



## Comprehensive and Responsive Assessment

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The growing concern about students' readiness for college and careers among governors, chief state school officers, business leaders, college faculty, and teachers has led to a demand for more rigorous instruction for the nation's children (Grossman, Reyna, & Shipton, 2011). The concerns have engendered two major shifts in K-12 education:

1. the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and
2. the development of assessments that align with these new state standards.

Descriptive data of student performance indicate our students are not performing as well as we would like. For instance, only 38 percent of U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> graders performed at or above proficiency in reading according to 2009 NAEP data, and only 25 percent of high school graduates in 2011 scored at a level on the ACT that indicates readiness for entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework. We can reverse this long-standing trend of underperformance on reading assessments by a large number of U.S. students with responsive instruction to improve high school students' reading abilities. Assessments are critical in planning responsive instruction for students who struggle with reading and writing.

Reading and writing assessments help teachers construct an understanding of how students are developing, and thus provide critical information that allows them to make important instructional decisions (Afflerbach, 2007). Afflerbach notes that responsive teachers need to examine the consequences, usefulness, roles, and responsibilities related to assessments, as well as the reliability and validity of the assessments.

This point is particularly important for the assessment of students who are English learners (ELs). Standardized tests that aim to measure knowledge of academic content (e.g., science, math) generally are not sensitive to second-language literacy development. As a consequence, some educators may incorrectly interpret data from these measures as evidence that students lack content mastery. A closer look might show,

however, that the students performed at the normal pace of the second-language acquisition process (IRA & NICHD, 2007; Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003). Tests results also are confounded by aspects of EL students' diversity (e.g., native-language literacy, educational history). Further, the tests may require knowledge of cultural experiences that many EL students have not had. The outcome of all this is that for EL students, many tests do not measure what they are intended to measure. It will be important to remember this when interpreting results for ELs on the new assessments linked to the Common Core state standards. The standards at Grades 6 and higher assume students have basic literacy skills, which may not be the case for newcomer and beginning level English learners.

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### Using Assessments to Plan Instruction

To plan responsive instruction, assessment must be ongoing. The assessment plan must include both formal and informal measures to gauge student progress and determine the effectiveness of instructional programs and their impact on students. All students can benefit from a diagnostic assessment at the start of the school year. Instruction in reading, writing, language, listening, and speaking can be more carefully tailored to the students' needs when teachers know, for example, that students have strong decoding skills but lack understanding of specific comprehension strategies, such as determining importance or making inferences.

EL students also benefit when teachers know the extent of their native-language literacy skills, because many of these skills transfer to English literacy acquisition (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). In addition, EL students who have strong home-literacy experiences and opportunities generally achieve better English literacy outcomes than do those without such experiences (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006). Therefore, effective assessment practices include the initial testing of students' native-language literacy as well as their English literacy.

To capture students' varied reading, writing, and linguistic abilities and interests, assessment plans must endeavor to

create comprehensive student profiles that measure the full range of student performance. This may include:

1. Ascertaining students' concept of reading and writing
2. Identifying students' strengths and weaknesses at both the word level and text level
3. Assessing students' acumen for reading increasingly complex narrative and expository texts over time
4. Assessing students' acumen for applying the knowledge of language and conventions when writing.
5. Gauging students' affective responses to reading and writing activities
6. Involving students in the assessment process and using their voices to adjust instructional practice and assessment practices, if necessary.
7. Having students cite evidence for arguments and inferences based on close readings of text

Using these seven dimensions to develop comprehensive profiles increases the likelihood that assessment practices will be of maximum benefit to students. Comprehensive and timely profiles allow teachers to focus attention on whether students view reading as a word-calling task, or on whether they strive actively to construct meaning as they read. The profiles give teachers ways to become aware of students' reading fluency, observe their reading for miscues, and assess their comprehension-monitoring strategies. Additionally, the profiles guide teachers in examining the texts students read, determining whether the content engages their interest. Regular use of eAssessments or other online assessments can help facilitate timely snapshots of students' skills to inform instruction and improve accommodations for students who struggle with reading and writing. Additionally, using constructed responses gives a more comprehensive view of students' strengths and weakness in writing and in citing text evidence.

Responsive instruction for ELs may be more complicated than for native English speakers. In general, EL students attain word-level skills, such as decoding, word recognition, and spelling, in a way similar to their English-speaking peers. For text-level skills, such as reading comprehension and writing, however, the situation differs because of EL students' more limited oral English proficiency and knowledge of English vocabulary and syntax. Given the important roles that well-developed listening and speaking and extensive vocabulary knowledge play in English reading and writing success, not to mention background schema, literacy instruction for EL students must incorporate extensive opportunities for language and vocabulary development. In particular, language and writing skills must be taught directly and explicitly. Students' writing, for example, can improve when teachers model a range of writing forms and techniques, and review writing samples with students to

help students expand their English usage. Writing can also improve when teachers have beginning-level students copy words and text until they gain more proficiency (Graham & Perin, 2007). Discussion and repeated practice with words and sentence patterns familiarizes EL students with English language conventions, such as how words and sentences are arranged in oral and written discourse (Garcia & Beltran, 2003).

### **Applying the Research:**

**Hampton-Brown Edge** provides a robust array of tools for both formal and informal assessments aligned with instructional materials to support teachers in understanding their students' needs and monitoring their progress. The assessment also identifies which students are in need of basic or advanced phonics, phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling instruction, provided in the Inside Phonics Kit.

