



Kentucky Department of  
**E D U C A T I O N**

What is a Comprehensive System of Assessment?

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## Introduction

Students experience many assessment moments across a school year. Some are embedded within daily instruction and used during lessons to guide teaching and learning. Others are selected by schools or districts to support shared goals, monitor progress and inform improvement planning. Still others are required by the state and provide both system- and student-level information.

A **comprehensive system of assessment** ensures that each of these assessments serves a clear purpose and provides meaningful information about student learning to support better decisions, more effective instruction and improved outcomes for students.

For Kentucky districts, a comprehensive assessment system drives continuous improvement. When implemented effectively, the system enables educators and leaders at all levels to answer essential questions:

- What do students know and what are they able to do in relation to grade-level academic standards?
- Are students learning?
- How much are they learning over time?
- What must we do next?

At a foundational level, assessments within a comprehensive system fall into two broad categories:

- **Assessments *for* learning:** These assessments provide timely evidence that students, teachers and leaders use to inform immediate instructional next steps.
- **Assessments *of* learning:** These assessments summarize student learning at a specific point in time. The data support describing and classifying performance (individually or in aggregate), monitoring progress toward shared goals and informing improvement planning, including adjustments to instruction, supports, systems or structures (Wylie & Landl, 2024).

## Why is a Comprehensive System of Assessment Important?

Together, assessments for and of learning equip stakeholders with the information they need to make decisions that drive increased student achievement. Assessments for learning provide immediate, actionable evidence for instructional adjustment, while assessments of learning offer periodic and comparable information that supports progress monitoring, accountability and long-term program evaluation.

The following terms provide nuance when describing the purpose of an assessment:

### Instructional

Assessments that provide timely, actionable information educators use to adapt instruction and curriculum in response to student needs.

### Evaluative

Assessments that are used to examine the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction or programs over time. Evaluative assessments support reflection and decision-making by teachers, school leaders and district staff to guide program improvement and future instructional or curricular adjustments, rather than inform immediate instructional changes.

## Predictive

Assessments that are used to estimate a student’s likelihood of meeting future learning expectations, such as end-of-year standards or assessments. Predictive assessments are often used at the classroom, school or district level to identify students who may be off track and may also serve as a screening tool to guide additional assessment, targeted support, or intervention<sup>1</sup>.

Assessment systems are most effective when each assessment is designed to serve its most specific instructional purpose before any broader uses are considered. For example, assessments intended to inform day-to-day instruction must prioritize timely, actionable feedback for teachers and students. Only after that primary purpose is met should educators determine whether the assessment can also support one additional use, such as predicting future performance or evaluating a program.

The following table shows how assessments for learning and assessments of learning might appear across the student experience in one district or system, from daily classroom checks for understanding to district-selected measures and state-required summative assessments. It highlights the instructional, predictive and evaluative roles that assessments can play when the system is coherent. The sections that follow define each assessment type in more detail and describe how the resulting information is used to support decisions at all levels.

**Table 1: Assessments Experienced by Students in a Comprehensive Assessment System**

| Control Level          | Assessment Type                                 | Purpose                      | Primary Use  |
|------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| Classroom/<br>Educator | Formative Assessment                            | Instructional                | <b>Assessment For Learning</b><br>Teachers and students use the evidence to provide feedback and adjust teaching and learning in real time.  |
| Classroom/<br>Educator | Classroom Summative Assessment                  | Instructional and Evaluative | <b>Assessment Of Learning</b><br>Teachers use results to determine whether students met grade-level expectations at the end of a unit or other instructional period and to inform future instructional planning or targeted support. |
| District/School        | Screening, Intervention and Progress Monitoring | Predictive and Instructional | <b>Assessment For Learning</b><br>Schools use results to identify students needing additional support, to guide targeted intervention and to monitor the effectiveness of Tier 1 universal instruction.                              |

<sup>1</sup> Definitions adapted from Measures That Matter: The Role of Interim Assessments in a Comprehensive Assessment System (Perie et al., 2007).

