

Why Should We Use Common Assessments?

Reviews of accountability data from hundreds of schools reveal the schools with the greatest gains in achievement consistently employ common assessments, nonfiction writing, and collaborative scoring by faculty (Reeves, 2004).

Powerful, proven structures for improved results are at hand. “It starts when a group of teachers meets regularly as a team to identify essential and valued student learning, develop common formative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set achievement goals, and then share and create lessons and strategies to improve upon those levels” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 48).

The schools and districts that doubled student achievement added another layer of testing—common formative or benchmark assessments. These assessments were designed to provide detailed and concrete information on what students know and do not know with respect to specific learning targets (Odden & Archibald, 2009).

The key to improved student achievement was moving beyond an individual teacher looking at his or her classroom data. Instead, it took getting same-grade teacher teams to meet, analyze the results of each interim assessment to understand what concepts in the curriculum were posing difficulty for students, share ideas, figure out the best interventions, and actually follow up in their classrooms (Christman et al., 2009).

In schools that help students burdened by poverty achieve remarkable success, teachers work in collaborative teams to build common formative assessments and use the data to identify which students need help and which need greater challenges. But they also use data to inform teachers’ practice, to discuss why one teacher is having success in teaching a concept and others are not, and what the more successful teacher can teach his or her colleagues (Chenoweth, 2009).

“High-growth schools and districts use frequent, common short-cycle assessments—at least every three to six weeks. Teachers create formative assessments before developing their lessons for a unit and clarify success criteria. The importance of focusing the attention of teachers on formative assessment practices and developing and using short-cycle common assessments was one of the most consistent findings of the study” (Battelle for Kids, 2015).

One of the most effective ways educators can use formative assessments is by collaboratively creating common formative assessments with grade-level or course-level colleagues . . . to assess student understanding of the particular learning intentions and success criteria currently in focus within a curricular unit of study. Common formative assessments afford teacher teams a clear lens through which to see their instructional impact on student learning (Ainsworth, 2014).

References

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