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Dylan Wiliam on Effective On-the-Spot Assessments

In this thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article, Dylan Wiliam (University of London) describes the *initiate-respond-evaluate* cycle: the teacher asks a question, calls on a student with a raised hand, says whether the answer is right or wrong, and moves on. The teacher's intent is to check for understanding, but there are several problems:

- Student participation is voluntary, which leads to the "Matthew Effect" (the rich get richer, the poor get poorer).
- Calling on one or two students doesn't give the teacher an adequate sampling of the whole class's understanding.
- Low-level, off-the-cuff questions can mislead the teacher into thinking students understand when they don't.

"Trying to manage the learning that is happening in 30 different minds at the same time will always be extraordinarily challenging," says Wiliam, but he believes there are ways to do better:

- **Cold-calling** – The teacher tells students to raise their hands only to ask questions, not to answer them, and calls on students at random (using an electronic randomizer or popsicle sticks). This simple shift can have a major impact on teaching and learning, says Wiliam – but it often meets resistance from students: eager beavers aren't able to show off their knowledge, and non-participants have to pay attention. Nevertheless, a no-hands-up policy equalizes class participation, increases engagement, and gives the teacher a more accurate idea of the class's understanding.
- **Posing the question first** – Wiliam recommends asking a question first, pausing to get everyone thinking, and then calling on a student.

Important Dates:

- **Professional Development Day**
- January 16
- **Mentor Meetings: All mentors assigned to a mentee for this school year are required to attend the following meetings.**
- January 26
- March 16
- May 18
- **District Meeting (DDMs)**
- January 28
- **Project Success Mentor Training**
- March 28

Stay tuned for further details



Dylan Wiliam on Effective On-the-Spot Assessments Continued

- **Using statements rather than questions** – For example, rather than asking, “Which country was most to blame for the outbreak of World War I?” the teacher says, “Russia was most to blame for the outbreak of World War I” and invites students to agree or disagree, with evidence.
- **Pushing the envelope** – “If the students are answering every one of the teacher’s questions correctly,” says Wiliam, “the teacher is surely wasting the students’ time. If the questions are not causing students to struggle and think, they are probably not worth asking.” He is fond of saying to his students, “Mistakes are evidence that the questions I asked are tough enough to make you smarter.” Research indicates that long-term learning improves when students make mistakes and correct their answers.
- **Asking multi-level questions** – This allows students at different achievement levels to participate. For example, the teacher might write two math problems on the board and ask, “Which of these two questions is harder and why?”
- **Using all-class response systems at least every 20-30 minutes** – Wiliam favors low-tech methods – dry-erase boards, ABCD cards, and students holding up fingers – and recommends multiple-choice questions to simplify analysis. “The powerful thing about all these approaches is that the teacher can quickly scan the students’ responses and make an immediate decision about what to do next,” he says.
- **Using exit tickets** – This can help the teacher decide where to begin the next lesson. If students write their names on the back of their answers, it can also allow the teacher to group students by misconceptions or creating mixed-answer groups for peer instruction.

District Determined Measures Year 2

It’s difficult to believe that it was only one short year ago when we first began learning about DDMs, struggling with the criteria, trying to figure out what a “year’s worth of growth” really is, and deciding what it was exactly that we were supposed to be assessing. And now, a year later, we may not be perfect but we’ve come a long way. Every single licensed educator in this district is working on two separate district determined measures. Some are going it alone while others have chosen the safety-in-numbers route. But whatever road you may be on, remember that we’re all in this together and that our ultimate goal is to improve student learning outcomes.

The district meeting on January 28, 2015 will focus on DDMs. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

- 1- Don’t wait for the next PLC meeting to score that assessment. There are numerous tasks that are addressed during PLCs. Like any other assessment, DDMs should be scored in a timely fashion. It is highly unlikely that PLC time would be used to score all DDMs. Instead, use the PLC time to look at samples of that work, discussing patterns, areas of strengths and weakness, and determining next steps. There may be times when your PLC decides to blind score a random sampling of assessments to ensure that everyone’s scoring methods are calibrated but there simply isn’t enough time to score every student assessment during a PLC. The purpose of a formative assessment is to determine where students are in the learning process and formulate a plan in response to that information to ensure student success. Valuable time is lost if scoring these common assessments only happens during PLC.
- 2- You **do not need** to turn in any DDM scores, samples, etc. to central office at the end of the school year.
- 3- But you **do need** to keep a file, preferably electronic, of your assessments, student work samples, and data to share with your evaluator. Think of this as evidence toward a goal- you need to be able to show your evaluator the results of your instruction. This could include the measures you

“The Right Questions, the Right Way” by Dylan Wiliam in *Educational Leadership*, March 2014 (Vol. 71, #6, p. 16-19), <http://bit.ly/1pSAwBF>; Wiliam can be reached at dylanwiliam@mac.com.

