*Student achievement* is the fourth in a series of professional development experiences on **Assessment for learning.** It is based on two readings co-authored by Rick Stiggins and Jan Chappuis. *Student achievement* provides a snapshot of these readings and some questions to consider.

The full readings are available at the given website.

##### References

Stiggins, R. & Chappuis, J. 2008, “Enhancing Student Learning: Create profound achievement gains through formative assessments”, *The District Administrator,* January: <<http://www.districtadministration.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1362&p=1#0>>.

Stiggins, R. & Chappuis, J. 2005, “Using student-involved classroom assessment to close achievement gaps”, *Theory Into Practice*, 44(1), 11–18:   
< <http://ati.pearson.com/tools-resources/papers.html>>.

Under increasing pressure to improve standards, politicians and educators are grappling with ways to improve results. More data is generated and more sophisticated data analysis is demanded as systems try to show improvement. Typically, the belief is that this can be achieved through increased high-stakes, standardised testing. Stiggins and Chappuis (2008) assert that more of the same approach is simply exacerbating achievement gaps as those who historically do well in these tests continue to do well and those who don’t do well continue not to and in fact may further decline in performance as they lose hope of ever meeting the standards. To change the status quo, we must first change our approach to testing.

An investigation into what makes a difference in student results reveals some interesting research results. Bloom (1984) found that using classroom assessment to support ongoing learning rather than as a final, verification tool had an effect on student results from one to two standard deviations. Jerald (2001) supports this finding with research showing that effective use of ongoing classroom assessment informing the teaching and learning cycle raises achievement in traditionally low-performing schools. This tells us that the timing and purpose of assessment can have a profound effect on student learning.

Black and William (1998) pooled worldwide assessment literature for the purpose of determining whether student involvement in high-quality formative assessment practices influences their results in summative assessment. Their findings were affirmative, attributing an effect of half to a full standard deviation. Furthermore, they found that the effects were more profound for low achievers. This tells us that student involvement in formative assessment is crucial for them to do well in summative assessment. It also gives us strong reason to believe that as the achievement of lower achievers improves, the distribution of achievement will narrow and achievement overall will be lifted.

Collectively these findings point to *assessment* ***for*** *learning* as a key to raising student achievement. Assessment *for* learning takes formative assessment (which is ongoing) and provides teachers with information on which to base future learning episodes, one step further. *Assessment* ***for*** *learning* brings students into the picture as major decision-makers and contributors to their own learning. As students begin to self-assess using formative assessment information, they assume greater ownership and control of their learning. They begin to see the relationship between input and output as they control the process which empowers them as learners.

Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) identify four **conditions**, from the research findings, which need to be in place for students to be able to assume ownership and control of their learning:

* Assessment must always be driven by a clearly articulated **purpose**. *Assessment* ***of*** *learning* informs the teacher or the system of progress made by the student for the purpose of reporting. *Assessment* ***for*** *learning* provides the student and the teacher with information about the student’s progress towards a set learning target.
* Assessments must arise from and accurately reflect clearly specified and appropriate **achievement expectations**. *Assessments* ***of*** *learning* typically measure achievement against a school, state or national standard. *Assessment* ***for*** *learning* measures student progress towards negotiated learning goals which are explicit subsets of school, state or national standards.
* Assessment methods must be capable of accurately reflecting the intended targets and are used as **teaching tools** along the way to proficiency. To produce accurate assessment data, teachers must be able to identify and minimise causes of inaccuracy including inappropriate assessment tool selection, inadequate or mismatched coverage of skills, knowledge and processes, excessive literacy demands of an assessment and negative physical and psychological conditions affecting student performance. To use assessment as a teaching tool, teachers must place the assessment within the unit of work, foregrounding it with models, discussion of what success looks like, and student-generated practices, and following it with descriptive feedback, student self-evaluation and opportunity for further skill development.
* **Communication** systems must deliver assessment results into the hands of their intended users in a timely, understandable, and helpful manner. The *purpose* of the assessment, the first condition in this list, will guide the response here. The intended user of *assessment* ***of*** *learning* is usually the teacher or system who, in turn, may report this information to parents at a set time. In *assessment* ***for*** *learning* the users are the teacher and students. Because of this, criterion-based information is required which can be understood by students at a time when they still use it to make improvements to their overall performance.

To enable students to become powerful decision makers in their learning, teachers require clarity about the destination, must roadmap the pathway in learning sequences with students, and be able to create student-friendly indicators of success. They also need to be confident with assessment tools to produce ongoing, reliable records of learning. All of this must be shared with students so that they can control their learning decisions as they track their own progress toward the learning destination against the roadmap set by the teacher. As teachers’ and students’ competence in assessment for learning improves, research tells us that student achievement will increase.

## Key ideas

Pressure to improve standards is resulting in more summative and high-stakes assessment.

More high-stakes or summative assessment will not improve standards. Such assessment reinforces results of high and low achievers. Different strategies are needed to bring about different results.

Research indicates *assessment* ***for*** *learning* will improve achievement for all and especially for low achievers. It is reasonable to expect that, as the tail end lifts and the distribution of achievement is narrowed, the overall standard of student achievement will improve.

Four conditions: purpose, achievement expectations, teaching tools, and communication, are required for assessment to be effective, especially to close achievement gaps.

## Questions to consider:

1. a. What do you know about achievement of students in your class?
   1. What do your students know about their own achievement? Consider grades, evidence, trends, strengths, weaknesses and so on.
2. What opportunities do you currently take to bring students in on the assessment picture as described by assessment *for* learning? Is there more you could do? If so, what?
3. Consider each of the four conditions described above. How effective are you in each?
   * You may wish to make a horizontal line for each, marking low on the left and high on the right. Describe what low and high would look like in that condition. Place indicators along the line from left to right showing progressive improvement in achieving the perfect conditions.
   * Mark where you currently are in achieving those conditions. Is this where you would like to be? If you wish to improve, set a target for yourself: what more would you like to do? by when?