

Designing Equitable Through-Year Assessments

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Introduction

Statewide summative assessments are crucial tools for advancing educational equity: As the only assessments that annually evaluate student growth and learning using valid comparisons across students and student groups in a state, they can offer valuable insights to policymakers, education leaders, advocates and parents on whether and how well schools are meeting the needs of all students.

[In focus groups](#) conducted by EdTrust in 2023, however, students, families, educators, and administrators expressed a strong desire for more meaningful, timely, and actionable assessment data.¹ Educators and administrators (including state agency staff, as well as school principals and district leaders) voiced frustration over the lack of timely results, noting that while traditional state summative assessments evaluate students' knowledge and skills at the end of the academic year, the results typically are received months later — often in the next instructional year. Focus group participants noted that such delays limit their ability to leverage the data to better meet the needs of their student(s).

For that reason, many state leaders are placing [big bets on through-year assessments](#),² which consist of several subtests administered multiple times a year. This [trend](#)³ is also taking shape because through-year assessments let states adhere to equity provisions required by The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which stipulates that states must produce summative scores for every student that are aligned to grade-level standards and that scores must be valid, reliable, publicly reported, and disaggregated by student group.⁴ And for the first time, ESSA clarified that states can use multiple interim assessments to generate a single summative score as an indicator to summarize grade-level proficiency.

About This Resource

If the fundamental goal of state summative assessments is to ensure that schools provide students with the resources they need to learn and thrive, then having more timely and relevant assessment data is crucial. This data allows educators, administrators, and families to more efficiently identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement and provide timely interventions so that every student can reach their full potential.

This resource builds on “[5 Things Equity Advocates Should Know About Through-Year Assessments](#)” and is designed to provide state-level policymakers, administrators, and advocates with more specific guidance on developing and implementing a through-year assessment initiative in a way that centers equity. **While through-year assessment models hold tremendous promise, not all through-year assessment models and initiatives are created equal.** Advocates must ensure that their state administrators prioritize equity in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of new or existing through-year assessment initiatives.

More specifically, this report outlines a vision for through-year assessments that can provide more timely, meaningful data that educators can use to adjust their instruction, assist administrators to make more strategic and equitable decisions about resource allocation, and help families better understand whether and how well their school is meeting the needs of their child. This resource is also designed to:⁵

- Inform advocates, administrators, and policymakers about the promise of through-year assessments — and the significant investments required to implement them successfully — which, if done right, can ultimately replace a traditional year-end summative assessment
- Identify a core set of conditions that through-year assessments must meet to be able to deliver on an identified purpose
- Outline specific assessment design considerations, including EdTrust recommendations, that are best suited to support an equitable through-year assessment design
- Highlight promising strategies and policy recommendations for advocates to use in discussions with state leaders

Centering Equity in Through-Year Assessment Design

Through-year assessments can — and must be — designed with the goal of helping education leaders advance equitable student opportunities. This can be achieved by customizing through-year assessments to provide educators and administrators with more meaningful and timely assessment data than traditional state summative annual assessments.

Having relevant, actionable through-year assessment data would allow educators to identify students’ strengths and adjust instruction to provide additional supports. This would also enable district and school leaders to be more strategic about assigning interventionists and support staff to the schools and students who need them most. Additionally, through-year assessments give students more opportunities during the year to demonstrate what they know and can do, which helps ensure that additional supports are aligned to students’ strengths and needs.

Advantages of Through-Year Assessments

Administering and using data from through-year assessments can alleviate common concerns that were raised by families, educators, and administrators in focus groups. For example, through-year assessments return timelier results and provide meaningful and actionable data that educators, administrators, and families can use to adjust instruction, make resource allocation decisions, and understand how the school is meeting their child's needs. This is in sharp contrast to traditional end-of-year summative assessments, whose results are often delayed by several months.⁶ Such delays limit the utility of the end-of-year assessment data and make it more difficult for educators, administrators, and families to use it to appropriately support students and help them stay on track.⁷ Through-year assessments have other advantages: The results of each administration (or each time a student takes a part of the through-year assessment) can be combined to form a student's final summative score. In contrast, an end-of-year summative assessment gives students "one shot" at demonstrating proficiency, which can be a significant source of anxiety for students and their teachers.⁸ Additionally, through-year assessments can potentially streamline a state's assessment system, eliminating the need for district-level assessment systems altogether. This would create more cost-effective opportunities to support student learning, reduce the footprint of assessments, and build coherence across the assessment system.

