



Fewer, More Actionable Assessments

January 2025

INTRODUCTION

Students in K12 schools spend up to 100 hours each year taking teacher-, school-, district- and state-mandated assessments—equivalent to an entire school year of their academic careers devoted to testing. In many school systems, multiple offices require different assessments even when one assessment could provide data to meet multiple needs. Schools add measures such as end-of-unit tests and end-of-course exams.

Despite efforts by some school systems to refine their assessment practices, most still require a fragmented and incoherent mix of tests.

And yet this excessive testing does not necessarily result in actionable insights to improve instruction. Too often, test results are just a set of scores lacking accompanying instructional resources and guidance about what to do next. If the data indicate that a group of students hasn't grasped a particular concept, do the data indicate what each student's misconceptions are? Should the educator reteach the concept the same way or are different approaches needed? Should the concept be retaught in a later unit for which the concept is a prerequisite?

Districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) need to take a deliberate and strategic approach to assessment. Working together with educators, leaders must critically evaluate what is measured, why assessments are administered, how data are used and shared, and the level of support educators receive to apply these insights effectively.

The district's ultimate goal is to ensure all assessments are high-quality, meet diverse data needs and provide actionable insights for teachers. Reducing the number of tests and time spent test taking is likely and also will benefit students and teachers.

Our assessment inventory guide is designed to help. It empowers district leaders to audit their current tests, evaluating their quality, alignment to standards and the data they generate. By using this guide, districts can begin to create a more coherent and streamlined assessment strategy, reducing the overall testing burden while ensuring that the remaining assessments provide actionable insights. This shift will return valuable time to teaching and learning, enabling educators to focus on what matters most—supporting student success.

This guide presents an assessment inventory process to help district decisionmakers audit their current assessment systems to achieve a more streamlined assessment strategy. District decisionmakers can consider:

- **The Assessment Inventory Process:** a four-step process for organizing, analyzing and identifying assessment strategy opportunities and needs for achieving a more coherent and streamlined assessment strategy.
- **Data collection and analysis tools** to capture a district's assessment landscape and organize in consideration of district assessment and data needs.

The Assessment Inventory Process



The assessment inventory process is one of five phases in a recommended approach to streamline and align high-quality assessments. This brief focuses on the inventory phase, with additional phases to be covered in an upcoming report.

CAPTURE THE ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Capture a clear and comprehensive view of all assessments to identify redundancies and improve alignment with district priorities.

Effective planning is critical, as the list of assessments can be extensive and overwhelming without organization. Consider appointing a project manager to plan, lead and execute all points of the assessment inventory. We also suggest convening a team of district decisionmakers to offer input throughout the entire process.

The first decision to make is which subject areas/needs to include in the inventory. We recommend including assessments of literacy; English language arts, mathematics and science; English and other language proficiency; screeners for services and programs including special education, advanced education or access to specialized schools; and measures used for progress monitoring, personnel evaluation and program evaluation.

Start by cataloguing state- and district-mandated assessments for preK-12. To fully understand the testing picture, include assessments *used by multiple classrooms or teachers that measure at least a week of instruction*. Not all assessments may be widely known; consider developing a survey or editable workbook to collect information from schools. Whatever tool you use, first communicate the purpose with school leaders and staff. Ensure they understand why the district is conducting this review and the specific information needed. Direct communication to school staff will help clarify expectations and ensure the process runs smoothly.

SORT THE ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Create a clear, actionable inventory of assessments to evaluate their effective use, alignment and impact.

Consider Tool 1 (below) as a potential way to build the inventory. Keep in mind that perfection isn't necessary and it's not practical to include every assessment.

After compiling the initial list of assessments, follow up with relevant school and central office staff (e.g., assessment office, special education specialists, English language learning staff, federal programs office) to confirm the list's accuracy and augment the list with descriptive information on purpose, usage and utility. The follow up should help answer questions such as:

- What are the purposes of each assessment?
- Which audiences (e.g., teachers, principals, central office staff, parents, students, the public) receive data from each assessment?
- When are the tests given and when are the results returned?
- How effectively is the information reaching each audience?
- How much time is required for each assessment to:
 - + Administer and collect the data?
 - + Analyze results?
 - + Report findings?
 - + Act on the insights?

Next, sort assessments by purpose—such as school or teacher evaluation, progress monitoring, classroom instruction and screening. This process helps identify gaps and provides an initial structure for analysis.

From the finalized list, sort assessments by grade band, subject area or other relevant categories to answer key questions for updating the district's assessment strategy. Use these sorts to develop "data views" that summarize the current scope and usage of assessments across the district. These views will provide essential context to understand the big picture before diving into individual assessments.

Implementation Tip: Provide multiple data views to help the decisionmaking team understand the current scope and usage of district assessments.

