

*The pandemic is exacerbating educational inequities in our education system, so it is essential that state leaders respond in ways that prioritize our most vulnerable students.*

***This guide can help.***



# EQUITY-DRIVEN APPROACHES TO MEASURE STUDENT LEARNING

COVID-19 has not only widened existing educational disparities – e.g., in access to strong and diverse teachers, a high-quality curriculum, and grade-level content – between White students and students of color and affluent students and students from low-income backgrounds, but health and economic disparities as well. Recent data show that the most vulnerable students, particularly students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, are also most likely to experience the health and economic impacts of the virus. **That is why it is critical to maintain transparency in these challenging times – to ensure that communities and leaders have the information they need to target additional support to the schools and students that need it most.**

**Public reporting** and related accountability systems are critical vehicles for communicating expectations and spurring action. If states continue to postpone reporting data, communities will not have access to information they need to help close opportunity gaps.

[Initial estimates](#) of instructional loss suggest that Black students may fall behind by 10.3 months, Latino students by 9.2 months, and students from low-income backgrounds by more than a year as a result of significant educational disruptions caused by COVID-19. As students resume instruction in the fall, high-quality **diagnostic assessments** could help educators and school leaders tailor their curricula and instructional materials, professional development, daily instruction, and other supports to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs and to accelerate learning. Many schools and districts already administer diagnostic assessments, but the quality varies greatly and the same assessments may not be used districtwide (or even schoolwide), making it difficult to use the results to identify schools, classrooms, and individual students in need of additional support.

To identify and learn from places that are serving all students well during this time, provide students and families with information about students' progress toward graduating high school ready for college and a career, and give state and local policymakers critical information that can help them decide how best to target resources, states must administer **comparable, statewide summative assessments** that show how students are performing against grade-level standards. States received a federal [waiver](#) exempting them from having to administer annual statewide assessments in the 2019-2020 school year and report on the results; states also got a reprieve from having to make annual accountability determinations and provide related data on state and local public report cards (although states are still required to publish report cards to share the other data they already have). The US Department of Education [wrote to chief state school officers](#) in September 2020 indicating that it will not be providing additional waivers to suspend

standardized testing in 2020-2021, but it will provide flexibility around how data from these assessments is used.

**EQUITY PRINCIPLE:** Every student and their family know whether they are meeting college- and career-ready expectations and how they are progressing each year, and educators and school system leaders have the information they need to provide all students with the appropriate instructional supports and resources. The state makes information publicly available about how well schools and districts are serving all students – and whether all groups of students have access to key resources for learning – so that stakeholders have the information they need to be partners in ensuring all children have the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

### **EQUITY ACTIONS:**

- Ensure timely **public reporting of available data by student group** (e.g., data collected until schools closed in spring 2020, per pupil expenditure data, school climate data) via school report cards for the 2019-2020 school year (released in fall 2020) and beyond.
- Require districts to collect consistent **data about student attendance and engagement and teacher attendance** throughout the 2020-2021 school year and beyond, and to regularly report this data publicly.
- **Use state or federal funding to purchase high-quality diagnostic tools** and make them readily available to districts upon students' return to school. Require districts to select one of these high-quality, state-vetted assessments or implement a statewide diagnostic tool to ensure quality and equity across districts. At a minimum, the state should require each district to use the same diagnostic assessment in all its schools for a given grade span.
- **Provide professional learning on diagnostic assessments and data literacy**, as it will be critical for teachers to be able to use the data to differentiate instruction and deliver comprehensive, individualized supports to the students who are the furthest behind academically in ways that meet their social, emotional, and academic needs.
- **Plan now to administer annual assessments during the 2020-2021 school year.** Work with vendors and assessment developers to prepare districts to administer statewide assessments in required subjects (at least annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school for English and mathematics; and once in elementary, middle, and high school for science) and in a variety of possible scenarios, including remotely or on a staggered schedule. These preparations must include: (1) investments in the technology needed to administer assessments remotely; (2) training for educators; and (3) developing necessary accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners.

### **Texas Gives Districts Tools to Measure Student Progress**

The Texas Department of Education has provided all districts with [optional end-of-year assessments to administer](#) in spring 2020 and [optional beginning-of-year assessments](#) to administer when students return to school in the fall. These assessments for grades 3-8 were built using released items from the statewide assessment, are aligned to grade-level standards, and cover a range of content areas. Some of the assessments are also available in Spanish.

### **A Note About Accountability**

As described above, diagnostic assessments provide educators with information to accelerate learning, but these assessments should not be used for high-stakes purposes, such as school accountability and improvement. As states resume administering statewide, summative assessments next year, they must use the results, including [student academic growth data](#), along with other [indicators](#) of student progress, to identify schools in need of support and to prompt action to raise student achievement. For more on state accountability systems and why they are critical to supporting students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, please see [An Introduction to School Accountability Under ESSA](#).

