



TO TEST OR NOT TO TEST?

The Case for State Assessments in Spring 2021

November 2020

As medical researchers tackle big questions about the short and long-term effects of COVID-19 on the human body, educators and policymakers are facing their own concerns about the pandemic's impact on student learning. This crisis has disrupted virtually every school and family in the country. In spring 2020, educators and families nationwide navigated a heroic transition to distance learning. Now schools are fluctuating between in-person and virtual learning to meet the needs of their students and communities. Through all this, reliable assessments and data are more crucial than ever before.

YOU CAN'T SOLVE A PROBLEM YOU CAN'T SEE

Many students will emerge from this crisis just fine—but we cannot forget those with limited internet access or whose parents struggled to balance jobs and schooling. Disadvantaged students already face an uneven playing field, and states cannot afford to let this crisis make it worse. 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.

4 Reasons Why State Assessments Are Essential for Spring 2021

Comprehensive end-of-year assessments are one essential part of a broader toolkit for improving learning and opportunities for each student. These assessments provide powerful, irreplaceable data which are vital to understanding and addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on student learning, especially for students who are historically underserved. State assessment data empowers families, educators and policymakers to:



GATHER INFORMATION

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.



TARGET SUPPORT

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.



ADVANCE EQUITY

Traditionally, underserved students have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. The rigorous expectations and administration of state assessments are imperative to keep the promise of equity and to make sure every student counts.



TRACK PROGRESS

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 as well as a way to track accountability for the scarce taxpayer dollars that fund education.

For more information, view our [Considerations for States: Preparing for State Assessments After COVID-19](#) document or contact Christy Hovanetz, Ph.D. at Christy@ExcellinEd.org.



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. The nation’s largest assessment companies all have developed solutions to ensure students can, as needed, test remotely in Spring 2021. As states work with their state assessment providers, they should consider the following six areas.

Access & Usability	Security
<p>Access: To test remotely, students must have access to technology (device and Internet bandwidth) and logins to access assessments. Students who are unable to test remotely will require local assessment centers with suitable technology and trained staff to meet all students’ needs, including those requiring accommodations.</p> <p>Usability: To reduce testing time and increase accuracy, states can consider transitioning to shorter, adaptive tests. Additionally, states could reduce technology-enhanced items within assessments (e.g., built-in sound or video) to improve user-experience for test takers with low-bandwidth.</p>	<p>Prior to the test, students and families need to understand the security expectations for proctored remote assessments (e.g., students must take assessments independently and test items must not be photographed, captured or discussed with peers).</p> <p>States can also take steps to enhance test security by virtually proctoring remote assessments, shortening the test administration window to reduce the possibility of inappropriate item sharing, limiting each username/login to one access, using adaptive testing or multiple equated forms and monitoring social media for test improprieties.</p>
Potential Cost Saving Options	Comparable Results
<p>States shifting to entirely remote assessments may require provider contract modifications, however, 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: continued improvements in automated scoring for faster, cheaper results; cross-state use of critical assessment applications, such as reporting systems and test delivery systems; and cross-state use of a common item pool to reduce development costs.</p>	<p>It is important that assessments are comparable with prior administrations. To begin, states can ensure items, forms and difficulty of tests are comparable to previous years. If states must use multiple modes of administration, they should ensure mode differences do not impact the comparability or results. It will also be important that score aggregations are representative of the student group, school, district and state based on percent tested of student tested and that states offer transparent reporting for each school, district and at the state level.</p>
Training & Support	Participation
<p>Prior to test day, students, parents and educators will require training and resources to ensure a successful remote administration. This training could encompass everything from testing Internet bandwidth and login credentials to understanding how teachers can respond to student questions within the assessment. On testing day, families and educators should have direct access to technical support hotlines and other support services.</p>	<p>States must encourage participation as a means to ensure all students are represented for making instructional, resource and policy decisions. Schools could encourage participation by require assessment completion to unlock/access instructional content moving forward. States could offer schools/districts a financial incentive for meeting the 95% tested requirement, with valid test scores.</p>