Assessment Audits: A Review of Existing Tools – what's missing/limitations

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July 2017

There is little doubt that assessments play an important role in support of measuring student progress based on the learning expectations valued by districts and states. However, critics charge that tests are too numerous, too lengthy, not of high-quality, and lack useful information. Additionally, over testing, and especially with assessments that are not of high quality and do not support teaching and learning, causes valuable instructional time to be lost.

As districts and states begin to consider new possibilities as allowed under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), they will need a process that will allow them to evaluate their current assessment system and create one that meets their state and local needs and challenges. Below is a review of several resources that have been developed and are being used to support an assessment audit. This review describes the anticipated process, findings, results, and areas of strength and need.

A major finding from this review is there is a similar process used to inventory and analyze existing assessments within a system and district educator engagement is promoted and anticipated during the process. The greatest limitation seems to be in providing professional development and support beyond the inventory process. LCI indicates on their website that they provide professional development, but little information is provided to verify the content of their training.

<u>Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts, Achieve</u>
(https://www.achieve.org/assessmentinventory)

This tool is intended for use by district leaders in order to "take stock of their assessments and assessment strategy." Their review tool allows for:

- Building a shared understanding of the purposes of the assessments
- Pointing out gaps and redundancies overall and for specific student populations
- Identify lack of alignment with standards or low quality
- Illuminate the costs of testing to the district
- Highlight which assessments provide the most useful results to teachers.

The process for using the assessment inventory includes four stages for a district:

1) Reflect and Plan –
   a. begins with grounding staff and stakeholders in a common understanding of and common language for discussing assessments;

b. focuses on logistical expectations (e.g., which individuals will do which activities, how results will be communicated).
2) Conduct the Inventory –
    a. provides a table for capturing information which includes type of assessment, years administered, alignment to standards, intended purpose, intended use and user of results, usefulness, as well as some logistic information (frequency, type of administration, item types, cost, etc.);
    b. refers educators to separate documents to understand the meaning of assessment types if there are questions when completing the inventory table;
    c. recommends the use of interviews or focus groups to answer questions, such as usefulness of assessments, context of assessment administration, etc.;
    d. recommends an independent analysis from an external expert or team of experts to conduct an alignment analysis.
3) Analyze the Inventory – four steps:
    a. analyze the information from a student-level perspective by looking at how many and what types of assessments a student at a particular grade level or grade-span would be required to take;
    b. identify assessments that the district will continue and determine if there are any changes that are needed to be helpful for their intended use;
    c. identify assessments that should be eliminated or need significant changes;
    d. detailed analysis to identify potential changes that need to be made to identified assessments and determine plan for other assessments
4) Make Recommendations –
    a. Table includes recommendation, rationale, authority for decision-making, timing of recommendations, and action steps needed

Implications of this assessment inventory include:

- Reduction of testing, particularly for interim/benchmark assessments and K-2 reading/literacy assessments
- Increased engagement by staff and stakeholders
- Identification of professional development needs (i.e., assessment literacy)

District leaders will ultimately need to move beyond this plan by implementing the recommendations. This tool is not intended to aid districts in this final critical step.

Strengths	Limitations
Allows for flexibility in configuring the four stages of implementation (e.g., which staff members engage in which parts of the process).	Lacks an emphasis on a district's theory of action regarding specific assumptions and expectations around assessments, behaviors, teaching, and curriculum.

Recommends a holistic approach to selecting individuals involved in the process.	Additional steps are expected that are not clearly spelled out in the process (e.g., external alignment review)
Includes alignment to standards and usefulness of results	Analysis of item quality and expected cognitive rigor is not expected
	Requires a strong foundation and training on issues related to assessment literacy
	Does not assist districts with implementation design and development after recommendations are produced.
Anticipates engagement by various stakeholders (parents, teachers, school board, administration) which may be time consuming and unwieldy, but can encourage buy-in on recommendations.	

Fewer and Better Local Assessments: A Toolkit for Educators Playbook, Education First

(http://education-first.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Assessment-Review-Playbook-11-17-15-FINAL.pdf)

This playbook is intended to help school systems make strategic decisions about assessments and outlines the major phases of work and key steps within each phase. They recommend approaching this work through five phases which they view to be iterative throughout the process. The phases recommended in this Playbook align to the Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts by Achieve and adds additional questions and strategies that districts should consider.

Phase 1: Reflect and Plan

1) Allocate the necessary resources (people, time & money)
2) Appoint a project leader and strong project manager
3) Outline the roles of key groups
    a. Cross-functional leadership team to build a shared understanding of goals make key decisions
    b. Working group
    c. Educator reviewers
4) Reflect on district needs and context including:
    a. Big picture (priorities, needs, enabling student learning, assessment problems
    b. Current status (what assessments are in place, is there redundancy, concerns about assessment quality, use of data)
    c. Contextual factors (external regulations, parent concerns, opt-out movement, teacher frustration)
5) Establish objectives and priorities
    a. Determine preliminary priorities

b. Decide on a decision-making process

6) Finalize the scope and plan to execute effectively – identify every single assessment used in the district **by more than one classroom/by more than one teacher, measuring more than a week's worth of instruction**.

