TAKING ACTION WITH ASSESSMENT
As an educator it can be cumbersome to research, evaluate and implement a balanced system of assessments, especially in an ever-changing world of standards, summative tests, technology, and accountability systems. At McGraw-Hill Education we understand your immediate need to make gains, maintain and break-through student achievement goals and believe that employing a high quality researched-based system of assessments is an essential part of your instructional ecosystem.

It is through our goal to provide opportunities for district leaders and education innovators from across the nation to collaborate, network and grow that McGraw-Hill Education holds an annual Assessment Symposium. During this event, leading experts and educational advocates share relevant and timely knowledge on the latest developments and opportunities in assessment use. In addition to discovering new ways to ensure your students reach their full potential — together we identify strategies for advancing assessment impact, exchange ideas and share success stories. In this Take Action with Assessment booklet, you will discover blog posts, white papers, and articles by the following thought-leaders:

**Embedded Assessment**

Dylan William

Professor Emeritus of Educational Assessment at University College London, who has taught in urban public schools, directed a large-scale testing program, and was Dean of the School of Education at King’s College London.

**Starting a Movement with Assessment To and Through the Bar**

Ken Williams

A distinguished teacher and recognized trainer speaker, coach and consultant in education and leadership, he serves as chief visionary officer of Unfold the Soul, Inc.

**Platform Student Privacy**

Andrew Bloom and Linnette Attai

Bloom: Chief Privacy Officer at McGraw-Hill Education; develops and implements a privacy program to support the business as it moves from a traditional publisher to a learning science company providing world class technology for students around the world.

Attai: Founder of PlayWell, LLC, a compliance consulting firm; created the nation’s first student data privacy and security self-regulatory program, and an FTC-approved Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) safe harbor program.

**Assessment for Instruction**

Dr. Douglas Fisher

Professor of Educational Leadership at San Diego State University and teacher leader at Health Sciences High & Middle College, leveraging his background in early intervention and elementary education.

**Performance Assessment: What Is It and Why Use It?**

Susan Brookhart

Independent educational consultant and author, currently serving as an adjunct faculty in the Duquesne University. Author/co-author of 17 books and 70+ articles and book chapters.

**Assessment Optimization Process**

McGraw-Hill Education

McGraw-Hill Education is the digital learning experiences company intent on changing the world of education. Drawing on its rich heritage of educational expertise, the company offers highly personalized learning experiences that improve learning outcomes around the world.
Employers often suggest that school leavers are not as well educated as those of previous generations, but this is simply not true. Today’s young people are better educated—and have higher IQs—than their parents and grandparents (Flynn, 2012; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013). The problem is that the “price of admission” into the world of work keeps on going up. Thirty years ago, a hotel receptionist needed only to be able to get people to fill in forms and hand out keys. Today the same job requires the ability to operate complex computer systems. What’s more, the trends we have seen to date are likely to continue, and perhaps even accelerate.

According to Princeton economist Alan Blinder, around 25 to 30 percent of jobs in the U.S. economy right now could be moved offshore within the next 30 years (Blinder, 2011). Even more dramatic, a recent estimate of the effects of workplace automation suggests that almost half of current U.S. jobs could be done by machines using only existing technology (Frey & Osborne, 2013).

Of course, preparing students for the world of work is not the only—nor even the most important reason—we educate young people. We also need to ensure that, as the world becomes more complex, young people are empowered to take control over their lives and are ready to participate effectively in democratic society.

The need for higher educational achievement has been widely appreciated for many years, but many of the solutions attempted have had unfortunate consequences.
There is no doubt that young people will, in the future, need higher levels of achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. But over the last 30 years, higher levels of achievement in these school subjects have been pursued by squeezing out subjects like art, music, dance, and drama (Au, 2007).

This is unfortunate for at least two reasons. The first is that art, music, dance, and drama are sources of personal fulfillment into adulthood in a way that math and science rarely are (Robinson, 2009). More importantly, art, music, dance, and drama tend to place a greater emphasis on creativity than other school subjects, and creativity is the one thing that machines don’t seem to do well (Colvin, 2009). This is where the new jobs will come from. The challenge, then, is to secure higher and higher levels of achievement, while at the same time ensuring the school curriculum is broad and balanced.

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the major determinant of the effectiveness of an education system is the quality of its teachers. Curriculum, facilities, class size, poverty, parental support, student aptitude, motivation, and a whole lot of other things matter, to be sure. But the research that we now have available indicates clearly that the quality of the teacher in a classroom is the crucial variable in any education system (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010).

In response to this research, many policy efforts have sought to increase the quality of entrants to the profession, but there are two problems with such an approach. The first is that it takes a long time. If you raise the bar for entry into teaching, it will be 40 years before those who became teachers before the bar was raised have completed their careers. The second problem is that it seems to be extremely difficult—if not actually impossible—to predict how good a prospective teacher is likely to be (Harris & Sass, 2009). If we want to improve education, there is basically only one way to do it. You have to invest in the teachers you already have, what my friend Marnie Thompson calls the “love the one you’re with” strategy.

Of course, the idea that teachers should receive some form of professional development has been around for decades, but too often, this has been targeted mainly at less effective teachers. The problem is that there aren’t that many of them, so if you improve only the least effective, the improvement in average teacher quality across the system is small. Giving young people a decent chance at a good life requires every single teacher to get better—not because they are not good enough—but because they can be even better. And when teachers get better, their students are healthier, live longer, and contribute more to society (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, 2006). The question then is, “better at what?” This is where educational research comes in.

