

# Steps in the Right Direction

A Guide to Using and Reporting Assessment Results



## Steps in the Right Direction: A Guide to Using *and* Reporting Assessment Results

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# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	4
<b>Section 1:</b>	
<b>Overview</b> .....	5
Introduction .....	5
Some Assumptions .....	5
Overview of Using and Reporting Assessment Results .....	7
Using Assessment Results to Help Individual Students and in Instructional Planning .....	7
Reporting Assessment Results to Students, Parents, the School Board, and the Public .....	8
In Summary .....	11
<b>Section 2:</b>	
<b>Using Assessment Results with Individual Students Assessed</b> .....	12
Why Results Should Be Used .....	12
How the Results Should Be Used .....	13
In Summary .....	17
<b>Section 3:</b>	
<b>Using Assessment Results in Instructional Planning and School Improvement</b> .....	18
Why Assessment Results Should Be Used .....	18
What Should Be Done and How .....	19
Conducting the Instructional Review .....	20
In Summary .....	26
<b>Section 4:</b>	
<b>Reporting Assessment Results to Students</b> .....	27
Why Results Should Be Reported to Students .....	27
How Results Should Be Reported .....	27
In Summary .....	29
<b>Section 5:</b>	
<b>Reporting Assessment Results to Parents/Guardians</b> .....	30
Why Results Should Be Reported to Parents/ Guardians .....	30
How the Results Should Be Reported .....	30
Who Should Share the Results? .....	31

Resources to Use in the Reporting Process .....	32
Four Parent/Guardian Reporting Strategies .....	32
In Summary .....	34
<b>Section 6:</b>	
<b>Reporting Assessment Results to the School Board</b> .....	35
Start with Purpose .....	35
Planning a Reporting Program .....	35
In Summary .....	39
<b>Section 7:</b>	
<b>Reporting Assessment Results to the Public</b> .....	40
Getting Started .....	40
Developing Contacts .....	42
The Background Report .....	43
The Report of Results .....	43
Follow-up Reports .....	44
Hints for Working with the Media .....	44
In Summary .....	46
<b>References</b> .....	47
<b>Appendices</b> .....	48
Appendix Table of Contents .....	48
Appendix A: Process for Analyzing Individual Student Performance on the Assessment .....	49
Appendix B: Preparing a School to Use the School-Level Results .....	51
Appendix C: Completed Content Standards Survey Summary .....	53
Appendix D: Model of the Instructional Review at the Building Level .....	55
Appendix E: What Can I Do to Help? Suggestions for Parents and Guardians .....	57
Appendix F: Parent-Teacher Conference Outline .....	59
Appendix G: Developing and Implementing a Broader Reporting Strategy .....	60
Appendix G: Developing and Implementing a Broader Reporting Strategy .....	61
Appendix H: Suggested School Reporting Categories .....	63
Appendix I: Sample Media Release .....	65

# Preface

Almost forty years ago, assessment staff of the Michigan Department of Education developed a series of monographs (Roeber, 1983) to describe the ideas and methods for using and reporting assessment results they had observed being used in several school systems in Michigan. These easy-to-implement ideas demonstrated that statewide student assessments could be used in relatively simple ways to improve student learning and achievement, as well as schools' instructional programs.

These districts also highlighted the uses they made of the assessment results when reporting to parents, school boards, and the community. Although relatively simple to implement, the ideas expressed proved useful to schools facing the challenge of using and reporting assessment results.

Thus, the idea of writing down these ideas was borne. First written as a series of six mimeographed documents, each monograph described an aspect of how to use the assessment results with the students assessed or to review and improve the schools' instructional programs. Uses of the assessment results served as the basis of reporting results to students, parents, school boards, and the public, a novel concept then that remains so today.

Although the monographs expressed useful ideas, they were less than attractive in appearance. Hence, two local educators in Michigan were commissioned to develop a more attractive version of the monographs. The result was a booklet titled *Pencils Down: A Guide for Using and Reporting Test Results* (Gucwa & Mastie, 1989).

One problem with this booklet, however, was that it was written specifically for a version of the Michigan assessment program in

use at the time that the booklet was written, not the version of state assessment currently in place in Michigan or elsewhere. Nor was it originally developed to show educators how they could best use and report the results from other assessments that they chose to use in addition to the statewide assessments.

What was needed was a more generalized version of the document, one that would be appropriate for any state summative assessments, for the large-scale assessments used by local districts, one that would be suitable for criterion-referenced, standards-based, or norm-referenced assessments. In 1998, the author and editor of the first set of monographs joined forces with one of the authors of the booklet to write an update of the original monograph series and the booklet. The *Pencils Down* booklet helped to guide this revision and much credit for the manner in which ideas are expressed here can be given to the authors of the original booklet.

This publication expands on the vision of the 1983 and 1998 versions, and adds a new author, Ellen Vorenkamp, who assisted in this effort. The intent of the revision is to make this guide even more generalizable to using and reporting the assessment results from any summative assessment used with students.

We hope that the ideas expressed in this publication will continue to be helpful to educators as they use assessment program information to improve student learning and to better report student progress to parents, students, school boards, and the public.

The authors are responsible for the ideas expressed herein; we invite your feedback about whether the publication has helped or if you have ideas for its improvement.

—Ed Roeber

# Section I: Overview

## Introduction

Effective school improvement must be directed at improving student learning and achievement. Although other goals, such as improving the school climate or student self-concept, can be important intermediary goals, ultimate success of the school improvement process leads to improvement in student knowledge, understanding, and skills. These outcomes are often assessed in student summative assessment programs managed by state education agencies or local school districts.

Once the results from each assessment are returned to schools, educators need to carry out several activities related to using and reporting the student assessment results. Schools face the challenge of using the assessment results in a number of ways, depending upon the purpose(s) of the assessment. They also are charged with appropriately reporting assessment results to, teachers, students and their families, and other audiences. Both sets of activities are described in this booklet.

Carried out well, these activities will help educators assist students to learn what they need in order to succeed in school and in life. Not done, or not done well, the potential benefits of the student assessment will not be achieved. At best, this will be a waste of precious resources; at worst, it will hinder efforts to improve student learning. It is essential, therefore, that schools understand how to use student assessment results appropriately, and then to communicate these proposed or actual uses of results as the primary basis for reporting the results to various audiences.

This guide was put together to help local educators see that the use of student assessment results, as well as the reporting of the results to a number of audiences, go hand-in-hand, helping to build public confidence and support, strengthen the family's role in schooling, and help students learn the challenging standards being assessed.

## Some Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie the ideas on using and reporting assessment results.

### ***It is appropriate to use assessment results to impact instruction.***

This may seem silly to say, since the reason most often given for assessing is to improve student learning, but there are educators who believe that assessments should not impact what they teach or how they teach it. We believe that assessment results, when properly used, can 1) provide invaluable information to a classroom teacher to help his or her students learn concepts they have not yet achieved, 2) assist teams of teachers to align their school's instructional program across grade levels and subjects, 3) help school improvement teams to make changes in their academic programs to improve the achievement of future groups of students, 4) help parents or guardians better gauge the achievement of their children, and 5) inform the public of the efforts educators are making to improve the instruction being provided. Thus, we feel it is appropriate to use assessment results to seek improvements.

### ***All children can learn, given the proper instruction provided under appropriate conditions.***

This is not just a "catch-phrase." There is ample evidence that traditionally lower-achieving groups, such as students in high poverty schools, students with parents with less formal schooling, students from single-parent homes, and minority students can learn at the *same* high levels as other students, *if educators believe they can and provide sufficient instruction in an appropriate manner*. Users and reporters of assessment results should keep this assumption in mind: **all** students can learn **if** we believe that they can, convince students and their families that they can, and act convincingly and *persistently* on this belief – *since whether we think they can or think they can't, we're probably right*.

### ***Assessment reporting should focus primarily on the uses made of the results.***

It is challenging to interpret any number without understanding what the number means. If a school reports that 64% of the students

achieved a satisfactory performance on an assessment, is this good or not? Is this better than last year? If so, why? If not, why not? Why did only 64% of the students pass? What will happen with the 36% who did not pass, as well as with the 64% who did? We believe that the results educators report beg for explanations to accompany them, and it is our belief that the uses of the results provide some of the best answers to these questions.

**The best comparisons are those that focus on change over time.**

Report a number such as 64% of the students passing an assessment and immediately the question will be asked about whether this is good or not. Was it an easy assessment that everyone should have passed? Or, was it a challenging assessment that few were expected to pass? Numbers beg comparisons. Of course, not all comparisons are fair or appropriate. Rather than compare school to school, district to district, or even school or district to state, the **best** comparison is the school, district, or state with *itself*. Have scores improved, declined, or stayed the same? Regardless, what is the school or district doing to improve student achievement?

This is not to say that comparisons between similar schools are never useful. Sometimes, lessons can be learned from a school serving similar types of students who have achieved at much higher levels. What has that school done to achieve greater success, and could such strategies work in the lower-scoring school? The key is not to assume all is well in a school because achievement is a bit higher, especially when large percentages of students are not scoring at the proficient or higher levels.

**Most educators have not been taught how to appropriately use and report assessment results.**

Typical teacher or administrator preparation programs do not include coursework on assessment, particularly strategies for using and reporting assessment results for instructional and school improvement purposes. The omission of these topics in pre-service programs does not mean that these skills are unnecessary, that they should not be learned, or that they are impossible for educators to master. Programs that address the assessment literacy of teachers (as

well as students and their families, administrators, and policymakers) are needed to help everyone understand the purposes and uses of student assessment, how to read and interpret assessment results, and how to act on the information to improve instruction and learning.

**There are relatively easy ways of using and reporting results, and they can be learned.**

A major assumption of this Guide is that there are relatively easy ways to use and report assessment results, that these can be learned in a short period of time, and that these skills can be readily applied. It takes no more than a few hours of time to appropriately use and report assessment results. Of course, it may take considerably more time to implement the ideas discovered in the process of reviewing the assessment results.

The ideas presented in this Guide are gleaned from observing educators in several states as they discovered how best to use and report their assessment results. Because they were developed and used by local educators, these ideas can be applied in a few short hours and can lead to significant change and improvement in student learning.

**There are ways and times of more appropriately (or less appropriately) using assessment results, and there may be subtle differences between these.**

The best time to use assessment results is right after they are received. The time to report them is immediately after the uses of the results have been determined. Waiting to “drill” students on the “missing skills” just before they take the assessment is not only an ineffective instructional strategy, it may also be unethical. Take the time to use assessment results at the right time – just after they are received.

**Generally, the reason students do poorly on assessments is that they have not been taught sufficiently, or sufficiently well, the concepts being assessed.**

Past experience has shown that when teachers look at the reasons

why individual students or groups of students did poorly on an assessment, it was because they had not been taught the skills being assessed sufficiently or sufficiently well to have learned the skill and/or how to apply it. This may be a bit disconcerting at first—after all, we want to assess only those skills that students have had a chance to learn. Realistically, however, it is possible for students to miss key concepts and, as a result, do poorly on portions of an assessment. It is important that strategies used to examine assessment results look closely at the issue of when students were taught, the extent of such instruction, the resources used when they were taught, and how they were taught the skills on the assessment.

### There are better and worse times to prepare students for the assessment

One outcome of the process of using the assessment results for instructional planning described in this publication is a coherent, articulated instructional program within grade and course, as well as across grades and courses. Each teacher should use this instructional plan to determine the optimal time to provide instruction on the skills to be assessed, with perhaps a brief review just prior to assessing. Take the time to do it right, and allow students to learn in a context of using past learning that may help them retain what has been taught and thus demonstrate higher achievement.

## Overview of Using and Reporting Assessment Results

While student assessments loom large in the public's attention these days, educators have received little practical help in appropriately using and reporting assessment results. One resource, however, was produced by Gucwa and Mastie (1989), based on the series of assessment monographs first produced in the 1970s (Roeber, 1983). Although originally written to help school districts use and report statewide assessment results in Michigan, the publication contains a wealth of suggestions that are equally applicable to summative assessments typical in the classroom, for more performance-based assessments at the local level, or for statewide assessment programs.

It may seem somewhat odd to present together the idea of using and reporting assessment results, but, believe it or not, they are quite closely linked. Describing the various ways in which assessment results have been and are being used makes a very compelling story, whether reported to parents, the local school board, or the general public (via the news media). By focusing reporting on the ways results have been and will be used, the focus remains on *use of the results for improvement*, rather than the less useful comparison of results from one school or school district to another.

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A by-product of this reporting is increased support and understanding for educators from the public, particularly parents, since they will see the steps that educators are taking to improve student learning (rather than hearing or reading the creative excuses educators have for less-than-desirable student performance).

This Guide suggests several ways in which summative assessments—those administered on a large-scale basis, those developed or selected by school districts, and even those constructed by teachers—can be used and reported effectively. All of these assessments should be examined for potential use to improve instruction to bring about improvements in student learning.

## Using Assessment Results to Help Individual Students and in Instructional Planning

Two basic uses of the assessment results will be described here. **The first of these is to help the individual students who were assessed.** Since the assessment covered skills deemed important for students to accomplish by the time of assessment, students who did not achieve all of the standards on which the assessment was based will need help learning the missing skills. Although this is often viewed as the most important use of summative assessments such as state

assessments, it is, in reality, only a *secondary* purpose. It is unlikely that an assessment that covers what students should have learned over the course of an entire school year or a major portion of it, such as a marking period, will provide much instructional guidance to teachers going forward. However, this said, such assessments might indicate some learning shortcomings that teachers will want to be aware of and perhaps correct.

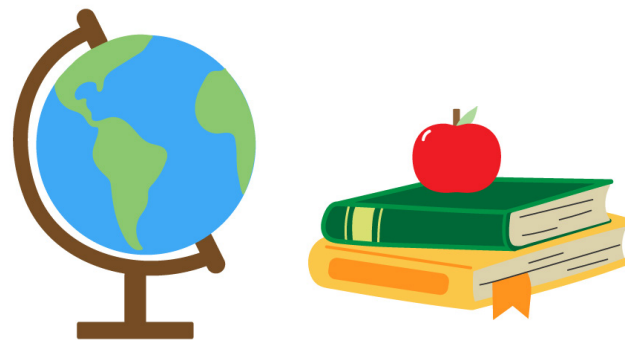
The needs of students may not be restricted to just those skills that were assessed. For example, the enabling skills needed in order to learn the skills that were assessed may also not have been achieved (but were not assessed on the assessment), so that the district may need to devise “diagnostic” assessments to determine the depth of individual students’ instructional needs. It is rare that districts will be able to determine these needs solely from the large-scale assessment program data. The assessment program can at least provide a start by giving educators an idea of potential area(s) for further investigation of needs. A number of activities can be carried out to help individual students. These activities consist of steps to help use the information collected by the assessment and might include remedial instruction, tutoring, enrolling in additional courses, and so forth. This is a traditional use of assessment results, one that is given some attention by many schools.

**The second way of using results is to analyze the assessment information for clues about how instruction—during the grade level assessed and during the grades that precede and follow it—should be modified so that *future* groups of students can achieve better results.** Ideally, school leaders and the teachers can work together as a group to determine areas in greatest need of improvement, analyze current instructional methods and materials, and collectively determine needed actions and activities. At the elementary level, this might include the entire team of educators, while at the secondary level, such a team might be organized in each department affected by the assessment.

This building-level review, which is not a typical use of the assessment results, begins with a determination of the areas of greatest concern,

followed by an analysis of the instruction on these (and other skills). Once current instructional practices are analyzed, the team can make recommendations regarding changes needed. The benefits of the process include developing an articulated instructional plan within and across grade levels or courses, as well as increased communication among administrators, teachers, parents, and even students. This horizontal and vertical articulation is missing in many schools, and the result is lower student achievement because of missed instructional opportunities.

The key steps to appropriately using student assessment results in each of these ways briefly outlined above are described in greater detail in sections two and three of this Guide.



## Reporting Assessment Results to Students, Parents, the School Board, and the Public

Schools also face the challenge of reporting the results to a number of interested individuals and groups in ways that meet each group’s need for information and understanding about assessment. Carried out well, assessment reporting will help build support for schools and the types of changes that educators wish to carry out. Not done, or done poorly, student assessments will either not be used or worse, may serve to harm the students, educators, and others. It is essential that schools report student assessment results, and that they report them appropriately.



Despite the attention given to student assessment these days, relatively little has been written on the use and reporting of student assessment results. Even less research has been carried out on the effectiveness of alternative strategies for using and reporting student assessment results. Yet, public reporting of large-scale assessment results remains one of the largest complaints about student summative assessments.

There are several key steps to appropriately reporting student assessment results (Roeber, et al, 1980; Roeber, 1986). These steps presume that teachers receive results for individual students as well as for groups of students. It is also assumed that educators in the building receiving the results have used them to determine the educational needs of the individual students assessed, as well as the manner in which instructional plans and materials will need to be modified to address the instructional needs of groups of students—both the group assessed and the groups of students in grade levels prior to and following each grade assessed. Finally, it is assumed that for reporting to consist of something substantial and understandable, reports of results need to focus on the *uses being made of the results*.

**The steps for appropriate reporting of the results include:**

1. Determine the audiences for which reporting activities will be directed. These may include students, parents/guardians, the school board, and the public.
2. Be clear about why assessment results should be reported to these audiences. A clear rationale statement is important.
3. Be equally clear as to what information is to be communicated, for what purposes, using which reporting techniques. Remember that multiple strategies are likely to be more effective.

Each of the audiences listed in Step 1 needs and deserves an accurate and complete report of the assessment results in a format that is appropriate to their understanding of the assessment process. To assist in communicating effectively, it is often helpful to develop a plan for reporting, keeping the following ideas in mind:

- What individuals or groups want information?
- What information would they want to be reported?
- What do you hope to accomplish by the reporting – what are the purposes of the reporting?
- What are the best methods for reporting the information to each audience?
- What is the best combination of reporting methods suitable for each audience?

Ideally, school reporting should be carried out on an ongoing, year-round basis. If this does take place, then reporting about the assessment taking place and the assessment results will occur naturally within the broader framework of reporting.

There are three times when reports about the assessment can and should take place.

- The first of these is before or when the actual assessment is taking place. This is an ideal time to discuss the purpose of the assessment program, without the natural distraction of assessment scores.
- The second time is when the results are in hand. Rather than simply reporting the assessment results, however, reporting could focus on the instructional changes to be made for individual students (for their parents/guardians) and groups of students (for all parents/guardians as well as the school board and the public).
- The third reporting occasion is when further uses have been made of the assessment data and decisions for change have been made. Parents/guardians, school board members, and other members of the public are eager to learn how the results are being used to carry out school improvement activities. These reports carry the needed background information, keep various groups informed about the current status, and convey an attitude of concern for improvement.

Each of these reports is summarized below:

## Background Report

This report, given before the results are available, describes the purpose of the assessment program, types of assessments used and in what content areas, the uses to be made of the results, and when results will be returned. The background report works well with students, parents/ guardians, school boards, and the news media. As mentioned above, an ideal time to make this report to the school board, parents/guardians, and the community is when the assessment is occurring in schools. There is a natural curiosity about the assessment program that can be capitalized on to provide this background report, especially if it “previews” when results will be returned and how they will be used.

The background report should contain several pieces of information:

- Basic facts about the assessment program, such as its purpose(s), how long it has been in existence, what is assessed, at what grade levels, and what type(s) of measures are used in it.
- What has been done in the past with the results, as well as plans for use of the results this year.
- Plans for reporting the results, including individual parent reports, and group reports to parents, school boards, and the public.

## Report of Results

This report should be as simple as possible and include the numbers that indicate student achievement. If “proficient and above” is the key metric used in reporting, indicate what percent of students met this mark this year. If results are reported by gender, racial-ethnic group, or other sub-groups, report those percentages, too, perhaps on separate pages or slides, so as not to clutter the report. The same goes for reports from each school in the district.

The written report should focus primarily on responses to these five questions:

- How did we do this year?

- Did student achievement improve this year?
- If so, why?
- If not, why not?
- What will be done to review this year’s results and how will the results be used with individual students, as well as at the school and district levels?

If answers to these questions, such as why achievement did or did not improve, are not known at the time of reporting, this written report should indicate what processes will be used to determine the answers and when these answers will be reported (as a follow-up report).

This is a report that needs to be written both when results are high and/or improving, as well as when they are low and/or declining.

Particularly in the latter case, it is critical that the results be presented openly and candidly, and that the “bad news” be told by the educators, not “discovered” by the persons receiving the reports. By discussing both the good news and the bad news, and discussing plans to more fully analyze the results, the emphasis can be placed on the *uses of the results*.

## Follow-Up Reports

Once the reports of results have been provided, the school staff should once again examine the results to determine areas where improvements are needed and set about making the needed changes. Follow-up reports should be used to describe the changes as they are being implemented, as well as overall results of the changes.

Such reports might emphasize changes made to instruction, professional learning carried out by staff, new materials being used by teachers, new learning opportunities being provided to students, and the impacts these changes are making on student learning.

## In Summary

As this section has indicated, the reporting of assessment results and the uses of the assessment data to make improvements in learning and teaching should be interdependent activities. Each reinforces the other, and both are important to carry out. By determining the meaning of the assessment information, the data can be used for student and school improvement purposes. The appropriate reporting of the results can bring greater credibility to the school, thereby helping to improve support for the school's instructional program.

The ideas that are presented in this guide are the result of work carried out in a number of school districts and are presented with the hope that other schools can learn from these ideas. These ideas were developed in full awareness of the limited time, money, and professional learning opportunities under which educators typically must work, but since they are ideas that local educators have developed and used successfully, there is a high likelihood that other educators can adopt these and use them effectively as well.

## Section 2: Using Assessment Results with Individual Students Assessed

There are several steps that educators should take to use assessment results for the students who participated in the assessment. These are predicated on the assumption that the assessment can provide information that is suitable for this purpose. It is not inappropriate to determine if students have instructional needs based on their performance on the assessment. In fact, it is more inappropriate *not to examine the results and determine what courses students need to take or what additional instruction they need on certain concepts.*

It is not inappropriate to determine if students have instructional needs based on their performance on the assessment. In fact, it is more inappropriate *not to examine the results and determine what courses students need to take or what additional instruction they need on certain concepts.*

This section provides information on how classroom teachers can use the assessment results to help identify and address the instructional needs of the students who were assessed. This section covers why the results should be used, how they can be used, and the potential resources that may be available to use in this process.

### Why Results Should Be Used

Most teachers spend a considerable part of each school day assessing students, using many types of information, by using both the formative assessment process (Kintz, et al, 2017) as well as more summative assessment measures such as homework, quizzes, and tests. In fact, the greater the number of sources of information, particularly objective information, the better. Decisions, made based on several sources of information, tend to be more accurate. Summative assessment data can provide one piece of sound information on which to make decisions.

### Measures of Important Skills

Every assessment program measures important skills. The skills assessed are carefully determined to be the most important for the continued educational success of students at several key points in their schooling. These are skills that students will need to succeed in later grades in school, as well as outside of school. Hence, they are among the most important types of skills that teachers should address. Summative assessments are carefully built to measure these skills in the best, most feasible manner.

### What the Assessments Cover

Regardless of the time of the year when the summative assessment is given, the assessment covers important skills and concepts that students should have learned during one or more prior grade levels. In the typical summative assessment program, students are assessed at several grade levels, and each assessment covers materials learned in two or more current and previous grade levels. This means that more than the teachers at the grade levels assessed need to review the summative assessment results.

### Addressing Deficiencies

When the summative assessments reveal weaknesses in student performance, educators should seek to address these, since these skills form the building blocks for subsequent academic work. The two ways in which educators should review summative assessment results are to address individual student instructional needs and to review the overall instructional program at the grade level(s) assessed and all of the prior grade levels. This section deals with how to use the assessment results with the students assessed, while the next section deals with the instructional program review.

The responsibility for using the assessment results with the students assessed falls on different staff members in different levels of the educational system. At the elementary level, the results will be used by the teacher of the students. At the secondary level, it may be the teacher, the counselor, department chair, or some combination of these, who is responsible. If the students are to receive specific

assistance, however, this responsibility needs to be assigned and carried out.

### Data Provided

Summative assessment results provide objective information that can be used to plan curriculum and instruction based on identified learning skills needing attention rather than guesswork, intuition, or simply following the textbook coverage of topics. By examining the student results, both individually and for the entire classroom, patterns of instructional need may emerge that can serve as a focus for changes in instruction. Therefore, the assessment results can serve as a resource in instructional improvement activities.

### How the Results Should Be Used

There are several ways in which assessment results can be used, and while there is no one best way to do so, the critical point is that the results are carefully examined and used. The results are often prepared for the summative assessment program, and teachers should receive them, although schools may have different policies about whether teachers receive individual student data. In some schools, the information is retained in the central office, filed in students' cumulative folders, and/or sent home. However, teachers should be provided access to the information so that they can carry out the steps that follow. Otherwise, the current instructional needs of students may go unmet.

A suggested six-step process for using the assessment results follows. Please note that this is merely a *suggested process, which can be modified to fit the particular circumstances of the school, the teacher, or the assessment program.*

1. Become familiar with the summative assessment program, the skills measured, and the manner in which the skills were assessed (within the context of ethical guidelines that accompany the assessment program).
2. Review the reports of student and/ or classroom performance in order to get a clear idea of how students, individually, within subgroups, and the classroom as a whole, did on the

assessment.

3. Set goals for improvement and plan how to do this.
4. Share assessment results, your interpretations, and your plan of action with the student, the student's parents/guardians, and other staff included in the plan.
5. Implement your plans.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and make further adjustments as needed.

This process is a versatile one, since it can be applied to individual student results, small groups of students, as well as entire classrooms. Each step in the process is explained in greater detail below.

### Step One: Understand the summative assessment that was administered.

What type of summative assessment was used, what content standards were assessed, and why was the assessment administered? What uses are intended for the results? Are the results reported in relative terms (i.e., norm-referenced) or more standards-based (i.e., criterion-referenced) terms? These will lend important clues to how the assessment results can be used appropriately.

As you examine the skills measured by the summative assessment, you should consider questions such as the following.

- What are the basic building blocks that lead up to the skills that were assessed? Is there any evidence of student mastery of these?
- Are the skills assessed, as well as those that lead up to them, a part of the curriculum for use in earlier grades, later grades, or in the grade in which they were assessed in my school?
- Were all of these skills introduced, taught to mastery, and reviewed in my school? At which grades?
- Which skills are most important currently for this particular student? Which are most important for the academic work of the student in this and subsequent grades?

- Are there patterns of skill instructional needs for the entire class or for sub-groups of students in the class?

There are several ways to familiarize yourself with the summative assessment program, depending on which resources are available. If the assessment is available (it may be secure in some programs), read through the assessment to become familiar with it. The assessment format, vocabulary, and presentation may have affected how students performed on it. Taking the assessment yourself will give you insights to how your students may have approached taking the assessment.

Also, seek out any explanatory information about the skills measured by the assessment. For example, the assessment developer may have published information on the assessment frameworks or curricular guidelines used as the basis for the development of the assessment. A set of content standards, with benchmarks for different grades or grade ranges, may be available. If not available in your school or district, this information may be available from your state department of education or assessment publisher, either in print or electronically. A growing number of states have placed their assessment frameworks or curriculum guidelines on their Internet web sites, and electronic versions of the assessment frameworks may be available from publishers of the assessments. For complete access to the web sites of all state departments of education, point your browser to [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org), since this one site is linked to every state department of education in the United States. Vendors for commercially-available summative assessments also maintain websites that can provide considerable information about the assessment.

The critical issue is to learn as much as you can about the skills that were selected for assessment: why they were selected, what assumptions were made about instruction students should have received before assessment, and how these assumptions match those on which the local curriculum is based.

### Step Two: Review Student Performance.

Review classroom and individual student assessment summaries to determine which students evidenced the greatest instructional needs.

These reports can help educators select students with the greatest levels of need, as well as pinpoint the areas in which they need assistance.

#### Classroom Summaries

If the summative assessment program provides these reports, they are handy for teachers to use to get a quick idea of how the classroom performed. For example, some of these reports show a matrix of content standards or skills on one dimension, with students listed on the other. A report such as this will permit the teacher to quickly determine which students have the greatest instructional needs, as well as the content standards and skills on which students had the greatest difficulty. Armed with this information, the teacher can make decisions about which skills need to be further examined, and which students are most likely to need assistance. The classroom summary may also give teachers ideas about how to group students with common instructional needs.

#### Classroom Item Analysis Report

If an assessment item analysis report is produced for the school or the classroom, additional insights about the performance of students might be gleaned from it, since it would show which items were most difficult for the students and what incorrect answers they most frequently gave. This type of report is most helpful when either the actual assessment items or a summary of each item is also available.

#### Individual Student Reports

These reports typically show the performance of a single student on each of the skills that formed the basis of the summative assessment, and some even provide the performance of the student on each item in the assessment. These reports provide a detailed picture of how the student did on the assessment and may include which standards they achieved and which they did not. The strengths and weaknesses of the student are shown on the individual student report, so that after the teacher has determined which students need the most assistance, this report can show on which standards or skills students need the most help.

Keep in mind that there may be underlying skills (i.e., building blocks) to those that were assessed that are needed in order for students to learn the concepts that were assessed. A simple drill on the skills missed may not help students master the skills assessed. Attention needs to be paid to the missing prerequisite skills. The teacher may need to conduct an informal (or formal) diagnostic assessment to determine the true nature of the underlying instructional weakness(es) of the student.



