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The Principal as Assessment Leader

Edited by Thomas R. Guskey

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *The Principal as Assessment Leader*, edited by Thomas R. Guskey. The eleven contributors to *The Principal as Assessment Leader* examine the many different issues a principal must consider in leading efforts to improve assessment practices.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers either to work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics a particular author addresses in his or her chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or teams to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess practices in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to develop a more effective assessment system.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to build assessment literacy in your school and to implement sound assessment practices that will benefit the learning of all students.

Chapter 1

Paving the Way for an Assessment-Rich Culture

Cassandra Erkens

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1. The author maintains that in order to help teachers understand and apply quality formative assessment practices, leaders must "create a learning culture" for the teachers in their schools. What are the hallmarks of a learning culture? How does this approach differ from traditional forms of professional development?

2. What steps have you taken to create a learning culture for the teachers in your school?

3. List the three ways in which formative assessment "honors the natural, iterative learning process for learners of all ages."

4. The core of this chapter describes "employing seven strategies for student-involved learning" to help teachers develop their assessment literacy. The first of these strategies is setting learning targets and deciding how competency in the targets will be assessed. What additional targets might be added to the author's list on page 14, and how would it be clear that teachers had met those targets?

5. Describe the process teachers would use to examine assessments that have been created and published by others in order to improve their own assessments.

6. How do you encourage teachers in your school to offer their peers descriptive feedback about their assessment practices?

7. The author notes that professional learning communities can *experience* formative assessment by engaging in a cycle of goal-setting and self-monitoring. Describe the steps of the cycle.

8. When teams set learning targets and monitor their own progress, they are able to identify their specific learning needs, which can then be addressed with targeted "mini-lessons." What are some ways that leaders can create time for teams to engage in this form of professional development?

Chapter 2

Build, Promote, Guide, Provide, Monitor: Action Words for Principals as Instructional Leaders in Assessment

Susan Huff

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1. For teachers to feel safe to engage in collaborative work on assessment, they need to know how principals will use their formative assessment data. What is one purpose for which principals should *never* use teachers' formative assessment data? What is the appropriate use of formative assessment data?

2. What steps have you taken or might you take to build an interdependent work structure—that is, a structure that facilitates teacher collaboration—in your school?

3. When principals are effective assessment leaders, they promote a coherent system of standards, a common curriculum, common formative assessments, confirmed instructional practices, and timely interventions. Discuss how each of these components is linked to and builds on the others.

4. Give three examples of collaborative job-embedded professional development for teachers. How is each one related to the analysis of student assessment data?

5. To assist teachers in analyzing data, principals must select the data that will be most relevant to the teachers' work of setting goals and assessing progress. What types of data does the author recommend principals retrieve and provide to their teachers?

6. Why is it important for principals to monitor the progress of individual students? What are some mechanisms for doing so?

7. Do you regularly participate in data discussions with your teacher teams?

8. On page 48, the author states that "assessment leaders expect and inspect assessment products [that] hold teams accountable for their assessment work." Give examples of the kinds of products to which she is referring. Are there any assessment products that you might want to add to those your school currently generates?

Chapter 3

A Principal's Guide to Assessment

Chris Jakicic

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1. Define *summative assessments*, *formative assessments*, and *interim assessments.* What are the purposes for which each type of assessment is used?

2. What is the first step a school should take in evaluating the effectiveness of its assessment system?

3. What are *common assessments*? If a school decides to use common assessments, what arrangements can the principal put into place to provide teachers with the time for writing the assessments?

4. What questions can principals ask teachers to help them determine how frequently to give formative assessments?

5. Two concerns are common among teachers when their school is making the transition to a system that uses more formative assessments: that the additional testing will take

time away from instruction and that they don't know how to write good test items. How can principals effectively address these concerns?

6. Discuss how to build a culture in which teachers willingly share their assessment results and use data to improve their practice. Does such a culture exist in your school/district?

7. Does your school have a data management system that "accelerates data analysis for teachers"? What capabilities does the author recommend for such a system?

Chapter 4

Building Assessment Expertise Through Twenty-First-Century Professional Development

Dennis King

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1. The author summarizes twentieth-century assessment practices as "testing, scoring, and reporting." How do twenty-first-century assessment practices differ?

2. Why does the author suggest that the first step in developing teachers' assessment literacy is to focus on the curriculum? How do horizontal and vertical teams contribute to the building of a strong curriculum?

3. What is the role of assessment in the response to intervention process?

4. The best way for teachers to develop their assessment literacy is to work in collaborative grade-level or departmental teams. What are some examples of assessment-related activities that teams can engage in? Do teachers in your school regularly participate in such activities?

5. What do teachers need to understand about the data from large-scale assessments? How have you worked, or might you work, with your teachers to help them use such data to improve instruction?

6. When shifting to twenty-first-century assessment practices, why is it necessary to develop assessment literacy in the external school community? What are some ways in which this might be accomplished? Have you made an effort to educate external stakeholders?

Chapter 5

A Seven-Module Plan to Build Teacher Knowledge of Balanced Assessment

Tammy Heflebower

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1.   What is meant by *balanced assessment*?

2.   What is the difference between norm-referenced assessments and criterion-referenced assessments?

3.   What does an achievement test measure? What information does an aptitude test provide? What are some possible causes of a discrepancy between a student's performance on an aptitude test and his or her performance on an achievement test?

4.   What is the value of mid-cycle and short-cycle assessments? Why is it important for teams of teachers to develop common interim assessments?

5.   The author provides seven training modules to build teachers' assessment literacy. How would you go about setting up this training for the teachers in your school or district?

