The Teaching and Learning Communique

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Rethinking Assessment:
Key Considerations for the Future

When it comes to formative assessment or assessment for learning, however, things look different. To check students' understanding, 76% of educators delivered formative assessments during remote learning. Though formative assessments have proven instrumental in addressing learning gaps related to school closures, the need for accountability testing has not gone away.

At its core, accountability testing exists to ensure every student receives a high-quality education. However, its standardized approach has made it difficult for teachers to quickly address learning needs and adjust instruction to improve student outcomes. As schools and districts prepare for the future of assessment, there are a few considerations to keep in mind.

Assessments Should be Part of the Learning Process

For years, summative assessments have been disruptive to the learning process. Students, teachers, and administrators alike feel the pressure to prepare students to perform in a high-stakes assessment environment. End-of-year assessments place a heavy burden on teachers to prepare students for the length and duration of these assessments, which can take away from the work they are doing every day to gauge standards mastery and personalize learning. These challenges have led a few states to begin to explore innovative assessment models that enable teachers to use shorter, standards-based assessments throughout the academic year to gauge student mastery with the same rigor as summative assessments. This fundamental shift allows teachers to maintain a line of sight into what students know and don't know throughout the year and relieves the pressure of predicting performance.

Assessments Must be Valid & Reliable

To ensure assessments are valid (accurate) and reliable (consistent) assessment items must be tightly aligned to a set of standards so educators get the information they need to best determine which students need additional support and which standards need reteaching.

Because you must assess learning needs before you can address learning loss.

Though innovative assessment models support this approach, building quality properly-aligned assessments is still challenging and time-consuming. For teachers to fully embrace this new model, they need access to prebuilt formatives that complement the classroom assessments they are already creating. With the support of expertly developed, psychometrically sound assessments, teachers can then use the assessments they create from their own content or item banks to verify the impact of their instruction.

Assessment Data Should be Actionable

Remote and hybrid learning has reduced instructional time, disrupted many students' academic progress, and left teachers with few sources of high-quality assessment data to identify learning needs and drive personalized learning plans. Traditional summative assessments will only further disrupt learning and won't provide teachers with the timely data they need to address the learning that was lost or unfinished during school closures. Moving forward, teachers need to receive immediate, meaningful feedback about student mastery in an intuitive, visual way so they can adjust instruction in the moment and design targeted interventions.

My data philosophy is simple; It's not enough to simply "collect" student assessment data. It must be used responsibly to directly benefit students and improve their learning experiences. As educators continue to keep the learning going, I will continue to support the work they are doing to make leveraging data to inform instructional next steps not only possible but simpler and more effective than ever before.