



National Research & Development Center to Improve
EDUCATION FOR SECONDARY ENGLISH LEARNERS

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A VISION FOR USING AN ARGUMENT-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDITY APPLIED TO A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SECONDARY GRADES

Brief III: Inverting the Assessment System

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The Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) Framework presents a vision for a system of assessments for English Learners in secondary grades that brings assessment closer to the classroom and fully involves teachers in assessment development and validation.¹ The CAS Framework is intended to signal a new

and equitable direction and to provoke reflection and debate among all those concerned with improving outcomes for English Learners. This brief describes the inverted approach to the assessment system adopted in the CAS Framework.

Current System

Currently, the assessment experiences of English Learners (and indeed, most, if not all K–12 students in the United States) are dominated by large-scale, year-end assessments (Figure 1).² These assessments are designed to support accountability reporting

and decision-making, but in practice are used for a variety of other purposes, including placement, accountability, classification, and reclassification.³ While the current system does include other forms of assessment such as benchmark assessments, most of these

function in service of, or as secondary to, large-scale assessments. Too often, student scores on the year-end summative assessment are treated as the most accurate and meaningful indicator of a student’s achievement, and information collected throughout the year is often designed to predict this score and gauge student progress on this assessment, rather than to collect substantive, actionable information about student learning.

An Inverted System

Undue attention to the summative assessment can distort classroom teaching and learning practices. For this reason, the CAS adopts the approach of inverting the current assessment system (Figure 2) to privilege assessments at the classroom level that inform ongoing teaching and learning for English Learners as the drivers of all assessment types.

The rationale for this inversion is articulated in the logic model in Figure 3. Within this logic model, there is congruence across the assessments in terms of the focus on simultaneous academic content and language development and in reinforcing approaches to teaching that are appropriate for the specified educational goals for English Learners.

In the **inverted system**, the large-scale summative score is less of a culmination and more of a confirmation of information that is already known. Such a system will require significant

Figure 1. Dominance of Large-Scale Standardized Assessment

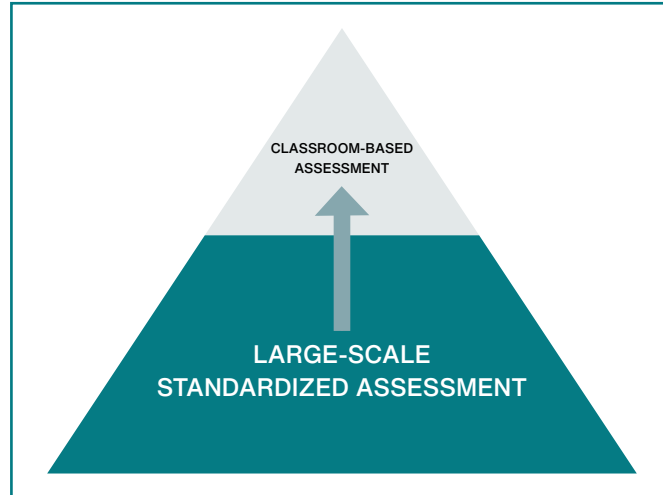
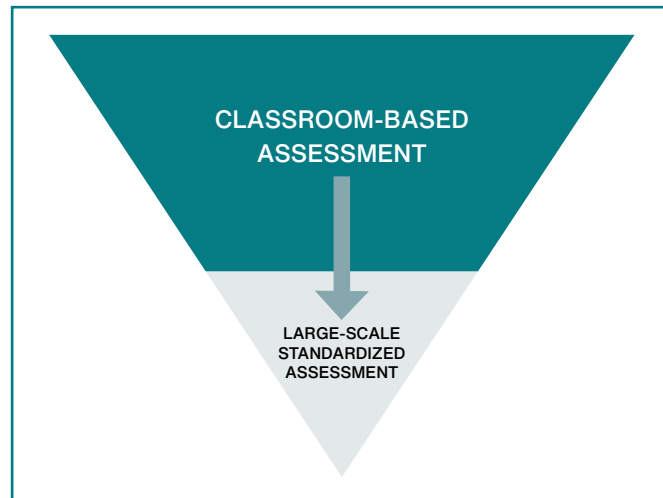
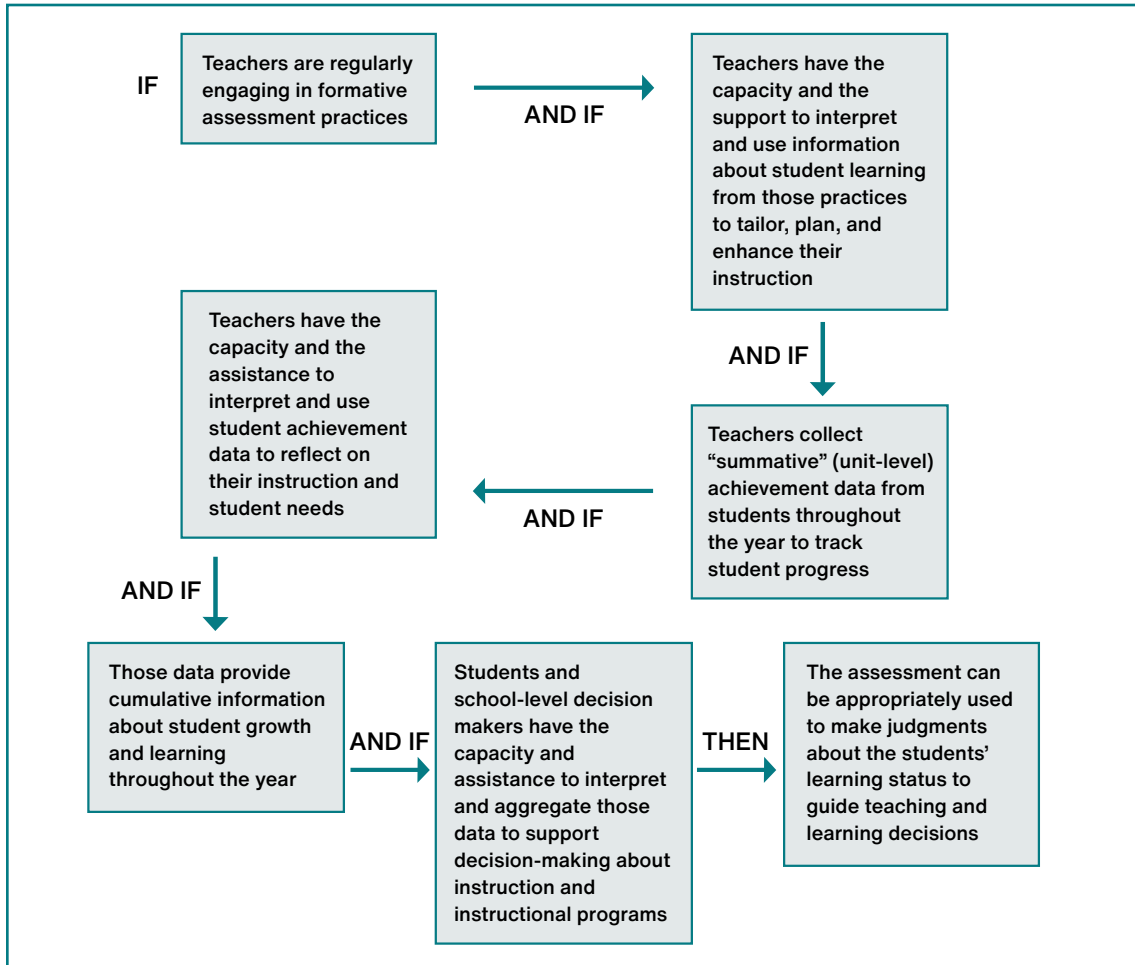


