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# TIPS FROM STEVE

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## Focus on Assessment & Evaluation - Part 1

We are in a time when so much emphasis is placed upon assessment, that we are forgetting why we need assessment. How many times have you been to an assessment workshop that shows how to take an evaluation of a child, but never spends equal time on how to use the results through instructional strategies and classroom management? This is first in a three part series on assessment and evaluation.

Part 1 of 3

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Focus On...Assessment  
&  
Evaluation

We are in a time in education when so much emphasis is placed upon assessment that we are forgetting how to use assessment. How many times have you been to an assessment workshop that shows how to take an evaluation of a child, but never spends equal time on how to use the results through effective instructional strategies and classroom management? Teachers know that they need to teach children the procedures and management of their room so that small group instruction (differentiation) can get underway, at the beginning of the year. However, numerous districts are asking teachers to do so many different assessments that teachers do not have anytime left. If teachers do not see any useful classroom application, these assessment tools turn into obstacles instead of important information they can use to guide their instruction.

What is needed in many schools and districts is an **Assessment Filter System** (A.F.S.). What the A.F.S. does is help distinguish what assessment tools should be used for what children in each room depending upon the child's specific needs, not some preordained list that is applied to every student. An A.F.S. is not a complicated mechanism. An example of an A.F.S. is shown below.

- ***Children at grade level or above will be given the following assessments***
  - Running record – minimum of one every three weeks or sooner if needed
  - Writing Inventory – minimum of one entry every 20 instructional days or sooner if needed
  - Phonics – once every quarter
  - Parent Interview - once at beginning of the year
  
- ***Children below grade level***
  - Observation Survey – twice a year at the beginning of each semester
  - Running record – minimum of one every 2 weeks or sooner if needed
  - Writing Inventory – minimum of one entry every 10 days or sooner if needed
  - Phonemic Awareness – minimum of once every month
  - Parent Interview– twice a year

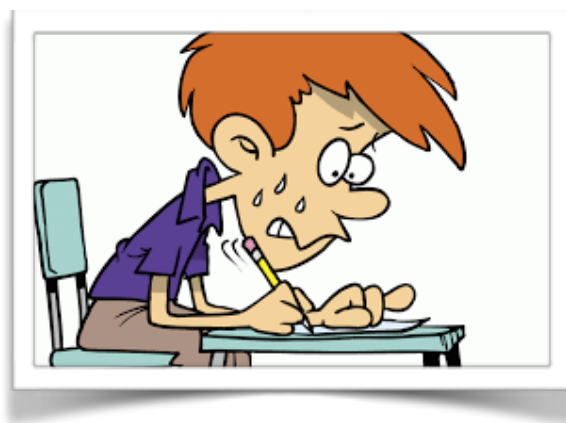
This Parent Interview form (next page) is used at the beginning of the year to gather background information on every child. It is a way of searching for information that can affect the child's learning. It needs to be highly confidential and used before children are referred to any intervention. In addition, some schools have used this form for the first parent/teacher conference as a way of building a relationship between home and school, instead of giving grades or assessment data. This form is designed as a time when parents can voice both their concerns and needs to the teacher in hopes of building a positive home/school connection.

## *Parent Interview*

Question to parents	Response
Did your child have any difficulties before kindergarten?	
Does your child have any medical conditions?	
How does your child feel about school?	
How does your child do with homework?	
What is most difficult for your child in school?	
What does your child have an interest in?	
What are your child's great strengths	
What do you want to see your child accomplish this year?	
What are your concerns about this year?	
How is your child doing socially?	
How is your child doing emotionally?	
Does your child read at home for pleasure?	
What can I do as your child's teacher to help him/her this school year?	
How can you and I partner in helping your child be successful this year?	
What are some things that have helped your child in previous years?	
Have there been any problems/deaths/situations that have affected your child that I should know about?	

The A.F.S. assists teachers so they are not over-burdened with assessment tools that are not needed for all children. District and building leadership teams need to consider offering more assistance in schools where there is a high population of children below grade level. Whether this is through class size reduction or extra personnel to help with certain assessments, it is important that children who are not doing well in school are looked at carefully and in more depth to determine their instructional needs.

There is a need to look carefully at the assessment tools being used. Often the assessments are based on different philosophical beliefs so they cannot be coordinated for instruction. This is a clear sign that we are forgetting to put equal emphasis on assessment as a **part of**



**instruction** (National Academy of Sciences, 1999). In order for assessment to be meaningful, we need to make sure teachers are given the teaching skills and strategies that match assessment.

We also need to review that there are two different types of assessments and that they are for different purposes. Assessment should be differentiated between summative and formative.

### *Summative assessment*

Summative assessment is that assessment that judges children's performance and is for the purpose of norming their achievement. It ranks and files them. The purpose is to let parents, teachers, schools, districts, and

the media know where their child is in relation to other children at a specific point in time. Examples of summative assessment tools could be

- Standardized tests
- Report cards
- Spelling tests
- End of unit tests
- In some cases, benchmark tests for purpose of grading

The above few examples are not an exhaustive list. However, the common theme that each of these possesses is that they “grade” or “norm” the child. Often times, these assessments are a specific event in time. This type of assessment is not typically used to inform instruction because it is usually conducted at the end of the instructional cycle or year and the information comes too late for the teacher to redesign instruction to help the child. This is the form of assessment that classifies the finished product, but what do we use for ongoing, daily assessment that informs instruction?

### *Formative assessment*

Formative assessment provides feedback for the teacher to form instruction. This is typically low stakes assessment that allows the teacher to monitor student learning and provide ongoing feedback. It can be used as a summative tool that “grades and ranks” students (i.e., benchmarks tests) but its primary function should be to inform the teacher as to what he/she is doing that is working for the child and accelerating or decelerating the student’s learning. If assessment is used to guide instruction, it should also serve as a definitive tool to inform parents, future teachers, and the school about the progress and processes that the student is using and needing. Unfortunately, many schools have different or no assessment tools at

every grade level. This does not allow teachers to communicate strengths and needs from grade level to grade level and also hinders consistent communication with the parent from year to year.