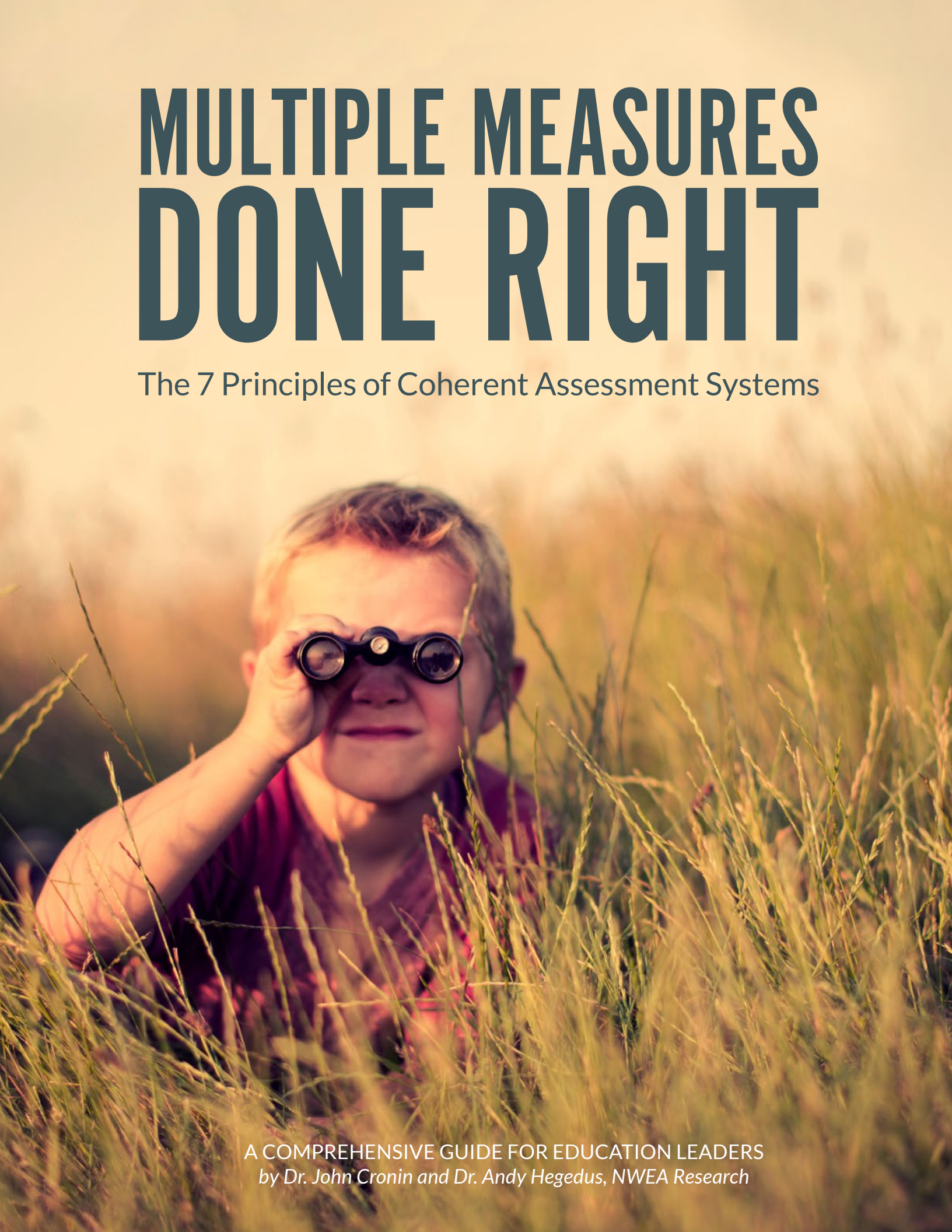
MULTIPLE MEASURES DONE RIGHT

The 7 Principles of Coherent Assessment Systems



A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR EDUCATION LEADERS

by Dr. John Cronin and Dr. Andy Hegedus, NWEA Research

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INTRODUCTION

"Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets."

Dr. Paul Batalden, Professor Emeritus,
Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth

Consider, for a moment, the assessment system at District X. While entirely fictional, it's one most educators will recognize all too well.

For starters, they are on their third different state assessment in as many years. Lacking timely and instructionally useful data, they've added on assessments to track progress toward success on the state test. Now, throw in separate tests for gifted identification, screeners and progress monitors for Response to Intervention (RTI), tests for English language learners, and tests for students with special needs. Over time, some tests have fallen out of favor; others have been added, duplicating the purpose of some assessments already in use.

In District X, teachers are confused about which assessments to use and how the data is supposed to help them. Administrators from across the district talk about data like they're speaking entirely different languages. Students feel overwhelmed and worn out, and parents are raising concerns about over-testing. Frustration runs high at the amount of time, energy, and money wasted.

In contrast, consider the assessment system in District Y. In District Y, administrators, teachers, and leaders came together to thoughtfully discuss what information they needed about students to make effective decisions at every level. They selected assessments that efficiently and reliably provided the necessary information. They eliminated or replaced any assessments that didn't support their purposes.

District Y trained staff on which assessments to use and why, how to administer them, and how to use the results. They considered the reporting needs for each group—teachers, parents, administrators, school board members—and when they needed information to support useful action. They provided relevant information about learning for every student in the district and set goals that encourage growth for all learners. There's a common language about assessment in the district, and everyone openly and honestly discusses what's working and what isn't. Their system is coherent and effective.

If the last two decades of educational policy have taught us anything, it's that educators should not expect the state and federal government to provide stability and constancy of purpose. Change is the nature of politics. It's far saner and less exhausting for local educational leaders to define their own goals and purposes for assessment and to make state and federal mandates work within that framework.

For nearly 40 years, NWEA™ has been devoted to education research and assessment development that serves our mission: Partnering to help all kids learn®. In addition to creating assessments that support learning—such as Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) and Skills Navigator®—we work with school systems to facilitate locally developed plans for their assessment systems. We start by asking educators to reflect on the principles that underlie a well-designed assessment system, and work from those principles to build an assessment system that works for all stakeholders in the community.

And that's what the principles in this guide will help you do. They ask you to consider why you assess, which stakeholders use data to make decisions in and outside of the classrooms, the way you time delivery of data, and the metrics you use to monitor student achievement—ultimately leading to a system that presents student achievement information transparently, with a long-term focus.

In District X, the assessment system was designed haphazardly over time as the district chased compliance with state and federal regulation. Predictably, the system delivered the only results it could—chaotic ones. If this sounds familiar, it's time to take a step back and reexamine your assessment system. This guide will help you build a system more like District Y's—coherent, efficient, and truly supportive of learning for all students.

DEFINE YOUR PURPOSES

PRINCIPLE #1

Define all the purposes assessment has in your school or district, and ensure each assessment you use is valid and useful for its expressed purpose

Before you start an audit on your existing assessment system, pause for a moment. One of the most common mistakes educators make is running headlong into evaluating their current system, without first stopping to think through the purpose of assessments to begin with. And this crucial step of **defining your purposes can be the determining factor in creating a coherent, effective system for your students.**

Ultimately, the purpose of assessment is to help students learn and grow. In service of this need, various stakeholders—teachers, parents, principals, school boards, district leaders—have specific applications for assessment data. Your goal is to **ensure that each assessment tool serves a clear purpose, and that every necessary purpose is being met.**

Clarify your needs

Start by identifying all the stakeholders in your school system—from the classroom all the way up to the district and even state. **Then talk with your stakeholders to discover the purposes they have for assessment data**, including what they currently use and what needs they may have that aren't being met by your existing system.

