

Helping Districts Design Balanced Assessment Systems

Presenters

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Abstract

Before completing an assessment audit, before making decisions about assessment options, educators district-wide need a foundation of assessment literacy, starting with the purposes for and types of assessment. Only after they become assessment literate can district staff develop a framework or foundation for a quality, comprehensive balanced assessment system. The *District Assessment System Design Toolkit (DASD Toolkit)* and associated process, developed by the Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA), were designed to build assessment literacy using primers and discussions that address:

- 1) purposes for assessment
- 2) how different approaches to assessment can address those purposes, and
- 3) the need to offer different information and take different approaches to assessment for various types of contributors to the education system.

In a proof of concept pilot, the *DASD Toolkit* was used by facilitators to guide district and school teams through a principled process that did the following:

- Achieved a shared understanding of assessment terms
- Catalogued existing assessments and evaluated their place (if any) in the new system
- Prioritized intended purposes and uses of assessment in the system
- Developed or modified a system design to serve the prioritized, intended purposes
- Developed a plan to implement, monitor, and intentionally evolve the system over time

Presentation Summary

Developing a balanced assessment system means meeting the needs of all the users of assessment information sufficiently. A coherent assessment system requires intentional development and maintenance if it is to complement and enhance instruction; support student learning; and meet educator, administrator, policymaker and parent/community needs to certify learning. Table 1 (page 3) shows the primary issues and how these were addressed in the development of the *Toolkit*.

The Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) organized a proof-of-concept pilot designed to refine the *DASD Toolkit* and identify the process and support required to facilitate its use.

District work was coordinated by a District Team Lead who also served as point person for the pilot. Two educational service agencies (ESAs)—Wayne RESEA and Oakland Schools—supplied the expertise of assessment consultants Ellen Vorenkamp, Steven Snead, and Jonathan Flukes who facilitated discussion during three 4-hour workshops. ESD consultants also facilitated homework completion and supported development of district assessment system action plans. NCIEA contributed the *Toolkit* with the accompanying agendas for workshops that functioned as the vehicle to engage district teams in the opportunity to:

- develop shared understanding of assessment terms
- engage in exercises to elicit district values and aspirations (assessment specific)
- conduct an audit of current practice
- initiate development of district plans that serve to align resources and practice with the purposes and uses of the types of assessment the district identified as valuing most.

Joseph Martineau of the NCIEA developed the *Toolkit* and provided much of the guided instruction for its use during workshop sessions. The MAC is providing project evaluation (in process), with Ed Roeber serving as principal evaluator. Evaluators will suggest refinements to the *Toolkit* and the facilitated process using District Lead and ESA Facilitator interviews, along with survey results; observation data; and analysis of pilot documents and processes.

Selected results to date

Participating LEAs elected to invest in this effort for various and unique reasons, and the results of their work reflect that.

Bloomfield Hills Schools

“Our participation in the District Assessment System Design (DASD) Toolkit will help us to advance our priorities by looking at our assessment system and analyzing the role it plays in the learning cycle.” –Wendy Osterman, BHS Assessment Director

Priority focus after participation: Development of common assessments and investment in professional learning to become more skillful in use of formative assessment.

Dearborn Public Schools

Dan Patterson, DPS Assessment Director, referenced their participation as a means to meet a stated goal in their district strategic plan *“...to create a well-aligned assessment system that provides important data on teaching and learning with as little impact on instructional time as possible...”*

Priority focus after participation: System-wide support for staff to become more skillful in their formative assessment practice.

Resources for further exploration

National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment: nciea.org

Michigan Assessment Consortium: michiganassessmentconsortium.org

DASD Pilot participants include:

	Joseph Martineau		Kathy Dewsbury-White Ed Roeber	Participating LEAs
	Ellen Vorenkamp		Steven Snead Jonathan Flukes	

Table 1: Primary issues in districts and how they were addressed in the DASD Toolkit.

Challenge	Associated Need	How the Need is Addressed in the Toolkit
Assessment Literacy	Improved assessment literacy	By developing a shared, consistent, and coherent assessment vocabulary.
Appropriate Data Use	Improved data literacy to better match the type of assessment and its associated characteristics to the desired uses and purposes of assessment data	By developing comprehensive, shared, coherent vocabulary around assessment purposes and uses, and identifying the types and characteristics of assessment(s) appropriate for each use/purpose.
Parsimony	A system that minimizes duplication (and thus the amount time devoted to formal test taking)	By using a disciplined process to identify a prioritized set of uses and purposes. This is followed by (for each purpose/use) the smallest set of assessments that can adequately fulfill those needs. This may be reflected in tweaks to, considerable modification of, or wholesale replacement of an existing system.
Coherence	A system in which various components form a coherent whole to create a comprehensive and balanced set of information about each student's achievement	By attending to coherence throughout the disciplined design process.
Power Sharing	A system in which educators share power and collaborate across all levels in the system (from the classroom to the district superintendent and school board)	By attending to power sharing and power differentials through the disciplined design process.
Implementation and Maintenance of an Assessment System	A plan for implementing the system that attends to potential hurdles and protects against <i>ad hoc</i> modifications to the system	By using a disciplined process that identifies anticipated hurdles from all stakeholders' perspectives. This includes near-term barriers to implementation and a plan for addressing them. It also provides a strong set of design documents that can serve as a foundation for ongoing evaluation of the sufficiency of the system and for evaluating (1) whether existing assessments should be continued as is, (2) whether and how they may need to be modified, and (3) whether and how any new proposed assessments would fit into the overall system.