

## Marshall Memo: A Balanced Assessment System (Originally titled “The Quest for Quality”)

In this Educational Leadership article, Educational Testing Service assessment experts Stephen Chappuis, Jan Chappuis, and Rick Stiggins present five keys to high-quality assessments. “Only assessments that satisfy these standards,” they say, “. . . will be capable of informing sound decisions.” They are:

- Clear purpose – Teachers should know exactly why they are using an assessment – to inform students of their progress, to help improve teaching, or for a final grade?
- Specific learning targets – “If we don’t begin with clear statements of the intended learning,” say the authors, “– clear and understandable to everyone, including students – we won’t end up with sound assessments.” These include expectations for knowledge mastery, reasoning proficiency, skills, and students’ ability to create products.
- Sound design – Assessments must yield accurate results, which means deciding whether multiple-choice, extended written response, performance assessment, or personal communication is the best format, and minimizing possible bias.
- Effective communication of results – This includes timeliness, informative presentation, and clarity on next steps.
- Student involvement – “Students learn best when they monitor and take responsibility for their own learning,” say the authors. Students need to be clear about learning targets and involved in self-assessing, setting goals for themselves, and tracking their progress.

Chappuis, Chappuis, and Stiggins close with four questions that teachers and administrators should consider as they put together their assessment plan:

- What decisions will the assessment inform? On-the-spot assessments help teachers make immediate instructional decisions; interim assessments identify where students are having difficulty and suggest instructional interventions; and end-of-year summative tests suggest how teachers can improve instruction the following year.
- Who is the decision-maker? With on-the-spot assessments, it’s students and their teachers; with interim assessments it’s building leaders, teacher teams, and individual teachers; and with summative assessments it’s district curriculum administrators and community leaders.
- What information do decision-makers need? With on-the-spot assessments, teachers need to know where students are on a learning continuum and where they are struggling; with interim assessments, teacher teams need to know how well students are mastering each standard; and with summative tests, everyone wants to know the percent of students scoring proficient or above.
- What conditions are essential? For on-the-spot assessments, teachers need clear curriculum maps for each standard, a way of getting feedback from students, and data that point clearly toward next steps; for interim assessments, teachers need results that show the level of mastery of standards of all their students; for summative tests,

everyone needs to know how each student did on each standard, and how all students did.

“In such an intentionally designed and comprehensive system,” conclude the authors, “a wealth of data emerges.”

“The Quest for Quality” by Stephen Chappuis, Jan Chappuis, and Rick Stiggins in Educational Leadership, November 2009 (Vol. 67, #3, p. 14-19); this article can be purchased at [http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership.aspx). The first two authors can be reached at [schappuis@ets.org](mailto:schappuis@ets.org) and [jchappuis@ets.org](mailto:jchappuis@ets.org).