Additionally, many districts use interim benchmark assessments to gather more timely information that traditional summative assessments cannot provide. Unfortunately, the quality of these assessments varies tremendously,⁹ and there's little public transparency to hold vendors accountable.¹⁰ And while well-resourced districts are generally better able to support teachers in understanding and interpreting interim assessment data, teachers in under-resourced schools often lack access to supports that can help them better understand their interim assessment data and adjust their instruction. Additionally, an incoherent system that has many different interim assessments and a separate summative assessment is labor- and resource-intensive and burdensome for under-resourced schools. What's more, interim assessments predominantly focus on student growth relative to their peers, which can be misleading and obscure the level of support and resources that many students — especially the lowest achieving students — need to achieve grade-level proficiency. It is important to note, however, that unlike summative assessments, many commercial interim assessments can assess students on below-grade level concepts and skills, which can provide meaningful data to educators, administrators, and families, so they can support the lowest achieving students who require the most support to catch up to grade level.

5 Elements of a Successful, Equitable Through-Year Assessment Model

EdTrust has identified **five core elements** for ensuring that through-year assessments can be leveraged by educators and administrators to better and more equitably meet students' academic needs. Only when all these elements are implemented with fidelity can the promise of through-year assessments become a reality.

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While through-year assessment models hold tremendous promise, not all through-year assessment models and initiatives are created equal.

Identifying Priorities That Advance Equity

Designing and implementing a coherent, equitable through-year assessment system is a complex endeavor. States must develop a clear, realistic theory of action to identify priorities, narrow the focus, and align the model's objectives to the purpose of their statewide assessment system. A theory of action can provide a roadmap to guide states on the design of their through-year assessment model and inform the specific characteristics and key design features.¹¹ Of course, this is easier said than done: Competing priorities are likely to come to the forefront, and families, communities, educators, administrators, and policymakers may have vastly different needs and perspectives.

With that in mind, EdTrust has identified specific priorities for developing a through-year assessment to guide our recommendations. If designed and implemented well, through-year assessments that emphasize the following priorities can produce more equitable opportunities for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds:

1. Ensure that through-year assessments maintain all equity guardrails, as stipulated by federal law, and that assessment results are valid, reliable, comparable, and can be disaggregated by student group.
2. Design a through-year assessment model that increases the utility and instructional relevance of summative statewide assessment results for educators, administrators, and families throughout the year to foster more frequent opportunities to create and sustain high-quality, rigorous, and equitable learning environments.

The five elements of an equitable through-year assessment model outlined in this report should be in direct alignment with these priorities and provide initial considerations for advocates, state administrators, and policymakers on how to make an equitable through-year assessment model a reality.

Element 1. Actionable Reporting to Support Student Learning

The strength of a through-year assessment hinges on the quality of the reporting, which provides high-quality feedback to students, their families, educators, and administrators. Getting timely results is essential, but timely receipt of assessment results on its own won't make information more meaningful. The data that's reported must also be actionable, so that educators can glean useful instructional insights from it, administrators can make informed resource allocation decisions, and families can clearly see how their school is supporting their child in meeting grade-level expectations. (See "[Making Assessment Reports More Meaningful for Students & Families](#)" for detailed information about improving individual score reports for students and their families. This section focuses primarily on actionable reporting for educators and administrators).

To design meaningful through-year assessment reports, state officials and assessment development vendors must engage with educators and leaders to understand what specific elements constitute actionable information. At the outset of the design process, it is essential that state officials and vendors seek the perspectives of those who will be using the reports. For instance, New Meridian consulted with Montana teachers and members of Montana’s state education agency before developing specific elements that aim to be more instructionally useful than the state’s current reporting design characteristics, and NWEA is leveraging reporting elements from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments in Louisiana.

Advocates are well-equipped to suggest this order of operations, clarifying that their state officials and assessment developers must take a user-centered approach in designing a through-year assessment model. Once state officials and assessment development vendors outline the desired outcomes of strong, actionable reporting in partnership with educators and administrators, they can then design the particulars of the report within the psychometric constraints of what is technically feasible.



