

Reporting State Summative Assessment Data to Support Illinois Students: Recommendations for State Leaders from the Data, Assessment and Accountability Committee of the P-20 Council
November 2021

Introduction

In fall of 2020, the Data, Assessment, and Accountability (DAA) committee of the Illinois P-20 Council formed a working group to explore how state summative assessment reporting practices might be improved to better inform teaching, learning, and school-parent/caregiver partnerships. This work included revisiting and ensuring clarity on the purpose of assessment data reporting, and how it fits into and compliments a balanced assessment system. The group was comprised of a diverse array of stakeholders from across the state, including school-district leadership, representatives from the Illinois Education Association and Illinois Federation of Teachers, advocates, education researchers, and representatives from the Illinois State Board of Education, and met roughly once a month from September 2020 through August 2021.

This report reflects the findings and recommendations of the working group and is intended to help inform the state’s work to ensure that data produced by summative assessments can be leveraged by various stakeholder groups and used appropriately to inform continuous improvement and help advance educational equity. As the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the collection of statewide data on student learning and needs, this work is arguably more critical now than ever before. For the first time since 2019, statewide assessments will return to being administered in the spring in 2022. To ensure that data provided by these assessments can be used to understand students’ academic “learning renewal” needs in years to come, the state will need to present and communicate assessment data in a manner that is accessible, actionable, and in-keeping with best practices, and help districts to do the same.

This report is intended to serve as a useful resource to state leaders in general and in particular to inform the efforts of the P-20 Council as it works to support Learning Renewal in the wake of the pandemic. The group used a Pk-12 focus, acknowledging that this is the section of the educational continuum where statewide summative assessments are required to be administered, and that “assessment” in the contexts of Early Childhood Education and Care and Higher Education are different in kind and therefore outside of the scope of this project. The recommendations of this working group are also intended to compliment and support the work of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), which included explicit goals in its recently developed [2020-2023 Strategic Plan](#) related to more effectively leveraging assessments in order to make “assessment data more useful, accessible, and actionable for improving alignment between standards and curricula, while reducing the time spent taking assessments” as well as to increase assessment data literacy so that reporting can help deepen stakeholder understanding of state standards and how they are assessed on standardized tests.

Objectives

The working group set out to explore how reporting of state summative assessment data at the state and local level might be improved to better inform teaching, learning, and school-parent/caregiver partnerships. This will include revisiting and ensuring clarity on the purpose of assessment data reporting, and how it fits into and compliments a balanced assessment system.

- Create recommendations and best practices for reporting summative assessment data in a manner that is valid and psychometrically sound, centers equity, informs classroom instructional practice, and is useful for the work of continuous improvement.
- Identify and elevate programs, schools, districts already leading in this space.
- Explore components of a framework for conceptualizing elements of high-quality data reporting that both informs teaching and learning and strengthens school-parent/guardian relationships.

Working Group Process Highlights

The working group engaged in a series of panel presentations and discussions with subject matter experts and practitioners from around the state and participated in facilitated conversations focused on the objectives listed above. A summary of the topics, activities, and stakeholders the group engaged is included below, along with highlights and key takeaways from the group's work.

1. Discussed questions and considerations that could serve as a foundation for inquiry and inform development of state level recommendations.
Those questions included:
 - What does strong summative assessment data reporting look like for safeguarding/increasing equity according to research? What does it look like/include for informing continuous improvement?
 - What does the current summative assessment data reporting system look like in Illinois? What are strengths and opportunities for improvement in assessment data reporting?
 - What does research indicate about best practices or guiding principles for assessment data reporting to inform appropriate/desired data use?
 - What can we learn from other states or cities in terms of promising practices?
 - How can we ensure reporting meets the needs of various stakeholders/user types (teachers, administrators, parents/caregivers, students, community members)?
 - How might summative data reporting be improved to better complement or support a balanced, aligned assessment system?
2. Grounded the group in context of relevant prior work done by the State Assessment Review Committee
3. Explored state-generated individual student reports for the Illinois Assessment of Readiness and SAT, primarily parent/caregiver-facing, and discussed merits of current report content and design and areas for improvement
4. Learned from deep dive presentations from school districts' own work to improve assessment data reporting (CPS and Urbana) and state perspective
5. Learned details about assessment data reporting included in renewed IAR contract
6. Explored current educator-facing reports, discussed data reporting elements to consider to add value for educators
7. Heard from educators from various subjects, grade-levels, and geographies about how they use summative assessment data, and what they would like to be able to get out of this data if reporting were to be improved