At the outset, it is important to recognize that research can only tell us what was, not what might be. Many research studies have found that a particular intervention has little or no effect on student achievement, but we cannot conclude from this that the intervention does not and cannot work. Here are four examples.
Homework: Whether homework increases student achievement or not has been debated for many years with authors adopting entrenched positions on either side of the debate. The research that has been done suggests that regularly assigning homework has little impact on student achievement (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). However, most of the homework that teachers assign is of rather poor quality, so all we really learn from such research is that poor-quality homework does not help students very much—not really a surprising result. But it is incorrect to conclude from this that homework cannot be effective. In fact, the homework that teachers most regularly assign is the least effective kinds of homework—finishing off at home what wasn’t completed at school. Homework assignments that ask students to prepare for future learning, or where they complete an independent study project, tend to be more effective. Even where homework is ineffective in the short-term, by building good study habits, homework may yield improvements in future years, so the lack of an immediate benefit is not necessarily a weakness.

Teachers’ aides: A large study of the deployment and implementation of support staff in England found that the use of teachers’ aides actually lowered student achievement (Blatchford et al., 2009). When the researchers looked in depth at the way that aides were employed, they found that often, aides were being asked to look after students with special educational needs. In other words, people with the least preparation were being asked to support the learning of those with the most complex problems. However, more recently, studies have found that teachers’ aides can be highly effective when deployed thoughtfully, within a careful framework that guides their practice.

Homogenous grouping: In many countries, students are allocated to different classes based on their achievement. The research shows that such practices tend to produce gains in achievement for the higher achieving students at the expense of losses for the lower achieving students (Educational Endowment Foundation, 2015). Since the gains for the higher-achieving students tend to be smaller than the losses for the lower-achieving students, the net effect is lower achievement. However, whether this is necessarily the case is not clear. Most of the time, when students are grouped by achievement, the most effective teachers are assigned to teach the highest achieving students, when in fact, they would have a greater impact on average student achievement if they were assigned to teach the lowest-achieving students. The problem is that it is almost impossible to get schools to participate in an experiment where the most effective teachers are assigned to teach the lowest achieving students, because politically active parents are more likely to have higher achieving students and are content with their children getting the best teachers.

Class-size reduction: Many studies of class-size reduction have found only modest effects, and this has led some authors to claim that class-size reduction does not work (Hattie, 2008). This conclusion is not warranted for several reasons. First, most of the studies have reduced class size by a small amount, so effects are likely to be difficult to detect. Second, and more importantly, very few studies have provided teachers with professional development to help them teach in different and more effective ways that are possible only with smaller classes. A teacher standing in front of a class and talking at 20 students isn’t going to be more effective than a teacher talking at 30, or indeed 300 students. But if teachers are given time and support to teach in ways that are only possible with smaller classes, significant improvements are achievable, particularly with
younger children. This said, class-size reduction programs may still not be justified for many reasons. Class-size reduction programs are expensive, with a 30 percent reduction in class-size increasing teacher salary budgets by 50 percent, not to mention the cost of building 50 percent more classrooms. A bigger problem with class-size reduction is that if you reduce class sizes, you need more teachers. What this means is that you end up employing people who are currently not regarded as good enough to be teachers. In other words, you dilute teacher quality. Even if an experiment shows that class-size reduction does work in one particular area, it is far from clear that the same would hold when the experiment is repeated across a state. Increasing student achievement by class-size reduction is a bit like trying to fill a sink without putting the plug in. Whether class-size reduction works across a whole system depends on the relative quality of those who would be newly employed as teachers as compared to those who are already teaching. The cut-off is the 10th percentile of quality. If the teachers you are adding to the system are only as good as those in the lowest 10 percent of effectiveness, then class-size reduction will actually lower student achievement. You might get an extra four months of learning per year from the smaller class sizes, but you will lose five months of learning because of the dilution of teacher quality. The point here is not that class-size reduction is inherently good or bad, it is that the effectiveness of such programs will depend on a complex set of local circumstances.

From the foregoing analyses, it should be clear that using research to guide policy is a complex process. We cannot rely on simple lists of which interventions are the most effective because whether the effects found in the research will apply to a particular system is hard to judge. Ultimately, school leaders and policymakers have to become critical consumers of education research. “What works?” is the wrong question in educational research because everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere. The important question is “Under what circumstances does this work?” and that is why professional judgment and local knowledge will always be essential to the task of using research to guide school improvement. We need to be sure that initiatives are likely to be effective in real classrooms, can be implemented within existing constraints, and are sustained.

