

WHAT DO ADMINISTRATORS REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ASSESSMENT?



America's school administrators hold a broad range of responsibilities—those they carry out directly and those they lead others in doing. Many of these leadership responsibilities rely on student achievement assessment tools and data in one form or another. Some examples are listed below:

Leadership responsibilities of administrators

- **Monitor performance of all students** in their school or district, using a variety of summative assessments provided by the state or the district. This means they need to understand the types of assessments used, how to read and interpret score reports, and how to speak to others (such as the board of education) about what the assessment results mean (and don't mean).
- **Understand accountability metrics** used to gauge—and improve—the status and progress of student learning at the building and district levels, as described by the accountability labels applied by the state.
- **Use achievement and observation data** to hold the educators in their school or district accountable for the performance of students. This may also involve formal evaluations of the quality of work of subordinates.

Responsibilities for mentoring & leading others

- Help others understand the implications of the summative district and school results.
- Help those who work for them to understand that different approaches to assessment are used for different purposes.
- Know and share that simply assessing students more often will not lead to higher achievement.

- Advocate for the need to use assessment practices that actually improve student learning and increase student achievement.
- Hold staff accountable for becoming assessment literate and for using assessment practices that support student learning; provide the opportunities and support for them to do so. Administrators also need to be able to gauge whether students are learning. There are a variety of approaches that can be used—both assessment for learning (the formative assessment process used daily by teachers during instruction to assure that every student is learning) or assessments of learning (the annual or periodic summative assessments used at the conclusion of learning).

Key questions to ask:

- As the building or district leader, am I able help foster the types of assessment practice that encourage in-depth learning and higher achievement?

“PUTTING THE FOCUS ON LEARNING, NOT PERFORMANCE, WILL, IRONICALLY, IMPROVE PERFORMANCE.”

—JO BOALER

- Do I understand the elements of a balanced approach to assessment, realizing that some assessments serve well the monitoring function, while other practices actually encourage and support learning and achievement?
- Can I thoughtfully encourage and mentor staff, supporting them as they improve their knowledge about and practice using assessment in support of learning?

Assessment literacy is critical

It is essential that administrators become assessment literate! (See sidebar.) Without assessment literacy, administrators jeopardize their students by neglecting to support teachers in helping each student learn to his or her potential. “Assessment illiteracy” can also jeopardize careers—of the administrator and of the teachers they lead.

The stakes are too high—with public scrutiny, district and school accountability, and educator evaluation—to lack understanding about the different types of assessment, the purposes for which each can be used, and the strengths and challenges of each assessment approach. Administrators also must be able to deploy and use the assessments to improve teaching and learning, and come to value good assessment as a vital element of improved instruction.

What Is Assessment Literacy?

The Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) has defined assessment literacy standards for students, teachers, building administrators, district-level administrators, and policymakers at the local and state level. For each audience, three types of assessment literacy standards have been created:

- **Knowledge**—What assessment-literate individuals know and understand about assessment (in non-technical terms). This includes that there are different types of assessment that have different purposes, each approach has advantages and limitations, how to select or develop good assessments, how to use the assessments, and how to understand and interpret the results from them.
- **Performance**—How assessment-literate individuals are able to use the assessments to improve student learning as well as how to become more assessment literate himself or herself and how to support the assessment literacy development of their staff, students and families in his or her district or school.
- **Dispositions**—What assessment-literate individuals believe about student assessment, such as that assessment is a critical part of good teaching, learning about assessment takes time and a commitment to do so, why a variety of approaches to assessment is best, that it can be used to help improve learning, and so forth.

Access the complete set of Assessment Literacy Standards: A National Imperative (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2016; 2020) at www.MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org.

What steps can administrators take to becoming assessment literate?

The first step to becoming assessment literate is to review the standards articulated in Assessment Literacy Standards: A National Imperative (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2016; 2020). Examine the lists of standards for building administrators and district administrators, then do some **self-assessment** by answering the following questions:

- Which knowledge standards am I confident that I have already achieved?
 - Which performance standards have I already carried out or are able to do so?
 - Which dispositions towards assessment can I claim?
- After assessing current status, think about the professional position held currently; then answer the following questions:
- What are the assessment and accountability demands of this position (not only for myself, but also for those I lead)?
 - Which standards am I missing or do I need to strengthen?



