




Illinois State Board of Education

Dr. Tony Sanders, State Superintendent of Education
Dr. Steven Isoye, Chair of the Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable John Curran, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House

FROM: Dr. Tony Sanders 
State Superintendent of Education

DATE: July 25, 2023

SUBJECT: Consensus Responses from the State Assessment Review Committee in Review of Recommendations for Improvements to the Illinois Assessment of Readiness

Pursuant to 105 ILCS 5/2-3.64a-5(j), the enclosed report provides a review of recommendations from the State Assessment Review Committee regarding potential changes to the state assessment after receiving feedback from the field compiled by the Center for Assessment.

This report is transmitted on behalf of the state superintendent of education. For additional copies of this report or for more specific information, please contact Hector Rodriguez, director of Government Relations, at 217-782-6510 or hrodrigu@isbe.net.

cc: Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the House
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center


State Assessment Review Committee

**Consensus Responses from the State Assessment
Review Committee in Review of Recommendations
for Improvements to the Illinois Assessment of
Readiness**

January 2023



**Illinois
State Board of
Education**

The State Assessment Review Committee, which was created by [Public Act 98-972](#) , is required to review:

- The time and money expended at the local and state levels to prepare for and administer the assessments,
- The collective results of the assessments as measured against the stated purpose of assessing student performance, and
- Other issues involving the assessments identified by the committee.

The committee makes periodic recommendations to the State Superintendent of Education and the General Assembly concerning the assessments.

ISBE contracted with the Center for Assessment to partner in gathering and analyzing feedback from teachers, administrators, and caregivers regarding the state assessment program via focus groups and a statewide survey consisting of more than 5,000 responses. As a result, eight recommendations surfaced as a basis or starting point for making improvements to the current state assessment program. SARC members met on December 2, 2022, with representatives from the Center for Assessment, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to discuss the feedback. SARC reviewed each of the eight recommendations from the report generated by the Center for Assessment and came to a consensus regarding key aspects of the recommendation as well as priority and timing. The group's consensus conclusions are contained in the report's "consensus responses." See [- Feedback from the Field Center for Assessment -- Feedback from the Field](#).

The review followed the format below:

- General Overview of Each Recommendation
- Pros/Cons of Each Recommendation
- Consensus Responses

Additional Recommendation from SARC Members not Included in the Center's Report

With these recommendations, to move the work forward, there is a definite need for ISBE to fully support SARC's work in 2023. There is urgency to this, given the timeframes called for in the recommendations below, particularly related to developing a theory of action. As a result, it is imperative that SARC members receive the following in early January 2023:

- Annual meeting schedule provided well in advance.
- Meeting lengths appropriate to the topics on the agenda, as was provided on Dec. 2, 2022.
- Continued assistance from AIR in planning the 2023 schedule and agenda, as well as facilitation at meetings.
- Continued support from the Center for Assessment and the TAC to serve as subject-matter experts.

Recommendation #1: Develop state interim assessment supports and/or resources that are decoupled from summative uses.

In order to provide more instructionally useful information during the year, ISBE may consider providing statewide interim assessment supports or resources to districts and schools. The feedback from the survey and focus groups suggests that there is not sufficient support to make such assessments compulsory statewide or use these assessments for summative purposes.

Potential state contributions:

- Promote additional assessment literacy and capacity-building initiatives.
- Provide feedback to help evaluate and use high-quality assessment resources.
- Engage with districts to develop a resource system to serve as a warehouse to assist in vetting assessments and assessment practices as options to the field.

- Explore, understand, and help districts to address the negative impacts interim assessments have on shaping classroom instruction around discrete skills, loss of instructional time, and narrowed curriculum.
- Organize/develop an assessment resource system (e.g., warehouse/database) using the work from the field. Perhaps a volunteer group could serve as facilitators of the vetting process, for examples of valid and reliable local/interim assessments. “Engage with districts to gather and support the development of interim/local assessments. Establish a cadre of practitioners from the field to vet assessments submitted.”

A well-developed theory of action should inform these initiatives.

- **Pros:** State partnership helps build local assessment capacity.
- **Cons:** It is resource intensive.

ISBE Response: All districts may participate in the Learning Renewal Interim Assessments at no cost. Currently, 18 school districts are participating.

Consensus Response:

SARC acknowledged a state interim assessment currently exists and is available and supports its continuance.

Recommendation #2A: Develop criteria for “high-quality” interim assessments.

Recommendation #2B: Create model resources and/or a “vetted list” of interim assessments.

ISBE, in partnership with SARC, should develop clear definitions and criteria for “high-quality” interim assessments (and provide professional training to districts so they can be more certain that the interim assessments they procure are technically sound and appropriate for their intended purposes. Districts also should apply the criteria to create model resources -- such as a bank of items, performance tasks, or tests -- that are available as options to districts and then consider creating a “vetted list” of interim assessments that would help guide districts in procuring an interim assessment.

Consensus Response:

SARC recommends ISBE form a panel composed of representatives from ISBE, SARC, and other experts after the theory of action is complete. This subcommittee will develop criteria for “high-quality” interim assessments and create model resources and/or a vetted list of interim assessments. SARC also recommends that the terms “assessment” and specifically “interim” assessment be clearly defined, in partnership with ISBE.

Recommendation #3: Provide professional training to support more effective assessment practices.

ISBE may consider providing professional training -- directly or through regional or district staff or other appropriate groups -- to support educators by instructing them on how to use assessment information more effectively. This assessment literacy could focus on use of summative, interim, and/or formative assessment information to support better teaching and school programmatic decisions.