When we look at research in this way, perhaps the most promising focus for intervention is classroom formative assessment, which has been shown to increase student achievement across a range of settings all over the world (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In the U.S., the term “formative assessment” tends to be associated with the idea of administering “common formative assessments” at regular intervals (typically four to ten weeks) and having instructional data teams look at the resulting evidence in order to ensure that all students are making sufficient progress (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). While such processes are an essential ingredient of effective schools, they are not, on their own, enough. Much greater improvements to student achievement are possible if we ensure that teachers get—and use—information on their students as a regular part of normal instruction—minute-to-minute and day-by-day (Wiliam, 2016). The problem with this is that it is much harder to change what teachers do when students are present than it is to change what teachers do when students are not present. Changing classroom practice is not, primarily, a process of knowledge acquisition but rather one of habit change.
Fortunately, there is now a lot of good research about how to change habits (Heath & Heath, 2010). In particular, we know that simple structures, where teachers meet regularly, make commitments to other members of the group about what they are going to do, and then, at subsequent meetings, are held to account by their peers, can produce profound changes in teacher practice and student achievement (Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004). Moreover, the time commitment required is not that great—about 75 minutes once a month, or roughly 10 hours a year. Within 10 years, the U.S. could have the best teaching force in the world, if we are only willing to stop trying to measure the effectiveness of our teachers, and instead, invest in helping them improve.
References


Starting a Movement With Assessment To and Through the Bar

By Ken Williams

Just the mention of assessments causes some of us to well up with fear. Students often don’t like them—and more and more districts are using assessment data to not only evaluate student growth but to evaluate teacher performance and demonstrate accountability.

When it comes to assessments, the pressure can definitely be felt.

But what if we took a different look at assessments? Instead of using assessments only to tell us which kids got it and which kids didn’t get it, what if we used assessments to better engage our students, enhance our classrooms, and inform our instruction? We’re going to take a look at how we can use assessments to help our students move to and through the BAR. In the course of our discussion, we’ll look at why it’s critical for our schools to develop a culture of learning for all, the importance of raising the standard of culture over structure within our schools, and establishing the bar which clarifies the essential targets that we must ensure every student masters.

But how is that done?

Tabula rasa—assume nothing

All too often, our expectations are met with disappointment as we, on the front end of learning, mentally put students into groups of those we think will succeed and those we suspect might not. Tabula rasa is a Latin phrase often translated to mean blank slate. We have to get away from our obsession with ranking,
sorting, and selecting students on the front end of learning. Judgment in this way hinders our impact as educators. It limits our thinking and stunts collaboration and problem solving.

Now consider your classroom, the classrooms at your school, and the classrooms of your peers. Are they performing at a level that you would expect for someone you hold dear? The vision we have for the education of our own children or loved ones should be projected upon the classrooms and schools we seek to build for all children. A culture of excellence and expectation should always be set high, without creating limitations to success. We should provide for all kids what we expect schools to provide our own children.

To ensure high levels of learning for all students, we can utilize the power of assessment as a compelling tool. However, before leveraging the strengths inherent in both formative and summative assessment, we must embrace three fundamental areas of change:

- Develop a culture of learning for all.
- Create a standard of culture, so that it supports healthy structure within our schools.
- Set the bar to understand what every student must learn.

Let’s take a look at these three ideas before moving on to discussing assessment.

**First, our schools must develop a culture of learning for all.**

One of the first and most critical ways that we can utilize assessment to drive results is to realize that our schools must develop a culture of learning for all. All too often, educators place their students into two distinct categories—students they know can learn, and students they think will struggle to learn. Many times, the students that educators believe will struggle are in that category because of where they’re from—socially, economically, racially, or any other pre-conceived bias that can easily get stuck in our heads about why or why not a certain group of students have difficulties achieving success.

Consider this simple yet powerful concept: We need to base our learning on where our kids need to go, not where they started. The more we base classroom learning on where kids are from, the more we’ll put up walls that not only impede the ability for students to learn but also our ability to teach effectively.

Instead of starting with the deficits of our students, which will always demoralize us and tell us why our kids are struggling, let’s bet on me and we first. Let’s remember that we became teachers because we believed in the power of teaching. We understood that we had to *be the motivation* instead of waiting for the motivation to come from somewhere else. When I was a teacher, I never needed to see a class list to know whether or not I was going to have a good year. I bet on me and what I *could accomplish with my students*, and I always knew it was going to be a great year. Assume nothing when your kids walk in on the first day of class and don’t worry about what they are bringing to the table. Know that your classroom is going to have an unbelievable year and watch it unfold.
Let’s help our students and fellow educators shake the labels that have been unfairly cast upon them and believe everyone can be high achievers. This is critical as it relates to assessment, because once we establish a culture of learning for everyone, we begin to see assessments as a tool to help us understand what our students can learn as opposed to what they don’t know, which is a subtle yet fundamental shift in thinking.

Setting a culture of learning for all also removes the notion of outdated and ineffective grouping practices and sets all our students on a level playing field of equity instead of equality. Equality is about sameness and promotes justice by giving everyone the same thing. But it only works if everyone starts from the same place (which inevitably, they don’t). Equity is about fairness and making sure everyone has access to the same opportunities. Sometimes our differences or history can create barriers to participation, so we must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality.

Second, create a standard of culture, so that it supports healthy structure within our schools.

Culture can sometimes be difficult to define within the walls of our schools and for good reason because it is difficult to measure. Culture can be defined as the assumptions, beliefs, values, and habits that constitute the norm for the school and guide the work of the educators within it (DuFour 2008). Structure, on the other hand, is much easier to grasp, because it is directly related to the policies, procedures, rules, and hierarchical relationships within the school. Traditionally, these types of relationships, rules, and policies are easier to measure. But structure can’t thrive without a good culture. Without a good culture, structure becomes inhibiting—stifling creative thinking, suffocating excitement, and squelching our passions.

