

What types of assessment does my child take and why?

Introduction:

Welcome to the Oregon Department of Education's learning session on *What types of assessment does my child take and why?* In this session Lina and Anna will discuss:

- The importance of parents understanding the different types of assessment and related practices used in Oregon and the purpose for each;
- The appropriate uses of foundational skills, formative, interim, and summative assessment to inform decision-making and help children be successful; and
- Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments and the type of information that each gives.

Lina and Anna are ready, so, let's get going!

Lina: Hi, my name is Lina, and I'm a kindergarten teacher in Oregon. I'm here to share information with parents about the types of assessments and related practices used in our state. Anna is the mother of one of my students and she's joining me because she has asked great questions about Oregon assessments and because parents are important partners in how we use assessment results to help children be successful.

Anna: Thanks, Lina. I do have questions! As you know, I recently moved to Oregon. I want to understand what my children are learning and how they're doing here in school.

Lina: Do you remember the first time you called me, Anna? You asked about why your daughter was taking a state assessment at the beginning of kindergarten.

Anna: Oh yes, I do remember! I wanted to know why she was being assessed before she had really gotten going in school.

Lina: That's when we first talked about the different types of assessments and how we use them here in Oregon.

Anna: Yep! That's when I learned that the Kindergarten Assessment gives a snapshot of skills that kindergartners have when they begin school—skills that you said are strongly linked to their third-grade reading and future success.

Lina: Yes! The Kindergarten Assessment gives teachers and schools a picture of the social, self-regulation, literacy, and math skills that children come to school with. The assessment helps us identify any students who need additional support early on.

At the state and district levels, Kindergarten Assessment results and other information are used to dedicate resources to support groups of children in need—including those in early learning settings from birth to preschool.

Anna: After that first talk, I began to understand that different assessments are used over the school year to measure learning for very specific reasons—and basically, to figure out how to best support children’s learning.

Lina: That’s right! We use assessment results in combination with other sources of information to build on students’ strengths and interests in different ways. For example, we talked about formative assessment practices and summative assessment. Do you remember that, Anna?

Anna: Mmm, I think so. Teachers use formative assessment practices to help plan, or form, their instruction, including learning goals and the feedback they give to students. And, summative assessment helps us find out, or sum up, what students have learned over longer periods of time.

Lina: Exactly! Formative assessment is an ongoing standards-based teaching and learning process used by *all* students and teachers over the school year.

Formative assessment practices provide students with ongoing feedback and help them take ownership of their learning. At the same time, these practices help teachers choose and adjust their teaching strategies to meet the needs of the classroom and all the students individually.

Anna: So, formative assessment isn’t a bunch of tests, but a set of practices that teachers use to evaluate and support standards-based learning *during* instruction over the entire year!

Lina: Yes, that's right! On the other hand, summative assessment, like statewide testing in language arts, math, and science, tells us how our students are showing grade-level proficiency after longer periods of instruction.

Results from these standards-based assessments help the state, districts, and schools develop continuing improvement strategies, including evaluating curriculum, training teachers, and dedicating support resources where they are needed the most.

Anna: Lina, I've noticed that for some of the assessments my children take, the scores are in reference to other children, but for others they have to earn a certain score compared to some standard.

Lina: Absolutely! You've noticed the difference between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments. A student's performance on a norm-referenced assessment is compared to national norms—the scores are based on a large, nationally-representative group of same-grade students who took the same assessment.

So, for these assessments, think of baby growth charts, where children's weight and height are compared to one another. Just like those charts, a student's percentile rank for norm-referenced assessments compares their performance to other grade-level peers. So, it's important for parents to understand that this percentile rank does not indicate whether their student met grade-level proficiency on academic standards.

Anna: Okay, so percentile ranks tell us how kids are performing compared to each other. But, how do we know if children are meeting proficiency on the academic standards that you just mentioned?

Lina: Good question, Anna! Criterion-referenced assessments can give us information in this area because students' performance on these are compared to predefined standards. For criterion-referenced assessments you can think of a person getting a driver's license, in which they have an opportunity to show what they know about the rules of the road.