**Diagnostic and Placement Assessments** Students entering the program can take a Phonics Test and a Lexile® Placement Test. This assessment provides a recommended placement in the appropriate level of *Edge*—Fundamentals, Level A, Level B, or Level C.

In addition to these placement tools, the program includes recommendations for further diagnostic assessment with standardized instruments from a number of test publishers. Such measures can give additional information on students' strengths and instructional needs in phonics, decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, grammar, and writing. The instructional plan also provides consistent support for informal diagnosis of student needs. Lessons include frequent checks for understanding and many opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills through a variety of oral and written responses. Ongoing progress monitoring enables teachers to gauge which students in levels A–C may need intervention on targeted basic or advanced-level phonics skills or more extensive systematic and explicit instruction in reading foundational skills. As they observe and evaluate these steps of the plan, teachers engage in continuing diagnosis of students' needs and progress in all areas of literacy and language development.

**Formal Progress Monitoring** The main formal assessment of student progress in *Edge* is tailored to the language and reading proficiency level of the student. Unit Tests include unique reading passages, and context-rich opportunities to assess language and grammar, and prompts for writing composition. A balance of selected response and constructed response items help students gain comfort with the question types they will encounter on high-stakes tests.

**Informal Progress Monitoring** The program provides a wealth of resources and daily support to help teachers monitor student progress informally, and provide immediate scaffolding or feedback. Lessons include an Ongoing Assessment step to assist teachers in quickly determining if students understand the skill. In addition, lessons are constructed so that at each step of the learning process, all

students respond in ways that demonstrate how successfully they are learning the strategy or content objectives. Students respond in a variety of ways, through graphic organizers, language frames and sentence frames, choral responses, written responses, gestures, and more. This interactive lesson structure gives teachers continual opportunities to note students' successes and areas of need. When students have difficulty with a strategy or concept, lessons provide specific suggestions for corrective feedback, addressing student needs immediately.

**Affective and Metacognitive Measures** Responsive assessment examines students' attitudes toward reading and writing and their self-assessments of achievement. *Edge* includes interest surveys, inventories related to the behaviors of reading and writing, metacognitive measures in which students can share the strategies they are using to determine the meaning of words and comprehend selections, and student self-assessments that lead to goal-setting.

**Summative Assessments** The program also includes two Level Tests that measure achievement on the standards taught in the program that are typically assessed on high-stakes tests. Two forms are provided.

**Reteaching and Review** The program includes flexible reteaching prescriptions for the informal and formal progress-monitoring tests and for the summative assessments so that teachers meet the learning needs of the students who were assessed. Review activities and resources aid retention and help students integrate knowledge.

**Fluency Assessment** Each week students can practice fluency with a passage, excerpted from the reading selection. This same passage can be used for a timed reading in which the words-correct-per-minute (WCPM) fluency rate is calculated. Students are encouraged to graph their fluency rates over time so they can see the evidence of their improvement. Fluency development in the core materials is supported by daily fluency activities including listening, choral reading, partner reading, and recording, with em-

phasis on intonation, phrasing, and expression. Additional technology support for fluency practice and assessment of WCPM rates is provided in the Comprehension Coach at levels A–C.

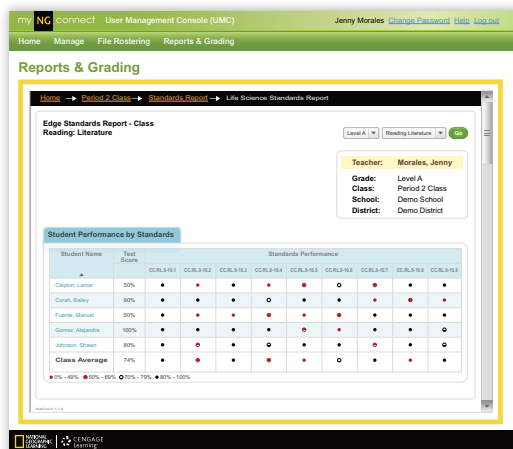
## Preparation for Common Core Assessments

To provide our learners with the best opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge on the new Common Core aligned assessments, we have incorporated the best instructional practices for striving readers and writers and English learners in our program. In addition, we have a range of measures to help teachers monitor student progress and prepare for these high-stakes tests, including interim measures. Our writing and language rubrics and our Unit Tests can help teachers determine where gaps in understanding occur as well as where language acquisition may interfere with demonstrating content knowledge. The passages and content in the Level Tests are calibrated so students have a chance to demonstrate their knowledge with texts written at accessible reading levels and the English Language Gains Test helps teachers determine language growth.

To help students practice for these new, computer-based standardized assessments, *Edge* includes online testing to help students become familiar with the particular skills and logistics required for computer-based testing. In addition to the frequent opportunities for students to practice taking tests online, eAssessment provides reports that identify target skills for reteaching and align performance to standards.

## Conclusion

*Edge* provides a full range of tools for formal and informal assessment that supports teachers in diagnosing their students' interest and needs and using assessment to continually monitor students' progress in order to provide striving readers and English learners with responsive instruction that optimizes growth and fosters success.



Reports help gauge student progress on Common Core State Standards and identify opportunities for intervention and reteaching.