What does it mean for a through-year assessment report to be actionable for educators and administrators?

Actionable reports provide instructionally useful information that allows educators to adapt their instruction, recommend targeted interventions, and understand students' progress toward grade-level standards. Several examples below illustrate specific elements of reporting that are intended to increase utility for educators:

Actionable reports provide stronger diagnostic value. Because each through-year administration can cover a more limited range of content, reports can focus more closely on specific skills and competencies and provide more fine-grain information about students' strengths and additional needs within a learning domain.

Testlet Summary		
Standards	Points Earned / Points Possible	
3.NF.A.3	3/5	
Question Description	Credit Earned	Standards
This question addresses students' understanding of basic probability concepts.	✗	3.NF.A.3
This question evaluates students' ability to solve quadratic equations by factoring.	✓	3.NF.A.3
This question assesses students' understanding of probability distributions.	✗	3.NF.A.3
This question assesses students' ability to perform operations with polynomials.	✓	3.NF.A.3
This question evaluates students' ability to order and compare fractions.	✓	3.NF.A.3

On the top, reporting from a through-year assessment administration indicates the ways in which a student is on their way toward comparing and finding equivalent fractions. The report notes that the student was able to perform some operations with polynomials and factoring, but needs more support with probability concepts and distributions. This level of specificity gives students, their families, and their teacher greater insight into their progress and allows them to work together to provide timely and targeted interventions. Compare this to the sample traditional score report on the bottom in a different state. The traditional score report provides much less detail about the student's strengths and areas of growth and fails to provide timely information to the student's teacher and family that would allow them to act during the same instructional year.

How Did Your Child Perform in Areas of Mathematics?

CONTENT

Your child performed about the same as other **Developing Learners** who demonstrated partial proficiency of the grade level content. Students demonstrate proficiency of the grade level content by solving problems involving conceptual understanding, procedural knowledge, and application of operations and algebraic thinking, place value, fractions, measurement, data and geometry.

REASONING

Your child performed about the same as other **Beginning Learners** who did not yet demonstrate proficiency of mathematical reasoning for this course or grade level. Students demonstrate proficiency of mathematical reasoning by solving problems and providing solutions that exhibit an ability to reason mathematically based on the course or grade level content.

MODELING

Your child performed about the same as other **Beginning Learners** who did not yet demonstrate proficiency of mathematical modeling for this course or grade level. Students demonstrate proficiency of mathematical modeling by solving problems and providing solutions that exhibit the ability to apply the modeling process based on the course or grade level content.

LEGEND
Your child performed about the same as:

● Distinguished or Proficient Learners

● Developing Learners

○ Beginning Learners

They provide information on students' areas of strength and areas in need of improvement to ensure that students receive the additional support they need.

Student Details

Student Name	Student ID	Test Date	Performance Band	Misconceptions
Ali, Fatima	111111111	09/16/2024	Band 2	
Anderson, Jackson	121212121	09/16/2024	Band 1	ME31
Brown, Olivia	1231231231	09/16/2024	Band 2	ME07
Chen, Lila	1234123412	09/16/2024	Band 3	
Davis, Noah	1234512345	09/16/2024	Band 1	
Desal, Rachul	1234561234	09/16/2024	Band 3	
Garcia, Aiden	1234567123	09/16/2024	Band 1	ME06 ME07

In this report view, a teacher can see the results of their entire class and organize temporary small group lessons for the three students who need the greatest level of support. Principals and district leaders can aggregate these results across other classrooms and grades to, for example, hire an additional math interventionist, expand high-dosage tutoring offerings, and/or provide more specific professional development opportunities for educators in a particular area.

Misconception	Description	# Students
ME06	Student added or subtracted numerators and denominators, instead of finding equivalent fractions.	3
ME07	Misinterprets ratio as additive relationship.	2
ME31	Incorrectly interpreted graph.	2

Math score reports can reveal whether students hold specific math misconceptions, which can impede their understanding of a learning standard. In feedback sessions with New Meridian, educators were particularly excited about this function. Educators can view these “misconceptions” reports by individual student or across the entire class.