The late business management guru Peter Drucker said, “Culture eats structure for lunch,” implying that a winning culture is at the heart of every great organization. Winning companies like Southwest Airlines, Google, and Zappos understand that anyone can come up with a good strategy, but it is inherently much more challenging to build an outstanding culture that inspires everyone to execute on the strategy day in and day out.

Any successful school must have both an outstanding culture and a well-organized structure—the two go hand-in-hand. However, many schools have relied too heavily on structure alone for far too long and must take a critical look at re-energizing their culture if they are to help students move to and through the bar!

We often avoid culture because it can be messy and crosses the line into people’s beliefs, but if we’re not willing to set our biases aside and let go of them, we can’t move our collective cultures forward. Culture is not an event—it’s the way we do things. In order to have a positive culture, everyone must be in the same boat, rowing in the same direction, and working towards the same goals.
Finally, set the bar: clearly define targets we must ensure every student masters.

How do we establish the bar?
Establishing the bar in a culture of learning for all forces educators to ask a critical question, “What are the *most essential* targets we must ensure all students master?”

The bar is comprised of the most essential learning targets in every curricular area. Mastery of these targets prepare students for success at:

- The next grade level.
- The next course.
- The high-stakes assessment (if applicable).
- The skills and competencies needed for life beyond the K-12 system.

Learning for all doesn’t mean that every student masters every standard in the curriculum. Instead, it means that we ensure every student masters the essential learning targets of every curricular area.

When considering what targets are the most essential, remember that essential and important are not equivocal. Think about the concept of your body for a moment. While your arms are *important* to daily living, you could live without an arm. You could figure out ways to open doors, use text recognition software for typing, drive with adaptive devices, and still live a healthy and productive life. However, you can’t live without a heart. You can’t live without a brain. Those organs are *absolutely essential* to life—and schools must determine what their most essential targets are, invite students to learn these and make sure no one walks out the doors without learning these essentials. We must get beyond simply calling targets essential and start treating them like they’re essential.

The bar removes judgment and frees educators to collaborate and innovate.

The essentials targets that make up the bar cannot be limited to just tests and assessments. Referring back to the criteria above, the bar must address four different areas, with the high-stakes assessment being among them. To be clear, they must be *included* in assessments, but only by establishing the bar can we take students to it and through it. In addition, setting the bar removes judgment because it creates a set of foundational learning essentials that everyone must master and that all educators must be aligned. When we think about the essentials of what each student must learn and view education through this lens, assessment becomes naturally more insightful—because they tell us who got it and who didn’t, and help us understand the why behind it.
Now, let’s use assessment to inform instruction.

When schools have a solid foundation in place for learning—an environment where everyone is expected to learn, a culture that is balanced with structure, and a bar that establishes the targets we must ensure all students master—that sets an environment where assessment can be used in a powerful way.

Historically, assessment data has been used by educators to confirm what students already knew or didn’t know. Instruction started with the assessment in mind and ended when the assessment was complete. This model leaves little or no room for using assessments in a much more powerful way—which is to inform instruction and guide the classroom.

When tied to informing instruction, both formative and summative assessments can help improve student achievement and be used as a confidence builder as opposed to using assessments to simply point out what’s wrong in the classroom. All too often, we start with deficits (what we’re doing wrong, what students don’t know, etc.), but assessments can be used as a powerful tool to improve learning and as well as instruction instead of using data as a source of fear punishment. Analyzing assessment data focuses the team on its collective strengths!

To leverage the true power of assessments, we must remember a few key principles. First, keep in mind that it’s not necessary to grade everything. Remember that not all assessments need to be a gradable assessment. In addition, assessments must be instructionally actionable regarding mastery of essential targets. This means that when the assessment is complete (whether it is formative or summative), educators need to proactively think about what’s next:

- How will the assessment results be utilized to inform instruction in the classroom?
- What will students do as a result of the assessment?
- How will the classroom instruction change tomorrow, next week and next month?

Assessment must be a part of a fluid educational process and not just the end goal.

Widening the effectiveness of assessments, districts or schools that have integrated assessment systems can gain visibility into student, class, grade, school, and district levels data for extremely valuable information that can inform broader decision-making. These reports can show how students are progressing towards state standards and reveal areas in which additional instructional resources might be needed. Again, the assessment data can be used in a powerful way to inform instruction in the classroom as opposed to just using assessment to bookend the quarter and tell educators what they probably already knew about their students.

Truly, assessments can be a powerful tool. If used correctly within a culture of equity where all students are expected to learn, assessments can be utilized to inform instruction and start a movement where all our students are well equipped to go to and through the bar!
The subject of student data privacy has never been more relevant, important, and stress inducing for school administrators. Although the topic has been around since the 1970s, when schools began collecting electronic information, a lot has changed since the days of analog technologies and magnetic tapes.

The size of our data universe has exploded, and most schools today are relying on cloud services to collect and store their data. The risks and responsibilities on administrators, as it relates to student data privacy, have never been greater.

This short brief covers the ABCs of student data privacy, with a goal of providing a quick overview of key privacy concepts to help you reduce risk to your school or district, and prepare you for what may lie ahead. For a deeper dive into privacy content, a list of useful resources is included on the last page.

