

## Curriculum-Based Assessments (CBAs), Curriculum-Based Measurements (CBMs), and Common Assessments

Often, the terms curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), curriculum-based measurements (CBMs), and common assessments may be confusing. The purpose of this document is to explain the differences among these assessments and discuss their use as district-wide assessments. These differences can be understood along several dimensions including distinctions about their purpose and the psychometric standards for quality. Both curriculum based measures (CBMs) and common assessments are forms of curriculum-based assessments (CBAs). CBAs share these general requirements: 1) measurement materials are aligned with the school's curriculum; 2) measurement occurs frequently; and 3) assessment information is used to formulate instructional decisions. (Tucker, 1987). Thus, they have a common purpose of providing student information that helps guide instructional decision-making.

Common assessments are forms of CBAs that are often district or teacher created and designed to offer diagnostic information related to the specific content or skill area measured. These measures may be formative or summative. Unless evidence is shown, often these assessments are not technically adequate (the scores' reliability and validity have not been established) and should not be used for the purposes of universal screening and/or progress monitoring.

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) is an approach to measurement that is used to screen students or to monitor student progress in mathematics, reading, writing, and spelling. Since CBM provides an index of student proficiency, teachers and schools can assess individual responsiveness to instruction. When a student proves unresponsive to the instructional program, CBM signals the teacher/school to revise that program. A student's unresponsiveness will be evaluated in terms of the rate of learning as reflected in the slope of his/her plotted scores and the level of the performance. **CBM is a distinctive form of CBA because of two additional properties: (1) Each CBM test is an alternate form of equivalent difficulty; and (2) CBM is standardized, with its reliability and validity well documented** (The National Center on Response to Intervention <http://www.rti4success.org/>). Another point of distinction of CBM and other measures is that the test items or questions are taken from the entire curriculum for a given grade level. That is, students are tested on curricular content on which they have not necessarily received instruction. This item construction characteristic is important so the students, staff, and parents have an index of student learning.

An important consideration for schools is whether their CBM assessments meet these quality standards. Often running records and informal reading inventories are mistaken for being CBMs. These assessment tools are not CBMs as they differ in purpose and may not have demonstrated technical adequacy (established reliability and validity). Running records and informal reading inventories (IRIs) focus on specific skills whereas curriculum-based measures are indicators of overall reading proficiency. In addition, a large body of research has shown that one-minute samples of the number of words read correctly from reading passages, CBMs, are sensitive, reliable, and valid of measures of reading proficiency – little research supports the use of running records and IRIs for this purpose. If teachers find them useful, running records

and IRI's may be used in conjunction with weekly progress monitoring to help inform changes to students' instructional programs (The National Center on Student Progress Monitoring [http://www.studentprogress.org/faq.asp#\\_Toc89594728](http://www.studentprogress.org/faq.asp#_Toc89594728)).

While all of these assessments have a distinct purpose, these cautions are offered for consideration if a district is contemplating using any of these assessments as district-wide assessments:

1. For students who have met categorical eligibility requirements to receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the provisions of this federal law apply when considering accommodations and district-wide assessments. These provisions include the possibility of having accommodations to the assessment as well as having an alternate form of the assessment available.
2. CBAs that are not CBMs should not be used for the purpose of universal screening and/or progress monitoring unless their scores' reliability and validity have been established for these purposes. Often, CBAs that are not CBMs do not have these psychometric properties established.

## References

Tucker, J. (1985). Curriculum-Based Assessment: An Introduction. *Exceptional Children*, 52, 199-204.

[American Institutes for Research](#). (2009). *National Center on Response to Intervention*. U.S.

Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. <http://www.rti4success.org>.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2008). *National Center on*

*Student Progress Monitoring*, <http://www.studentprogress.org/> (see specifically Frequently Asked

Questions <http://www.studentprogress.org/faq.asp# Toc89594728>).

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