

Components of a Balanced Assessment System

Formative

ONGOING



A continuing, interactive process in which students and teachers engage in instructional activities, gather evidence of learning, and use feedback to adjust teaching and improve learning in real time. Teachers choose a variety of resources and activities to gauge student understanding.

Benchmark

MULTIPLE/YEAR



Assessment of recently taught material (such as unit, chapter, term) for grades and/or to monitor progress towards learning goals; may be implemented at the district, school, or class level, with content based on curriculum pacing.

Interim

2-4/YEAR



General achievement measures to monitor progress toward end-of-year goals and identify students or curricular areas needing additional attention. Typically chosen and implemented at the district level.

Summative

1/YEAR



General achievement occurring after instruction. In the U.S., states use these to identify underserved areas or groups, evaluate programs to enhance student learning, demonstrate improvement, and fulfill requirements for accountability.

SCHOOL YEAR

Beginning

Middle

End

What's the difference?

Benchmark or Interim?

These terms—along with “periodic” and “through year”—are often confused. The major distinction is content coverage, which affects how they’re used. Benchmark tests cover only the material taught up to their point in time. Interim assessments usually cover the full year's standards.

Summative ≠ Accountability

“Summative” means any type of assessment that occurs after instruction for the purpose of demonstrating learning or achievement. Statewide accountability tests are summative tests—but so are classroom unit tests, mid-terms, and more.