### Step Three: Develop a plan.

Educators will need to make decisions about what needs to be taught and how this instruction should be provided. A number of important questions will need to be considered at this stage. These include:

- On which standards and skills did students have the greatest difficulty?
- What are the critical prerequisite skills for the skills assessed?
- Have students mastered these prerequisite skills? What evidence of this do I have?
- What is the best approach to instruction?
- What are my time constraints?
- How can I provide remedial assistance and teach new skills as well? Can remediation be integrated into ongoing instruction?

- Can students with the same needs be grouped together for instruction on these standards or skills?
- Do the students with the lowest achievement need an individualized education plan?
- Will some students require separate instruction, perhaps outside of class?
- How can I provide the needed instruction for students with different learning styles?
- Are there other ways the needed instruction could be provided, such as peer or volunteer tutoring or computers?
- Do teachers at prior grades have ideas or materials for the missing prerequisite skills?

This is the time for educators to develop plans for each student with needs uncovered by the assessment.

Note: Steps One, Two, and Three have been summarized in [Appendix A](#) “Process for Analyzing Individual Student Performance on the Assessment.”

### Step Four: Share the Assessment Results.

The assessment results, plus the plans to assist students, should be shared with parents/guardians and students at the elementary level, and with parents and students at the secondary level. This will encourage understanding and support for the plans set in the previous step. It will also answer the obvious question (“why did we take this assessment?”), which might serve to motivate students in the future. The following steps are suggested to share the results with students:

1. Provide a debriefing to students right after they complete taking the assessment. Answer their questions.
2. Let students know when the results are likely to be available and how they will be used.
3. When results are received, give each student a copy of his or her personal individual student report.

4. Explain what each section of the individual student report contains and what each type of score means. If an “understanding the individual report” interpretive piece for students has been prepared, make copies of this interpretive piece, and pass it out to students. Emphasize the standards or skills students have or have not mastered.
5. Provide encouragement and the overall plan of action to address the identified needs of all students, indicating that individual plans have been developed as needed.

Reporting to parents/guardians as well as to students means that they can be engaged informally or formally in helping implement the plan developed in Step Three. Their understanding of the results is vital to obtaining their support for plans to address the needs uncovered by the assessment.

### Step Five: Implement the Plan.

At this stage, the plans set by educators for each student should be implemented. The information collected by the summative assessment program and from other sources will help in this effort. It may be helpful to remind yourself of the standard or skill being addressed as you develop lesson plans.

The way in which you deliver the instruction will be somewhat dependent on the materials you use. You may want to consider selecting materials from among the categories given below.

**Printed Materials**—Books, worksheets, workbooks, periodicals, reference books, and so forth

**Visual Materials**—Charts, chalkboards, overhead projectors, displays, videos, DVDs, instructional, and the Internet

**Tactile Materials**—Games, puzzles, manipulatives, and so forth

**Auditory Materials**—Audio recordings, records, CDs, lectures, and discussions

Regardless of the types of materials you select, there are six important factors to keep in mind when deciding what to use in

providing the instruction. These points should help you provide the most effective instruction to the students who need it most, while keeping the use of precious resources (time and money) to a minimum:

- **Nature of the standard or skill**—Some skills require the use of one particular type of instructional material. Others offer more flexibility. It is important to consider the nature of the skill when deciding which types of materials to use.
- **Types of students being taught**—Students will have different learning styles. You should select the materials that best complement those styles.
- **Availability**—Which materials are readily available? Which others might be obtained at little or no cost?
- **Teacher-produced materials**—Some teachers are able to readily produce the materials that are needed, while others do not have these skills or time to do so. Instructional media staff may be able to provide support to those who want to produce their own materials.
- **Flexibility, durability, and convenience of materials**—Will the materials be usable by a wide number of students, and will the materials hold up to student use?
- **Cost-Effectiveness**—Which materials are the least costly while doing the job most effectively? Balance utility and cost to select the best materials.

### Step Six: Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Plan.

Once the planned instruction has taken place, educators should assess whether the instruction has accomplished the intended purposes and met student needs. It may be helpful to examine both process and outcome data as your teaching strategies are implemented. Process data might include the number of sessions with a tutor, the number of repetitions needed to learn a concept, or how engaged students seem to have been during the learning process. Outcome data include how well students were able to learn the skills. This might include formal procedures, such as pre- and post-testing



them, or observational information using the formative assessment process collected by listening to students explain the concept to other students in a group.

Whatever method is used is not as important as having a pre-thought means of assessing the effectiveness of the changes. The feedback that it gives is essential in determining what has been accomplished and what further needs to be done.

## In Summary

Implementing these six steps can assist educators to use summative assessment results to correct student learning issues that the assessments uncover and to help students continue to learn the types of skills they need to make progress in school. Assessment results are only as good as the uses to which they are put. Using the standardized assessment results to help students learn key missed skills is not an end in itself, but a natural part of the teaching-learning process. By sharing with your students some of the goals of instruction, students can become more engaged in the learning process and, therefore, assume more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are encouraged to use the assessment framework or curriculum guidelines on which the assessment is based to build their own instructional program.

These uses and reports are important components of the larger process of using and reporting summative assessment results effectively.

Assessment results are only as good as the uses to which they are put. Using the standardized assessment results to help students learn key missed skills is not an end in itself, but a natural part of the teaching-learning process.

## Section 3: Using Assessment Results in Instructional Planning and School Improvement

This section presents ideas about how the results of summative assessments used at the state, district, school, and classroom levels can be used to review and improve the school instructional program. This is the most important purpose of a summative assessment used at all of these levels, since such assessments typically cover what students should have learned over the course of an entire school year. It is presented here out of the hope that the summative assessment results, along with other information on student achievement, gathered from various formal and informal measures, will be used to review and improve the school's instructional program. The discussion will focus on three areas:

- Why assessment results should be used.
- What steps should be carried out and who should carry them out.
- How the instructional review should be conducted.

Each of these will be covered in some detail, with appropriate resource materials where available.

### Why Assessment Results Should Be Used

There are some who believe that external sources of information, such as summative assessment scores, should not be used to help review and improve the school's instructional program. The belief is that each local educator knows best what students ought to be taught, how well students are achieving, and what additional instruction is needed to improve student performance. There is no doubt that teachers do know students best; however, this section is presented out of the belief that summative assessments such as state

or district summative assessments can provide valuable objective information that school improvement teams (composed of the school leaders, teachers, and other individuals) can use, along with other information, to make substantial improvements in student learning opportunities. Local educators still maintain control over when, how, and with what materials the content standards that are assessed are taught.

The suggestions provided here have been taken from observations of effective schools as they have reviewed achievement results obtained from state, district, and other summative assessments. The processes described here are practical and do not demand substantial investments of time or money. They empower local educators to make better resource decisions, since the focus becomes the activities students need in order to do well on the various measures of student performance.

It is important to use whatever information is available to help students learn, since schools are funded with tax dollars and citizens expect schools to do all in their power to help students learn. The steps suggested here provide constructive ways for schools to turn the pressures of public reporting of assessment scores (and the attendant accountability pressures) into constructive actions for improvement, so that the results of such scrutiny can be shared with parents, policymakers, and other members of the public.

Assessment results typically are provided annually and contain information on the performance of students in the areas assessed. These results, along with other performance indicators, can be used to detect trends and patterns in student performance, and help identify possible causes for lower-than-anticipated or desired performance. Changes implemented because of the review of the instructional program can improve the educational quality of your schools.

The standards and skills assessed serve as the starting point to developing an articulated instructional program that can communicate to all staff what is expected. The efforts undertaken to use the summative assessment results can serve as the starting point

of ongoing efforts for the improvement of both the curriculum and the instructional program.

## What Should Be Done and How

Conducting an instructional program review is a familiar activity which involves several steps. While it may appear complex, the steps outlined here can be carried out by persons who do not have special training. What is needed is dedication to the improvement of the school's instructional program. There are no hard and fast rules about how the review should be conducted, nor what tools and resources should be used in it. This is, however, the most major and legitimate use of summative assessment results such as provided by state or district assessment programs.

Conducting an effective instructional program review using summative assessment results does take some dedicated staff time, effort, and commitment. It requires preplanning, leadership, teamwork, and the cooperative involvement of the total instructional staff (at least those responsible for the areas assessed in the assessment program). While different persons may be involved at different points during the review process, the staff effort must be continuous and sustained in order to satisfactorily carry out the several tasks involved in successfully using the assessment results.

Note: "Preparing a School to Use the School-Level Results," found in [Appendix B](#), gives tips and suggestions for the pre-planning stage of the instructional review process.

### Preplanning

Planning for the use of the results can begin before assessment starts. This will help to inform all staff about the standards and skills on which the assessment is based, the manner in which they are assessed, and how the results will be used with the students. If this latter type of information is effectively communicated to students, this may serve to motivate them to take the assessment seriously.

The assessment utilization team should be organized with a task-oriented agenda, and responsibilities assigned. The resource materials

needed should be obtained and distributed to all staff members.

### Leadership

The school principal or the designee of the principal should provide the direction in pre-planning the activities, while continuing to participate in the actual review activities once the assessment results are received.



### Teamwork

Attention to the instructional needs identified by the review is not the job solely of the teachers in the grades in which the assessment occurred, even if the assessments are given in the spring. Almost every assessment program assesses standards and skills that may be taught to students at any point over a two-, three-, or more-year span of grades. This means that all of the teachers in these previous grades must be actively involved in the instructional review process. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, the prerequisite skills to those assessed may occur as many as three grades prior to the grade in which the assessment occurred. Second, not all teachers of the same grade level teach the same content in the same manner to the same degree of emphasis. By involving all of the staff members in the effort, a within-grade and cross-grade articulated program of instruction can be developed by the school team.

Articulation across buildings may also be required, particularly if the grade range covered by the assessment spans grades contained at

two levels. For example, sixth grade results may need to be analyzed jointly by educators at the elementary grades (e.g., grades four and five) and the middle school (e.g., grades six through eight). In cases where feeder school reports are available, it should be possible for the teachers in the “sending” elementary school to see how their students did on the assessment a year or two after leaving the elementary school.

The emphasis in all of these types of reviews should be on pulling together in a positive improvement direction instead of on “fault-finding.” Looking for scapegoats does nothing to help the students who were assessed, nor does it prevent the recurrence of the same educational needs in future groups of students. It may serve, rather, to shut down the review process and not uncover where there are issues. Instructional change occurs best when all staff members feel committed to making improvements and have been involved in determining what needs to be changed.

Once the results are received, it is time for the assessment utilization team to swing into action. This is critical so that reports of assessment results can reference the findings of the instructional review process and changes that will be made as the result of it. The assessment utilization team, while planning the instructional review process, should examine the results, draw tentative conclusions about the level(s) of performance of students as a group, look at the performance of sub-groups, and observe trends in performance. Then the team should report the results to all staff and involve all the staff in the decision-making and implementation processes. The team should establish the timeline for doing this, along with a plan for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the review process.

## Conducting the Instructional Review

The process for using the summative assessment results to conduct a school instructional review process is outlined in the following steps. This is only a suggested process and can be changed to better fit the school’s situation. The process outlined comprises a few easy steps. However, keep in mind that effective school improvement is not a one-shot, short-term effort. While these steps can certainly begin the

process effectively, they are only a start of the school improvement efforts needed to bring about long-term, sustained growth and improvement.

There are seven major steps suggested in the instructional review process:

1. Determine staff expectations.
2. Examine student performance.
3. Examine the current instructional delivery system.
4. Make decisions and set goals.
5. Develop a plan of action.
6. Implement the plan of action.
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan.

Each of these steps is explained below.

### Step One: Determine staff instructional expectations

The first step is suggested for when the staff of the school wishes to prioritize its instructional review activities. It is used to determine one or two areas that were assessed that are of the highest concern. This can serve as a useful start to an overall instructional review eventually conducted in an entire content area across multiple grades. It can serve as a “starter” activity to be returned to and repeated later, or when the assessment utilization team feels that work on only one or two sub-areas is warranted.

The determination of staff expectations sounds like a simple activity, since literature accompanying many assessment programs indicates that all students are expected to pass every standard or skill. While this may be an appropriate long-term goal, it may not be true initially, especially in schools with overall low performance. Therefore, it may be useful to start by determining which skills or strands of skills educators feel are most important, perhaps combined with the lowest initial student performance. These sub-areas can be designated as

most critical or essential for the teachers in the school to work on. As teachers look at the skills assessed, which ones do they feel are most essential for subsequent student learning and which are deemed to be of lesser importance?

If the assessment utilization team decides to examine all the standards in a discipline that was assessed, Step One and Step Two may be omitted, although carrying out these two steps can still be important to demonstrate that what teachers *think students will do on the assessment may not match how well students actually did on it.*

### Resources

A member of the assessment utilization team should create a matrix containing each standard or skill, such as shown in [Appendix C](#), listed in order from the earliest grade to the last grade in the grade range to be examined, down the left side, along with 6-8 blank, evenly spaced columns to the right. The matrix will permit staff to express their opinions. The blank columns will be used by individual teachers to indicate the priority assigned to each content standard and the level of student performance expected. In addition, a complete list of skills assessed, whether serving as the basis for reporting or not, will also be useful.

### Activity

The matrices described above should be used in two ways.

First, provide a copy of the matrix to each staff member in the grade range to be examined and ask them to use the first two columns to independently a) rate each content standard on the expected level of performance (i.e., the proportion of students they expect to pass or attain a proficient or better score on the standard or skill) and b) how essential they view the standard or skill (or sub-unit) by rating it a “10” for critical and a “1” for not at all important. It is important that each staff member do this step by himself or herself, without sharing their ratings with colleagues.

Second, collect and tally the individual surveys. A summary report of the survey results should be prepared, with each column on the tally sheet showing one of the five pieces of information listed above

for each staff member. Thus, if there are two kindergarten teachers and three first grade teachers, the summary sheet will list individual teacher results, for example, the extent of current instruction provided on each standard. While the grade level should be indicated, the results should be listed anonymously, such as “K-1,” “K-2,” “1-1,” “1-2,” and “1-3.” This will indicate the staff’s expectations and views about how critical the skills being assessed are, as well as factors related to classroom emphases on the skills assessed.

The assessment utilization team should look at the summary showing tallies of the importance of each standard assessed and prioritize the importance of all skills that were assessed in the assessment program.

### Step Two: Examine student performance

Once the expectations of the school staff have been prioritized, the next step is to review actual student performance on the assessment. The key activities here are to first look at the discrepancies between predicted and actual student performance on each standard, and then second, determine the highest priority standards with the greatest discrepancy between *expected* and *actual* student performance. It is this subset of skills assessed that then become the priorities for the assessment utilization team to examine more carefully in Step Three.

### Resources

The resources used at this step will be somewhat dependent on the reports published by the assessment program. Most useful at this stage would be a school summary showing performance of all students by standard or strand. A complete list of skills assessed, whether serving as the basis for reporting or not, will also be useful. If available, school assessment item analysis reports or feeder school reports may be helpful as well, particularly for elementary and middle schools. The matrices prepared in Step One will also be used.

