Appendix C

Best Practices in Reading and Writing Assessment

Reading

The act of reading and comprehending is complex and requires the acquisition of many overlapping and supporting skills and strategies. Effective reading instruction depends on sound instructional decision-making in partnership with the use of reliable data regarding students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress in reading. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that there are no easy answers or quick solutions for optimizing reading achievement. Nor is there one assessment that will screen, diagnose, benchmark and progress monitor students reading achievements. Multiple indicators from different types of assessments provide a more complete picture of students' reading processes and achievement.[13]

There are various ways to gather assessment data.[14] Teachers can test students, analyze student work samples, observe students performing literacy tasks, or interview students on their reading skills. Teachers can gain the most information by using all of these methods to collect data.

"Timely and reliable assessments indicate which children are falling behind in critical reading skills so teachers can help them make greater progress in learning to read. Reliable and valid assessments also help monitor the effectiveness of instruction for all children; without regularly assessing children's progress in learning to read, we cannot know which children need more help and which are likely to make good progress without extra help."[15]

When developing items for reading assessments, it is necessary to consider the cognitive complexity of the proposed task/question. The four DOK levels focus attention on the cognitive processes required by students to complete a task or answer a question. By creating assessments that encourage students to demonstrate their ability across all DOK levels, students will become strategic thinkers who can analyze, synthesize, communicate their understanding, and apply their thinking to new situations/tasks.[16]

DOK should not be confused with difficulty. What does the word *secure* mean? and What is the definition of the word *prescient*? are both DOK 1 level questions even though few students might correctly answer the second question. The second question is more difficult but not more complex. Both questions merely require recall.

The information below is not all inclusive but merely a few examples[5] of questions that are aligned to each DOK level for reading.

Level 1: Many questions at this level require the ability to:

- locate answers in the text; recall details from the text
    - Which is true according to the Nutrition Facts chart found in the article? (given multiple choice answers)
    - What is similar about the two men's experiences before law

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[5] Some examples are NECAP Released Items or adaptations of NECAP Released Items.

school? (given selected response answers and information is explicitly stated in the text)

- use language structure or word relationships to determine meanings of words
  - Which word(s) has the same vowel sound as blue? (given multiple choice answers or word box)
  - The root *bio* in biography and antibiotic means (given multiple choice answers)
- select appropriate words to use in context when intended meaning is clearly evident
  - In paragraph 10, the word _____ means (given multiple choice answers)
- identify or describe characters, setting or sequence events
  - Why is the hockey game different than other games for the narrator? (information is explicitly stated in the text)

Level 2: Many questions at this level require the ability to:

- use context cues or resources to identify the meaning of an unfamiliar word
  - *Use the definitions below to answer the question.*
    condition *n* **1.** state of health or well-being **2.** social status **3.** the state of usability **4.** demand or requirement
    Which is the **best** definition of the word condition as it is used in this sentence?
    Mark said he would accept the job on one condition.

- make basic a inference or draw a basic conclusion about information presented in the text
  - Why did the Northwest Coast Indian tribes call the western cedar tree the "Tree of Life"? (given multiple choice answers)
- recognize appropriate generalizations about text
  - The author most likely wrote this story to (given multiple choice answers)
- summarize the major events, problem, solution, etc. in a literary text
  - Identify how the sons change in the story. Use details from the passage to support your answer.
- distinguish between fact and opinion
  - Which of the following phrases from the text is an opinion? (given multiple choice answers)
- organize information using mapping, charting, summarizing, etc.

Level 3: Many questions at this level require the ability to:

- make and support inferences using evidence from the text or other sources
  - What conclusion can be drawn from these three texts?
- describe how word choice, point of view or bias affects the interpretation of a text
  - Describe the author's attitude toward (the subject of the article) and analyze how she communicates this attitude to the reader. Use examples from the article to support your answer.
- interpret the use of author's craft to analyze/critique text

o Examine the author's use of literary devices in conveying the theme of the passage.

