

To succeed in standards-based school improvement we must be clear about what students need to know and be able to do, and we need to be skillful in how we teach. To be certain that students have learned what we intend for them to learn, we must develop balanced assessment systems that provide data on how students are progressing, and that also use the classroom assessment process to promote greater learning. What we teach, how we teach it, how well we assess, and how we use assessment to improve student achievement will all determine the success of our efforts, and ultimately, how we are judged.

Evidence suggests that the culture we create in our schools can positively influence student success. Collaborative cultures emphasizing teamwork and continuous learning and improvement are positioned to deliver the necessary professional support teachers need, support aimed at demonstrable results in student achievement. Research evidence continues to grow showing the difference effective school leaders can have on student learning. (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The role of the leader continues to be studied, with scholars and practitioners alike working to translate research into practice, describing what effective leadership looks and sounds like. The number of websites, books, articles, and conferences devoted to the subject of school leadership makes it clear that we are in yet another cycle of examination and study, looking at the topic with multiple lenses from a variety of angles. We may not yet be at the apex; Fullan (2004) predicts that leadership will be to this decade what standards-based reform was to the last.

This recent focus on the role and effectiveness of the school leader provides new understandings about the nature of leadership, and is in part influenced by thinking outside of education. Earlier contributions from business management (Covey, 1989; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1990) and from human psychology/motivation (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982) are now joined by current thinking and insight (Collins, 2001; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2003; Gladwell, 2000). All share a common foundation in that they describe principles and values by which leaders can live and work, principles more complex than simply following a checklist of behaviors or practices applied in isolation from a set of core beliefs.

Today's standards-based environment is a very different one from when the focus was on effective schools research, when instructional leadership and teacher supervision were the popular topics in principal training programs. Today, with school improvement taking on more urgency due to the federal accountability mandated in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the resulting need to raise test scores, improving leadership knowledge and skill is being leveraged as one more strategy directly aimed at raising student achievement.

The current reality for most school administrators is dominated by the implementation of state standards and the need to demonstrate improvement as measured through the AYP (adequate yearly progress) requirement of NCLB. We have written this guide from our belief that quality assessment in the classroom is the foundation for school improvement. It provides a structure through which you can refine your vision of excellence in assessment for your school or district, examine the skills and knowledge needed to support your vision, and develop an action plan to turn your vision into reality. By using this guide in study teams with other school administrators and teacher leaders, you can achieve a balanced, instructionally relevant local assessment system in which both classroom assessments *for* learning and standardized assessments *of* learning effectively serve their intended purposes. Both are important. Although we emphasize in this guide what leaders can do to take advantage of the power of assessment *for* learning to improve student achievement, we believe that all uses of assessment can and should help students learn, and therefore assessments *of* learning also contribute to a balanced assessment system. We will explore this distinction in depth later in this guide.

Beyond working at the systems level for achieving assessment balance and quality, this action guide also helps you as a school leader analyze your individual knowledge about assessment and prepares you to plan your own continuing learning about sound assessment practices. By completing the work presented in the accompanying activities and resources, you will develop your own assessment literacy. Your team will acquire the tools needed to set your staff on the path to assess accurately, to increase student motivation to learn, and to use assessment to improve learning. The key to completing that journey is sustained support of the collaborative learning process and school culture necessary to turn your vision into everyday reality in the classroom.

Table 1-1

**Comparing Assessment *of* and *for* Learning:
Overview of Key Differences**

	<i>Assessment for Learning</i>	<i>Assessment of Learning</i>
<i>Reasons for Assessing</i>	Promote increases in achievement to help students meet more standards; support ongoing student growth; improvement	Document individual or group achievement or mastery of standards; measure achievement status at a point in time for purposes of reporting; accountability
<i>Audience</i>	Students about themselves	Others about students
<i>Focus of Assessment</i>	Specific achievement targets selected by teachers that enable students to build toward standards	Achievement standards for which schools, teachers, and students are held accountable
<i>Place in Time</i>	Process during learning	Event after learning
<i>Primary Users</i>	Students, teachers, parents	Policy makers, program planners, supervisors, teachers, students, parents
<i>Typical Uses</i>	Provide students with insight to improve achievement; help teachers diagnose and respond to student needs; help parents see progress over time; help parents support learning	Certify competence or sort students according to achievement for public relations, gatekeeper decisions, grading, graduation, or advancement

	<i>Assessment for Learning</i>	<i>Assessment of Learning</i>
<i>Teacher's Role</i>	Transform standards into classroom targets; inform students of targets; build assessments; adjust instruction based on results; involve students in assessment	Administer the test carefully to ensure accuracy and comparability of results; use results to help students meet standards; interpret results for parents; teachers also build assessments for report card grading
<i>Student's Role</i>	Self-assess and contribute to setting goals; act on classroom assessment results to be able to do better next time	Study to meet standards; take the test; strive for the highest possible score; avoid failure
<i>Primary Motivator</i>	Belief that success in learning is achievable	Threat of punishment, promise of rewards
<i>Examples</i>	Using rubrics with students; student self-assessment; descriptive feedback to students	Achievement tests; final exams; placement tests, short cycle assessments

Source: Adapted from *Understanding School Assessment* (pp. 17 and 18), by J. Chappuis and S. Chappuis, 2002, Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute. Copyright 2006, 2002 by Educational Testing Service. Published in Australia by Hawker Brownlow Education. Adapted by permission.

3. The results of a state's assessment of high-priority content standards should be reported standard-by-standard for each student, school, and district.
4. A state must provide educators with optional classroom assessment procedures that can measure students' progress in attaining content standards not assessed by state tests.
5. A state must monitor the breadth of the curriculum to ensure that instructional attention is given to all content standards and subject areas, including those that are not assessed by state tests.
6. A state must ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of state standards; consequently, it must provide well-designed assessments appropriate for a broad range of students, with accommodations and alternate methods of assessment available for students who need them.
7. A state must generally allow test developers a minimum of three years to produce statewide tests that satisfy Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing and similar test-quality guidelines.
8. A state must ensure that educators receive professional development focused on how to optimize children's learning based on results of instructionally supportive assessments.
9. States should continually track progress to ensure that tests are
 - a) appropriate for the accountability purposes for which they are used,
 - b) appropriate for determining whether students have attained state standards, c) appropriate for enhancing teaching, and d) not the cause of negative consequence.