### Activity

The initial examination of student performance should start by examining the school summary report of the assessment program. This report may indicate how well students performed on each of

the standards measured by the assessment, as well as how they performed on the entire assessment. The matrices can be used to record student performance on each standard or skill.

The building staff should look at the discrepancy between the criteria for performance set by the building and actual student performance. Record on a fresh copy of the matrices the desired level and actual levels of performance. Look for standards on which students did particularly well and poorly relative to the criteria and expectations set by the building. Among those on which students' performance was much less than desired, put a checkmark next to those viewed throughout the building as most critical. This will help the school staff determine those areas of the assessment viewed as most important on which the greater discrepancy occurred between expectations and actual performance.



### Additional Analyses

If standards for proficient performance have been set for the assessment, look at the percentage of students who fall at or above this performance level. By examining selected student characteristics (such as absenteeism rates or length of time in the district), clues to the performance of the school may be found. A re-analysis of the results for students with similar characteristics may help in identifying some problem areas, or in ruling out some possible explanations for results that vary from expectations.

If assessment item analysis reports are available showing the performance of students by assessment item, the school staff can, using a copy of the assessment (if available and appropriate to access), examine how well students in the school did on each item in the assessment. If large groups of students chose the same incorrect answer, this might indicate that an area of instruction has been omitted, misconceptions about a fact or process have been formulated, or unfamiliar method/format/vocabulary (as opposed to lack of knowledge) have interfered with student performance. The team should consider and record possible causes for incorrect responses.

Likewise, if the reports of results are disaggregated, look at the differential performance of different sub-groups of students. This search should not be to seek excuses or scapegoats for lower-than-desired performance, but instead to seek a better understanding of how the students in the school performed on the summative assessment program. How are these characteristics of students related to their opportunities to learn each standard and skill assessed?

Finally, if feeder school reports have been prepared, showing how each elementary school did on the middle school assessment or how each middle school did on the high school assessment, do these show differences among the elementary or middle schools? How do the school results on the elementary assessment and on the middle school feeder school report compare? Did students who did well at the elementary level also do well on the middle school assessment? Were there any reversals (e.g., students who did well on the first assessment who did poorly on the later one)? What do the feeder school results imply for instructional planning for the grades between the elementary and middle school assessed grades? What instructional planning work should the elementary and the middle school undertake together?

### Step Three: Examine the current instructional delivery system

At this stage, if the school staff went through Steps One and Two, it

should have some good ideas about which parts of the assessment are of most concern. In this step, they will examine how these and other standards and skills were and are being addressed in the school's instructional program.

### Resources

The resources needed in this step are blank copies of the matrices used in Step One, along with complete listings of state-level standards and skills, and the current school curriculum, plans for instruction, all textbooks, electronic and other instructional materials used, and any other resources that are used in instruction.

### Activities

In this step, the current instructional delivery system is to be examined to determine what is being taught, by whom, when, and using which materials and strategies. Obviously, students don't have much of a chance of mastering skills that they have not been taught thoroughly. In this review of the instructional program, sometimes it is helpful to differentiate among skills introduced, taught to mastery, or reviewed for retention. There are several ways in which the school's instructional program can be examined.

The major activity in this step is to once again survey all teachers in the grade range being examined to determine how the assessed standards are being addressed by each classroom teacher in the building. The same grade-level matrices used before can also be used to collect information from the staff on their instructional practices.

First, ask each teacher to independently use a fresh copy of the matrices used in Step One to collect data on three pieces of information: a) the extent of current instruction on each standard or skill that each teacher currently provides, b) when such instruction occurred or will occur in the school year, and c) what instructional materials are used to provide instruction on each standard. It is important that each teacher do this step by himself or herself, without sharing their ratings with colleagues.

Information about the instructional practices in the building can be gathered in one of several forms for each standard assessed.

Teachers may be asked:

- whether or not they teach each of the standards and skills, by responding "Y" for yes and "N" for no;
- whether they introduce the skill, teach it to mastery, or merely review it (presuming it has been taught to mastery in an earlier grade). Responses could be "I" for introduced, "M" for taught to mastery, "R" for review, and "NA" could be used to indicate that the skill is not addressed at all;
- how much time they spend teaching the skill, rating each according to time: a lot of time (3), a moderate amount of time (2), a small amount of time (1), or no time at all teaching the standard or skill (0); or,
- how much time they spend teaching the skill, with responses expressed in terms of the number of class periods, days, or weeks.

Experience suggests that the second item in the list above is the easiest and most useful information to collect, since it provides more information than the first item, is better understood than the third item, and takes much less time to do than the fourth item.

Teachers should also indicate *when* during the school year the standard or skill was addressed (e.g., the three weeks prior to Thanksgiving vacation), as well as what instructional materials or other resource materials were used. They can note these on their copies of the matrices.

Second, collect and tally the individual surveys. A summary report of the survey results should be prepared, with each column on the tally sheet showing a) the extent of current instruction on each standard or skill that each teacher currently provides for all staff members. Thus, if there are two kindergarten teachers and three first grade teachers, the summary sheet will list the extent of current instruction by individual teachers in separate columns. While the grade level should be indicated, the results should be listed anonymously, such as "K-1," "K-2," "1-1," "1-2," and "1-3." This will indicate the staff's expectations and views about how critical the skills being assessed are, as well as factors related to classroom emphases on the skills assessed.

Once this summary matrix has been developed, additional summary matrix sheets, showing individual teacher determinations of time when instruction was provided (b) and instructional resources used (c), can also be prepared for eventual use.

### Step Four: Make decisions and set goals

In this step, teachers will carry out several activities. If Steps One and Two were carried out, they will review the standards viewed as most essential and for which the greatest gap exists in students along with the results of the survey of their instructional practices from Step Three. Other assessment utilization teams who are examining instruction in the entire discipline will begin with the information collected in this Step. With this information in hand, each team will then be in a position to review the school's instructional program and begin to make decisions about what aspects of the school's instructional program will need to be revised and can begin the discussions of the manner in which the school's instructional program might be changed.

### Resources

All of the information gathered in Steps One and Two and/or Step Three should be used by the teachers in this step. This includes their levels of expectation for student performance, their ratings of importance of each assessed standard or skill, and the various ways in which they have evaluated the current instructional system in Step Three. Copies of all these materials should be made available for each participant in the review. Ideally, each member of the school staff affected by the results of this planning effort should participate in this step.

### Activities

The goal of this step is to determine how the standards or skills deemed most important, where actual student performance differs most from expected performance, are currently being addressed in the school's instructional program. Obviously, weaknesses uncovered by the assessment suggest change is needed, but what accounted for the lower-than-expected and less-than-desired performance of students? Questions worth answering include:

- Did some students receive instruction on the skills while others did not?
- Were some students merely introduced to the topic, while others received full instruction in it (i.e., taught to mastery)?
- Did some of the students just receive a "review," presuming full instruction later that never occurred?
- Were there students new to the building who had not received instruction that had gone undetected until now?

These are just some of the possible explanations that can be discerned from the instructional surveys collected in Step Three:

- Look for consistency in the manner in which all teachers of the same grade or the same course report information. For example, are all third-grade teachers, or the teachers of Algebra I, reporting a consistent "introduction," "taught to mastery," and "review" for each content standard?
- Does instruction flow in a logical and consistent pattern from one grade or course level to another? For example, is the standard introduced and taught to mastery in grade three or Algebra I, then reviewed in fourth grade or Algebra II? This look at instruction on the enabling skills which should have been taught in grades prior to the grade assessed should be a particular focus.
- Are there gaps, illogical instructional sequences, or inconsistent patterns (e.g., reviewed in grade three, skipped in grade four, taught to mastery in grade five)?

By reviewing the instructional survey results, the school team should be able to quickly identify areas of weakness in the school's current instructional program. It can also identify at least some of the reasons for the weaknesses in student performance.

Another important thing for the school team to examine is places where the instructional survey indicates that the school has been providing *too much instruction*. Since the teachers may have not had a chance to develop an articulated, cross-grade instructional program, there may well be places where the teachers in two or more grades



are providing unnecessarily redundant instruction to students. The team may wish to consider ways in which such instructional emphases could be trimmed without unduly affecting the performance of students (which, presumably, is satisfactory).

The school team will also want to examine the instructional materials that teachers reported they used, as well as the strategies used by the teachers to provide instruction. If weaknesses are uncovered in these, the team will need to determine how to address these needs.

The team should keep in mind that the weaknesses in instruction may not be at the grade at which the standard or skill is assessed, but in the enabling skills leading to those assessed. Hence, it is critical to examine the standards and skills back three grades or more when looking for tentative causes for the lower performance of students.

### Step Five: Develop a plan of action

At this stage, the school team will have some ideas about what probably caused the performance of students to be lower than desired, as well as some ideas about how to address the curriculum needs. During Step Five, the school team needs to develop a formal plan of action with two parts:

- How the instructional needs uncovered by the work thus far will be addressed this year and beyond in order to make changes in the instructional program so that future groups of students will do better on the assessment.
- How the needs of the students uncovered by the assessment this year will be addressed in any remediation provided to these students.

This report should be used in the school-level reporting, both to the administration and to the school board (emphasizing the first bullet) and to parents/guardians (emphasizing the second bullet).

All instructional staff should be involved in developing the plan of action. The plan should contain several parts:

- Short-term remedial goals.

- Longer-term curriculum and instructional goals to avoid the same problems in the future.
- Steps staff will take to implement the longer-term goals, such as the need for professional learning, the selection or development of new instructional materials, the creation of related classroom assessment strategies, and so forth.

All instructional and instructional-support staff should be involved in the development of the plan of action. Total involvement in developing the plan, particularly when care is taken to assure the active participation of all members of the team, goes a long way in assuring the success in implementing the plan. More importantly, it also goes a long way in assuring that teachers are better able to develop an instructional plan that is well-articulated within and across grade levels.

The plan should identify, in detail, the tasks to be accomplished, the staff assigned the responsibility to see that these tasks are carried out, the timeline for developing and implementing the elements of the plan, and the manner in which the plan will be implemented. At the secondary level, different teams made up of persons with instructional responsibility for the subject area could devise the plans, then present them to the entire staff for action.

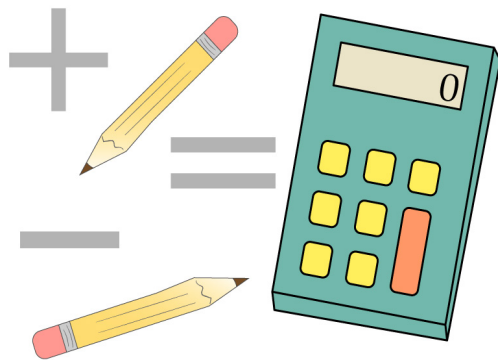
Note: The “Model of the Instructional Review at the Building Level,” shown in [Appendix D](#), can be used by the building team to help them put together their plan of action for use in meeting students’ instructional needs.

### Step Six: Implement the plan of action

Once the plan has been developed by the school team, the plan will need to be implemented. This implementation may be dependent on the approval of the school board or the central administration, which may need to understand the intended changes. Hence, the school may need to develop a report about the plan to present to the school board or the superintendent.

As the plan is being implemented, the school team may wish to meet periodically to discuss implementation issues that arise. These meetings will serve to assure that the plan is being implemented as

originally agreed upon by all members of the school faculty, or that changes necessitated by these issues are resolved by the entire faculty. They will also help assure that the school faculty remains a strong, united team as they implement the changes.



### Step Seven: Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan

The final step is to determine how successful the plan has been in addressing the educational needs of students. It is important to examine this question to make sure that the changes implemented by the school are having the desired impact. It may be that the changes have only partially worked, or even have had no impact. In these cases, the school faculty will need to make changes or develop new plans by working together. It is important to keep in mind that significant change can take more than a few months to bring about, particularly when the work of teachers at several grades prior to the grade assessment is the focus of the plan. In this case, the evaluation might seek to look for gradual improvements in student performance as measured by summative assessments used at the classroom level, keeping in mind that it will take two or three years for the full impact of the new plan to be seen in student performance on broader measures such as annual district or state assessments.

One way of evaluating the effectiveness of the plan is whether student performance on the summative assessment program has improved. However, since the school's plan may focus on the skills requisite to those assessed, other sources of evidence may be needed.

The evidence needed to evaluate the plan may be found in other summative assessments used in the school, or those used during instruction.

Regardless of the sources of information, it is important to be patient enough to wait for the changes to have an impact, while watching for ways in which additional improvement can occur.

### In Summary

By working together, educators within a building can use the summative assessment results to improve the school's instructional program. Perhaps more importantly, these steps can assist the educators within the building to become a much more coherent team focused on the improvement of student learning.

## Section 4: Reporting Assessment Results to Students

This section addresses reporting of assessment results to students, including why the results should be reported, how the reporting should be handled, and the resources that are available in this process.

### Why Results Should Be Reported to Students

Students want to know how they did on any assessment. In fact, letting them know how well they did and how they may be helped to improve their performance can go a long way towards motivating them to take the assessment seriously and give it their best effort—particularly if they are informed of the teacher’s (or school counselor’s) intended use of the results in advance of taking the assessment.

Experienced teachers know that the feedback they provide to students can help motivate students to work hard. If they respond to student work promptly and thoughtfully, students will tend to give their best effort to their work.

To understand this need for information, think of how long and how hard we would work at a task without feedback. For example, if we were to shoot basketballs at a hoop hidden behind a screen, so we couldn’t see whether our shots went in, how long would we persist? The pride in successfully sinking the shots (or even coming close) would be missing, and eventually, our interest in shooting hoops would wane.

Successful teachers know that if they want the same effort from students, they will need to provide the reinforcement that frequent, specific feedback will provide.

Another advantage of providing feedback to students is that it is more likely that the student will remain actively engaged in learning. Sensing then what standards and skills they have achieved and

which ones they still need to work on, they are more likely to be interested in working on the skills they still lack. When these needs are communicated to them in a goal-setting process in which the student plays an important role, the student is even more likely to take ownership for the problem and to participate in the solution.

### How Results Should Be Reported

A two-step process is recommended for reporting assessment results to students. First, the teacher should provide an overview of the assessment results to all students in the class. Then, the teacher should provide interpretation and goal-setting sessions for students individually or small groups.

The group interpretation process should include the following steps:

1. Reminder to students about the assessment that they took
2. The purposes in taking that assessment.
3. That the results have now been returned to schools.
4. The general types of uses to which the district, school, and classroom results will be put.
5. The value and uses of the individual student results, for the teacher, the student, and the parents/ guardians.
6. The process that the teacher will use to assist students and parents/guardians to interpret and understand the results.
7. If reports of results are distributed to students in the group setting, how to read the individual report of results.

