

Making Sense of Student Assessments and Data

Key Concepts for Effective School System Governance

This handout provides an overview of the core assessment types and frameworks, alongside practical strategies for utilizing data to drive continuous improvement and meet board goals.

1. The Three Core Assessment Types

These types serve distinct purposes throughout the learning cycle:

Type	Purpose	When Used
Formative	Guide Instruction. Ongoing checks to provide immediate feedback to students and teachers, allowing for necessary adjustments to instruction.	<i>During</i> learning (daily/weekly)
Interim/Benchmark	Measure Progress. Periodic checks that monitor growth toward end-of-year learning goals and inform curriculum adjustments.	<i>Periodically</i> throughout the year
Summative	Measure Mastery. End-of-unit, course, or year evaluations that determine overall achievement and competency.	<i>After</i> learning (end of unit/term/year)

2. Assessment Comparison Frameworks

Understanding how scores are derived is crucial for interpretation:

Framework	Comparison Standard	Focus
Criterion-Referenced	Measures performance against a fixed set of criteria or learning standards (e.g., "Proficient," "Meets Standards").	Mastery of specific content/skills.
Norm-Referenced	Compares a student's performance to that of a larger, defined peer group (the "norming group").	Ranking or relative standing within a population (e.g., national percentile).

3. Common Assessments Across Idaho: Strengths & Limitations

Assessment	Purpose/Description	Strength(s)	Limitation(s)
Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT)	Statewide summative assessments measuring student proficiency in English Language Arts, Mathematics & Science.	State alignment - proficiency of standards - common tool	Single data point - after instruction is completed
Idaho Alternative Assessment (IDAA)	Alternative participation option for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Determined by the IEP team.	Adapted to needs - all students assessed	More & different resources to administer
IRI (Idaho Reading Indicator) - Amira	Early literacy screening tool used in K-3 to identify students needing reading support.	Reading foundation & intervention - year round	Technology based, - new this year again
ELPA (English Language Proficiency Assessment) - WIDA ACCESS	Federally mandated assessment to ensure students develop English language skills necessary for success in school.	Thorough assessment data	Time demands - training - slow return of results
Civics Test	Questions from the United States Citizenship Naturalization Test. Pass/Fail - Graduation Requirement. Being updated.	Simple data - easy to understand	Narrow focus
NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress)	"Nations Report Card". National Assessment in grades 4, 8 & 12. Students only participate if school is selected. No individual student or school results.	Comparative state and national data	High level data only - not actionable
SAT School Day	College readiness assessment offered to all Idaho 11th graders at no cost to families. (Required to offer.)	Readiness data for college	Only have data for those who take it
Local Benchmark Assessments	District-selected interim assessments like MAP Growth, i-Ready, STAR and others that track progress during the year.	Varies by specific assessment type	Not always consistent K-12 or across schools

4. Using Data to Improve Governance (Key Questions for Boards to ask?)

Effective governance requires asking the right questions. What story is the data telling?

1. What type of data is this?
 - a. proficiency? growth? snapshot? historical?
2. What does the data tell us?
 - a. Strengths/celebrations? & Weaknesses/concerns?
 - b. Trends or Patterns?
3. What does the data not tell us? (The rest of the story)
4. How do we compare to similar districts and the state?
5. What are successful programs doing?
6. What ways can we collaborate with others?
7. What resources are available that we can we allocate?
8. How is the information being shared with the community?
9. What in our strategic plan and goals applies to the data?
10. How do we advocate for our district's needs?

5. Using Data to Improve Governance (Connection to CIP & Board Goals)

Effective governance requires connecting assessment results directly to the District Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) and Board Goals. Data analysis should not be a separate function but an integrated driver of resource allocation and policy.

Practical Takeaways for Governing Bodies

- **Ask the Right Questions**
 - Focus on **growth trends**, **equity gaps**, and **program effectiveness** rather than simply focusing on raw scores. Data should reveal *why* results are what they are.
- **Balance Multiple Measures**
 - No single assessment tells the complete story. Use a diverse set of data sources (e.g., formative, interim, summative, attendance, discipline) for a comprehensive understanding.
- **Connect Data to Action**
 - Ensure assessment results directly drive meaningful improvements in instruction, support systems, and resource allocation across the district.
- **Build Assessment Literacy**
 - Commit to ongoing learning about the various assessment tools used in the district, their limitations, and their appropriate uses in making high-level governance decisions.