



Helping Teachers Make the Connection between Assessment and Instruction

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Most discussions about interim and formative assessments end in agreement that many teachers would benefit from professional development on a variety of assessment topics. The trick is to identify the right topics.

First, though, let's rid ourselves of the notion that teachers don't know anything about testing or that their testing practices should be presumed to be bad. Remember, high school grade-point average is a better predictor of college success than are college entrance examination scores. At all grade levels, teachers usually have a pretty good idea of what their students' relative performance will be on standardized tests. On the rare occasions when their predictions are wrong, the smart money is on the teachers—not the results of that single test.

The reason for this high level of awareness is simple; the grades teachers give students are based on multiple and varied measures administered during a marking period, semester, or year. Those cumulative measurements are generally more reliable than a single standardized test—even one of the highest quality.

It's also true, however, that a single standardized test may be more reliable than a single, teacher-made measure. Plus, with teacher-assigned grades, variation in standards across classes and schools (e.g., the quality of performance associated with specific letter grades) is an issue. (This is why there are standardized tests.) But this situation should be expected, just as it should not be

surprising that standards for proficiency vary across states using different tests and establishing those standards independently.

So, let's start with the premise that teachers already know a lot about gathering evidence of student learning. That being said, what are some areas of teacher training or experience that would provide fertile ground for continuing education? Here are some possibilities.

- Creating good tests—and test items
- Evaluating student work—gathering information beyond a number
- Knowing what different types of assessments can and cannot do
- Developing and using rubrics for scoring open-response items and performance-type assessments
- Using information from different types of assessments to modify instruction

In terms of assessment mastery, let's give teachers what they really need—professional development to ensure that assessments of all kinds lead to better teaching and learning.



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It's all about student learning. Period.**