In the subsequent individual student or small group follow-up sessions, the students should be helped to understand the significance of how well they performed on the assessment and how the information will be used to plan instruction for the immediate future. Emphasis should be placed on the following:

- the standards and skills the student has or has not learned—not on “passing” or “failing” the assessment or on the number of items answered correctly;

- encouragement and reinforcement for both actual achievement and effort shown;
- the need to achieve the standards and skills assessed (not to do better in comparison with other students);
- the plan of action to address the educational needs of the student;
- how the student can participate in planning and carrying out the plan to address these needs.

In most settings, these meetings will result in a specific but informal agreement about the steps to be taken to assist each student. In some cases, however, formal agreements about services to be provided and the manner in which these services will occur may need to be written, containing responsibilities, schedules, and signatures.



The suggested two-step process, using both a group report and individual student follow-up sessions, will work in most settings. For example, at the elementary level, the classroom teacher should be able to carry out both types of meetings. At the secondary level, it may be advisable for a school counselor or principal to conduct the group meeting, perhaps as an assembly, if individual teachers are not used for this step. The individual student meetings might be held by either classroom teachers, school counselors, or both, depending on

whether the likely plan is to include remedial instruction in existing classes for the student, or whether the student would be asked to enroll in different or additional courses in the subject area assessed (particularly when the student is not currently enrolled in a class in the area assessed). The specifics in each school's plan will need to be worked out to suit each school's situation; what is most important is that these sessions be held.

## Resources

A variety of materials and resources are available for your use at one or both of the two steps in reporting the results of assessment programs:

- the explanatory materials returned with the assessment results, particularly for the individual student report (It may be informative to duplicate the section of these materials that explains how to read and report these results);
- information on the district and school plans for using the assessment results for instructional review and improvement;
- information on how and when parents/guardians will receive the individual student results;
- information on when and by whom the individual student sessions will be held and a schedule for students to use to sign-up for their individual session.

## Materials that may be helpful for planning and/or conducting the individual student sessions include:

- the explanatory materials returned with the assessment results, particularly for the individual student report (It may be informative to duplicate the section of these materials that explains how to read and report these results);
- copies of standards and skills assessed by the assessment program;
- a sample copy of the assessment, if the use of the assessment is permitted in interpretive sessions following assessment (note that in some secure assessment programs, this is not permitted);

- the student’s individual student report of the assessment results (copies for both the teacher and the student);
- any written plans to help the student learn the skills assessed.

## In Summary

No one at school or in the home can work to improve the performance of a student on the standards and skills measured by the assessment program unless the individual student actively participates in the learning activities. For that to occur, students must learn specifically how they did, the significance of their performance, and how they can improve. The summative assessment program can provide one important source of information, as can other types of information about the student. The process described here enlists the student in setting and working to accomplish goals for himself or herself. Specific feedback on performance is a vital part of the process of improving student performance.

No one at school or in the home can work to improve the performance of a student on the standards and skills measured by the assessment program unless the individual student actively participates in the learning activities. For that to occur, students must learn specifically how they did, the significance of their performance, and how they can improve.

## Section 5: Reporting Assessment Results to Parents/Guardians

The emphasis of this section is on reporting assessment results to parents, guardians, or others with responsibility for care of the students—both those with students who were assessed and all others with students who attend the same school. All these individuals want to know how well the students in the school performed, what the school will be doing to improve, and—for the parents or guardians of the students who were assessed—what the school will do to help their children do better.

### Why Results Should Be Reported to Parents/ Guardians

Parents and guardians do want to know how their children are doing in school. Are their children exceeding, meeting, or failing to meet the performance standards that have been set for the assessment? The standards and skills measured by the assessment are often some of the most critical for the academic success of students—a fact that many parents and guardians already know. The assessment results will give parents and guardians an indication of how well students are doing in meeting these standards. Sharing results with parents and guardians is an excellent way of informing parents how well their children are doing in school on some of the most important skills schools are trying to teach.

Parent and guardian concern and involvement are also crucial in helping students learn. Research has shown that involvement of parents and guardians in academic achievement is a critical factor in supporting better student performance. Sharing results with parents and guardians can permit cooperative planning by teachers, parents/guardians, and students to improve student performance.

In addition, parents or guardians of students who are assessed are entitled to see reports of the results, under the Family Educational

Rights and Privacy Act (ESEA 1974, Section 513, commonly called FERPA or “the Buckley Amendment”). This Amendment assures parental/guardian access to their children’s assessment scores and other information, while at the same time limiting the access of others to this information without parental or guardian permission. Educators need to be aware of and to respect these rights.

Parents and guardians also want to know how the school and the school district are doing. In many states, freedom of information laws require that existing information about public schools, such as school and school district assessment summaries, be made available or be released to the public. Wise educators realize that assessment programs generate considerable public interest, including the desire of many parents and guardians to know how well their schools are doing. With this in mind, educators plan for the release of the results through formal public presentations of the results, as well as written reports sent home to parents and guardians or included with school newsletters. This will help reach those parents and guardians who do not visit the school, yet are interested in how well the school is performing. Therefore, it is wise not only to report the results at parent meetings, but also to prepare a written report containing the school’s assessment results, interpretations of these results, and projected improvement plans based on the results, and to widely circulate this report throughout the community, using a variety of mediums including school websites and appropriate social media accounts.

### How the Results Should Be Reported

By taking steps to directly report summaries of assessment results to parents and guardians, rather than rely on the news media, schools have a unique opportunity to tell their own stories, including what will be done with the overall results, and perhaps to reduce the opportunity for misinterpretation or misrepresentations of the results. The importance of developing an accurate initial school interpretation of the results cannot be overemphasized. The overall assessment results, and the school’s interpretation of them, should be shared with parents and guardians as soon as possible after the receipt of the information. Being the first to report to parents and

guardians the status and progress of overall school-level student performance is an excellent way to improve public relations at the building level. The manner in which individual student results will be made available to parents and guardians can be included in this summary report, to alert parents and guardians about when and how they will receive the reports of the performance of their child.

Being the first to report to parents and guardians the status and progress of overall school-level student performance is an excellent way to improve public relations at the building level.

Planning for the reporting of assessment results should be done at both the school and the student levels. Three activities are involved: 1) staff preparation; 2) review and interpretation of the assessment results; and 3) development of a plan of action. Sharing assessment results effectively with parents and guardians, which can be considered the fourth step in this planning sequence, requires careful preliminary work for success. When the meaning of the results has not been determined and plans for use have not been developed, it becomes difficult for staff to report the results in a meaningful way that does not sound defensive or indifferent about the results. Through careful planning, staff can convey a thoughtful, concerned attitude that parents and guardians will appreciate and support.

**At the school level**, emphasis should be placed on reporting:

- the group assessment results;
- implications of the results for the school's instructional program;
- the relationship of the assessment results to other information on the achievement of students; and
- the school's proposed plans of action.

The plans of action should be those developed by the school team, following the process described in Step Three earlier. The importance of interpretation cannot be overemphasized. In developing the official school interpretation, school staff should:

- reach an understanding of what the assessment results mean;
- relate the assessment results to other achievement results, in order to derive a more complete picture of student performance; and relate all of this performance information to the instructional program that the school is implementing.

**At the individual student level**, emphasis should be placed on communicating to parents and guardians the:

- child's assessment results;
- implications of the results;
- relationship between the assessment results and other achievement information on the student; and
- plan of action proposed for the student, and the parents' or guardians' role in helping to achieve it.

The plan mentioned above should be the one that the teacher has derived earlier in the process, described in Section Three, of examining the results. Each student's report of results should emphasize both the strengths and weaknesses uncovered, the extent to which this report supports or contradicts other information about the student, and how the teacher and parents or guardians can work together to help the student make improvements.

## Who Should Share the Results?

In elementary schools, the responsibility for reporting the individual student results to parents and guardians will typically lie with the classroom teacher. At the middle school or high school levels, this responsibility may be carried out by classroom teachers or by guidance counselors, particularly in cases where the student is not enrolled in a class in the area assessed.

School-level results are typically reported by the building principal, the counselor, department heads, or others designated to carry out these responsibilities. Regardless of who does the actual reporting, the participation of the building principal in determining how the results will be interpreted and reported is vital. As the instructional

leader, the principal plays an integral part in seeing that the school team reviews the results, determines how to interpret them, plans for the use of the results for improvement purposes, and sees that plans are implemented. With this in mind, the principal should also be integrally involved in reporting the assessment results.

Parent/guardian and community awareness of the larger school performance is vital to maintaining their support for the school's improvement efforts. Parents and guardians are also a vital link in maintaining the support of the broader community. Therefore, it is important for each school to help parents and guardians of students assessed and all other parents and guardians (those who did not have students who were assessed) learn about and understand the assessment results for the school.



## Resources to Use in the Reporting Process

Each summative assessment program will produce somewhat different resources for reporting assessment results:

- Individual student reports of assessment results.
- Parent/guardian reports of individual student assessment results.
- School summaries of assessment results.
- Materials for explaining and interpreting these reports of results.
- “What Can I Do to Help? Suggestions for Parents and Guardians” (see [Appendix E](#));

- Sample or actual assessment booklets to illustrate the assessments that students were asked to take.

## Four Parent/Guardian Reporting Strategies

We've identified four different ways in which to report the assessment results to parents and guardians. They may be used as described below or combined or adapted to fit the individual needs of the school or district. Each requires that preliminary preparations be done, including familiarizing yourself with the summative assessment program, reviewing the reports of results, analyzing and interpreting the results, setting student goals, and developing a plan of action.

### 1. Individual Parent/Guardian-Teacher Conferences

The parent/guardian-teacher conference is the most desirable means of reporting individual student results to parents and guardians. Its advantages include:

- providing for two-way communication between teachers and parents,
- personalizing the assessment results,
- personalizing the plan of action, and
- getting parents and guardians actively involved in the education of their children.

Its single disadvantage is that it reaches only those parents and guardians willing to attend, and must be supplemented by other means for the remaining parents and guardians. A detailed outline of this model, along with suggested materials and procedures, is presented in [Appendix F](#).

### 2. Individual Student Report Sent Home

If conferences cannot be arranged, the individual student report should be sent home with the student or mailed home. A cover letter should be used to explain the assessment program and the assessment report for parents and guardians, summarize the student's strengths and weaknesses as indicated by the results,



outline any necessary plans for remediation, and encourage the parents and guardians to contact the school for further information.

Sending the student report home is far less desirable than holding an in-person conference, but it may be the only avenue of communication open between school and home. Even though it may be necessary to report results in this manner, the school should still provide an individual interpretation of the results and not just send the report of results home without any interpretation. An individual student interpretation may encourage parents and guardians to contact the school and seek further explanation or to be involved in the follow-up work.

### 3. Parent Group Meeting

An open meeting for parents and guardians allows reporting of the school-level assessment data to the parents and guardians of students assessed and to the parents and guardians of students who were not involved in the assessment program, but who will be or have been.

The sharing of individual student assessment results can be carried out as a follow-up activity after the formal meeting. This can be done by either mailing the parent/guardian a copy of the assessment results with an invitation to come to the meeting or distributing the parent/guardian copy of individual student assessment results to parents and guardians at the meeting (with individual parent/guardian-teacher conferences following the presentation of the school-level results at the group meeting or scheduled for a later time).

The group meeting has several advantages:

- It can provide parents and guardians with a clear understanding of the assessment program, such as why the assessments were given, what was assessed, and how the results are reported and used.
- It creates a setting in which to discuss the overall instructional plan and achievement goals of the school.
- It provides a vehicle for putting the summative assessment results into the larger context of the total school program.
- The process of providing parents and guardians of students

assessed with student results and building individual improvement plans can be put in the larger context of school improvement plans.

- It involves the entire staff, not just those in the grades assessed or grades in which assessment results are returned.
- It can reach parents and guardians of students at all grades.

A disadvantage is that it reaches only those parents and guardians who attend the meeting. However, the opportunity for two-way communication makes the meeting the most desirable method of sharing the assessment results with parents and guardians of the total school population.

### 4. Newsletter Articles

The school-level assessment results can be communicated to parents and guardians and the school community at large through a prepared article or short written report. School newsletters, parent newsletters, or letters to parents may be used. These articles can also be published to school websites and posted to various (and appropriate) school social media accounts. Articles should be clear, concise, and written for the layperson, using a minimum of educational or assessment jargon. This communication might even be supplemented by a linked video recording of a presentation of school results posted on the school's website.

Articles should address the following points:

- School results (an overview of the findings and recommendations).
- Factors affecting the school results.
- Uses being made of the results at the classroom or school level.
- The availability of individual student results from classroom teachers (and/or the results being sent home).
- What the school is doing to improve achievement in the areas of identified weakness.
- Staff members who are available for further information about the individual student or school results.

## In Summary

Research tells us that parental/guardian involvement in their children's education is an important determinant of achievement. Reporting of individual student and school assessment results to parents and guardians offers a unique opportunity to review student progress, set goals, and elicit parental/guardian support and participation.



## Section 6: Reporting Assessment Results to the School Board

One of the important audiences for assessment results is the local board of education. As the entity responsible for the education of students, board members have a vital interest in the performance of students on the assessment program.

Local boards of education oversee the operation of public schools and make policy decisions and allocate funds and other resources. They are expected to represent the interests of the community. Thus, their role is seen as balancing the “narrower” interests of the district staff.

School boards expect school administrators to provide them with information in a timely manner and in a format they can easily understand. They have many issues to consider and a great deal of information to absorb in a relatively short period of time. Most board members are lay persons, albeit with considerable interest and experience in education. They will need help in understanding the assessment program—its purposes, its uses, and its reports—if they are to provide the types of support needed to help schools and students improve. Hence, reporting to the school board is an important step in the overall using and reporting process.

The natural tension that exists between local educators and their school board often makes the task of reporting an onerous one. Reporting assessment results is made even more sensitive by the surrounding pressures coming from the media and outspoken parents. Having a preconceived, systematic plan for using and reporting the assessment results can help to make reporting a more routine activity and remove much of the accompanying anxiety.

### Start with Purpose

The ideas presented here are tied to the principle espoused throughout this document that using the results of a summative

assessment and reporting the results of such assessments are two aspects of a single process, not separate and unrelated activities.

Three types of reports will be appreciated by school board members:

- **Background Report**—a report highlighting the purposes of the assessment program and outlining how the results will be used.
- **Report of the Results**—a report that gives the assessment results and provides interpretations of the information.
- **Follow-Up Reports**—reports that describe specific ways in which the results are being used by teachers, counselors, curriculum specialists, and other district personnel.

The process suggested begins before the assessment results are returned to the school district, by helping board members understand the purposes of the assessment program before turning their focus to the actual assessment scores. By doing this, it is possible to help the school board understand that the purpose of the assessment program is not simply to provide “box-score” comparative data, but to provide a means to help students learn and assist schools as they fine-tune their instructional programs. The ideas given here provide starting points for developing a comprehensive district reporting plan covering all aspects of a local educational program that is well-suited for the informational needs of various groups.

