



## The Types and Purposes of Student Assessment in Education: An FAQ

### 1. What does the word “assess” mean?

Here are two dictionary definitions:

- To evaluate or estimate the nature, ability, or quality of (Oxford dictionary).
- To judge or decide the amount, value, quality, or importance of (Cambridge dictionary).

### 2. What are the types of assessments in education? Can one assessment serve all purposes?

An assessment can be formative or summative. An assessment that combines aspects of both formative and summative and occurs between them has been referred to as an interim assessment. Different assessments serve different purposes. Experts caution against using one assessment for too many purposes.

### 3. What is a summative assessment? What is the purpose of Connecticut’s summative assessments?

A summative assessment is the culminating evaluation of student performance against a set of grade-appropriate standards. Connecticut’s statewide mastery examination that is required pursuant to the Every Student Succeeds Acts and Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-14n is a summative assessment.

- The primary purpose of the state’s summative examination is to provide an efficient and reliable estimate of a student’s overall performance in a subject area relative to grade-appropriate standards that enable valid interpretations of student achievement and progress. Put simply, it should, at the end of the year, tell the student, the parent, and the teacher if the student is overall on-track and making progress toward academic success in college and career.
- In the aggregate (e.g., district, school, grade level), results from the statewide summative assessment provide one valid and reliable indication of the academic achievement and progress attained by students. Such aggregate results tell us if all students – regardless of zip code, family income, dominant language, or disability – are achieving and making progress academically toward success in college and career.
- The statewide summative assessment is an important indicator of student achievement and progress, but it is not the only one. State law appropriately prohibits the use of the “mastery examination” results as the sole criterion for student promotion or graduation.
- Aggregate results from the summative assessment can inform federal/state reporting, district/school accountability, program evaluation at state/district/school levels, educator evaluation and support, and district/school identification for support and recognition. As with an individual student, aggregate results from the statewide summative assessment are an important indicator of academic achievement and progress, but not the only one.

### 4. What is the statewide mastery examination *not*?

- The statewide mastery examination is not a tool to inform day-to-day classroom instruction.
- It is not a curriculum-based diagnostic measure of specific student strengths/weaknesses in sub-skills like phoneme segmentation, oral reading fluency, or adding/subtracting fractions.

**5. What is formative assessment? What purpose does it serve?**

Unlike a summative assessment which is an “event” that measures a student’s overall performance, formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction throughout the year. It provides feedback to teachers so that they may adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievement of intended instructional outcomes. It also provides feedback to students to help them know where they are, where they need to be, and what they need to do to close that gap.

*According to Perie et al, a formative assessment is “embedded within the learning activity and linked directly to the current unit of instruction. Furthermore, the tasks presented may vary from one student to another depending on the teacher’s judgment about the need for specific information about a student at a given point in time. Providing corrective feedback, modifying instruction to improve the student’s understanding, or indicating areas of further instruction are essential aspects of a classroom formative assessment. There is little interest or sense in trying to aggregate formative assessment information beyond the specific classroom.”*

**6. What are interim assessments? What purposes do they serve?**

Interim assessments are administered periodically to evaluate students’ knowledge and skills ideally relative to a specific domain or sub-skill (e.g., “Read Informational Text” or “Numbers and Operations in Base Ten”). They should inform decisions primarily at the classroom level but may also extend to the grade/school level. They are best administered in domain blocks, few times a year based on the needs of the teacher/grade-level team and the curriculum. They may be standardized but it is more important that the test items in these interim blocks be aligned to the standards and of the same quality as those in the summative assessment.

Some interim assessments measure overall performance like the summative and also claim to predict results on the summative assessments. Repeatedly measuring overall performance throughout the year with an eye to predicting the summative assessment results may inadvertently reduce the instructional value of an interim assessment to the classroom teacher while overemphasizing the summative. Preserving the interim assessment’s focus on teaching and learning without raising the stakes on that assessment will strengthen the ability of the standards (and not the test) to drive instruction.

**References**

[Attributes of Effective Formative Assessment](#). A work product coordinated by Sarah McManus, NC Department of Public Instruction, for the Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) Collaborative of CCSSO (published in 2008).

[The Role of Interim Assessments in a Comprehensive Assessment System](#): A Policy Brief by Marianne Perie, Scott Marion, Brian Gong (National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment) and Judy Wurtzel (The Aspen Institute) (published in 2007)

# The Strategic and Effective Use of Student Assessments

*Based on Graphic Originally Developed by Perie, Marion, Gong, and Wurtzel (2007)*

