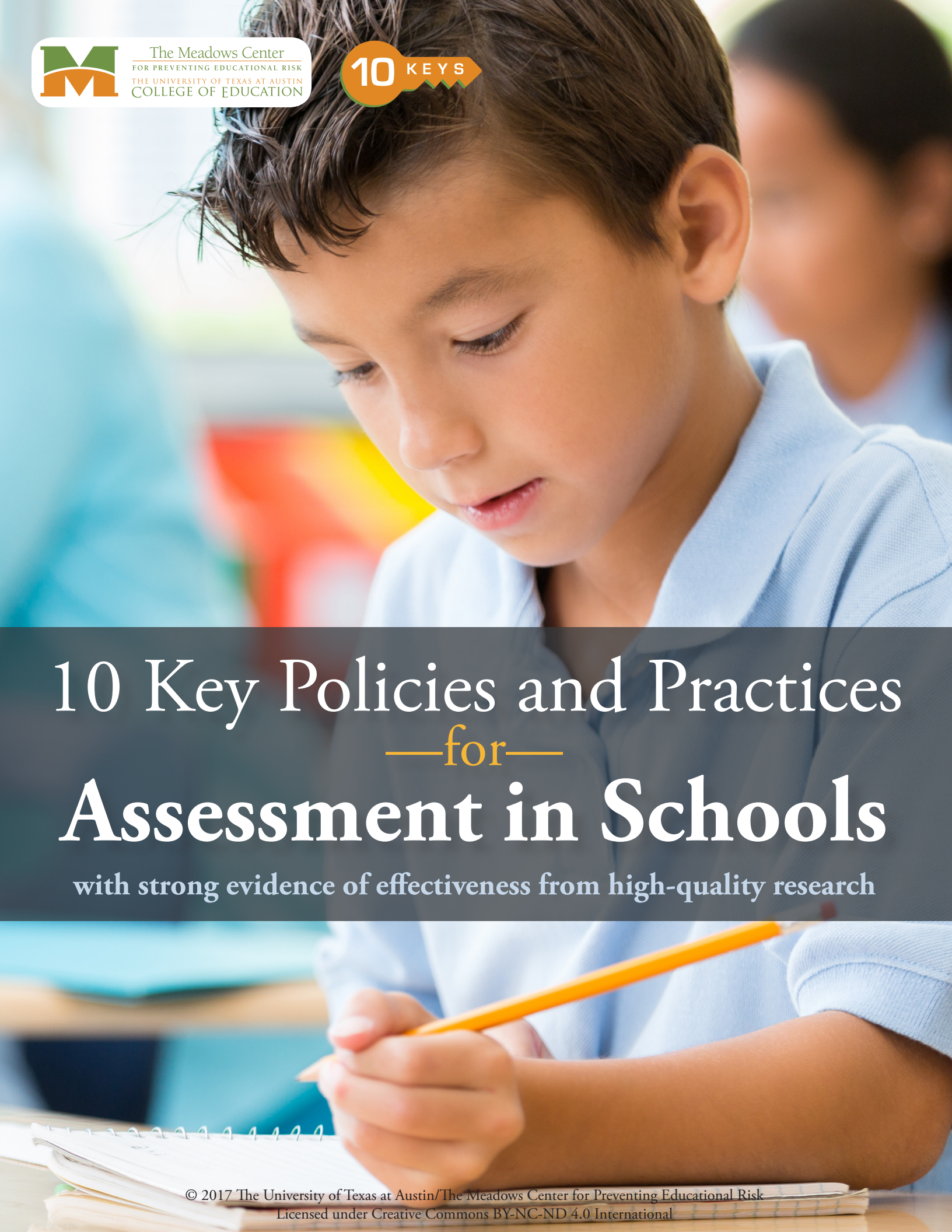

The Meadows Center
FOR PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL RISK
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

10 KEYS

10 Key Policies and Practices —for— Assessment in Schools

with strong evidence of effectiveness from high-quality research

10 Key Policies and Practices for Assessment in Schools

with strong evidence of effectiveness from high-quality research

1. **School leadership ensures that teachers have a shared understanding of the curriculum and standards across the grades.**

   Understanding how content builds through the grades improves instruction as teachers prepare students for the content they will encounter and that will be assessed in the next grade level. This vertical alignment of content and instruction throughout the grades leads to more effective communication among teachers and improved instruction schoolwide.

   Desimone, 2013; Faxon-Mills et al., 2013; McDaniel, Agarwal, Huelser, McDermott, & Roediger III, 2011; Roediger et al., 2011

2. **Schools use assessment to enhance student learning, beyond just measuring it.**

   Research shows that the benefits of assessment go beyond simply measuring student achievement. Assessment, when done well, improves student learning. The process of preparing for and taking tests can help students focus their attention and redirect their study efforts. Assessment also improves teachers' instruction by enhancing their focus on key concepts.

   Benjamin & Pashler, 2015

3. **Teachers give periodic tests or quizzes to improve both students' long-term recall and later test performance and to help students to apply what they have learned to problem-solving.**

   Taking frequent quizzes or tests develops the process of retrieving information. High-quality studies show that the retrieval process is essential for long-term learning. Through periodic assessment, students have additional exposure to the concepts and practice the retrieval process. Increasing the time that students retrieve information leads to better long-term learning.

   

   - Periodic assessment increases recall and decreases the rate of forgetting content.
   - Students who take more tests in the classroom do better on later, more comprehensive exams.
   - Through assessment, students acquire strategies for organizing and clustering related concepts, making them more retrievable.
   - The benefits of periodic assessment apply to students of all abilities.

