

Foreword

On the surface, it would appear that the most important assessments in schools are the annual standardized tests. They receive major attention in news reports, whether local, state, national, or international test scores. They command an investment of tens of millions of dollars annually as communities hold schools accountable for student learning. But the fact is that these politically important tests pale in their contribution to school success when compared to the assessments teachers develop, administer, and use day to day in the classroom. Given the decisions influenced by classroom assessments, it is not an overstatement to contend that a child's academic well-being hinges on the quality of these assessments and on the manner in which they are used.

In this parent and community guide to assessment in schools, Jan and Steve Chappuis explain why classroom assessment is so crucial to student well-being. They do so to explain the role of parents and the community in protecting that well-being. If classroom assessments are of inferior quality or are poorly used, students are placed directly in harm's way. The consequences for them and their learning can be painful and long lasting. But if classroom assessments are of high quality and are used well, students can soar to new heights of academic success. Again, Steve and Jan explain why.

Theirs are the voices of experience; they are uniquely qualified to address assessment issues in this context. They are parents raising a school-age daughter, as well as specialists in professional development in the field of educational assessment. Both have years of experience in addressing school and community concerns around educational issues such as assessment. Few others are able to blend the caring sensitivity of parents with technical expertise and a background in community relations to provide practical insights that help parents and community act in the best interest of students.

As you read, I recommend that you tune into three specific aspects of the Chappuis' presentation.

Chapter 1



Assessment in School Today

What Is Assessment and Why Is It Changing?

Everyone needs information to plan. Doctors need information about patients to plan treatments. Investors need information to help you invest your money. And educators need information about students' achievement to help them learn. *Assessment* is the process of collecting information. In our schools, it is the process of collecting evidence of student learning. That evidence may focus on individuals or groups of students, and it may come from one or more sources. Tests are the best-known tools for collecting that information. But tests are only one tool. Student oral presentations, projects, student interviews, writing samples, performance assessments, teacher observation, portfolios, and student self-assessment can all serve to collect accurate information about student learning.

Much about assessment in schools remains the same as it has always been: students study for tests, teachers calculate grades, and some students fare better than others. But much about assessment in schools is changing, too, in response to major shifts in thinking about education.

Table 1.4 Sample Decisions Made on the Basis of School Assessment Information—Outer Circle

SUPERINTENDENT	SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS	STATE DEPTS OF EDUCATION	CITIZENS & LEGISLATORS
<p>Are our programs of instruction producing results in terms of student learning?</p> <p>Is each building principal producing results?</p> <p>Which schools deserve or need more resources?</p>	<p>Are our students learning and succeeding?</p> <p>Is our superintendent producing results?</p>	<p>Are programs across the state producing results?</p> <p>Are individual school districts producing results?</p>	<p>Are our students achieving in ways that prepare them to become productive citizens?</p>

Source: Adapted from *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment*, 3rd ed. (p. 33) by Richard J. Stiggins, 2001, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill-Prentice Hall. Copyright © 2001 by Prentice-Hall, Inc. Adapted by permission.

Summative Assessment—Assessment of Learning

Summative assessment has as its main purpose to gather and report evidence of learning. It sums up the learning—it’s a status report. It can take the form of a test at the end of a course given by a classroom teacher, a college admissions test, or a state-mandated standardized test. All summarize student learning at the time of the assessment, and can help decision makers in certain ways. Much summative assessment is not intended to inform the classroom teacher about day-to-day instruction, or to help students become better learners. Rather, assessments *of* learning in the classroom most often are used to determine a grade. In some instances they are also used to help determine placement into specific instructional groupings, such as special education or gifted and talented programs. Summative assessments *of* learning can take the form of tests, quizzes, projects, performances, interviews, reports, oral presentations; in short, any method of assessment can be used summatively. Results can be reported in a number of ways:

- A letter grade (A, B, C, etc.)

Chapter 2



Connecting Student Motivation and Assessment

How Does Motivation Work?

How do you motivate kids to do things? Imagine you are trying to get your children to clean up their bedrooms. Some clean up their rooms because it's a habit, because it's the right thing to do, or because they like a tidy room. Some do it because their allowance or a privilege is dependent on a clean room. Others do it to avoid a negative consequence. And then there are those who will wait us out, hoping that we will get tired of asking, telling, pleading and finally go in and do it ourselves.

The motivational forces at work behind the scenes can be categorized as either intrinsic (internal) or extrinsic (external). When we are relying on *intrinsic* motivation to get something done, our children *want to* do the activity, either because they value the outcome (a clean room, for example), or because they enjoy the act of doing it (putting things away, finding long-lost treasures). If our children are not intrinsically motivated to accomplish the task, we rely on *extrinsic* motivation. In this case, our children *will* do the activity, either to get the reward they have earned (allowance, privilege), or to avoid the consequence of not doing it (no television, no Internet). And when neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation works, the task does not get done unless we do it for them.

Accurate Classroom Assessments

Teachers need to know how to choose and develop assessments that give an accurate picture of student achievement. How well does Sam write? Has Kelsey learned the specific maths skills desired? This is called *assessment literacy*. As you will remember from Chapter 1, we define assessment literacy as the ability to provide accurate information about a student's learning, in ways that encourage the learner to keep learning. Black and Wiliam's (1998) findings show that educators need the opportunity to learn how to write or select good assessments, and then how to use assessments as teaching tools. We discuss ensuring assessment accuracy in Chapter 4.

Descriptive Feedback

Think about the kinds of feedback students often get about their learning: a letter grade, a percentage, a tick, a smiley face, the words “good job” or “needs work”. Many times there is no accompanying explanation of what features of the work earned the evaluation. This is what Black and Wiliam (1998) refer to as *evaluative feedback*. It can have a valid use in learning—to sum up learning over time, but it does not function as a tool to increase learning. In some cases, evaluative feedback reduces motivation and inhibits further achievement.

The researchers found, however, that *descriptive feedback*—specific comments about the quality or characteristics of the work itself—has a positive impact on motivation and learning. Descriptive feedback can point out strengths or weaknesses. It offers specific information to students about the quality of the work they have done, helping them understand what they are doing right and what they can do to improve. Descriptive feedback on a writing assignment might look like this: “Your use of vivid details when you explained the frog race made it seem real”; “The sentence structure of this paper gives it a sense of rhythm and flow”; or, “You have allowed run-on sentences to creep into your writing.”

To understand the different effects evaluative and descriptive feedback can have on a child, think about a Year 4 child who gets back a maths paper with a “-7” and an “N” (for Needs work) at the top. When asked what this means, she says, “I’m not good at maths”. Looking more closely at the paper, you notice that several problems test her ability to subtract numbers requiring “borrowing”, several problems relate to geometric shapes, several problems test place value, several problems ask that she write fractions for the shaded part