



ACTIVITY 3.1

Merging Local and State Assessment Systems

PURPOSE

We've advocated that a local assessment program function as a system, with each component sharing a clear purpose, all working toward the same goal of improved student learning. This activity extends the systems-thinking approach to assessment by asking participants to consider what is necessary to achieve a level of balance and synergy between a state system and a local assessment system.

TIME

1 hour

MATERIALS NEEDED

- The grids from the assessment audit of your school/district in Activity 2.1
- Information on your state assessment(s)—test and item specifications, test examples or methods, sample reports distributed at the district, school, teacher, and student levels

SUGGESTED ROOM SETUP

- Tables and chairs set for ease of discussion among participants
- Interactive whiteboards or easels with flip charts and markers to record discussion and decision making

DIRECTIONS

First, you will need to have completed the assessment audit in Activity 2.1 in Part 2. This activity helped map the big picture of assessment in your school or district. In addition, gather information about the state assessment system, including test and item specifications, released samples of the various assessments, methods used, online resources, professional development provided, and sample reports from state assessments to the various levels: district, school, teacher, and student. If your state is using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), much of this information can be obtained from the two testing consortia. Remember that it is difficult for any single test to deliver accurate, reliable, and meaningful information if the test is spread too thinly among multiple purposes. With this information, consider the following questions:

- What is (are) the purpose(s) of the state test(s)?
- Considering your big picture, what specific summative (accountability) decisions need to be made based on assessment results, and who is making them?
- Of these, which can be informed by state assessment results? Which cannot?
- What formative uses (supporting student learning) need to be informed by assessment results? Who is making those decisions?
- Which of these can and cannot be informed by state assessment results?

Now go back to the big picture of assessment in your school/district once again in relation to your answers to the above questions.

- If there are information needs the state tests do not meet, are they being met currently by district, school, or classroom assessments?
- Are there subjects that seem over-tested while others are not tested at all?
- Is there redundancy among state, district, and school assessments?
- What information should your local assessment system provide? To whom? For what purposes?

And possibly most important, are all assessments at every level based on the learning targets found in the state standards? If the adopted and written curriculum is not always the tested curriculum what needs to happen to get the system in sync?

CLOSURE

Answers to the questions above can guide your choices of what to test locally and how to test it.

No doubt your team could pose other questions about how to get the most from a system that integrates state and local assessment. You might address balance in standards or targets tested, assessment methods used, or methods for communicating the information to the users. You could also look at balance from the summative/formative perspective; are students getting opportunities to practice before having to show what they know for an accountability purpose? Our purpose in this activity is to illustrate the opportunity local leaders have to improve balance and quality, even if the state system might drive the majority of public focus and attention.