

A Paper Issued by the Michigan Assessment Consortium

Principles and Practices

There are several principles for effective student assessment systems for use at the state or district levels. The purpose of this paper is to identify the key characteristics of high quality assessment systems and raise important questions to help decision-makers identify the most suitable choices for future assessment systems.

Principle 1. There are different purposes and uses for student assessment at the state, district, school, classroom and student levels. Such purposes could be individual student instruction, individual or group remediation, instructional planning, student accountability, educator evaluation, and/or school accountability.

Question: Have the various purposes and uses for student assessment at the state and district levels been clearly defined and agreed upon?

Principle 2. One single assessment cannot meet all of these purposes equally and effectively. Some purposes are mutually exclusive with other purposes. A test for individual student assistance, for example, may not be useful for another purpose (e.g., educator evaluation).

Question: Have the different purposes for assessment been paired with assessments that are appropriate for those purposes?

Principle 3. Principle 2 means that a *system* of assessments is needed for the different purposes.

Question: Is a *system* of assessment envisioned or is only one testing program to be selected? If the latter, will other assessments be used with it?

Principle 4. In order to accomplish all assessment purposes equally well, a *balanced* system of assessment is necessary.

Question: What steps are being taken to balance in importance, resources, and emphasis the various assessments and assessment resources included in the assessment system?

Principle 5. A typical balanced assessment system consists of an annual summative assessment at the end of the school year, several additional mini-summative assessments (sometimes called interim benchmark assessments) are used during the year, along with on-going formative- assessment strategies and practices used daily embedded in classroom instruction to assure students are learning what teachers are teaching.

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Question: Are interim benchmark assessments included in the assessment system? Are all of the assessments aligned with one another (and the standards being addressed) in order to create a *coherent* assessment system? Will results be returned in a timely and useful manner?

Principle 6. All the assessments used in the assessment system should be fully aligned to the academic content standards being measured. This means that each assessment item measures most or all of a standard, and that each standard is measured by one or more items.

Question: Are all of the assessments aligned with the standards being addressed - does every assessment task measure some portion of the standards and are most if not all of the standards measured by the assessment?

Principle 7. Too few educators have learned about classroom assessment, especially formative- assessment practices, in their pre-service program. Educators and administrators need to learn how to plan for, administer and use the assessment or evidence results in the balanced assessment system. Students also need to know how to use formative assessment evidence to adjust their own learning tactics.

Question: Have resources been identified to assist educators learn to use formative- assessment practices in their classrooms?

Principle 8. Providing instructional resources to educators about instruction is vital to assuring that educators help students achieve the standards being measured. A test or assessment method by itself will not assure higher levels of achievement. Resources need to be created to assist educators, and educators need help to learn how to use these resources.

Question: Does the assessment system include instructional resources for educators that are aligned with the summative and interim benchmark assessment, as well as the formative-assessment strategies and practices? Are professional learning strategies to help educators learn to use these resources for improving student learning also included in the assessment system? Are there professional learning resources to encourage the collaborative work of teachers?

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