ISBE Response:

The Assessment Department already has an ongoing initiative that offers a series of webinars to provide information about assessment literacy to parents, teachers, and administrators in Illinois. The topics range from interpreting the assessment results, increasing the knowledge of what students need to know and can do, and synthesizing assessment results to provide awareness of student learning in order to be effective in the classroom. A list of calendar events is provided, and the webinars are recorded for district staff to view at their own pace.

Consensus Response:

SARC recommends continuing the conversation about empowering districts to serve as models for the use of high quality assessments. Collaborating with state partners to expand professional development opportunities would be highly beneficial to districts to promote assessment literacy.

Recommendation #4: Accelerate and improve assessment reporting.

ISBE should consider working with its current or future state assessment contractors to accelerate the response time for summative assessment results. The agency could also explore strategies to expand and/or improve assessment reports so they are more useful to educators, parents, and others. TAC suggested that ISBE could explore automated scoring to shorten turnaround time for test results. Automated scoring refers to replacing human scoring with machine scoring in whole or part.

- **Pros:** Can potentially accelerate turnaround time for constructed response items.
- **Cons:** Requires extensive investigation to determine the appropriate specifications, procedures, and acceptance criteria; may raise “trust” issues.

Two prominent suggestions:

- Have stakeholder/user panels review score reports and provide specific feedback.
- Consider releasing constructed response items together with sample responses and annotated feedback.
- **Pros:** Stakeholders can provide valuable insights; releasing items and annotated work provides more useful information for teachers and parents, as well as better signaling.
- **Cons:** Releasing items requires more extensive development and increases costs.

Consensus Response:

SARC recommends convening a panel of educators to review the current format, quality, and use of the assessment reports. Its recommendations and other relevant research will be presented to SARC at its next quarterly meeting. SARC recognizes and appreciates ISBE’s efforts to accelerate reporting and seeks a commitment from ISBE to at least maintain this speed and report format availability.

Recommendation #5: Develop a theory of action for state assessments.

With SARC, ISBE should clearly define assessment and develop a clear, detailed theory of action of what purpose(s) state assessments should serve and what actions will lead to those purpose(s) being accomplished. The role of assessments should be clearly articulated in terms of what assessment information is needed to support the actions leading to the goals. TAC emphasized the importance of developing a comprehensive theory of action that reflects ISBE’s policy priorities informed by stakeholder feedback.

The theory of action will guide subsequent design decisions. For example, many TAC members addressed an important “signaling function” that the current state summative assessment provides. SARC discussed the implications of issues related to assessment content (e.g., performance tasks) that assesses the higher-order thinking skills reflected in the state content standards and growth measures necessary for the state accountability system. In addition, SARC representatives of both statewide teachers’ unions spoke to the important role the theory of action will play in addressing the impacts that state, district, and school assessment policy and practices have on teaching and learning conditions, curriculum and instructional practices. Ultimately, these are policy decisions that should be reflected in the theory of action or similar resource.

Consensus Response:

SARC recommends convening a subcommittee consisting of representatives from ISBE, SARC, and other experts to develop a theory of action for state assessments. The theory of action should include the state summative assessment, interim assessments, and assessments that occur closer to the school/classroom level and the state’s role in achieving them. The full SARC will review the draft at its next quarterly meeting.

Recommendation #6: Explore strategies to shorten the end-of-year test.

- Explore options to shorten the end-of-year state assessment and make sure that any reduction in length of testing time minimizes unintended negative consequences.

- Work with technical advisers and contractors to determine technically defensible and feasible strategies. Two prominent ideas to shorten the test or otherwise reduce test burden were discussed: 1) examine modified blueprints and 2) explore an adaptive design.

Modified blueprints -- Work with the contractor to provide examples of modified or streamlined blueprints. For example, blueprint modifications can be produced to illustrate reductions in testing time of 10, 20, 30 percent or more. Each modification should be examined with respect to the content representation and impact on estimated test reliability.

- **Pros:** A reduction in testing time may be achieved by removing test items or replacing time-consuming items with items that take less time.
- **Cons:** Substantial changes in testing time are likely not possible without removing content that assesses higher-order thinking (e.g., performance tasks). Some reduction in reliability (precision) is expected.

Consensus Response:

SARC recommends that at the next quarterly meeting, it will review strategies to shorten the end-of-year test while maintaining integrity as informed by TAC. ISBE will also research options for engaging the vendor to further research these strategies.

Recommendation #7: Consider transitioning from fixed form to an adaptive design.

Consider an adaptive design for state assessments, where the difficulty of questions would be adjusted to a student’s ability level. There are several possible adaptive designs, each with advantages and drawbacks. ISBE should work with contractors and advisers to explore the technical and practical implications.

Explore a fully adaptive or stage adaptive test design:

- Fully adaptive -- Difficulty for each item a student encounters is determined by performance on previous items.
 - Stage adaptive -- The test is presented in stages or sessions; the difficulty of each subsequent session is influenced by performance on the previous session(s).
- **Pros:** Theoretically, adaptive approaches can reduce testing time without sacrificing precision.
 - **Cons:** Adaptive designs require extensive item banks and can be time consuming and expensive to develop, especially if the state owns the content.

Consensus Response:

SARC recommends that ISBE request the current vendor provide a proposal of how an adaptive test would look in Illinois. SARC and TAC will then compare and contrast the test designs at their next quarterly meeting.

Recommendation #8: Proceed deliberately and responsively.

Do not rush, but plan thoroughly and proceed with deliberate speed. Thoroughly understand the different viewpoints and values that have made consensus and adoption challenging. Be sure to exercise leadership to move forward with improvements while maintaining the required high quality required for high-impact state assessments.

Consensus Response:

SARC will continue to review the recommendations posed today, ensure that the theory of action encompasses the goals of all parties, and proceed deliberately and responsively. Moving forward, SARC requests that ISBE provide all meeting dates for the year in advance.