



PREPARING FOR STATE ASSESSMENTS AFTER COVID-19

The Case for State Assessments in Spring 2021

November 2020

The recommendations in this document will be updated and refined to reflect the changing realities states face.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted so many aspects of our lives, including our children’s education. Because of this disruption we need to know now—more than ever—where students are and how we can help get them back on track. Annual assessments will provide objective, comparable information about student achievement to empower states as they support students, teachers and schools. The rigorous expectations and administration of the state assessment are imperative to keep the promise of equity and to make sure *every* student counts.

ASSESSMENTS ENSURE EVERY STUDENT COUNTS

States measure academic achievement because they care about student learning, and what gets measured gets done. As we emerge from this crisis, many students will be just fine academically—but many others won’t. State assessments help ensure *all* students are meeting education standards that prepare them for success in life. In spring 2021, states need to administer comprehensive end-of-year assessments to all public-school students to ensure every student is counted and to help schools offer extra support for the students who need it the most.

These assessments are one essential part of a broader toolkit for improving learning and opportunities for each student. They provide powerful, irreplaceable data which is vital to understanding and addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on student learning, especially for students who are historically underserved.

4 Reasons Why State Assessments Are Essential for Spring 2021

<p>GATHER INFORMATION</p> <p>Objective, comparable information about student achievement derived from a state assessment will enable leaders to understand the pandemic’s impact on student learning and respond effectively.</p>	<p>ADVANCE EQUITY</p> <p>Traditionally underserved students have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. The rigorous expectations and administration of state assessments are vital to keep the promise of equity and to make sure every student counts.</p>
<p>TARGET SUPPORT</p> <p>Students and schools are weathering the pandemic differently. Understanding student academic achievement is the first step to ensuring state resources and supports are appropriately provided to students, educators, schools and districts.</p>	<p>TRACK PROGRESS</p> <p>State assessment data provides parents with honest, objective information on how their child is doing, information to know if state policies and interventions are working, and a way to track accountability for the scarce taxpayer dollars that fund education.</p>

Students and families need state education leaders to prepare for a successful statewide, standards-based summative assessment in 2020-2021. Whether in a remote or in person environment, gathering comparable and reliable information on student performance is essential to make objective policy and resource decisions on behalf of students. States can negotiate with their testing contractor to make customized decisions about access and usability, training and support, security and participation to prepare for Spring 2021.



PREPARING FOR STATE SUMMATIVE TESTING IN 2020-2021

2020-2021 is a school year unlike any other. Consequently, the state must plan for equitable access to assessments for students' various instructional environments—in-person, blended and fully remote.

In-person and **blended learning scenarios** will allow for traditional on-site state assessment administration protocols with minor modifications for social distancing and equipment cleaning if using a shared computer lab for testing. Conversely, **remote testing** will also allow the value of summative results while recognizing the new reality of remote education. Remote testing presents different conditions for administration. State assessments should only be administered remotely when leaders are confident the data generated is accurate, valid and reliable.

Testing companies that currently deliver summative assessments in states—including Cambium (formerly the American Institutes for Research), Data Recognition Corporation (DRC), ETS, Measurement Inc., Pearson, Smarter-Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and Questar—have already developed solutions to ensure students can test remotely in Spring 2021. The sooner the states begin working with their assessment provider to make decisions the better.

As states create 2020-2021 assessments, they should consider these six areas:

- Access & Usability
- Security
- Results
- Training & Support
- Participation
- Cost Saving Options



Access & Usability

Assessments should be accessible and usable for all students, regardless of their instructional environment. Students need to have a device and access to highspeed internet to have a seamless testing experience. States can mitigate some access issues with reducing the needed internet speed and establishing testing centers as an option for students. As states create assessments for 2020-2021, they should consider the following things:

Student Access to Technology & Logins

Devices, Internet bandwidth and secure logins will be essential for successful remote assessments.

- Students must have access to a secure device to take the assessments.
- Internet speeds must be fast enough to load test items and test taking tools without delay.
- Secure identification and passwords must be provided for the student to login and access the assessment.

Local, Specialized Assessment Centers

Some students will be unable to test remotely, and students with special needs may not be able to receive the accommodations necessary to test remotely. Consequently, states will need to consider creating local, specialized assessment centers.

- Equipped computer labs and trained staffed will allow for better participation for students who are unable to test remotely.
- Students requiring accommodations must have access to the appropriate the technology and equipment to be successful instructionally and with remote testing.

Shorter, Adaptive Tests

States transitioning to adaptive testing can reduce testing time while providing increased accuracy. Adaptive tests present items based on previous student responses, making the test tailored to the student and getting accurate information about the student's mastery of the standards more quickly.



Reducing Technology-Enhanced Items

States can reduce technology-enhanced items within assessments to improve user experience for test takers with low-bandwidth.

- Removing items with built in sound, video and other enhancements will reduce bandwidth requirements and improve the remote test taking experience.
- Old items (and forms) that are secure should still be available in most states along with the psychometrics to support them. While this would be a step backwards to use old, less technologically advanced items it could make for more accessible spring 2021 testing.