Student Data Privacy Is Important—And It Is Your Responsibility

Student data privacy covers the use, collection, handling and governance of students’ personally identifiable information (PII). This includes any and all information that can be used to identify, locate or contact an individual student—such as name, address, student ID, and login information. It also includes the student’s academic, health, and disciplinary records, as well as information that can be combined to identify a particular student, like demographics and birth date.
Simply put, student data privacy is important because there are legal and ethical limitations on the collection, use, sharing, and handling of student PII. Federal and state laws regulate the privacy of student PII—and while enforcement has been historically lax, the legal landscape is changing.

Meanwhile, data collection and the use of student information inside and outside our schools is rising all the time. Plus, administrators are outsourcing data services and bringing more technology into the classroom, resulting in a greater number of contracts with information technology (IT) service and solution providers—and more for schools to manage.

This evolution should serve as a wake-up call for all administrators. The bottom line is that schools are legally and ethically obligated to keep student PII private—regardless of where and how the student data is created, used, or stored.

**Fundamentals of Current Federal Privacy Laws**

Regulation around student data privacy is evolving. While the majority of legislative activity is happening at the state level, there are a few longstanding federal laws. Administrators should at least become familiar with the following three:

1. **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**

FERPA was signed into law in 1974 to allow parents and students age 18 and older (referred to as eligible students) access to their school records. Overseen by the US Department of Education (DOE), the law applies to educational institutions that receive federal funding, and grants four specific rights to the parent and eligible student:

   - The right to see the student’s education record.
   - The right to seek an amendment to those records if they are misleading, inaccurate, or in violation of the student’s privacy rights, and, in certain cases, append a statement to the record.
   - The right to consent to disclosure of personally identifiable information in the education record.
   - The right to file a complaint with the Family Compliance Policy Office in Washington, DC.

Failure to comply with FERPA exposes school districts to a loss of federal funding, though the DOE has not yet imposed this penalty on any institutions.
2. Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)

PPRA was passed into law in 1978 and applies to programs and activities funded by the DOE. It allows parents to review marketing surveys and also to grant or deny permission for their minor child to participate in surveys, analyses, and evaluations that require the student to reveal information about themselves or their family that deal with sensitive subject matter, such as:

- Religious practices, beliefs, or affiliations
- Political affiliations or beliefs
- Mental health problems
- Sex behavior or attitudes
- Illegal or self-incriminating behavior
- Critical appraisals from others close to the student or family
- Legally recognized privileged relationships (i.e. doctors, ministers, lawyers)
- Income (other than as required by law to determine program eligibility)

As with FERPA, the rights given to the parent transfer to the student once the student reaches the age of 18.

3. Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)

COPPA was enacted in 1998 to protect the privacy of children under the age of 13 while online. Enforced by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the law requires operators of websites and online services that target or knowingly collect PII from children under 13 to obtain verifiable parental consent before doing so and keep the information secure.

Unlike FERPA and PPRA, COPPA applies directly to technology operators, although in certain situations, operators may rely on the schools to obtain the required verifiable parental consent.

Legislation at the State Level is Booming

The exponential growth of technology used in schools has resulted in a recent flurry of student data privacy legislation at the state level. According to the Data Quality Campaign, from 2013 to 2016, 49 states introduced over 400 bills related to student data privacy. To date, 73 of those bills have been signed into law across 36 states—and the number is growing.

While policy strategies vary from state to state, these new laws have common threads. For example, they tend to focus on the following themes:

- Establishing additional safeguards for the collection, use, and disclosure of PII.
- Governing the permissible activities of online service providers.
- Prohibiting service providers and districts from selling or profiting from PII.
- Expanding existing regulatory definitions of personally identifiable information.
As a school administrator, it is important to keep an eye out for new and pending student data privacy legislation at the state level. If recent events are any indication, if you have not been affected yet by new data privacy regulations, you may be soon.

**Know Your Data—and Your Data Contracts**

An important first step in developing effective student data privacy policies and procedures for your school is understanding all of the student data you have. This may sound obvious, but it’s something many districts fail to consider before jumping into creating policy.

The best way to discover the data you have is by doing a data inventory and mapping all the automated and manual processes that collect or use student information. Once you understand what data is being collected and how it is used, you can properly secure it.

As an administrator, you will realize the benefits of the data inventory and mapping quickly. First, you will be able to create thorough and transparent privacy information to be shared with parents and students. Second, you will be able to communicate more effectively with employees and vendors about data-related issues, practices, and requirements. Finally, you will be able to better identify any areas where you might be unnecessarily collecting data, or where you might not be protecting data as well as you could be.

Just as important as knowing the data you have is ensuring that contracts with third parties reflect privacy requirements. The school is ultimately responsible for how vendors use the data, so even though you may have counsel to review your school’s legal contracts, it is important that you know what to look for—and what to look out for—in data service agreements.

Before contracting with any IT vendor, make sure they understand the student data privacy laws in your state, as well as your district requirements. Contracts with vendors should be clear about how their system will interact with your data—including where and how it will collect, store, and protect the information and, if appropriate, how their system will securely destroy it.

**In Conclusion**

Because student data privacy is a critical and growing issue nationwide, it is imperative that all schools have a clear understanding of the issues at hand as well as a clearly outlined policy that covers data privacy within their school or district, as well as for those who work with them (contractors, IT vendors, etc.). Local and federal laws will continue to change and evolve over time, and a foundational policy and plan will help keep up with the rapid changes and growing demands of data privacy. For further reading and information, see the links and resources below.