Phase 2: Conduct the Inventory – recommends using Achieve's inventory table

1) Sort the inventory to prepare for analysis
   a. Sort by grade bands, subject areas, or other necessary way to develop a data view that conveys a comprehensive picture of the assessments in the district
2) Begin to analyze the assessments and prepare for the next phase –
   a. develop a summary of the findings from the inventory process
   b. form a hypotheses about issues to address
   c. analyze assessment alignment using the *Assessment Evaluation Tool* by Student Achievement Partners (CCSSO, Achieve, Council of Great City Schools).
3) Engage School-based Educators: *Select, Convene, Train, and Prepare Educator Reviewers*
   a. Consider key criteria for educator reviewer selection
   b. Develop a recruitment strategy and selection process – includes tips for educator selection and content area teams
   c. Prepare and train educator reviewers to evaluate assessments

Phase 4: Evaluate & Analyze – Review the quality of individual assessments, analyze the assessment suite and provide input into districtwide recommendations.

   a. Review the quality of individual assessments using a rubric including alignment to standards, math clusters and supporting clusters, text quality and complexity

Phase 5: Update Assessment Strategy – make key decisions; compare to original objectives; develop & communicate strategy to staff and community.

1) Engage working group to review the educator reviewers' input and develop recommendations
2) Engage leadership team in recommendations and decision-making
3) Develop action plan to implement decisions
4) Build plan for ongoing monitoring and annual assessment review

Strengths	Limitations
Encourages the identification of individuals to be responsible for specific aspects of the inventory.	There are few district individuals who have the bandwidth to add this work to their current work. They report that in a mid-size urban project management would require approximately 10 hours a week over the course of a school year.

Provides greater specificity about which assessments to inventory.	In small districts there may not be more than one teacher or classroom that administers some assessments; although they recommend flexibility in examining the scope of assessments.
Provides a deeper dive into the scope of work that needs to be completed.	Requires a strong foundation and training on issues related to assessment literacy.
Defines assessment types.	
Provides a resource for determining assessment alignment to standards (*Assessment Evaluation Tool* by Student Achievement Partners).	
Provides a link to understanding and analyzing good assessments http://education-first.com/teacher-engagement-toolkit/	

Assessment Inventories, Learner-Centered Initiatives, Ltd.

LCI supports teachers, schools, and districts with assessment inventories through the following mechanisms:

1) Teams or individuals can purchase LCI's inventory license and toolkit.
2) LCI provides off-site support, including online, self-directed courses.
3) Building off a community's needs, LCI can design and carry out the entire inventory.
4) On-site support includes LCI's facilitating the work of teachers and teams.

Their process includes:

1) Building a team (http://lciltd.org/tools/Audit/Rubric_AuditTeam.pdf)
2) Inventory assessments
3) Collect artifacts
4) Code and analyze the assessment artifacts (http://lciltd.org/tools/Audit/Tool_DataCollectingCoding.pdf)
5) Action planning
    a. What to eliminate
    b. What to refine
    c. What to design (must be performance-based)

Findings:

- Districts underestimate number of assessments they are giving, district tendency is to add assessments rather than eliminate (only 2% of the 146 districts LCI worked with have eliminated assessments)

- There is substantial misalignment between standards and assessments—most teachers really don't understand the standards.
- Authentic performance tasks are few and fewer in heavily tested areas
- Authenticity is a stretch for all teachers in designing performance assessments, implementation and instruction for performance assessment requires high-quality pedagogical tools that teachers are often not equipped with. Teachers need practice designing and using rubrics.

Note: Most of the above information comes from Susan's interaction with an LCI representative during CCSSO's 2017 NCSA meeting. Very little information regarding the details of their work was found online.

Assessment Audit, Georgia Center for Assessment, University of Georgia
(http://gca.coe.uga.edu/assessment-audit/)

The Assessment Audit offers tools and resources to help determine if an assessment system is in balance – meaning:

- Does it meet the intended purpose?
- Does it include policies and practices that will meet the assessment needs of all learners?
- Is it aligned to instruction to promote student learning and achievement?
- Does it represent the rigor in the curriculum?
- Does it support critical thinking skills?
- Is it accessible to all students?
- Are the assessment and results produced reliable?
- Do the results assist in making valid interpretations?

The Assessment Audi has three levels:

Level 1:

- An analysis and review of DOK, universal design, and bias and sensitivity.
- A review and targeted feedback on item specifications.

Level 2:

- Assessment Audit Level 1 AND
- An alignment analysis to the standards or a data review of assessment results.

Level 3:

- Assessment Audit Level 1

- An alignment analysis to the standards
- A data review of assessment results

No further information is available unless they are contacted directly.