

# STATE POLICYMAKERS' DISCUSSION GUIDE

*What does my legislature need to know?*



**The purpose of this discussion guide is to build policymakers' understanding of what through-year assessments are and explore support for transitioning to a new system.**

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## **Guidance:**

Utilize the guide below as an outline for discussing with state policymakers' your reasons for wanting to change the state's tests and why through-year assessments may better serve needs. The guide is designed to support conversations with governors, legislators, state board members and other decision makers and their staff. Adapt the guide based on the politics and context in your state as well as your relationships with policymakers' and knowledge of their motivations, values and priorities.



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## Frame the problem

Layout the problems with the current state testing system you want to solve and why. Aim to build on their perspective on the current state tests to demonstrate alignment or explore differences.

**The timing of the test results limits their usefulness; the data comes back too late and is too infrequent to help improve teaching and learning.** Data from current state tests come back weeks after the end of the school year, reducing their usefulness and frustrating stakeholders because the data comes long after when:

- + Parents need information to support their child,
- + Schools and system leaders have decided the upcoming school year’s priorities and budget, and
- + Teachers need the information to inform their instruction.

**The tests are too disconnected from what students are learning, meaning we are measuring the wrong thing.** Current state tests are disconnected from curriculum and daily instruction, creating a dynamic where the test results reflect different levels of students’ background knowledge, rather than truly measuring what they learned. This is evidenced by the strong correlation with school demographic data.

**There is too much focus and time spent on state tests.** When the tests are given once a year and schools, teachers and students will be judged on the results of that single test, it leads to:

- + Too much time spent on test prep
- + Stress and test anxiety experienced by students and educators
- + Narrowing the curriculum, so there is less focus on music, arts, history and other subjects

**The tests don’t provide a true measure of student growth over the school year.** Current student growth measures assess growth from one spring to the next, rather than from the start of the school year to the end-making it harder to understand where students’ start the year and the impact of summer learning loss.

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## Articulate a vision for a through-year assessment

Lay out how and why you're considering transitioning to a through-year assessment system. Explain how through-year assessments differ from the current state tests and how they could solve the identified problems and serve stakeholders better. Focus on shared concerns.

- + Despite the shortcomings of the current state tests, they are important for monitoring student progress and equity. We are exploring transitioning to an innovative approach to state tests called a through-year assessment system because we believe it has the potential to be more equitable, focused and relevant to students, families, educators and school leaders.
- + Rather than relying on single end-of-year tests in math and reading, a through-year assessment model administers multiple, shorter tests throughout the school year; but still provides scores at the end of the year that reflect students' proficiency and progress.
- + Providing students the opportunity to demonstrate learning multiple times a year, creates the ability to:
  - + Produce data on student learning right away, rather than weeks or months after tests are taken
  - + Provide frequent and timely reports to families, students, teachers and leaders multiple during the school year when it can still be used to inform instruction, make data driven decisions and target school and system improvements
  - + Create greater clarity and transparency for stakeholders about student achievement and school quality
  - + Strengthen the connection to curriculum and daily instruction
  - + Better connect what students are tested on with what they've learned, rather than assessing their access to resources, background knowledge or opportunity
  - + Support the design of tests that are culturally sustaining and relevant for students and teachers experience
  - + Reduce the pressure single end-of-year tests place on students, teachers and the system
  - + Calculate within-year growth by using the first administration as a baseline, thus providing a clearer measure of progress and deeper understanding of the impact of summer learning loss
  - + Eliminate duplicative or low-quality local tests