Learn more about our digital solutions and platforms at mheonline.com/dataprivacy
Resources

FERPA|SHERPA (ferpasherpa.org) provides service providers, parents, school officials, and policymakers with easy access to materials and resources to help guide responsible uses of student’s data.

US Department of Education Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) (ptac.ed.gov) is a resource for education stakeholders to learn about data privacy, confidentiality, and security practices related to student-level longitudinal data systems and other uses of student data.

Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Model Terms of Service (ptac.ed.gov/sites/default/files/TOS_Guidance_Mar2016.pdf) the PTAC, working with the Department of Education’s Family Policy Compliance Office, has developed guidance for evaluating vendor Terms of Service Agreements. This document is intended to assist users in evaluating potential agreements and understanding commonly used terminology.

CoSN Privacy Toolkit for School Leaders (cosn.org/focus-area/leadership-vision/protecting-privacy) provides school officials with 10 essential skills areas, outlining the responsibilities and knowledge needed to be an educational technology leader.

CoSN Trusted Learning Environment Program (trustedlearning.org) provides school systems with measurable steps to implement practices to help ensure the privacy of student data.

Data Quality Campaign (dataqualitycampaign.org/action-issues) provides information on state laws annually, as well as other useful privacy review tools and resources.


ConnectSafely Educator’s Guide to Social Media (connectsafely.org/eduguide) explains how educators can use social media in the classroom without risking their professional reputation.

ConnectSafely, FPF, PTA Parent’s Guide to Student Data Privacy (ferpasherpa.org/pdf/parents_guide.pdf) assists parents in understanding the laws that protect student data and helps parents understand their student’s rights under the law.
There are any numbers of assessment tools that teachers can create (or buy) to help them plan instruction. It’s not the assessment that matters to me, but rather the ways in which wise teachers use the information they gain from the assessment to inform their instruction. I’ve come to think that we should stop saying “formative assessment” because almost every assessment that I’ve used could be either formative or summative, depending on how I use it.

To use assessment tools formatively, I think that there are several important considerations. First, the assessment has to be clearly linked with a learning target or objective. If students (and teachers) don’t know what students are supposed to be learning, it’s hard to measure that learning. Further, students may not be giving it their best shot if they don’t know what it is that they’re supposed to be learning. When assessments come out of the blue, disconnected from learning targets, the data are of questionable use.

Second, students need success criteria. In advance of an assessment, during the learning phase, students should know what quality work looks like. They need examples and non-examples as well as good and great examples. When this happens, expectations are clear and student performance can be measured against an agreed upon standard.

Of course, teachers need a lot of tools to use. There are literally hundreds of ways to check for understanding. These tools can be organized into several categories, including oral language, written language, non-verbal, projects and performances, and tests. The tool that is used has to be consistent with the learning target and success criteria. A mismatch may lead to incorrect identification of students’ needs.

When these systems are in place—students know what they are supposed to be learning, understand what success looks like, and their teachers select appropriate tools—the information gained from the data collection can be used to inform instruction. When there are breaks in this chain, assessment is of little formative use.
Performance Assessment: What Is It and Why Use It?

By Susan M. Brookhart, Ph.D.

Pretend you are an elementary student, and your class is learning to interpret direction and distance on a map. Which would you rather do, take a test on map skills or plan and describe a safari across a map full of interesting places with exotic sights to see? Pretend you are a middle school language arts student, and your class is learning about imagery in poetry. Which assessment would show you understand imagery deeply, a test with questions like circle the similes or an opportunity to write a brief poem centered on a meaningful (to you) image? Pretend you are an anatomy student who wants to be a doctor some day. Which would feel closer to your dream, a paper-and-pencil anatomy test or a series of exercises using a human body simulator?

While a test is an efficient way to gather evidence about students’ conceptual knowledge, a performance assessment is a better tool for gathering evidence about what students can do with their knowledge. Effective performance assessments allow students to apply knowledge to solve a problem or demonstrate a skill. In performance assessments, students demonstrate or construct something, and that work is assessed using observation and judgment, often using a tool like a rubric.

Performance assessment is especially useful for assessing students’ achievement of complex learning standard (e.g., analyzing author’s purpose), assessing their ability to apply concepts they learned to solve problems (e.g., using understanding of past presidential elections to predict what will happen in this presidential election), and assessing skills (e.g., using an electronic library card catalog). As a colleague once said, “The only way to know if they can swim is to put them in the pool.” Some simple skills, though (e.g., kindergarten students making equal sets with colored counters) are also best assessed by observing student performance.
Performance tasks must be carefully designed so that the student responses really do give evidence of the knowledge and skills we are trying to assess. Performance criteria must be clear and help students focus on those things, particularly, so they can “show what they know.” Performance tasks help show students what real work in a discipline looks like—what it means to be a writer, mathematician, historian, or scientist, for example. And when students understand the criteria for success with a learning task and apply those criteria as they work, research shows that their performance—and their achievement—increases.

Next time you are planning a unit, take a look at the learning goals you intend your students to achieve. Find one or more that lend themselves to performance assessment, and try it out!
4 Steps to Optimizing Assessment and Boosting Student Achievement

Executive Summary

Pressure is on K-12 school and district leaders to demonstrate student growth and achievement amidst increasingly difficult state standards. Improving these results is possible if you are able to optimize assessment. The McGraw-Hill Education (MHE) Assessment Optimization Process guides you through assessment optimization in four steps:

1) Develop a shared vision for assessment.
2) Connect assessment with instruction.
3) Create a balanced assessment ecosystem.
4) Analyze results and use them to inform.