Training & Support

Educators, parents, caregivers and students should have access to training prior to assessments and live support during testing windows. As states create assessments for 2020-2021, they should consider the following things:

Training for Students and Families to Access Assessments

Prior to test day, students and families should be trained on how to access the online assessment, how to find their login credentials and how to test their internet speed to ensure a successful administration.

- A standardized video may be helpful to convey test taking instructions.
- Training and instructions must be available in the languages spoken in students' homes.

Training for Teachers to Remotely Administer Assessments

Teachers must be trained on how to direct students to access the assessment remotely.

- Teacher training may include how to provide test-taking instructions, monitor students during the test and responding to student questions.
- A standardized video may be a better avenue to convey test-taking instructions.

Technical Support Services

The test vendor should provide technical support hotlines and other services directly to educators, parents, caregivers and students during the testing window.



Security

States need to enhance test security for proctored remote assessments and communicate security expectations to families and educators. As states create assessments for 2020-2021, they should consider the following things:

Security Notification for Families

Prior to the test, states should notify students and families of the expectations of remote test administration and item security.

- Students and families should understand the security of the assessment administration and item security.
- Test vendors and the state should create a video as part of the test taking instructions to inform students that there will be remote proctoring of the assessment and that the students must:
 - Take the assessment independently;
 - Verify their identity when logging;
 - Not access other websites, books, materials, or receive help during the test administration;



- Not take screen shots or photos to share or distribute test items; and
- Not discuss test items with their peers.

Assessment Security Measures

There are multiple ways states can enhance test security for remote assessments, from test creation to access opportunities.

- Adaptive testing is the most secure option as items are selected based in an individual student’s responses.
 - However, if using fixed forms, having multiple equated forms, rather than a single fixed form, will enhance security.
- Using items that can be retired after the administration and resurrecting secure—but retired—items for use in remote environments will reduce future security and expense if there is item exposure.
- Shortening the administration window could reduce inappropriate item sharing.
- Allowing only one access opportunity per username/login will prevent students from previewing the items and returning to the test.
- Allowing for only forward progress through items will reduce opportunities for students to see items and return after researching or gathering additional information to change responses.
 - This will, however, change the testing procedure so student could not return and check their work or skip items they would like to return to later, as some students are taught as a test taking strategy.
- Locking down students’ browsers and other applications while students are logged on to testing sessions could help ensure they aren’t researching or gathering information.
- Proctoring the remote test administration—live or recorded—will help guard against improprieties. This could include:
 - Training teachers as proctors;
 - Hiring external individuals as proctors (this, of course, will require consideration for privacy if using external proctors and/or recording and re-watching videos of test taking); and
 - Using artificial intelligence to proctor assessment.
- Conducting electronic forensics could help identify potential improprieties (e.g., response changes, timing or response changes and logging back in after test section completed).
- Monitoring media and social media outlet for posted items and discussion will help identify test improprieties.



Participation

States, districts and schools must work together to ensure every student participates in the state assessment so policymakers can make informed instructional, resource and policy decisions to meet student needs.

Require Completion for Advancement

States can require test completion to unlock/access instructional content moving forward. If the test is remote, students would have to complete the test before they could move on to the day’s lessons or access more instructional content.

Create Incentives for Schools/Districts

Offer schools/districts a financial incentive for meeting the 95% tested requirement with valid test scores.



Comparable Results

State assessments should be comparable with prior administrations.

Comparability

States should focus on ensuring the items, forms and difficulty of tests are comparable to prior years. The 2021 testing environment, if remote, will not be entirely standardized. Remote testing will mean students will experience a different environment than prior years' classroom settings, and this year home environments will differ from student to student. **However, these remote testing environments will be the same as their instructional environment.**

- Using a single mode of administration is ideal. But if multiple modes of administration are utilized—fully remote online, testing center online or paper/pencil, in-person online, in-person paper-pencil, etc.—states must ensure mode differences do not impact the comparability or results.
- Score aggregations should be representative of the student group, school, district and state based on percent tested of student tested.

Transparent Reporting

Results of the state assessment should be transparently reported for each school, district and at the state level.

- The number of students tested, number of students eligible to test, participation rate, number and percent of students at each achievement level as well as the number and percent of proficient students should be reported for each subject, grade and student group.
- Information on when and how the test was administered and any differences from the prior years' administration conditions should also be noted.



Cost Saving Options

States shifting to entirely remote assessments may require provider contract modifications, but they likely will not need funding beyond current budgets. However, as many states consider budget reduction requirements, they can consider cost-savings through the following improved testing efficiencies:

Testing Efficiencies

There are ways to realize cost-savings through improved testing efficiencies.

- Continued improvements in automated scoring allows faster and cheaper scoring that allows states to maintain emphasis on deeper learning.
- Cross-state use of critical assessment applications such as reporting system and test delivery systems.
- Cross-state use of a common item pool can reduce development costs.