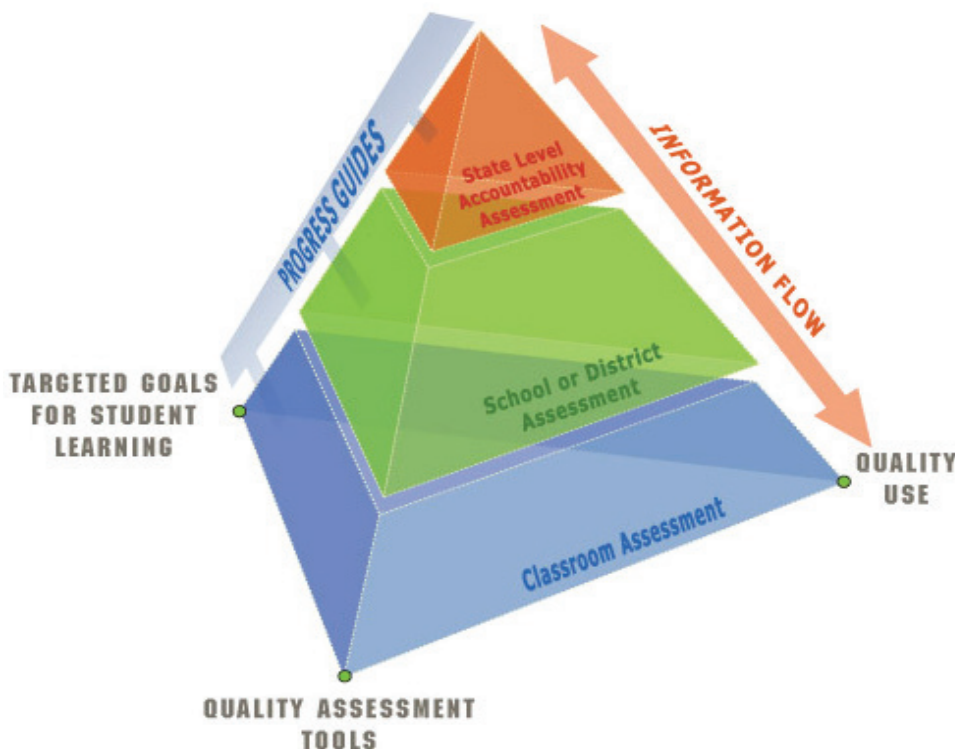


SECTION I — ORGANIZING AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES, WITH IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we introduce a set of Organizing and Design Principles for an early literacy assessment system (ELAS) and provide Recommendations for developing, implementing, and supporting such a system.

Background

To begin discussion about a system of assessment, we offer an illustration of how a system might be structured and then discuss some of the principles that would make it a system rather than simply a collection of assessments. **Figure I.1**, developed by the Center for Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning (CAESL), illustrates what a three-tiered assessment system might look like (Herman, et al., 2005). The base represents classroom-level assessment. Assessment in the classroom is typically far more extensive and frequent than that at the district level and serves multiple purposes related to ongoing teaching and learning. The middle portion of the illustration shows district assessment, which is where one often finds interim or benchmark assessments designed to gauge district-level progress at key points during the instructional year. At the top of the pyramid is state-level assessment, which is far less extensive in terms of coverage and frequency than either of the two levels below it. State-level assessment typically serves a high-level, yearly monitoring purpose.



● **FIGURE I.1**
Graphical representation of a multilevel assessment system
Source: Center for Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning (Herman, et al., 2005)

For an assessment system like that illustrated in Figure I.1 to function well, within and across levels, the system should exhibit three properties: **coherence**, **comprehensiveness**, and **continuity**.

For the assessment system to support learning, it must have a quality referred to as **coherence**. One aspect of coherence is that the conceptual base or models of student learning underlying the various assessments within a system should be compatible. As one moves up and down the levels of the system—from the classroom through the school and district—assessments along this vertical dimension should align. As long as the underlying models of learning and development are consistent, the assessments will complement each other rather than present conflicting information and goals for learning.

By **comprehensiveness**, we mean that a range of measurement approaches are used to provide a variety of evidence to support educational decision making. No single assessment can be considered a definitive indicator of a student's knowledge, skills, and interests. Multiple assessments and indicators enhance the validity and fairness of the inferences drawn by giving students various ways and opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

Finally, an assessment system should be designed to be **continuous**. That is, assessments should measure student progress over time. To provide such pictures of progress, multiple sets of observations over time must be linked conceptually so that change can be observed and interpreted. Models of student progress in learning should underlie the assessment system, and assessments should be designed to provide information that maps back to the progression. Thus, continuity calls for alignment along the third dimension of time and instruction.

The system illustrated in Figure I.1 can be said to adhere to these properties to the extent that the assessments are: (a) coordinated within and across levels, (b) unified by common learning goals, and (c) synchronized by unifying progress variables. Adherence to these properties is challenging and requires considerable care and thoughtfulness in the design of the system and in the selection and implementation of the component assessments.

While Michigan law calls for a “system” of early literacy assessments to be put into place, such a “system” cannot be just a collection of assessments. Rather, it must be a purposeful set of assessments put into place, within and across levels, with thoughtful planning and professional learning to help teachers and others use assessment productively in their ongoing activities. Everyone concerned with the early literacy development of Michigan's children needs to understand the goals and purposes of the various assessments included within the system and how to use the information derived from those assessments properly and productively in their ongoing activities to support the development of literacy for all children.

“While Michigan law calls for a ‘system’ of assessment to be put into place, this ‘system’ cannot be just a collection of assessments. Rather, it must be a purposeful set of assessments put into place, within and across levels, with thoughtful planning and professional learning to help teachers and others use assessment productively in their ongoing activities.”