NOTE: Images represent renderings of draft reports that will be piloted in Montana's pilot this academic year. These reports temporarily use norm-referenced bands because the state has not yet determined associated performance levels and cut scores in the pilot, which the state plans to finalize in summer 2025.

They combine the results of multiple testing administrations into one final report that reflects student performance throughout the year. This function allows educators to understand how their students progressed throughout the year across a variety of learning standards and helps administrators understand the effectiveness of various interventions and programs offered during the year.

They identify students who may have relied on guessing answers to complete the assessment.

Some students play a game of chance and resort to guessing on multiple-choice items. Since through-year assessments are shorter and have fewer total items, the results are more sensitive, and a student's performance score can more easily be skewed. NWEA assessments report the average time that a student took to complete an item and use that and other indicators (e.g., failure to use a calculator to complete an item where the use of a calculator is necessary) to detect whether a student "rapidly guessed" on more than 30% of the assessment items.

Actionable assessment reports use asset-based framing. Through-year assessments not only give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do, but also give schools multiple opportunities to support students in demonstrating what they know and can do throughout the year. Therefore, through-year assessment reporting can emphasize the need for system-level action, rather than placing the onus on an individual student and their family to provide necessary supports. At the classroom and schoolwide reporting levels, asset-based reporting also inspires a culture of continuous improvement, growth, and data-informed decision-making.

The Student is beginning to develop the skills needed to evaluate numeric expressions, but has not yet shown consistent understanding in reading, writing, and interpreting these expressions.

While they are on the path to grasping the fundamental mathematical operations involved, additional support and targeted practice are necessary to reach full competency.

Focused interaction aimed at these areas will be crucial in helping the student meet the established mathematical standards.

In the example above, a score report situates Olivia's results in a larger asset-based context. The report clearly shows that Olivia is beginning to develop the necessary skills to demonstrate proficiency on this set of standards, but needs additional and targeted support. The responsibility of providing this support is placed on the school ("focused instruction will be crucial"), rather than the student or her family. In the future, artificial intelligence (AI) may also offer additional opportunities to provide instructionally relevant insights on assessment data. This area is still nascent, but it's one that states should begin to think about in earnest to minimize the many logistical challenges associated with assessment scoring and reporting.

Meaningful through-year assessment reporting offers more frequent opportunities to act on the information provided to meet the needs of all students. Educators can leverage assessment reports, alongside proper supports and guidance, to:

- Celebrate students' strengths and growth over the year and use asset-based language in conversations with students and their families
- Adjust the pacing of whole-class instruction, where there is stronger or weaker understanding across or within topics
- Group students for temporary and targeted small-group instruction to provide more targeted instruction specific to student's skills and knowledge within learning domains
- Identify students who need additional supports and understand which areas of targeted support are needed most
- Directly address misconceptions that could be interfering with a student's understanding of certain math concepts
- Provide more specific resources for families to support learning at home

Additionally, strong through-year assessment reporting allows administrators to:

- Establish an asset-based school environment that celebrates strengths and growth of students over the course of the year and hold asset-based conversations with students and their families and staff
- Monitor the progress of students receiving additional interventions and have an additional datapoint to evaluate the strength of a particular intervention or program
- Inform budgeting and resource allocation reviews
- Provide information to inform a more targeted suite of professional development opportunities for educators, according to their needs
- Strategically assign interventionists (such as reading or math coaches) to classrooms
- Encourage peer-to-peer learning among teachers in specific domains



The strength of a through-year assessment hinges on the quality of the reporting, which provides high-quality feedback to students, their families, educators, and administrators.

Element 2. Authentic Engagement Throughout the Through-Year Assessment Design and Pilot Processes

Throughout the entire through-year assessment design, pilot, and implementation processes, states must center the experiences of those who will be most directly impacted by a through-year assessment model and those who are underserved by our educational system.

Obtaining these perspectives is essential to help state leaders and their vendors understand the impact of a through-year assessment on students, families, educators, and leaders. Authentic engagement should be honest and highlight the increased value that through-year assessments can provide to educators, administrators, and families, as well as the areas in which state leaders will need to offer additional support and get further buy-in. Community engagement efforts should also seek to clarify new or existing considerations that state leaders must resolve or mitigate in partnership with the community.

