> **"Assessment is today's means of modifying tomorrow's instruction."**
>
> – Carol Ann Tomlinson (2014)

A comprehensive system of literacy assessments allows educators to better understand where students are with respect to the English language arts CCSS. Data gathered from high-quality literacy assessments help educators determine students' entry points as well as whether they have met goals, achieved growth and/or need support in specific areas. In this way, assessments are essential educational tools that help answer the question, "Did students learn what was taught?" thus bridging instructional intent with its impact on student learning. Utilizing data on student performance to inform instruction is an essential component of high-quality reading instruction (United States Department of Education, 2017). These critical data points help schools implement effective interventions, supports, and enrichment opportunities that improve student literacy outcomes and align to Literacy Guiding Principle 2.

ASSESSMENT PURPOSES

- *Promote Student Achievement by Informing Instruction:* Analyzing assessment data allows educators to understand students' strengths and needs in order to adjust instruction and inform policy making decisions. The goals of assessment can be broken down in two ways: assessment for learning and assessment of learning.

  - Assessments for learning are used as a part of an ongoing instructional cycle to promote student achievement through a data-driven pedagogical approach.

  - Assessments of learning provide a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of instruction.

- *Understand Opportunity Gaps:* Data gathered from assessments can be disaggregated to understand differences in educational outcomes for subgroups of students. This information is essential in informing equitable instructional practices and policy decisions.

- *Ensure Accountability:* Data gathered from assessment shine a light on student performance. Assessment results are reported to stakeholders and the broader community to increase transparency and ensure educational institutions are supporting positive student outcomes.

- *Evaluate Programming:* Assessments provide information used to determine the success of programs (e.g., curricula, instructional practices, etc.) and inform improvements needed to ensure those programs meet their intended goals.
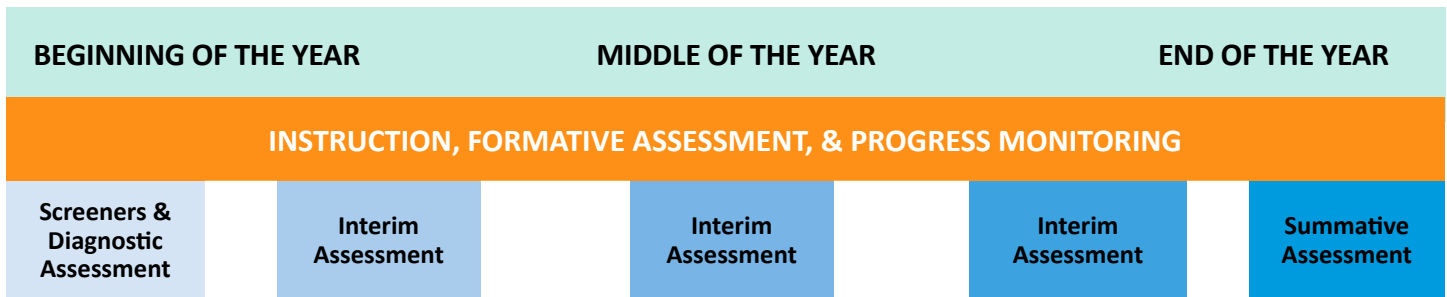
Figure 1. Assessment as part of a learning system (Center for Assessment, 2020).

Assessment is one part of a larger learning system and is aligned to content standards, instructional practices and curricula.
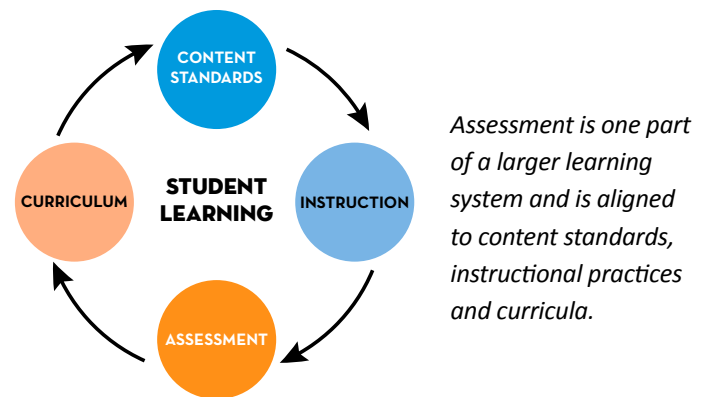
Building A Comprehensive Assessment System for Literacy

Building a comprehensive literacy assessment system (Literacy, Guiding Principle 2) starts with identifying the purposes for assessing students. Ideally, there would be a balance of assessments *for* learning and assessments *of* learning. A strong assessment system will have a combination of formative tools that drive instruction and summative tools that provide valid, reliable and comparable measures of performance and growth. LEAs may want to consider Achieve's Student Assessment Inventory, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) reading assessment database, or another resource to take stock of their assessment use and strategy.

