



Multiple Choices

Language Magazine's guide to choosing the right assessments for your students

Considerations When Purchasing an Assessment System

1. Ease of Use. Teachers do not need to spend valuable teaching time laboring over complex technology tools. If an assessment is cumbersome, teachers will likely not use it, and districts will risk losing their investment.

2. Short Implementation Time The system should be easy to implement. Schools and districts should be able to begin using the system out of the box. Easily importing district test items and curricular goals and objectives should allow teachers to use the system immediately and realize the benefits of their investment.

3. No Modifications to your Assessment Program Required

The system should be flexible enough to allow you to use your assessment items and your specific district curriculum. The system should not require you to make modifications to the way you wish to administer your classroom tests and district benchmarks. Regardless of the type or purpose of your assessments, the program should meet your needs today and adapt to your changing needs in the future.

4. Provides Immediate Results to the Classroom A good assessment system should allow teachers to easily build tests, score and analyze the results, and get immediate feedback. Not only is this information invaluable in tracking and monitoring student progress and modifying instruction, but also results from classroom testing can be used for final grades or determining exit competency for the course or content area. Having this flexibility requires that tests be scored locally and that scores be aggregated at the building or district level.

5. Accuracy The system should utilize proven, accurate technology, which will help ensure accurate scoring of assessments. Teachers, schools, and districts will then be assured that the classroom results are valid and therefore a good predictor of performance on other assessments.

6. Permits the Use of Publisher, District, and Teacher-Developed Content Correlated to State and District Curriculum Frameworks

The assessment system should allow users to take advantage of the electronic item banks provided with popular textbook publisher's teachers' editions. Items from a myriad of sources including public domain items, district-developed items, and teacher-developed items can be either entered or imported into the item-banking system. The item-banking component should allow correlation to textbook and/or state or local objectives.

7. Flexible, Scalable and Open Getting data in and out of the assessment system should be easy and quick. It should allow student demographic information and class rosters to be manually keyed, imported, or scanned into the program. Additionally, the program should allow raw test data, test score information, and student demographic to be exported for external analysis and grade book programs. Report formats should include both PDF and HTML. The system should also be scalable to allow it to be used from the smallest to the largest schools within a district - both elementary and secondary.

8. Saves Teacher Time It is all about giving teachers time to teach. A good assessment system should allow teachers to quickly and easily build a test from items saved within the item banks, score the test and report the results, and then export the scores directly to their teacher grade book or other statistical package. Immediate results will allow the teacher the opportunity for an immediate instructional response in the classroom or with individual students.

9. Affordability The assessment system should be reasonably priced allowing districts and schools with limited budgets to purchase and implement the solution.

10. Proven Customer Support The assessment system vendor should have experience providing assessment solutions in the education market. Support concerns should be quickly resolved with easy-to-use online help or through a readily available telephone support staff.



ESOL Assessments for Consideration

Choosing an assessment system is a very time consuming process, so we put together a simple cribsheet to get the ball rolling

ACT COMPASS/ESL system

The COMPASS/ESL system is a comprehensive, computer-delivered, adaptive placement testing, advising, and retention system and is currently used by more than 1,000 colleges across the country, serving over 1.5 million new students each year. Developed by ACT (a not-for-profit testing and research organization), the COMPASS/ESL system is available in a Windows version and the new Internet version introduced in 2004. The new Internet system includes a Windows to Internet student data and system setup integration features, allowing the use of either or both systems in combination. Both the Windows and Internet systems include the same full set of pre-set demographic items (and options for addition of up to 40 local demographic items at no additional charge), along with the following assessment instruments: standard placement tests, an e-Write production test, ESL tests, and diagnostic tests.

BALLARD & TIGHE IPT® Testing System

Ballard & Tighe's IPT Testing System is an innovative K-12 English language proficiency testing system, specifically designed to help states meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The IPT, a wholly new testing system founded on scientific research and analysis, is now available for nationwide use. Also available with this new testing system are scoring and reporting services offered by Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM), the largest comprehensive provider of educational assessment products, services, and solutions. The combined package, the IPT/PEM Title III Testing Solution, has the capacity for large-scale delivery, training of test examiners, and scoring and reporting on both a small and large scale. The IPT/PEM Title III Testing Solution was recently selected by the North Carolina State Board of Education to assess the language proficiency of its 75,000 LEP students. The IPT/PEM Title III Testing Solution is available to - and can benefit - all states, including those states that have contracted with consortia to create their language proficiency tests.

COLLEGE BOARD ACCUPLACER

The College Board's ACCUPLACER program uses world-class technology to deliver a comprehensive assessment, placement, and guidance tool over the Internet. ACCUPLACER offers a variety of computer-adaptive tests, and computer scored writing samples. Select from tests covering the areas of reading, writing, ESL, and mathematics. ACCUPLACER also provides the option of delivering tests in other subject areas. These tests have been developed to create the most reliable scores in the least amount of time.

CTB/ MCGRAW HILL LAS Links™

CTB/McGraw-Hill recently announced an agreement with Nevada's school districts to implement the newly launched LAS Links as the state's English language proficiency assessment. LAS Links is an integrated system of reliable, research-based assessments and instructional guidance for all English language learners. The system also provides compliance with NCLB Title III requirements. Its features include K-12 proficiency assessments for accurate placement/evaluation, benchmark assessments for ongoing progress monitoring, and instructional guidance and staff development tools to help teachers use test results to inform learning and address students' needs. The LAS Links system features complement any English language proficiency test a state or district chooses to administer. The K-12 assessment uses a common vertical scale to measure the four NCLB domains of Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, and incorporates realistic illustrations, reading passages, photographs, and culturally relevant test content to encourage students to do their best.

