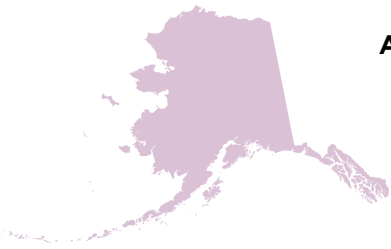


Alaska's Computer-Adapted Through-Year Assessments

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Alaska's work on assessment over the past few years highlights an innovative approach to leveraging assessments that lead to more meaningful teaching and learning.

This new assessment, Alaska System of Academic Readiness (AK STAR), is designed to provide data that informs teaching and helps engage students in learning beyond a singular accountability goal. This state case summary demonstrates how leadership starting at the local level can drive assessment system design that meets accountability requirements while also improving student learning.

Alaska has taken a state-driven step to redesign its assessment system to better balance statewide assessments with student learning throughout the school year. The state leveraged COVID-19 pandemic disruptions as an opportunity to revamp assessment systems with a clear learning focus. In 2023, Alaska launched AK STAR, a testing platform that integrates the [NWEA MAP Growth interim assessments](#) with a statewide summative assessment. This through-year model allows Alaska to reduce testing time, align assessments to instruction and generate real-time data that informs responsive teaching practices.

Key Innovation

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development redesigned its system to better serve educators and students by providing:

- **Instructional Utility.** The interim data is available within 24-48 hours after testing and is used to guide real-time instruction.
- **Continuity.** Students use the same testing platform throughout the year, which can reduce anxiety and improve familiarity.
- **Efficiency.** This approach reduces duplicative testing in the spring by integrating the MAP Growth data to fulfill federal accountability requirements while maintaining growth measurement.

The department committed to a multi-year approach to developing the AK STAR that began in the summer of 2021. At least 48 of the 54 Alaskan school districts were already using interim assessments. Through a combination of state leadership and educator consultation,

the next step in the system was the effort to connect interim assessments that districts were already using to the summative assessment. The connection helped educators see more value in the spring summative assessment rather than an assessment that results in a metric solely for federal accountability.

Alaska's innovation lies in streamlining assessment across the school year using a computer-adaptive platform. The [computer-adaptive](#) assessments adjust the difficulty of the questions based on prior student responses with the intention of providing more precise understanding of student proficiency. This adaptive model ensures that each student is met at their level and makes it possible to track progress even for students significantly above or below grade level.

The AK STAR system offers interim assessments for grades three through nine in English language arts and math in the fall and winter that transition seamlessly into the spring summative assessment. The spring assessment combines the growth and summative components into a single administration. It also provides consistent measurement tools across districts while preserving local control since districts voluntarily engaged in the fall and winter administration. This model delivers timely student data that is accessible to educators, families and students multiple times throughout the year. The fall and winter interim assessments provide student-level data for the projected proficiency on the AK STAR summative assessment, normative academic achievement, and growth data and information from prior scores in instances where the student participated in prior assessments.

The department made a concerted effort through an assessment advisory panel to create assessment reports that provided continuity between assessments while being understandable to the average parent. One of the additional benefits of the new reporting is that, along with proficiency data, families and educators also receive growth data. This can help determine student progress and provide areas to celebrate and capitalize on those efforts along the way to demonstrating proficiency. The Legislature recently passed [H.B. 57](#), which provides financial incentives to school districts for both measures of proficiency as well as demonstrated improvement. Another signal that the state is focused on continuous improvement in schools.

Implementation and Capacity Building

By leveraging a familiar tool, the through-year model has experienced broad support and buy-in from the districts. Combined with that powerful start, the department also offers basic online training, tailored webinars and a certified facilitator program to train district leaders in assessment literacy. Certified facilitators can engage in leadership discussions to help ensure districts have effective systems of balanced assessment in place. They can also provide educators a clear sense of what assessment is, its value and how to use assessment data to empower students, teachers and communities. Professional development aims to help educators gain a better understanding of the data reports and use the reports to inform daily instruction. Outreach efforts also include family toolkits for districts that provide communications to parents and families, including flyers, report explanations, slideshow presentations and videos.

State-Led Purpose

The system development began as a grassroots effort by drawing on insights from educators and observing what many districts were already implementing. From the bottom-up foundation, the state intentionally worked to connect the interim assessments to the summative assessment to design a system that provided meaningful information for instruction on top of meeting federal requirements. In doing so, the state pushed the bounds of the summative assessment while still [meeting](#) the federal government's requirements in the peer review process.

Next Steps

The current through-year system is in an iterative phase. The department continues to build, implement and adjust in real time. The department aims to expand the assessment system's reach by connecting the state's large homeschool population with these assessments to enable these students to benefit from the rich data provided by the newly aligned tools.

These efforts are a part of a broader goal of building a larger standards-based system that informs instruction. Through collaboration with districts, the initiative serves as a model for improving student performance and aligning assessment with statewide priorities. The department believes that the lessons learned in this process can be a valuable tool for other initiatives such as the state's new [reading initiative](#).

See additional [special reports](#) in this series for more information.