To garner this type of feedback, community engagement opportunities must be frequent, consistent, accessible across various modalities, and conducted in a culturally inclusive manner. Trusted community groups can often help broker these opportunities alongside the state agency. Feedback must also be solicited and considered with enough lead time to effectively influence decision-making processes.

Additionally, while state leaders may be tempted to streamline the feedback process by soliciting only a select group of voices, it is imperative that they seek diverse perspectives from:

- A range of educators, administrators, students, parents and families, school/district leaders, paraprofessionals, interventionists, and test coordinators
- Individuals who have traditionally been underserved by the education system, or individuals who work with majority students of color, multilingual learners, students from low-income backgrounds, and/or students with disabilities
- Parents, aides, and educators who work directly with students with disabilities and multilingual learners across a variety of settings, both in general education classrooms, as well as bilingual settings and special education classrooms
- Educators and administrators from districts that heavily rely on interim assessments. These educators and administrators may have different perspectives about the perceived value of interim assessments and the disruption they can cause to existing systems than those from districts that do not rely as heavily on interim assessments.

To understand how a through-year assessment model operates in various contexts, the sample of pilot participants should correspond economically and racially to the demographics of the state, and state leaders should be transparent with the public about which schools are participating in the pilot and whose feedback is being sought. To help monitor the pilot efforts, advocates can create resources that provide further transparency and insights. For example, [The Commit Partnership](#) maintains [a data visualization](#) of the Texas districts participating in their pilot program. The resource allows advocates to filter participating sites by legislative district and school board members, which can help guide advocacy efforts.¹²

Element 3. Coherent, Equity-Centered Design

State leaders make [myriad decisions](#) when designing the key features of their through-year assessment model.¹³ At every point, available options are informed by the dependencies, tradeoffs, and limitations of decisions made up until that point.¹⁴

These design decisions, such as how to assess grade-level standards across administrations, how to align administrations to instruction and/or curricula, and how to generate a final summative score — will determine whether through-year assessments will (or won't) provide more meaningful and actionable results for educators and administrators. In other words, these design choices are crucial to ensure that through-year assessments better meet the needs of educators and administrators, which, in turn, allows them to better meet the needs of students.

Below, EdTrust highlights **three questions** that states will need to answer and offers recommendations for state leaders and advocates. While these three questions represent key considerations for developing a coherent through-year assessment model, they may set off a chain of more decisions that are outside the scope of this brief. The Appendix also briefly summarizes the three core considerations, along with EdTrust's recommendations and the rationales behind them.

Question 1: How will state academic learning standards be assessed?

Summative assessments evaluate students' knowledge and skills against a set of state academic learning standards, which represent all that students are expected to know and do over the year. Since through-year assessments consist of multiple tests that are administered over the course of the year, states are in a unique position: How can they make the best use of these tests to assess learning during the year?

One option would be to assess all standards during each administration, effectively providing a beginning-of-year diagnostic and progress checks before the final administration. Another option would be to use each administration to assess a narrower scope of content, clustering standards in some way.

For states that assess all standards in each test administration, operationalizing the assessment's design is relatively straightforward. However, when administrations focus on a cluster of standards, states must determine how and when to assess specific knowledge and skills during the year, despite a highly variable instructional landscape across classrooms. In both cases, states must consider whether and how to incorporate off-grade items, especially if many students are entering the academic year behind grade level.

Different Priorities Lead to Different Assessment Design Decisions

To develop a successful through-year model, advocates and state leaders must first determine which goals to prioritize. Consider how different objectives in Montana and Texas led to distinct design decisions:

Per Montana's [theory of action](#), the primary goal of their model is to provide instructionally useful information to educators, while Texas is piloting a progress-monitoring system to assess how students are progressing over the course of the year. Fittingly, Montana's pilot is designed to tie the flexible administration of modular assessments to the local curriculum — and produce information at a grain size small enough to support useful instructional actions. In Texas, each administration covers the full set of grade-level standards, whether students have received instruction on them yet.

