

## Aligning Assessments for More Than One Purpose

With the need to demonstrate accountability to multiple agencies, today's classroom teachers must use assessment time efficiently. Teachers implementing a new local curriculum are often frustrated trying to use assessments already in place as well as create additional assessments for the new curriculum. Since neither the school day nor the school calendar has been extended, the time spent on assessments in such a situation has been disproportionately increased.

Perhaps the answer to the problem lies partially within the process for writing curriculum. In the CLI Model—and probably in many models for writing curriculum—there is a step in which we examine the alignment of the local curriculum with the state and/or national standards for that subject. In this process, we align the local curriculum, both in task and in content, with those standards. Most states now identify standards by grade level for at least reading and math, making the grade-by-grade alignment fairly simple. It is more difficult to align local curriculum when a subject's standards are still written by grade *range* (i.e. *by* grade four, or *by* grade eight). In these instances, the writing committee might explore another level of the standard document for more specificity, such as performance indicators, criteria, or coding that indicates which specific skills will be tested at each grade level. If this additional information is not available, then teachers make decisions based on their professional judgment. Regardless of whether the standards are by grade level or grade clusters, it is entirely possible that *more* will be expected of students in the local curriculum than in the standards, but generally not less.

When using a local curriculum that was written to thoroughly align with state standards, assessments designed to measure student learning of the local curriculum will *necessarily* also measure student learning of the standards. *Thus, a teacher need not prepare a set of local assessments specifically to align with the state standards and a **second** set of local assessments to align with the local curriculum.*

Many districts or schools do not have locally prepared assessments for the standards. Those districts *begin* by preparing assessments for the local curriculum, knowing that these assessments will also serve as a measure of student learning of the standards. If locally prepared assessments for the standards do already exist, they might very well work as assessments for the new local curriculum, and vice versa. Existing assessments under consideration for adoption require a critical review by grade level teachers to determine their suitability to measure both the standard and the local cur-

riculum. Sometimes, we find that an existing local assessment requires only minor changes to make it suitable. Sometimes, we find that an existing assessment is not suitable for the new curriculum *or* the standard it was intended to assess.

Whether creating new local assessments, or critiquing existing ones, there are several things the teacher must do to check for alignment and validity. First, the teacher must assure that the *type* of assessment is the best fit for the learning goal. The *type* of assessment must match the *cognitive level* of the learning to be assessed. Likewise, the *verb* used and the *content* must be the same in the assessment as in the curriculum/standard. For example, if the learning goal in the local curriculum says a student will *compare* (verb) *our country's economic policy to that of another country* (content), then an assessment that simply asks a student to *describe* the two policies would not be valid. However, we often find that the verbs in a state standard are more vague than those used in a local curriculum. Using our previous example, suppose the state standard simply said that a student should *be knowledgeable about* our country's economic policy. *Being knowledgeable about* is rather vague. Using the local curriculum in which a student must compare the two policies provides a specific way in which the student demonstrates that knowledge. Consequently, the assessment for the local curriculum also assesses the state standard, even though the verbs were not the same.

With instructional time at a premium, assessments that can serve more than one purpose are likely to be welcomed by many stakeholders: teachers, students, data collectors, and intervention decision-makers. Creating two sets of assessments that measure virtually the same thing is not only unnecessary, it overtaxes students and teachers alike, and is not efficient or effective practice.