The simple but powerful question, "What do you need to understand about student learning, and how might assessment give you that data?" will yield crucial insights. You might also want to ask your stakeholders: how do you use assessment data now? What data do you wish you had, but don't? What data do you receive but have no real use for?

By collaborating with stakeholders, **you'll get a complete view of all the purposes your system needs to fulfill**. You may find that their needs are wildly divergent—for example, an English as a Second Language teacher's priority may be focused on her class's specific needs, while her principal is looking for school-wide achievement gaps. But you'll also begin to see many areas of commonality, which can guide you in forming the backbone of an assessment system that serves everyone well.

COMMON ASSESSMENT PURPOSES

Students need to know:

- *what skills they need to learn next in order to do well in their class*
- *how to set learning goals for themselves*
- *how they're progressing in their learning*

Parents need to know:

- *if their child is on track to be promoted to the next grade or graduate*
- *what their child's strengths and weaknesses are*
- *how they can help their child with extra learning at home*

Teachers need to know:

- *if whole group instruction is appropriate for an upcoming unit*
- *how to best regroup students for instruction*
- *which students need extra help and which need enrichment*
- *the progress of the students in intervention programs*

Principals need to know:

- *where a school is doing well and where it needs to improve*
- *whether or not school-wide programs are effective*
- *the areas in which teachers need support or professional development*

District administrators need to know:

- *how students and schools are performing on state standards*
- *if there are gaps in the curriculum*
- *if budget is being properly allocated to support all learners*

Now, audit your assessment system

You've done the critical work of defining your purposes—**only now is it time to look at your current system and evaluate two things**:

1. Does each assessment serve a clearly defined purpose?
2. Are your assessments meeting all of the purposes you've defined?

There's a good chance that you'll answer "no" to one of those questions at some point. We'll give you tips in chapter four that will help as you decide which assessments to remove or repurpose, which ones should stay, and what you may need to add in order to fill any gaps. But before we get to that, it's important to keep one more thing in mind when evaluating your system.

Are your assessments actually valid for your purposes?

In addition to knowing if each assessment serves a purpose, it's crucial to **make sure each assessment you use is designed to effectively meet that purpose**. Time and again, our education experts have heard schools lament the mistake of skipping the crucial step of vetting the true capabilities of an assessment. So apply these two questions to every assessment tool you use or consider using:

1. Does it accurately measure what it purports to measure?
2. Does it provide valid and reliable data you can trust to drive meaningful action?

These questions help you **evaluate whether the tool produces reliable and accurate results**. The technical documentation for each assessment is a good place to start checking on what each assessment can validly measure; look for information on frequency of administration, alignment to content, and standard measure of error as a start. For example, an interim assessment should include:

- a low standard error of measurement
- a deep item pool
- a stable, longitudinal scale
- research-driven design of both the items and the assessment

Finally, remember that **what an assessment can *accurately* measure may be different from what you are *using* that assessment to measure**—and that's a red flag that your assessment isn't valid for the purpose it's serving.

For example, if you want to use an assessment for placing students into gifted programs, you need evidence that the assessment is an accurate and reliable measure of high-performing students. Most standard proficiency tests are designed to measure performance of students only within their grade level; thus, they wouldn't be valid instruments for this purpose.

"We had to back up and make sure that we understood the purpose of assessment as a learning tool."

Lisa Wilson
Director of Assessment and Research
Blue Valley School District, KS

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

Let's say your district needs an RTI program to accurately identify students in danger of falling behind their peers, and then support those students with intervention strategies. This suggests two purposes: first, screen all students to identify those at risk (i.e., universal screening); second, monitor the progress of students in intervention programs to make sure the extra support is working (i.e., progress monitoring).

These are two very different purposes, and they require different kinds of assessment. For the first purpose, an assessment that acts as a universal screener is necessary. By using a high-quality assessment for all students, educators can identify those students at risk of academic failure. Such a screening is typically administered to the entire student population three times a year, and should be sensitive, specific, practical, and valid. An interim assessment that measures academic achievement accurately—on, above, or below grade level—is required here.

Monitoring progress requires a different kind of assessment. When students are in an intervention program, educators need to know on a more frequent basis what specific skills each student is struggling with, has mastered, and is ready to learn, so they can make real-time adjustments to instruction. Using an interim assessment that was designed to be administered three times a year wouldn't be appropriate. Instead, you need an assessment designed for progress monitoring—something you can give frequently, in the classroom, in a short amount of time. So for this purpose you need a mastery measure that offers more specific assessment of skills within a learning progression. An effective mastery measure will have:

- a hierarchy of skills that can be mastered one after the other
- a way to track the adequacy of student progress over time
- a way to track the changes and or adjustments to the intervention

By first identifying your purposes, you can easily see what kinds of assessments you need to validly and accurately fulfill them.

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. **Assemble a team of people within your district who use assessment data. Make sure this team represents the full range of different types of stakeholders in your district, including teachers, parents, building leaders, district leaders, board members, and various specialists (like curriculum directors, ELL teachers, or interventionists) appropriate to your unique school system.**

2. **Work with your team to document the primary purposes for which your school needs data. Consider how data serves different groups, such as students, teachers, and administrators at various levels.**

3. **Rate how critical each purpose is on a scale of one to five and prioritize your purposes. For example, how critical is it for your students to set goals using assessment data?**

4. **Now take a look at the assessments you use. Identify the actual assessments your district uses (e.g., formative, diagnostic, benchmark, interim, summative) and what purpose each is intended to fulfill.**

5. **Evaluate the assessments you use to see how well they align with the purposes you've defined. Identify how well your current assessment system uses data for each purpose on a scale of one to five.**

6. **Review the two different ratings you've given each purpose. Do they match up? Or is there a disconnect between what you want to achieve and what your current system has accomplished so far? This will give you a better idea of which purposes you need to focus on.**

EDUCATE TEACHERS

PRINCIPLE #2

Educate teachers and staff in properly administering assessments and applying data

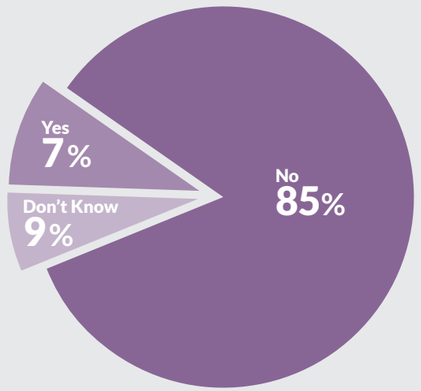
Teachers use data to directly impact the daily lives of students—so supporting them is crucial to creating an assessment system that helps students learn. Make sure your approach to assessment includes tools and supports that help teachers—as well as proctors and other staff—understand:

- the purposes of the different assessments you use
- how to properly administer the assessments
- how to interpret the assessment data and use it effectively to help students

Teacher assessment literacy is the key to connecting assessment to instruction

Teachers deserve good assessment training—and it's up to you to make sure they have it. A 2014 survey conducted by NWEA and Grunwald Associates found that 85% of district administrators report that new teachers are unprepared to integrate assessment into their instructional practice—and 55% of teachers say they never took a course in assessment literacy during their pre-service programs. You can hand your teachers the best assessment data in the world, but if they don't have appropriate training and tools, they can't interpret and apply that data to actually help students learn. That's a surefire recipe for your investment in assessment to go underutilized—and it's not fair to teachers or students. When teachers have strong assessment literacy, they're well prepared to use assessment data to personalize learning for each student—truly bridging the gap between assessment and instruction.