While gathering data through a system of assessments is a critical part of the authentic instructional cycle, it is important to note that no single assessment serves all purposes - including screening, diagnosing, setting benchmarks, monitoring progress and providing a comparable measure of achievement. Strong comprehensive literacy plans (CLPs) gather data from a variety of assessment sources in order to take an intentional and systematic approach to meeting the needs of all learners. Strong instruction and aligned assessments ensure that schools support all students, including but not limited to students with disabilities, English learners, English learners with disabilities, students who experience opportunity gaps, students who face socioeconomic inequities, and students who may benefit from additional strategic academic support. Only when educators have data to see and understand differences in instructional outcomes can schools work to close opportunity gaps and create more equitable learning experiences for all students. Below is a sample assessment timeline and details on different assessment types to consider when building a comprehensive assessment system.

BEGINNING OF THE YEAR	MIDDLE OF THE YEAR	END OF THE YEAR

INSTRUCTION, FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT, & PROGRESS MONITORING

Screeners & Diagnostic Assessment	Interim Assessment	Interim Assessment	Interim Assessment	Summative Assessment

ASSESSMENT TYPES

- **Diagnostic Assessment:** Diagnostic assessments are administered at the beginning of a course, grade, semester or unit to get a baseline of student performance. While often administered at the beginning of instruction, diagnostic assessments may be administered multiple times in order to determine students' academic strengths and needs. Diagnostic assessment can be classroom created (e.g., teacher and/or school curated rubrics, checklists), provided by curricula, and/or used at the district level.

- **Screeners:** Screeners are brief assessments used over a year to help determine students' needs and plan for additional academic support in specific areas (e.g., English proficiency or learning differences). Screeners can support students' literacy development by alerting educators of students who need additional instructional support. The National Center on Intensive Intervention has an [Academic Screening Tools Chart](#) that schools can explore for screener assessment examples.

- **Formative Assessment:** Formative assessments are used by educators as a part of the instructional cycle to improve teaching and learning. These assessments are used frequently (daily, weekly) during regular classroom instruction to measure students' progress and achievement of intended instructional outcomes. The data collected from formative assessments support intentional instructional decision-making such as adjusting groupings, instructional delivery methods, the scope and sequence, and other instructional decisions that promote learning. Formative assessments are often designed by teachers, districts/networks, and/or curriculum writers. Formative assessments also provide educators with the opportunity to test knowledge and skills that are difficult to assess using other assessment types (e.g., speaking and listening, research projects, authentic writing, etc.).

- **Progress Monitoring:** Progress monitoring is a specific type of formative assessment in that it is used to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and give insight into student performance. Often, the term "progress monitoring" is used when a teacher is providing specific instructional interventions to support individual students to track their progress in focus areas. This is a key component of a MTSS, which is a preventative, data-driven continuum of evidence-based practices designed to meet the academic, behavioral and social emotional needs of all students. Decision-making regarding instruction and intervention tiers is made based on data obtained through universal screening and regular progress monitoring.

- **Interim or Benchmark Assessment:** Interim or benchmark assessments are administered periodically (three to nine times per academic year) throughout a course or grade to measure student achievement and growth related to a specific set of goals or standards. Interim or benchmark assessments may be aligned to or predictive of summative assessments. Interim or benchmark assessments can be used by educators to inform instructional decisions (e.g., reteach specific knowledge/ skills, identify students in need of additional support) and by schools/districts/networks to track progress toward goals on summative assessments.

- **Summative Assessment:** Summative assessments are administered near the end of the academic year to determine overall achievement and growth for a course or grade. These assessments measure students' performance against the standards and a set of learning targets for that period. Summative assessments inform educator and policy-maker decisions at the classroom, school, district and state levels because they provide a standardized set of data to make comparisons across groups and over time. They also provide students, caregivers and other stakeholders an overview of yearly performance.

- **Multilingual Program Assessments:** Formative and summative assessments are key components of dual language programs delivering instruction to English learners and emergent bilingual students. Research-based practices recommend assessing literacy skills in both languages of instruction to better understand students' trajectories toward biliteracy. The coexistence of two or more languages in children cannot be measured or understood as independently constrained by each language. Highly effective dual language programs use summative and formative assessments in two languages (e.g., English and Spanish), as evidence of success in bilingual and biliteracy programming. The assessments of multilingual competence promote the use of multilingual practices such as language choice, translanguaging, code switching and code mixing. For more guidance and information, see the [Multilingual and English Learner section](#) of the CLP.

THE DISTRICT'S SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The District of Columbia administers annual statewide summative assessments of English language arts and literacy in grades 3-8 and high school. Since the 2014-15 school year, the District has administered the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments and the Multi-State Alternate Assessments (MSAA) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These assessments are designed to provide a valid, reliable and comparable measure of student performance and growth on the reading and literacy CCSS. This assessment currently provides the *only* way to look at student academic performance across schools, LEAs, the state and different groups of students. While the primary purpose of these assessments is to inform programmatic change and policy decisions, student results should also be used in concert with formative tools to support school- and LEA-based decisions.