Assessment systems exist that make the process feasible and easy to navigate for any school or district that is driven to improve results and willing to make it a focus.
Introduction

Today, tremendous pressure is on school and district leaders nationwide to demonstrate student growth and boost student achievement within an environment of increasingly difficult and often-changing state standards. Fortunately, improving growth and achievement results is well within reach when you optimize your assessment strategy.

Knowing the pivotal role that assessment plays in academic success, we leveraged our experience with hundreds of district leaders, school administrators and teachers over the years to develop the McGraw-Hill Education (MHE) Assessment Optimization Process.

The methodology consists of four steps:

1) Develop a shared vision for assessment.
2) Connect assessment with instruction.
3) Create a balanced assessment ecosystem.
4) Analyze results and use them to inform.

This paper explains what these steps entail and how they can be applied to maximize the benefits of high-quality assessment and improve results. We’ve seen it work in many classrooms of varying sizes and student populations across the country.

Step 1: Develop a Shared Vision for Assessment

The first step in optimizing assessment and improving results is creating a shared vision for assessment and for how assessment results will be used. Be sure to gather input from all relevant stakeholders, including other district leaders, school administrators, teachers, students and parents. Having collective buy-in is essential to your success. Moreover, each group will lend a unique and valuable perspective that will enrich and broaden the collective vision for assessment.

Start by determining your school or district’s goals for assessment and what you will do with assessment data. Below are several examples of such goals. Yours may include one or more of these, or others:

- Improve student learning and measure growth over time
- Evaluate the district’s academic progress
- Establish accountability for performance at the student, teacher, school and district levels
- Inform district and school planning regarding resource, professional development and student needs
- Evaluate or validate curriculum
- Provide meaningful information to parents regarding their child’s growth and development

Next, determine how various types of assessment can be used to accomplish the goals you have set. Determine what, if any, changes need to be made to better prepare students for year-end summative assessments. Consider multiple forms of formative assessment — from daily informal checks for understanding, to more formal weekly and unit assessments, to benchmark/interim assessments. Discuss the purpose of each type of assessment and how the resulting data can be used.

Additionally, consider how more formal formative assessments will be created. Will teachers have access to professional services or an assessment system to help them build more reliable and valid tests? (Research shows that teacher-created assessments have .35-.50 reliability compared to .85-.95 for assessments from an assessment company.)

Step 2: Connect Assessment with Instruction

Once a shared vision for assessment has been established, the next step is to drill down to the classroom level and connect assessment with instruction. This step is pivotal because productive learning is interactive — a dynamic exchange between the teacher facilitating learning and the student acquiring and demonstrating mastery of learning. The two are interdependent; if neither makes adjustments through the transaction, learning stalls.

Ensure Assessment Reliability

Assessments are:

- 35% to 50% reliable if created by a lone individual
- 85% to 95% reliable if created with an assessment organization
To connect assessment with learning, the educator should start at the foreseen “end” — the skills and strategies that must be acquired per state standards — and work backward. The process looks like this:

1) Determine the skills, strategies and standards that will be required, and how they must be demonstrated to show mastery.

2) Decide the content that will be taught and the pedagogy and technology best to teach that content to facilitate a successful demonstration of mastery.

3) Use assessment results to inform and adapt next instructional steps, relative to learning goals.

By planning which skills, concepts and standards will be assessed — and how they will be assessed — prior to instruction, teachers ensure that they are meeting students where they are currently and determining the best path forward. This “reverse-engineering” approach keeps instruction focused on learning and building proficiency in the areas required within state standards. It is a simple yet powerfully effective technique!

**Connected, Personalized Learning**

Ten to twenty years ago, the only way to offer personalized learning and support for individual students day-to-day was to provide an unrealistically high teacher-to-student ratio, build more classrooms and hire additional staff. But technology has changed that. Today, technology-based assessment systems make connected, personalized learning possible in every classroom, regardless of size.

Assessment systems make this possible because they can continually gather data about how each student is performing, measure it against past performance, identify any knowledge gaps, and suggest targeted activities or content to close those gaps. Using reports from the system, educators can know at any given point what each student is ready to learn next and where they need support.

Some systems also offer adaptive assessment, in which the test continually adapts its questioning based on the student’s response — either increasing or decreasing the level of difficulty. Depending on your assessment goals, this can be a useful methodology. Compared to fixed-form testing, adaptive assessment is highly personalized, measuring individual student knowledge and achievement in great detail. This is especially beneficial when measuring achievement of the highest- and lowest-performing students, whose readiness typically cannot be captured via fixed-form testing.

Keep in mind, however, that the highly personalized nature of adaptive assessment has a down-side. It makes it extremely difficult to analyze performance results at a macro level. Therefore, its value to your school or district is solely dependent on the assessment goals you established in Step 1 of our process. Be mindful of this as you evaluate assessment systems and the test methodologies they support.

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**One School Administrator’s Story**

**Name**
Robinson Intermediate School

**Location**
Aurora, Missouri

When Dr. Shawn Page joined Robinson Intermediate School in Aurora, Missouri as principal in 2008, he had his work cut out for him. More than half of the student body wasn’t performing at grade level in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The school’s state test scores were low, they had no way to track students’ progress toward state standards, and they lacked predictive assessment data.