Figure 2. Inverted Assessment System



investments to ensure that teachers have the capacity, support, and assistance to engage in the instructional and assessment practices described. The cost savings from using fewer formal assessments offer an opportunity to redirect and reprioritize spending towards investments in the human capital of teachers instead.

Figure 3: Logic Model for Inverted Assessment System



A Range of Assessments for Decision-Making

Just as a one-size-fits all pedagogy does not meet the learning needs of every English Learner, no single assessment can accomplish all assessment purposes for English Learners. The inverted CAS comprises a range of assessments with the aim of providing decision-makers with the information they need to support English Learners in the secondary grades to engage in challenging and rigorous content learning required to meet state standards. Table 1 shows the potential users, purposes, and proposed methods of assessment within the CAS.

A system of assessments, each one with a distinct purpose, is needed to ensure that all stakeholders have the appropriate type of information.

Table 1. Assessments and Their Uses in a CAS¹

TYPE	USER	PURPOSE	METHOD	INFORMATION
Formative Assessment designed into ongoing teaching and learning	Teachers and students	Inform ongoing learning and teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of classroom discourse/students engaged in instructional tasks • Analysis of student work • Student self-assessment/peer assessment • Metacognitive monitoring relative to goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging, partially formed language • Understanding of academic content • Current learning status relative to lesson goals • Any difficulties, misconceptions
Classroom summative at the end of a learning episode or thematic series of lessons	Teachers, students, parents, school-level administrators	Evaluate learning relative to medium-term goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student work products and performances (e.g., portfolios), with associated rubric(s) • Student self-assessment and evaluative reflection • Classroom summative assessments (e.g., unit assessments, interim assessments that cover one or more units) designed/selected by teacher(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumulative record of learning • Status of student learning relative to medium-term goals (e.g., units) • Student strengths and needs
Classroom summative at the end of course, semester or year	Teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators	Evaluate learning relative to long-term goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student work products and performances (e.g., portfolio), with associated rubric(s) • Student self-assessment and evaluative reflection • Classroom summative assessments designed/selected by teacher(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumulative record of learning • Status of student learning relative to longer-term goals • Student strengths and needs
External summative at the end of the year	Teachers, students, parents, school, district and state administrators	Federal accountability, evaluate programs, inform systemic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-administered standardized assessment • Statewide standardized assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement relative to end-of-year state standards

¹ Since the CAS represents a reimagining of what is possible, not a reordering of what currently is, there are types of assessment (e.g., district-administered, off-the-shelf assessments) that are not explicitly included in the framework.

Endnotes

- 1 Heritage, M., Wylie, C., Faulkner-Bond, M., Walqui, A., (2021). *A vision for using an argument-based framework for validity applied to a comprehensive system of assessment for English learners in the secondary grades*. WestEd.
- 2 Gordon, E. W. (2020). Toward Assessment in the Service of Learning. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 39(3), 72–78.
- 3 Umansky, I. M., & Porter, L. (2020). State English learner education policy: A conceptual framework to guide comprehensive policy action. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(0), 17. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.4594>



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