

A Comprehensive Study to Review Current Assessments in the Roseland School District

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A comprehensive study was undertaken to review current assessments being used in the Roseland School District. This study included a review of current assessments (MAP, CTP, KidBiz, Sages, IRI, Common Writing assessments, PARCC) and how they were being used to improve student achievement. Further, assessments in the other sending districts were reviewed to assess compatibility.

Today's students need to know not only basic reading and math skills, but also skills necessary in order to be prepared for their future, often referred to as 21st century learning skills. Students need to be able to think critically, communicate, collaborate, and problem solve. Assessment is a fundamental part of instruction, as it determines whether or not the goals of education are being met. It affects decisions about instructional needs, advancement, grades, and placement. The main purpose of assessment is to improve student achievement by gathering evidence of learning for a variety of different audiences.

Assessment for learning is an ongoing process that arises out of the interaction between teaching and learning. What makes assessment for learning effective is how well the information is used. We want students and teachers to use information gained from assessments to help determine the best strategies to meet individual learning goals. Assessments provide opportunities for families to be kept informed of the next plans for learning and the progress being made, and school leaders can use the information for school-wide planning, to support their teachers and determine professional development needs. Additionally, Boards of Education use assessment information to assist their governance role and their decisions about staffing and resourcing.

Completing almost a full year as Superintendent in the Roseland School District, I have been able to review Roseland's current assessments, and how they are being used to improve student achievement. My first recommendation is to shift the philosophy about assessments so teachers understand that assessments are used to drive instructional decisions. As we shift this mindset, teachers will

ensure that students are learning, and will use data to determine what to do to help students reach their full potential. To teach effectively, teachers need to know if their teaching methods are working and how well their students are learning. By assessing the individual student, and the class as a whole, a teacher can evaluate if the presentation of the material has been successful.

My second recommendation is to put structures in place so that teachers have an opportunity to collect and analyze data. We need to provide opportunities for teachers to come together collegially in professional learning communities. “The Professional Learning Community (PLC) model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn.” (DuFour, 2004)

PLC's engage each member of the organization in an ongoing cycle of:

- Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning
- Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implementing those strategies and ideas
- Analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Applying new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

How we begin to use data to improve performance is essential. Whatever test, benchmark or assessment we use; the question must be what are we going to do with the information? How will it help to improve instruction? Working with teachers to actually use the data to improve performance will help children learn well. The researchers found that strengthening formative assessments can raise student achievement. Creating and using effective classroom assessments require skill and practice. All assessments should be tied to a curriculum based on state academic content standards.

My third recommendation is to involve students in the assessment process. “Research suggests classroom learning may be directly proportional to student involvement.” (<http://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/three-tips-for-quality-assessment-in-elementary-school/>) Students at the elementary level need to have a concrete, measurable way to follow their own progress. Involving the learner is at the heart of promoting learning, and learners can be involved in assessments in several ways. Students can be provided with rubrics or checklists that clearly explain the standard against which their work will be evaluated. They can be provided with high-level instructional feedback that is timely, useful and appropriate. “Useful feedback,” says author Thomas Guskey

(2005) “is both diagnostic and prescriptive. It reinforces precisely what students were expected to learn, identifies what was learned well, and describes what needs to be learned better.”

[\(http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Using_Classroom/\)](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Using_Classroom/)

The chart below represents the assessments that have been used in the Roseland School District.

Grade	Assessment	Date	Purpose	Recommendations	Rationale
Kindergarten-Sixth	IRI	Implemented in 2013	Determines how students read and comprehend	Replace with Teacher's College Reading Assessment	Outdated from 1997 there are only 2-3 levels per grade and comprehension questions are not aligned to common core standards. They do not promote higher level thinking skills
Kindergarten-Sixth	Teacher's College Reading Assessment	Implemented Jan. 2015 and on-going	Determines how students read and comprehend and assigns Fontas & Pinnel reading levels	Continue with Teachers' College Assessment	Matches students' reading levels to appropriate texts, and helps teachers target instruction for independent and guided reading groups.
Second-Sixth	Achieve 3000 KidBiz	Sept. 2014 and on-going	Assigns Lexile Reading Level	Continue	Matches non-fiction articles to students' reading level
Second-Fifth *West Essex administers 6 th grades in all sending districts	MAP	Administered Fall and Spring	Measures student progress and growth in math and reading	Discontinue for grades 3-5	PARCC provides information for students in grades 3-5. 2 nd grade students will have an opportunity to practice taking an online assessment. It will also give us information about students' strengths and weaknesses

Grade	Assessment	Date	Purpose	Recommendations	Rationale
Second-Fifth	CTP	Spring, 2014	G&T	Discontinue	Used for G&T but does not actually measure cognitive abilities
Kindergarten-Second	SAGES	October, 2014	G&T	Discontinue	Difficult to administer for kindergarten assessment
Third-Sixth	PARCC	March, May	Measures whether students are on track to be successful in college and their careers	Continue	State Mandated
Second-Sixth	Insight Test of Cognitive Ability	Fall, 2015	Measures cognitive ability	Implement in Sept. 2015	Measures cognitive ability. Gives information for G&T and RTI
Kindergarten-Sixth	Qualitative Spelling Inventory	Fall, 2015 and ongoing	Learn about students' word development	Implement in Sept. 2015	Gives information on each student's spelling stage and provides opportunities to differentiate spelling instruction
Kindergarten-Sixth	Unit assessments	Ongoing	Determines students' mastery of information	Continue	To inform teachers about instruction and to identify students' strengths and weaknesses

The chart below is a review of assessments being used in all four sending districts:

Assessment	District
PARCC	All sending districts
Running Records	All sending districts
Achieve 3000, Kid Biz	All sending districts
MAP	Essex Fells, North Caldwell
Study Island	Essex Fells, North Caldwell
WAWA	Essex Fells

Currently, the placement criteria for incoming seventh graders in West Essex Middle School are NJASK 5 and MAP 6. With the elimination of the NJASK and the possible inconsistencies with PARCC results due to test refusals, West Essex Middle School is looking at alternatives for the 2016-2017 school year.

In summary, providing quality assessments are an integral part of instruction and inspire us to ask hard questions: “Are we teaching what we think we are teaching?” “Are students learning what they are supposed to be learning?” “Is there a way to teach the subject better, thereby promoting better learning?” Effective assessments provide students feedback on how well they understand the information and on what needs improvement, while helping teachers design better instruction. Assessment becomes even more relevant when students become involved in their own assessments. “The shift in consciousness from assessment data as an organizational hammer to its use as a tool in strategic planning is slow but critical if we in school are to truly develop learning organizations.” (Hearne, 2012) Assessments are about helping everyone to be more successful in his or her role within the education system.

Work Sited

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