Review of Relevant Literature/Research

Summative large-scale standardized assessments, usually administered statewide (although they can also be set at the national or district level) are "given one time at the end of the semester or school year to evaluate students' performance against a defined set of content standards" ([National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment](#)). Although data from large-scale state assessments like the IAR have limited utility at the classroom and individual student level, they can be [powerful tools](#) for informing decision-making at the district, school and grade-departmental levels. Because data produced by these tests are comparable across the state and can be disaggregated by student demographic characteristics, they can also provide state and local policy makers with valuable information for targeting supports and resources and informing revisions to policies and practices that facilitate growth and improvement.

Different types of assessments are designed to serve different purposes in the education system.

Summative assessments are typically given toward the end of a school year and are designed to “evaluate students’ performance against a defined set of learning standards”, while *formative* assessments are embedded in classroom instruction and used as part of a process to provide feedback that informs ongoing teaching and learning. Summative assessments are not designed to provide they type of granular data that formative assessments can yield, but taken together in a balanced assessment system, the two types of assessment can complement each-other, each playing a role in providing data on student learning that can be used in an [ongoing cycle](#) of instructional improvement. Though summative assessment data are often used for multiple purposes – to measure student learning and evaluate programs for example – it is important to limit the use and interpretation of summative assessment data to appropriate purposes, as the more purposes a single assessment aims to serve, the more its ability to serve any one purpose well is compromised ([Knowing What Students Know, the Science and Design of Educational Assessment](#)). This group’s discussion and recommendations relate to statewide end-of-year summative data reporting.

It is worth noting that interim assessments, [defined as](#) “assessments administered during instruction to evaluate students’ knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic goals in order to inform policymaker or educator decisions at the classroom, school, or district level”, are another level/type of assessment that can also play a useful role in comprehensive, balanced assessment systems. However, lack of specificity and evidence related to intended uses of available interim assessments [presents a challenge](#) in making claims about results and data generated by these assessments at present.

Current Assessment Data Reporting in Illinois

The group focused on summative assessment data reporting, including reportage for the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) in grades 3-8, the Illinois Science Assessment, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Pre-SAT, and the ACCESS test, but the group’s main focus was on reporting data from the IAR. Student-level reports are generated for this assessment, which include information about scale scores, performance levels, and sub-claim performance indicators, and are accompanied by a “[Score Report Interpretation Guide](#)” provided that explain the report contents and how they can be interpreted. Educators are able to view student results on the IAR and other summative assessments in the Student Information System and through a secure portal. [Schools receive](#) a Student Roster Report, and districts will receive a District Summary of each School Report. Schools, districts and classroom educators can also choose if they wish to provide additional information, contextualization, and interpretation of results as they analyze and use them to inform policy and practice and communicate about them to parents/caregivers.

2019 SARC Recommendations on Current Assessment Data Reporting

The State Assessment Review Committee is charged by law with reviewing the various components of the state’s system of assessments and making periodic recommendations to the State Superintendent of Schools and to the General Assembly. In 2019, after a year of expert interviews and investigation of the topic of how the state could work to make data from large scale assessments more useful, the SARC made a series of recommendations that included:

- improving data reporting mechanisms and practices from the existing system before considering the adoption of a new system;
- reducing district dependence on commercial test organizations by adding norm-referenced reportage based on State of Illinois norms to existing reportage based on cut scores and [proficiency levels](#);
- reducing turnaround time to match that of most commercial test organizations;
- creating stronger alignment of score reportage across elementary, middle and high school tests
- using released test items to provide concrete examples to educators and parents/caregivers of what standards and proficiency levels/scaled scores mean at various grade levels;
- providing professional development and supports around summative tests and appropriate uses of the data they yield.