Level 4 assessments require an extended period of time and usually include accessing multiple sources of information. Many projects or assignments may include the ability to:

- gather, analyze, organize, and interpret information from multiple sources to discuss author's craft, universal themes, drafting a reasoned report, etc.
- evaluate the relevancy and accuracy of text using multiple sources to support or refute claims

The following has been developed as a guide for LEAs to evaluate their comprehensive assessment system in the area of reading.

Guidance for Developing a Comprehensive Assessment System in Reading

This guidance provides Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with tools and information to assess their areas of need in reading instruction.

The *Facets of a Comprehensive Assessment System in Reading* defines the types of assessments needed for a thorough reading development system of measurement for students in grades K-12.

The *Needs Assessment Worksheet* determines what assessments are currently being implemented within the LEA and provides an overall picture of the reading assessment system within the LEA.

Directions to complete the *Needs Assessment Worksheet*:

List the LEA-wide reading assessments currently in place. The provided grade ranges identify what grades need specific assessments. Please note: some assessments measure more than one component and should be listed within *each* category. If an assessment is given multiple times within the year for a variety of purposes, it should be listed in every category that it is currently being used for in the LEA.

Example: What phonics assessment is used to screen students in grades K-1?

In grades 3-5? Does the same assessment screen phonemic awareness skills? Are there alternate forms of the assessment that may be used for benchmarking?

Keep in mind that intervention assessments are needed for a much broader range of grades due to the variety of student needs or gaps in instruction.

Upon completion of the *Needs Assessment Worksheet*:

Use the questions below to guide the analysis of the information collected:

- Which COMPONENTS have assessments ranging across the grade levels?
- Does any ASSESSMENT TYPE (screening, benchmark, progress monitoring, etc.) have an overabundance of assessments currently in place?
- Does any COMPONENT have an overabundance of assessments?
- Does any ASSESSMENT TYPE (screening, benchmark, progress monitor, etc.) have insufficient assessments and/or does not range across the grade levels?
- Does any one COMPONENT have insufficient assessments and/or does not range across the grade levels?
- Which assessments are being used within multiple categories? Is the assessment designed to produce data for all of these categories?

Facets of a Comprehensive Assessment System in Reading

Classroom Instructional Assessments

Screening Assessment(s) ~ a type of interim assessment

- Used as a first alert or indication of being at-risk for reading below grade level
- Administered to all students *before* instruction
- Quick and easy to administer to a large number of students and are correlated with end-of-year achievement tests
- Rarely provide specific information needed to determine the most appropriate invention or target for instruction

All essential components of reading may not be included within any given grade level's Screening Assessment. However, to make informed decisions on a student's proficiency in reading, ample data must be collected. Therefore, a screening assessment should include at a minimum, two of the components that influence reading proficiency.

Key questions that should be answered by the screening assessment(s):
- Which student(s) is experiencing reading difficulty?
- Which student is at-risk for reading difficulty and in need of further diagnostic assessment(s) and/or additional interventions?

Benchmark Assessments ~ a type of interim assessment

- Used to chart growth in reading
- Administered to all students
- Determine if students are making adequate progress in overall performance towards standard(s)

- Typically administered at predetermined time (examples: end of a unit/theme, quarterly, etc.)

Key questions that should be answered by the benchmark assessments:
- What is the effectiveness of classroom instruction?
- Which student(s) needs extra support to acquire a particular reading skill(s) or standard(s)?
- How should groups be formed for classroom reading instruction?
- Which specific reading skills need to be emphasized/re-taught?

Progress Monitoring ~ a type of formative or interim assessment

- Used to determine next steps
- Used during classroom reading instruction (may occur daily, weekly)
- Aligned to instructional objective
- Can be used on an ongoing basis and may include teacher made-assessments, book logs, work samples, anecdotal records, standardized or semi-structured measures of student performance such as a miscue analysis and observational notes from a reading conference

Key questions that should be answered by the progress monitoring assessments:
- How does the data articulate if the students "got it"?
- Does the lesson need to be re-taught to the whole class or just a few students?
- Who needs extra support?
- How is specific, constructive, and timely feedback provided to students promoting

student learning or relearning of reading skills/standards?

