Figure This!

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Getting to the Point of Comprehensive Student Assessment Systems

All school systems must be accountable for student learning and achievement. As educators gather evidence of what students know and are able to do, they need multiple assessments to reliably measure student progress, refine instructional practices, and develop programs that will support student learning. Assessment is the key to successful instruction and drives the curriculum for all content areas. The Albuquerque Public Schools Comprehensive Student Assessment System (CSAS) uses three different forms of assessment to measure student learning and provide accountability information to educators: Norm-Referenced Testing (NRT), Standards-Referenced Testing (SRT) and Classroom Assessments.

Why use multiple assessments?

Teachers know that Norm-Referenced Testing (NRT) does not accurately measure what their students have learned in their classrooms, and yet the NRT has been the key form of assessment that drives instruction. Accountability systems have made NRT a 'high-stakes' test that measures student achievement, establishes teacher accountability, and determines funding for school programs.

School systems need to move away from this incomplete model of assessment and implement a Comprehensive Student Assessment System that provides the school district with continuous, on-going assessments that measure student progress over time. Multiple assessment approaches allow different users' needs to be met. The CSAS provides teachers, schools, districts, and states the means for evaluating and implementing quality curriculum and instruction with their students. The CSAS also furnishes the necessary accountability data for each level of the educational systems.

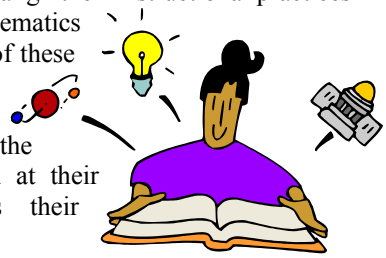
What is the APS Comprehensive Student Assessment System?

The foundation for the APS Comprehensive Student Assessment System (Figure 1) is the teacher's own Classroom Assessments, which directly impact student learning. The Classroom Assessments gauge day-to-day learning, and the repertoire of assessment techniques available to the teacher range from formal unit exams to teacher observations.

Classroom Assessments that align to the APS Content Standards allow for the development of higher order thinking skills on the part of the student. Once standards have been established for the content areas, curriculum materials, as well as district and classroom assessments should align directly to the standards. Assessments no longer emphasize that students memorize facts. Content Standards are designed to get students to think at higher cognitive levels. Standards require the students to know and be able to – identify, collect, interpret, describe, demonstrate, solve, defend, analyze, explain, formulate, compose, judge, support, and conclude what they understand about the content. Guiding student learning through the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation) can provide students with the deeper understanding of what they know and are able to do.

Classroom Assessments align and support the Standards-Referenced Tests (SRT) implemented at the APS - District level. The SRT is the key to measuring where the student is performing within the Standards Framework for any given content area. (APS has developed the Language Arts and Mathematics Standards first.) SRT provides teachers with the information that determines the next instructional steps within the content standards and benchmarks.

The information gathered through Classroom Assessments and Standards-Referenced Testing provides teachers and schools with valuable data that can develop a school's instructional program and directly impact their students' learning. For Example: Teachers who administer the APS District Mathematics Assessments should meet to discuss the assessments and student proficiency, so they can align their instructional practices with the Mathematics Standards. As a result of these professional discussions the school addresses the needs of the mathematics instruction at their school and redesigns their mathematics program.



This blend of Classroom Assessment and SRT supports the implementation of the State's Assessment System that includes NRT and SRT. At the school and district levels, teaching practices develop independent learners and build critical thinking skills, so when a student is faced with the State's Norm-Referenced Test (TerraNova) the student can expand on previously learned material to answer the broad-based knowledge questions found on the Norm-Referenced Tests. These assessment practices also support the National Assessment programs (NAEP) being implemented within the district. The District is then provided with the valuable accountability data from the State and National Assessments that supports programs and funding to enhance student instruction and learning.