Do traditional teacher preparation programs adequately prepare new teachers to integrate assessment into their instructional practice?



SOURCE: 2014 REPORT FROM NWEA AND GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES

A key place to start is making sure teachers understand the purposes of the assessments you're using. This ensures that educators see the value of the assessments and recognize how they can use data to help their students.

Give educators clear guidelines and training for proper administration

Educate teachers, proctors, and other staff in how to correctly administer each assessment so that the results accurately reflect each student's performance. Assessment tools that are administered poorly won't collect valid data. For example, when using an untimed assessment like MAP, the educator administering and monitoring the test should be coached on how to allow adequate time and create an environment where students don't feel rushed. Otherwise some students may not give their best effort, and the test results won't reflect what the student truly understands. It's important to understand the unique administration procedures for each assessment tool you use and give teachers the training they need.

You'll also need to help educators understand how different groups of students may respond to an assessment. For example, an adaptive assessment like MAP is a very different testing experience than a fixed-form test. Because an adaptive assessment continually adjusts the level of difficulty based on student responses, high-performing students might become frustrated (and therefore disengage) because they aren't accustomed to encountering many questions they can't confidently solve. Your assessment providers should offer training that helps teachers and proctors understand how to prepare various types of students to experience the particular type of assessment they're taking.

Support those who administer assessments with training and supporting documentation. Create clear documentation that outlines how to conduct the different assessments your schools use. In addition to these logistics, the documents should also spell out your district's policies on:

- who should administer the assessment (including instances where multiple administrators, such as both a teacher and proctor, should be present)
- when and how often the assessment should be given
- when it's appropriate to re-test students, and who should approve a re-test
- available accommodations for students, such as for students with disabilities
- when and how accommodations should be offered, and how they affect the test results

This documentation should go hand-in-hand with proper training. Partnership with an assessment provider that offers both product training and deeper professional development around assessments is invaluable in getting teachers the support they need.

Give teachers tools and training to go from assessment to action

Of course, proper administration of assessments is just the first step. **For any assessment to truly serve its purpose, your teachers must be able to interpret and apply the data to help students.** After all, helping students grow is the whole point of having an assessment system. By using assessment data to inform instruction, your teachers can help every kid learn—no matter where they're currently performing academically.

Many teachers enter the classroom with little to no education about using assessment to inform instruction. In order to make your investment in assessment pay off for everyone—especially the students—you need to **make teacher assessment literacy a priority**, and incorporate it seamlessly into your school year. Here are four proven methods for doing just that:

1. Implement assessment-focused professional development. This ongoing education is invaluable for teachers, and furthers the payoff students reap from an investment in education. Partner with assessment providers who provide more than product training—such as coaching, data literacy, and assessment education services.
2. Take advantage of professional learning communities (PLCs), and develop them if your district doesn't have any. Whether in person or online (or both!), these communities give teachers an ongoing source of education, ideas, and support—and they help newer teachers learn from the pros. For more details, check out this blog by education expert Kathy Dyer, which goes deeper into the value of PLCs.
3. Identify and support teacher leaders. When one educator becomes an expert on using assessment data, build on that valuable resource. Designate teacher leaders who can share their knowledge and develop programs to support other educators. Find out more about leveraging the value of teacher leaders in this blog post by Kathy Dyer.
4. Structure team-learning time. Simply structuring time so teachers can work in teams and learn from each other can be an effective way to support professional learning and deepen their knowledge of the appropriate uses and limitations of assessment data.

GIVE TEACHERS TOOLS TO TAKE ACTION!

When students were asked what type of support they received based on assessment results,

20%
of STUDENTS

reported that they do not receive any extra help if they don't perform well on a classroom-based assessment

SOURCE: 2014 REPORT BY NWEA AND GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES

Help teachers collaborate with parents and students

While this chapter has focused on how teachers use data to impact instruction and improve student learning, there's another important group to remember—parents. And because teachers are your primary connection to parents, give teachers the tools they need to:

- have consistent communication with parents
- share assessment results—and their meaning—with parents
- communicate how children benefit from an assessment
- collaborate with parents on goal-setting, whether students are falling behind or need opportunities for enrichment
- engage parents in the process of taking action based on assessment data

Teachers engage with parents in many ways, from parent meetings and emails to formal reports and parent-teacher associations. Rely on your teacher leaders and professional learning communities to identify ways to effectively engage parents, and incorporate their needs into your assessment system.

A final—and crucial—way in which teachers must apply assessment data is in collaboration with the students themselves. Studies have shown again and again that when students are highly engaged in tracking their own progress, their achievement improves—often tremendously. So give teachers practical tools that help them not only make the connection between assessment and instruction, but also invite students to understand that connection and take action. Some ways to get started:

- Offer teachers professional development that focuses on student engagement
- Look for assessment tools that include student goal-setting as a core function
- Give teachers tools and resources for celebrating student success

More than six in 10 parents say their child's teachers

39% RARELY
OR
22% NEVER

discuss assessment results with them

SOURCE: 2016 REPORT BY NWEA AND GALLOP

> "We found that our teaching staff really needed to make connections between the data to understand the relevance of each of the assessments."

Aimee Kirch
Manager of Assessment
Akron Public Schools, OH

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

Here's a sample scenario of this principle in action. Imagine your school uses an assessment intended to measure cognitive ability. A teacher is responsible for administering the test to a group of students. She's been trained on how to administer the test, and has documentation to refer to as needed—and she has a clear picture of the purpose for this assessment.

However, the student group includes English language learners. The teacher must be able to recognize whether or not this assessment is appropriate for students who have not fully mastered English yet, because if a student's language skills hinder her ability to understand the test, the results won't accurately represent her actual cognitive ability. If you've applied this principle effectively, the teacher will have received training—and have access to documentation—that explains appropriate accommodations for English language learners so that they can be measured equitably.

After the assessment is given, the teacher receives data she can use to make adjustments to instruction as needed, including:

- creating instructional groups
- identifying students for intervention
- communicating with parents about their children's needs
- setting goals and learning strategies with students
- providing supplemental instruction for both low- and high-performing students

In addition to knowing how to interpret and apply this data, thanks to supportive professional development, the teacher will also have access to a peer group or professional learning community with which she can discuss strategies and make plans for effective instructional adjustments.

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. **Develop internal structures and policies to provide assessment literacy training for all teachers and administrators. This training should help educators understand what the results can and can't tell them—and how to use the results in a way that will positively impact students. The National Task Force on Assessment Education for Teachers offers an excellent guide to what assessment literacy means for each key group of stakeholders.**

2. **Document and share your assessment policies and expectations, including issues like proctoring, re-testing, and monitoring the fidelity of test administration. Periodically review performance relative to expectations and conduct constructive conversations when there is a gap between the two.**

3. **Conduct assessment-specific professional development that helps educators understand how assessment data can be used to meet the learning needs of individual students.**

4. **Train teachers on how to have positive and productive parent conversations. Many teachers find these conversations intimidating. When teachers are well prepared, they gain confidence and develop higher levels of trust and support from parents.**

PRINCIPLE #3

Align assessment results to the needs of each audience

Assessments serve a wide variety of people—teachers, principals, school boards, district administrators, parents, and—most importantly—students. Though there is some overlap, each group has its own distinct needs for assessment data, because each group will use assessment results in different ways. So your system should provide the results that every stakeholder needs—and, just as importantly, a robust infrastructure to deliver the results in a form each individual can readily use for their intended purposes.

