



Teachers' Desk Reference: Practical Information for Pennsylvania's Teachers

Assessment

Research has shown that you, the classroom teacher, are the most important factor affecting student achievement. As an effective teacher, you should gather a variety of assessment data about how and what your students are learning in order to adjust instruction to meet their needs.

Fair assessment is one of the components of Pennsylvania's Standards Aligned System (SAS) and is a process used by teachers and students before, during, and after instruction to provide feedback and adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve student achievement. As part of the SAS, Pennsylvania has identified four types of assessment used to gather information about student learning: Formative, Benchmark, Diagnostic, and Summative.

Formative Assessments

Formative assessments have been shown to be one of the most powerful classroom tools teachers can use to increase student learning. Pennsylvania defines formative assessment as classroom-based assessment that allows teachers to monitor and adjust their instructional practice in order to meet the individual needs of their students. Most of the assessments you conduct will be formative in nature.

Formative assessment may be formal or informal. Formal types of formative assessment include tests, quizzes, written responses, etc. Informal assessments include observations, choral response, response cards, and other ways to obtain evidence of a student's learning. The key to formative assessments is using the results to adjust instructional procedures or to show your students how to adjust learning strategies.

Fair assessment is one of the components of Pennsylvania's Standards Aligned System (SAS).

For more information about SAS, visit:

www.pdesas.org

When you know how students are progressing and where they are having trouble you can use this information to reteach, try alternative instructional approaches, or offer more opportunities for practice. As an effective teacher, you should meaningfully plan for and integrate ongoing formative assessment strategies into your daily instructional routines.

Note: More detailed information about formative assessments will be provided in the next issue of Teachers' Desk Reference.

Benchmark Assessments

Benchmark assessments are designed to provide feedback to both you and your students about how each student is progressing toward proficiency on grade level standards. Benchmark assessments are administered to a group or individuals at regular intervals. The results can be used to determine student growth and performance relative to statewide grade-level achievement expectations. Benchmark

assessments can be used to guide classroom instruction and identify individual student needs for re-teaching, intervention, and/or acceleration. In addition, benchmark assessments can be used to provide periodic evaluation of a program's effectiveness and guide professional development efforts. Examples of benchmark assessments include:

- 4Sight is a Pennsylvania-specific tool administered multiple times throughout the year. 4Sight assessments are one-hour tests that mirror the formats, coverage, look, and feel of the PSSA. They produce overall scores that predict students' scores on the PSSA.
- Riverside Assess2Know® are self designed benchmark assessments.
- The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is a set of standardized, individually-administered measures of early literacy development. The DIBELS measures assess three of the five Big Ideas of early literacy: Phonological Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, and Fluency with Connected Text.

Diagnostic Assessments

Diagnostic assessments are used to ascertain each student's strengths, deficits, knowledge, and skills prior to instruction. This information enables you to provide remediation and adjust the curriculum to meet each student's unique needs. Examples of diagnostic assessments include:

- A DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) assesses students in four skill areas: accuracy, fluency rate, phrasing, and retelling.
- A running record is a method of assessing a child's reading level by examining both accuracy and the types of errors made.
- The GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation) is a norm-referenced group test that provides diagnostic information about individual skill levels, making it

possible to identify students who may need further testing and intervention.

- The GMADE (Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation) is a norm-referenced group diagnostic mathematics test that measures individual skills in the main areas of math as identified by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).
- The Key Math 3 assessment and instruction system provides tools to assess and improve math skills of students ages 4½ - 21.

Summative Assessments

Summative assessments seek to make an overall judgment of progress at the end of a defined period of instruction. They may occur at the end of a school year, semester, or course. They may be administered at certain grades for purposes of state or local accountability. These are considered high-stakes assessments and the results are often used in conjunction with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Summative assessments, such as the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) or Terra Nova, are designed to produce clear data about a student's accomplishments at key points in his or her academic career. Scores on these assessments reflect the student's standing in relation to meeting, falling short of, or exceeding expected standards. The results of summative assessments are of great interest to parents, school faculty, central administration, and the public at large.

Assessments give teachers the information they need to make data-driven decisions that will maximize student achievement. For more information on assessments visit the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Standards Aligned System website at www.pdesas.org.

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