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**Common Formative and Summative Assessments:
The Principal's Role...**

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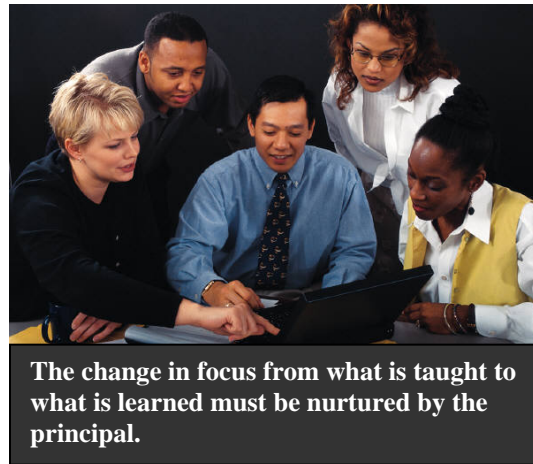
The Principal's Role in Supporting Common Formative and Summative Assessments

As we center our efforts on developing learner-centered schools—schools where each of us is focused on ensuring that every student is learning—common formative and summative assessments take on added importance because the emphasis is no longer on what lessons the teacher has delivered, but rather on what the students have learned as a result of those lessons. Indeed, there is a strong feeling that if the students have not learned it the teacher has not yet taught it (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999).

Therefore, ongoing common assessments become key to the school's success. It is the only way we have of knowing how effective our efforts are at increasing the learning of all students.

In most cases, this shift in emphasis from what has been taught to what has been learned is a major change. For years, we asked teachers to document when they covered a

standard or benchmark or, more often as not, a textbook chapter without having asked them the two imperative questions—why are you teaching it and how well have your students learned it? It is these questions we must answer if we are going to increase student achievement and to answer them we must change the way we look at assessment. This change in focus from what is taught to what is learned must be nurtured by the principal.



However, it is hard for us to nurture something we don't understand. Therefore the principal must become assessment literate (DuFour, 1999; Stiggins, 1999; Schmoker, 2000; Wiggins, 2004).

What does it mean to be assessment literate? In its most basic sense, Wiggins and McTighe in



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Understanding by Design say we need to start thinking like *assessors*. We need to start by asking ourselves, 'What is this standard asking my students to do, understand, or learn?' Then we need to ask ourselves, 'How are my students going to demonstrate that they have done it?' Next we need to use the answers to those questions to design our common formative and summative assessments. Once we have our assessments in place, we can plan our instruction so that our students will be able to successfully perform the assessment tasks that have been designed to measure their essential learning (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005).

In addition to this, Stiggins says, "Teachers and administrators who are assessment literate understand the difference between sound and unsound practices in assessment, evaluation, and communication" (Stiggins, Teams, 1999). According to him, those who are assessment literate:



- ✚ "Understand what assessment methods to use, and when to use them in order to gather dependable information about student achievement" (Stiggins, 1999);
- ✚ "Communicate assessment results effectively to all intended users — including principals, other teachers, parents and students — whether using report card grades, test scores, portfolios, or conferences" (Stiggins, 1999);
- ✚ "Understand how to use assessment to maximize student motivation and learning by involving students as full partners in assessment, record-keeping, and communication" (Stiggins, 1999).

To bring this to fruition within the school, "effective principals must work with their staff members to articulate clear and measurable (SMART) goals; to identify indicators that offer evidence of progress; and to develop systems for monitoring those indicators on a continuous basis" (DuFour, 1999). It is the principal's responsibility to help



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create a culture where everyone is focused on student achievement and working together as a team while they do it. The principal is indispensable in establishing this collaborative working environment. In schools that function as learning communities, the principal doesn't just encourage collaboration. The principal creates structures and expectations to ensure that teachers will work in teams (DuFour, 1999). According to DuFour, these structures include:

- ✚ *Providing staff members with relevant background information and research findings.*
- ✚ *Ensuring that teachers receive the training and coaching to master skills that make them more effective in achieving the goals of the school.*
- ✚ *Providing time and creating structures for the staff to engage in reflection and discussion.*
- ✚ *Developing monitoring procedures that supply teams with the data, information, and feedback that enable them to make the necessary course corrections and improvements to achieve team objectives (DuFour, 1999).*

As we move away from thinking of assessment as a unit test at the end of

a chapter and start thinking of it as a mutually agreed upon indicator of student learning that we use to inform our instruction and that we teach students to use it as an ongoing learning tool, professional learning communities become a vital part of the assessment process. By working together to create common formative and summative assessments and by analyzing the results of those assessments as a team, we can help to ensure that all our students are learning by being able to plan timely interventions where and when they are needed to guarantee each student's academic success. For this to happen, the principal must be actively engaged in each part of the process as an instructional leader that helps his or her staff successfully transform the school into a learner-centered community.

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