### Planning a Reporting Program

An organized plan for reporting the assessment results and related information to your local school board helps to manage staff time more efficiently and minimize surprises.

A model for “Developing and Implementing a Broader Reporting Strategy” is given in [Appendix G](#). Using this approach, important school events and activities are identified, in advance if possible. Then potential audiences and possible reporting activities can be specified for each event. Responsibilities for preparing and giving the reports can be assigned along with appropriate schedules.

As outlined above, three different types of reports are recommended as the basis of the reporting campaign. The **first report** that should be made to the school board is the background report. This report should be done before the results are available, so that the school board can focus on the purposes of the assessment program and the uses to which the results will be put, without being distracted by actual results. The report should:

- explain the purpose(s) for the summative assessment program;
- provide facts about who is assessed, when, and how;
- indicate when the results will become available;
- and clarify how the results will be used (at the student, classroom, school, and school-district levels) and reported (to parents and guardians, students, educators, and the public).

The purpose in providing this background report before the results are returned is so that the board will focus on the purposes for the assessment program, not the results. The time to give this report is either when the assessment is being given and/or before the results are returned (in cases where several months may intervene between assessment and reporting of results).

The **second report** to the school board is the report of actual summative assessment results. This is the report that will be the most challenging to prepare. It should contain the district-level scores, the building-level scores, and the state- and national-level scores (if available); an interpretation of the scores, from each school's perspective, from the district, and from the state or national levels (if available); information on how these assessments are similar to other achievement information that is available and an explanation for any differences; and a description about how the results will be used at the school level and reported at the school and district levels.

The **third report** to the school board is a follow-up report(s) on the information provided in the first two reports. Since either the background report or the report of results may contain statements about steps the schools or the district intend to follow after the data

are received and reported, it is important to provide periodic follow-up reports to the school board giving updates on the progress in using the assessment information at the student, classroom, school, or district levels. This will help assure that the school board focuses more on improvement purposes of the assessment program and less on the comparative uses often made of the assessment information.

## The Background Report

The background report provides the opportunity to discuss the assessment without the assessment results to distract board member attention. The purposes of the assessment program can be described in some detail independently of the natural concerns about whether scores are up or down, better or worse than neighboring districts or the state. The particular summative assessment program (e.g., the statewide assessment program) can also be placed in context of the district's entire assessment program. This is also the time to discuss what will be done with the results before they are received and while there is still time to modify plans.

In planning the background report, include the following four parts.

### 1. Basic Facts about the Assessment Program

Include facts about the program such as the grades at which assessment takes place, the subjects assessed, the nature of the assessments—standards-based or norm-referenced, and the types of assessment items used (perhaps with released samples of each item type).

### 2. Purposes for the Assessment Program

Emphasize the purposes for the program, at the student, classroom, school, and district levels. Describe what purposes are or are not intended in the use of the summative assessment.

### 3. Uses of the Assessment Results

A description of how the results may be used by an individual classroom teacher, as well as how a school improvement team might use the school results, will help board members see that one purpose for the summative assessment is primarily instructional improvement.

This could include the plans of the district to encourage the use of the assessment results by individual teachers as well as school improvement teams.

#### 4. District Reporting Plans

Conclude with the district plan for reporting the assessment results to the school board, parents and guardians, educators, and the news media. This may include the plans for the state to report statewide assessment results, if this occurs at a different time than the release of district results. Let the board know when additional board reports will be planned. Finally, let them know how and when parents of the students assessed will receive their students' results.

### The Report of District Assessment Results

The second of the three types of reports that each district should make to its board is the report of the assessment results. This report is crucial in establishing what meaning the assessment results have for the district, the schools, and students. In some cases, reporters can see school or district results at the same time as the board, so this report provides an opportunity for district staff to frame the results for both the board and the media. In other cases, this report will serve as the official release of results from the summative assessment. It will still provide the opportunity of framing the results for both audiences.

The report of results has four basic parts.

#### 1. Review of Assessment Program Information

The review of some of the information covered in the background report will serve to remind board members of the basic information about the assessment program.

#### 2. Report of District Results

This is the “meat” of this report and should contain answers to the following questions:

- How did we do this year?
- How well did all student sub-groups do?

- Has performance improved over recent years in each of the areas assessed?
- If so, why?
- If not, why not?

If answers to these questions, such as why achievement did or did not improve, are not known at the time of reporting, this written report should indicate what processes will be used to determine the answers and when these answers will be reported in a follow-up report.

The most understandable numbers to present are the percentages of students achieving a proficient level or passing score on the assessment. The report of results should focus on these numbers first when answering the questions listed above.

If additional reporting levels are used (e.g., “advanced” or “novice”), if results are disaggregated, reported by skill area or content standard (or sub-units within these), these numbers can also be reported, but should not take the same prominence in the report. One way to do this is to follow the overall presentation of results with additional sections that focus briefly on these additional data. Alternatively, these data can be used when questions are being addressed. For example, in responding to the question about improvement, the report might mention that although the percentage of students at the proficient level or above has not changed much, the percentage of students in the bottom performance level (e.g., “not proficient”) has declined sharply (if this turns out to be the case).

In reporting changes in student performance, it is important to be modest in claims for improvement (since what went up this year might go down in the future) and open in acknowledging declines in student performance (better to tell your story yourself, along with appropriate explanations than to have board members or the media “discover” the declines themselves). While the reasons for improving or declining scores may not be known, the declines may encourage a more detailed review to determine the causes. If so, the plans for this should be mentioned in the report.

The report of assessment results, particularly from criterion-referenced or standards-based assessments, should downplay comparisons between districts or between schools within the district. These comparisons are misleading, since they suggest districts or schools performing above the state level are successful and need to make no changes to improve in the future, while districts or schools performing below the state level are “failures” with little hope for improvement. Such comparisons too easily get translated into success/failure judgments of the entire school, the school program, and the school faculty, based on only a small piece of the total picture.

The report of assessment results should include comparisons **only if** 1) the schools being compared to yours are similar in meaningful demographic characteristics (e.g., size, location, funding levels, socio-economic conditions, family educational attainment); and 2) the purpose of comparison is to learn how the students in that school were able to achieve higher performance and how your district might make improvements to ensure comparable achievement for all student groups. Without these safeguards, comparisons can be misleading, since they suggest districts or schools performing above the state level (or higher than their less-resourced neighbors) are successful and need make no changes to improve in the future, while districts or schools performing below the state level are failures with little hope for improvement. Such comparisons too easily get translated into success/failure judgments of the entire school, the school program, and the school faculty, based on only a small piece of the total picture.

In reality, virtually every school has room for improvement and the need for improvement, so the plans to do so should be the focus of the report of results. The board report should also put the assessment results in the context of other information, such as other achievement assessment results, other measures of student performance (e.g., number of graduates gaining college entrance or employment) and outcomes (e.g., graduation rates). A list of some other variables that could be included in reports of results is found in [Appendix H: Suggested School Reporting Categories](#).

Recipients of the summary results should consult the reporting tools the sponsor of the summative assessment may have created. The availability and use of these reporting tools can be ascertained by visiting the website or conducting Internet searches for resources prepared for users of the summative assessment.



### 3. Implications of the Results

Answer the “so what?” questions clearly, concisely, and honestly. School-level teams should be involved in developing interpretations of the results and could be involved in reporting these interpretations to the school board. They have first-hand knowledge about what students have been taught and their capabilities, and they can describe the implications of the results for individual students (in summary form) and for the school’s instructional program. School and district personnel can add meaning to the reports by suggesting needed changes in instruction and corresponding staff development plans.

### 4. Plans to Use the Results

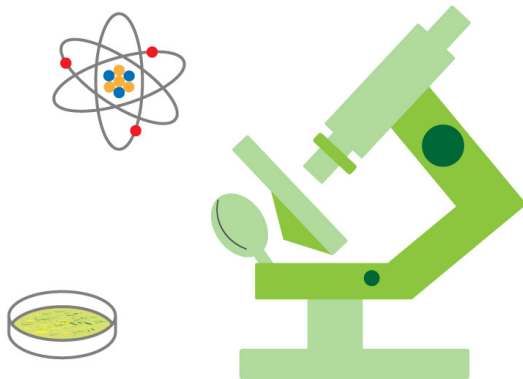
This section can describe each school’s plans to use the results, as well as the district-level plans to coordinate these efforts, particularly across grade levels. In addition, since the school board report will serve to frame the results for both the board and the media, the district’s and schools’ plans to release the results to parents and other citizens should be highlighted.

## Follow-Up Reports

Once the results and plans for using them have been reported, it is logical to report back to the school board during the year on the progress being made in using the results to improve learning opportunities for students. The following are suggested topics for these follow-up reports:

- Specific areas of need selected as priority for review.
- Results of the instructional review processes.
- New instruction or services contemplated as a result of the instructional review.
- Planned follow-up assessments of students or schools after remediation.
- Special activities (awards, summer programs, Saturday programs, and so forth) planned as a result of assessment.

Multiple follow-up reports may be used to highlight the different activities taking place in different schools, or in schools at different levels. The follow-up reports may be in writing only, or may involve teachers, administrators, parents, or students presenting some aspect of the program.



## In Summary

The importance of reporting results quickly, accurately, and completely to the school board should be emphasized. While the model presented here is not the only one that can be used to present results, it is effective in focusing the attention of school board members on the instructional uses of the assessment program and thus, may serve to discourage inappropriate uses of the data.

Remember, assessment results are only as good as the uses to which they are put. An effective plan for reporting results to the school board must be accompanied (and preceded) by appropriate efforts to use the results to review and revise curriculum and instruction needed, as described in earlier chapters of this manual.

## Section 7: Reporting Assessment Results to the Public

Reporting, or more accurately, “explaining” the results of assessment programs to the public, via news or other media, is the focus of this section. Just as in previous sections, the premise of this chapter is that there are relatively simple steps that district personnel can take to provide understandable explanations to the public that will help them grasp and support the school districts’ efforts to improve student learning.

The approach presented here emphasizes once again the connection between planning for the use of the assessment results and the reports of the assessment results. As was the case with reporting to the school board, including information about how the results will be used to improve instruction will not only make the data more meaningful, but it will also serve to convey the equally important aspect that the school district is actively taking steps to improve teaching and learning, thereby building public support for the improvements being sought.

Putting the results in this context goes beyond the numbers and focuses on the implications for learning, which in turn re-emphasizes the purpose for giving summative assessments—to promote student learning. Although this message does not guarantee that the results will be reported exactly as local educators would ideally like them to be reported, it can help. Furthermore, it provides the foundation for follow-up meetings with news media representatives or the public.

Included in this section is information about:

- contacting reporters;
- formatting data;
- organizing the information; and
- developing the district reporting program.

### Getting Started

The image of the public schools held by many people is largely shaped by what they read in the newspaper or newsletters, see on television, hear on the radio, view online, or hear from others. Since most citizens in most school districts do not have school-age children, they do not have much direct contact with local educators. While parents and guardians see the schools in action and hear about them in many ways, the average citizen forms impressions of the schools largely based on what they hear or see in the news media or from those that do so. Because the media helps shape public opinion, educators should work closely with representatives of the news media and other influencers so they can provide the public with accurate and complete information about schools.

Keep in mind, too, that there are other ways of reaching the public. District websites, appropriate social media accounts, newsletters sent to all citizens, and letters are additional means to reach the public. The focus of this chapter is on reporting to the “public,” not reporting to the “news media,” although the chapter does focus on how to work with news media in reporting the results.

Working with news reporters, especially when presenting assessment results from external programs, may seem difficult to do well. However, with some planning and a few basic ideas, school personnel can confidently share assessment results with the public through the media.

### Step 1: Plan for the use of data

One way to help staff feel more confident about reporting is to plan early for using the results. Using and reporting scores are closely related activities, and both need to be planned at the beginning of the school year, regardless of when the assessment and the reporting of the assessment take place. This will help assure that the important use and reporting activities take place throughout the entire school year, not just when results are received back in the school district.

Including information about how the assessment results will be used to strengthen the instructional program and address student



weaknesses responds to the “so what?” aspect of reporting the results.

It is easier to report the results when school officials know what they mean and what will be done as a consequence of them. Early reports will help the news media understand the purpose of the assessment program, how the results are used to benefit students, and why using the scores for comparative purposes is not the most important use of the assessment results.

### Step 2: Determine purposes and goals.

It is also helpful to start determining the purposes for communication. Before the summative assessment even starts, district personnel need to have a clear understanding of what it is they want to accomplish by reporting assessment results. Some districts have learned the hard way that unless they interpret the assessment results for their local news media, someone else will.

Some districts use assessment reporting to undertake an overall school district information program. Reporting assessment results can be a year-long effort, which does not have to begin the day the results are released.

Successful school communicators begin the reporting process by explaining the purposes and limitations of the summative assessment program before the results are received. Then they present the results later with other important measures of school district accomplishments, provide follow-up reports based on the plans given in the previous reports, and wrap up the year by evaluating the success of their efforts. The goal is to share how the results from the summative assessment are just one measure out of many that can be used to ascertain the success of the district.

Selecting reporting goals is also helpful. Such goals need not be limited to the assessment program, since these tips will help schools broaden their reporting efforts to many important school efforts.

Some sample assessment reporting goals might include:

- making people in the community aware of the proper use of the assessment results,
- encouraging the use of the assessment results by teachers and school administrators,
- convincing the public that educators are very concerned about the achievements of students, and
- convincing people to support the schools, as educators strive to make improvements in them.

### Step 3: Think ahead

Designing a district reporting program involves addressing several important issues:

- Who needs to know what assessment information?
- What are the steps that can be taken to ensure that those who need to know get the information?
- What are the different possible ways to present the information, and which one(s) work best for each audience?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that the information distributed is complete, hits on major points, and is understandable to those who know very little about the proper uses and limitations of the assessment program?
- What additional information is needed during the year?
- Has the communication program accomplished its intended purposes?

Answers to the following questions about the audience for the information may help clarify those issues:

- What information does each person currently possess?
- Are their interpretations of the information accurate?
- What are their attitudes toward this and other summative assessment programs?
- Who else is talking to them about the assessment and what are they saying?

- How does the audience feel about the state or local school district that is the source of the information? What is their level of trust?

#### Step 4: Decide whose job it is

It is also helpful to decide who within the school district will have primary responsibility for organizing the communications program and working with the news media. Ideally, one person who has the time to do the pre-planning and preparation activities given in this chapter should be responsible for working with the media.

If the district has a public information director, that person should coordinate coverage of the results of assessment just like any other report. However, this communications person, the instructional director, and the assessment director (or those serving in these roles) should work as a team - the communications director arranging for and hosting briefing sessions for reporters; the assessment director interpreting the results and answering questions about the reports of results; and, the instructional director adding how the students assessed will be helped, how the schools' instructional program will be reviewed and improved, and how results will be reported to parents. The communications director will write the news release about the results, but the assessment and instructional staff will provide the content for the release.

