

PATHWAY EIGHT: ASSESSING PROGRESS AND ASSURING QUALITY

Ready Schools incorporate ongoing assessment and monitoring of quality as key components in their reform efforts. The school systematically uses both formal and informal assessments to plan and tailor instruction to address individual student needs, to improve classroom practices and instruction, and to improve outcomes for all children. The school develops a data-driven written improvement plan that includes strategies for maintaining its mission and goals over time and monitors progress toward them. Ensure that space, time, tools, and resources are purposely designed to support all school personnel's capacity to work effectively with children.

The journey begins with assessment literacy, which means understanding sound assessment principles, such as:

- ▶ Understanding different types of assessments, their purposes, and users;
- ▶ Choosing appropriate assessment methods for designated learning goals and age groups;
- ▶ Examining assessments for cultural and language relevance; and
- ▶ Using assessment to engage and motivate students.



Key Understandings

Assessing progress on school improvement efforts begins with high-quality goals for achievement and student outcomes in all domains of learning and development. Using a broad base of data or information to inform progress on those goals is essential. Some general principles frame this work:

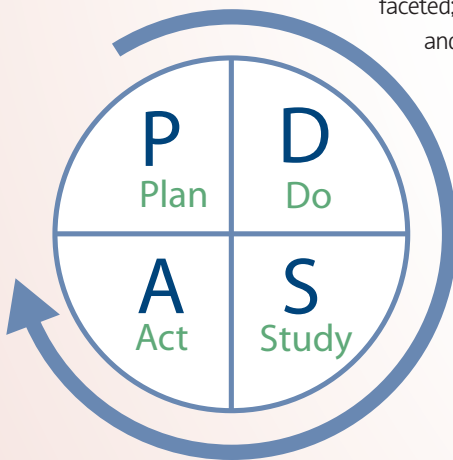
- ▶ Schools and districts should align high-quality and comprehensive standards, curriculum, and assessments on a continuum from PreK through 3rd grade or beyond.
- ▶ All formal assessments should be valid and reliable, and meet high testing standards.
- ▶ Use assessments for the purpose for which they were intended. No one assessment can meet all educational purposes.
- ▶ More than one source of data/information should be used in making decisions about individual children.
- ▶ Data on assessments of children should not be reported without data on the programs that serve them.
- ▶ Schools and districts should work toward comprehensive data systems to inform their progress on high quality goals for all students. Data systems should include formative, benchmarking, and summative assessments.
 - » Development of local benchmarking data for students' progress should be consistent across the school and the district.
 - » Reports should highlight attributes of classroom quality, instructional practices, and teacher-child interactions that are most highly correlated with promoting children's learning and development.

Research shows that appropriately used assessments have great influence on teaching and learning. Information gleaned from them can motivate students and improve instruction when they are multi-faceted; involve immediate feedback; provide for self-reflection; show when students are successful; and indicate how improvements can be made.

Therefore, reliance on End-of-Grade or other summative tests, designed primarily for accountability purposes, cannot be the primary source for assessing ongoing progress during the school year.

Assessment and monitoring quality is integrally intertwined with the school improvement process that includes "Plan, Do, Study (or Check), Act." This model is the basis for the North Carolina School Improvement Guide.

Knowing where you are as a system is equally as important as knowing where students are in the education progress. We should hold high standards for students as well as high standards for our teachers, schools, and systems. Assessment in its broadest form should inform our practice and indicate how we can improve to ensure the success of students.



The Shewhart Cycle - The Deming Wheel

Graphic from saferpak.com/pdsa.htm



Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

In addition to the questions in the High/Scope Ready Schools Assessment, referred to in the Steps to Success for a School-Based Team section, we encourage teams to explore additional questions to help evaluate how well your school addresses this pathway, including:

- ▶ Are we using an appropriate combination of formative (classroom and instruction embedded), benchmarking (periodic common assessments), and summative assessments to measure both student progress and instructional strategies and programs? Where do we need to improve?
- ▶ Are we using a broad base of data/information to help inform our status, progress, and attainment of goals? For example: parent surveys, attendance data, retention data, special education placement trends, discipline referrals, etc.?
- ▶ Do professional learning community teams analyze data to promote understanding of their teaching and their student's learning?

The NC Department of Public Instruction encourages use of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for all schools as part of its comprehensive School Improvement Process. This assessment links to the areas addressed by the High/Scope tool, but provides a broader focus than just PreK to 3rd grade. Combining the use of these two instruments will provide a comprehensive review for the Ready School.