Who uses assessment data—and why?

Every school system is unique, with different stakeholder groups, but there are some core groups that are common across the educational landscape. The lists below are a good jumping-off point as you consider your district's unique stakeholders, the data they need, and the manner in which they need it reported.

Teachers need assessment data to show them what each student knows and is ready to learn. This helps them:

- identify students who need extra help or enrichment
- create instructional groups
- find instructional resources that meet specific student learning needs
- adjust instruction in the moment in reaction to students' mastery of material
- move students in need of intervention into RTI programs

TEACHERS ARE NOT ANTI-ASSESSMENT; THEY ARE MOST INTERESTED IN MULTIPLE MEASURES

Most teachers say they use assessment data to:

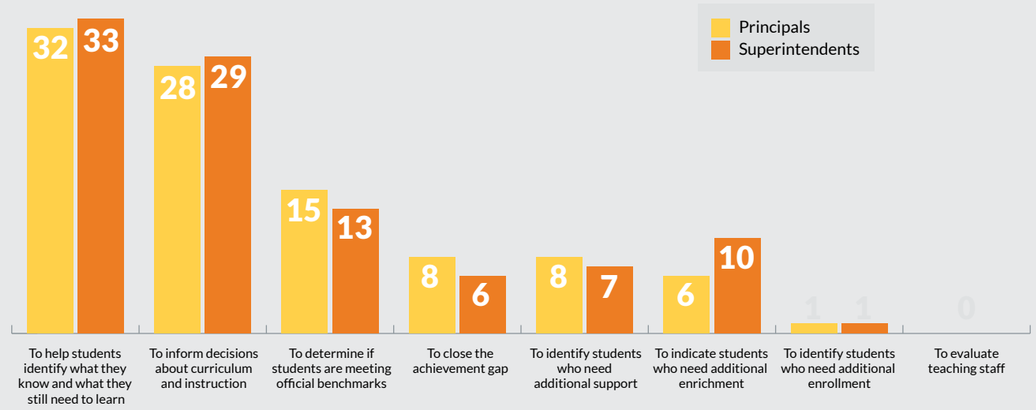
92% adjust instructional strategies
87% discuss student progress with parents
86% set instructional goals
85% plan and differentiate instruction for students
83% collaborate with peers and administrators
77% set learning goals with students
76% collaborate with grade- or subject-level teachers

SOURCE: 2016 REPORT BY NWEA AND GALLOP

Principals make school-wide decisions; assessment data helps them:

- evaluate the effectiveness of programs and plan improvements
- support instructional strategies and professional development for teachers
- track student progress toward grade promotion and graduation
- find remedies for systemic issues
- ensure educational equity for all students

PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS:
In your opinion, which of the following is the most important use of assessment data?



SOURCE: 2016 REPORT BY NWEA AND GALLOP

District administrators find valid and reliable assessment data crucial to their ability to:

- see if students are meeting standards, and enact strategies to help them do so long term
- support and track the success of schools in meeting standards and achievement goals
- direct curriculum to meet student learning needs and state standards
- enact programs that support equity in education for all students
- improve growth and outcomes for students and schools across the district

School boards look to assessment data to tell them what's working well and what isn't throughout a system. Quality data helps them support decisions that:

- clarify goals and track whether or not they're being met
- allocate budget in ways that will benefit students and teachers
- engage parents, students, and citizens in the educational discussion
- ensure transparency and accountability to the community
- promote effective programs and improve or eliminate ones that aren't meeting student needs

Parents want to make sure their kids are learning and growing. Assessment data can help them:

- understand how their child is performing in relation to expectations
- see if their child is on track to move forward, graduate, or go to college
- take action if their child needs additional support or intervention
- know what extra help they can give their child to support success
- get involved in the educational process

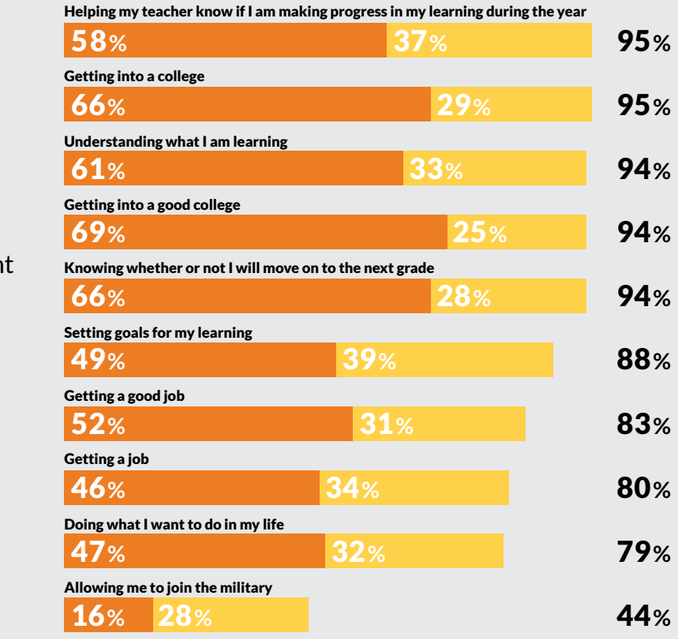
3/4
OF STUDENTS
and more than
1/2
OF PARENTS
believe that students spend the right amount of time or too little time taking assessments

SOURCE: 2016 REPORT BY NWEA AND GALLOP

Students, of course, are the reason quality assessment data matters in the first place. Their assessment results help them:

- set goals and take responsibility for their learning
- feel motivated to improve
- track their own progress
- make the connection between the schoolwork they're given, the goals they create, the active role they play in their learning, and the outcomes they achieve

Students: thinking about tests overall, how important are tests for...



SOURCE: 2014 REPORT BY NWEA AND GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES

Deliver the data: build an infrastructure

It's not enough to know what data each stakeholder needs and when—you've got to get that crucial information into their hands so they can take action that supports students. That's why your task of aligning results to stakeholder needs is not complete until you build an infrastructure that delivers the results.

Create this system of communication by keeping three key questions in mind:

1. What specific information does each stakeholder need?
2. When in the school year does each stakeholder need to get data in order to take meaningful action?
3. What format most usefully communicates the data to each stakeholder in a way that supports meaningful action?

"We wanted to make sure that teachers could take the information that came from our assessment and apply it to their instruction. If they could, I knew it was a good assessment that supported student learning."

Aimee Kirch
Manager of Assessment
Akron Public Schools, OH

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

When Akron Public Schools in Ohio started evaluating their assessment programs, Aimee Kirch, Manager of Assessment for the district, developed three clear priorities. First, they needed an assessment that provided real-time data for all stakeholders; they didn't want to wait three or four months to get data to make meaningful decisions.

Second, Kirch knew they needed data on subgroups of students and specific programs so that the district could evaluate programs to help serve all students. "We needed to know if we should make changes to particular programs or change the way we were providing instruction to a certain group of students," Kirch notes.

Finally—and crucially—the district knew their assessment data had to be actionable for teachers. "We wanted to make sure that teachers could take the information that came from our assessment and apply it to their instruction," says Kirch. So they rounded up example data and sample reports from assessments they were vetting and brought them to teachers. Kirch asked teachers, "What would you do with this? How would this positively impact your lesson designing and your delivery?" If teachers could make that connection, Kirch says, "I knew it was a good assessment that supported student learning."