30,000-foot level: A complete list of every assessment given in one content area sorted by grade band and includes descriptors (e.g., frequency, timing, purpose and reporting)

10,000-foot level: List of assessments for each grade band sorted by purpose

Ground level: List of assessments for each grade band, sorted by timing (i.e., laid out on a calendar) to discern whether assessments are given too close in time proximity, which contributes to over-testing and accumulation of unused data.

ANALYZE THE ASSESSMENTS

Identify key issues, uncover gaps or redundancies and prioritize actions to refine assessment strategy and improve data quality.

Create a high-level summary of findings from the inventory and conduct a deeper analysis to identify needs. This analysis helps determine which assessments should be reviewed further by additional experts (e.g., educator reviewers, additional district staff or technical experts) and which require no further review. Consider using Tool 2 (below) to inform your analysis and determine which assessments are necessary and which might be redundant.

The analysis may reveal quick wins, such as redundancies or gaps. For instance, if schools use multiple early reading screeners, compare these screeners to decide whether to consolidate to a single tool that meets district needs. Remember: The goal is to ensure all assessments are high-quality, meet diverse data needs and provide actionable insights for teachers—not just reduce the number of tests.

This step may also uncover gaps in coverage or misuse of assessments, such as missing interim math assessments in certain grades or universal screeners being misused as summative tools. Use these findings to inform adjustments and future professional development to improve assessment literacy.

PREPARE FOR ALIGNMENT

Refine the district's strategy to ensure assessments are purposeful, actionable and aligned with district priorities.

The decision making team should use the inventory to answer these questions:

- What is your strategic, coherent selection of the most critical measures?
- Which assessments align most closely with your district's priorities and provide actionable insights?
- Are there opportunities to reduce redundancies or eliminate low-value assessments that do not meet your strategic goals?

These questions can guide the district to create a more focused, efficient and impactful assessment strategy that supports both teaching and learning.

Districts may uncover critical misunderstandings about assessment through this review process. For example, a universal screener might be misused as a summative assessment, or an interim assessment that the district wants to use to gauge standards mastery might not actually provide accurate data for this purpose. While the review process doesn't directly address assessment literacy for all educators and leaders, it provides valuable insights that can guide future professional development efforts to enhance understanding and effective use of assessments.

SORT THE ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Tool 1: Data Collection Analysis

What assessment data does your district currently capture? The table below includes a list of *suggested* input, output and outcome measures. This list focused on measures that can be influenced at the district level related to collected and measured assessment data.

As a district team, review this table and identify the data points from each category (inputs, outputs and outcomes) that your district currently captures. Please note, these are examples only and not intended as a checklist. Most districts collect some but not all these data points. You may have any areas blank that you do not collect any current information. Add any additional data points you feel are relevant to the way your district considers assessment data.

| Inputs | Outputs | Outcomes |
|---|--|---|
| Literacy screeners (e.g., K–3 reading) Examples: DIBELS, iReady Reading Screener | Assessment data identifying students needing additional support Examples: Reports indicating which students require Tier 2 or 3 support | Increased early literacy rates and targeted interventions Examples: Higher reading proficiency rates in early grades |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| Interim assessments Examples: MAP, STAR, iReady, SBAC IAB | Performance reports at the student, classroom, and school levels Examples: Growth percentile data for students across the district | Improved instructional planning and student growth monitoring Examples: Clearer identification of achievement gaps |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| Progress monitoring assessments Examples: FastBridge, Acadience Math | Frequent updates on student progress in targeted skills Examples: Weekly skill-specific updates for RTI or MTSS programs | Timely interventions and progress tracking towards mastery Examples: Accelerated mastery of foundational skills |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |

| Inputs | Outputs | Outcomes |
|---|--|---|
| English language proficiency assessments Examples: WIDA ACCESS, ELPA21 | Individual student proficiency levels in English Examples: Student progress reports with proficiency levels (e.g., Speaking, Listening) | Enhanced English learner support and increased language acquisition Examples: Faster reclassification rates for English learners |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| Spanish language proficiency assessments Examples: LAS Links Español, AAPPL | Proficiency data for dual-language or native Spanish speakers Examples: Language skill reports aligned with bilingual program goals | Strengthened bilingual education programs and cultural inclusivity Examples: Higher bilingual proficiency rates |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| End-of-course exams (middle/high school) Examples: School-developed Algebra I EOC, Biology EOC | Summative data on content mastery in core academic subjects Examples: School-level data identifying subject proficiency trends | Increased alignment with state standards and improved graduation rates Examples: Statewide Algebra I EOC, Biology EOC |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| End-of-unit tests in HQIM (high-quality instructional materials) Examples: Illustrative Mathematics Unit Tests | Feedback on specific standards taught within units Examples: Performance summaries for individual units | Enhanced instructional adjustments and deeper content mastery Examples: Stronger curriculum alignment and teacher strategies |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |

| Inputs | Outputs | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| Benchmark assessments tied to curriculum Examples: Eureka Math mid-module assessments | Snapshot of progress toward meeting grade-level standards Examples: Standards-based reporting for grade-level progress | Strengthened coherence between curriculum and assessment Examples: Improved pacing and student comprehension |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| Universal screeners Examples: STAR Reading, AIMSweb Plus | Identification of systemic trends across grade levels Examples: Reports highlighting struggling subgroups or grade levels | Improved resource allocation and equity in supports Examples: Enhanced equity in interventions |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| Diagnostics (math, literacy, etc.) Examples: KeyMath-3, iReady Diagnostic | Detailed understanding of student misconceptions and prior knowledge Examples: Itemized reports showing gaps in prerequisite knowledge | Targeted re-teaching and improved student learning outcomes Examples: Accelerated learning for struggling students |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| State-mandated assessments Examples: State Summative Assessments (e.g., SBAC, PARCC) | District-wide performance benchmarks Examples: Public reporting of school-level achievement data | Accountability measures and informed district-wide decision-making Examples: District-wide strategy adjustments |
| Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? | Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used? |
| Formative classroom assessments Examples: Exit tickets, quizzes tied to specific lessons | Immediate feedback for students and teachers Examples: Real-time feedback on student understanding | Increased student engagement and continuous learning improvement Examples: Improved lesson delivery and student outcomes |

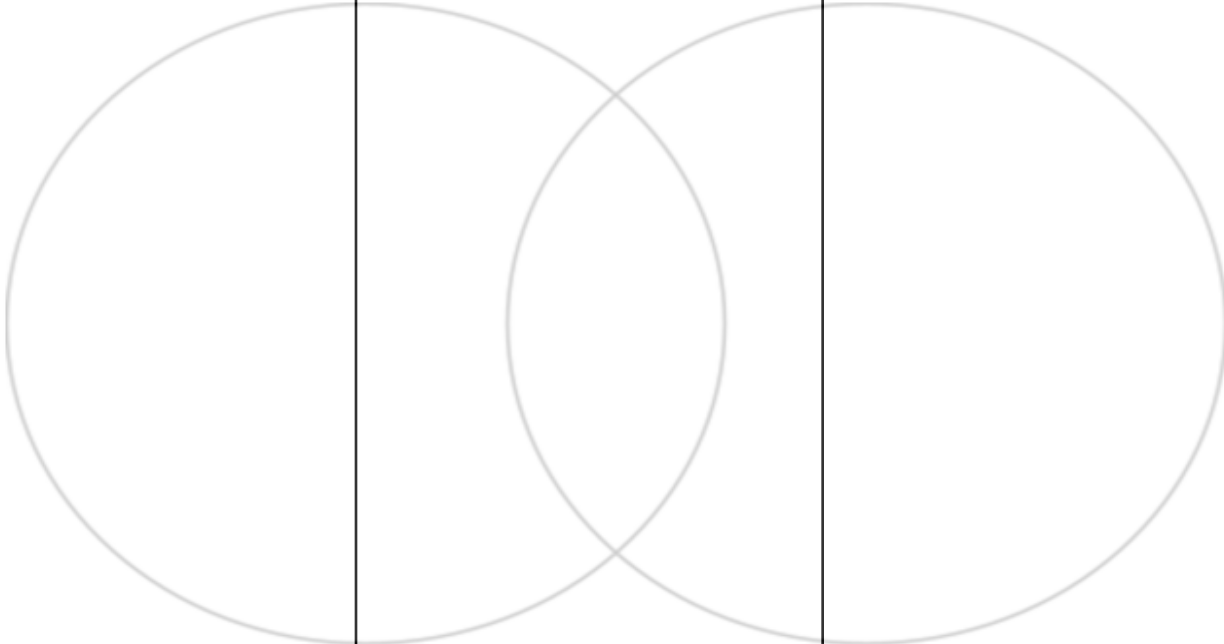
| Inputs | Outputs | Outcomes |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used?</p> | <p>Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used?</p> | <p>Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used?</p> |
| <p>[add your own]</p> | <p>[add your own]</p> | <p>[add your own]</p> |
| <p>Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used?</p> | <p>Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used?</p> | <p>Notes - What does your district collect in this category? Where, how, by whom is it collected, reported, used?</p> |

ANALYZE THE ASSESSMENTS

Tool 2: Data Needs Analysis

Based on the inventory/Tool 1, sort the assessments into the columns below by discussing as a leadership team these three questions:

1. What do we measure, but don't value?
2. What do we measure AND value?
3. What do we value, but not measure?

| 1. What do we measure, but don't value? | 2. What do we measure AND value? | 3. What do we value, but don't measure? |
|---|----------------------------------|---|
|  | | |

Use this tool to inform your analysis and determine which assessments are necessary and which might be redundant.