6. In which areas of assessment do you feel your knowledge and understanding are particularly strong? Which areas of your own assessment literacy need further development?

Chapter 6

Plug Us In, Please: Using Digital Tools for Data Collection

William M. Ferriter

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1. Explain the author's statement "Technology makes fine-grained actions and decisions possible for every teacher."

2. How do interactive whiteboards and student responders contribute to assessment *for* learning?

3. Timely and specific feedback has been identified as a crucial factor in improving student achievement. What are the barriers to teachers' delivering this kind of feedback, and how can technology help to eliminate those barriers?

4. How comfortable are the teachers in your school with the general process of collecting, analyzing, and acting on data? Are they ready to benefit from the introduction of new tools to aid in these endeavors?

5. Explain how reflecting on your building's core beliefs can inform your decisions about which digital tools would be most useful to introduce into your school.

6. Have you used any of the digital tools discussed in this chapter? Which ones strike you as promising for your school? What steps would you have to take to make digital tools part of the assessment practices in your building?

Chapter 7

Finding Meaning in the Numbers

Nicole M. Vagle

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1. How does the author define *data work*?

2. What are the two broad areas leaders need to focus on to facilitate high-quality data work in their schools?

3. What does the author mean by "a culture of possibility"? How does creating such a culture relate to beliefs about the extent of teachers' impact on student achievement?

4. Have the teams at your school established norms for their collaborative work?

5. The author states, "Being data literate means that we understand the purpose and use of various types of data." What questions can leaders ask to help teachers think about different kinds of data and what they might reveal?

6. Figure 7.3 (pages 162–163), the protocol for a team approach to analyzing and responding to data from a common assessment, indicates that the data should be

organized by learning target, by individual student, and by teacher. What are the advantages of organizing data in these three ways?

7. What questions guide the team's analysis of the data? What questions guide the team in planning responses to the data analysis?

8. Explain how the biology teacher's organization of the data in table 7.6 (page 169) allowed him to group his students and provide appropriate differentiated responses.

Chapter 8

The Courage to Implement Standards-Based Report Cards

Ainsley B. Rose

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1. Why is the traditional report card, with single letter grades to describe performance, inadequate for a standards-based approach to education? What is the function of a standards-based report card, and how does it differ from that of a norm-referenced report card?

2. What are the goals of assessment in a standards-based approach to education? Why is detailed feedback essential to this approach?

3. What are the two points the author suggests that educators must explain to the community about "the new education"?

4. What information is included in a standards-based report card, and what forms might it take?

5. What are the four guidelines for developing the language that will be used on a standards-based report card to describe students' progress?

6. In developing a standards-based report card, the author's district decided to create two report cards: a formative report card and a summative report card. What information did each report card convey?

7. Have you considered or tried moving to a standards-based report card? What has been your experience? Having read the author's description of the steps his district went through in developing a new report card, how might you approach this process, or what might you have done differently?

Chapter 9

Lowering High School Failure Rates

Mark Weichel

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1. What are the four broad requirements the author lists for "improving assessment scores and reducing high failure rates"?

2. Why is establishing a team of teacher leaders to guide a change effort, such as the effort to improve failure rates, more successful than using a top-down managerial approach?

3. What are the seven ideas from assessment research that the author recommends considering when developing a best-practice grading philosophy for your school? Which of these practices are in effect in your school?

4. Why is it important for a school to have a schoolwide intervention system? What support does such a system provide to individual teachers?

5. Describe the benefits of using a computer system to generate weekly reports on student performance.

6. What are the author's recommendations for holding a formal discussion with a teacher who has high failure rates?

7. What ongoing steps should a principal take to ensure that the school continues to maintain low failure rates?

Chapter 10

Assessing the Student at Risk: A New Look at School-Based Credit Recovery

Charles Hinman

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1. What is the purpose of credit recovery?

2. A credit-recovery assessment is the first step in the school-based credit recovery process. Explain what this entails.

3. What are the ways in which a school-based credit recovery program addresses the social/emotional issues that led to student failure?

4. How might a principal approach teachers' resistance to changing a student's original grade or issuing previously unearned credit?

5. Students and their parents must understand that a credit-recovery program will not affect a student's grade point average. What, instead, is the goal of a credit-recovery program?

6. Why should freshmen not be admitted into credit-recovery programs?

7. How can a student's schedule be arranged so that he or she can be concurrently enrolled in the regular program and the credit-recovery program without falling further behind?

8. What are the staffing requirements for a school-based recovery program?

9. What does the author mean by "the inequities of student assessment in our traditional school systems"?

Chapter 11

Formative Assessment, Transformative Relationships

Tom Hierck

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1. On page 247, the author notes that "in assessment, we build relationships by helping students ask and answer questions about their achievement." What are the three questions Royce Sadler poses to frame students' conversations with their teachers about their learning?

2. What are some examples of specific supports that principals can provide to their teachers to help them "help each student bridge the gap between where that student is and where that student needs to be"?

3. How do rubrics help to clarify learning targets for both teachers and students?

4. What are the qualities of *descriptive* feedback?

5. Have you been able to strike a balance between focusing on results and building and maintaining positive relationships with teachers? How do you approach data analysis so that teachers do not feel threatened by it?

6. What are the potential benefits of conducting action research within a school or district? Have you and your teachers engaged in this process?

7. On page 259, the author talks about the principal's role in leading a "staff dialogue on assessment, learning, teaching, student success, and staff fulfillment." How might Sadler's three questions guide your discussions with teachers about school improvement?