In small districts without a person who regularly handles the news, it means that one person will have to handle the tasks in providing the results to reporters. This may be an assistant superintendent, a building principal, a guidance counselor, or perhaps, the superintendent.

#### Developing Contacts

To develop the list of reporters (or other key communicators) you wish to report to, begin with a personal contact to each organization, newspaper, radio station, or television station in the school district area. This contact should be made long before the first report is to be released. The initial contact at the newspaper will probably be an editor. Ask whether one reporter has been assigned to the "education beat." If not, the contact person may continue to be the editor. The

contact may also be the news reporter who regularly attends school board meetings.

Remember the radio and television stations that serve your community. Even if the district is just one of many in a station's service area, broadcasters may appreciate a brief report of the assessment results. Direction of the news in a radio or TV station usually rests with the news director. In the absence of someone in that position, the program director should be contacted.

Once a contact is made, ask when it would be convenient to stop by for a visit. If you're too far away to drop in for a visit, ask how and in what format the written report of assessment results should be provided. If the media will be receiving results directly from the state department of education by mail or off the Web site, ask how and in what format your comments should be provided.

If a get-acquainted visit is made, keep it brief. Editors and reporters are usually pressed for time. Ask about deadlines and what should be presented to them. Let them know when the assessment results are expected and that a contact will be made again once the information is available. Arrange a time for a background session at a mutually convenient time, prior to the release of the results. Personal contacts will help media representatives make a more accurate report of a complex news story.

Later, when the results are released, reporters should be provided with detailed reports and charts or graphs. The main points will be covered by the press and summarized by radio and TV. Don't be disappointed if the media does not carry all of the report. What was said or printed, and how the message is absorbed by readers and listeners, are more important than the amount of detail involved in the message.

Don't forget to follow-up. Whether the article is positive or negative, provide the reporter with a reaction to what was said or printed. Try to emphasize the positive aspects; mention but do not dwell on the negative aspects. Find out, if necessary, how communication could have been clearer. This type of follow-up leads to better reporting

each year. In addition, these contacts can help in other reporting activities as well.

## The Background Report

If reporters are simply get access to or are given summative assessment results without any advance preparation, their attention may naturally focus on the comparative nature of the results: which district scored the highest or lowest, which school buildings outperformed others, whose results were most surprising, and so forth. That is why many school districts, after making a preliminary contact with editors and news reporters, will arrange a session to report background information prior to the time actual results are ready for distribution. Such a session, held shortly before assessment results are to be reported, might be held when the assessment is taking place (a newsworthy event in itself), or a few weeks before the results are released. This session will provide the news media with background copy for their advance story on the upcoming release of the assessment data while providing an opportunity to focus on the real purposes of the assessment and uses of the results.

Reporters should be told the purpose of the assessment, what it seeks to measure, the scoring methods, how to read and understand the assessment reports, keys to interpretation, and how the results will be used by teachers and other district personnel.

## The Report of Results

School and district personnel will undoubtedly spend many hours analyzing the summative assessment results and preparing the written reports of results. The written report usually will be several pages long, with graphs and charts attached. When presenting the results to the school board, many graphs and charts may be used to convey the results, showing the overall performance of students at each grade assessed, the breakdowns of performance in several different ways, and performance over time, if available. Listening to this extensive presentation, media representatives may ask, “Could you tell me in a sentence or two what the results mean?” The presenter, who may have talked for a half hour or more, may be taken

aback. However, the reporter is neither trying to disregard a thorough or complex story nor show disrespect. He or she may study the report thoroughly before writing a story. But the request to “boil it down” is a request to find a summary that provides a quick overview of the assessment results.



Good communicators are prepared to give reporters the basic information they will need in order to develop the “lede” or introductory paragraph for their story. In fact, a good written report states the most salient facts and the important outcomes (i.e., conclusions) at the beginning and then fills in the details. This type of report is different from the reports we normally write, where we give all of the background first and then state our conclusions at the end.

Some school districts help reporters by providing an indexed list of highlights as a preface to lengthy reports of results. The list shows where reporters can find important details.

Reporters should also be given school publications that have been prepared to explain assessment results to school staff. Such materials should give a thorough yet simple explanation of why the summative assessment was required, what types of assessments were administered, which students were assessed, and why the assessment

results were reported. This information allows the reporters to include how the results will be used for reviewing the school's instructional program.

Plans to report the results of individual students to parents and guardians should also be presented to reporters, since if they mention this in their stories, parents or guardians may be more likely to learn of the assessment results available to them and request to see the results.

The complete display of the assessment data that has been prepared for the school board should also be distributed to the news media. However, in order for the news media to focus on a few pieces of the overall story, the written report may emphasize just a few of the graphs and charts in order to support the key points of the story.

Charts and graphs can be very useful in displaying the results when they are released. Graphs should be designed to develop the theme of year-to-year within-school or within-district comparisons, comparisons of skill areas, and district-to-state comparisons. Comparisons of schools or of districts should be discouraged by emphasizing that these do not promote the types of school improvement activities that lead to improved student performance, thereby helping reporters avoid unfair comparisons.

### Structure and Content of the Report of Results

The following questions can help structure a press release featuring assessment results:

- How did we do?
- How did sub-groups of students do?
- Is achievement better than last year in each area assessed?
- If so, why?
- If not, why not?
- What will be done to review and use the results this year?

If answers to these questions, such as why achievement did or did not improve, are not known at the time of reporting, this written report

should indicate what processes will be used to determine the answers and when these answers will be reported in a follow-up report.

Whether a lengthy report or a brief news release is prepared, include the following information about the assessment:

- WHO said it or WHO did it?
- WHAT was said or done?
- WHERE did it take place?
- WHEN did it take place?
- WHY and HOW is the assessment carried out?

A sample press release illustrating these ideas is given in [Appendix I](#).

It may be helpful to brief reporters on the assessment report shortly before its release at either a separate news conference or a school board meeting. This will allow district personnel to review results and answer questions before the actual report. It will permit reporters to better understand the results as well.

### Follow-up Reports

When follow-up reports are scheduled to be presented to the school board, they should also be prepared for the news media to describe the types of activities that occurred after the assessment results have been analyzed. These are most effective when they feature tangible activities, such as the purchase and use of new instructional materials, the attendance of teachers at professional learning activities (and how teachers will be using the new skills they have learned), and so forth.

### Hints for Working with the Media

There are several additional hints to local educators for working with the news media successfully:

- Begin all reporting on assessment with a quick review of the purposes and limitations of the assessment program. It is okay to be repetitive with this information.

- Make sure the information given will help the reporter or editor understand and interpret the information.
- Use plain English. Practice with individuals in the district who know nothing about the assessment program or results from it.
- State the meaning in a concise manner; practice summarizing the significance of the assessment results in two minutes or less.
- Be very clear about what it is that the school district intends to do with the assessment results. Be direct. Don't try to cover up results that might not be as good as you would like them to be. Don't try to diminish their importance. Don't try to blame others for the lower-than-desired performance. Not squarely accepting the results will be viewed negatively by members of the public.
- Give reporters a list of the other measures of student performance used in the school district and a summary of how well students did on each of these measures.

Help the media and other key communicators paint a more complete picture of student performance by giving them data they can use to do so. This may include longitudinal comparisons, district test or college entrance test performance, and other measures of students, such as the number gaining entrance to college, the military, or gainful employment. These are important measures of a district's achievement and help put the assessment results in a broader context.

Existing reporting programs must be flexible. If program modifications are needed, make them. Call the local news media and ask them if they thought the reporting procedures were helpful to them. Find out how communication could have been clearer and reporting smoother.

### Communication Checklist

It may be useful to develop a checklist to monitor your communications program during the school year. The checklist should contain the following information:

- A list of all key communicators and local news reporters by name, address, and phone number.

- A list of what key communicators and local news media should be advised of over the school year.
- A detailed schedule of assessment reporting activities.
- An itemized listing of the means of reporting assessment and other information. A file should be kept containing examples of previous releases, reports, and charts and graphs, as well as the news stories that resulted from this information.

At least once a year, the communications program should be carefully evaluated. Do reporters, parents, and other citizens now better understand the summative assessment? Which of the several ways used to try to reach this audience seemed to work best? Which conveyed the most information most accurately? Did the press refrain from making unfair comparisons this year? Was the work of the schools' instructional review processes accurately reported in the stories?

Existing reporting programs must be flexible. If program modifications are needed, make them. Call the local news media and other key communicators to see if they thought the reporting procedures were helpful to them. Find out how communication could have been clearer and reporting smoother.

### Some Reminders

There are several points to keep in mind when working with the news media:

#### Don't Surprise Anyone

Let the school staff, administration, the school board, the public, and the press know ahead of time that the assessment results are to be released.

#### Do Some Audience Identification

Ask yourself four simple questions when you start to plan for the release of assessment information:

- Who needs to know this?
- When should the identified audiences first hear the information?

- What’s the best way to get this information to the audience?
- What will each audience be most interested in?

### Cover the Inside First

Provide a simple but clear interpretation for all insiders—those building administrators who will be carrying the message to their staff members. School staffs include not only teachers, but the teacher aides, school bus drivers, and others who come in direct contact with parents/guardians and students. Prepare the message points, graphs, and charts they will need to assist them. Provide the tools teachers will need to assist them in understanding and using the assessment data.

### Help the Media Interpret to the Public

Develop a positive working relationship with the news media who will have the job of digesting and reporting your results to the public. Help them as needed to understand and develop an interpretation of the results.

### Start with a Simple Explanation

When you begin the public disclosure of the results, explain the purpose of the assessment program, what it can and can’t reveal about schools, and how the information will **be used**.

### Set Up a Timetable

Background briefings should begin before the date of public release of the results to reporters. Top administrators should be informed first, then all school administrators. The school board and school staff should receive the results at the same time. Remember, it may be helpful to sit down with the news reporters and other key communicators and spend an hour or so reviewing the results and the accompanying report just before you present the report to the school board.

### Sum Up What the Results Mean

Make it a point to compare this year’s district results with last year’s, so long as the summative assessments used are comparable. If they aren’t, make sure to point this out, including simple explanations of how they are different. See if you can relate these summative

assessment results to other summative assessments given in the school district. Explain in simple terms what the state or national comparisons mean and what they don’t mean. Try comparing your district results to what you thought your district should achieve. Be cautious, however, when comparing results within your district or across districts.

### Tell What Will Be Done with the Results

Indicate the district’s plan to develop the low areas found in the report, as well as what strengths were found in the data. Explain what administrators, teachers, and others plan to do with the results.

### Take the Assessment Story to Targeted Groups

Don’t expect the news media to do the entire job of public reporting. There are important audiences that need to be reached in other ways, such as in-person presentations, specially written reports, and meetings. After assessment results have been reported, make a special effort to communicate the results to community opinion leaders in these ways.

## In Summary

The importance of quickly and accurately reporting results cannot be overemphasized. The strategies presented in this chapter urge you to pre-plan a comprehensive reporting campaign that uses the media to reach many important audiences, particularly through the background report and the report of results. While this is not the only approach to reporting that can be used, it helps to focus attention on the instructional uses of assessment programs. This may help avoid the use of a summative assessment program as the sole external evaluation of school systems, which is a misuse of the assessment information. This approach can also help assure that the results are used to improve student learning, the most often cited purpose for assessment programs.

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# Appendices

The materials provided in the Appendix section are intended to be samples of models, forms, or procedures you can use in implementing the concepts presented in the previous chapters. They are not all-inclusive, but rather are representative of what other educators have used to facilitate using and reporting assessment results. You are encouraged to use the materials as they are or to use them as examples of what you might do in developing your own materials. In either case, we urge you to review this section to familiarize yourself with what others have developed to assist in using and reporting assessment results.

## Appendix Table of Contents

### **Appendix A:**

Process for Analyzing Individual Student Performance on the Assessment

### **Appendix B:**

Preparing a School to Use the School-Level Results

### **Appendix C:**

Completed Content Standards Survey Summary

### **Appendix D:**

Model of the Instructional Review at the Building Level

### **Appendix E:**

What Can I Do to Help? Suggestions for Parents and Guardians

### **Appendix F:**

Parent-Teacher Conference Outline

### **Appendix G:**

Developing and Implementing a Broader Reporting Strategy

### **Appendix H:**

Suggested School Reporting Categories

### **Appendix I:**

Sample Media Release



## Appendix A: Process for Analyzing Individual Student Performance on the Assessment

### Expected Outcomes

1. Weak skill areas and standards identified and documented;
2. Individual student needs identified and documented;
3. Assessment test results examined and analyzed;
4. Plan of action developed to meet identified skill and standard needs;
5. Plan of action developed to meet individual student weaknesses in the areas assessed.

### Participants

Teacher, counselor, or other staff member assigned the responsibility of program planning for the individual student.

### Materials Needed

1. Individual report of student assessment results;
2. Classroom report of assessment results (if available);
3. Classroom/school item analysis report (if available).

### Activities

#### Identify Skill Needs

- A. Set a realistic classroom criterion level based in part on the performance of students, time constraints, and the number of standards or skills needing attention;
- B. Use the classroom report of results to identify the skills or standards that fall below the criterion level;
- C. Compile a skill needs list:
  - List all standards or skills needing attention;
  - List the students who need help with that skill;
  - Repeat this process for all skills.

#### Identify Individual Student Needs

- A. Decide upon a reasonable total number of skills or the total assessment score to be attained by each student;
- B. Use the student or classroom reports to identify students needing assistance;
- C. Examine the performance of each identified student to determine what specific assistance to provide to each student.

#### Analyze the Findings

##### Skills and Standards:

- A. Use the classroom/ school test item analysis report and the assessment booklet to analyze skill attainment:
  - the item analysis report shows the percentage of students selecting each possible answer or scoring at each possible score level;
  - the assessment booklet shows the assessment items students were asked to respond to.
- B. Compare the information on student performance with assessment items to try to determine causes for students' performance;
- C. Speculate on possible causes;
- D. Discussing the assessment questions with the class may provide additional insights into the causes of the problems;
- E. Record the findings and the implications.

##### Individual Student:

- A. Use the individual student report of results and the assessment booklet to analyze individual student performance;
- B. Individual student reports show the answers given by the student or score level attained by the student;
- C. Assessment booklet shows the assessment items;
- D. Look at the two together to determine the problem. Causes other than lack of knowledge should also be considered.

- E. Discuss with the student why a specific response was given;
- F. Record the findings and implications.

### **Make Decisions**

#### **Skills and Standards:**

- A. Compare the Skills Needs List and the findings from the skills analysis to determine the best course of action to address skill needs.

#### **Individual Student:**

- B. Compare the individual student's plans and the findings from the analysis of individual student information to determine the best course of action to address student needs.

#### **Both:**

- C. Consider the following alternatives.
  - address each high need student individually;
  - group high need students with the same weak areas together for instruction;
  - focus only on most critical skills;
  - teach skills in isolation;
  - integrate weak skills with other instruction.

