

Balanced Assessment System



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Professional Learning

WHAT IS A BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM?

“A balanced assessment system is a set of components (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, and learning theory) that interact with each other and function coherently with the intention of improving student learning.”¹

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM?

There is a saying that schools can be data rich, but information poor. This means that you can have many sources of data on students but lack the coherent information you need to make effective decisions. It’s helpful to consult many sources of formal and informal data to inform your instructional design, of course, but without an intentional, well-thought-out plan for how all the sources of data fit together, it will be hard to make decisions well. A coherent approach to assessment practices can streamline decision-making and improve learning.

One way to achieve this coherence is by developing a balanced assessment system.

A balanced assessment system intentionally makes use of formative, interim, and summative assessment practices—with the most emphasis placed on formative assessment.

HOW DO I CREATE A BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM?

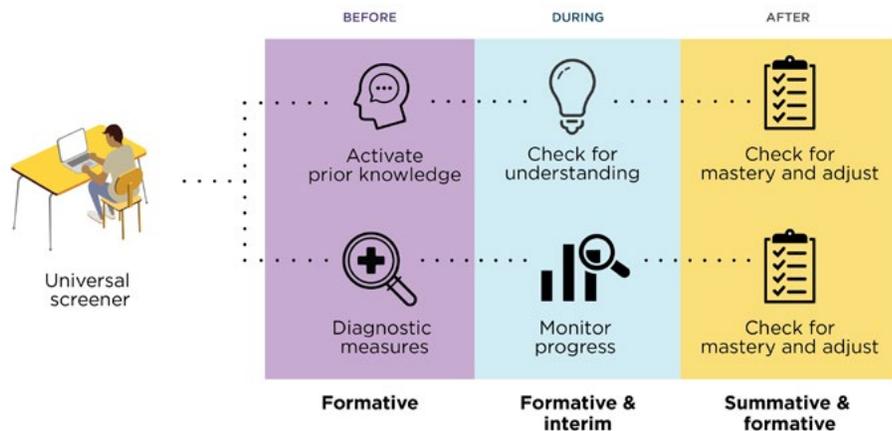
To create a balanced assessment system, there are two major domains that teachers need to consider:

1. The standards-based core instruction domain that aligns to grade-level or advanced content
2. The intervention domain for students who are not yet achieving standards and need additional support

Formative assessment plays a key role in both domains and should always be the starting point. It begins as a universal screening process for all students. The purpose, just like when doctors take your blood pressure and weight during an annual checkup, is to look for signs that something might be off track. Following the administration of a universal screening process, educators face a decision point that affects which of the two domains come into focus for teaching and learning.

What does a balanced assessment system look like?

Here’s a visual representation of the sequence and relationship between formative, interim, and summative assessment and the relevant assessment approaches that are most helpful in the core instruction domain and the intervention domain.



1. Nichols, Paul, 2019. Director, Assessment Design Psychometric Solutions, NWEA®.

HOW CAN I EXPLORE THIS TOPIC FURTHER ON MY OWN OR WITH MY COLLEAGUES?

Questions for teachers

- What are ways to activate learning in your classroom?
- During core instruction, how are you checking for understanding during the lesson?
- How does instruction in the domain of intervention differ from the domain of core instruction?
- How can you ensure your classroom has a balanced assessment system in place? In what ways do all of your assessment practices inform each other?
- How have you determined the progression of learning that your students need?
- How are you diagnosing or pinpointing student intervention needs within a learning progression?

Questions for leaders

- What processes do you have in place to monitor school-wide data and reflect on improvements that are needed for teaching, learning, and leading?
- How can you ensure there is a balanced assessment system in place system-wide? To what extent does your school have a systematic approach where different types of assessments inform each other?
- How can you support teachers in identifying effective learning progressions and developing responsive plans that move students forward along a progression?
- Does your school's schedule assure that there is sufficient time for both core instruction and intervention?

Where can I access more information about a balanced assessment system?

- [How to Build a Balanced Assessment System](#)
- [8 Questions Teachers Should Ask When Giving Assessments](#)
- [4 Simple Steps for Streamlining Your Assessment System](#)
- [How to Be Assessment Literate, No Matter Your Role](#)



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