Albuquerque Public School's Comprehensive Student Assessment System furnishes educators with multiple data points to assess student learning. These multiple data points are blended together to create a Performance Index (PI) and are used to measure an individual student's achievement over their entire educational experience. The Performance Index is also used as an accountability measure for the individual schools and the district. Combining student outcomes into a Performance Index helps to ensure that accountability decisions are made using results from multiple forms of assessments. The Performance Index discourages judgments based on a single data point from a single measure, but instead offers a composite representation of a student's performance.

An ongoing component of the CSAS is professional development. As the CSAS grows, professional development must be designed to support the assessment structure. The Professional Development component of the CSAS takes many forms: it allows teachers and administrators time to meet and discuss their instructional practices and school programs; it develops the teacher's knowledge of content; and it trains teachers to administer, interpret, and implement information for NRT & SRT.

"Traditionally, testing programs follow a 'top-down' model; policymakers develop an assessment design that meets their needs, hoping that data may be useful by persons at lower levels. An alternative is to build the assessment system needed at the local level, aggregating the information upwards to the district, state and national levels." (Roeber, *Emerging Student Assessment Systems for School Reform*, 1995.)

The primary goal for Albuquerque Public Schools' Comprehensive Student Assessment System is to inform teaching and instructional practices with regard to student learning and achievement. This means different things at each of the Assessment and Accountability (School, District, and State) levels.

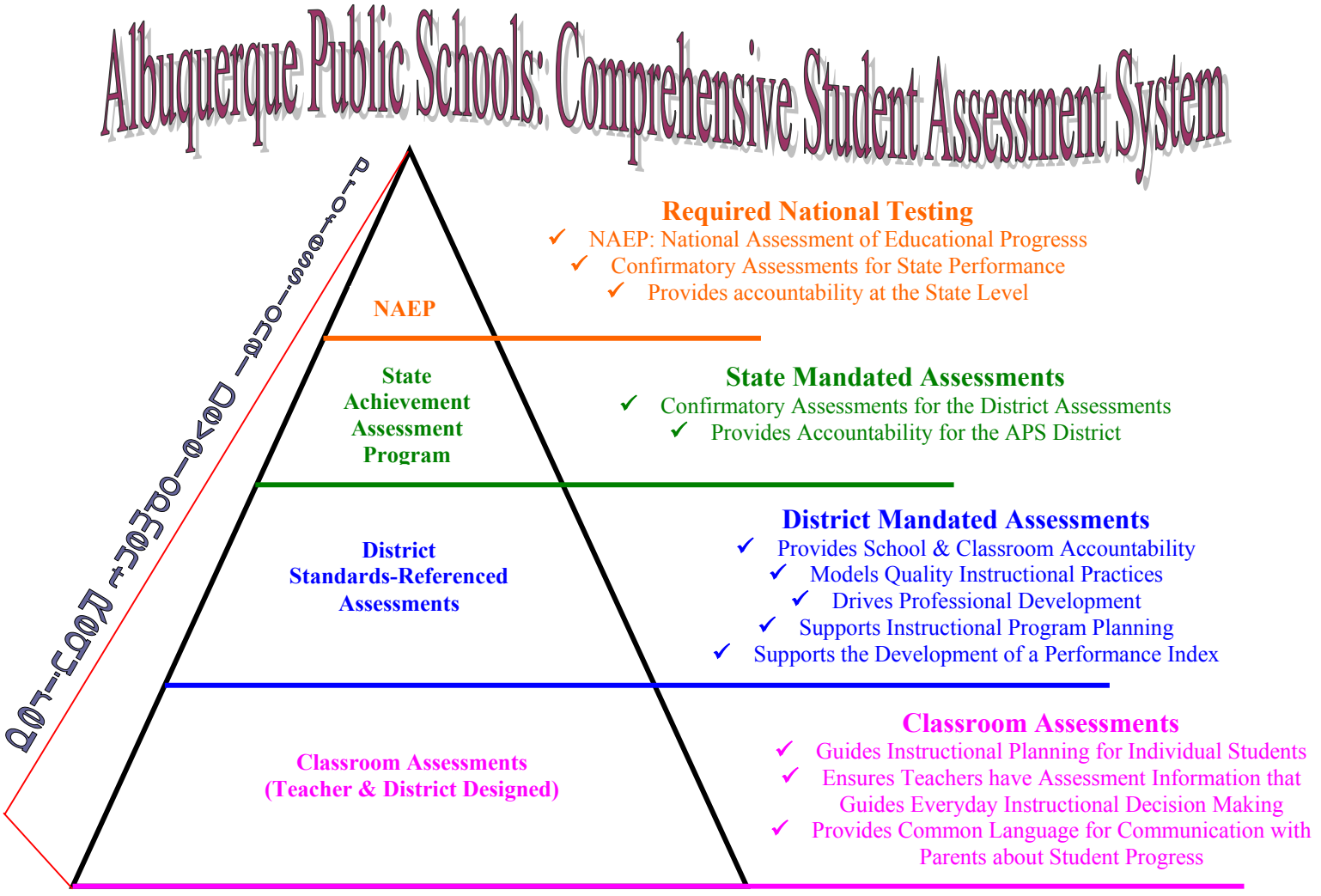
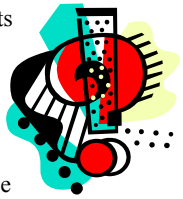


