



What do we mean by Interim/Benchmark Assessments?

Interim or benchmark assessments (interim/benchmark assessments) fit between formative assessment practices and summative assessments on the formative/summative continuum. Given this position on the continuum, interim/benchmark assessments are built for a variety of purposes. As with all assessments, interim/benchmark assessments are built for a specific purpose or purposes. If the interim/benchmark assessment is used for something that it wasn't designed for, the results may very well prove to be unreliable and/or invalid.

Regardless of the purpose of the interim/benchmark assessment, one characteristic it will possess is the ability for the results to be aggregated (combined) across classes, classrooms, and schools. This may be the most prominent difference between formative assessment practices and interim/benchmark assessments. The ability for the results to be combined implies that the interim/benchmark assessment must be the same for all students who take the assessment. For this reason, interim/benchmark assessments are often referred to as “common assessments.”

Interim/benchmark assessments have come into prominence with the move to standards-based educational models. Using interim/benchmark assessments allows educators, students, and parents to monitor the progress of all students on their journey toward mastery of the identified learning objectives.

Perhaps an analogy will help demon-

strate this point. When motorcyclists or even bicyclists travel together, it is well known that each rider should “ride their own ride,” that is, move at a pace that is appropriate for them. As the riders will have different skill or fitness levels, this results in different rates of travel. In order to honor these differences but still keep track of the whole group, specific stops are planned from the start, where all

To learn more

Moving Toward a Comprehensive Assessment System: A Framework for Considering Interim Assessments

Marianne Perie, Scott Marion, and Brian Gong, National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc. (2009)

ncaase.com/docs/PerieMarionGong2009.pdf

The Role of Interim Assessments in a Comprehensive Assessment System

Marianne Perie, Scott Marion, and Brian Gong (National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment) and Judy Wurtzel (The Aspen Institute) (2007)

achieve.org/files/TheRoleofInterimAssessments.pdf

Interim Benchmark Assessment – A Typology

Edward Roeber (2012)

tinyurl.com/Interim-Typology

riders will meet to make sure that all members of the group are making progress toward the goal of the ride at the end. These planned meeting points may coincide with a particular time (e.g., lunch) or as a rest stop after a certain distance (e.g., after 25 miles). Note that if a rider is having difficulty by the lunch stop, steps can be taken to make sure that they catch up with the group by the end of the ride.

Interim/benchmark assessments provide a similar role in the instructional process. At some appropriate point, a common assessment is given to each student to see if they are on track to meeting the learning objectives. It is expected that each individual will have mastered the content of the interim/benchmark assessment when it rolls around, but if some haven't, there is still time for actions to be taken so that the students who are having difficulty can reach the end of the instruction and meet the learning objectives. This is one of the main differences between interim/benchmark assessments and purely summative assessments. They are administered when there may still be time for remediation to students who need more support to meet the learning objectives.

Perie, Marion, and Gong (2009) list 12 valid uses for interim assessments. They then go on to categorize these uses into three general classes or purposes of interim assessments: instructional, evaluative, and predictive. Even with these three classes, we can see a spread across the formative/summative continuum. Interim assessments used for instruc-

“Where do benchmark assessments fit in a balanced assessment system? While annual state assessments provide a general indicator of how students are doing relative to annual learning standards, and while formative assessment is embedded in ongoing classroom instruction to inform immediate teaching and learning goals, benchmark assessments occupy a middle position strategically located and administered outside daily classroom use but inside the school and/or district curriculum. Often uniform in timing and content across classrooms and schools, benchmark assessment results can be aggregated at the classroom, grade, school, and district levels to school and district decision-makers, as well as to teachers. This interim indication of how well students are learning can fuel action, where needed, and accelerate progress toward annual goals.”

– Joan L. Herman, Ellen Osmundson, & Ronald Dietel, in Benchmark assessments for improved learning (AACC Policy Brief, 2010). Los Angeles, CA: University of California.

tional purposes would be closer to the formative end of the continuum than interim assessments used for strictly evaluative purposes.

As stated previously, assessments are designed for specific purposes. Perie, Marion, and Gong (2009) go on to present five questions that educators can use to identify the goal in using an interim assessment. Those questions include:

1. What do I want to learn from the assessment?
2. Who will use the information gathered from the assessment?
3. What action steps will be taken as a result of this assessment?
4. What professional development or support structures should be in place to ensure the action steps are taken appropriately?

5. How will student learning improve as a result of using this interim assessment and will it improve more than if the assessment system were not used?

These are not necessarily easy questions to answer, but they are important. As the authors state: “Importantly, these questions and the associated answers serve as the beginning of a validity argument to support (or refute) the particular assessment system.”

Perie, M., Marion, S. & Gong, B. (2009). Moving toward a comprehensive assessment system: A framework for considering interim assessments. *Educational measurement: Issues and practice*. 28(3). Pp. 5-13.

The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN), is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.