District Determined Measures Year 2 Continued

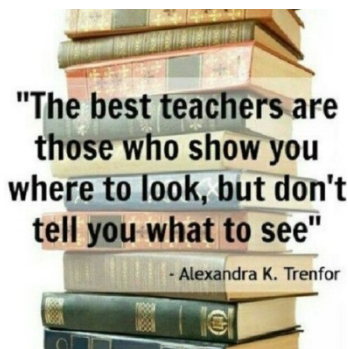
used, the rubric or scoring guide, protocols, student work samples of high, moderate and low growth, the data you collected on the students who participated in the DDM, and any other pertinent or anecdotal information. All these elements provide the evidence and context that best represents student growth. Evaluators don't want or expect big binders full of every single exit ticket, test grade, and homework assignment that were a part of your DDM. Keep it simple and focused.

- 4- The January district meeting is an opportunity to **share** with your colleagues the work that you've done thus far, **celebrate** the successes, and **discuss** what needs to happen between now and June. ***You should bring the district determined measures that you're working on, including the rubric/scoring guide and the protocols you're following for administration and scoring. Have a few samples of student work at various levels; real evidence of learning sparks the most engaging and spirited conversations!***

Second to the "when are we supposed to get all this done" question is, "how do I determine what high, moderate, and low growth is?" The DESE's response is that Districts should be guided by the professional judgment of educators. Low growth is less than a year's worth of growth relative to academic peers, while high growth is more than a year's worth of growth. Moderate growth is equal to a year's worth of growth, what past experience and current understandings expect by the end of the school year (or semester in the case of some high school courses).

One doesn't have to think very long or hard on that answer before they realize that it isn't at all helpful because it assumes that every teacher agrees on what a year's worth of growth on any given standard looks like. We expect that there will be some deep conversations and modifications made as we use the DDMs and compare the scoring parameters to historical data and other measures of student performance. The curriculum mapping initiative will help to bring teachers to build consensus around what students are expected to know and be able to do for each standard.

In the meantime, I attended a two-day conference at MSSAA on district-determined measure and the presenter shared with us a few slides that helped me understand it a bit more and also gave some practical examples. So I thought I'd share them with you.



The first chart shows how the DESE’s median SGP is reached, in case you were wondering how to determine growth.

Median student growth percentile for one teacher

Last name	SGP
Lennon	6
McCartney	12
Starr	21
Harrison	32
Jagger	34
Richards	47
Crosby	55
Stills	61
Nash	63
Young	74
Joplin	81
Hendrix	88
Jones	95

Median SGP for the 6th grade class

Imagine that the list of students to the left are all the students in your 6th grade class. Note that they are sorted from lowest to highest SGP.

The point where 50% of students have a higher SGP and 50% have a lower SGP is the median.

The 47 (median) is the teacher’s score (one DDM data point) if this includes all of her students.

The second chart shows how a teacher would determine high, moderate, and low growth for his/her class on a local assessment. Basically, the top 10-15% is considered high, the bottom 10-15% is low and everything in the middle is moderate.

At this point in the school year, most of you have either already given or are about to give the mid-point DDM assessment to your students. This means you will have two data points in order to begin looking at growth. This chart is one suggested way of doing this but it is by no means the only way. **The most important thing to keep in mind is that this assessment data gives you the information necessary to inform your instruction and ensure successful student outcomes:**

Sample Cut Score Determination (for local assessments)

Pre-test	Post test	Difference	Student Scores Sorted low to high	Teacher score is based on the MEDIAN Score of her class for each DDM	
20	35	15	5	Cut score	LOW Growth Lowest ____ %
25	30	5	15		
30	50	20	20		
35	60	25	25		
35	60	25	25	median	teacher score
40	70	35	25	median	Teacher score
40	65	25	25		
50	75	25	30		
50	80	30	35		Top 20%
50	85	35	35	Cut score	HIGH GROWTH Highest ____ ?

I hope that these examples provided you with some guidance as we move towards the end of the year and you look at your own data to determine high, moderate, and low growth. Obviously, these charts are geared to classroom teachers and do not address Specialized Instructional Support Personnel, like guidance counselor, social workers, nurses, and psychologists, just to name a few. Currently, there are no examples out there for those educators but I will keep searching. As always, I will share any news or information as soon as it becomes available. In the meantime, thank you for all that you do for our students.