While these two objectives (i.e., producing instructionally useful information in Montana and scores that predict final summative performance in Texas) might not seem mutually exclusive, it would be impossible to create a model that properly satisfies both goals in the same assessment. For Texas to provide predictive benchmarks and calculate students' rate of within-year growth, students are tested on the full breadth of standards in each administration. This stands in direct conflict with Montana's aim of increasing the utility and specificity of the results so that educators can adjust their instruction.

EdTrust Recommendation: Through-year assessments should consist of multiple administrations that assess students on a subset of grade-level standards. This aligns with the overall goal of providing more actionable feedback to improve instruction, as a narrower scope of specific content is more likely to identify what students know and can do, as well as identify the areas in which students need additional support and instruction, so educators and administrators can allocate more equitable supports to the students who need them most.

To give students another explicit opportunity to show improvement and to measure whether students retained concepts and skills over the course of the year, states should also consider measuring proficiency at the end of the year as part of their through-year assessment model. The end-of-year test would include a sample of items that assess students on the full breadth of grade-level standards but would be significantly shorter in length than a traditional summative assessment.

Question 2: How will through-year assessments align with instruction?

Traditional summative assessments tend to be completely disconnected from instruction and the curriculum.¹⁵ For example, students are often exposed to passages on their ELA summative assessment that they have never seen before and have no connection to the books they've read in class.¹⁶

While the choice to separate summative assessments from what students are learning in the classroom may be an attempt to uphold impartiality — so no one student is more familiar with the material on the test than another — this choice is misguided.¹⁷ Every student uses prior knowledge — what they know about the world and what they've learned in school — to situate their learning.¹⁸

Therefore, controlling for prior exposure to assessment content is not only impossible, but ignores the ways in which different types of students' background knowledge may already impact how students are able to demonstrate what they know and can do.¹⁹ (This is similar to the [common but also misguided practice](#) of stripping overt cultural references from summative assessments in an attempt to uphold neutrality.²⁰)

In contrast, the through-year model provides an opportunity to make assessments more relevant: Rather than decouple assessments from instruction, through-year assessments can create meaningful opportunities to link assessments to the curriculum.

Through-Year Assessments and High-Quality Instructional Materials

Some states have made laudable strides toward building coherence between state academic standards and curricula by adopting and implementing high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), a critical factor to support student learning outcomes.²¹

These efforts, in theory, represent an additional opportunity to align curricula to through-year assessment models, and thereby could mitigate the impacts of varying types of background knowledge on student assessment performance.

However, this is easier said than done. Under-resourced schools experience additional barriers to successfully implementing and sustaining HQIM, such as higher rates of teacher and leader turnover²² and less funding for high-quality, sustained professional development,²³ which are both critical for successful HQIM implementation.²⁴

Moreover, if a through-year assessment model too heavily relies on a narrow set of curricular materials, a varied HQIM landscape can curtail opportunities for all students to fairly demonstrate what they know and can do on an important assessment, given the differences in HQIM implementation across the state.

However, designing a through-year assessment that is aligned with the curriculum and instruction is a monster undertaking, as curricular materials vary widely within and across districts and schools. Even in states with a list of approved instructional materials, these lists tend to be quite long and districts sometimes obtain waivers that allow them to substitute their own choices.²⁵ Materials also often differ from classroom to classroom: Almost 90% of America's public school teachers add and mix and match a plethora of content from the internet into their district-mandated content.²⁶ As a result, states cannot simply align all curricula to their through-year assessments, as content across these curricula — and, therefore, the instruction — varies significantly. Moreover, states need to find a way to balance the opportunity of aligning their curricula with assessments against the logistical challenges this presents.

Montana's Testlets vs. Louisiana's Crawfish Funnel to expand LEAP Assessments²⁷

Montana's pilot design is an example of a **"scope & sequence"** model, which allows for strategic, but flexible, clustering of standards. This lets Montana's districts maintain local control over the scope and sequence of instruction while producing more relevant assessment data reports.

Montana's "testlets" can be configured in the order that best aligns with the local scope and sequence of instructional material and include tools for districts to determine this alignment and order. Each administration counts toward a summative score.