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. Ask each of the main stakeholder groups in your district to identify the top three to five questions they need assessment data to help answer.
2. Ensure that your assessment tools are helping you to answer these questions with valid data.
3. Review the reports that stakeholder groups receive with the following questions in mind:
   a. Does this data/report help answer their key questions?
   b. Is the data presented in a format that is easily understood by that stakeholder?
   c. Is the data actionable?
4. If the answer to any of the above is no, consider if there are other reports or alternate presentations of the data that will be more useful.
5. Consider the infrastructure required to deliver assessment results to each stakeholder group. Ask yourself: What specific reports will each group receive? How will each group access their reports? What communication is needed? What training is needed? It may sound simple, but the logistics are potentially complicated when meeting the needs of several different groups.
6. Consider what professional development may help each stakeholder group put their data to use to support students.

PRINCIPLE #4

Create efficiency by eliminating what you don't need—redundant, misaligned, or unused assessments—and filling in the gaps

Every assessment has strengths and limitations, which means no single measure will serve every specific need. If your system has been built piecemeal over time, it's likely to be chaotic, as various tools have been added to meet needs without a comprehensive look at the entire system. To create a coherent system that meets all needs efficiently, you'll want to **do a thorough review of the assessments you have and compare that with the purposes you've identified in chapter one**. You're likely to find redundant, misaligned, and unused assessments—as well as discover gaps between what you need and what your current assessments deliver. So it's time to **cut what you don't need and add what you do**.

WHAT YOU GAIN WHEN YOU STREAMLINE

- More confidence in your data
- More reliable results
- More effective instructional time
- More value delivered from time spent testing
- Budget savings
- Higher student engagement
- Support from parents and the community

Remove redundant assessments

Assessment is an investment—but if you're using more than one measure to deliver the same information, your investment isn't being spent wisely.

Look at your system and identify redundancies that you can eliminate. Two assessments may deliver the same kind of information, but present it in different ways that are preferred by different audiences. For example, if you use an interim assessment that gives teachers throughout-the-year information about performance, you can likely pull end-of-year data to inform district-level decisions from the same assessment tool—eliminating the need for an additional summative assessment. Work with your assessment provider to get data reported in multiple ways so you can deliver crucial information to many stakeholders with fewer assessments.

Let go of assessments that don't align with your purposes

When you consider each assessment you're using, ask yourself: does this meet a need that you've defined as vital? If not, it may be time to let that assessment go. The purposes you identified in chapter one are your north star—continually refer to them as a guide, and align the tools you use to those purposes. Eliminate assessments that don't meet a defined purpose or evaluate whether the data from the assessment could be employed to serve a purpose you really need.

Remember, your assessment should give you data that helps you answer a specific question or fulfill an intended purpose. Otherwise, you aren't measuring what you want to measure and risk making decisions based on the wrong information.

Eliminate any assessments that aren't useful

If it's been a while since you've evaluated your assessment system, it may be easy for "unused" assessments to have slipped into your system. An "unused" assessment is any test that is given to students, but **stakeholders aren't using its results to make decisions and take action**.

You might still be administering an assessment that filled a need at one point. But changes in standards, classroom technology, student demographics, or other factors have rendered that purpose irrelevant over time. It's easy for those **small changes to create a situation where you're still administering the assessment, but no one has much use for the data anymore**.

Alternatively, you may have once used an assessment for a single, specific purpose, such as identify gifted and talented students. Later, you may have implemented an assessment that delivers data to fulfill multiple purposes—including gifted and talented identification. In this case, **changes elsewhere in the system made the assessment redundant**. If you are still administering the first assessment, but no one is using the data anymore, it's time to eliminate it.

Assessment data may go unused if it's not actionable—the information does not have a clear connection to what stakeholders need to do every day. The problem may lie in how the data is reported, so work with your assessment provider and your stakeholders to get the data delivered in a format that makes data useful. Or you may need to find an assessment tool that delivers data that is both valid and presented in an actionable way.

One common reason assessment data goes unused is that **stakeholders don't know how to use it effectively**. Earlier we talked about the need for professional development that helps educators understand and apply assessment data. Be sure you have such development as part of your overall assessment system. Additionally, make sure each stakeholder group understands the connection between their needs and the data they receive. If they don't, implement training that supports good use of data.

Finally, **consider whether certain assessment data is going unused because it's not reliable**. Ask your stakeholders if they trust the assessment data they get, and carefully evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement tools you're using. For example, a school in Texas started using their state summative assessment as a measure for gifted-program placement some years ago. Students scoring "advanced" on the state test were eligible for consideration for this program. After two years, teachers complained that half the students identified as eligible each year failed to produce an eligible score the following year. When the district investigated, they found that the test had a very high standard error of measure for high-performing students, which caused scores to be unstable from year to year. As a result, the district moved to another, more appropriate, measure for gifted placement.

Mind the gap—what's missing?

Eliminating assessments you don't need is one step in making your system coherent. But you also need to **note any key purposes for which your assessment system is not providing necessary data and fill those gaps**. Evaluate the measures you're confident are valuable and ask if you can use their data to validly fulfill more needs. And if you still have gaps, implement additional measures to fill them—but do so mindfully, keeping the purposes you defined in chapter one as your guiding philosophy.

"We're in the exciting position to drop a good number of other assessments that were less productive and helpful to improving student achievement."

Steven Adamowski
Superintendent
Norwalk Public Schools, CT

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

When Dr. Michael Connor joined Norwalk Public Schools in 2015 as chief academic officer, Superintendent Dr. Steven Adamowski asked him to take a closer look at the district's assessment plan. Dr. Connor immediately consulted the overall district strategic plan and connected assessment to three key goals: improving achievement in math, reading, and science for all students; reducing the achievement gap for high-needs students; and developing exemplary teachers and school leaders. To meet these goals, Dr. Connor knew he needed the assessment system to fulfill three main purposes:

1. efficiently measure the effectiveness of district systems
2. empower teachers and leaders to truly use data to inform instruction
3. intentionally inform leadership decisions

Dr. Connor partnered with Diane Filardo, the director of assessment and accountability, to review the assessments in place across the district. They discovered 29 different assessments, all with varying levels of technical rigor. "There were so many assessments, and we really couldn't measure how well instruction was going on from an organizational level," Connor said. The assessments in place were largely embedded within different programs in use across the district. Some assessments were as long as 70 questions. As they reviewed the items within the assessments, Connor and Filardo noticed that many item types—including a lack of technology-enhanced items—didn't really assess the depth of understanding teachers needed to make meaningful adjustments to instruction.

They also listened to conversations about data across the district. "If you hear a huge variance in school discussions around data, then the assessment practices have to change," Connor said. "You want to create that coherence within the organization."

After consulting with stakeholders from across the district—including the board of education, curriculum leaders, principals, and teachers, as well as embarking on a Learn and Listen tour with parents—they determined none of the assessments in play truly met the purposes outlined in the strategic plan.

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

Norwalk decided to pilot MAP and Skills Navigator across the district, allowing them to cut 11 assessments in 2015 and another 13 assessments in 2016.

"We wanted to improve instructional time and decrease the amount of assessments," Connor said. "But more importantly, we wanted quality information for teachers and leaders to make decisions."

For Dr. Connor, the benefits of the decision were clear. Teachers now have information to create personalized student growth plans to meet the needs of all students. Data conversations around the district are richer and have more coherence, allowing leaders to make decisions to improve school outcomes with confidence. Principals now have specific information to develop intentional and focused professional learning opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, they've really taken control of their own systems for helping students learn. "We have full autonomy and local control to understand how well we're doing in the context of the new ESSA policy," Connor said.