Outcome Measures ~ a type of summative assessment

- Used as a program or student evaluation in reading
- Used to indicate a student's learning over a period of time and how proficient a student is towards meeting the grade level standards in reading

Key questions that should be answered by the outcome assessments:

- To what degree has the student achieved the reading content standards?
- Is the assessment aligned to the state adopted reading standards?
- What information/data is provided and maybe used to evaluate the effectiveness of the reading curriculum?
- Can decisions about selection, utilization of resources, materials and personnel be made with data collected from this reading assessment?

Intervention Assessments

Diagnostic Assessment(s) ~ a type of interim assessment

- Used to gain an in-depth view of a student's reading profile
- Administered to students who have already been identified as being at-risk of reading below grade level during the screening process
- Often are individually administered so observations of behaviors can also be included

Diagnostic assessments are used to determine specific areas of need and may not include all essential components of reading. However, a comprehensive assessment system must include a variety of assessments that address all essential

components of reading for educators to use as needed.

Key questions that should be answered by the diagnostic assessments:

- What are a student's strengths in reading?
- What are a student's weaknesses in reading?
- Which components of comprehensive reading (fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, text comprehension, and vocabulary) are problematic for the student?
- Are other students exhibiting similar reading profiles?
- How should reading intervention groups be formed?

Progress Monitoring of Intervention ~ a type of formative or interim assessment

- Used to chart rate of growth towards benchmark/goal/standard
- Used for students who have intervention services in reading

Key questions that should be answered by the progress monitoring assessments when using a method of intervention:

- Has this intervention been proven effective in improving students' literacy skills?
- Is the individual student progressing at a sufficient rate to achieve the goal?
- Are instructional revisions needed in order for sufficient progress to be made towards the student's goal/standard?

Comprehensive Assessment System in Reading: Needs Assessment Worksheet

Components that Influence Reading Proficiency		Screening	Benchmark	Progress Monitoring	Outcome Measures		Diagnostic	Progress Monitoring
Comprehension *RL & RI 1-3 and 5-10* *Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the key ideas and details within a text or multiple texts that has been read?* *Does the student use their understanding of text structure, words and phrases and point of view to gain meaning from text(s)?* *Does the student analyze how the author's choice(s) contributes to the overall structure and meaning of the text?* *Does the student integrate knowledge and ideas to analyze and evaluate various aspects of texts?* *Does the student read and comprehend literary and informational grade appropriate text independently and proficiently? Grades 2-12*	**Class Instruction**	*1-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	**Intervention**	*1-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*
Vocabulary *L 4,5,6 and RL/RI 4* *Is the student able to determine and clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple meaning words using various strategies?* *Does the student demonstrate an understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings?* *Has the student acquired a range of general academic and domain specific words and phrases sufficient for reading and understanding a variety of texts?* *Is the student able to determine the meaning of grade appropriate words and phrases as they are used in text (including figurative and connotative meanings)?*		*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 –Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*		*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*

Components that Influence Reading Proficiency (continued)		Screening	Benchmark	Progress Monitoring	Outcome Measures		Diagnostic	Progress Monitoring
Fluency *RF-4* *Is the student's reading fluency at a sufficient level of accuracy to comprehend appropriate grade level text?* *Is the student's reading fluency at an appropriate rate for grade level text?* *Does the student read on-level text with expression on successive readings?* *Does the student use context, language structures, and/ or visual cues to confirm or self-correct understanding and word recognition?* *Does the student adjust their rate of fluency within various contexts and texts?*	**Classroom Instruction**	*1-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	*K-2 -Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	*K-2 -Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	*K-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	**Intervention**	*1-2 Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 –Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*
Phonics/Decoding/Word Analysis *RF-3* *Does the student know and apply the grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding unfamiliar words?* *Does the student have knowledge of syllables and syllable patterns to decode multi-syllabic words?* *Does the student have mastery of needed sight words at each grade level including irregularly spelled words?*		*K-2-Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	*K-2 -Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	*K-2 -Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*	*K-2 -Elementary* *3-5 Elementary*		*K-2-Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*	*K-2 -Elementary* *3-5 Elementary* *Middle School* *High School*
Phonemic Awareness *RF-2* *Does the student demonstrate an understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds?*		*K-1-Elementary*	*K-1-Elementary*	*K-1-Elementary*	*K-1-Elementary*		*K-1 Elementary* *2-5 Elementary*	*K-1 Elementary* *2-5 Elementary* *Middle School*
Print Knowledge *RF-1* *Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the organization of print (directionality, return sweep, page by page, spacing between words, first and last concepts as they relate to words, sentences and whole text, etc.)?* *Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the basic features of print (connection between spoken and written language, first word in a sentence, capitalization, punctuation, etc.)?*		*K-1-Elementary*	*K-1-Elementary*	*K-1-Elementary*	*K-1-Elementary*		*K-1 Elementary* *2-5 Elementary*	*K-1 Elementary* *2-5 Elementary* *Middle School*

