

Curriculum Corner

Phone: 781-934-7600

email: lhunter@duxbury.k12.ma.us

Twitter: DuxAsstSuper

Data, Data and More Data

The shift in education has been toward a research-based model where data informs instruction. As educators, the balance between assessment and instruction can be precarious. Over time, the district implemented a range of its locally developed assessments meant to gather data on individual and aggregate student performance. The state simultaneously mandated the MCAS as its tool to award high school diplomas and hold schools accountable.

Other standardized assessments the district incorporates are generally very skill specific. Currently, AIMSweb provides reading and data at the elementary grades in very specific details relative to skills necessary for reading acquisition and fluency. StarReading and StarMath create opportunities for comprehension and application of phonics and math computation in a format related to the MCAS. At the upper grades, Assessments21 from Academic Merit gives students texts where written responses are then scored twice by members of the faculty as to the characteristics of a well-written response. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges also requires that the high school provide feedback on its particular standards that are currently spread across all of the content areas.

Many years ago, the district created common assessment across all subject and grades. These benchmarks, mid-term exams and finals became a means of consistent evaluation of student growth. The state, in fact, has since mandated that all districts create these types of common assessments and incorporate them into the teacher evaluation system.

How much is too much? These are questions currently under debate. The amount of instructional time to gather all of this data is indeed questionable as is the pressure being put upon the students themselves. Data used on a daily basis to guide instruction provides a formative value in knowing what students understand. Summative data gathers student skill and conceptual acquisition while measuring the overall curriculum effectiveness. Over the coming month, consolidation and prioritization will be the focus of a revised assessment plan for the 2015-2016 school year where the information necessary to ensure high outcomes is balanced by student mental health, productive time in the classroom and opportunities for alternate types of learning.