One final chart I'd like to share is the DDM Implementation Schedule- it outlines who is in Year 1 of data collection and who is in the final Pilot Year:

Content/Grade Level	2014-2015 Implementation Student Impact Rating- Oct. 2016	2014-2015 Pilot year Student Impact Rating- Oct 2017
Classroom teachers K-5	X	
ELA and Math 6-8	X	
ELA 9-12		X
Math 9-12		X
History/Social Studies 6-12		X
Science & Technology 6-12		X
Physical Ed K-8		X
Health 4-8		X
Art K-12		X
Library K-3	X	
Library 4-12		X
Music K-3	X	
Music 4-12		X
Technology 4-12		X
Psychologists		X
SPED Team Chairs		X
Speech-Language Pathologists		X
OT/PT		X
Social Workers		X
Instructional Coaches		X
Reading/Reading Recovery/Title 1		X
SPED-Specialized Programs		X
Guidance		X
ESL K-12	X	

Interested in being a tutor?

From time to time, the Instruction Office receives requests from parents and other teachers for tutors. Since there is no official system in place, we thought it might be worthwhile to put together an informal database of teachers interested in offering their expertise to students in need. All tutoring would take place outside of the school day and individual teachers would determine their own rate of pay. The Instruction Office would simply be the "matchmaker". If you are interested in being placed on this list of tutors, please email Jan Butler (butlerj@dy-regional.k12.ma.us) with your name, grade level(s), and content area.

Looking at Data from Student Work Protocol (50 minutes)

Materials: Data results spreadsheets, rubrics, recording form, student work, action plan template

The goal of the results meeting is to analyze with your PLC the results on the most recent assessment and determine an action plan that meets the needs of your students.

Step 1: Choose roles (1 min)

- Facilitator- makes sure the group follows each step of the protocol and guides the process
- Process Checker- supports the facilitator; might use language like “let’s do a quick process check” if the group seem to be off track
- Timekeeper- sets a timer for each step of the protocol and transitions the group when time is up

Step 2: Analysis (2 min)

- Individually read the spreadsheet and reference the rubric to determine strengths and challenges of student performance and record

Step 3: Description (5 min)

- The facilitator asks: “What do you see?”
- During this period, the group shares as much information as possible from the data.
- Group members describe what they see in data, avoiding judgments or interpretations. It is helpful to identify where the observation is being made- e.g., “On page one in the second column, third row . . .”

Step 4: Identifying challenges (5 min)

- Go around: each person names the top 2-3 areas they noticed that students had challenges with. List these areas on the recording form.

Step 5: Looking at Student Work (10 min)

- Participants look at student work with the challenges identified in mind

Step 6: Discussion (5 min)

- Of the challenges identified, which should be prioritized?
- Team comes to agreement about top two challenges to focus on right now

Step 7: Brainstorm (5 min)

- Group members ask, “What evidence do you have?” as needed and take notes while each other are speaking to capture additional challenges

- Go around: each team member shares an idea or proposal for addressing the challenges evidenced in the student work.
- If you don’t have an idea, say “pass”.
- No judgments made. If you like an idea, when it’s your turn, simply say, “I would like to add onto that idea by . . .”

Continue going around, about 30 seconds at a time, to suggest new ideas/proposals for the full 5 minutes.

Step 8: Come to consensus around the best actions to take (5 min)

- One person proposes an action with the rationale for what makes it effective.
- Other group members weigh in on agreement with thumbs up, disagreement with thumbs down, or unsure with a thumb in the middle. For any responses other than thumbs up, briefly discuss reasons for diverse ideas, clarify the specific action, and re-do the vote.

Step 9: Complete the action plan template. (see PLC handbook Analysis of Student Work) (8 min)



We invite all K-12 mathematics teachers and college math faculty to a

Math Swap and Share Event

Thursday, January 29, from 4pm to 6:30pm
Hosted by the Cape Cod Regional STEM Network!

This event, focusing on the *M* in STEM education, will be held in the Lorusso Tech Solarium at Cape Cod Community College.

Teachers are invited to bring a math lesson, strategy, unit, rubric, or any math teaching or learning support that they would like to share with others. The goal of the event is to share some best practices with other math teachers and help support each other as we engage in teaching the Common Core and prepare for PARCC!

Like a holiday cookie swap or Valentines’ day card exchange, please bring extra copies and be prepared to tell others about your “secret ingredients”! Refreshments will be served, and free parking is available in Lots 9 and 10.

Please share with all math teachers. We are looking for representation from across grade levels! RSVP by January 15!

Join us to celebrate mathematics!

To RSVP or for any questions, please email Jill Neumayer DePiper at jill@capecodstemnetwork.org or call 508-362-2131, x4459