| Control Level   | Assessment Type                | Purpose                                   | Primary Use   |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| District/School | Interim / Benchmark Assessment | Instructional, Predictive, and Evaluative | <b>Assessment Of Learning</b><br>Teachers and leaders use results to monitor progress, identify strengths and gaps, and guide instructional and resource decisions.   |
| State-Mandated  | State Summative Assessments    | Evaluative                                | <b>Assessment Of Learning</b><br>Schools, districts and the state use results to evaluate curriculum and program alignment with standards and to ensure all students have access to rigorous, standards-based content. <sup>2</sup> |

**Coherence is what makes the system work.** Coherence means that curriculum, professional learning communities, evidence-based instructional practices and assessment all reinforce the same learning expectations. To achieve coherence, each assessment within the system must have a clear purpose, a defined audience and an intentional plan for how data will be used. When coherence is strong, assessments strengthen teaching and learning. When coherence is weak, assessment information becomes harder to interpret and is more likely to be redundant and contribute to competing or misaligned priorities.

This document provides a shared framework and common language to support coherent assessment system design and implementation across Kentucky. It clarifies key assessment categories and describes how each category functions within a comprehensive system.

## Assessment Type, Purpose and Use

Implementing a comprehensive system of assessment requires a shared language for discussing assessment types, purposes and how results are used. The timing and frequency of an assessment are closely connected to its intended purpose and the level of detail it provides. The sections below define the primary assessment types students experience across a school year and clarify how each type functions within a coherent system. For definitions of specific assessment examples, refer to the glossary in this document.

### Formative Assessment

#### Definition

A process used by teachers and students during instruction to gather and respond to evidence of learning.

#### Purpose

Formative assessment occurs while learning is in progress and is embedded within daily instructional activities. It provides immediate feedback to identify where students are in their learning, surface misconceptions and

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<sup>2</sup> This table draws on the WestEd resource “Components of a coherent and effective assessment system” (Center for Standards, Assessment, & Accountability at WestEd, 2024).

determine next instructional steps. **An assessment is formative only when the evidence collected is used to adapt or adjust instruction.**

### **Examples**

- HQIR Curriculum-Embedded Assessments, such as checks for understanding and daily exit tickets.
- Common Formative Assessments

## **Screening & Progress Monitoring**

### **Definition**

Screening and progress monitoring assessments are systematic measures used to identify students who may be at risk of not meeting grade-level expectations and evaluate students' responses to instruction or intervention over time.

### **Purpose**

Universal screening assessments are administered to all students at designated points during the school year to identify patterns of risk, determine which students may require additional diagnostic evaluation or targeted support and monitor the effectiveness of Tier 1 universal instruction.

Progress monitoring assessments are administered more frequently for students receiving supplemental or intensive intervention to measure growth, evaluate responsiveness to instruction and inform decisions about the intensity, duration or type of support provided.

### **Implementation Consideration**

Unlike classroom formative assessment, which is embedded within daily instruction, screening and progress monitoring assessments are structured, scheduled measures designed to support decision-making within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework.

### **Examples**

- Universal literacy, math or behavior screening tools administered at the beginning, middle and end of the school year
- Progress monitoring tools such as curriculum-based assessments, mastery measurement or direct behavior rating

## **Diagnostic Assessment**

### **Definition**

A formal or informal assessment, utilizing valid and reliable tools that gather detailed information about an individual student's strengths and needs relative to learning standards or goals.

### **Purpose**

Diagnostic assessments are administered when more specific information is needed to determine the underlying cause(s) of learning challenges and to inform instructional decisions or targeted interventions. They

are distinct from the ongoing, moment-to-moment formative assessment process.

### **Examples**

- Formal diagnostics: KDE-Approved Reading and Math Diagnostics
- Informal diagnostics, such as curriculum-embedded pre-unit assessments, informal reading inventories, error analysis, observations, rubrics or skills checklists

## **Interim/Benchmark Assessments**

### **Definition**

Assessments that are administered at defined points throughout the school year to provide information about individual students and group student performance relative to grade-level benchmarks and content standards.

