

The Role of Assessment in Teaching and Learning

Successful student learning is most effective with an aligned system of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. When assessment is aligned with instruction, both students and teachers benefit. Students are more likely to learn because instruction is focused and because they are assessed on what they are taught. Teachers are also able to focus, making the best use of their time.

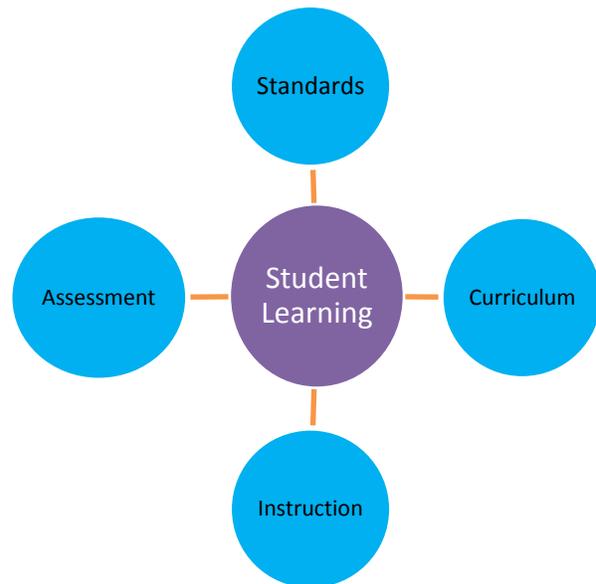
Rhode Island's learning **standards** describe educational objectives - what students should know and be able to do by the end of a course or grade level - but they do not describe any particular teaching practice, curriculum, or assessment.

Without standards, districts and schools don't have goals to shoot for. By matching what is taught in the classroom to the standards in each subject area, students (and their parents and teachers) will know what teachers should be teaching, what students should be learning and what they will be tested on.

Curriculum provides a "map" for how students will master the standards. Decisions about what that map looks like are made by districts, schools, and teachers. This map includes the materials (e.g. lesson plans, assignments, tests, resources) that will make learning possible.

Teachers are responsible for providing **instruction** by identifying teaching practices that are effective for all students, since not every student learns or retains information in the same way. This is where teachers get to be creative in how they engage students in learning.

Assessments are the tools and methods educators use to what students know and are able to do. Assessments range from teacher questioning techniques to statewide assessments like PARCC. Assessments are only useful if they provide information that is used to improve student learning. Assessment inspires us to ask these hard questions: "Are we teaching what we think we are teaching?" "Are students learning what they are supposed to be learning?" "Is there a way to teach the subject better, thereby promoting better learning?"



Why do we have so many different assessments?

One assessment cannot answer every question about student learning. For example, if a teacher wants to know if students learned the material she just taught and where they may be struggling to adjust the next day's instruction he/she may give a short quiz of a few questions on a specific skill. If he/she wants to know if the students mastered the material taught in the first semester and is ready to learn more challenging content he/she may give a longer test that measures several skills. A comprehensive assessment system includes both state and local assessment of student learning.

State assessments which are given annually provide a valuable "snapshot" to educators and families and help us see how we're doing compared with other districts, compared with the state as a whole, and compared against several other high-performing states. State assessments only account for about 1% of most students' instruction time. Results from state assessments which are part of a comprehensive assessment system keep families and public at large informed about school, district, and state achievement and progress.

Local assessments measure student progress and achievement in numerous ways, including classroom tests, which our teachers develop, administer, and grade. The methods and assessments that define a districts' assessment system are determined by schools and districts. Formative assessments, such as classroom assignments, homework, and quizzes and tests, occur while the content is still being taught. These assessments inform teachers of what students know or do not know and provide feedback, so teachers can adjust accordingly. This is the type of assessment that occurs most often. School-wide or district-wide assessments help guide instruction and curriculum development and help schools and districts identify additional programs or resources that might be needed support student learning or professional development teachers may need to improve instruction. District or school wide assessments are administered periodically throughout the year and are common across the school or district in which they are administered. These assessments often measure instructional units or groups of standards, but typically not the depth and breadth of the standards at one time.