In contrast, Louisiana's ELA "Crawfish Funnel" through-year assessment pilot was an attempt to deploy a **"curriculum relevant"** model that draws on common themes across all HQIM curricula. However, at the time of this publication, Louisiana indicated that the pilot is not continuing this year.²⁸ The pilot aimed to iterate and expand on their "LEAP assessments," the state's first through-year assessment [effort](#) that aligns directly with the scope, sequence, and content of the two most commonly used curricula in the state (ELA Guidebooks and Wit & Wisdom).²⁹

However, despite the wide popularity of these two curricula, roughly [1 in 4 Louisiana districts](#) do not use them,³⁰ and districts may use [nearly 30 other approved HQIM ELA curricula](#), each with their own distinct texts, topics, scope, and sequence.³¹ The pilot's design aimed to create an assessment that was based on passages and prompts that become increasingly "colder" for students (meaning that students have had less previous exposure to them), while still connecting to the general themes across a wider variety of curricula. This approach may have provided opportunities to incentivize deeper engagement with texts and reduce reliance on background knowledge, while also recognizing the logistical limitations of more direct and explicit curricular alignment.

EdTrust Recommendation: Through-year models should minimally ensure that each administration can be aligned with the pacing and order of material taught in the classroom (i.e., “scope and sequence”). This approach advances a through-year model that builds closer alignment between instruction and assessments by reducing the time between when material is taught and when students are assessed on that material. This “scope and sequence” design choice still incentivizes the use of HQIM without treading too heavily on a district’s local control, which if diminished or challenged, would likely undercut efforts to build strong and necessary support for through-year assessments across the state.

Additionally, it’s not yet clear whether an even closer connection to instruction and curriculum, beyond a “scope and sequence” model, is feasible. While there are many theoretical benefits to a curriculum-relevant model, important implementation questions remain, especially across various state contexts and curricular landscapes. Over the next several years, as state leaders and advocates learn more about implementing a through-year model, the answers to these questions may come into clearer focus.

Question 3: How will a student’s summative score be determined?

States must determine how best to produce an annual summative score for each student, a requirement stipulated by federal law. To date, there is no agreed-upon standard about how to roll up multiple parts of a through-year assessment into a single score,³² but a state’s approach to calculating this final score will likely go hand in hand with previous decisions about how standards are assessed across test administrations.

If each assessment administration covers the entirety of grade-level standards, for example, states are more likely to base the summative determination on the final assessment score because students will not yet have received instruction on the content assessed in prior administrations, so any other scoring method would be illogical and unfair. In this instance, prior administrations can act, in effect, as practice tests that provide diagnostic (first administration) and progress monitoring opportunities (middle administrations). This is the case in Texas, where assessments conducted throughout the year serve as interim evaluations rather than comprehensive through-year assessments.³³ In North Carolina, a student’s final score is likewise solely determined by the final assessment in the series, but the state plans to use computer-adaptive features to have students begin their final assessment at various levels of rigor based on students’ scores on previous assessments.³⁴

In cases where each administration covers a narrower scope of skills and content, states must determine how to weigh each administration fairly. This is a complicated undertaking that adds more intricacies to an already complex summative assessment scoring process. However, states must develop robust methodologies for aggregating scores from multiple administrations, ensuring that the final summative score accurately reflects students’ overall proficiency and growth, while simultaneously recognizing that students’ skills and understanding of concepts often compound over time. States must also consider how to determine scores for highly mobile students who transfer between schools or districts during the academic year. In these scenarios, students may miss administrations, and/or the continuity of learning across schools may be disrupted.

Either way, the process for determining students' summative scores must closely align with a state's theory of action and reflect what the score is meant to indicate about student knowledge and skills, as well as how the state intends to act based on the results. In other words, calculating summative scores should not only accurately reflect students' knowledge and skills, but also support the broader objectives of the state's assessment system.

EdTrust Recommendation: Students' summative scores should be informed by all through-year administrations *including* a shortened, summative end-of-year assessment. Measuring proficiency at the end of the year via a shortened summative assessment that includes samples from all standards — and considering the results of the previous administration scores — ensures that students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency and have it reflected in their final summative score. This structure also incentivizes district and school leaders to allocate additional, effective supports to students *throughout* the year, “awards” the impact of additional effective supports, and accounts for different learning progressions among students. But it's *essential* that this design choice be paired with the recommendation outlined in Question 1 to assess a subset of standards across each administration.