### **Purpose**

Interim or benchmark assessments are used to monitor progress toward longer-term learning goals, identify patterns of retained learning or skill development, and determine areas of strength and concern across classrooms, schools or districts. Positioned between formative and summative assessment, interim or benchmark assessments inform instructional planning, curriculum alignment and system improvement efforts when they are well aligned to the scope and sequence of instruction and designed for a clear, shared purpose.

### **Implementation Consideration**

Interim or benchmark assessments embedded within an HQIR or aligned to the curriculum's scope and sequence are strongly recommended to ensure coherence with instruction and to avoid unnecessary assessment burden.

### **Examples**

- HQIR Curriculum-Embedded Interim or Benchmark Assessments
- District-Created Benchmark Tests

## **Summative Assessment**

### **Definition**

An assessment administered at the conclusion of a period of instruction to evaluate what students know, understand or are able to do relative to defined standards or course goals.

### **Purpose**

Summative assessments are retrospective in nature, measuring current levels of achievement after learning has occurred. Results are typically used to monitor achievement at the classroom, school or system level and to inform program evaluation, accountability and school or district improvement.

### **Implementation Consideration**

State summative assessments are designed to serve an evaluative purpose at the system level. Classroom

summative assessments (such as end-of-unit assessments) may also be used formatively to identify trends and adjust upcoming instruction.

### Examples

- Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA)
- Advanced Placement exams
- SAT/ACT exams
- Some HQIR Curriculum-Embedded Assessments, such as unit/module assessments or mid-year assessments

## Take Action

A first step in implementing a comprehensive system of assessment is to inventory the assessments administered across the district or system. For each assessment, consider the following:

- Identify the intended purpose, primary audience and planned use of the assessment data.
- Examine whether current stakeholders' use of the data aligns with the intended purpose.
- Evaluate the quality of each assessment, including alignment to academic standards, the curriculum and intended outcomes.
- Determine whether multiple assessments serve the same purpose and identify opportunities to reduce redundancy or address assessment volume.

**Table 2: Example Assessment Inventory**

| Assessment   | Type       | Intended Purpose          | Who uses the data?                  | How is the data used?  |
|--|------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA)                            | Summative  | Evaluative                | State, district, and school leaders | Program evaluation to inform curricular and instructional changes year over year.  |
| Universal screening assessments (literacy, math, and behavior) | Screener   | Instructional, Predictive | School leaders and teachers         | Identify students who may need tiered supports and interventions; monitor the effectiveness of Tier 1 universal instruction. |
| Reading and Math Diagnostics                                   | Diagnostic | Instructional             | School leaders and teachers         | Identify specific knowledge and skill gaps to determine and provide targeted intervention.                                   |
| Interim assessment (e.g., quarterly assessment covering all    | Interim    | Instructional, Predictive | School leaders and teachers         | Monitor student mastery of the <i>Kentucky Academic Standards</i> ; adjust upcoming  |

| Assessment  | Type      | Intended Purpose | Who uses the data? | How is the data used?   |
|---|-----------|------------------|--------------------|---|
| standards taught to date, mid-year curriculum-embedded assessment).   |           |                  |                    | instruction.  |
| Curriculum-Embedded Assessment (e.g., pre-unit assessment, check for understanding, daily exit ticket, unit assessment) | Formative | Instructional    | Teachers           | Monitor student mastery of the <i>Kentucky Academic Standards</i> taught or to be taught within a Tier 1 lesson activity, lesson or unit; adjust upcoming instruction to provide just-in-time instruction or remediation. |

Once you have conducted your inventory and made adjustments, take steps to implement your assessment system by clearly communicating the intended purpose and use of each assessment to all stakeholders and providing ongoing support and professional learning focused on effective data use, including data access, analysis and action planning.

For additional guidance on implementing a comprehensive assessment system that aligns with district curriculum and instructional priorities, refer to the assessment guidance and the [Kentucky Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(KyMTSS\) Implementation Guide](#) on the KyMTSS webpage.

