

Fact Sheet #5 - Performance Standard 5: Assessment Strategies

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

The teacher systematically chooses a variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies and instruments that are valid and appropriate for the content and student population.

A teacher’s skill in assessment must be more than merely testing students or measuring achievement. Teacher assessment skill “must center not on *how [they] assess* student achievement but on *how [they] use assessment* in pursuit of student success.”¹ Researchers usually draw a distinction between *assessment of learning* and *assessment for learning*. Gronlund described *assessment of learning* as “a broad category that includes all of the various methods for determining the extent to which students are achieving the intended learning outcomes of instruction.”² *Assessment of student learning* can emerge in various formats, such as teacher observation, oral questioning, journal entries, portfolio entries, exit cards, skill inventories, homework assignments, project products, student opinions, interest surveys, criterion-referenced tests, or norm-based tests.³ In comparison, *assessment for learning* involves the teacher gathering, analyzing, and using data, including state and district assessment data, to measure learner progress, guide instruction, and provide timely feedback. Educators distinguish three different types of assessment based on the purpose and principles that drive assessment:

- Diagnostic assessment – the purpose of diagnostic assessment is to ascertain, prior to instruction, each student’s strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills and to permit the teachers to remediate, accelerate, or differentiate the instruction to meet each student’s readiness for new learning.
- Formative assessment – formative assessment is an assessment that is integral to the instructional process to help teachers adjust and modify their teaching practices so as to reflect the progress and needs of the students.
- Summative assessment – summative assessment can occur at the end of a chapter, unit, semester or a school year to determine the student attainment of the standards of certain subject areas.

The practice of assessing student learning is essential for effective instruction and learning. High quality assessment provides teachers with the information regarding the extent to which students have attained the intended learning outcomes, and it informs teachers’ instructional decision making (what to teach and how to teach) as well. The goals of assessment are to provide teachers with evidence of student learning and to facilitate teachers in making informed decisions on revising instruction and advancing student learning.

Assessment can facilitate instruction and learning in many ways, including:

- Providing diagnostic information regarding students’ mental readiness for learning new content.
- Providing formative and summative information needed to monitor student progress and adjust instruction.
- Keeping students motivated.
- Holding students accountable for their own learning.
- Providing opportunities to re-expose students to content.
- Helping students to retain and transfer what they have learned.⁴

Research has indicated that teachers who introduce assessment into their classroom practice can affect substantial achievement gains. In their 1998 research review, Black and Wiliam examined a multitude of empirical studies to determine whether improvement in classroom assessments can lead to improvement in learning.⁵ They found that formative assessment has substantial positive effects on student achievement, with effect size ranging from 0.3 to 0.7 standard deviations. Particularly, they found that formative assessment is more effective for low achievers than other students, thus, reducing an achievement gap while raising achievement overall at the same time.⁶ Wenglinsky found that teachers’ use of frequent assessment and

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constructive feedback had a positive effect on student mathematics and science achievement at all grade levels.⁷ Stronge et al. also noted that effective teachers and ineffective teachers differed in their student assessment practices.⁸ In particular, effective teachers were found to provide more differentiated assignments for students than those deemed ineffective.

Research has found that an effective teacher:

- Gives regular feedback and reinforcement.⁹
- Offers timely and specific feedback.¹⁰
- Gives homework and offers feedback on the homework.¹¹
- Uses open-ended performance assignments.¹²
- Analyzes student assessments to determine the degree to which the intended learning outcomes align with the test items and student understanding of objectives.¹³
- Interprets information from teacher-made tests and standardized assessments to guide instruction and gauge student progress by examining questions missed to determine if the student has trouble with the content or the test structure.¹⁴

Assessments are more likely to have a positive influence on student learning when they exhibit the following characteristics:

- Aligned with the framework of learning targets and instruction.
- Of sufficient validity and reliability to produce an accurate representation of student learning.
- Accompanied with frequent informative feedback, rather than infrequent judgmental feedback.
- Involve students deeply in classroom review and monitoring.
- Processes and results are timely and effectively communicated.
- Documented through proper record keeping of learning results.¹⁵

As noted earlier, there are multiple methods for assessing student learning. Guskey found that teachers and administrators believed student portfolios were the most important type of assessment tool used to measure student learning,

while division, state, and national assessments ranked the lowest.¹⁶ Interestingly, homework ranked in the middle of Guskey's analysis of assessment types. Regardless of the type of assessment used, the more important issue is the practical value of the assessment in use. Tomlinson suggested that teachers must find a proper fit between students and the method being used to assess their learning.¹⁷ Assessment is a form of communication. Teachers must allow students to communicate their learning in a manner best suited to their needs.