- Which standards might best benefit me and my colleagues in our current work if we were to take steps to learn more? What actions could we take to practice strengthening our skills?
- Which knowledge, performance, and disposition standards are most important for me to learn or acquire?

Next, do a **staff assessment** by answering similar sets of questions for your staff:

- Which knowledge standards are you confident that staff have already achieved?
- Which performance standards do you believe that they have already carried out or are able to do so?
- Which dispositions towards assessment can you claim that they have? Are some individuals stronger or weaker in their understanding and use of assessment?
- How might staff support one another in learning and using assessment more effectively?

Once you have assessed *current* status, think about staff members' current professional positions and answer the following questions:

- What are the assessment and accountability demands of those positions?
- Which standards are they missing?
- Which knowledge, performance, and

disposition standards are most important for them to learn or acquire?

- What strategies will you use to help your staff learn more about assessment and use it more proficiently and effectively? How can you lead such professional learning or support others to do so?

The result of this self-assessment and staff assessment should be the start of a personal action plan for yourself, as well as the start of a professional learning plan for your staff. Using the resources listed, begin to think about how you can access and use the available resources to address your needs and those of your staff.

How Can Administrators Become More Assessment Literate?

There are a variety of approaches to learning more about assessment. A wealth of resources are available from the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) at www.MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org.

- **Learning Points:** one-page documents that each answer one key question about student assessment, written using reader-friendly, non-technical language.
- **Online assessment learning and credentialing system** (available to all educators):
 - Level 1: Nine self-paced online learning modules aligned to the MAC's Assessment Literacy

Standards; provide basic assessment learning resources in accessible, non-technical terms.

- Level 2:* Assessment mini courses (in micro-credential style) aligned to the MAC's Assessment Literacy Standards; permit learners to demonstrate competency on one or more assessment topics. These self-paced courses have required assignments, collection of evidence, and expert feedback organized by course facilitator. Courses can be taken individually, in short stacks, or all together; can lead to classroom assessment apprentice (CAA) or school assessment apprentice (SAA) credentials and SCECH credits.
- Level 3:* Allows those who have earned apprentice credentials to seek specialist credential by demonstrating their knowledge and skills in leading the assessment learning and use of others. This leads to certification as either Classroom Assessment Specialist (CAS) or System Assessment Specialist (SAS). Apprentices will identify an audience of others to work with (on assessment for or of learning) and help those in that group to improve their use and understanding of assessment at the classroom or school and district levels. Apprentices are expected to assemble a portfolio of evidence for review by a panel of expert assessment learning facilitators. Certification may be particularly of value to those seeking career advancement.

*Note: Available 2021

- **Assessment Learning**

Network: a professional learning community of members from Michigan's professional education organizations. The goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators. The ALN hosts regular engagements where diverse education leaders learn together about the power of assessment to support the development of students, educators and our state.

- **Rick Stiggins—Assessment Literacy:** this 14-minute video produced by the MAC features author Rick Stiggins answering questions about assessment literacy.
<https://vimeo.com/97668950>

Assessment Learning Module Series

These foundational modules can be accessed individually or as a series

- 21st Century Assessment Systems
- Developing Appropriate Assessments
- Selecting Appropriate Assessments
- Developing a High Quality Balanced Assessment System
- Making Meaning from Student Assessments
- Understanding the Technical Concepts Used in Student Assessment
- Using Assessment Data Well
- Collaborative Inquiry

Other learning opportunities

- Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program: Ongoing, job-embedded professional learning offered through Michigan Department of Education (MDE). See www.FameMichigan.org.
- In-state Conferences:
 - Michigan School Testing Conference (held each February)
 - Michigan Education Research Association (held each fall and spring)
- National Conference on Student Assessment (held annually in June)
- Center for Standards, Assessment, & Accountability (WestEd): provides a portfolio of research-informed resources, technical assistance, and services to support balanced, coherent, and efficient systems of teaching and learning. <https://csaa.wested.org>



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Contact the MAC

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