RESOLUTION

On Literacy Assessment

The International Reading Association supports literacy assessments that recognize and address the complex nature of multiple literacies, that are built on goals and standards with broad societal endorsement, and that take into account individual and cultural differences among students.

The resolutions that follow reflect a continued commitment of the International Reading Association to provide leadership in improving, revising, and redesigning assessment procedures and measures. 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 are concerned with the quality and quantity of literacy assessments and reducing the amount of time individual students and teachers must devote to administering literacy assessments for large-scale accountability purposes, and

WHEREAS, many current literacy assessments used in the early grades may lead teachers to narrowly focus their literacy instruction and

WHEREAS, much assessment has, instead, focused on comparing student groups in districts, provinces, and states, and

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

WHEREAS, reducing the number of “high stakes” literacy assessments administered in school will result in more time for learning and instruction while conserving scarce financial resources. Be it therefore

RESOLVED that large-scale “high stakes” 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 literacy assessment 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 assessment that are applied to authentic texts and tasks; 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 6 (grade 1); be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association be at the table when national, state, provincial, and local education groups review testing practices and assessment tools to have a voice in the selection and use of literacy assessments.

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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, policy makers, business leaders, 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 psychometric and literacy 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, academic, economic, and professional implications, and

WHEREAS, teacher preparation programs include instruction and application of current assessment instruments that contain interpretation of formal and informal tests and measurements for instructional purposes and

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

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

RESOLVED that literacy assessments must be based in current research, guided by widely accepted psychometric standards, 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

RESOLVED that literacy assessments must incorporate multiple observations, taking into account the complex nature of reading, writing, and language, and must also include the use of high-quality texts, a variety of genres, and a range of work, school, and personal 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

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

RESOLVED that literacy assessments utilizing narrative and poetic texts 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, another 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 using a variety of observations, procedures, and instruments to triangulate data decisions; be it further

RESOLVED that users of assessment results take into account the specific purposes for which assessments were designed 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, individual student scores must be protected.

(Adopted May 1991; Revised May 2004; Revised May 2012)