Writing

Writing requires the coordination of multiple skills and abilities, including organization, purpose/focus, elaboration, voice, word choice, sentence structure, spelling, planning and revising, etc. "To address each of these aspects instructionally, educators need an assessment plan that is comprehensive and meets the varied needs of students."[17]

Writing assessments may be used for a variety of purposes i.e., providing assistance to students, assigning a grade, determining proficiency, placing students in instructional groups or courses, and even evaluating writing curricula/programs. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) believes that the primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning. Consequently, the goal of assessing students' writing should always be for refining instruction and improving student learning.

Writing assessments must reflect the social nature of writing and its recursive process; while also considering that each writing piece has a specific purpose, audience and task. Due to the variety of genres of writing, the skills associated with each, the diverse audiences and various purposes for writing (entertain, persuade, inform), a student's overall writing ability should be based upon multiple measures. One piece of writing, regardless of the quality of the writing and/or the conditions that it was written for, should never be the sole indicator of overall writing ability. "Ideally, writing ability must be assessed by more than one piece of writing, in more than one genre, written on different occasions, for different audiences, and responded to and evaluated by multiple readers as part of a substantial and sustained writing process."[18] Students may draw incorrect conclusions about the very nature of writing when there is a lack of multiple measures. "For example, timed writing may

suggest to students that writing always cramps one for time and that real writing is always a test. Machine-scored tests may focus students on error-correction rather than on effective communication."[19]

Students should be able to demonstrate what they do well in writing. Assessment criteria should match the particular kind of writing piece being created and its purpose. These criteria should be directly linked to the standards and clearly communicated to students in advance so that the students can be guided by the criteria while writing. In some cases, teachers may even want to involve students in the creation of the rubric, a process which can solidify their understanding of the criteria for success and invest them in the assessment process.

Most standardized tests focus on easily assessed features of language (grammar, usage and mechanics) through the use of multiple choice questions. Choosing a correct response from a set of possible answers is not writing. This type of assessment lends itself to provide information on what students do wrong or do not know rather than on how well a student can communicate through writing.

Classroom formative assessments are short-term, ongoing, in-process judgments about what the students know and what to teach next. Classroom assessment should include a period of ungraded work that receives feedback from multiple readers, including peer reviewers. Writing feedback often occurs within a conference, both peer and teacher, which provides specific feedback to improve the piece. Sometimes this type of conference provides written feedback but not always, sometimes it is just oral (promoting the social aspect of writing). Self-assessment should also be encouraged. "Ultimately, we want students to internalize the qualities of good

writing and to have inner conversations about their writing- in other words, to have conferences with themselves in which they notice their strengths, critique their own writing, set reasonably high goals, know how and when to seek help, and work towards accomplishing their goals."[20] Classroom-level assessment of writing should also include reviewing the initial piece through to final drafts of a writing piece and multiple opportunities to demonstrate quality writing. Classroom "assessment gets to the heart of teaching and lets us decide how and when to offer support to writers"[21] to develop proficiency in writing.

