

Common Threads for Inclusive Education



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Student Assessment in an Inclusive Classroom

PLANNING YOUR LEARNING

What assessment practices and strategies will support students' diverse learning needs in an inclusive learning environment?

FIRST STEPS

The *Teaching Quality Standard* comprises six professional competencies that form the interrelated set of knowledge, skills and attributes teachers will draw on in a particular context to support optimum student learning. The competencies, Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge and Establishing an Inclusive Learning Environment, provide direction to teachers regarding student assessment in an inclusive classroom (Alberta Education 2017).

Teachers are guided by school jurisdiction policies and procedures on student assessment and evaluation that provide for continuous, fair and equitable student evaluation and reporting to parents or guardians (Alberta Education 2019). In an inclusive learning environment, assessment is the process of collecting, synthesizing and interpreting data about each student's learning to aid the teacher's decision making. Assessment informs a series of events that take place over time in the teaching-learning cycle. Each of these elements relies on best practices in assessment and careful analysis of the classroom contextual variables and student learning needs.

Assessment is today's means of modifying tomorrow's instruction.

—Carol Ann Tomlinson



Assessment allows teachers to identify individual students' strengths and needs.

—Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center 2019



ASSESSMENT

The primary purpose of assessment is to improve learning for all students, including those with diverse learning needs. Teachers understand that each learner has strengths and unique needs that can influence learning. Different assessment strategies will be used throughout the teaching–learning cycle to inform the design of classroom curriculum and individualized programs, monitor student learning and make instructional adjustments, and evaluate student learning in relation to program goals and learner outcomes.

Assessment for Learning (Formative Assessment)

Assessment for learning means assessment experiences that result in an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress toward clearly specified learner outcomes; this information is *not* used for grading purposes (AAC 2016). The data from formative assessment tasks helps the teacher to understand each student's strengths and learning needs. This information helps teachers to determine who needs additional supports, who needs more challenge, who needs targeted strategies and supports, and who needs additional individualized strategies and supports. Formative assessment also helps the students to feel more confident about their learning and when to seek additional support.

Assessment of Learning (Summative Assessment)

Assessment of learning means assessment experiences designed to collect information about student learning in order to make judgments about student performance and achievement at the end of the periods of instruction. This information is shared with students, parents or guardians and others who have a right to know (AAC 2016). Summative assessment generally results in a grade being assigned. Teachers must base this grade only on what the student demonstrates relative to the provincial learner outcomes or individualized program plan/instructional support plan (IPP/ISP) goals. Other factors such as behaviour or work habits can be noted; however, these factors must be reported separately from the evaluation of the learner outcomes.

FAIRNESS AND EQUITY

Assessment often creates concern for students and parents that teachers have to address. These concerns can result from confusion regarding the purpose of an assessment and how an assessment will apply to all students in the classroom. It is important to explain how treating all students the same or equally may not be fair. Fairness is about giving all students an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their learning. This may mean that some students will require adaptations or modifications to an assessment strategy so that they have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their learning.

A fair assessment strategy provides

- an opportunity for students to achieve success;
- meaningful data that reflects students' achievement; and
- flexibility, as required, to meet individual needs of students.

An equitable assessment strategy

- maintains high standards for student learning even when the assessment is individualized, and
- accurately measures performance even when the accommodations are implemented (GreatSchools 2015).



Students and parents need to trust that the assessment process is fair and equitable for all students.



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Establishing a positive relationship with each student allows teachers to assess the student's learning needs.

PROGRAMMING

Effective assessment is based on the program of studies and considers the strengths and learning needs of diverse learners. Teachers need to take the time at the beginning of the term to get to know their students and to establish a positive working relationship. As well, there are a number of ways teachers can get to know their students as the term begins:

- Review the cumulative record.
- Talk to last year's teacher.
- Talk with parents or guardians.
- Review samples of student work (Bennett and Mulgrew 2018, 28).

Teachers will use student assessment data in the Response to Intervention (RTI) (Alberta Education nd) approach to adjust their universal instructional strategies, implement targeted supports and strategies, and, for those students who are still not successful, implement individualized supports and strategies.

