

How to Use Diagnostic Assessments to Advance Student Learning

Formative

Interim

Summative

When assessment results from interims or other summative assessments indicate that a student or group of students is not making expected progress, the use of a diagnostic assessment can help pinpoint where intervention will do the most good. Diagnostic assessments are evidence-gathering procedures that measure students' specific skills, needs, and/or assets to provide teachers with immediate, actionable, and specific information to support and progress learning for individual students.

It is critical that diagnostic assessments be used judiciously and with purpose in mind. Marianne Perie and other experts suggest that educational leaders answer these questions before choosing any assessment, and in particular, a diagnostic assessment.

1. What will be learned about a student or group of students from the diagnostic assessment?

The purpose of diagnostic assessment is to provide a clear indication about the student's understanding of specific content and their acquisition of skills, including any misconceptions and gaps in knowledge.

2. Who will use the information obtained from the diagnostic assessment?

Diagnostic assessments can be used by educators to determine which learning targets a student has or has not mastered, so appropriate actions can be planned.

3. What action steps will be taken as a result of the diagnostic assessment?

Diagnostic assessments inform about which supports are appropriate for an individual student's needs, as well as what instructional adjustments should be made.

4. What professional development or support structures should be in place to ensure the appropriate action steps are taken?

Because diagnostic assessments assess the depth rather than the breadth of a target concept, the design of a high-quality diagnostic assessment requires not only content-area knowledge, but also advanced assessment literacy to administer and interpret the results. Professional training will be essential.

5. How will student learning improve as a result of using this diagnostic assessment, and will it improve more than if the assessment were not used?

It is important that educators clearly understand the purpose and utility of the diagnostic assessments before they are administered, so appropriate actions are taken and student learning progresses.

Finally, because diagnostic assessments are used to determine a student's deeper and more discrete knowledge, educators must ensure these assessments contain enough items (test questions) in each target claim, domain, or discipline to make a valid inference about the student's current learning status.

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Resources

- Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic
https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/final_diagnostics_brief_2020.pdf
- General Education Leadership Network's Learning Map: Prioritizing and Assessing Standards to Accelerate Student Learning
<https://www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/Learning-Map-Prioritizing-and-Assessing-Standards-to-Accelerate-Student-Learning.pdf>
- What are "Diagnostic Assessments?" ALN Learning Point
https://www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2017_Dec_DIAGNOSTIC-ASSESSMENTS3-1.pdf
- [Moving Toward a Comprehensive Assessment System: A Framework for Considering Interim Assessments](#)
Perie, M., Marion, S., and Gong, B. (2009). Educational Measurement: Issues and Practices. 28(3). pp. 5-13.

Put into Practice

1. Review the ENGAGE Module on Page 2 of the [General Education Leadership Network's Learning Map](#) from the Resources listed to the left. Find a colleague to join in a review of the ENGAGE module of the training (or present this module during a District-Provided Professional Development session), then complete the [Shape Reflection Handout](#) (<https://tinyurl.com/y6od8o8t>).
 - » What were the three important points from the training?
 - » What did you learn from the training that is consistent with your belief about assessment?
 - » What questions do you have about assessment that haven't been answered?
 - » This training was originally developed for the Fall 2020 start of school. Do you still find it relevant for the beginning of this school year? Why or why not?