

Your Question:

You asked for information on student achievement data and state efforts to assess students during the pandemic.

Our Response:

The following response includes available student assessment data and state policy examples.

Assessment Data

Widespread school closures caused by the pandemic were quickly followed by state and federal assessment waivers. This left many states with limited data and concerns around potentially drastic learning loss. The assessment organization, NWEA, released [learning loss projections](#) that predicted students would return to school this fall about half a year behind in reading and almost a full-year behind in math. These projections do not account for existing variation in achievement and opportunity gaps that could result in [larger losses for low-income students and students of color](#).

NWEA recently released [this report](#) analyzing data comparing math and reading performance in fall 2019 to new fall 2020 data. The authors highlighted these key findings:

- In fall of 2020, students in grades 3-8 performed similarly in reading to same-grade students in fall 2019, but about 5 to 10 percentile points lower in math.
- In almost all grades, most students made some learning gains in both reading and math since the COVID-19 pandemic started. However, gains in math were lower on average in fall 2020 than prior years, resulting in more students falling behind relative to their prior standing.
- This fall, students scored better than NWEA's projections in reading, while math scores were in line with projections for grades 4-6 and slightly above projections in grades 7-8.
- Some differences by racial/ethnic groups are emerging in the fall 2020 data, but it is too early to draw definitive conclusions from these initial results. **Student groups especially vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic were more likely to be missing from data.** Thus, the researchers have an incomplete understanding of how achievement this fall may differ across student groups and may be underestimating the impacts of COVID-19.

Another assessment provider, Curriculum Associates released a [first look](#) at data from their iReady assessment. They found gaps in readiness indicative of a COVID-slide, especially when the data were disaggregated by race and income status for students who took the assessment in school. Curiously, they found students who tested at home performed at a higher level than expected, prompting concerns about parental involvement. A more detailed report on this data can be found [here](#).

Finally, the [Opportunity Insights Economic Tracker](#) provides real-time data for online math curriculum participation and progress that can be disaggregated by state. The data on **Hawaii** indicates that participation in this program has drastically decreased since January 2020, but progress for participating students has increased.

State Policy Examples

State legislative activity addressing assessment has largely focused on assessment and accountability waivers as the pandemic has pushed schools back into remote environments. In states that have waived statewide assessment requirements, there have been some efforts to require district planning and reporting, while in other states, state education agencies have released guidance to support student assessment. This Education Commission of the States [Policy Outline](#) on accountability and school improvement provides an overview of these trends as well as legislative examples.

Additionally, the following legislative examples represent enacted legislation addressing formative assessment in lieu of standardized assessments. These were pulled from our [State Policy Tracking database](#) using the “assessment” issue area tag.

- **Massachusetts [H.B. 4616](#)** allows the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to set the deadline for school districts to submit their three-year plan setting forth clear and achievable goals and measurable standards for student improvement in order to address persistent disparities in student achievement. It also allows comprehensive assessments to be waived and details that any tests administered in the spring of 2020 will be used for informing teachers, parents and administrators of individual academic progress, not school performance.
- **Michigan [H.B. 5913](#) ([bill summary](#))** requires schools to develop extended COVID-19 learning plans that include the use of benchmark assessments to measure student progress toward achievement goals. These assessments must be aligned to state standards and selected from a list of providers approved by the department of education.

Although there has been limited legislative action, state education agencies have released guidance to support schools and districts and answer assessment-related questions. For example, the **Colorado** Department of Education released [guidance](#) to support districts in administering the ACCESS for English language learner’s proficiency assessment to ensure compliance with state and federal provisions. **California** also developed a [webpage](#) answering more general questions about assessment and accountability in the state.