

# Comprehensive Standards-Based Assessment System: Achieving Balance

## What is a Comprehensive Assessment System?

Comprehensive Standards-Based Assessment System (Herman, 2016) presents a model for a balanced assessment system, as described in the Every Student Succeeds Act. The brief outlines how states, districts, and schools can align different types of assessments to propel students toward college and career readiness. Assessment can be a powerful tool for stakeholders at all levels of the educational system in their efforts to improve student learning. To achieve this vision, however, there must be capacity and commitment to use assessment well at all levels. Capacity demands knowledgeable stakeholders who understand how to use assessment appropriately to support their decision-making needs. States need to engage stakeholders at all levels—students, parents, educators, school and district leaders, policymakers, the public—to move toward more usable and effective systems.

This brief (linked [here](#)) is intended to provide a common foundation by laying out a general framework for a comprehensive, learning-based assessment system. The framework incorporates different types of assessment to serve the distinct information needs of different stakeholders, but all of the assessments are closely coordinated. The different assessments capture different-sized steps along a standards-based learning progression and provide different grain size results to support their use, from the very detailed evidence that teachers and students need for on-going instruction, to the gross indicators that stakeholders outside the classroom need to support accountability and improvement (see Table 1). By coordinating these assessments, stakeholders ensure uniform focus and strategic action across levels.

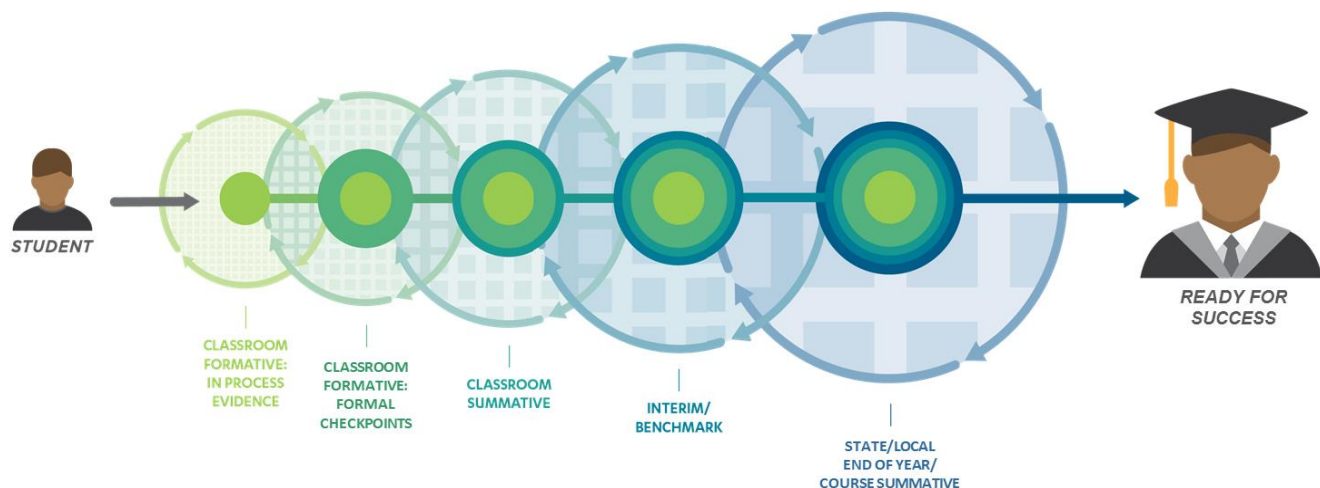


Table 1: Assessment Type, Grain Size, Timing, Uses, and Users

ASSESSMENT TYPE	GRAIN SIZE	TIMING	USES	USERS
Diagnostic/Placement	Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diagnose strengths and weakness in students' existing knowledge and skills</li> <li>Eligibility and placement for special programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students</li> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Parents</li> <li>Specialists</li> <li>School Leaders</li> </ul>
Classroom formative: In process evidence	Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minute-by-minute</li> <li>Day-to-day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect on-going evidence of students' progress to inform immediate instruction</li> <li>Feedback to students to move them toward achieving lesson learning goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students</li> <li>Teachers</li> </ul>
Classroom formative: Formal checkpoints	Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As needed</li> <li>Weekly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate what students have learned</li> <li>Information on students' strengths and where to fill gaps in knowledge and skills</li> <li>Inform parents of student progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students</li> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Parents</li> </ul>
Classroom summative	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chart student progress on classroom and unit goals</li> <li>Identify gaps in student learning</li> <li>Grading</li> <li>Grade level or school level progress checks</li> <li>Inform parents of student progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students</li> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Parents</li> <li>School Leaders</li> </ul>
Interim/Benchmark	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly</li> <li>Semester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor student status and progress on intermediate and/or long-term learning goals</li> <li>Predict whether students are likely to test proficient on end-of-year state tests</li> <li>Evaluate relative performance of classrooms, schools, programs</li> <li>Support school and district data-based decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students</li> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Parents</li> <li>School/District Leaders</li> </ul>
End-of-year summative assessments	Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annually</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad view of students' achievement on major grade-level or course expectations</li> <li>General view on student proficiency relative to grade-level college and career ready standards</li> <li>Evaluate school curricula, program effectiveness; inform improvement planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students</li> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Parents</li> <li>School/District Leaders</li> <li>State</li> </ul>

For the full brief, visit <https://www.csai-online.org/resources/comprehensive-standards-based-assessment-systems-supporting-learning>



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