Assessment Data Reporting Considerations for School Districts

Presentations from Chicago Public Schools' Assessment team and from Urbana provided insights to the group about how district leaders can leverage assessment data to inform continuous improvement, the role of state summative assessments in balanced assessment systems, and the opportunities (from a school district perspective) for improving statewide assessment data reporting. Key takeaways from those conversations included the notions that high-quality summative assessment should clearly connect back to state learning standards, inform decision-making, and create opportunities for students by helping to identify need for and target supports rather than be used in a punitive way.

Rather than being viewed in isolation, summative assessment trends are best viewed as one important part of telling a larger story of a school or district, complimented by additional sources/forms of information, and should be presented and communicated as such. Another important consideration that arose from these discussions was the idea that summative assessment data can and should be used to serve a discrete number of distinct purposes, but that there are limitations to the uses this data can appropriately serve. Importantly when local education agencies are not supported with trainings and tools focused on appropriate uses of summative assessment data, the risk of misinterpretation and incomplete or inaccurate conclusions increases. District presentations also spoke to the need for contextualizing student performance and working to identify and address equity gaps by disaggregating and displaying assessment data by student groups.

Educators' Reflection on Current State Assessment Data Reporting

With the help of the Illinois Federation of Teachers and Illinois Educators Association, the working group convened a panel of educators from across the state to share what they found to be valuable from current assessment reporting practices and what they thought could be improved. Educators mentioned a desire for more clarity in the relationship between student performance data and discrete learning standards/skills. They expressed that student and classroom level reporting would be more helpful in providing them with information about student learning if it allowed them to see connections between student responses and associated Illinois learning standards.

Educators also saw value in professional development aimed at building educator knowledge of ways to analyze and appropriately interpret and use summative assessment data. They shared frustration that turnaround time between when summative tests are administered and when they receive student scores is too long for the information to be actionable at present - reportage might have a greater value if it were available closer to test administration. In discussing ways that reporting could be improved to increase its usefulness, educators also agreed that being able to see released test items would be helpful in making meaning from students' test data to allow both for identification of strengths and planning to address areas of need.

Parents' and Caregivers' Reflections on Current State Assessment Data Reporting

Interviews with parents/caregivers were conducted to gain an understanding of the current value-add of, and opportunities for improvement related to, state assessment data reporting from a parent/caregiver perspective. The chair of the Family and Community Engagement for Northwest Cook Region PTA in Illinois and the East Central Region Director were interviewed about parents' needs and preferences related to assessment data reporting for the purpose of this working group.

Drawing from their own personal experience and reflecting on observed or reported experiences of fellow parents/caregivers in their PTA regions, both shared a feeling of frustration at the lack of clarity around how statewide end-of-year tests fit into the larger picture of understanding students' learning. They suggested there would be a high value in outreach and engagement activities hosted by the school or district and designed to help parents understand what this data are and equally if not more importantly, are not used for. Using multiple methods of communication to share this information was encouraged, including using

parent-teacher conferences as an opportunity to share materials and answer questions about summative assessment data. This suggestion is in keeping with poll data which demonstrates that parents tend to trust their classroom teacher most as the source of information about their child’s learning and development.

They also expressed a desire to understand what this particular type of data can reveal about their individual students’ progress and need, but described a desire for this information to be presented in easy-to-interpret contexts rather than just a single set of information about their child provided each year in isolation. They wanted to know what their child’s scores meant about where they performing in relation to grade- or age-appropriate benchmarks. They also both noted that seeing their child’s scores over time and in relation to their peers would be helpful for making sense of the information.

