Hillsborough County, Florida, used a systematic process to choose a standardized test that matched its curriculum.

Selecting Your District's Achievement Test

Systemwide normative testing is an educational fact of life; the demands of accountability ensure its continued well-being. But how do decision makers at the district level determine which test among the many touted by publishers best meets their needs? One large Florida school district, Hillsborough County, established and followed a series of steps in their test selection process that could be used by other districts facing a similar dilemma. Because the prime use of test results was to improve instruction, the district concentrated on finding the test that most closely matched the county's curriculum.

The six largest test publishers accepted an invitation to present their tests to a selection committee consisting of instructional supervisors, principals, counselors, specialists, and teachers in mathematics, language, and reading. A review form was developed for rating each test in five areas: quality of items, format, content, administration, and reports. Under content, reviewers were instructed to determine how well the test matched the district's curriculum and State Minimum Standards. They judged how thoroughly the cognitive domain had been sampled, how closely items matched the curriculum, and the extent of curriculum coverage on the test. In examining the quality of items, reviewers determined the appropriateness of the test in assessing the students for whom it was intended, including readability, control of bias, relevance to students' experiences, difficulty, and clarity.

Under test format, committee members considered use of illustrations, print size, items per page, item arrangement, use of color, clarity of test directions, and sample items. In the area of test administration, reviewers looked at time allotment, directions for test administration, and the informational content of the manual. Finally, reviewing the reports possible with each test, the committee evaluated the completeness of information contained in the reports, curriculum decisions to be made on the basis of each test, availability of subtest analysis, clarity of reporting forms, and ease of interpreting test data.

The test selection committee met six times. During the first part of each meeting, they discussed the test presented at the previous meeting and collected review forms. In the second part of the meeting another publisher presented its test, which committee members reviewed before the next meeting. At the last session, each person ranked the six tests according to preference.

The Department of Testing and Evaluation reviewed the two highest ranking tests for technical qualities and data processing options. Negotiations over costs and services began, and the instruments were field-tested with selected students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11.

Based on an analysis of the results, the Director of Testing and Evaluation made a final recommendation to the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. Their decision was later approved by the Board; the chosen test will be used for the first time in spring 1983.

The test selection procedures this district followed were long and involved, but they did permit an important decision to be made on the basis of data rather than whim. Throughout the process, instructional considerations were emphasized over financial concerns. The result should be a testing program that matches the county's curriculum and yields data from which sound educational decisions can be made.

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APRIL 1982

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