

The Big Picture

How Powerful Practices Connect

The Parts of the Whole

Just as a finished architectural blueprint must contain everything needed to guide the actual construction of a building (including plumbing, electrical, door-and-window scheme, and so on), it is necessary to first design the “big picture” blueprint of a comprehensive instruction and assessment model—including all the major components of that system—*before* attention turns to “building” each individual component. As educators and leaders work together to effectively design one essential component of a comprehensive instruction and assessment system *before* proceeding to the next component, they make definite, incremental progress toward eventually finishing the big picture system they are constructing.

The major components in our model of a standards-based comprehensive instruction and assessment system include:

- a. Power Standards
- b. “Unwrapping” the standards; Big Ideas and Essential Questions
- c. Formative and summative assessments
- d. Instructional unit design, including classroom performance assessments
- e. Collaborative scoring of student work, including implications for grading
- f. Data-driven instructional decision making, including implications for intervention and acceleration

Each of these components plays a powerful role, both independently and interdependently, in advancing student learning. Our essential focus in this book is to showcase the role of common formative assessments as they *connect* to each of these interrelated components.

Here is a brief overview of the individual components in this standards-based instruction and assessment model. In subsequent chapters, each component and its relationship to the others will be described in greater detail.

Power Standards are a *subset* of the entire list of the state or district content and performance standards. These are *prioritized* standards that are determined as being absolutely essential for student understanding and success (a) in each level of schooling; (b) in life; and (c) on all high-stakes assessments.

“Unwrapping” the standards refers to a simple yet powerful technique of analyzing the Power Standards—and other related standards—to identify the critical concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do. Big Ideas and Essential Questions that emerge from the “unwrapped” standards are then used to focus and align both instruction and assessment.

Instructional unit design follows—not leads—the selection and “unwrapping” of Power Standards and includes designing conceptual units of study with performance tasks and accompanying rubrics or scoring guides. Classroom performance tasks serve as “learning vehicles” that enable students to apply and understand the “unwrapped”

concepts and skills and develop their own Big Idea responses to the Essential Questions. A pre-assessment is given to students *prior to* designing instructional units and performance assessments. A postassessment is given at the conclusion of the instructional unit.

Formative classroom assessment results can provide immediate feedback to both teachers and students regarding current levels of student understanding. These same results provide teachers with feedback regarding the effectiveness of instruction and how to better meet learning needs of students. **Summative classroom assessment** results provide a final measure for determining if learning goals have been met. Working together, formative and summative assessments provide “multiple measures” of evidence regarding the degree of student understanding of the standards in focus.

Common formative and summative assessments may be identical to individual classroom formative and summative assessments except for one notable distinction—they are developed *collaboratively* in gradelevel and department teams and incorporate each team’s collective wisdom (professional knowledge and experience) in determining the selection, design, and administration of those assessments.

Collaborative scoring of student work occurs after administering the common formative pre- and post-assessments to students, particularly if the assessments are of the constructed-response type. Participating teachers meet to evaluate the student papers by means of a scoring guide designed for that purpose, and then sort the student papers by predetermined levels of proficiency. Collaborative scoring promotes fair and accurate determination of proficiency levels. Grades reflect student performance on *summative* assessments.

Data-driven instructional decision making involves five steps: (1) the charting of student performance data; (2) analyzing the data; (3) setting a goal for improvement; (4) selecting specific teaching strategies to meet that goal; and (5) determining results indicators to gauge the effectiveness of the selected teaching strategies. Participating teachers write an action plan to guide the implementation of their five data-driven steps to improve student achievement. Planning for instructional interventions and accelerations results from analyzing the formal and informal assessments teachers use to diagnose and monitor student learning.

The Circle Graphic

The following two diagrams represent the interconnectedness of these practices. In the first, and more simplified, representation—a circle around which appear the instruction and assessment practices of our model—leaders and educators can choose to begin the implementation of these practices wherever they choose. Three different approaches are described below.

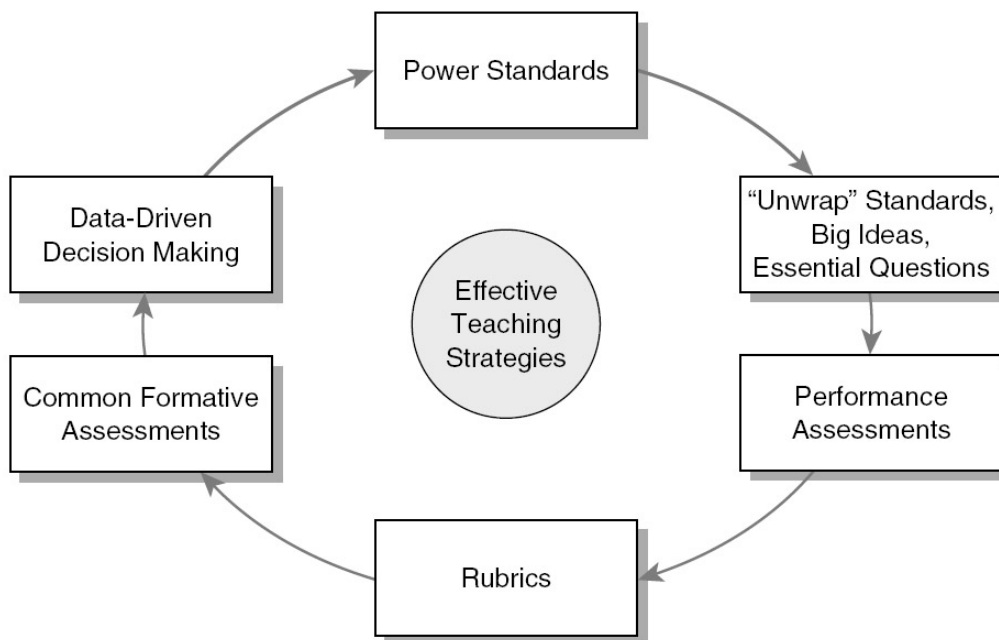
Begin With Power Standards

Approach 1. Educators and leaders within schools and districts *first* use their professional judgment to identify their Power Standards and *then* review both state assessment data and state assessment requirements to determine if any modifications or changes need to be made to their selections. They then proceed to “unwrap” their

prioritized standards and continue around the circle as indicated. The following sequence of steps describes this approach:

- *Identify the standards* representing the greatest need for students to be successful each year in school, in life, and on annual highstakes assessments. Determined by professional judgment, these become the Power Standards or the *prioritized* standards upon which to place the greatest instructional emphasis throughout the year.
- *Analyze state assessment data* to see where students are scoring low *and* to identify in the *state assessment requirements* those standards which receive the most “weight” in terms of frequency and rigor of test items.
- *Make modifications or changes* to initial selection of Power Standards to reflect data analysis and assessment requirements.
- *“Unwrap”* those prioritized standards to identify concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do; determine Big Ideas and Essential Questions to focus instruction and assessment.
- Select *effective teaching strategies* to achieve student understanding of the “unwrapped” concepts, skills, and Big Ideas.
- Teach those “unwrapped” concepts and skills in depth by using *classroom performance assessment tasks* with an emphasis on student writing.

Figure 1.1 How Powerful Practices Work Together



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- Evaluate student proficiency on performance assessment tasks with *rubrics* or *scoring guides*. (Note: Terms used synonymously.)
- Administer *common assessments* to determine student understanding of “unwrapped” Power Standards *within grade, department, school, and/or district*.
- *Analyze data* from the common assessments and *repeat the process*.

Note the placement of effective teaching strategies *after* the “unwrapping” process and *before* the teaching process. This is by no means to confine effective teaching strategies to one assigned place in a sequence of interrelated practices. Teaching occurs throughout the entire process. To emphasize this point, this circle graphic—when presented in PowerPoint format—shows effective teaching strategies spiraling in to the *center* of the circle. As we will advocate the use of assessment to inform instruction throughout this book, instruction is a continually recurring event in a series of connected practices to improve student achievement.

Begin With Data

Approach 2. With *adequate yearly progress* (AYP) being determined by the results of the annual state assessments, individual schools and districts may decide to start the process with their state assessment data and use that data to “drive” each of the remaining practices represented on the circle. The following sequence of the first three steps describes this approach:

- *Analyze state assessment data* to see where students are scoring low *and* to identify in the *state test requirements* those standards which receive the most “weight” in terms of frequency and rigor of test items.
- *Identify the standards* representing those areas of need and focus. These become the Power Standards.
- *“Unwrap”* those prioritized standards to identify concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do; determine Big Ideas and Essential Questions to focus instruction and assessment.
- Continue around the circle from there.

A note of caution is appropriate here. If the Power Standards *only* reflect the test-determined areas of greatest need, other standards that are essential for student success in school and in life may be inadvertently overlooked or de-emphasized. Even though it may be appropriate and necessary at first to identify Power Standards strictly in terms of student performance on high-stakes annual assessments administered by the states, these selections should be reviewed and updated annually. Power Standards should reflect what students need in order to be successful, not only on the state test in any given year but in subsequent years of schooling and in the real world.

Begin With “Unwrapping” the Standards

Approach 3. To enable educators to carefully analyze standards *before* attempting to prioritize them as Power Standards, schools and districts, particularly in Ohio, have wisely decided to begin the process of implementing these interrelated practices by first “unwrapping” the standards. Using this approach, the standards are “unwrapped,” next they are “powered” or prioritized, and then they are cross-referenced with state assessment data and state assessment requirements. The following sequence of the first three steps describes this approach:

- *“Unwrap” all* standards in selected content areas to identify concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do; determine Big Ideas and Essential Questions to focus instruction and assessment for each standard.

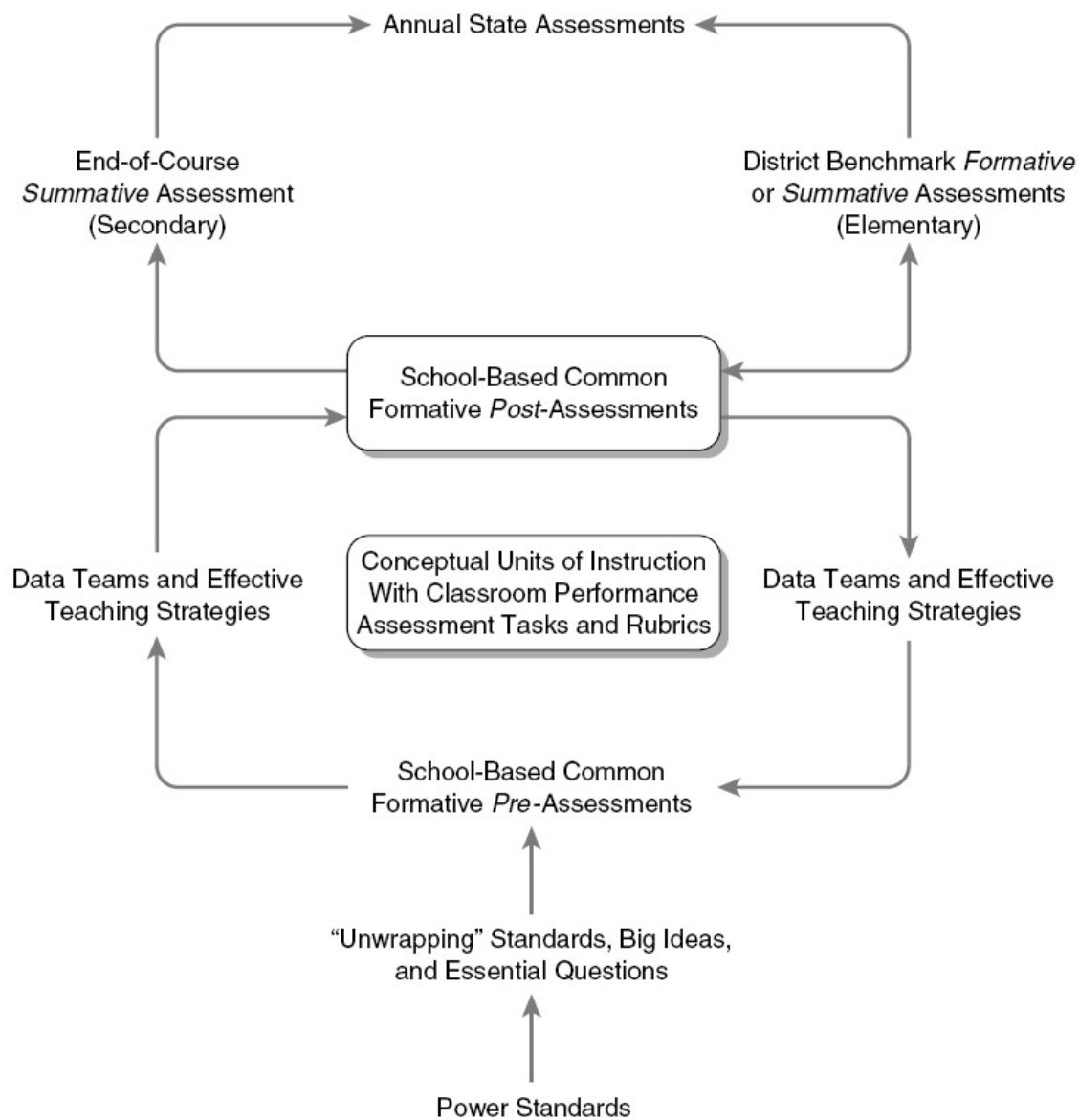
- Determine *which concepts and skills are essential* for students to learn.
- *Designate the standards* containing those “unwrapped” concepts and skills as the Power Standards.
- *Analyze state assessment data* to see where students are scoring low *and* to identify in the *state test requirements* those standards which receive the greatest emphasis.
- *Cross-reference* those areas of need with the selected Power Standards. Make any modifications or changes to selections as needed.
- Continue around the circle from there.

The Standards-Assessment Alignment Diagram

The purpose of this second, and more detailed, diagram is twofold: (1) to graphically represent the big picture of our comprehensive instruction and assessment system model, and (2) to emphasize the deliberate alignment of each level of assessment with the one that follows it.

The directional flow of the arrows suggests that the entire process begins with the Power Standards followed by the “unwrapping” of those Power Standards and then continues through each successive practice. (Note: The Power Standards may be identified through any of the three approaches described above.) The common formative *school*-based assessments are intentionally aligned to the “unwrapped” Power Standards. Classroom performance assessments are intentionally aligned to both the “unwrapped” Power Standards and to the school-based common formative assessments. School-based common formative assessments are deliberately aligned to the formative and summative *district* benchmark assessments (typically administered quarterly) and end-of-course summative assessments. Last, district benchmark assessments and the end-of-course assessments are deliberately aligned to the annual *state* assessments.

Figure 1.2 Standards-Assessment Alignment Diagram



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The sequential steps represented by the diagram above are summarized below. Each of these steps will be described in detail in the chapters that follow.

1. Identify the complete set of Power Standards (which includes the analysis of state assessment data and state assessment requirements) for each grade level and department in selected content areas.
2. "Unwrap" selected Power Standards and then determine the Big Ideas and Essential Questions to focus instruction and assessment for the *current instructional cycle*.

3. Collaboratively design common formative **pre-** and **post**assessments aligned to one another in grade-level and department Data Teams for the current instructional cycle.
4. Administer and score common formative (**pre-**) assessments for use by grade-level and department Data Teams.
5. Analyze **pre-**assessment results in Data Teams. Write goals for student improvement, and select effective teaching strategies to meet those goals during the current instructional cycle.
6. Design classroom conceptual units of instruction with performance tasks and scoring guides matched to the “unwrapped” Power Standards in focus.
7. Teach and assess in each classroom the conceptual units of instruction.
8. Administer and score common formative (**post-**) assessments for use by Data Teams.
9. Analyze **post-**assessment results in Data Teams. Compare pre- to post-assessment results, reflect on the process, and make plans for further improvements.
10. Repeat the process outlined in steps two through nine above for the *next* instructional cycle.
11. Align common formative assessments with quarterly district benchmark assessments and end-of-course assessments. (Note: The alignment of common formative assessments with district assessments and end-of-course assessments may certainly occur earlier in the sequence than is indicated here, often concurrently with Step 3.)
12. Administer quarterly district benchmark assessments; analyze those results (whether formative or summative) in Data Teams to inform future instruction and assessment. (Note: The double-headed arrow on the elementary district benchmark assessments indicates that the assessments may be either formative or summative. The single-headed arrow pointing to the end-of-course secondary assessments indicates that the assessment is summative only.)
13. Align quarterly district benchmark and end-of-course assessments with the annual state assessments. [Note: Again, this alignment between district or end-of-course assessments and state assessments can—and often does—take place earlier in the sequence in order to ensure a deliberate alignment. Educators determine this alignment by referencing (a) state assessment requirements; (b) current year and prior year school and district state test data; and (c) released state assessment items and formats from prior years. This enables the educators to better prepare students for what will be expected of them on the annual state assessments.]

Predictive Value

When intentionally aligned in this way, each level of assessment results provides educators with “predictive value” as to how students are likely to do on the next level of assessment. For example, if teachers use the common formative pre-assessment data to diagnose student learning needs and then modify instruction deliberately to meet those needs, the post-assessment results will certainly demonstrate student gains—if the assessments align so that a same-measure to same-measure comparison can be made. If assessments are continually aligned to subsequent assessments within the classroom, grade level, department, school, district, and state—and when educators use that data diagnostically with the deliberate intention of bringing about improvements in student achievement—students are far more likely to achieve the desired results.

“Predictive value”—often confused with the questionable practice of “teaching to the test”—will be further explained in Chapter 2.

A Vision of Complete Alignment

We will recognize that this “vision of complete alignment”—when viewed within current conditions where assessments often are *not* aligned—may seem a distant ideal for many. But we believe it represents the deliberate connections between assessments and standardsbased practices that must be made if school systems are to realize dramatic improvements on *all* measures of student performance, both formative and summative. With this big picture now in view, let us look more closely at how each of the practices indicated in the diagrams above work together interdependently. In Chapter 2, we will explain formative and summative assessments and how to use them as a regular part of a powerful instruction and assessment system.