Summary of Recommendations

In order to achieve these goals, and to improve the state’s assessment reporting systems to enable the use of such data for the purposes of increasing educational equity and informing continuous improvement, the DAA Committee’s Summative Assessment Data Reporting working group recommends that the state act on the following recommendations.

1. **Communicate clearly and consistently about the appropriate uses and interpretations of summative assessment data**, including conveying to various stakeholder groups not only the value-add of this information but what it is *not* valid/reliable for doing and needs to be complimented by smaller-grained information from formative assessments and other means.
2. **Build capacity of educators and district leaders to understand, interpret, and leverage assessment data for appropriate purposes.** ISBE has already identified this as a priority in its 2020-2023 strategic plan, articulating the intention to “expand literacy on the utilization of assessment and on assessment data to accurately identify learning gains, achievement gaps, and COVID-19’s impact on learning.” This could be accomplished through:
 - a. Launching/establishing ongoing partnership with state and local management organizations, teachers unions, and professional organizations (e.g. NCIEA, LSRI, CCSR etc.) to provide professional development focused on equipping educators with tools to make meaning around state assessment data and its role in a balanced assessment system when used effectively/appropriately to inform their practice
 - b. Providing tools or data protocols based on [modern improvement science](#) to support analysis and connect assessment data and contextual data to decision-making and strategic planning at the school and district levels
 - c. Using existing mechanisms like ISBE’s assessment update webinars to provide trainings on accessing, analyzing, and using assessment data to inform continuous improvement and to further equity goals
3. **Revisit and redesign score reporting mechanisms for specific stakeholder groups based on research-based best practices for effective score report design as well as feedback from stakeholder groups.** ISBE has also identified a goal closely aligned to this recommendation in its strategic plan, focused on enhancing score reports. This could entail:

Adding content not currently provided in reporting of summative assessment data that would be beneficial to include, tailored to various stakeholder groups, such as

 - i. Norm-referenced trend data based on State of Illinois norms that allows for the understanding of changes in student performance over time, both within a single cohort and in a single grade across multiple cohorts

- ii. Growth trends over time within and across cohorts
 - iii. Full distributions of growth and attainment for various sub-groups
 - iv. Designing reportage in a manner that helps end-users better understand Illinois learning standards.
 - v. Releasing test items in a timely fashion and in a manner tied to actual test output/results is critical to help with sense-making.
4. **Increasing the speed of assessment reporting to support the productive use cases of large-scale summative assessment to help inform school and district continuous improvement efforts.** If made available in a more timely manner, such data could allow teams in districts and schools to answer questions about overall student performance, as well as performance over time, by different demographic groups, across and within grades, and within a subject area. This is only truly achievable if districts and schools have final data files by the end of June, following test administration, that can be analyzed, reported, and used for planning during the summer.

All of the above recommendations can be implemented within the state's existing system of assessments, including the reporting of Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) data, as well as in any future statewide assessment system.

Membership

The group was comprised of a diverse array of stakeholders from across the state – names and organizational affiliations of members are listed below. Additionally, staff from the Illinois State Board of Education participated and provided valuable consultation throughout the course of the working group’s convening.

1. Alan Clemens, *Northern Illinois University*
2. Amy Alsop, *Illinois Federation of Teachers*
3. Antoinette Taylor, *Exceptional Needs Consultant*
4. Benjamin Boer, *Office of the Governor*
5. Ginger Reynolds, *Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University*
6. Jean Korder, *Consultant, ROE 9, ROE 54*
7. Jill Meciej, *Marquardt School District 15*
8. Kay Dugan, *Bensenville District 2*
9. Larry Frank, *Consultant to the Illinois Education Association on Educational Policy and Research*
10. Melissa Figueira, *Advance Illinois*
11. Paul Zavitkovsky, *University of Illinois at Chicago*
12. Peter Leonard, *Chicago Public Schools*
13. Robin Steans, *Advance Illinois*