Anna: Oh, so like some statewide assessments where students' scores are reported and sorted into different levels based on their performance.

Lina: Yes! Some examples of criterion-referenced assessments include the statewide summative assessments in language arts, math, and science, and the alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These assessments have “cut-scores” that sort student performance into different achievement levels, and tell us whether students meet grade-level proficiency.

The English Language Proficiency Assessment (or ELPA) in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, is also criterion-referenced. The ELPA helps us understand if students know enough English to be able to understand what is being taught or if they would benefit from language support services.

Anna: It sounds like even though norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments give us different information, they both help tell us how our children are learning.

Lina: Having both national norms and predefined standards to help make sense of students’ assessment performance is important. National norms help make sure that students are meeting minimum performance expectations compared to other students across the nation. Predefined standards help us make sure that students are meeting grade-level academic and language proficiency standards.

Anna: That all makes good sense to me! I understand how formative assessment practices and summative assessments are different, and how norm- and criterion-referenced assessments are different, too. I even understand how they’re all used!

Hmm. I remember during our first parent-teacher conference we looked at how my youngest daughter did on her foundational skills assessments. She was being screened for basic skills like letter names and sounds and math facts, and you said that in later grades she’d be assessed in oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, right?

Lina: That’s right! In some districts and schools across Oregon, teachers give what we call foundational skills assessments a few times each year. These assessments, sometimes called benchmark screening and progress-monitoring assessments, tell us how students are doing in building the basic skills needed for more advanced learning—typically foundational skills in the areas of literacy and math.

Anna: Because our school does that, can you tell me a bit more about foundational skills assessments, Lina?

Lina: Sure! Foundational skills assessments can be norm-referenced and criterion-referenced because performance on these assessments can be compared to the performance of students in a national norm group as well as foundational skills expectations for a particular grade and time of the year.

They are used for screening all students and then progress monitoring a smaller portion of students who may need intervention support to build the basic skills they need to approach complex learning tasks required by grade-level academic standards.

So, it's important for parents to understand that foundational skills assessments do not indicate how well students are doing in reference to grade-level academic standards. Other information, from standards-based assessments, help give us a more complete picture of grade-level proficiency.

Anna: So, can standards-based assessments also be given over time? Would that make them the same thing as interim assessments?

Lina: That's right, Anna. Our district is using interim assessments, which are based on the Common Core grade-level academic standards in language arts and math. They are given at different points during the school year, and sometimes, at the end of instructional units, to tell us if students can demonstrate the knowledge and skills they are being taught. Interim assessments show students' achievement growth over time and also help predict students' proficiency on the statewide summative assessments at the end of the school year!

Anna: So, it sounds like results from interim assessments can not only show us how students are learning but also help teachers reflect on the quality of their teaching!

Lina: Totally Anna! Along with the formative practices we discussed earlier, interim assessment results are used by teachers to analyze their instruction—what went well and what they might change going forward to meet students' needs. The results are used by students to reflect on their effort and engagement.

Anna: Wow. This is a lot of information to take in, but it all makes sense. I think the basic message is that different types of assessments and assessment practices give us very specific information for helping children to be successful in school. So, the point is to use the right assessment for the right purpose!

Lina: You've got it, Anna!

Anna: (happy sigh) Thank you, Lina! I'm so glad we talked about assessment here in Oregon. Having a better understanding of the different ways that assessment is used is important to me because I really want to support how my children are learning in school. I can see that talking with their teachers is part of building that understanding! I really appreciate you taking the time.

Lina: You're so welcome, Anna, and thank you! When parents take an active role in understanding their children's assessment results, they help teachers provide the learning supports that their children need!

Conclusion:

This concludes Oregon Department of Education's session on *What types of assessment does my child take and why?* During this conversation, Anna and Lina discussed different types of assessment and assessment practices and how they are used here in Oregon. We hope this information will help parents partner with teachers to support children. Please check out the other video learning sessions on assessment-related topics and ODE's website for more helpful information. Thanks for joining!