



### **How Should We Assess Student Learning This Year?**

By Marilyn J. Dominick, Chairperson of Nazarene Educators Worldwide

Considering the very strange and challenging school year of 2020-21, has your school leadership team planned how they will assess the learning that has taken place? Recently, the United States Department of Education proclaimed that states will not be permitted to cancel their state assessments and must find a way to measure student academic progress.

The questions we must ask are:

1. What will those tests look like, considering the major shifts we have experienced in how we deliver instruction?
2. How will we best use the results going forward?

#### **Different Opinions**

In discussing this matter with educators with whom I work, I have found that there is little agreement on how this assessment should be accomplished. In one camp, some educators believe administering the assessments as we have in the past is unfair. To assume that curricula has been delivered on a pacing chart that was created in the best of circumstances is not reality in most schools, and most educators agree that it would be less than useful to give the tests as if that had happened.

Even though educators have been thrown many curve balls in the last year, they are my heroes! They have stood on their heads to engage students, serve families, and stay on track to the best of their abilities. And they have proven to be more than capable! The students and families who

have faithfully connected have learned effectively. But the stress even on those students has been and is still very real and bound to have an impact on learning. For those diligent students, regular assessment may be satisfactory and would give us an opportunity to celebrate their learning.

However, we must acknowledge there are many other students who have not connected or have minimally engaged with us. For those students, a different approach to assessment will be necessary. We need real diagnostic data so we will know their needs going forward. For example, can students in eighth grade be expected to succeed in Algebra I in the fall if they have not learned the math that is essential to beginning that course? We need to know where the students stand to prepare them for success.

As we communicate with our leaders and even our state education departments, we must stress the need for diverse approaches to assessments. At the end of the day, the teachers know best where students stand on their learning. The smaller assessments that teachers have been giving throughout these months might provide the baseline, and each student may need an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) as we begin next fall.

### **My Suggestions**

For those who have truly connected with school, proceed with the appropriate assessment that was prepared for 2020 but never used in most states.

For those students who have not connected well, give them the state assessment from the previous grade to determine how they finished 2019-20. If they do well, give them the next assessment as a diagnostic tool.

In a parallel manner, provide teachers with adequate time and resources to write a plan for each student for 2021–22.

As we end this challenging school year, I believe these suggestions are the best ways to find out where our students stand and how we can well equip them going forward.

I would be interested in knowing what your school district is doing for assessment. You may contact me at [mjdominick77@gmail.com](mailto:mjdominick77@gmail.com)

God bless you as you work on this and many other things as the school year draws to a close. God has been with us through all of it, and He will continue to provide. May He make us more prudent than when we are on our own!

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