### **Set Goals**

#### **Skills and Standards:**

- A. Select the skills to be addressed and the manner in which they will be addressed.

#### **Individual Student:**

- B. Determine how the most critical skill needs of each student will be addressed.

## Appendix B: Preparing a School to Use the School-Level Results

### Things to Keep in Mind When Planning to Use the Assessment Results

1. The school is the key unit to use assessment data.
2. The emphasis should be on having staff pull together in an agreed-upon direction.
3. Instructional change can be made most easily when all of the instructional staff are involved in the change.
4. Getting full staff participation is more easily said than done.
5. The model for using assessment results is adaptable to most school situations.
6. The model for using assessment results can be put into operation in three sessions that involve 2 to 4 hours, in addition to the effort of each staff member.

### School Team Membership

1. Size: will vary according to school size and method used to select team members.
2. Composition: at least one person per grade; ideally, the entire staff should be involved.

### Things to Keep in Mind When Organizing the School Team

1. Organizational structure of the school
2. Contractual agreements on meeting time and length
3. Preliminary information sessions with key support personnel (administrators, department chairs, curriculum specialists, remedial specialists, etc.)
4. Who will conduct the meeting(s)

5. How the team membership will be determined mandatory, voluntary, or other
6. How many team members are needed? The school team should include at least a representative cross-section of the staff
7. Staff-faculty attitude toward testing: negative, positive, neutral, or unknown
8. Description of proposed activity at total staff meeting
9. Team meeting date, place, and time

### Materials Needed

1. Copy of reference materials (and overheads): district and state summaries
2. Copy of the school summary for each staff member
3. Classroom/ school test item analysis reports, if available
4. Reference handbook for the assessment program
5. Copies of the assessment booklets, if appropriate for the program



## Appendix C: Completed Content Standards Survey Summary

**Content Standards Survey  
Summary Table  
Measurement Strand K-6**

Instructional Time (In Hours)

Grades	K	K			1	1	1		2	2	2
Teachers	1	2			1	2	3		1	2	3
<b>GLCE Code</b>											
M.UN.00.01	5										
M.TE.00.02	2	1									
M.UN.00.03		2									
M.UN.00.04	1	1			1		3				
M.PS.00.05	1	3			1		4				
M.UN.01.01		4			3	1	1				
M.UN.01.02		3			5	2	1				
M.UN.01.03	1				1		1		1	NA	3
M.UN.02.01											
M.PS.02.02											
M.UN.02.03											
M.TE.02.04											
M.UN.02.05											
M.UN.02.06											
M.UN.02.07											
M.PS.02.08											
M.UN.02.09											
M.PS.02.10											
M.TE.02.11											
M.UN.03.01											
M.UN.03.02											
M.UN.03.03											

**Content Standards Survey  
Summary Table  
Measurement Strand K-6**

M.UN.03.04											
M.UN.03.05											
M.UN.03.06											
M.UN.03.07											
M.UN.03.08											
M.TE.03.09											
M.PS.03.10											
M.PS.03.11											
M.PS.03.12											
M.PS.03.13											
M.UN.04.01											
M.PS.04.02											
M.UN.04.03											
M.TE.04.04											
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M.TE.04.06											
M.TE.04.07											
M.TE.04.08											
M.PS.04.09											
M.TE.04.10											
M.PS.04.11											
M.UN.05.01											
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M.UN.05.03											
M.UN.05.04											
M.PS.05.05											
M.TE.05.06											
M.TE.05.07											

**Content Standards Survey  
Summary Table  
Measurement Strand K-6**

M.TE.05.08														
M.TE.05.09														
M.PS.05.10														
M.UN.06.01														
M.PS.06.02														
M.TE.06.03														

## Appendix D: Model of the Instructional Review at the Building Level

### Session 1: Examining Results and Identifying Present Needs

#### Goals

The school team will be able to:

1. read, understand, and interpret the assessment reports;
2. determine where the school stands in relation to the district and the state;
3. make realistic criteria selection; and
4. identify school problem areas and determine present needs.

#### Materials

School, district, and state summaries

#### Time

1–2 hours

#### Group Size

It will vary, depending on staff size and method of selection. Include at least one teacher per grade and the principal, the entire staff if possible. In larger schools, the team might be subdivided by grade groupings (e.g., K-3).

#### Process

1. Introduce the activity briefly, explaining goals of the activity.
2. Review type, format, and content of the report forms.
3. Compare school to district assessment results.
4. Compare school to state assessment results.
5. Develop a list of possible criteria for school attainment of the skill or standard, including any criteria set by the state or other organization.

6. Remind the school teams that selection of a criterion for attainment implies follow-up action on those skills or standards not attained at the criterion level. Therefore, realistic criteria should be established.
7. The building team should select a working criterion that results in the selection of at least some of the skills or standards to which the building team will want to give special attention.
8. Prepare a list of the skills that fall below this criterion level.
9. Group the skills into skill areas or standards.
10. Determine short- and long-term goals.
11. Make arrangements for the current needs of the students who were assessed and the short- and long-term goals to be summarized for the next meeting.

### Session 2: Curriculum and Instructional Planning

#### Goals

The school team will:

1. examine present performance of the students assessed, summarized from the previous meeting;
2. complete skill review forms to determine present status of the school's instructional program; and
3. identify which skills are school-wide priority and individual classroom priorities.

#### Materials

1. summary of present needs
2. blank skill review forms for each participant
3. classroom summaries of results (if prepared)
4. assessment interpretive materials

#### Time

1-2 hours





## Appendix E: What Can I Do to Help? Suggestions for Parents and Guardians

Here are several tips that may help you to help your child:<sup>1</sup>

- Try not to be overly anxious about test scores. Too much emphasis on test scores can be upsetting to children.
- Give your child encouragement. Praise him/her for the things he/ she does well. A child who feels good about himself/ herself will do his/her best. A child who is afraid of failure is more likely to make a mistake.
- Don't judge your child based on a test score. Test scores are not perfect measures of what your child can do. There are many other things that might influence a test score. How the child is feeling, the setting in the classroom, and the attitude of the teacher are just a few. Remember also that any one test tells only part of the story.
- Meet your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss your child's progress. Parents and teachers should work together to benefit the child.
- Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you to do with your child at home that will help your child prepare for tests and improve his/her understanding of school work.
- Make sure your child attends school regularly. Remember that tests reflect the overall achievement of your child. The more often your child is in a learning situation, the more likely he/she will do well on tests.
- Make sure your child completes his/her assigned homework and turns it in on time. Homework is an important way that teachers help students learn. Try to provide a comfortable, quiet, and well-lit working environment for the child at home.
- Make sure your child is well rested on school days and especially on the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or handle the demands of a test.
- See that your child has a well-rounded diet. A healthy body leads to a healthy, active mind. Most schools provide a free breakfast and lunch for students who qualify. For information, you should contact the principal at your child's school.
- Provide a variety of books and magazines for your child to read at home. Through reading new materials, your child will learn new words he/ she might see on a test.
- Additionally, you should know the policies and practices of your school system that affect testing and the use of test scores:
- Find out which tests your child will take and for what purposes. The school principal or counselor should provide you with a schedule of testing for the year and explain the use of the tests. Contact your school board to find out about tests that may be required.
- Find out whether your school system has prepared the staff to understand testing. School personnel must be trained in order to understand and use test information properly.
- Find out whether your child's school gives students practice in taking tests. Are practice exercises used to make sure students are familiar with directions and test format? Such practice is part of good test administration.

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<sup>1</sup> "Your Child and Testing." National Institute of Education, Washington, DC 20208



## Appendix F: Parent-Teacher Conference Outline

### Goals

The goals of the parent-teacher conference are to:

1. Provide the parent or guardian with a better understanding of the child's strengths and weaknesses in the areas assessed;
2. Provide the parent or guardian with an understanding that the assessment is just one piece of information that fits into the total picture;
3. Provide parent or guardian with a plan of action to address the child's weak areas;
4. Solicit parent's or guardian's assistance in carrying out the plan.

### Materials

1. *Steps in the Right Direction: Using and Reporting Assessment Results*, chapter 2;
2. Individual student assessment results and parent copy of these results, if prepared;
3. Interpretive materials for these assessment reports;
4. Copies of "What Can I Do to Help? Suggestions for Parents and Guardians" (Appendix D);
5. Student assessment booklet, if permitted by the assessment program procedures;
6. The plan of action developed by the classroom teacher for each student;
7. Plans and priorities developed by the staff from the school-level results.

### Time

Preparation time will differ depending on the number of students and the extent of their needs. Conferences will take approximately 20-30 minutes, more if additional data is to be presented and discussed.

### Participants

Classroom teacher or counselor, and parents or guardians

### Process

1. Before the conference, prepare the plan of action for each student and assemble all materials;
2. Give a brief overview of the assessment program, its purposes, and the types of measures used;
3. Use any available information explaining the parent report to describe how to read the report;
4. Use the test booklet (if appropriate) to show the types of items contained in the test;
5. Explain the child's strengths and weaknesses as given in the parent report or individual student report;
6. Relate the assessment results to other information on the student, such as classroom work and tests;
7. Formulate plans to remediate the weaknesses, involving parents or guardians where possible. Discuss not only the steps to be taken at school, but those that parents or guardians can take at home as well.
8. Similarly, formulate plans to enrich or extend areas of high performance, discussing not only the steps to be taken at school, but those that parents can take at home as well;
9. Indicate what follow-up will be provided to update the parents or guardians on the child's performance and progress;
10. Give parents a copy of "What Can I Do to Help? Suggestions for Parents and Guardians" found in [Appendix D](#).

## Appendix G: Developing and Implementing a Broader Reporting Strategy

School Event and Activity	Reporting Activities	Person(s) Response	Start Date	End Date
<b>Prior to Testing</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State briefings</li> <li>• Local briefings</li> <li>• Prep for testing by principals, teachers, and students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press Release re: testing schedule</li> <li>• District communication to teachers, students, and the board</li> </ul>			
<b>Tests Administered</b>				
<b>After Testing</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results returned to students, teachers, parents, school, and district</li> <li>• Results reviewed: identify strengths, weaknesses, curricular implications of these, and plans to address these needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District communication about availability of results and review</li> <li>• Prepare reporting packages:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify information of interest</li> <li>– Available information</li> <li>– Report formats</li> <li>– Reporting schedule</li> </ul> </li> <li>• School board reports</li> <li>• Media reports</li> <li>• Background reports</li> <li>• Report of results</li> <li>• Follow-up reports</li> <li>• Parent reports</li> <li>• Annual school reports</li> </ul>			

## Appendix G: Developing and Implementing a Broader Reporting Strategy

School Event and Activity	Reporting Activities	Person(s) Response	Start Date	End Date
<b>Preparation for Next Year’s Assessment</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ID high priority skills</li> <li>• ID performance expectations</li> <li>• ID how to reach these expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District communication to teachers, students, and parents about planning activities and procedures</li> <li>• Press release about planning in progress (e.g., could request volunteers to work in schools)</li> <li>• Media articles about outcomes of planning activities</li> <li>• School board follow-up reports</li> </ul>			
<b>Evaluate the Reporting Campaign</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ID strengths and weaknesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact audiences to determine reactions to the campaign</li> </ul>			
<b>Plan the Next Reporting Campaign</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact media persons to determine interest</li> <li>• Contact media persons to determine deadlines</li> <li>• Contact parents to determine interests</li> <li>• Contact teachers to determine interests</li> <li>• Contact board to determine interests</li> </ul>				



## Appendix H: Suggested School Reporting Categories

Listed below are just a few of the possible topics and areas around which school districts could develop reports to parents, the school board, and the public. Use this list as you develop a comprehensive reporting program for your school district.

### Inputs

1. District or school facilities for science instruction, vocational education, guidance and counseling, career development, physical education, gifted and talented programs, special education, and so forth
2. School support personnel, such as nurse, social workers, counselors, psychologists, librarians, teacher-aides, custodians, secretaries, curriculum specialists, school improvement specialists, student assistants, special education consultants, and so forth
3. District philosophy, mission statement, and goals
4. Financial resources, such as:
  - tax base
  - per-pupil expenditures
  - state aid
  - federal aid
5. Student/ teacher ratios
6. Student enrollment by grade and school level
7. Teachers:
  - degrees held
  - colleges or universities attended
  - previous teaching or work experiences
  - staff development courses taken

- other interesting information, such as summer training sessions or travel, and so forth
8. Support services available:
    - guidance and counseling
    - family services
    - special education
    - remedial programs
    - speech therapy
    - nursing services
    - library and media services
    - gifted programs
  9. Materials and methods of instruction
  10. Activities provided for various student interests
  11. Parent and citizen committees or councils
  12. Future plans for the district or schools

### Activities

1. Special education programs (content, types of students served, placement procedures, contact people, and so forth)
2. Vocational education programs
3. Programs in art, music, dance, or theatre
4. Girls' and boys' athletics
5. Science programs
6. Language programs and travel





## Appendix I: Sample Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Soon, XXXX

CONTACT: MARY GREEN

Public Relations

555-1234

### Schoolville Schools Cite New Test Inadequate Coverage as Possible Causes of Low Student Performance

Schoolville Schools' fourth, eighth and tenth graders turned in a low performance on the state's new assessment program, in tests taken last spring. Low performance was expected on the new test.

In a report to the Schoolville Board of Education, Superintendent Sarah Klein reported that students performed as expected on the new assessment. "Only\_% of the fourth graders,\_% of the eighth graders, and\_% of the tenth graders scored at the proficient level or above in mathematics. In reading,\_% of the fourth graders,\_% of the eighth graders, and\_% of the tenth graders achieved a proficient or better score. In all subjects and grades, the district outscored the state by margins ranging from 2% at fourth grade reading to 11% at tenth grade mathematics. However, we are not satisfied with the performance of all of our students, since so few achieved at least a proficient level on the tests."

Dr. Klein went on to say "The new assessments have revealed weaknesses in the school system's instructional program due to lack of coverage of some of the important skills assessed. We plan to carefully examine each of our schools' instructional programs during the coming weeks to determine areas of weakness and to set plans to address them."

The district and state results were released last Wednesday. Included in the package of results that were returned to the school district were copies of reports intended for the parents of students tested. Schools will be sending these reports home, along with a copy of the plan designed to address the needs of each student.

Parents are urged to contact their child's teacher(s) for more information. The assessment program is given each spring to all eligible students. The program was enacted several years ago to provide schools with information they can use to improve their instructional programs.

The program also provides information to parents and teachers to help assure that students learn all of the important skills they need for success in school. The tests are developed by teachers with the help of a contractor, and contain both multiple-choice and written questions. A copy of the district's assessment report, as well as Dr. Klein's report to the Board of Education, can be obtained at the district's administrative offices, located at 143 Locust Street.



[www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org](http://www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org)