

, and the City Local. Philip Kennicott is The Washington Post's culture critic.

Testing and Assessment Terms You Need to Know

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Do data and assessment terms confuse you? Can you tell the difference between a norm- and a criterion-referenced test? What are benchmark data and why are they so important? What are school abilities tests? What is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)? As your curriculum team clicks through these various phrases, are your eyes starting to roll up in the back of your head? Don't worry; you are not alone. Understanding assessment data is a complex task, but it's one that we can make easier. While this article can't answer all your questions about assessments, it will give you some of the background you need to be an informed board member.

Nature of assessment data

Assessment data are observations or facts that must be collected, organized, and analyzed to become useful. The key point to remember is that data are merely **numbers** or words that do not have **meaning** in and of themselves. Data **only** acquire meaning when educators and board members sift the numbers through their personal experiences and place them within the context of their school or the district as a whole. Because your personal and social filters are different,