   Agarwal, Roediger, McDaniel, & McDermott, 2010; Karpicke & Roediger, 2007; Mulligan, 2005; Pan, Pashler, Potter, & Rickard, 2015; Roediger, Agarwal, McDaniel, & McDermott, 2011; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006

4. **Teachers distribute tests over time, with gradually increasing intervals between tests.**

   Multiple studies show that taking frequent, shorter tests leads to greater long-term learning than taking a single comprehensive test. Research shows that assessment is most effective with frequent shorter tests early in the academic year, gradually increasing the intervals between tests over time.

Examples

- Ms. Grant, an eighth-grade math teacher, gave quizzes weekly for 8 weeks, then every 2 weeks for the next 8 weeks, and then monthly for the remainder of the year. She reported that her students did better on the annual assessment than students did in past years.
- Ms. Baker, a fifth-grade teacher, organizes science instruction into 6-week units. For the first two units of the year, she gave weekly quizzes, building up to end-of-unit tests. In January, she changed the quiz schedule to every 2 weeks, with a final unit test. By spring, she gave only a mid-unit quiz before ending with a unit test.

Benjamin & Pashler, 2015; Roediger et al., 2011; Rohrer & Pashler, 2010; Storm, Bjork, & Storm, 2010

5. **Teachers provide immediate corrective feedback on assessment performance to enhance long-term learning.**

Feedback is an essential element of effective assessment. Research shows that students have improved recall of information and perform better on later assessment when they receive immediate corrective feedback on individual items in practice tests. Effective feedback is both immediate and corrective, specifically regarding what part of students' response is correct and how to improve or correct their response.

Examples

- When Maria, an eighth-grade student, missed a math problem, her teacher, Mr. Marks, identified where the problem-solving process broke down and pointed out to Maria what part of the process was correct. Telling Maria what part was correct reinforced her accurate recall of the process. Mr. Marks also helped her to go through the remaining process with accuracy. Maria could see what she understood correctly and how to fix any misunderstanding.
- After reading a textbook passage, Derrick missed two comprehension questions. Ms. Jennings, Derrick's teacher, praised him for the questions he answered correctly, pointing out parts of the text that support his correct responses. She then directed him to look back in the text to find relevant information to help him rework the two incorrect responses.

Dihoff, Brosvic, Epstein, & Cook, 2004; Faxon-Mills, Hamilton, Rudnick, & Stecher, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007

6. **Teachers provide feedback to students on test performance because it motivates them to study and promotes realistic self-perceptions about their learning.**

Feedback plays a critical role in how students approach an upcoming test. Students with inflated or unrealistic self-perceptions of what they know and can do may be overconfident and fail to allocate sufficient study time to prepare for tests. Having inaccurate, low self-perceptions may lead students to feel that studying is not worth the effort. All students need accurate information about what they have and have not learned. Teachers should provide individualized feedback to help students form accurate self-assessments of where they stand in meeting the expectations and how to best prepare for tests.

Benjamin & Pashler, 2015; Dihoff et al., 2004

7. **In periodic tests, teachers include at least some higher-order questions that require deep thinking and focus on causation, relations, and logic.**

   Tests typically require factual recall of information, a necessary part of content learning. However, effective assessment also requires some application of the facts that are learned. Studies have shown that when students encounter at least some higher-order, application-type questions on periodic tests, they acquire a deeper conceptual understanding of the content and have better retention of facts. Higher-order questions engage students in using the factual information to better understand complex relationships among ideas and how they relate to the world.

   Jensen, McDaniel, Woodard, & Kummer, 2014; King, 1994

8. **Schools complement state assessment with formative assessments that provide ongoing progress monitoring regarding learning goals.**

   Formative assessment is a cyclical process of establishing learning goals, gathering student performance data, and using the evidence to better meet the goals. Through ongoing formative assessment, students and teachers receive constant information about student performance, which enhances long-term learning and motivation.

   Teachers examine the data and adjust instruction to better address specific needs. Teachers also share data with students to focus them on learning targets. When students receive ongoing and specific feedback provided by formative assessment, they are motivated to adjust their learning behavior.

   Short-cycle formative assessments occur daily, between and within lessons. Medium-cycle assessments occur within and between instructional units.

   Klute, Apthorp, Harlacher, & Reale, 2017

9. **Schools minimize the teaching of test-taking strategies and focus instead on deep content learning.**

   Devoting some time to test-taking strategies and practice tests familiarizes students with the testing process. More important to test preparation is teaching for deep content learning. High-quality studies show that teaching test-taking strategies and giving practice tests have only a minimal positive impact on test performance. This type of "teaching to the test" pulls valuable time away from teaching the curriculum and detracts from meaningful learning. Test-preparation activities should not compromise content learning.

   

   Desimone, 2013; Koretz, McCaffrey, & Hamilton, 2001; Mehrens & Kaminski, 1989; Popham, 2001; Sturman, 2003; Welsh, Eastwood, & D'Agostino, 2014

10. **Schools minimize the teaching of decontextualized facts that might be tested and focus instead on deep, integrated instruction of content standards.**

    Educators often focus on teaching isolated facts that are likely to be tested, believing that this practice will raise test scores. This practice narrows the content and decontextualizes learning, making it difficult for students to engage in deep, meaningful learning that leads to long-term retention. Content instruction should include higher-order skills and cognitive engagement with complex tasks.

    Benjamin & Pashler, 2015; Desimone, 2013; Faxon-Mills et al., 2013; Jensen et al., 2014; Koretz et al., 2001; Popham, 2001

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