Ready Schools in Action: Iredell-Statesville Schools Recognized for Data Driven Continuous Improvement Approach

The Iredell-Statesville School System (ISS) was the only educational organization in the United States to receive a visit from the Baldrige National Quality Program in 2008 – a comprehensive data driven, continuous improvement approach. They were recognized as among the top six percent of all Baldrige applicants nationally, including those from health care, business, and other areas.

ISS has moved from the bottom quartile in the state to the top quartile on most measures and is among the top 10 districts on selected indicators (attendance, writing achievement, academic growth, and energy efficiency). The Continuous Improvement Approach that ISS uses to guide efforts to raise achievement and close gaps is founded on 5 key questions:

1. What do students need to learn?
2. How will they learn it?
3. How will we know if they've learned it?
4. What will we do if they don't learn it?
5. What will we do if they already know it?



Taking Action

Conducting a Data Inventory

A data inventory provides a summary of data that are available in your school. It helps you review what data you have available, how it is used and organized, and how it might be used more effectively. Both "External Assessments" (those required beyond the individual school) and "Internal Assessments" (those created by and used specifically by the individual school) are important to include. *Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning* (Boudett & Moody, 2008) provides a description of how to conduct an inventory using Clark Elementary, a K-8 School, as an example. Headers for the inventory are shown here for illustrative purposes (Figure I).

Figure I - Data Inventory

Clark K-8 School Data Inventory: External Assessment						
Data Source	Content Area	Date of Collection	Students (grades) Assessed	Accessibility (by whom)	Current Data Use	More Effective Use

Sources of external data identified by the Clark School team included (these will be specific to an individual school):

- ▶ State Skill Mastery Assessment,
- ▶ Observation Survey (Reading),
- ▶ Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA),
- ▶ Stanford 9,
- ▶ English Proficiency Assessments, and
- ▶ District Math Assessment.

The internal data inventory showed the following types of data available:

- ▶ Reading Checklists (Reading),
- ▶ Running Records (Reading),
- ▶ Writing Samples (Writing), and
- ▶ Unit Assessments (Math).

A data team – a small group of people who are responsible for the technical and organizational aspects of data work – can help with the potential barrier of time. The school might choose staff that are interested in this work, have the inclination or skills for it, and are willing to "dig" into the data.

Common Assessments and Other Data

Other student level data and information is also important. The school may develop common (benchmark) assessments within or across grades for various subject areas to better monitor student progress, intervene by groups of students, and determine which teachers are handling certain objectives best. Retention rates by grade level and type of student (and maybe even teacher) are important to know. More effective instructional strategies are key to reducing retention rates. Absenteeism, discipline data, numbers, and types of parent involvement, special education referrals and placements, and other pertinent data may be identified to help further school improvement work.

Displaying data to tell a clear story is important. Templates for each student, class, and grade level may be helpful. Disaggregating data by multiple groups is important to determine needs for diverse learners. While the state requires specific student categories for disaggregated state testing data, these may or may not be sufficient to fully understand student learning.

Conducting an Instructional Inventory as Part of Assessment

An inventory of instructional initiatives will help acknowledge what is already happening before moving on to new school improvement strategies. Initiatives are programs the school has put in place to meet a variety of needs. They may target special student groups or the whole school. They may or may not be used as intended or effectively (i.e., with fidelity). That is part of the discussion that can proceed once the inventory is complete. An example from Boudett, City, and Murnane (2008) is provided for illustrative purposes, showing the data for one instructional initiative (Figure II).

Figure II - Inventory of Instructional Initiatives

Franklin High School Inventory of Instructional Initiatives					
Name of Instructional Initiative	Intended to be Implemented by	Percent of the Relevant Teachers who are Implementing 1= all (100%) 2= Most (+75%) 3=some (25-75%) 4=few (-25%)	Among Implementing Faculty, Extent of Implementation 4=Completely 3=Mostly 2=Partially 1=Just Beginning	Evidence of Implementation	Other Evidence that Would be Helpful to Collect
Collaborative coaching and classroom visits	All Teachers	3	4	Conversations with instructional coaches	Survey of teachers; classroom visits

Elementary schools may find different types of programs or initiatives based on grade level, as well as individual school needs. Some state-level elementary school initiatives in North Carolina include: Response to Intervention, Positive Behavior Support, Power of K (Kindergarten), and professional learning communities, as well as specific curriculum and instructional programs.