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. **Identify assessments that are performing the same purpose. Can you eliminate any of these assessments and still have all your critical purposes fulfilled? What if you leverage other assessments to validly meet other needs? Make sure to evaluate these assessments by both grade span and subject before you decide to eliminate them.**

2. **Review your defined purposes and the assessments currently in use to meet the purposes. Review technical documentation for each assessment and confirm that each one can validly meet its defined purpose.**

3. **Identify stakeholders receiving results from each assessment. Confirm that the data is being used regularly to inform key decisions. If no one is receiving the data or using it to meet a defined purpose, consider eliminating the assessment.**

4. **After you have listed the assessments and confirmed their capabilities and current uses, identify critical purposes of stakeholders that are not currently being met by assessment data. This is an opportunity for you to fill in any gaps and create a coherent assessment system that serves the needs of your stakeholders.**

PRINCIPLE #5

Deliver assessment results in a timely and useful manner

Your assessment system should deliver the right data at the right time to the right stakeholders. Because stakeholders have different needs and goals, the meaning of what is considered “timely” can vary. For example, a teacher may need assessment data within hours in order to effectively adjust instruction for students. However, a district administrator may need data at the end of a term in order to allocate resources properly for the following term.

Find out from your stakeholders when they need data in order to take meaningful action, and **make sure your assessment tools deliver the information in a timeframe that supports this**.

Make sure your stakeholders get data when they need it most

The word "timely" can mean different things to different people. In this case, **"timely" means that assessment data is delivered at a time when it will be most useful to each group of stakeholders**. When building a coherent assessment system that works for your school or district, you'll need to consider the time between when the assessment is given and when each group of stakeholders needs the results.

Also pay attention to the time an assessment is administered to students relative to the timing of important decisions. For example, if your district makes decisions about eighth grade math placement in April, you may want to administer your end-of-year assessment to seventh-graders at the beginning of that month so that the most up-to-date data about math performance informs your decisions.

Certain stakeholders will need data sooner than others. An example any teacher can relate to is the results of summative (i.e., "accountability") assessments. Teachers don't get the results of these end-of-year tests until students have left for the summer—far too late to use the data to help students. While educators at the district and state level may not need the data until much later, you must be sure your assessment system gives data to teachers early enough for it to be useful in the classroom.

Deliver useful results

Imagine for a moment one simple piece of data: the street address of a building hosting an important community meeting. Now imagine the many different stakeholders who will be using that piece of data:

- a speaker who flew in from out of town needs to know how to get to that address from the airport
- a meeting attendee needs driving directions to the address from her house
- someone who takes public transportation needs to know the relevant bus routes and schedules to get there
- the caterers need to know the address of the main entrance, and how to get to the service entrance to load in their equipment

And so on for a number of interested parties. Each person needs that single street address contextualized to actually use the information.

Applying this notion to your assessment system means **considering not just what data each stakeholder needs and *when* they need it, but also *how* they need that data presented**. Data, after all, is pure information, but the context in which it is presented allows it to be applied for different purposes. And, of course, you need an infrastructure that allows you to deliver the data and context to the right people at the right time.

You've already identified the purposes for which various stakeholders in your school system will use data. Now you need to consider the context in which they will use this data and evaluate whether your assessment tools can deliver it effectively.

The more closely reports are aligned to a user's intended purposes, the more easily people can use the data to take action. For example, let's say you have one assessment that scores fifth graders on reading proficiency. Here are just a few of the ways in which different stakeholder groups may need that data contextualized:

- **Teachers** use data to adjust instruction and support the unique learning needs of all students
- **Students** use data to set individual goals for the school year
- **Parents** use data to find appropriate books for their kids to read at home
- **Principals** use data to increase library staff and offer one-on-one tutoring during lunch periods to students who need extra support
- **Curriculum directors** use data to compare classrooms in the district to see if the fifth grade reading curriculum needs to be adjusted across the board in order to better meet student needs
- **District superintendents** use data to see if their schools are meeting state standards or if extra support is required in order to get kids back on track
- **State boards of education** use data to compare schools and see if everyone is getting equal access to the instruction they need in order to move forward

A word of caution: **do not sacrifice quality data for attractive reports**. A report that a stakeholder can use is only valuable if that report is presenting valid and reliable data. If your assessment tool offers slick reports but you aren't completely confident that the data it returns is of the highest caliber, take a big step back and consider those crucial purposes for assessment data you've defined. Uncertain or invalid data will make it impossible for you to fulfill those purposes effectively, no matter how attractively that data is presented.

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

Polly Siecinski, the supervisor of assessment and accountability at Southfield Public Schools in Michigan, knew her board of education needed to tackle big questions, like "are we closing achievement gaps?" and "are our students growing enough?" In order to effectively answer these questions, the school needed consistent data over a longer period of time. They also needed to understand what the data was telling them. To address these needs, the school conducted professional development workshops with the board of education so they could understand the data within their MAP district reports.

Siecinski established a regular cadence with the board, sharing district reports each October after fall testing, in March after winter testing, and in June following the final test administration of the year. This allowed the board to not only see how the district was progressing throughout the year, but year over year as well. Because the board had a common understanding of the data and regular reporting intervals, **they were able to ask better questions** about what was happening in the district—and **take actions they knew would help students**.

An example of the positive outcome of this arrangement comes from their analysis of kindergarten growth data. Administrators noticed that kindergarten classrooms across the district were not consistently making a year's worth of growth according to norms. This led to some important questions, such as:

- Are students coming to kindergarten less prepared than other students across the country?
- Does our curriculum for this grade have gaps?
- Are our kindergarten teachers using instructional methods that don't support our academic goals?
- Is our MAP administration procedure supporting valid results?

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

That last question was particularly important, as it revealed one cause of the problem. Siecinski discovered that the district had an extra teacher in the room during fall testing to help the kids navigate the online assessment and use the mouse. However, there was no such additional helper for winter testing. This discrepancy in test administration could account for the kindergarteners exhibiting less growth than normal from fall to winter. The district now plans to make their MAP administration procedures consistent for each test session.

“We looked teachers in the eye and asked if a particular assessment was useful. By and large, the teachers said, ‘No. I don’t get the results for six months.’”

Dr. Jack Bierwirth
Retired Superintendent
Herricks Union Free School District, NY

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. Find out when each group of stakeholders will need assessment data in order to make important decisions and take appropriate action.
2. Review your assessment calendar to see if your assessments deliver the data your stakeholders need in time to affect important decisions that help students.
3. Adjust your testing calendar to ensure that data gets to each group of stakeholders when they need it most.
4. Review and adjust your planned professional development and planning days so that teachers have crucial assessment data that can support their ongoing learning and instructional planning.

PRINCIPLE #6

Use metrics and incentives that encourage a focus on all learners

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides powerful support for ensuring equity in education. By replacing the one-size-fits-all approach of its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with greater flexibility for states and districts to meet the unique needs of their learners, ESSA creates an opportunity and a duty for education leaders to create systems that support equity in their schools.