Dr. Page turned to McGraw-Hill Education for an assessment system that offers personalized learning experiences for students, powerful features for teachers (i.e. performance tasks, item banks, pre- and post-tests, fixed and adaptive assessment, targeted instructional materials, progress monitoring) and user-friendly reports for educators and administrators.

McGraw-Hill Education provides the assessment data Dr. Page needs to track student, class, grade and school progress and achievement — as well as predict future achievement. Reports are featured in easy-to-read formats and available online, which makes them easy for teachers to access and use. Many teachers share individualized reports with students, getting them more involved and engaged in their own learning.

The school started with the McGraw-Hill Education ELA assessment and instructional resource content, and later added fifth and sixth grade math. Today, they are using McGraw-Hill Education as their complete assessment system.

When asked to summarize the system’s impact on the school, Dr. Page said, “McGraw-Hill Education has enabled us to get better and better.” Case in point: The school increased its ELA scores on the state’s summative assessment from 40% Advanced and Proficient in 2014, to 62% in 2015, to 67% in 2016.
Step 3: Create a Balanced Assessment Ecosystem

The third step in the MHE Assessment Optimization Process is creating a balanced assessment ecosystem. An assessment ecosystem must be balanced in order for teachers and administrators to have a complete and accurate picture of how each student is progressing and where they are relative to state standards.

The figure below illustrates the concept of balanced assessment. As you can see, formative assessments occur frequently and the stakes are relatively low. Summative assessments, of course, occur infrequently and the stakes are high (particularly because their results carry consequences that affect all stakeholders in varying degrees).

Formative assessments include all short-cycle classroom activities that are used to measure learning and progress and provide evidence used to make instructional adjustments. They can be as simple as a teacher pausing instruction to do a quick check on students’ general understanding, or they can be more structured and planned, such as a daily quiz or weekly assessment. They may even be administered by the student in the form of a self-assessment.

Informal assessments include performance based activities, research and inquiry projects and other alternative forms of measuring student progress toward outcomes. They are content driven and used to learn about student learning styles and behaviors.

Regardless of the format, the purpose they serve is to uncover readiness and inform instruction.

Interim/benchmark assessments and universal screeners bridge the gap between lower-stakes formative and high-stakes summative assessments. These formal, research-based tests need to be detailed enough to inform instruction yet broad enough to provide achievement information at a macro level. Typically, they are used to assess student knowledge relative to predefined goals and indicate the breadth and depth of curricula covered at a given point in time. Additionally, they can help uncover or confirm a student’s need for intervention.

It is important that educators utilize all the various types of assessment to keep their assessment ecosystem balanced. As mentioned earlier, if the ecosystem is unbalanced, it cannot provide an accurate, complete view of students’ learning or needs, making it more difficult for all stakeholders to achieve success.

Lastly, as you build the assessment ecosystem, keep in mind the assessment goals you established in Step 1 of our process. No matter how balanced the ecosystem, it cannot be effective unless it supports the primary assessment goals of your school or district.

Step 4: Analyze Results & Use Them to Inform

The output from the balanced assessment ecosystem created in Step 3 is a mass of data. In Step 4, the loop is closed by transforming that data into meaningful insights and using them to inform next steps.

With an assessment system in the classroom, measuring results and using them to inform instructional next steps happens every time a student starts a lesson. The system continually assesses the student’s understanding of the material being presented and determines the readiness needed to move on. If the student demonstrates that additional support is necessary, the system recommends targeted content (e.g., video, interactive resource or teaching game) specifically designed to close the learning gap.
Some assessment systems offer comprehensive reporting functionality that makes it easy for teachers to gather results that inform instruction. Teachers can use the reports to determine how individual students are progressing relative to their personal learning goals within the state’s standards. They can also use them to discover specific information about class performance, such as how a group of students is performing year-over-year. Some teachers share assessment reports with individual students to get them more involved and engaged in their own learning, which can be very effective.

For administrators, being able to run reports at the student, class, grade, school and district levels provides layers of valuable information that informs decision-making. Reports can reveal current student progress toward state standards, predict future assessment results, and uncover academic areas where more resources may be needed. They can also be used to evaluate curricula by comparing grade to grade level, year-over-year.

Conclusion

Even in today’s climate of increasingly difficult state standards, student growth and achievement can be increased by optimizing assessment.

Based on years of experience, the MHE Assessment Optimization Process was developed to help school and district leaders maximize the benefits of assessment. It is executed in four practical steps:

1) Develop a shared vision for assessment.
2) Connect assessment with instruction.
3) Develop a balanced assessment ecosystem.
4) Analyze results and use them to inform.

Employing a modern assessment system, inclusive of quality assessment items and prebuilt forms like that available from McGraw-Hill Education, in conjunction with these steps, creates a solid foundation for improving student success and increasing summative scores.

Visit mheducation.com/prek-12 to learn more.

About McGraw-Hill Education

McGraw-Hill Education is a learning science company that delivers personalized learning experiences that help students, parents, educators, and professionals drive results. McGraw-Hill Education has offices across North America, India, China, Europe, the Middle East and South America, and makes its learning solutions available in nearly 60 languages. Visit us at mheducation.com.