Given the prevalence of standardized assessments at the state, regional, and national levels, in the United States and in numerous countries around the globe, a brief summary on this particular type of assessment seems in order. Extant literature has documented both positive and negative impacts of standardized assessments on teachers' instruction and assessment at the classroom level. The positive evidence indicates that standardized tests motivate teachers to:

- Align their instruction to standards.
- Maximize instructional time.
- Work harder to cover more material in a given amount of instructional time.
- Adopt a better curriculum or more effective pedagogical methods.¹⁸

However, other research reveals that high-stakes assessments force teachers to:

- Narrow the curriculum.
- Focus on memorization, drills, and worksheets.
- Allocate less time to higher-order skills.
- Restrict their teaching to formulated approaches of instruction.¹⁹

Standardized assessment is not primarily concerned with what is going on in the daily classroom. Consequently, teachers should maintain a balance between state/national-level assessments and classroom-level assessments to optimize student learning.

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Sample Performance Indicators for the Professional Knowledge of Teachers

- Aligns student assessment with the established curriculum and benchmarks.
- Involves students in setting learning goals and monitoring their own progress.
- Varies and modifies assessments to determine individual student needs and progress.
- Identifies and uses formal and informal assessments for diagnostic, formative, and summative purposes.
- Uses grading practices that report final mastery in relationship to content goals and objectives.
- Uses assessment techniques that are appropriate for the developmental level of students.
- Collaborates with others to develop common assessments, when appropriate.

- How are you using formative assessments to adjust instruction? How do you differentiate based on formative assessments?
- What is your process for analyzing and interpreting formative assessments data?
- What is an example of how you used data to adjust instruction?
- How are the summative assessments connected to the GPS/GSE or other standards?
- How does the data from the summative assessment inform your future instruction?

Sample Student Evidence that Teacher met the Criteria for Level III

- Give examples of how the teacher assesses prior knowledge at the beginning of most instructional units/courses, etc.
- Give several examples of how the teacher gave different tasks to different individuals or groups.
- Learn from their misconceptions as the teacher uses formative assessment to adjust teaching to meet student needs.
- Participate in and learn from a variety of appropriate formative assessments.
- Explain teacher feedback on summative assessments as well as re-teaching that promotes specific knowledge of the GPS/GSE content.
- Describe their strengths and weaknesses *based on assessments*.

Sample Conference Prompts

- How are you using assessment data to plan your lesson or unit plans?
- How are you differentiating based on diagnostic data?
- What is your process for analyzing and interpreting diagnostic data you collect on your students?

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Teacher Self-Assessment Checklist					
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Quality		Level IV	Level III	Level II	Level I
Use Different Formats of Teacher-Made Assessment	Use conventional multiple-choice, matching, alternate choice, true/false, and fill-in-the-blank questions appropriately.				
	Use short answer, constructed response, and essay to encourage students to explain their understanding of important ideas and principles.				
	Design performance tasks to ask students to show what they can do with the knowledge and skills learned.				
	Observe students informally in the classroom to assess their ongoing learning.				
	Encourage students' self-assessment of their own thinking, reasoning, processes, and products.				
	Clearly explain homework.				
	Design diagnostic assessment to identify students' strengths, weaknesses, and mental readiness for learning new content or skill.				
	Use formative assessment to monitor student learning progress and modify instruction.				
	Use summative assessment to determine the student attainment of the standards of subject areas.				
	Be a critical consumer of available assessment resources.				
Validity of Assessment	Relate assessment to the content under study and to student capacity.				
	Match assessment to intended learning objectives.				
	Align assessment with written and taught curriculum.				
	Use assessment that can truly reveal whether students understand the learning.				
	Use ongoing assessment to monitor student progress.				
	Use multiple assessments to determine whether a student has mastered a skill.				
	Design assessments to assess both higher- and lower-level content and skills.				
	Exercise accommodations in assessment for students with special needs.				
	Use robust rubrics or scoring guides for student assignments, products, and projects.				