Educators need to understand the following in order to develop a system for assessing writing:

- How to find out what students can do in writing informally and on an ongoing basis
- How to use that assessment in order to decide how and what to teach next
- How to assess in order to form judgments about the quality of student writing and learning
- How to assess ability and knowledge across varied writing engagements
- What the features of good writing are
- What the elements of a constructive process of writing are
- What growth in writing looks like, the developmental aspects of writing
- How to deliver useful feedback, appropriate for the writer and situation
- How to analyze writing tasks/situations for their most essential elements, so that assessment is not of everything about writing all at once, but rather targeted to objectives
- How to analyze and interpret both qualitative and quantitative writing assessments
- How to use portfolios to assist writers in their development
- How self-assessment and reflection contribute to a writer's development

- When determining proficiency in writing, multiple student writing samples should be reviewed from various genres, and for diverse audiences, tasks, and purposes.
Adapted from Newkirk and Kent (2007)[22]

When creating items for local writing assessments, it is necessary to consider the cognitive complexity of the proposed task or question. The DOK levels focus attention on the cognitive processes required by students to complete a task or answer a question. The information below is not all inclusive but merely a few examples[6] of questions/prompts that are aligned to each DOK level for writing tasks.

Level 1 requires the student to write or recite simple facts. Students may be asked to use standard English conventions to edit sentences, identify misspelled words or apply conventional spelling patterns and rules in a sentence and paragraph or to new situations, use resources to correct spelling, identify grammatical errors, apply basic formats for documentation, select appropriate vocabulary to convey intended meaning, or write simple sentences.

- Which word in the sentence below should be capitalized? (given multiple choice answers)
- Which of the following is a complete sentence? (given multiple choice answers)
- Choose the correct punctuation to complete the following sentence: Which is your favorite book_ (given multiple choice answers)
- How should the underlined word in the sentence below be spelled?
    The brilliennt ocean lay sparkling before them.

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[6] *Some examples are NECAP Released Items or adaptations of NECAP Released Items.

Level 2 requires some mental processing, such as beginning to connect ideas using a simple organizational structure. At this level, students are engaged in first draft writing for a limited number of purposes and audiences. This may include note taking or outlining to organize ideas in writing, developing text that is approximately one paragraph in length, constructing a variety of sentence types, writing summaries that contain the main idea of a reading selection and pertinent details, editing final drafts of compositions for mechanics and conventions.

- Think about your **least** favorite activity. Write a paragraph that explains how your character tries to avoid doing the activity. Use descriptive details to convey the character's feeling(s) about the activity.
- What is the best way to combine the two sentences below? (given the prompt and multiple choice answers)
- Combine the two sentences below into one complex sentence.
- Given a picture prompt, the student could be asked to use dialogue, descriptive details and/or sensory language to capture the action and convey the experience or event

Level 3 requires some higher level mental processing. Students are developing multi-paragraph compositions that include complex sentence structures or may demonstrate some synthesis and analysis. Students show awareness of audience and purpose through focus, organization, and voice/tone. Students edit and revise to improve the quality of the writing, support ideas with details, examples, quotations, text references and/or citations, and summarize information from multiple sources to address a specific topic. Assessments would be completed in one sitting and students might be presented with a text to draw information from to complete the response.

Sample on-demand writing tasks/questions:

- What would a person from ancient Rome find familiar and/or different about writing today? Write an informative/explanatory response to convey the ideas by selecting information found in given facts and connecting to prior knowledge.
- When given an informational text to read, student may be asked to address something from the text or support/refute the claims in the text, using details from the text to support their response.
- When given a literary text to read, the student may be asked to compare two or more (characters, settings, or events) in the story, drawing on specific details to support the analysis.

Level 4 Higher-level thinking is central to this level. Multi-paragraph extended writing demonstrates synthesis and analysis of complex idea or themes and evidence of a deep awareness of purpose and audience. Gathering, analyzing and evaluating written information for the purpose of drafting a reasoned report that supports and appropriately illustrates inferences and conclusions drawn. Writing will usually take place over an extended period of time.

Sample writing performance assessment tasks:

- short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources to build knowledge and/or summarize findings
- arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence
- opinion pieces on topics supporting a point of view with reasons and information
- informative or explanatory text which examine a topic and convey the ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content

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