

Components of a Coherent and Equitable Assessment System

Assessment is the process of gathering evidence of student learning to guide educational decisions. Each assessment is designed to provide information about student learning for a particular purpose. The purposes and uses of assessment data differ depending on the level of the education system—classroom, school/district, and state—and the interest holders who will be using the information.

There is no single assessment that can be used to support all purposes and uses. In an assessment system that is coherent and equitable, high-quality, appropriate assessments are used purposefully. Taken together, the various types of assessment provide a full picture of individual student learning and insights into the performance of the education system.

This handout summarizes the key purposes of various types of assessments that are created at the classroom, school/district, and state levels.

Primary Purpose Key



Inform immediate next steps in learning for teachers and students



Measure individual student achievement



Inform instruction and planning



Inform evaluation of programs and policies



Help identify students who need additional supports

Classroom



Formative Assessment Process



Ongoing, during learning

Learning experiences that elicit evidence of student learning in real time

Purpose: Provides evidence of learning as it is developing to inform next steps in learning

Use: Most useful to teachers to guide feedback and next steps in instruction and for students during peer feedback, self-assessment, and discourse

Formal Classroom Assessments



Weekly, monthly

Classroom summative assessments, curriculum-embedded assessments

Purpose: Provides evidence of retained learning across a few related lessons or a group of lessons or standards over a period of learning

Use: Most useful to teachers, students, and their families as evidence of what a student has recently learned; given during a pause in learning and may contribute to grades

District/School



Interim/Benchmark Assessment



2–3 times per year

Benchmark, common assessments

Purpose: Provides evidence of retained learning at various benchmarks throughout the year or progress in specific skills

Use: Most useful to groups of teachers and school leaders for identifying concerns or allocating resources

Screening and Intervention Assessments



As needed

Diagnostic assessment, universal screener, progress monitoring

Purpose: Provides evidence of student strengths and needs in specific skill areas to inform instruction

Use: Most useful to inform targeted instruction and intervention in specific skill areas

State



Standardized Summative Assessment



1 time per year, after learning

State summative assessments

Purpose: Summarizes evidence of retained learning of the standards

Use: Most useful to school and district leaders as one piece of information to evaluate curriculum and program alignment with standards and to ensure all students have access to rigorous, standards-based content