To deliver on the promise of equity—the idea that every student, regardless of background or circumstances, is given an equal opportunity to learn and succeed—your assessment system must achieve two key things:

1. Your metrics must **report on the progress of all students**, including important subgroups of students

2. Your **incentives should support inclusion of all types of students**; take care that you do not inadvertently encourage a focus on some groups of students at the expense of others

Metrics report on all students

Every single student must be measured equally—and the data your district uses to track progress must include all these students. This includes all subgroups of students as well—ethnic minorities, special-needs students, students from low-income families, English language learners, and more. ESSA requires measurement and reporting on a host of additional subgroups, like homeless students, students from military families, and more. The goal of all this is true equity—taking pains to include all groups in your metrics, especially ones that have been often overlooked in the past, leads to inclusiveness in decision-making and resource allocation.

The inverse of this spirit of measuring everyone equally can have disastrous unintentional consequences. For example, school systems have for many years felt pressured to meet "adequate yearly progress" benchmarks. This single focus can create a tacit incentive to focus on "bubble students," or students whose performance is close enough to the proficiency bar that teachers could hypothetically move them above the bar with timely intervention. Such a focus, however, comes at the expense of low-performing students who are unlikely to change status in a given school year, and it ignores the needs of high-performing students who already perform well beyond the proficiency cut scores. Focusing on this single metric inherently creates an incentive for schools and teachers to focus their efforts on a rather small sliver of students who might become proficient in a given year, at the expense of other students.

When your assessment system values multiple measures, it creates opportunities and incentives for educators to support a wide variety of students. In addition to proficiency benchmarks, you can glean metrics from a variety of other measures and use this multi-dimensional view to get a more accurate understanding of how all students are performing—and support their needs accordingly. Other measures you may wish to include are:

- **Growth**—Measuring student growth, regardless of grade level or proficiency, gives you remarkable insight into the performance of your school system. A growth measure lets you see the progress of below-grade students as well as high performers who are achieving above their grade level.
- **Student engagement**—The value of student engagement to lifelong learning cannot be overstated. When your assessment system tracks this metric, you gain a picture of each student's likelihood to maintain motivation year after year, even if they are not performing at proficiency level yet. And you have the ability to intervene right away if students need help.
- **Skills mastery**—Valid assessment data helps you to understand whether a student has mastered a specific skill and is ready to move on to new material. Alternatively, if a student has not mastered a skill yet, you can use assessment data to support their path to mastery. With the help of timely data, you can adjust instruction, implement an RTI program, identify special education needs, and monitor the effectiveness of programs as well as student progress.
- **Program participation**—Tracking the number of students participating in special programs—including enrichment, remediation, and extra-curriculars—can be a key indicator of equity in your school system. Measuring this can help you make sure all students are being given the opportunities they need to best succeed.

Incentives should reward what matters

Incentives should reward more than just achievements of certain performance benchmarks, as such a focus can leave out other important indicators of success, such as student growth, engagement, and participation, as well as increased inclusiveness and program development. For example, one district wanted to increase high school participation in extra-curricular activities. So they set a goal based on how many students signed up for participation in their freshman year. This worked—enrollment went up. However, when they looked at the programs over the course of time, they discovered that a huge number of students dropped out of the programs in later years. Upon reflection, the district realized that they'd created an incentive for educators to encourage enrollment, but put no incentives in place to support ongoing engagement—a crucial difference.

When you create measures, you also create—implicitly or explicitly—incentives for educators to perform well on those measures. Take a realistic look at what incentives your metrics create for educators. Do you focus on so few metrics that teachers are encouraged to divert resources to certain students? Do your reactions to certain results create punitive conditions for student groups who are unable to meet expectations? Is your focus longitudinal—looking at each student over many years—to discourage "passing the buck" on student needs?

Here's an example of a narrow focus creating problems for students and schools in the long term. Say an elementary school measures growth from fall to spring term in each class. If that school attaches high stakes to that measurement, it creates a strong incentive for teachers to focus on demonstrating growth over a single school year. Therefore, it's in educators' best interests to see lower fall scores, because

the lower the fall score, the bigger the growth they can demonstrate over the year. This can incentivize educators to give less support for fall assessments, and students to try much harder on their spring tests than fall. In this system, a student might see tremendous growth between the fall and spring of second grade—only to show huge summer learning loss when they take their fall third-grade assessment. The summer learning loss in this case is illusory—the problem is actually overstated single-year growth—and if the school reacted to this data with a large investment in summer learning programs, it could be a waste of valuable resources. Instead, the school could remove the high stakes and narrow focus. This would remove the incentive for schools to overly focus on single-year growth, and, with an investment in proper resources, could encourage cross-grade collaboration among teachers to support each student.

Be mindful of the incentives your assessment system creates—whether they are implicit or explicit, high-stakes or low-stakes. Make sure your incentives support the kind of behavior that helps every student learn to the best of their ability. Here's a bracing thought experiment that can help you illuminate potential pitfalls in your system's incentives. Ask yourself honestly:

"What metrics, if disappointing, would make me feel genuinely upset?"

"What metrics cause me to take immediate action? And on what results do I take no action?"

"Do I tend to react mainly to public metrics—the sort that show up in the paper—or am I also motivated by metrics unremarked by others (such as minority kids not getting advanced opportunities)?"

"As we're looking at our systems, we always ask ourselves, 'Are we stretching the top students? Are we stretching the bottom students, and are we taking care of everyone in between?'"

Dan Grunman
Director of Assessment Research
Shawnee Mission School District, KS

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

Here's an instance of how a school system focusing on a single metric can cause certain students to miss out on resources—and how to correct for this. At one time, it was common to measure the success of advanced placement (AP) programs by focusing only on the percentage of students who passed the placement test. This created a perverse incentive in some schools to limit the students taking AP to those they were certain would pass the test. It also created an incentive to have students skip the test if teachers thought they wouldn't do well. As a result, the number of students who had a chance to even test into AP classes—as well as participate in the classes—was limited.

To correct this, many school systems expanded their metrics. Instead of just measuring the percentage of students passing the test, schools began to measure the number of students taking the tests and classes, the diversity of students taking them, and the proportion of students passing—with goals to increase the number and diversity of participating students while maintaining or improving the pass rate. This expanded the availability of AP coursework to students and improved the fairness of the programs. This is an excellent study in how using multiple measures improves equity for students.

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. **Ask yourself what three to five metrics most influence educational decision-making in your school or district. Then ask what behavior those metrics incentivize—and whether all students are encompassed in those metrics. Is everything centered on the state assessment, or do they take advantage of other data sources?**

2. **Put systems in place to assure that your schools use a variety of data sources that provide information on all learners to make decisions.**

3. **Review your metrics and ask whether improvement in these numbers is likely to improve the outcomes for all students or just certain segments of your population.**

4. **Revise the metrics you use to evaluate programs so that they not only reward improvements in performance, but also reward programs that are increasing the number and diversity of students participating.**

INVITE COLLABORATION

PRINCIPLE #7

Create a system that contributes to transparency and objectivity to support ongoing, long-term collaboration among all stakeholders

Assessment data should be used to illuminate—in a transparent and unbiased way—the strengths and weaknesses in programs. The courage to be objective and transparent—rather than to use data in service of a particular narrative of a school's performance—is what allows all stakeholders to see what is and isn't working so that positive adjustments that help all students can be made. This transparency and collaboration should be ongoing in order to continually serve students in ways that best address their needs, as well as build trust between schools and the community.

When you build your coherent assessment system, **include processes that encourage objectivity and transparency about data**. Transparency means that all assessment results—the poor as well as the excellent—are shared openly. Objectivity demands that you treat data plainly, rather than spinning it to support a desired narrative—or the narrative that you've grown accustomed to. By relying on these qualities, you can create long-term, ongoing collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and leaders at the district and state levels—as well as among the students and parents in your community—that will support continuous improvement over time.

