

Understanding Instruction, Assessment, and Learning

Instruction and assessment work together to support all students to learn based on the grade-level academic standards. This expectation extends to all students with disabilities, including those who take the state general assessment and those who take the state alternate assessment.

This parent resource focuses on district- and classroom-level assessments. It explains the importance of assessments for all students, the different types of district and classroom assessments, and how data from multiple

assessments are used to support students learning new skills and content.

Instruction & Assessment Overview

Why use assessments?

Assessments are part of the learning cycle. They are like detective tools for teachers—they help answer questions about what your child has learned and what areas need more or different instruction. Every student's instruction

and assessments should align with the state's grade-level standards for the subject. The assessments let teachers and parents know the extent of each child's learning related to the standards. Different types of assessments provide teachers with different types of information related to instruction.

What are some different types of assessments?

- **Classroom Assessments:** These are ongoing and continuous in your child's classroom. They can be planned, like quizzes, tests, or even fun projects. Alternatively, they can happen in the moment, like when the teacher asks a specific question to the class to learn what the students understand and do not understand about the lesson. Depending on the purpose, assessments may be given at the end of a unit (sometimes called "summative assessments"), or teachers may integrate assessments throughout a unit (sometimes called "formative assessment practices").
- **Benchmark Assessments:** Schools and whole districts may periodically give bigger, standardized tests to see how students are learning the grade-level state standards. These assessments help teachers to

understand the strengths of both the whole classroom and the individual students, as well as identify gaps in learning where more instruction would be beneficial. Some districts call these "interim assessments."

- **Statewide Assessments:** All students in the state take the standardized statewide assessments. They help the state and districts know how well the students in schools are learning grade-level academic standards and where instructional programs need to change to support student learning.
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP) Progress Monitoring:** If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the team may use assessment data to help determine the extent that your child is achieving their goals and to decide if your child needs extra support. Assessments provide one piece of information that is useful for determining a student's strengths and needs.

Why do we have different types of assessment?

No one type of assessment can accomplish everything. Teachers need multiple types of assessment data to:

- **Identify Strengths:** They can see which topics or skills your child has mastered. These become the foundation for connecting new learning to what your child already knows and can do well.
- **Identify Challenges:** They can see which topics or skills your child finds tricky. Maybe it is fractions, spelling, or understanding historical events. Teachers can then create a plan to help address these struggles.
- **Identify Misunderstandings:** Assessments reveal any misunderstandings your child might have about the content that is being taught. Teachers can then help to correct these misunderstandings and progress their learning.

What is the Instruction and Assessment Cycle, and how is it used?

The **Instruction and Assessment Cycle** (see Figure 1) works to support

student learning. Classroom and benchmark assessments are snapshots of what your child has learned in relation to the grade-level standards. These assessments provide information to teachers so they understand what your child knows and if they might need some extra help. Teachers adjust their instruction based on the multiple pieces of assessment information. For example, if many students in the class struggle with learning multiplication, the teacher might try a different method to explain multiplication to the whole class to meet their learning needs. However, if a few students struggle learning multiplication, then the teacher might provide some additional small group instruction to support those students.

Figure 1. Instruction and Assessment Cycle



Source: Brookhart (2020). Used with permission.

Students also benefit when they understand what they are expected to learn, the learning goal, for each lesson and unit. The assessment data helps the student understand what they know, what new knowledge and skills are emerging, and what they still need to focus on. This information supports students to take ownership in their learning. Figure 1 shows how assessment and instruction fit together for both teachers and students. Both the teacher and the student understand:

- **Where am I going?** (What is the lesson's learning goal?)
- **Where am I now?** (Where is the student at in reaching this learning goal?)
- **Where to next?** (What are the next steps that the student needs to take to achieve the learning goal?)

The cycle continues as every student learns the content and new learning goals are set.

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