

REL Mid-Atlantic 2016 Educator Effectiveness Webinar Series
Assessment Literacy for Educators
Q&A with Edward Roeber, Ph.D.
May 5, 2016

In this webinar, Dr. Edward Roeber, Assessment Director for the Michigan Assessment Consortium, addressed what educators need to know about formative, summative, and interim assessments and how each functions in a coherent assessment system. This Q&A addressed the questions participants had for Dr. Roeber following the webinar. The [webinar recording](#) and [PowerPoint presentation](#) are also available.

Questions

1. What are the essential skills required for assessment literacy?

Dr. Roeber describes the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) assessment literacy standards, including sample disposition, knowledge, and performance standards that building-level administrators should possess. Comparable assessment literacy standards are available for students (elementary and secondary, teachers, central office administrators, and local and state policymaker. Regarding dispositions, he indicates that building-level administrators should believe that an effective assessment system must balance different purposes for different users and use appropriate assessment methods to measure different learning targets. Multiple measures can provide a more balanced picture of a student or a school, and quality assessments are a critical attribute of effective teaching and learning. Regarding knowledge, Dr. Roeber states that building-level administrators should know that a balanced assessment system consists of different users who have different assessment purposes, and that different assessment purposes may require the use of different assessment methods.

Building-level administrators should also know about different types of assessment methods and what teachers should know about how and when to select each method. Regarding performance standards, Dr. Roeber says building-level administrators should promote a culture of appropriate assessment practice and assessment literacy for him or herself and staff. They should also promote the use of assessment data to improve student learning through the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Using assessment results, including subgroup performance, can influence the school's curriculum and instruction programs. Multiple sources of data over time can be used to identify trends in learning.

Dr. Roeber states that teacher assessment skills include choosing and developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions; effectively administering, scoring, reading, and interpreting the results of assessment methods (both externally-produced and teacher-produced); utilizing assessment results to inform decisions about individual students,

instruction, curriculum development, and school improvement; developing valid student-grading procedures; communicating assessment results to stakeholders; and recognizing unethical, illegal, and inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

2. Do you know of any current empirical research about the current competency of teachers' assessment literacy?

Dr. Roeber notes the limited research on current teacher competency regarding teachers' assessment literacy and that the MAC is hoping to collect information on the extent of educator assessment literacy using the assessment literacy tools they developed. He mentions the three elements of assessment literacy for teachers: 1) an understanding of what assessment methods to use in order to gather dependable information about student achievement; 2) communicating assessment results effectively, whether using report card grades, test scores, portfolios, or conferences; and 3) understanding how to use assessment to maximize student motivation and learning by involving students as full-time partners in assessment, record keeping, and communication.

3. How would you describe the difference between assessment literacy and data literacy? Are these differences important or critical? If yes, why? How might each type of literacy assist educators as they make instructional decisions?

Dr. Roeber explains that there is an important difference between assessment literacy and data literacy, in that assessment literacy is simply the process used to collect information. He says that data literacy is much broader and requires the individual to know how to collect data relevant to decisions to be made, read and interpret data itself, such as analyzing data tables in reports.

4. How do you address the multiple interests of varied stakeholders in assessment (e.g., classroom-level for teachers vs. system-level for leadership), mindful of implications (e.g., opportunity costs)?

Dr. Roeber explains that all stakeholders need to equally be assessment literate, although what constitutes assessment literacy will vary by stakeholder. These stakeholders include students; parents/guardians; teachers; specialists at the district and school levels; building administrators; central office administrators; policymakers at the local, state, and national levels; and the general public. In terms of teachers and administrators, Dr. Roeber suggests some action steps toward improved assessment literacy, which include providing ample introductory, intermediate, and advanced level assessment learning opportunities, endorsing teacher and administrator certificates by creating an assessment specialization (thus recognizing those who have become more assessment literate), and providing assessment specialists to every district. Dr. Roeber indicates that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states and districts with more flexibility in how they spend federal education funds and perhaps this may open up the opportunity for addressing the assessment literacy needs of educators and others.

5. How do you harness the formative assessment process that takes place in the classroom? Formative assessment should be in the classroom but the patterns and trends are with school improvement process in real time. I haven't figured out how to do that well.

