|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **District Assessment System Design Toolkit**  *Workshop #1, Advance Reading #6* |
| *Primer on Purposes of Assessment* |

**Developed By**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Joseph Martineau** | Senior Associate |  |
| **Kathy Dewsbury-White**  **Ed Roeber** | President & Chief Executive Officer  Assessment Director |  |
| **Ellen Vorenkamp** | Assessment Consultant |  |
| **Steven Snead**  **Jonathan Flukes** | Supervisor, Curriculum & Instruction Unit  Research, Evaluation, & Assessment Consultant |  |

## Why Clarity of Purpose Matters

Any given assessment with specific characteristics is useful for only a small number of purposes and yet there are many potential purposes of assessment. This means that if a district desires to satisfy too many purposes, it is easy to create an assessment system that is so unwieldy as to be a hindrance rather than a help.

## A Catalog of Purposes of Assessment

In order to create a useful assessment system, it is important to identify the highest priority purposes of the assessment system. This in turn means that it is important to have a common language about the purposes of assessment. This primer provides a catalog of purposes of assessment to create that common language. The catalog of purposes was created to balance a need to be both *specific* enough to identify appropriate types and characteristics of assessment, and *broad* enough to capture the range of potential purposes with a relatively small set.

In developing the catalog of purposes, we identified eight categories of similar purposes:

* Signal *Facilitate communication*
* Corroborate *Use data from a test to corroborate information from other assessment.*
* Inform Instruction *Monitor learning to adapt daily instruction*
* Inform Programming *Evaluate achievement to guide longer-term instructional programming*
* Grades *Assigning grades*
* Eligibility *Evaluate achievement to determine eligibility for some program/award*
* Readiness *Evaluate achievement to determine readiness for some next step*
* Programs & Policies *Evaluate achievement for program and policy evaluation/development/adaptation*
* Growth *Measure growth in achievement and contributions to that growth*

We make the distinction between *informing instruction* and *informing programming* to reflect that informing daily instruction decisions is a very different thing than informing much less frequent decisions about instructional programming such as instructional grouping and placement. While both do affect instruction, the first is a daily process that has fine and detailed effects, the second is much too blunt an instrument to respond quickly to student needs.

To ensure that each purpose is parallel to the others, for each purpose, we identify an action taken, the object of that action, and the purpose of that action. The 31 purposes we identify are given in Table 1 on the next page. Each purpose is placed into a category, and the complete purpose is given as well as an abbreviated purpose.

The first two purposes (in the *Signal* category) are grayed out because they are so integral to assessment that they go almost without saying. *Every* assessment sends a signal to students and educators about what knowledge and skills are valued. Any assessment given before a final grade at the end of a marking period is part of what should be a feedback loop between educator and student.

Table 1. Purposes of Assessment

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Complete Purpose** | **Abbreviated Purpose** |
| **Signal** | Maintain a feedback loop between student and teacher to signal next steps | Maintain feedback loop |
| Indicate valued knowledge and skills to motivate instruction and student work | Indicate valued knowledge & skills |
| **Corroborate** | Corroborate formative assessment insights to improve decisions and refine practice | Corroborate formative insights/practice |
| Corroborate unit grades/test results to improve decisions and refine content/scoring | Corroborate unit grades/tests |
| Corroborate marking period grades/test results to improve decisions and refine content/scoring | Corroborate marking period grades/tests |
| Corroborate results of a 2+ marking period test to improve decisions and refine content/scoring | Corroborate 2+ marking period grades/tests |
| **Inform Instruction** | Monitor instructional effectiveness for in-the-moment adaptation and rapid course correction | Monitor in-the-moment effectiveness |
| Monitor student/group needs to differentiate and/or tailor next-lesson planning & instruction | Monitor needs to tailor next lesson |
| Monitor student/group needs to differentiate and/or tailor next-unit planning & instruction | Monitor needs to tailor next unit |
| **Inform Programming** | Evaluate achievement to guide mid- or long-term grouping (including remediation) | Guide instructional grouping |
| Evaluate achievement to guide instructional program placement (e.g., grade, course, track) | Guide placement (e.g., grade/course/track) |
| **Grades** | Evaluate achievement to support traditional grading | Traditional grading |
| Evaluate achievement to support standards-based grading | Standards-based grading |
| **Eligibility** | Evaluate achievement to determine eligibility for course credit (w/out taking the course) | Eligibility for course credit |
| Evaluate achievement to determine eligibility for program entrance (e.g., EL, SWD) | Eligibility for program entrance |
| Evaluate achievement to determine eligibility for program exit (e.g., EL, SWD) | Eligibility for program exit |
| Evaluate achievement to determine eligibility for graduation/diploma annotation | Eligibility for graduation/diploma |
| Evaluate achievement to determine eligibility for formal honors/awards | Eligibility for honors/awards |
| **Readiness** | Evaluate achievement to determine readiness for the next lesson | Readiness for next lesson |
| Evaluate achievement to determine readiness for the next unit | Readiness for next unit |
| Evaluate achievement to determine readiness for the next grade or course | Readiness for next grade/course |
| Evaluate achievement to determine academic readiness to begin college coursework | Readiness for college coursework |
| Evaluate achievement to determine academic readiness to begin career training coursework | Readiness for career training |
| Evaluate off/on/above track status for an outcome 2+ years out for planning/intervention | On track for outcome 2+ years out |
| **Programs & Policies** | Identify needs and track progress to develop/refine/evaluate school policies/programs | School policy/program analysis |
| Identify needs and track progress to develop/refine/evaluate district policies/programs | District policy/program analysis |
| Identify needs and track progress to develop/refine/evaluate state policy/program implementation | State policy/program analysis |
| **Growth** | Measure growth during a single marking period for policy/program evaluation | Within marking period growth |
| Measure growth across 2+ marking periods for policy/program evaluation | Across making period growth |
| Isolate school effects on student growth for policy/program evaluation | Isolate within marking period effects |
| Isolate educator effects on student growth for educator evaluation | Isolate across marking period effects |