

Best Practices in Student Assessment

1. Encourage teacher ownership to drive the process.

Teacher resistance to assessment activity can defeat the best designed assessment practices. Assessment planning should grow out of the fundamental questions staff members have about how their contributions shape both student and program success.

2. Define your objectives in the context of your institutional mission.

A shared mission that centers on student learning is fundamental to a district's assessment system. Staff must be able to envision how their use of assessment tools and results is a K-12 endeavor for continuous improvement.

3. Focus on collaboration and teamwork.

Staff members must agree on assessment goals for planning to be meaningful. Collaboration within a grade level/department, across grade levels/departments, and with administration will facilitate the best outcomes when planning assessments. Among staff, assessment skills are more efficiently developed and refined when colleagues assist each other by sharing practices and strategies.

4. Clarify the purpose of assessment.

Assessment can serve dual purposes: Assessment can promote student learning or provide evidence for accountability requirements through an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The overarching goal is for students to experience a direct, positive benefit from their participation in assessment activities.

5. Identify clear, measurable, and developmental student learning

Identifying and sharing student-friendly learning expectations and targets helps teachers create a scaffold on which students can build their knowledge and experience and, thereby, perform more effectively.

6. Help students succeed on assessment tasks.

Students fare best in assessment activities when teachers make expectations explicit, provide detailed instructions, and offer samples or models of successful performance. Students benefit most with opportunities to practice prior to assessment and when given timely, detailed feedback about the quality of their performance.

7. Interpret and use assessment results appropriately.

Assessment should be a stimulus for growth, renewal, and improvement. Linking funding to assessment outcomes may encourage artificial results. Assessment data should not be used for personnel decisions.

8. Use multiple measures and sources consistent with resources.

Effective assessment planning can only occur when properly supported with appropriate time, funding, and feedback. Multiple assessment measures that address variations in learning style and differences in types of learning are essential for assembling comprehensive results that lead to appropriate interventions.

9. Implement continuous assessment with clear, manageable timelines.

More effective assessment practice involves spreading out assessment activity throughout the year and across years. The goal should be to build a consistent assessment program that is unobtrusive and flows naturally from the curriculum framework. Assessment works best to inform instructional decisions when it is ongoing and not episodic.

10. Evaluate your assessment practices.

Results from assessment activity should be evaluated to address their reliability, validity, and utility. Poor student performance can reflect limited learning or an ill-designed assessment process. Examining how effectively the assessment strategy meets student needs is a critical step in the evolution of a school or district plan.