Dr. Roeber states that the effective use of formative assessment practices requires teachers to understand how on-going instructionally-embedded assessment strategies can help all students achieve at higher levels. Current research on assessment literacy now has included more of an emphasis on the use of formative assessment as opposed to the exclusive focus on summative measures, with the intention to help move students toward learning of instructional targets. With this focus on formative assessment, the complexity of assessment systems has also increased. The Herman and Heritage model (2007), a Coherent System of Measures, discussed in Dr. Roeber's presentation, displays how formative assessment is ongoing and integrated into instruction, as well as provides instructionally-trackable information. Dr. Roeber also states that a coherent balanced assessment program using both results from formative and summative assessments is critical to improving student achievement.

6. How do you help resistant teachers; those who have been teaching for years and "know how to read data"?

Dr. Roeber states that it is imperative to engage teachers and have them be excited about the positive effects of assessment literacy. He outlines that for pre-service teacher programs, it is essential that these programs observe and model the use of effective assessment practices at the university level and offer courses on classroom assessment, using both formative assessment practices and summative measures. He also states pre-service teachers must practice using classroom assessment strategies while student teaching.

For in-service teachers, Dr. Roeber suggests the following practices: developing assessment learning opportunities at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels; endorsing teacher certificates by creating an assessment specialization; and seeking to provide teacher assessment specialists to every district. He describes how the MAC is currently engaged in this effort and has developed a set of eight introductory modules and has designed a credentialed system for assessment specialization.

7. How does assessment literacy relate to the opt-out movement? Is there a relationship between assessment literacy and participation rates in state or national assessments?

Dr. Roeber describes early on in the presentation that as individuals and stakeholders begin to understand what assessment literacy is, they influence students and parents/guardians in a way that they are less likely (or more likely) to opt out students from the assessments. As more knowledge is disseminated about assessment literacy, there is more attention given to the topic, therefore fostering more opinions about assessments.

8. Why do we use the term “balanced assessment,” which calls to mind a scale where each type is equal?

Dr. Roeber explicitly states that balanced approaches to assessment are essential, and notes the difference of “balanced approaches” as opposed to “balanced assessments.” Balanced approaches to assessment require an understanding of how formative and summative assessments can work together, and include assessments *for* and *of* learning which measure the same concepts in different ways at different points in the instructional cycle. The mission of MAC also focuses on accurate, balanced, and meaningful assessment. In reality, however, there should be much more assessment *for* learning than assessment *of* learning in a “balanced assessment system.”

9. What are some strategies to overcoming an 'accountability' mindset?

Dr. Roeber explains while displaying the Herman and Heritage Model (2007), a Coherent Systems of Measures, that a coordinated, coherent assessment system defines the parameters of assessment literacy for educators, students and their parents, and policymakers, and what these individuals need to know and do relative to the assessments used in schools, in the various assessment contexts found in schools. All individuals are involved in assessment literacy and are accountable, avoiding making one specific person or group at fault or accountable for students’ academic success. Dr. Roeber states that the focus should be on good classroom instruction. He also explains that because data plays a larger role in assessment literacy now than in the past, there is more room for outcomes-oriented accountability, easing the accountability mindset of teachers.

10. What are the key points about assessment literacy?

Dr. Roeber describes how assessment literacy is important for all of those individuals affected by education and stakeholders: students, parents/guardians, teachers, specialists at the district and school levels, building administrators, central office administrators, policymakers at all levels, and the general public. Dr. Roeber highlights that everyone has the potential to become more assessment literate and that learning more about assessment can range from introductions to in-depth learning about assessment. It ought to be an on-going process engaged in over time. When educators become more assessment-literate, they will be more effective users of assessment, which will in turn will serve to improve student learning; and when policymakers are more assessment-literate, they will be better able to help ensure that only sound assessment policies are promulgated.

11. Where can I find resources for assessment literacy? Which groups/organizations are available in this area?

More information regarding assessment literacy can be found at the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC), the American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in

Education, National Education Association, Council of Chief and State School Officers (InTASC model). Information and resources can also be found from the following authors: Richard Stiggins, Paul Black, William Dylan, Susan Brookhart, and James McMillan.

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