

# Federal Policy Guide to Improve Equity in State Summative Assessments

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Annual statewide assessments provide valuable insight into how schools are supporting all students. Comparable data produced by these assessments:

- Allow families to see how their child is performing in comparison to grade-level standards.
- Enable educators to adjust curricula and instructional plans.
- Provide a roadmap for administrators to allocate resources in a way that supports underserved students and schools and identify bright spots to learn from.

But statewide assessments [must be modified](#) to better empower all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, to demonstrate what they truly know and can do. By doing so, data that drives decision-making will better meet the needs of families, educators, and administrators.

The three innovations outlined below build on EdTrust's 2023 [Future of Assessments](#) report, which enumerates four equity pillars based on focus groups of students, families, and educators, and are discussed in more detail in a [series of reports](#) released in 2024. To maximize impact and address the intersecting concerns heard from stakeholders, policymakers should ideally work to implement all three improvements below:

## *1. Improve assessments to better reflect student identities and interests.*

Statewide assessments must be made more [racially and culturally inclusive](#) to ensure that all students can accurately demonstrate their learning. Currently, almost all state assessments exclude content that intentionally represents specific cultural topics or themes. While the aim may be to provide an “objective” assessment, this approach limits representation by defaulting to a “neutral” whiteness. Instead, assessments must intentionally represent diverse identities and interests. **Federal officials should provide additional funding and guidance to states to support the development of inclusive assessment content. Without outside incentives, guidance and support, most states are unlikely to initiate these improvements on their own.**

## 2. *Adjust the timing of state assessments to assess student progress throughout the year.*

The current end-of-year structure of statewide summative assessments prevents educators from using assessment data to provide current students with the supports they need, restricts administrators from using results to inform resource allocation decisions during the year, limits parents' ability to track their child's grade-level progress, and creates anxiety for students, educators, and families. [Through-year assessment models](#) offer a promising alternative approach: students demonstrate their learning throughout the year, offering multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency, while eliminating the need for costly district interim assessment which vary in quality and pose equity concerns. **Federal actors play an integral role in offering clear guidance to answer [several important questions](#) about through-year assessments and how the model can adhere to federal standards.**

## 3. *Improve individual score reporting to be more meaningful for students and their families.*

No matter the structure, [assessment reporting](#) must assist every family in understanding how their school is meeting their child's needs. Individual assessment reports provide essential information by summarizing students' grade-level performance to identify if a student may need additional support. However, the design of score reports are often confusing, not asset-based, and rarely integrated within broader conversations about students' academic progress. States must improve these reports to communicate results more effectively and why they matter, while also providing guidance to ensure results are accessible to families. States can also work to improve their "report card" platform, which helps students and families contextualize their individual assessment results across the school, district, and state levels. **Federal officials can clearly communicate the value of strong individual score reports and provide resources that incentivize states to improve them in both design and delivery.**

<i>IF</i>	<i>THEN</i>
Assessments are racially and culturally inclusive by connecting with students' identities and interests...	...Students feel more engaged and will be better able to show what they know and can do.
Through-year assessments provide more meaningful, timely assessment data to educators and administrators...	...Educators and administrators can better identify students' strengths and additional supports needed.
Assessment results are more clearly communicated to students and families through improved reports and meaningful conversations...	...Students and their families are empowered to ensure their school is meeting their needs.

# Recommendations for Federal-Level Action

## 1. *Publish federal guidance to assist states in developing and implementing a suite of assessment innovations.*

- Update peer review guidance to expand on requirements specific to states administering “multiple statewide interim assessments,” alongside multiple examples of evidence. The current lack of guidance has led to uncertainty among states, dissuading many from pursuing innovations.
- Publish a “Dear Colleague” letter or formal guidance document that communicates the importance of inclusive assessments and highlights examples of assessment items and review processes that are racially and culturally inclusive. As a starting point, the Department can look to Chapter 3, Section G of the [2028 NAEP Science Framework](#).
- Release guidance that conveys the importance of asset-based interpretations of state assessment data, with examples of ways states can equip their districts and schools in discussing assessment data in culturally affirming, asset-based ways. Asset-based data framing places the onus on systems to support all students and recognizes students’ strengths and areas for improvement.
- Further clarify technical requirements required in the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA). While the Department has recently made several positive adjustments to the program (e.g., adding a separate planning period, lifting the limit on the number of participating states), additional technical clarification around comparability requirements would allow states to better understand how different design adjustments do — or do not — adhere to the required comparability specifications.

## 2. *Require the Department of Education to annually report when states report assessment results.*

- To pressure states to report their data faster, the Department should produce a report summarizing: the dates of each state’s assessment window when preliminary results are shared with school and district leaders, and when results are made publicly available and available to each student and their family. Additionally, Congress should require results to be released a set number of days after assessments are administered.

## 3. *Leverage the peer review process to consider how statewide assessments are/are not racially and culturally inclusive.*

- Require that the Department’s peer review process for evaluating the technical quality of state assessment systems specifically considers whether assessments are racially and culturally inclusive.