Element 4. Robust, Adaptive Support for System Leaders and Educators

States must provide comprehensive support and resources to empower educators and administrators to make informed instructional decisions and optimize the benefits of through-year assessment data. These resources should be adaptable and responsive to the feedback and needs expressed by educators and administrators, so they can accurately and meaningfully leverage assessment results. This support might include robust professional learning materials, explanatory guidance, and practical tools for implementation. States should also provide detailed “use cases” that demonstrate effective and appropriate ways to utilize assessment information to guide instructional decision-making and provide guidance for districts on effectively communicating assessment results with communities to foster greater transparency and trust.

For example, Louisiana’s [“Score Report Guidance”](#) provides educators with important contextual information about how the assessment is organized and outlines a set of instructional supports for subsequent ELA Guidebooks units, based on their observations from the results of the latest administration.³⁵ Additionally, Louisiana created a score report [“Reflections Guide”](#) to help educators analyze classroom-level trends and determine instructional next steps.³⁶

Element 5. Built-In Opportunities to Assess Impact

In addition to developing and implementing a through-year assessment initiative, states must also *evaluate* their through-year assessment by asking questions such as: “To what extent does the through-year assessment achieve its intended aim, and for whom?” and “Does this level of ‘success’ justify an investment to scale the assessment statewide in lieu of keeping the current system?”

To answer these questions, state leaders must set up the necessary infrastructure at the outset of their efforts, so they can collect and use empirically sound information to evaluate their through-year assessments. If state leaders want to understand whether participant perceptions of assessments changed after taking part in the pilot, they should administer pre- and post-surveys to measure how initial perceptions changed over time. The more data points available over time, the more robust the statistical analysis can be. State leaders should not only be mindful of the data they will collect to inform their program evaluation, but from whom they will be collecting it. Having a diverse pilot program across a range of school and district contexts is essential. What’s more, all these outputs must be disaggregated, so that system leaders can understand how findings may differ by racial, linguistic, and economic demographic.

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Appendix

Summary of Key Design Decisions for Equitable Through-Year Assessments

**Options highlighted in blue represent EdTrust design recommendations

How will state academic learning standards be assessed?			
<p>Option 1: Assess students on all standards during every administration, thereby providing a beginning-year diagnostic and progress-monitoring checkpoints before the final administration.</p>		<p>Option 2: Assess students on a subset of standards in each administration, thereby providing more specific insights into what students know and can do in relation to what was recently taught. <i>(EdTrust Recommendation)</i></p>	
<p>Rationale: Assessing students on a subset of standards is more likely to yield actionable feedback and instructional insights that can help educators identify areas in which students need additional support, provide more timely and targeted interventions for students, and evaluate programs throughout the course of the year. States should also consider measuring students’ proficiency at the end of the year, with the final administration assessing the full breadth of standards.</p>			
How will a through-year assessment align with curricular materials?			
<p>Option 1: No alignment with curricular materials</p>	<p>Option 2: Scope and Sequence <i>(EdTrust Recommendation)</i></p>	<p>Option 3: Curriculum Relevant</p>	<p>Option 4: Curriculum Aligned</p>
<p>Rationale: Through-year models should minimally ensure that each assessment can be aligned with the pacing and order of material taught in the classroom (“scope and sequence”). This approach allows closer alignment between the curriculum and assessments by diminishing the time between when material is taught and when students are assessed. This “scope and sequence” design choice still incentivizes the use of HQIM, without treading too heavily on a district’s local control, which if diminished or challenged, might undercut efforts to build strong and necessary support for through-year assessments across the state. It’s not yet clear whether an even closer connection to instruction and curriculum, beyond a “scope and sequence” model, is feasible or recommended.</p>			
How will a student’s summative score be determined?			
<p>Option 1: Use only the last score to make the final summative determination.</p>		<p>Option 2: The final summative determination will be based on scores from all administrations. <i>(EdTrust Recommendation)</i></p>	
<p>Rationale: Students’ summative scores should be informed by all through-year administrations and award “credit” for students’ “best” performance across standards throughout the year. This gives students multiple opportunities to demonstrate and “receive credit” for what they know and can do. This structure also incentivizes district and school leaders to allocate additional, effective supports to students throughout the year, and “awards” improvement and accounts for different learning progressions.</p>			

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