



*A Union of Professionals*

## **Student Assessment and the Use of Data**

### COVID-19 CLOSURE WORKING PAPERS

Assessments play an important role in educators' ability to meet students' learning needs. Assessments should be aligned to standards and inform teaching and learning. In light of the educational disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to address related learning gaps as we plan for the reopening of school buildings, the role of assessment becomes even more critical. In response, states and districts must engage in an extensive review of all assessment programs to limit the loss of learning time to excessive testing, and to prioritize assessments that provide teachers with crucial information. Districts and schools will need to establish appropriate diagnosis of students' learning levels and needs given the truncated traditional school year and focus on formative assessments that allow teachers to adjust instruction in a timely manner. These diagnostic and formative assessments should be teacher-friendly and accompanied by access to relevant instructional resources and supports to fill gaps. We need to use this data to guide instruction, identify and share best practices, partner with families to support student learning, and collectively solve mutual problems.

### Considerations for States, Districts, Schools and Educators

#### Preparing for autumn

- Use the summer months for curriculum realignment and developing project-based and performance assessments that can be done in classrooms or remotely.
- [States](#), [districts](#) and [schools](#) should ensure educators have access to meaningful professional development on diagnostic and benchmark testing; project-based learning; and performance assessments, with a focus on remote instruction and trauma-based instruction.

#### Assessing teaching and learning

- [Teachers](#) should use diagnostic testing at the beginning of the year, and make use of [formative testing](#) throughout the year, to assess learning and learning gaps during schooling disruptions.
- [Schools and teachers](#) should consider assessing students on content from the previous grade level. Research shows that as students advance through grade levels, there are learning gaps happening under the surface. With widespread school closures due to the coronavirus, this "[iceberg effect](#)" will impact more students.
- [States](#) and [districts](#) should provide support to teachers, ensuring educators have the resources they need to adapt such assessments to remote learning when necessary.

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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### Structures to help support and assess learning

- Have students start the school year with a teacher from the previous grade (like looping) to allow the relationships to school and school structures to be re-established with a familiar adult. The teacher starts the school year already knowing what each student’s last school year looked like; this would also be a good practice for creating a comfortable testing environment for students.
- Balance academics with other needs—take the time to do benchmark/diagnostic testing, focus on social emotional learning, rebuild relationships, and set class routines and structures.
- Ensure educators have additional planning time and implement vertical planning teams in addition to grade-level teams to provide a professional learning community where educators can collaborate around student learning needs. Because classrooms will include even greater variation in student readiness and achievement levels, educators will need to understand learning standards or goals at the grade levels preceding and following the one they teach.

### Using student and school data differently

- **Districts** should consider using [standards-based report cards](#)<sup>1</sup> to provide educators, parents and students a clear understanding of progress toward learning goals.
- **Schools** should consider hosting virtual curriculum/data nights for families where educators explain learning standards students are working on, assessments used to measure learning, how to understand results, as well as how families can support learning at home.

### High-stakes testing

- **States** should consider applying for waivers from tests mandated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and [repurpose assessment funds](#). Minimally, the federal government should allow states to amend their ESSA plans to remove any stakes attached to ESSA-mandated assessments.
- **Districts** should conduct an [assessment inventory review](#) to ensure that only state-mandated assessments and assessments that will guide instruction are given.

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<sup>1</sup> Marzano and Heflebower (2011) “[Grades that Show What Students Know](#)” *Educational Leadership*, 69 (3), 34-39.