

Memorandum

To: School Year 2020-2021 Approved Formative (Interim) Assessment Program Vendors
From: Dr. Charity Flores, Director of Student Assessment, Indiana Department of Education
Re: Recommendations for Educator Professional Development and School Collaboration
Date: June 8, 2020

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) appreciates the support and service that assessment program vendors provide to Indiana schools and students. Interim and formative assessments are important aspects of a strong local assessment system. Approved formative/interim assessment program vendors provide needed support in this area to Indiana schools.

Several criteria must be met in order to reach the status of “approved program” for Indiana’s Formative Assessment Grant. These criteria sometimes raise questions from local school corporations or require some explanation to schools for best practice. In an effort to increase collaboration between the IDOE and approved assessment program vendors, the IDOE offers recommendations and support to program vendors to discuss these topics with local schools. These recommendations may be included in vendor communication with schools and/or in professional development opportunities that are provided.

The IDOE provides similar recommendations to Indiana corporations and schools. The intent of these recommendations is to increase collaboration between Indiana corporations and their selected assessment provider, resulting in the implementation of best practices that support student learning.

Using Assessments as Intended by Test Design

Educators should use assessment scores in ways scores are intended to be used based on test design. Use of scores in ways not intended most often results in unintended negative consequences for schools and students. Different assessments have different designs and often varied intentions for use. Assessment program vendors can support schools’ best use of data by:

- Clearly stating the purpose of the assessment(s) offered. The school’s purpose for giving the assessment should fit comfortably with the purpose intended by the assessment designer. If schools have a purpose entirely different from the assessment’s intended purpose, the school should either investigate another tool or adjust their purpose.

- Clearly stating the intended uses of assessment data. Using scores for purposes other than intended can have severe negative consequences. Assessment program vendors can help educators understand different ways that the assessment tool can be used and also warn against unintended uses of data that might lead to misinformation or poorly-informed action.
- Clearly stating limitations of assessment data based on test design. All data have limitations. Educators must understand what information they can receive from an interim or formative assessment as well as what information they need to look for in other places. For example, most interim assessments today are not equipped to assess speaking and listening skills. Perhaps writing is assessed only through multiple-choice items and not through authentic writing activities in order to support faster results.

Assessment program vendors may also consider sharing key elements of test design and how these elements affect local implementation of the assessment.

- Is the assessment an interim, benchmark (modular), or formative tool by design? Some interim assessments provide data over the course of the year based on an overall test blueprint. These are typically intended to show growth or proficiency across a larger set of standards. Others are more modular (or benchmarked), and are designed to assess specific standards or strands at specific times in the school year. These are typically intended to be matched to curriculum and instruction. Both types of assessments have value. Schools should understand which type of assessment they are using and how that impacts the way they understand their data. The IDOE does not encourage the use of both interim and modular assessments due to potential overtesting of students.
- Is the assessment a fixed-form test or a computer-adaptive test? Fixed-form tests can provide advantages such as item-level analyses for groups of students. Computer-adaptive tests can provide advantages such as more precise measurement for the spectrum of student abilities. Assessment program vendors should help schools understand their assessment structure and how that structure affects the available data. For computer-adaptive assessments, it's important to share if adaptation occurs across or within grade levels.
- Is customization available? Some assessment programs may allow schools to make changes to assessments. If this is the case, providers should discuss the pros and cons of customization with schools along with potential impacts to validity, reliability, and comparability of test scores (see "Addressing Comparability and Reliability with Customization" section of this document).

Understanding the Predictive Measure

Indiana Code 20-32-5.1-17 requires approved assessment programs to provide predictive measures related to student performance on Indiana's state summative assessment, ILEARN, for grades 3-8. While predictive measures have value, the intent of these measures is often misunderstood, leading to a misuse of data that can negatively impact schools and students.

Foundationally, predictive measures attempt to let schools know ahead of time how students will likely perform on another, higher-stakes assessment. Educators can then use that knowledge to provide students with targeted support. This approach can be useful for differentiating instruction, so long as the following key ideas are understood and applied.

- Predictive measures are not an end: They are a means to an end. The end goal is not to “be really good at prediction.” The end goal is to understand student needs through data, act on those needs, and change the path a student is currently on so that the student can achieve even more than anticipated.
- Instructional practices always impact (and should impact!) predictive measures. An assessment vendor may provide schools with results of predictive studies. These studies are typically based on data from a large number of schools representing varied responses to data. Some schools may dig into data and work with students based on specific data points. When schools take action on data, they may negatively impact a predictive rate. For example, the interim assessment may predict a student will not pass the summative assessment, but because educators received an early warning, they adjusted instruction and the student does eventually pass the summative assessment. While this might at first appear to be a negative impact on paper (the predictive measure failed), in reality, it is a sign that the system is working properly because student needs are met.
- There is an important difference between under-predicting and over-predicting student performance. If interim assessment data is used to inform instruction and remediation, interim assessments as a predictive measure should more consistently under-predict student performance. It is better to flag students for additional support who may not need as much targeted remediation than to not flag a student for support who really needs intervention.

The IDOE publishes [these presentation materials](#) to support discussions of predictive measures with schools.

Interpreting Proficiency Scores Versus Growth Scores

Proficiency scores and growth scores represent very different aspects of student learning. Proficiency scores share data about student achievement for specific academic skills. Growth scores show how much a student has changed over the course of time. Students may receive very high growth scores, but still need additional remediation in order to attain proficiency. Conversely, some students may demonstrate proficiency on academic standards but not show growth over the course of time, indicating that they are high-achieving but not being challenged to continue growing. Some assessments focus on proficiency, others focus on growth, and many provide both types of data in some way.

Assessment program vendors should clearly define how schools can use data to understand student proficiency versus student growth whenever either is available. Educators should understand that high growth scores may not indicate that students have achieved proficiency,

and high proficiency scores may not indicate that a student is actively learning and/or achieving their full potential.

Addressing Comparability and Reliability with Customization

Some assessment programs allow schools to build their own assessments or to customize pre-built assessments to match the corporation's instructional plans. While these tools can provide flexibility and support for school programming, customization can also be a danger to comparability, reliability, and even validity if not performed thoughtfully.

Assessment program vendors who allow customization of assessments should have conversations with schools about how assessment changes specifically affect comparability and reliability. Each time that a school updates test blueprints, comparability to previous test scores is affected. Stability and standardization are necessary in order to ensure test scores can be compared across administrations and test forms in any meaningful way. Assessment program vendors should work with schools to support comparability in whatever ways are possible.

Providing Appropriate Accommodations

All approved assessment programs have carefully considered aspects of accessibility and accommodations for students needing specific supports. A wide variety of accommodations are available to students, along with different recommendations for use. The IDOE encourages schools to consider the main purpose of their assessment as they determine how they will implement accommodations.

- If the main purpose is to guide daily instruction, then schools should implement accommodations that are intended for daily instruction.
- If the main purpose is to identify students needing support to achieve proficiency on the statewide summative assessment, then schools should implement accommodations that match those the student will receive on the summative assessment.

More information is available in IDOE's published "[Considerations for Implementation of Accommodations to Interim/Formative Assessments](#)" guidance.

Receiving Support and Assistance

For any support regarding these recommendations or for any desired collaboration to support local assessment implementation, contact Mary Williams, Senior Assessment Specialist with the Indiana Department of Education (mwilliams@doe.in.gov, 317-234-5602) or the Office of Student Assessment (INassessments@doe.in.gov, 317-232-9050).