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE (ETS) TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

The new TOEFL test emphasizes integrated skills, and provides better information about test takers' ability to communicate in an academic setting.

ETS has developed a new TOEFL test that will help individuals demonstrate the English skills needed for success. This next generation TOEFL test will help institutions make better decisions about prospective students' academic readiness for academic coursework. The new test will also impact the teaching and learning of English worldwide.

The new TOEFL test will be delivered via the Internet, which allows ETS to capture speech and score responses in a standardized and fair manner. It will also make it possible to greatly expand test center access.

In order to maintain test and score integrity and ensure a quality administration for test takers, ETS will introduce the new test in phases. The test will first be administered in the U.S. on September 24, 2005. On October 22, the TOEFL iBT test will begin in Canada, France, Germany, and Italy. The test will be introduced in the rest of the world in 2006. ETS will continue to administer the current computer-based and paper-based versions of the test until the new Internet-based test is implemented.

HAMPTON-BROWN Avenues e-Assessment

Hampton-Brown is launching Avenues e-Assessment to support the Avenues K-5 language and literacy program for English learners and struggling readers. Avenues e-Assessment is designed to provide educators and administrators with immediate information to inform instruction using tests that provide an accurate picture of students' language proficiency and skills development. Subscribers can then access data on a secure website to get a variety of useful reports on demand. Aggregated data also gives administrators the big picture at the district, school, or classroom level, while online links to re-teaching lessons allow teachers to effectively intervene before the high-stakes tests.

HARCOURT ASSESSMENT

Stanford English Language Proficiency Test (Stanford ELP)
Harcourt Assessment provides a suite of ELL Solutions including Professional Development, which help to ensure that English language learners meet standards for achievement and proficiency. These valid and reliable assessments meet NCLB requirements and give students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. To ensure that Spanish-speaking students meet challenging academic standards, Harcourt created Aprenda 3, a high quality, and culturally inclusive Spanish-language test of achievement. Stanford English Language Proficiency Test (Stanford ELP), developed by ESL experts, reflects all aspects necessary for comprehensive, standards-based assessment of English language proficiency. The parallel transadaptation of Stanford ELP, the Stanford Spanish Language Proficiency Test, provides a complete proficiency assessment solution for native Spanish-speakers when given with the Stanford ELP.

ORCHARD Orchard's Software assessment

Orchard's Software assessment is based on each state's specific standards and provides a powerful formative assessment tool that informs and assigns targeted standards-based instruction. Students begin by taking grade-specific and subject-specific interim assessments based upon their state standards. These 40-60 item assessments gauge which standards students have mastered and which standards they are struggling with. Orchard then automatically creates customized learning plans for students by assigning specific instructional Skill Trees (programs) based on identified problem areas. By linking assessment to instruction, Orchard ensures that students are always working with targeted standards-based content. Orchard's formative assessment features integrate with over 160 programs that cover over 3,000 essential skills and concepts in reading, language, math and science most commonly found in state standards and assessed on high-stakes tests. Its ease of use, ability to motivate, and affordability set Orchard apart from its more complicated and expensive competitors.

PEARSON EDUCATIONAL MEASUREMENT (PASeries) Progress Assessment SeriesT (PASeriesT)

Pearson Education recently launched formative assessment products designed to forecast student growth toward state performance standards. Released for the 2004-2005 school year, the first two products in the Progress Assessment SeriesT (PASeriesT) product line, PASeries Reading and PASeries Mathematics, use the scientific Lexile(r) scale for reading measurement and its new companion QuantileT scale for mathematics to evaluate student progress. Developed to provide educators in grades 3 through 8 with better ways to measure student progress and tie assessment to classroom instruction, PASeries assessments are scientifically valid, reliable, and research-based benchmark tests. PASeries tests are designed for completion in one class period and for delivery either on paper or online with quick electronic reporting of results. Used in PASeries Reading, Lexiles provide a common scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty, allowing easy monitoring of student progress.

PEARSON NCS Prosper™

Pearson NCS offers a broad range of affordable tools designed to ease the administrative burden pertaining to the creation, delivery, scoring and analysis, and data reporting needs of formative and ELA assessments. They provide scanning solutions used with the nation's leading ELL and summative assessments. They also provide ExamView software used for test item banking, test generation, and online testing. Prosper assessment system enables classroom teachers to generate assessments aligned to local and state curriculum frameworks and track student mastery of those standards. The Classroom Performance System utilizes wireless response pads or "clickers" in the classroom as a means to engage students while assessing their grasp of the material.

URBANA SOFTWARE PerTest Enterprise Suite

Urbana Software is the developer of leading educational and enterprise learning software that provides "personalized" test delivery and analysis. Urbana's patented PerTest Enterprise Suite provides diagnostics and individualized learning paths for assessments which can optionally be tied back to educational or corporate standards. The PerTest Enterprise Suite transforms standardized testing into a personalized assessment and learning experience that provides the examinee with diagnostic and remedial learning paths. PerTest is designed from the ground up on open standards, allowing it to be extended and integrated with customers' existing IT investments. PerTest is a scalable and portable platform able to meet both small company and large enterprise needs. The Urbana method creates intellectual engagement with the learning process and greatly improves critical thinking skills, knowledge and retention of subject matter, as well as overall productivity.

Further Reading:

TESOL PUBLICATIONS ESOL Tests and Testing

Stephen Stoyneff and Carol A. Chapelle introduce teachers and administrators to the principles, methods, and vocabulary of language assessment. Twenty-one experienced ESOL test reviewers consider how to evaluate tests and testing manuals, and they discuss test purpose and method. Practitioners learn how advances in measurement theory and language testing research have changed the assessment landscape. The sequence approximates how teachers and administrators might evaluate a standardized test. **X**