

RESOLUTION

On Literacy Assessment

The International Reading Association supports literacy assessment that recognizes and addresses the complex nature of literacy, that is built on goals and standards having broad societal endorsement, and that takes into account background differences among students.

The resolutions that follow reflect the continued commitment of the International Reading Association to provide leadership in improving, revising, and redesigning traditional assessment procedures and measures. They are intended to encourage innovative formal and informal assessments that incorporate current theory, research, and instructional practice. These expanded resolutions focus on the effectiveness of assessments, the assessment development process, the content and form of assessments, and the need for appropriate interpretation of assessment findings as a means of monitoring and evaluating student progress, encouraging student self-assessment, planning instruction, and reporting to various audiences.

I. Improving the effectiveness of assessment procedures and measures

WHEREAS, educators and researchers concerned with literacy assessment are effectively using sampling procedures to increase the usefulness of assessments and reduce the amount of time individual students and teachers must devote to assessments for large-scale monitoring purposes, and

WHEREAS, many current reading measures used in the early grades may lead to narrowly focused instruction that insufficiently addresses the language and cognitive skills that become increasingly essential to literacy beyond the early grades, and

WHEREAS, students and educators must strive to attain the highest standards of literacy, and whereas much testing effort has, instead, focused on comparing students, districts, provinces, and states, and

WHEREAS, young children are especially vulnerable to negative experiences with tests, and

WHEREAS, reducing the number of tests administered in school will result in more time for learning and instruction while conserving financial resources. Be it therefore

RESOLVED that large-scale assessments for the purpose of evaluating program effectiveness, such as at the national or state and provincial levels, be implemented on a sampling basis for economical reasons that would allow the use of more sophisticated, authentic tasks that often require more time for administration and increased resources for scoring and analysis; be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association supports efforts to develop standards for literacy attainment that are applied to authentic texts and call for authentic tasks; be it further

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RESOLVED that the International Reading Association opposes the proliferation of school-by-school, district-by-district, province-by-province, and state-by-state comparison assessments; be it further

RESOLVED that where large-scale assessments of outcomes of instruction for program evaluation purposes are deemed necessary, such assessments should not be imposed on learners before age 9 (grade 4); be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association provide leadership at the national, state, provincial, and local educational levels to review current testing patterns and practices to reduce the volume and proliferation of inappropriate or unproductive assessments.

II. The importance of how assessments are developed

WHEREAS, literacy assessments are often used to make important decisions affecting students, teachers, and schools, Be it therefore

RESOLVED that literacy assessments be based on broad goals and standards developed through consensus of a wide range of involved citizens, teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and representatives of professional organizations such as the International Reading Association; be it further

RESOLVED that literacy assessments be developed on the basis of the best available theory, research, and practice; be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association, through the professional talents and knowledge of its members and working with related professional organizations, will provide information and assist in creating opportunities to focus discussion, support and encourage research, and promote sound decision making about literacy assessments.

III. The importance of assessment content and philosophy

WHEREAS, teaching and learning are influenced by the form and content of assessment instruments that often have powerful personal, political, and professional implications, and

WHEREAS, there have been significant advances in our understanding of reading, writing, and language as complex, constructive, and dynamic processes, and

WHEREAS, definitions of reading based on a hierarchical sequence of discrete skills lead to inappropriate assessment and foster inappropriate instruction, and

WHEREAS, students in most educational settings come from varied cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds and are faced with a diversity of learning opportunities. Be it therefore,

RESOLVED that literacy assessments must be based in current research and theory, not limited by traditional psychometric concepts, and must reflect the complex and dynamic interrelationship of reading, writing, and language abilities critical to human communications; and therefore, to better inform teaching and learning; be it further

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RESOLVED that literacy assessments must incorporate a variety of observations, taking into account the complex nature of reading, writing, and language, and must also include high-quality text, a variety of genres, and a range of authentic literacy tasks; be it further

RESOLVED that assessments must reflect a broad based-consensus about age- and interest-appropriate literacy tasks for students reflecting the learning opportunities that have been provided for children in schools and communities; be it further

RESOLVED that to be of use in the improvement of instruction and learning, literacy assessments need to reveal change over time at the level of the individual child; be it further

RESOLVED that literacy assessments must be designed to eliminate bias toward students whose language, cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds may be different from those of the majority population.

IV. The importance of appropriate interpretation and use of assessment results

WHEREAS, the International Reading Association recognizes that one valid purpose for assessment is monitoring the outcomes of instruction at the level of the school, the community, the state or province, or the nation, and

WHEREAS, a valid and distinct, purpose for assessment is to provide information to the teacher, student, and family for the guidance and improvement of instruction and learning, and

WHEREAS, large-scale assessments for the purpose of monitoring outcomes and classroom assessments for the guidance and improvement of instruction and learning presently require different approaches and techniques appropriate to the needs of those who use assessment results, and

WHEREAS, large-scale assessments do not address the question of how to improve teaching and learning because such data are subject to misinterpretation and error when applied to small groups or individuals. Be it therefore

RESOLVED that users of assessment results recognize the importance of considering a variety of observations, procedures, and instruments; be it further

RESOLVED that users of assessment results take into account the specific purposes for which assessments are made and the settings in which assessments are conducted; be it further

RESOLVED that where large-scale assessments are conducted for the purpose of monitoring outcomes, results should not be reported for individual students, classes, or schools.

(Adopted May 1991; Revised May 2004)