It is important that the teacher talk with the student's parent or guardian about the use of accommodation or assistive supports to ensure they understand their child's learning needs and successes.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS

Universal Strategies (Tier 1)

Learner Profiles describe the ways and conditions in which students learn best including information on the students' interests, learning preferences and styles, and differences related to gender, culture and personality. The purpose of a learner profile is not to label students but to help teachers better understand what instructional and learning strategies can support student learning. Learner profiles are dynamic and change as the students grow and develop; therefore, it is recommended that teachers work with students, and parents as required, to update their learner profiles at the beginning of each term (Alberta Education 2010). Kathy Howery, from the University of Alberta, suggests that a learner profile should include

- formative assessments,
- summative assessments,
- student's interest,
- learning preferences,
- strengths,
- needs and
- examples of supports that have worked in the past (quoted in BC Ministry of Education 2017).

For More Information

- Alberta Education. 2010. "Developing Learner Profiles." In *Making a Difference: Meeting Diverse Learning Needs with Differentiated Instruction*. https://education.alberta.ca/media/384968/makingadifference_2010.pdf.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. nd. "Student Profiles." UDL website. <https://udlresource.ca/2017/12/student-profiles/>.

Differentiated Assessment

Differentiation is a process through which teachers enhance learning by matching student characteristics to instruction, learning strategies and assessment strategies. Differentiation does not mean individualization. Differentiated practices look for patterns in student learning needs and then create strategies that target groups of students in the classroom.

Differentiated assessment involves providing students flexible options in product, process and modality to demonstrate their learning. Some examples of differentiated assessment include individual projects, problem-based projects, learning contracts, role-playing or performance, curriculum compacting for students who already know the concept, learning-style options (auditory, visual, kinesthetic), portfolios, tiered activities based on ability, open-ended and closed questions, and opportunities to redo an assessment.

For More Information

- Abdao, D. 2015. "Differentiated Assessment." *Principles and Methods of Assessment* (blog). <https://abdao.wordpress.com/2015/07/18/differentiated-assessment/>.
- Alberta Assessment Consortium. nd. "Differentiated Assessment." <https://aac.ab.ca/learn/go/differentiated-assessment/>.
- Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) Teachers. "Differentiation and Assessment." ACE Educator Resources. <https://sites.google.com/site/aceeducatorresources/Home/assessment-resources/differentiation-and-assessment>.



Accommodations give students with individual learning needs an equitable opportunity to succeed.

Targeted Strategies (Tier 2)

Scaffolding is an instructional strategy where teachers provide struggling students with additional support to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of concepts and skills. Scaffolding in assessment includes such strategies as

- alternative format for students to access information,
- organizers to break down the tasks for students,
- alternative formats for students to provide evidence of learning,
- additional time to learn the material and complete assignments and
- detailed feedback on work in progress. (Bennett and Mulgrew 2018, 65)

Accommodations or Assistive Supports is a change or alteration in the regular way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments or participate in classroom activities. Accommodations include special teaching or assessment strategies, equipment or other supports that remove, or at least lessen, the impact of a student's individual learning needs. The goal of accommodations is to give students with individual learning needs an equitable opportunity to succeed. Accommodations or assistive supports for assessment include

- allowing extended time,
- allowing breaks during a test,
- reducing the number of questions,
- breaking the assessment into smaller parts and administer them at separate times,
- translating the assessment or providing an interpreter,
- allowing the use of bilingual dictionaries,
- adapting the text to an appropriate reading level,
- allowing the student to audio record their responses,
- providing a separate room and
- providing a noise-buffering headphone.

It is important that the teacher talk with the student's parent or guardian about the use of accommodation or assistive supports to ensure they understand their child's learning needs and successes (Alberta Education 2006).

For More Information

- Alberta Education. 2006. "Selecting Accommodations and Strategies." In *Individualized Program Planning*. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/384992/individualized-program-planning-2006.pdf>.
- Martin, S. "How Can I Adapt My Assessments to Better Meet the Needs of My Students with LDs?" LD@school website. www.ldatschool.ca/a-t-e-assessments/.
- GreatSchools. 2015. "Fair and Equitable Grading Practices for Students with LD Who Have IEPs." GreatSchools website. www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/grading-students-with-ieps/.