# Glossary

Terms in this section are defined by Kentucky Administrative Regulations, [KAR 3:095. The Use of a Multitiered System of Supports](#)

## **Universal screening**

A systematic process of analyzing students' performance at certain points during the academic year, utilizing valid and reliable tools to assess the learning and achievement of all students in academics and related behaviors, that may include validated indicators such as course performance, attendance, and behavior data to evaluate the effectiveness of Tier 1 universal instruction and determine which students need closer monitoring or intervention.

## **Diagnostic assessment**

A formal or informal student assessment, utilizing valid and reliable tools, given to guide instruction and tailor interventions based upon individual student academic and behavioral strengths and needs to accelerate progress toward proficiency.

## **Tier 1 Universal Instruction**

Instruction provided to all students based on the state's academic standards, as set forth in [704 KAR Chapter 8](#), and aligned with [KRS 158.6451](#).

## **Tier 2 Targeted Intervention**

Supplemental evidence-based intervention, in addition to and in alignment with Tier 1 universal instruction, for students identified by universal screening and diagnostic assessment data as at-risk for not meeting grade-level academic or behavioral benchmarks.

## **Tier 3 Intensive Intervention**

In addition to Tier 1 universal instruction and Tier 2 targeted intervention, a student is provided evidence-based intervention services, based on diagnostic assessment and progress monitoring data, with an intensity and duration matched to the student's individualized academic and behavioral needs.

## **Differentiated instruction**

The tailoring of curriculum, teaching environments, and practices to create appropriately different learning experiences to meet individual student needs while recognizing each student's learning differences, varying interests, readiness levels, and level of responsiveness to Tier 1 universal instruction.

## **Implemented with fidelity**

The accurate and consistent delivery or application of instructional resources, interventions, and assessments as they were designed to be used.

## **Evidence-based intervention**

An intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other

relevant outcomes based on

- strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
- moderate evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or
- promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias

An intervention that meets the requirements of subclause (I), (II), or (III) of [20 U.S.C. sec. 7801\(21\)](#) subparagraph (A)(i):

(21) Evidence-based

**(A) In general**

Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the term "evidence-based", when used with respect to a State, local educational agency, or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that-

**(i) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on-**

**(I) strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;**

**(II) moderate evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or**

**(III) promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or**

(ii)(I) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and

(II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

**(B) Definition for specific activities funded under this chapter**

When used with respect to interventions or improvement activities or strategies funded under section 6303 of this title, the term "evidence-based" means a State, local educational agency, or school activity, strategy, or intervention that meets the requirements of subclause (I), (II), or (III) of subparagraph (A)(i).

**Screener**

A short, efficient assessment given to all students at designated points in the year to identify students who may be off track academically or behaviorally. Rather than provide detailed instructional information, screeners flag potential risk and guide next steps, such as administering a diagnostic assessment, prescribing intervention and progress monitoring to understand the impact of the intervention.

**Curriculum-Embedded Assessments (CEAs)**

A form of formative assessment that is intentionally integrated into the day-to-day instructional sequence and tied directly to what students are learning. All high-quality instructional resources incorporate CEAs into their materials. CEAs use tasks and activities from the curriculum to gather meaningful evidence of student understanding and skills at key instructional points, with results used immediately to inform teaching and

learning. CEAs are not additional assessments; they are integral to high-quality instructional resources. Depending on the administration timeline and duration, these assessments can serve as formative, interim or summative.

### **Common formative assessments**

In the absence of an HQIR, teams of teachers who teach the same grade level or content develop assessments to measure student learning at shared points in the curriculum. Common formative assessments are administered to all students to determine progress toward agreed-upon learning goals, inform instructional decisions, and support timely, collective responses for students who need additional support or acceleration.

### **Progress monitoring**

A systematic process of collecting and analyzing brief, repeated measures of student performance over time using valid and reliable tools to evaluate a student's rate of improvement in response to instruction or intervention. The data are used to inform instructional adjustments and determine the appropriate intensity and duration of evidence-based supports.

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