

## Balanced Comprehensive Assessment System

### Assessment

In his article, “Assessment Crisis: The Absence Of Assessment *FOR* Learning”, noted assessment specialist Richard Stiggins, breaks educational assessments into two categories. First, there are assessments *of learning*... Most national, state and district tests are assessments *of learning* and are designed to determine if students have learned the standards that the test creators wanted them to learn. In Arizona, all students take the [Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards \(AIMS\)](#). While the results may change future instruction, their real purpose is to hold educational systems accountable, and to motivate the systems to increased outcome performance. The other type of assessment is *for learning*.

The critical qualities of assessments *for learning* are:

- understanding and articulating *in advance of teaching* the achievement targets that their students are to hit;
- informing their students about those learning goals, *in terms that students understand*, from the very beginning of the teaching and learning process;
- becoming assessment literate and thus able to transform their expectations into assessment exercises and scoring procedures that *accurately reflect student achievement*;
- using classroom assessments to *build students' confidence* in themselves as learners and help them take responsibility for their own learning, so as to lay a foundation for lifelong learning;
- translating classroom assessment results into frequent *descriptive feedback* (versus judgmental feedback) for students, providing them with specific insights as to how to improve;
- continuously *adjusting instruction* based on the results of classroom assessments;
- engaging students in *regular self-assessment*, with standards held constant so that students can watch themselves grow over time and thus feel in charge of their own success; and
- actively involving students in *communicating* with their teacher and their families about their achievement status and improvement. (Stiggins 2002)

The Arizona Response to Intervention framework uses assessments both *for learning* (formative) and *of learning* (summative). In an AZ/ RTI balanced comprehensive assessment system, there are four types of assessment: Outcome, Screening, Diagnostic, and Progress monitoring.

**Outcome assessments** provide the final analysis of our efforts to improve instruction for all students. They are the measure of the end product, over a period of time. While these types of assessments have value for system analysis, they are frequently given and discussed long after they have any chance at impacting the education of the students who took them.

**Screening** assessments are to identify (as early as possible) students who are not making expected progress, and to assess the effectiveness of the core curriculum. In AZ RTI, elementary students are screened three times a year. Literacy screeners usually are based upon phonemic awareness, phonics, and/or fluency, with the most common measures assessing oral reading fluency (ORF). Math screeners are somewhat more difficult because mathematics achievement is a continuum and the purpose of a screener is to identify if the student is below the expected level. Math screeners, therefore, are dependent upon their placement on the math standards continuum and the students' grade level.

Middle and high schools will determine their most effective measures for screening students. Many will prescreen students using [Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards \(AIMS\)](#) scores to identify students who scored at the falls far below and approaches levels. The identified students are then given a specific screening instrument to further specify which students may need additional instruction. High school screeners may assess oral reading fluency, as most students who do not pass the AIMS are reading in a much lower grade level. It is important to remember that when screening to determine the students reading level, the specialist may need to give increasingly lower level ORFs in order to determine the level of instruction and to progress monitor. Maze completion, or a variety of other types of assessments, may also be used to screen students. During the year, some schools may screen using student data. In July of 2008, Jessica Heppen and Susan Therriault published a paper for the National High School Center that identified an [early warning system](#) for high school students. Many high schools are adopting this system as a means of screening students, during the year, to identify those in need of intervention in order to prevent them from dropping out of school. In this system, the school tracks attendance, course failures, grade point averages, and credits earned toward graduation. Students who are not on track are identified and a plan for intervention can be developed.

[Diagnostic assessments](#) are used to identify specific deficiencies in student skills. They provide the information for instructors to know what skills to address in the student individual RTI plan at Tiers 2 or 3. Examples of diagnostics would be phonics screeners and specific math skill inventories.

[Progress monitoring](#) assessments are a means to measure the effectiveness of instruction or intervention. They are brief assessments, to look for incremental growth. Scores are plotted on a graph and compared against the aimline that is established in the student RTI plan. Students in Tier 2, are progress monitored bi-weekly, and students at Tier 3 are monitored weekly. Oral reading fluencies are an appropriate tool, as they are a good measure of overall reading. Students are progress monitored at their skill level. (Example: An eight grader whose skill level is third grade, would need to be progress monitored using a third grade oral reading fluency.) While mazes can be used to progress monitor, they are not effective at showing incremental changes in the student's skill and therefore would be used less frequently than an ORF. Mathematics progress monitoring will always be at the skill level of instruction and will be a curriculum based measure.

An integrated data system, that informs decisions at every level of service delivery, must have assessment procedures that include nine characteristics.

They:

- directly assess the specific skills embodied in state and local academic standards;
- assess “marker variables” that have been demonstrated to lead to the ultimate instructional target (e.g., reading comprehension);
- are sensitive to small increments of growth over time;
- can be administered efficiently over short periods;
- may be administered repeatedly (using multiple forms);
- are readily summarized in teacher-friendly data displays;
- can be used to make comparisons across students;
- can be used to monitor an individual student's progress over time; and
- have direct relevance to the development of instructional strategies that address the area of need.

Another type of assessment is needed at the High School level; it is a method to identify students who are at risk of dropping out before they disengage and leave school. Schools should maintain an Early Warning System. Evidence shows that prior to leaving school, students show a number of indicators of their level of disengagement with the school. Some of these are: attendance, grades, credits earned, and behavior data. Schools can find Early Warning tools at the National High School Center ([www.betterhighschools.org/](http://www.betterhighschools.org/)).

The function of assessment in RTI is to verify educational growth, and identify at-risk students as early as possible. Assessment should be used to gathering [relevant data](#) to support **educational decision making**, and to impact what the school is doing to improve achievement. The framework of assessment tools must be increasingly sensitive to detect subtle changes in student performance, as assessments move from screening to diagnostics, to progress monitoring.

Assessment Resources:

[National Center for Response to Intervention](#)

[Intervention Central](#)

[RTI Action Network](#)