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Teachers must design assessment strategies specific to individualized learning goals.

Individualized Strategies (Tier 3)

Students with specific learning needs often have an individualized program plan/instructional support plan (IPP/ISP) developed by the students' learning team that outlines the components of the students' educational program. The IPP/SLP is a planning document that helps to monitor and evaluate the students' educational program and progress. Some students will have an *adapted program* meaning that their educational program is based on the program of studies, but adjustments are being made to the instructional and learning processes to address the unique needs of the students. Generally, students who are gifted and those who are performing below grade level will be on an adapted program. Some students will have a *modified program*, meaning their educational program is composed of learning goals significantly different from provincial curriculum and specifically developed to meet the students' unique needs (Alberta Education 2007).

Whether a student has an adapted or modified program, the learning goals and objectives in the IPP/SLP will be stated in measurable terms that set the standard for the student's learning. Any accommodations or assistive supports for learning and assessment are also identified. Teachers may need to design specialized classroom assessment strategies and tools to collect

evidence to measure student learning specific to the individualized goals in the IPP/SLP. Teachers may choose to involve educational assistants in collecting evidence of student learning using the strategies designed by the teacher and which the teacher will then use to evaluate the students' progress (ATA 2016). Specialized classroom assessment strategies include

- observation methods such as anecdotal records, event recording, checklists and rating scales;
- portfolios and reviewing samples of student work;
- performance assessment;
- role play and interviews; and
- specialized inventories and rubrics.

For More Information

- Alberta Education. 2006. *Individualized Program Planning*. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/384992/individualized-program-planning-2006.pdf>.
- Calway, J. 2016. "Reflection—Principles of Assessment in Special Education." *Ms Calway (blog)*. <https://mscalway.wordpress.com/2016/10/03/reflection-principles-of-assessment-in-special-education/>.

REPORTING AND COMMUNICATING

Teachers are responsible for assessing and evaluating student learning and communicating to parents on student progress toward educational goals. The teacher has a responsibility to carry out frequent and fair evaluations of student learning and to base decisions regarding promotion and final grades on adequate evidence of the performance of each student. The reporting process includes ongoing dialogue between teachers, students and parents and more frequent communication when there are concerns about the students' progress. There should be no surprises in the report card for students or parents.

Report Cards and Student Conferences

Each school jurisdiction and school has student evaluation policies and procedures that guide its teachers. These policies may include information on how to report on the achievement of students with diverse learning needs. Teachers should discuss with parents or guardians any assessment modifications and assistive supports that have been provided to the students to support their learning. The overall goal is to promote student learning and to keep the lines of communication open between teachers, students and their families.

IPP/ISP Conferences and Meetings

Parents or guardians as part of the student's learning team will be involved in development and approval of the IPP/ISP. The school jurisdiction policy will establish the time frame for parent conferences. Teachers should communicate more frequently with parents or guardians about the students' progress using such strategies as telephone conversations, agenda books and e-mail. Teachers can demonstrate that they understand the students' specific learning needs and are supporting the students' learning when they communicate regularly with parents. Teachers and parents may request a progress meeting at any time to review learning goals, assistive supports and student progress.

For More Information

- Alberta Assessment Consortium. nd. *Communicating About Student Learning*. https://aac.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Communicating_about_Student_Learning.pdf.
- Alberta Education. 2003. *The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs*. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3531893/learning-team-handbook-for-parents.pdf>.



Teachers should keep parents or guardians informed of the assessment modifications and assistive supports provided to support the student's learning.

CONTINUING YOUR LEARNING

Reflect on the universal, targeted and individualized assessment strategies that you use to support student growth. Do these strategies reflect the values of fairness and equity?

How do you use student assessment data to support student learning and modify your instructional practice?

How can you use formative assessment data in weekly conversations with individual students about their learning?

How do your assessment strategies promote student self-reflection in an inclusive learning environment?

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Common Threads for Inclusive Education is a publication of the Alberta Teachers' Association intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to inclusive education competency.

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