Brief III: Inverting the Assessment System

The Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) Framework presents a vision for a system of assessments for English Learners in secondary grades that brings assessment closer to the classroom and fully involves teachers in assessment development and validation. The CAS Framework is intended to signal a new and equitable direction and to provoke reflection and debate among all those concerned with improving outcomes for English Learners. This brief describes the inverted approach to the assessment system adopted in the CAS Framework.

Current System

Currently, the assessment experiences of English Learners (and indeed, most, if not all K–12 students in the United States) are dominated by large-scale, year-end assessments (Figure 1). These assessments are designed to support accountability reporting and decision-making, but in practice are used for a variety of other purposes, including placement, accountability, classification, and reclassification. While the current system does include other forms of assessment such as benchmark assessments, most of these...
function in service of, or as secondary to, large-scale assessments. Too often, student scores on the year-end summative assessment are treated as the most accurate and meaningful indicator of a student’s achievement, and information collected throughout the year is often designed to predict this score and gauge student progress on this assessment, rather than to collect substantive, actionable information about student learning.

**An Inverted System**

Undue attention to the summative assessment can distort classroom teaching and learning practices. For this reason, the CAS adopts the approach of inverting the current assessment system (Figure 2) to privilege assessments at the classroom level that inform ongoing teaching and learning for English Learners as the drivers of all assessment types.

The rationale for this inversion is articulated in the logic model in Figure 3. Within this logic model, there is congruence across the assessments in terms of the focus on simultaneous academic content and language development and in reinforcing approaches to teaching that are appropriate for the specified educational goals for English Learners.

In the inverted system, the large-scale summative score is less of a culmination and more of a confirmation of information that is already known. Such a system will require significant investments to ensure that teachers have the capacity, support, and assistance to engage in the instructional and assessment practices described. The cost savings from using fewer formal assessments offer an opportunity to redirect and reprioritize spending towards investments in the human capital of teachers instead.
Inverting the Assessment System

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Figure 3: Logic Model for Inverted Assessment System

IF Teachers are regularly engaging in formative assessment practices AND IF Teachers have the capacity and the support to interpret and use information about student learning from those practices to tailor, plan, and enhance their instruction AND IF Teachers collect “summative” (unit-level) achievement data from students throughout the year to track student progress AND IF Teachers have the capacity and the assistance to interpret and use student achievement data to reflect on their instruction and student needs THEN The assessment can be appropriately used to make judgments about the students’ learning status to guide teaching and learning decisions.

A Range of Assessments for Decision-Making

Just as a one-size-fits all pedagogy does not meet the learning needs of every English Learner, no single assessment can accomplish all assessment purposes for English Learners. The inverted CAS comprises a range of assessments with the aim of providing decision-makers with the information they need to support English Learners in the secondary grades to engage in challenging and rigorous content learning required to meet state standards. Table 1 shows the potential users, purposes, and proposed methods of assessment within the CAS.

A system of assessments, each one with a distinct purpose, is needed to ensure that all stakeholders have the appropriate type of information.
### Table 1. Assessments and Their Uses in a CAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>USER</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formative Assessment designed into ongoing teaching and learning</td>
<td>Teachers and students</td>
<td>Inform ongoing learning and teaching</td>
<td>- Observation of classroom discourse/students engaged in instructional tasks</td>
<td>• Emerging, partially formed language</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Analysis of student work</td>
<td>• Understanding of academic content</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Student self-assessment/peer assessment</td>
<td>• Current learning status relative to lesson goals</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Metacognitive monitoring relative to goals</td>
<td>• Any difficulties, misconceptions</td>
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<td>Classroom summative at the end of a learning episode or thematic series of lessons</td>
<td>Teachers, students, parents, school-level administrators</td>
<td>Evaluate learning relative to medium-term goals</td>
<td>- Student work products and performances (e.g., portfolios), with associated rubric(s)</td>
<td>• Cumulative record of learning</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Student self-assessment and evaluative reflection</td>
<td>• Status of student learning relative to medium-term goals (e.g., units)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Classroom summative assessments (e.g., unit assessments, interim assessments that cover one or more units) designed/selected by teacher(s)</td>
<td>• Student strengths and needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom summative at the end of course, semester or year</td>
<td>Teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators</td>
<td>Evaluate learning relative to long-term goals</td>
<td>- Student work products and performances (e.g., portfolio), with associated rubric(s)</td>
<td>• Cumulative record of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Student self-assessment and evaluative reflection</td>
<td>• Status of student learning relative to longer-term goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Classroom summative assessments designed/selected by teacher(s)</td>
<td>• Student strengths and needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External summative at the end of the year</td>
<td>Teachers, students, parents, school, district and state administrators</td>
<td>Federal accountability, evaluate programs, inform systemic planning</td>
<td>- District-administered standardized assessment</td>
<td>• Achievement relative to end-of-year state standards</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Statewide standardized assessment</td>
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</table>

Since the CAS represents a reimagining of what is possible, not a reordering of what currently is, there are types of assessment (e.g., district-administered, off-the-shelf assessments) that are not explicitly included in the framework.
Endnotes


Inverting the Assessment System

The National Research & Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences with a dual charge: 1) to identify and describe the systemic barriers that prevent secondary English Learners from successfully accessing the general curriculum, and 2) to develop and test innovative educative curriculum materials that enable secondary English Learners to reach their full potential in community, college, and career.

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