Transparency invites trust, collaboration, and better outcomes for all

Transparency requires that you **share the results of your assessment system with those who are affected by them**, whether those results are what you hoped for or not. After all, you can't have meaningful collaboration that helps students long term without being upfront about the state of all your school system's components.

Transparency also requires that you **share information in a way people can understand**. Take, for example, the system by which states give schools grades. It seems transparent—the public is clearly told whether any given school has earned an "A," or a "B," et cetera. However, what do those grades mean? Some states, for example, have very complicated systems for assigning grades to schools, but provide no clear explanation as to the system by which those grades are assigned—nor can parents easily understand how the education provided by an

"A" school qualitatively or quantitatively differs from a "B" school. And so on. Thus while the grading system is nominally transparent, it's transparent in much the same way that "terms of use" notifications on websites are transparent—the information is all there, but virtually no lay person (or even expert, for that matter) is likely to actually read and understand it.

When you look at the information you share, consider not just the fact that you are sharing a result, but also the way in which you communicate it. By making your results clear and easily understandable, you illuminate truth and facilitate effective collaboration and communication. Compare transparency in your system to the transparency you would expect from a good financial adviser. Most of us wouldn't trust a financial adviser who promised us every year that our results would be great—after all financial markets aren't great every year. We would be more likely to trust an adviser who told us which investments were working out well, which ones weren't performing as expected, and, most importantly, what we could do to improve our results.

Just the facts, ma'am

Assessment data should serve the ultimate purpose of helping students learn, and it can do so only if your school system treats all results—positive and negative—with an equally unbiased stance. Therefore, when you share data and tell stakeholders what it means, it's crucial you do so objectively. **You must create a climate that encourages all educators to be equally objective**.

Schools need a **firm commitment to objectivity from the top down**. Abandon all agendas, renounce the desire to advance a pre-ordained narrative, and relinquish the temptation to create high stakes that encourage biased interpretations of data. After all, the stakes are already high—those stakes are the futures of the students in your system. You serve your students best with an objective approach to your assessment results. One way to do this is to start with different questions when discussing results. For example, instead of asking the question, "What did we do well and what did we do poorly?", ask the question, "What do you see that's interesting in this data?" The latter question encourages less defensiveness and is also more illuminating.

Long-term collaboration lifts all students

All this transparency and objectivity is in the service of **improving outcomes for all students through ongoing collaboration**.

Your assessment system must include **processes by which all interested parties can work together**. This may take the form of illuminative reports that highlight key goals and metrics on progress, cross-disciplinary educator action committees that address problem areas with innovative ideas, or community meetings where the public can interact with state leaders on important strategy decisions. It's easy to get consumed by the day-to-day tasks. By building collaboration channels into your plan, you make it easy for educators to use assessment data to serve your students and meet goals.

This collaborative approach must take a long view. If a school system feels pressure to produce instant success, short-term gains will come at the expense of important systemic changes that could benefit more students. And if stakeholders aren't invested in the system's long-term success—over the course of many years—individual agendas can quickly trump the incremental improvements that lift up all students. Build your assessment system with this long horizon in mind, so that collaboration spans many years and affects lasting change.

“There’s a natural human tendency to want to select the data that makes your picture look good. In our community, people were really demanding of good results. But over time, they became very supportive of us being absolutely candid with them about where we stood, how well we were doing, and where we felt we needed work.”

Dr. Jack Bierwirth
Retired Superintendent
Herricks Union School District, NY

THE PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

How can you tell if your school system has an environment that encourages objectivity? One easy indicator is to examine whether your school system's leaders expect schools and educators to produce results that conform to a particular narrative for their schools.

Here's an example of what this looks like: a school district was accustomed to their students being ranked in the 95th percentile on their assessments—it was a district full of "high-flying" students. They were justifiably proud of their achievement, but when they implemented a new assessment tool, that pride at first got in the way of educators' objectivity. Students weren't performing as well on this new measure. Because this performance didn't conform to educators' preconceived narrative of their schools, their first impulse was to say something was wrong with the measurement. But when they stepped back and really looked at the data, they found a different explanation—this new tool measured aspects of the educational system that had not been measured with previous tools. And because those aspects hadn't been measured, the district hadn't put resources into them—naturally, students had lower levels of achievement in such areas. Because they had the courage to question their usual narrative, these educators were able to use assessment data objectively to identify unmet needs and therefore better support their students.

NEXT STEPS

TAKE ACTION

1. Review your annual report of student achievement. Do your stakeholders believe that it provides an honest and open appraisal of your schools? How could you make it more transparent, more actionable, and more solicitous of collaboration? If you need help getting started, check out the MAP Insights Report for an example of an objective report focused on presenting key findings in a straightforward and accessible manner.

2. Meet with various stakeholder groups and use your data as a platform for conversation. Rather than providing a summary of strengths and weaknesses, ask questions like "what do you notice?" or "what stands out, positively or negatively?" Collect those observations. Look for similarities, themes, and trends. What results stand out over and over?

3. Once you've identified key findings, begin asking "why" and "how" questions. Avoid assumptions and continue to investigate until you feel confident in the objectivity of your conclusions.

4. Determine key areas for action to help meet your long-term goals. Clearly communicate your strategy and tactics for addressing each area to stakeholders, as well as what corrective action you will take if those strategies fail to meet your objectives.

5. Review the tone of a few of your recent communications to stakeholders about student learning in your district. Does it feel like you're just touting successes, or are you truly educating your partners about the complete picture? Try writing an op-ed about your educational program that would surprise readers because of its honesty and frankness.

6. Understand that this work will never be complete. Schools are complex systems with complex challenges. Pursue change that positively impacts student learning with a long-term view, knowing you will always be in the act of improving.

CONCLUSION

Now is the time to create the assessment system your students and teachers deserve

Education leaders need assessment systems that support a huge variety of needs—student learning, system accountability, program evaluation, and more—to deliver on the promise of equitable education for all.

State and federal policies have long dictated a constantly changing roster of assessments that serve the mandate of the moment. Educational policy will always be changing as elected officials change—that's the nature of politics. But **as an education leader, you have a higher mandate—that of supporting every student's learning**.

You have an opportunity to **change the landscape of assessment in your school system by creating a coherent assessment system rooted in a clear sense of purpose**. And you can do so not in an atmosphere of fear and penalty, but in a collaborative environment that supports success for everyone involved—especially students.

For nearly 40 years, NWEA has been devoted to education research and assessment development that serves our mission: Partnering to help all kids learn. We hope the seven principles outlined in this guide support you in your efforts to do the same.

In addition to creating assessments that support learning—such as MAP and Skills Navigator—we work with school systems to facilitate locally developed plans for their assessment system. We'd love to talk with you about how we can help your district. **Drop us a line** and let's talk about how we can help your students grow.

Visit NWEA.org or call 866-654-3246 to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) is a global not-for-profit educational services organization with nearly 40 years of expertise in providing innovative assessment solutions, including our flagship interim assessment, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP); our progress monitoring and skills mastery tool, Skills Navigator; and the OECD Test for Schools (based on PISA). More than 8,500 schools, school districts, and education agencies in the US and abroad trust us to offer pre-kindergarten through grade 12 assessments that accurately measure student growth and learning needs, professional development that fosters educators' ability to accelerate student learning, and research that supports assessment validity and data interpretation. To better inform instruction and maximize every learner's academic growth, educators currently use NWEA assessments with over nine million students.

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