](#)
- [This School Didn't Teach to the Test—And Scored Better](#)
- [Listening to Parent and Teacher Voices](#)

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: What messages about assessments are educators in our building hearing from administrators? What messages are students receiving from educators?

WHY IT MATTERS: Educators and administrators should frame assessment as an opportunity to highlight existing skills and an opportunity for growth. Doing so has the potential to both reduce anxiety and improve student achievement. When not framed to focus on continuous improvement, assessments can cause anxiety among both educators and students—and potentially even lower test scores.

RESOURCES:

o Goble: How Schools Can Change Their Culture of Assessment to Make Scary Tests Into a Road Map for Learning | The 74
o How Do Principals Influence Student Achievement?
o Testing, Stress, and Performance: How Students Respond Physiologically to High-Stakes Testing | Education Finance and Policy | MIT Press

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: Do educators in our schools know how to interpret assessment data? Do they have the skills necessary to use the results of assessments (especially formative and interim assessments) to make adjustments to instruction?

WHY IT MATTERS: Assessment and other data cannot have a meaningful impact on student learning unless educators are consistently using it to make instructional decisions. While educators see the value of data, formal data literacy training is rarely a part of teachers' pre-service preparation.

RESOURCES:
o Teachers Want to Use Data BUT CAN'T GO IT ALONE
o Every teacher should succeed with data literacy - kappanonline.org

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: How can educators access state and district assessment data? Are data from all assessments available in a centralized database? What other types of data are available here as well?

WHY IT MATTERS: Having a centralized location for all student-level data (both academic and nonacademic data) is critical for allowing both administrators and educators to make data-informed decisions about school-level interventions and classroom instruction. In addition to simply being available, these data need to presented in a way makes the data understandable, and therefore, actionable.

RESOURCES:
- Educator Access to and Use of Data Systems | RAND
- Making Data Work For Teachers and Students

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: How much time do educators have to analyze assessment data? Are educators doing this in isolation or in collaboration with other educators and administrators?

WHY IT MATTERS: Access to data and educator data skills are meaningless if time is not regularly built into school schedules. This time should aim to provide opportunities for educators (and administrators) to collaboratively analyze data and discuss short- and long-term strategies to improve student learning based on these analyses.

RESOURCES:
o Teacher Data Literacy: It's About Time
o Making Data Work For Teachers and Students
o Team Collaboration: How do leaders build in time and team structures for data-driven instruction?

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED:

QUESTIONS TO ASK: What professional development opportunities are available to educators around the use of assessment data? How often are they available? Do these opportunities allow educators to practice their skills using real local data?

WHY IT MATTERS: As we note above, educators rarely receive formal data training before entering the classroom. Therefore, it's critical that schools and districts consistently provide educators with ongoing professional development opportunities that allow educators to both build and practice their skills in data analysis and applying analysis into data-informed classroom practices.

RESOURCES:
o [Assessment and Data Literacy E- Learning Series | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)
o [5 Ways to Make Teacher Assessment Literacy a Reality - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)
o [Teaching and Assessing Data Literacy](#)

CURRENT PRACTICES:

FUTURE ACTION NEEDED: