



## ARTICLE FOR SUBMISSION

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# "Determining What Works, One Day at a Time"

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TUCSON, AZ/November, 2009 - There is widespread agreement that in order to continue to be competitive in the global society in which we live, we must elevate student achievement significantly beyond current levels. The current national commitment to elevating student achievement is apparent in the Federal Race to the Top initiative which commits over four billion dollars to the national effort to increase student achievement.

We have certainly not reached the point where we can say that we have solved the problem of how to significantly increase student achievement across the nation. We will not be able to make that claim until the goal of increasing achievement nationally has been realized. Yet, there is evidence regarding what works to elevate achievement. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the solution to the problem of elevating achievement can be rather straight forward.

There is evidence suggesting that one effective way to elevate student achievement is to administer a series of interim benchmark assessments aligned both to academic standards and to the district curriculum and to then use the results of each benchmark to re-teach the skills that students have not yet mastered and to provide enrichment for those ready to proceed to higher levels. The Massachusetts Department of Education commissioned MAGI Services to conduct a study evaluating the use of Assessment Technology Incorporated's (ATI) Galileo K-12 Online to elevate achievement. The study revealed that when teachers used Galileo benchmark assessments to guide instruction, achievement was enhanced. This finding was not surprising to us. Nearly 20 years ago we conducted a study published in 1991 in the *American Educational Research Journal* that revealed findings consistent with those found in the MAGI Services study. For many years, WestEd has emphasized the importance of using interim assessments to guide instruction in its Local Accountability Professional Development Series. A number of "success stories" have also emerged that support guiding instruction based on benchmark results. The remarkable success of

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the Vail Unified School District in Arizona is an example. Many other examples are beginning to emerge.

ATI believes that interim benchmark assessment can play an important role in elevating achievement in the years ahead. In this connection, we were delighted to find support for guiding instruction utilizing interim benchmark assessment results and results from other assessments in the information provided in the Federal Register regarding the Race to the Top initiative. The Federal Register information on the Race to the Top program defines interim assessments, discusses the importance of establishing the reliability and validity of these assessments, and describes their use in guiding instructional decisions. A policy brief on the role of interim assessments in a comprehensive assessment system prepared jointly by the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment and the Aspen Institute attests further to the growing recognition of the importance of interim benchmark assessments in guiding instructional decisions.

Given the straightforward nature of the approach and the growing body of evidence supporting its use, it would seem that jumping on the interim assessment bandwagon would not be a bad idea. We at ATI certainly agree. We have been developing interim benchmark assessments for use in guiding instruction for several years. However, deciding to use interim assessments to guide instruction is a bit like deciding to lose weight. It's simple. Eat less, or if you want a complicated version, eat less and exercise more. Yet, losing weight is easier said than done. That is also the case with respect to using benchmark assessment to guide instruction.

Recently in a presentation to the Arizona Educational Research Organization, ATI initiated a discussion of the critical characteristics of interim benchmark assessments, the management technology needed to support an interim assessment initiative, the challenges associated with implementing such an initiative, and ways of addressing those challenges. The full presentation can be found on the ATI website, [ati-online.com](http://ati-online.com). In the weeks and months ahead, we will be presenting success stories from a number of districts that will inform the discussion. The first of these recounts the remarkable achievements of the Laveen Elementary School District located in Laveen, Arizona. This District achieved increases in the percentage of students meeting standards on the Arizona statewide test AIMS at every grade.

Continual change is a hallmark of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not surprisingly, the environment of

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continual change is having a profound effect on schools. While No Child Left Behind is still with us, we are already being influenced by the Race to the Top initiative. Dynamic educational management systems will be required in order to accommodate the rapid changes occurring in our society. In these systems, technology will be updated on a continual basis. New tools will be created automating management tasks. Innovations in assessment and instruction will be designed to support levels of learning far beyond our current expectations. The path to the future will be forged by local initiatives involving schools, the research community, and technology providers. To meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the marketplace of ideas must have many voices. ATI invites you to comment on our blog: <http://townhallblog.ati-online.com/>. We value your opinion and are sure that the school districts meeting the challenge to elevate student achievement value it too.

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