

Competency Standards in Student Assessment for Educational Administrators

Developed by the
American Association of School Administrators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Council on Measurement in Education[1]

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Background

Student assessment is pervasive in schools, yet few preservice programs for educational professionals require substantive course work in assessment. These standards are intended to guide the preservice and in-service preparation of educational administrators and to inform future standards for the accreditation of administrator preparation programs and the certification of educational administrators. They are intended for both building-level and central office personnel who assist, supervise, or evaluate individuals directly instructing students.

The committee[2] that formulated these competency standards for educational administrators first met in 1991. Draft standards went through several revisions, informed by a sample survey of members of participating organizations[3], by feedback received in a forum at a professional meeting, and by responses to a draft circulated for public comment.

In these standards the term assessment refers to the process of obtaining information about student learning outcomes to guide educational decisions about students; to inform students, their parents, teachers, or other appropriate audiences about their progress, strengths, and weaknesses; to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy; and to inform policy. Assessment methods or techniques include, but are not limited to, formal and informal observation of student performance, student demonstration of skills and knowledge, qualitative analysis of pupil performance and products, portfolio-based assessments, commercially developed and teacher-developed paper-and-pencil tests, oral questioning, computer-managed or adaptive tests, and analysis of student records.

Overview of the Standards

These standards represent assessment competencies in the administrative contexts in which assessment is relevant to educational administrators. These contexts include: (a) assisting teachers in creating and using assessment effectively; (b) providing leadership in the creation and implementation of building- or district-level assessments policies; and (c) using assessment results in their capacity as administrators in making decisions about students, teachers, and instruction, and in reporting on assessment results to a variety of stakeholders and constituencies.

Educational administrators should have the same student assessment competencies as teachers when they are performing in the context of assisting teachers in creating and using assessment. Because of that role the first standard is a summary of the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students. Educational administrators should have the competencies described in the teachers' standards consistent with the level of direct interaction, supervision, and evaluation of teachers. Administrators should possess, at a minimum, a working knowledge of these competencies. This working level is needed

for two reasons. First, administrators must understand why teachers need these competencies; and second, if appropriate, administrators may be required to observe, recognize, record, monitor, and evaluate them in teachers. These competencies are reflected in Standards 1 and 2.

Educational administrators require a somewhat different mix of knowledge, skills, and abilities than teachers when providing leadership in the creation and development of assessment policies. Because the field of assessment is changing rapidly, administrators should be able to judge the reasonableness of new assessment techniques proposed for use in their schools and districts. They ought to be able to evaluate the appropriateness of the proposed uses and interpretations of both tradition and new assessment strategies. Standards 3, 4, and 5 are associated with the fundamental skills of student assessment: the sound principles of assessment, the uses of assessment, and the language of assessment.

Educational administrators need a variety of competencies when using and reporting assessment results for decision making. Administrators often communicate assessment results to others and use assessment results to make decisions about individual students, groups of students, teachers and other personnel, curricula, and educational programs. The remaining Standards (6 through 12) apply to various contexts within which administrators and the principal users of assessment results.

Standards

Competencies associated with assisting teachers:

1. Have a working level of competence in the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students. These standards are:
 - a. choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
 - b. developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
 - c. administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of both externally produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.
 - d. using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning, teaching, developing curriculum, and school improvement.
 - e. developing valid pupil grading procedures that use pupil assessments.
 - f. communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.
 - g. recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

2. Know the appropriate and useful mechanics of constructing various assessments.

Locally built assessments are pervasive. Teachers construct daily, weekly, and term assessments for their classrooms. Administrators who have supervisory responsibility must be able to determine the quality of the assessment procedures their staff members use in making decisions about students. The growing use of performance assessment, portfolio-based assessment, and computerized testing requires administrators to play a critical role in the proper development and use of these approaches.

Competencies associated with providing leadership in developing and implementing assessment policies:

3. Understand and be able to apply basic measurement principles to assessments conducted in school settings.

Administrators ought to be aware of how these principles apply to school settings so that in their supervisory roles they can support the proper use and interpretation of assessment results. They should understand the distinction between criterion-referenced and norm-referenced test interpretations, and should be able to judge the appropriateness of each kind of interpretation in specific decision contexts. They must understand the principle that validity inheres in the use or interpretation made of a test score, not in the score itself, and should be prepared to exercise leadership both in supporting appropriate uses and in discouraging inappropriate uses of assessment results.

4. Understand the purposes (e.g., description, diagnosis, placement) of different kinds of assessment (e.g., achievement, aptitude, attitude) and the appropriate assessment strategies to obtain the assessment data needed for the intended purpose.

This standard extends Standards 1 and 2 in the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students, which focus only on making instruction decisions. Most assessment techniques are best used for a single purpose. Therefore, decisions should be based on assessment results consistent with the purpose for which the technique was constructed. Administrators have a responsibility to use assessment results appropriately in each decision context.

5. Understand the need for clear and consistent building- and district-level policies on student assessment.

This extends Standard 5 in the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students, which focuses only on grading. School- and district-level policies should incorporate grading, final examinations, and other aspects of assessment. Administrators should work to ensure that teachers share a common understanding of the appropriate bases on which to assign marks and grades, and share common standards for the quality of work that merits a given grade. Similarly, administrators should provide opportunities for teachers and others to understand the proper means by which final examinations and other assessments are used in making decisions about students.

Competencies needed in using assessments in making decisions and in communicating assessment results.