Figure 1: Designed by Rose-Ann Mckernan, Marie Fritz, & Donna Little-Kaumo

Questions and Answers about the District Mathematics Assessments in Grades 2, 5, & 8

Q **Why should the performance assessments be double scored at the school site?**

A The math performance assessments are designed to determine the next instructional steps for the students. Having the assessments double scored at the school sites allows teachers to engage in conversations regarding the mathematics inherent in the tasks; provide each other with feedback about student performances; exchange ideas and lessons to instruct the students; and provide teachers with time to discuss their teaching. Double scoring provides the teachers with time to discuss the *APS Mathematics Content and Performance Standards* and gauge how their school's mathematics program aligns to the district's mathematics standards. Using the information gained by double scoring the assessments and discussing the standards, teachers can begin to customize instruction for their students. The double scoring is also used as the initial reporting mechanism for the first phase of the Comprehensive Student Assessment System.



Q **Where do we get the time to double score the assessments and discuss our mathematics teaching?**

A Each elementary and middle school was given an opportunity to send a teacher or instructional coach to attend the mathematics teacher leader meetings that occur once/twice a month. The teacher leaders then set up study groups at their school. Teachers are given opportunities at the study groups to explore a variety of mathematics concepts, including the district mathematics assessments and double scoring. At the elementary level ExxonMobil funds the meetings. Title II funds the middle school meetings. Teachers are compensated for their time. For more information about teacher leaders or school study groups contact Franny Dever at TLS – 880-8249 X115.

Assessment Terms and Definitions

Norm-Referenced Tests (NRT) – provides information about student achievement compared to a representative sample of students from across the United States. Administration is standardized from school to school and district to district. Information is reported in terms of percentile rankings of groups of students compared to the norm group.
Example: TerraNova (NM Achievement Assessment NMAA).

Standards-Referenced Assessments (SRT) – based directly on the content area standards and are reported in terms of percents of students who demonstrate mastery of the objectives, or to record individual students' mastery of the objectives. These may be formal, standardized or informal assessments, and are designed to elicit performances designated in the standards and curriculum that is taught to and learned by the students.
Example: District Mathematics Assessments

Classroom Assessments – are informal assessments that are designed to capture how well a student performs on everyday tasks in the classroom. These take the form of teacher observations, unit exams, evaluation of student products (projects and assignments), and student reflection and self-assessments. These are the teacher's own assessments and are an inherent part of their teaching practices.

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