

# FAMILY GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS: STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLS



## Understanding the Purpose of Assessments

The goal of any assessment is to improve teaching and learning. Depending upon the type of assessment administered, an assessment should answer one or more of the following questions:

- Are students learning and understanding what is being taught?
- Are students being taught what they need to learn?
- Are students growing as learners?
- What did students learn?
- Are students prepared for the next level of learning or for college and careers?
- How do students compare to their peers, students in other states or students in other nations?
- Into which level or intervention should the student be placed to succeed academically?

## Understanding Types of Assessments

There are many types of assessments designed by classroom teachers, testing companies, state departments of education, and school districts. Some assessments are required by state or federal law while others are determined by district or school administrators. Below are descriptions and definitions of various types of assessments, along with examples of assessments used in South Carolina and in other states. Note that some assessments are given at the discretion of local schools, districts, or course requirements while others are required by state or federal law.

### Formative Assessments

**Definition:** Formative assessments provide **immediate** feedback to students and teachers so that they can modify future instruction and learning.

Some students may need more assistance and others may need accelerated learning opportunities. The assessment, often given multiple times during the school year, is used to inform teaching and learning decisions. Formative assessments are often used as interim measures, allowing teachers to determine if a child is on track to be successful at the end of the school year.

**Examples: School/Class** – homework, observations, questions, quizzes, reading logs, etc.

The S.C. Board of Education has identified the following formative assessments school districts may choose to use and receive state funding for administration: Measures of Academic Progress (MAP); Blended Assessment with Instruction Program (BAIP-Math); or STAR Reading and STAR Mathematics.

## TIPS FOR STUDENT TESTING SUCCESS FOR PARENTS & FAMILIES

1. Know what tests are given and when tests are scheduled. Inquire about results.
2. Avoid scheduling appointments, trips or other activities during testing.
3. Set a daily study time and limit interruptions.
4. Discuss homework with your child. Stress responsibility for doing the work and check to see that assignments are completed.
5. Keep track of your child's progress throughout the year. Praise success. Talk with your child's teacher about any areas of concern.
6. Encourage your child to ask questions at home or in class.
7. Read to your child, read with your child, and read yourself.
8. Encourage your child to review beforehand and to do his/her best on testing days.
9. Remind your child of the importance of reading directions carefully and not rushing through a test.
10. Review test results with your child. Praise success and talk about what can be done for areas in need of improvement.
11. Remind your child to do their best because some test scores can have an impact on his or her future.
12. Look for ways to make learning a part of everyday conversations and activities.

Formative assessments like MAP and STAR are often administered at different intervals throughout the year to determine student knowledge and skills relative to specific academic goals. Results are used to inform instruction and guide decision making at the classroom, school and district level, as well as be used to measure student growth over time.

### Summative Assessments

**Definition:** Summative assessments determine the level of student performance at the conclusion of a defined instructional period.

A summative assessment can be at the end of a quarter, unit, course, semester, program, or at the end of the school year. In statewide accountability, summative assessments refer to end-of-grade testing in grades 3 through 8 and in high school. These assessments are designed to measure students' knowledge and skills in relation to state standards. Schools and districts in South Carolina are held accountable for educating all children, and the results of summative assessments help ensure that happens. Some summative assessments may be used to compare achievement of students in one state to the achievement of students in other states.

**Examples: School/Class** – Final exams, EOCs, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate Exams (*at the discretion of the school or district*)

**State:** SC Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SC-PASS) in Science and Social Studies in grades 4-8, End-of-Course Assessments in high school courses: Algebra I, English 1, Biology, and U.S. History and the Constitution (*assessments required by state and federal law*)

### Alternate Assessments

**Definition:** Alternate assessments evaluate the performance of students who are unable to participate in regular state assessments even with accommodations. Students who qualify to take these assessments typically have significant cognitive disabilities, and therefore, are assessed using alternate achievement standards.

**Examples:** SC-ALT in Science and Social Studies and National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Alternate Assessment in English Language Arts and Mathematics (*assessments required by state and federal law*)

### Authentic & Performance Assessments

**Definition:** Authentic and Performance assessments use tasks typical of how the skills are used in “real world” settings. Such assessments follow “authentic learning” in which teachers facilitate learning through connecting the skills and content knowledge students are taught in school to real-world issues, problems, and applications. Teachers determine what students need to be able to do to show mastery of knowledge and skills and then develop learning activities to measure whether students have mastered essential knowledge, skills, and understanding. Rubrics of project's criteria are explained to students before beginning the work.

**Examples: English language arts** – Create a poem, ballad or story, write an obituary for a famous person.

**Math** – Determine how much paint or carpet would be needed to re-decorate a room, develop a budget for getting your first apartment.

**Science** - Develop a recycling campaign, prepare and participate in a global warming debate

**Social Studies** - Analyze a political cartoon, create a map using road directions (*all at the discretion of the school or district*)

### Standardized tests

**Definition:** “Standardized” refers to the “conditions of administration” of a test, so the test is administered in the same way each time it is administered and scored using the same procedures for all examinees. Some of the most common standardized tests are aptitude tests, college admission tests, International comparison tests, Psychological tests, and job skills assessments.

## WHAT IS HIGH-STAKES TESTING?

The public often hears about “high-stakes testing,” which means that decisions are made about a student, teacher, or school based on the results of certain tests. Most tests are **not** designed to be high-stakes but rather, are used to inform teachers about how students are progressing academically so that they can better address the learning needs of students.

**Examples:**

1. State - Gifted and Talented placement tests, Iowa Assessment (IA) and Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) (*assessments required by state and federal law*)
2. College Readiness Exam (*ACT will be administered to 11th grade students.*)
3. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
4. IQ tests
5. ACT WorkKeys (*assessment required by state law*)

**Kindergarten Readiness Assessments**

**Definition:** Early readiness assessments determine the developmental skills a child should have upon beginning kindergarten. It is meant to answer the question: Is my child ready for kindergarten? The readiness assessments often include social & emotional, mathematical thinking, health, and early literacy.

The early readiness assessment is not used as criteria for entry into Kindergarten but instead, the results are used to provide teachers with a better understanding of each student's strengths and educational needs. The assessment includes teacher observations, student responses to questions, and other activities to measure where a child is cognitively.

**Examples: State** – Implemented CIRCLE assessment in 2014-15 to determine early literacy of students entering 4K and 5K. This year, school districts have a choice in 4K to administer one of the following three assessments: Individual Growth Development Indicators (IGDIs), Teaching Strategies GOLD; and PALS: Pre-K. The State

will also pay for students entering 5K to be administered the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) although districts may use alternative assessments at their own expense.

**Placement Tests**

**Definition:** Placement tests are used to determine which level or class a student should be enrolled in and what level of intervention is needed.

**Examples:** ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) for English language learners and Alternate ACCESS for English language learners with significant cognitive disabilities. (*assessments required by federal law*)

**National Assessments**

**Definition:** These assessments represent progress toward what America's students know and are able to do in Reading, Mathematics and Science. The tests are given to randomly selected students in each state every two years.

**Example:** National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

**IDEAS FOR PARENTS & FAMILIES -- ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

1. Which tests are given at your child's school? Who determines which types of tests are given? What do these tests measure? What you can do at home to help your child prepare for tests?
2. Discuss with your child the importance of developing all of their academic skills and personal attributes. Give examples of your child's strengths in different areas and let them know about situations in your own professional and personal life that require a variety of skills.
3. Consider organizing a "testing information" night for parents at your child's school about upcoming tests and/or how to interpret the results of tests. The SIC or PTO could sponsor an evening event featuring presentations, as well as, a question-and-answer session.