The District also requires an annual assessment of English language proficiency for English learners in grades K-12. These assessments are the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 and Alternate ACCESS for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These assessments are designed to measure the WIDA English Language Development Standards across four different domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and are used to set the District's exit criteria for English learners. Additional information on the District's summative assessments can be found on OSSE's State Assessments website.

Using Assessment Data: Cycle of Improvement

Using assessment data to drive positive learning outcomes is a cyclical part of instructional design that allows teachers and school leaders to be intentional and equitable in their literacy practices. Educators and policy makers at all levels must develop their assessment literacy skills and ensure that a robust set of data is collected to fully understand student performance. An overview of these best practices is outlined below. To learn more about assessment literacy, schools may consider engaging in the Center for Assessment's Classroom Assessment Learning Modules (2020) for teachers as well as school, network or district leaders.

Cyclical Design Process

- Plan: Whether planning for a year, unit, or lesson, it is important that practitioners consider the sources of data they will draw upon to measure learning outcomes. Draw inferences from the assessment data collected and use those inferences to make decisions to plan future instruction.

- Implement: Throughout instruction, implement assessments that align to learning.

- Collect & Analyze: After instruction, take time to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative assessment data whether from formative, interim, or summative assessments. Use these data to take instructional actions that drive positive learning outcomes for students.

Recommendations provided by the US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (2009) on how to use data to support instructional decision making include:

1	2	3	4	5
Make data collection and analysis part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement	Teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals	Teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals	Provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school	Develop and maintain a districtwide data system

DATA DRIVEN INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES	
Educator Data-Driven Instructional Practices	• strategically adjusting instructional time (e.g., planning more time to address student needs, inform scheduling, etc.) • identifying individual students or small groups of students who need targeted support • revising the scope and sequence to prioritize standards, knowledge and/or skills • evaluating the effectiveness of lessons and/or curricula used • tailoring instructional methods based on its effectiveness • reflecting on student-, class-, school-, and system-level strengths and needs • connecting students with supports and services they may need • improving vertical integration of curricula across grade levels • providing timely, appropriately formatted/accessible, specific and constructive feedback • informing families and caregivers of students' progress

Grade, School, LEA, District, or State Data Meeting Practices	• tracking progress toward goals at the classroom, grade, district, or state level
	• setting a vision for student mastery/generating assessment exemplars
	• training staff on how data can be used to adjust instruction during lessons, inform planning practices, create strategic student groups, adjust instructional time, etc.
	• providing staff support with collecting and interpreting data collected (e.g., data reports)
	• connecting staff with resources to support students who have not yet mastered content
	• intentionally planning data meeting times, frequencies and topics through:
	  • Preparation. Prior to these meetings, educators should set an agenda that focuses on using the most updated data relative to a specific, timely topic. It is too overwhelming to attempt to address all student achievement concerns at once; targeted discussions are key to successful data meetings.
	  • Analysis. During these meetings, teachers should follow the cycle of inquiry, using data to state hypotheses about their teaching and learning practices and then testing those hypotheses.
	  • Action agenda. At the end of each meeting, educators should be prepared to enact a data-based action plan that examines and modifies their instruction to increase student achievement in the area of focus for the meeting.

Data Driven Instructional Practices (United States Department of Education, 2009)

ASSESSMENT QUALITY & EQUITY

When designing and evaluating assessments used as a part of a comprehensive literacy plan (CLP), it is important to consider the quality of those assessments. Assessments should be designed to be accessible to all students and with Universal Design for Assessment Principles (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2016) in mind. Considerations for evaluating assessment quality found in the Appendix H are adapted from the Center for Assessment's (2020) report. Assessments at all levels (e.g., formative, interim, etc.) should align to these key aspects of assessment quality.

Adhering to these aspects of assessment quality not only leads to effective assessment, but also helps ensure that assessments are equitable. Equitable assessments are accessible, fair, have accurate measurements, and lead to valid interpretations. When designing or evaluating assessments, schools must consider the language, abilities and backgrounds of students. For assessments to be equitable for all students, accessibility features and accommodations must be available to students who need them and the test must reflect students' lived experiences.

Assessments provide an objective tool for understanding the current state of learning so that educators can support learners and promote literacy. A CLP includes a system of balanced assessments where data collected from a variety of assessment types is used intentionally to drive instruction. By creating a comprehensive system of literacy assessment, schools ensure that educators are equipped with the tools and systems that can drive positive literacy outcomes as outlined in Literacy Guiding Principles 1 and 2.

For more information on Assessment and Progress Monitoring, see:

• Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Literacy
• Multilingual and English Learners
• Professional Learning and Educator Development
• The Assessment and Progress Monitoring Appendix H