Indiana DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Dr. Jennifer McCormick
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Working Together for Student Success

Memorandum

To: Corporation Test Coordinators, School Test Coordinators
From: Dr. Charity Flores, Director of Student Assessment
Re: Recommendations for Educator Professional Development and Collaboration with Formative/Interim Assessment Program Vendors
Date: June 5, 2020

Interim and formative assessments are important aspects of a strong local assessment system. They provide meaningful data to educators during instruction so that students can receive targeted support and intervention as needed. Schools and corporations may select assessment programs approved through Indiana's Formative Assessment Grant to help meet this need for interim/formative data. Others may implement different approaches to gathering this data.

Regardless of a school's specific approach to data collection, it's important to collaborate with the assessment program provider to ensure that assessments are administered and used with fidelity. The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) offers recommendations to schools and corporations on topics that should be discussed with assessment program providers. The intent of these recommendations is to increase collaboration between corporations and their selected assessment provider, resulting in the implementation of best practices that support student learning.

Each of these recommendations is further discussed in the published training, "Which Test is Best? Evaluating Interim Assessment Solutions" (recorded training available here, presentation materials available here).

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. Schools should discuss the following questions with their assessment providers:

- What is the purpose of the assessment? 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.

- What are the intended uses of the assessment data? Using scores for purposes other than intended can have severe negative consequences. Educators should understand different ways that the assessment tool can and cannot be used. Using assessment data in ways not intended can lead to misinformation or poorly-supported actions.
- Are there any 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.

Schools should also ask assessment program providers to share key elements of test design and how these elements affect the 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. Schools should ask assessment providers about their assessment structure and how that structure affects the available data. For computer-adaptive assessments, check to see 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, schools should discuss the pros and cons of customization with their providers 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.

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.

Schools planning to customize assessments should have conversations with assessment program providers about how the customization specifically affects 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. Schools should work with their assessment program provider 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, 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).