

## ANALYSIS OF A BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

**Rick Stiggins**  
ETS Assessment Training Institute  
317 SW Alder St., Suite 1200  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
[www.ets.org/ati](http://www.ets.org/ati)

Assessment is, in part, the process of gathering evidence of student learning to inform instructional decisions. Local district assessment systems serve to promote student success when they inform all of those decisions that support and that verify learning; that is, when the system serves both *formative* and *summative* purposes across all relevant levels of assessment use.

Those levels of use include *classroom* assessment, *interim benchmark* assessment, and annual *accountability* testing. The attached table crosses these three contexts with formative and summative applications to define the overall mission of a balanced system in terms of the full array of purposes it must serve. Those specific purposes are framed in the form answers to each of the following four questions within each use context:

- What *key decisions* are to be informed by assessment results?
- Who are the *decision makers*?
- What information do they need to make sound decisions?
- What essential *assessment conditions* must be satisfied to assure a productive decision?

In a truly productive balanced assessment system, those essential conditions are always satisfied permitting quality evidence to flow into the hands of the proper decision maker who is ready to make the right instructional decisions.

Level of Assessment/Key Issues	Formative Applications	Summative Applications
<p><b>Classroom assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key decision(s) to be informed?</li> <li>○ Who is the decision maker?</li> <li>○ What information do they need?</li> <li>○ What are the essential assessment conditions?</li> </ul>	<p>What comes next in the student's learning?</p> <p>Students and teachers</p> <p>Evidence of where the student is now on learning continuum toward each standard?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear curriculum maps per standard</li> <li>• Accurate assessment results</li> <li>• Descriptive feedback</li> <li>• Results point student and teacher clearly to next steps</li> </ul>	<p>What standards has each student mastered? What grade does each student receive?</p> <p>Teacher</p> <p>Evidence of each student's mastery of each relevant standard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and appropriate standards</li> <li>• Accurate evidence</li> <li>• Focus on achievement only</li> <li>• Evidence well summarized</li> <li>• Grading symbols that carry clear and consistent meaning for all</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interim/benchmark assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key decision to be informed?</li> <li>○ Who is the decision maker?</li> <li>○ What information do they need?</li> <li>○ What are the essential conditions?</li> </ul>	<p>Which standards are our students not mastering? Where can we improve instruction right away? Which students need specific help?</p> <p>Instructional leaders; Learning teams; Teachers</p> <p>Standards students are struggling to master</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and appropriate standards</li> <li>• Accurate assessment results</li> <li>• Results reveal how each student did in mastering each standard</li> </ul>	<p>Did the program of instruction deliver as promised? Should we continue to use it?</p> <p>Instructional leaders</p> <p>Evidence of mastery of particular standards</p> <p>Accurate assessments of mastery of program standards aggregated over students</p>

<p><i>Annual accountability testing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Key decision(s) to be informed?</i></li> <li>○ <i>Who is the decision maker?</i></li> <li>○ <i>What information do they need?</i></li> <li>○ <i>What are the essential assessment conditions?</i></li> </ul>	<p>What standards are our standards not mastering? Where and how can we improve instruction next year?</p> <p>Curriculum &amp; instructional leaders</p> <p>Standards students are struggling to master</p> <p>Accurate evidence of how each student did in mastering each standard aggregated over students</p>	<p>Are enough students meeting standards?</p> <p>School and community leaders</p> <p>Percent of students meeting each standard</p> <p>Accurate evidence of how each student did in mastering each standard aggregated over students</p>
--	--	---