6. Understand and express technical assessment concepts and terminology to others in nontechnical but correct ways.

Administrators should understand technical concepts in order to make decisions about what assessments to use or how to present assessment results to others. As administrators interpret assessment results to various audiences and stakeholders (e.g., teachers, other administrators, parents, school boards, the media), they need to be able to express technical concepts in nontechnical but correct ways. Moreover, decisions such as selecting a standardized test or other assessment procedure often require reading manuals, technical reports, or other technical literature on assessment that use technical concepts.

7. Understand and follow ethical and technical guidelines for assessment.

Because assessment results may be used to make important and sometimes difficult-to-reverse decisions about individual pupils, school personnel, and educational programs, interpretations of results must be valid and consistent with technically sound assessment principles and good educational practice. Administrators should be familiar with available guidelines and standards that describe how to develop, use, and report assessments properly.

The major educational assessment guidelines and standards applicable to administrators' assessment uses at the time these competency standards were developed in 1995 are:

- American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, and the National Education Association. (1990). Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessments of Students. Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. (1985). Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. Washington, DC: Author. (Currently under revision.)
- Joint Committee on Testing Practices. (1988). Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education. Washington, DC: Joint Committee on Testing Practices, American Psychological Association.

8. Reconcile conflicting assessment results appropriately.

Sometimes assessment results appear contradictory, and these apparent contradictions need to be resolved to make appropriate decisions. For example, results from a curriculum-based assessment may indicate strong performance in reading, yet scores from a standardized test in reading may be low; measures of school climate may indicate a positive perception of the school by the students, yet parental complaints about safety may be frequent. Administrators should be able to recognize apparent contradictions in assessment results in light of contextual factors and make appropriate interpretations.

9. Recognize the importance, appropriateness, and complexity of interpreting assessment results in light of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and other out-of-school factors in light of making accommodations for individual differences, including disabilities, to help ensure the validity of assessment results for all students.

Assessment results may be influenced by a number of social, cultural, and other factors. These factors may or may not directly cause poor or good performance, but knowledge of these factors often helps in the interpretation of performance on assessment tasks. Administrators should be aware of the kinds of accommodations for administering assessments that may be appropriate in inappropriate for different students under different circumstances.

10. Ensure the assessment and information technology are employed appropriately to conduct student assessment.

Technology includes computer-based assessment tools such as computerized-adaptive testing, computer-managed testing, computerized test item pools, computerized assessment records, and computerized databases. As technology becomes available to more and more schools, administrators will need to make decisions about the use of this technology to conduct student assessments and to store, organize, use, and safeguard the results obtained.

11. Use available technology appropriately to integrate assessment results and other student data to facilitate students' learning, instruction, and performance.

Administrators should be able to organize a wide array of student assessment information with other student data and to make inferences about the quality of performance of students, their teachers, and school programs. Administrators should recognize appropriate and inappropriate uses of assessment results in this context.

12. Judge the quality of an assessment strategy or program used for decision making within their jurisdiction.

Teachers' classroom assessments, school-based testing programs, system-wide testing, and state assessment potentially have an impact on school operations. Administrators should be able to assist teachers and others to make informed judgments about assessment strategies. Administrators ought to be able to undertake or coordinate systematic investigations that correctly inform decisions about the quality of existing and proposed assessment programs. The changing technology of assessment procedures makes this responsibility especially critical. For example, administrators should establish and monitor assessment procedures so that performance and portfolio assessments are undertaken in technically sound and educationally appropriate ways.

Synthesis of Competency Standards in Student Assessment for Educational Administrators

Competencies associated with assisting teachers:

1. Have a working level of competence in the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students.
2. Know the appropriate and useful mechanics of constructing various assessments.

Competencies associated with providing leadership in developing and implementing assessment policies:

3. Understand and be able to apply basic measurement principles to assessments conducted in school settings.
4. Understand the purposes (e.g., description, diagnosis, placement) of different kinds of assessment (e.g., achievement, aptitude, attitude) and the appropriate assessment strategies to obtain the assessment data needed for the intended purpose.
5. Understand the need for clear and consistent building- and district-level policies on student assessment.

Competencies needed in using assessments in making decisions and in communicating assessment results:

6. Understand and express technical assessment concepts and terminology to others in nontechnical but correct ways.
 7. Understand and follow ethical and technical guidelines for assessment.
 8. Reconcile conflicting assessment results appropriately.
 9. Recognize the importance, appropriateness, and complexity of interpreting assessment results in light of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and other out-of-school factors in light of making accommodations for individual differences, including disabilities, to help ensure the validity of assessment results for all students.
 10. Ensure the assessment and information technology are employed appropriately to conduct student assessment.
 11. Use available technology appropriately to integrate assessment results and other student data to facilitate students' learning, instruction, and performance.
 12. Judge the quality of an assessment strategy or program used for decision making within their jurisdiction.
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[1] In 1990, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council on Measurement in Education, and the National Education Association published the Standards for Teacher Competence on Educational Assessment of Students. The joint committee recommended those standards as a framework for preservice and in-service training for teachers. The committee also recommended that standards be developed for other categories of educational professionals. This document is intended to complement the Standards for Teacher Competence.

[2] The committee was appointed by the collaborating professional associations: James C. Impara and Barbara S. Plake (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) co-chaired the committee and represented the NCME along with Jack C. Merwin (University of Minnesota), Richard Miller, Gail Stephens, and Gary Marx represented the AASA, Ron Areglado represented the NAESP, and James Keefe and Paul Hersey represented the NASSP. The project could not have been completed without the financial support of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

[3] More information about this survey can be found in: Impara, J. C., Plake, B. S., & Merwin, J. C. (1994). Student assessment tasks and knowledge: Comparing superintendents and elementary and secondary principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 4 (5), 517-528.