

*Understanding School Assessment:
A Parent and Community Guide to Helping Students Learn*

Study and Discussion Guide

The following suggestions have been designed to facilitate a discussion-based approach to reading the book with a group of parents and/or community members.

1. Share the list of guiding questions for a chapter prior to reading it as a way to introduce the content. Ask participants to think of one or two of their own questions about the chapter content in advance of reading.
2. Choose one or more of the guiding questions to frame the discussion of the chapter.
3. Encourage participants to keep notes on important ideas, areas of agreement, disagreement, or confusion, and questions.

Chapter 1—Assessment in School Today

Content

- Defines assessment and lays out the different kinds of assessments in use today
- Introduces the differences between assessment *of* learning (summative) and assessment *for* learning (formative)
- Explains accountability testing
- Describes the state of assessment literacy in schools today

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 1 Discussion

- What is assessment?
- How has assessment changed since we were in school?
- Why are there so many assessments these days?
- What are the differences between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning?
- To what extent are educators prepared to use assessment to maximize our children's learning?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions:

Chapter 2—Connecting Student Motivation and Assessment

Content

- Summarizes research on connections among assessment, motivation, and student achievement
- Explains what research-based practices look like in the classroom

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 2 Discussion

- What assessment practices are likely to increase student motivation to learn?
- What role can assessment *for* learning play in the support of underachieving students?
- What types of feedback about their work will help our children learn the most?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions:

Chapter 3—What Students Learn: Standards, Curriculum, and Learning Targets

Content

- Explains the importance of having a curriculum
- Shows how curriculum is structured and defines kinds of learning targets
- Describes how parents can learn about their district's curriculum

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 3 Discussion

- How do teachers know what to teach each day?
- Is there a high-quality written curriculum in place for each grade-level and subject in our neighborhood schools?
- Are our children getting a clear picture of what they are to learn in school? How would we as parents know that?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions:

Chapter 4—Classroom Assessment: Principles, Methods, and Issues of Quality

Content

- Defines standards of assessment quality
- Explains the range of assessment methods in use
- Describes what student involvement in each method looks like
- Addresses the issue of helping with homework

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 4 Discussion

- Of the tests our children take, which ones assess what part(s) of the curriculum?
- When student involvement in assessment is done successfully, what does it look like?
- What constitutes productive help on homework?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions:

Chapter 5—Standardized Testing

Content

- Describes different kinds of standardized tests and what each is designed to do
- Discusses high-stakes testing issues

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 5 Discussion

- What are the differences between norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests?
- Which of these tests do our children take in school, and what do these tests measure?
- What can be done to minimize our heavy reliance on standardized tests?
- What are the high-stakes testing issues that concern me the most? Which do I support and why?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions:

Chapter 6—Communicating About Student Learning

Content

- Explains grading and report cards
- Describes other forms of communication in place in schools
- Discusses the benefits of students communicating about their own learning
- Explains communication about standardized tests
- Explores the connection between state test results and report card grades

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 6 Discussion

- In what ways does my child's teacher/school/district communicate with me currently about my child's progress as a learner?
- Is communication about my child's learning accurate, understandable, and timely?
- What factors should be considered to create the report card grades students receive?
- What factors should not be included in calculating those same grades?
- What role can students play in communicating about their own learning?
- What do I as a parent want to know about the results of a standardized test?
- What other ways beyond test scores and grades are there for me to learn about my child's progress?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions:

Chapter 7—Putting the Pieces Together: Parent and Community Involvement in School Assessment

Content

- Offers general tips for working with schools
- Provides chapter-by-chapter suggestions for what parents should know and can do

My questions about this topic prior to reading the chapter:

Guiding Questions for Chapter 7 Discussion

- Which questions suggested in this chapter might I want to ask? To whom might I address these questions?
- Which actions suggested in this chapter might I take?

My notes while reading the chapter—important ideas, thoughts, and questions: