Innovations *in* Assessment

educationfirst

A Pilot Year in Review

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THROUGH-YEAR ASSESSMENTS?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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About this publication

A Pilot Year in Review: What have we learned about through-year assessments?

This publication interrogates key takeaways from through-year assessment pilots administered during the 2022-2023 school year. We explore key design decisions, enabling conditions and implications for future research and practice. This publication is part of a series published through Education First's Through-year Curriculum-Connected Assessment Grant Program.

Authors

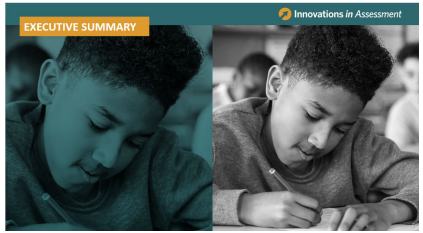
Dave Powell
Senior Consultant
Education First

Emma Fortier
Associate
Education First

Senna Lamba
Associate
Education First

Khaled Ismail
Principal
Education First

Directory



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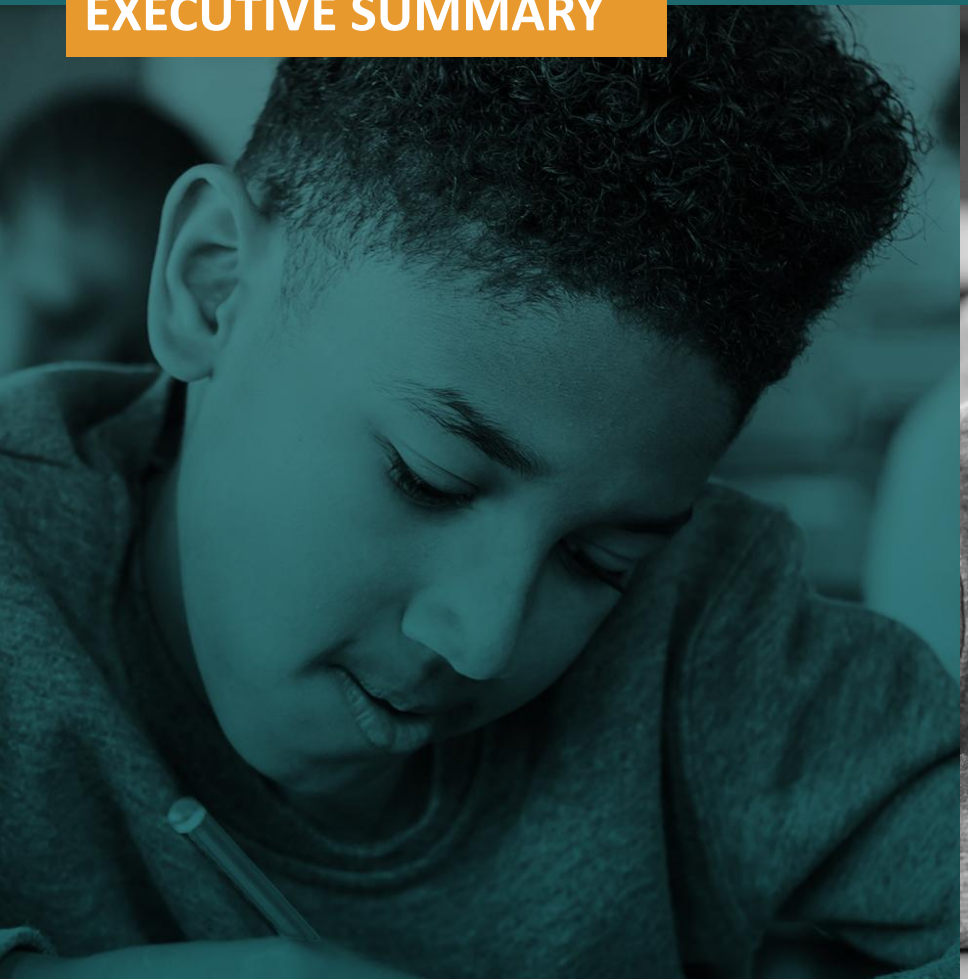


Introduction & Background

While state summative assessments serve an important role in our education system, ***they have the potential to improve through various innovations***

Education First believes students, educators, families and state leaders need more equitable, focused and relevant assessments that strengthen the connection between assessment and instruction and better align what is tested with what is taught

Since 2019, we've led grant and coaching programs to advance innovations in assessment, reporting and accountability

Grants have supported a range of innovations, including **through-year assessments, computer-adaptive assessments, comprehensive graduate portfolios, whole-child measures and equity indicators**.

The curriculum-connected through-year assessment grant program has focused on:

- **Incentivizing R&D** to support states to focus on curriculum-connected through-year models
- **Building connections and buy-in** among federal advocates and policymakers for change, including supporting CGSA grant writing
- **Facilitating a community of practice** among grantees, innovative states and developers pursuing through-year assessment
- **Sharing our learnings** and thought leadership with the field

The models we invested in must address the needs of stakeholders and advocates, and meet the following criteria:

Disaggregate data for essential student populations and provide data across schools and districts.

Eventually scale statewide or organization-wide *(if shown to be successful)*

Be able to **integrate within the state accountability system in the future**, even if that integration requires policy change

Many states are exploring through-year assessments to address some long-standing, legitimate concerns about traditional end-of-year summative assessments

Stakeholders (including students, families and educators) often see traditional end-of-year summative assessments as:

- **Lacking utility to teaching and learning**
- **Providing untimely results that do not inform instruction**
- **Requiring a large footprint on the overall system**
  (in terms of the resources needed, time for preparation and administration)
- **Misaligned to what and when students are taught and their curriculum**

Read more about the reasons for the growing interest in through-year assessment models in Education First's publication, "What are Through-year Assessments?"

Sources: Education First (2022). Marion, S. (2021).

Education First believes that if states test throughout the year, align those tests to what is taught and provide timely reporting–student learning will improve

If you…

- Test throughout the year
- Align the content of the test to what students have recently learned
- Provide reports in a timely manner

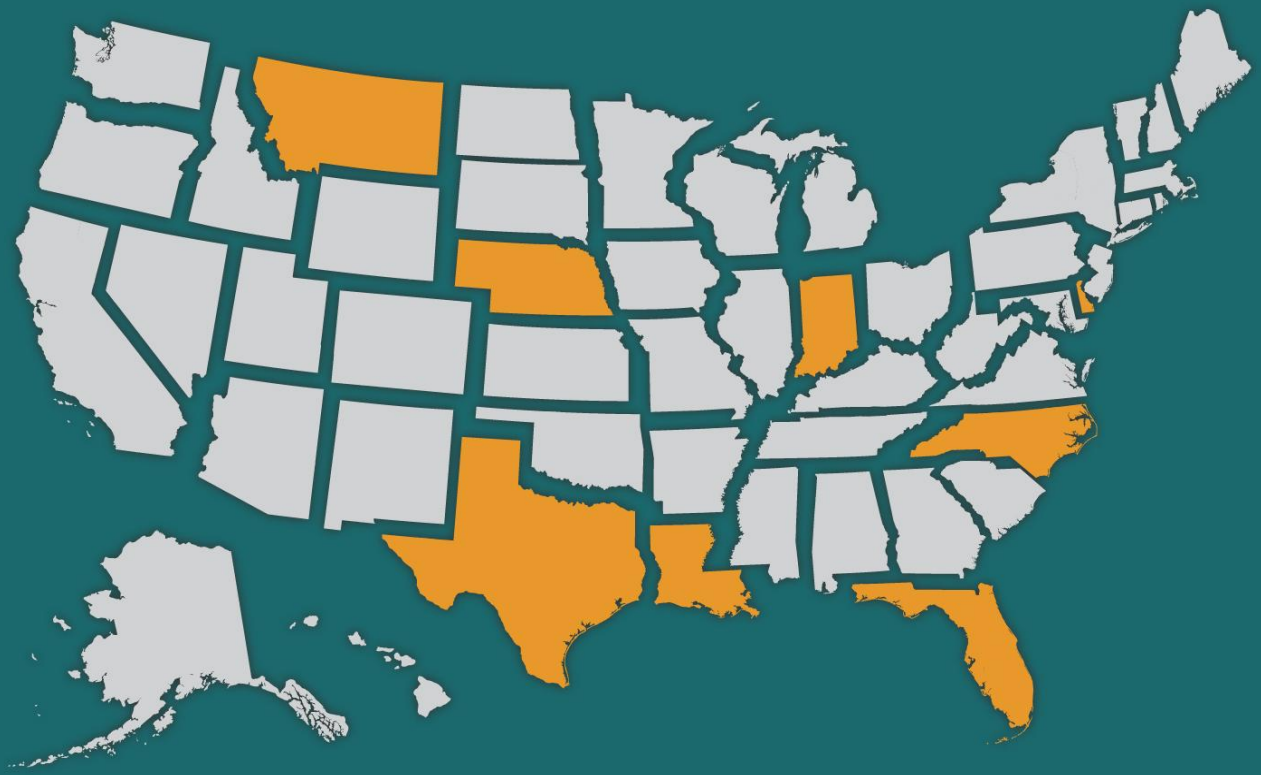
Then you can…

- Address some of the disparities in background knowledge
- Provide more frequent and timely feedback to students and instructors
- Create space for course corrections
- Support teachers in planning instruction & scaffolding material
- Measure the acquisition of knowledge more effectively

Which will…

- Improve student experience and outcomes
- Make assessments more equitable
- Improve coherence between instruction, curriculum and assessments

Improve student learning



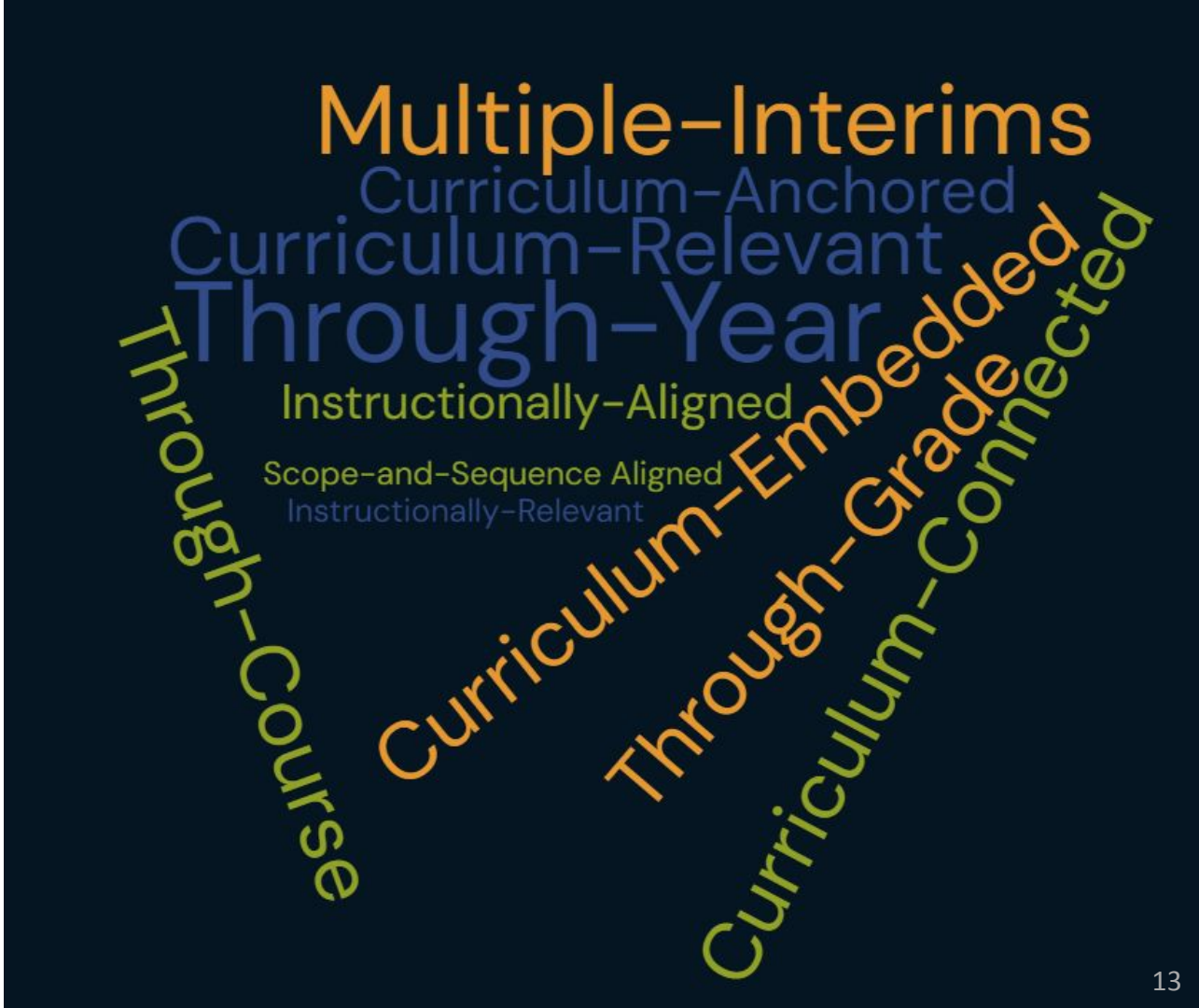
This report synthesizes learnings from 8 states who tested different versions of through-year assessment models in the 2022-2023 school year

We also incorporated learnings from CenterPoint's Through-Year Illustrative Mathematics (IM)-Aligned Interims study with district partners in Maryland and Wisconsin. In total, 13 states were currently exploring, developing, or testing through-year models in the 2022-23 school year.

Through-year assessment designs differ, and the field has varying levels of alignment on definitions.

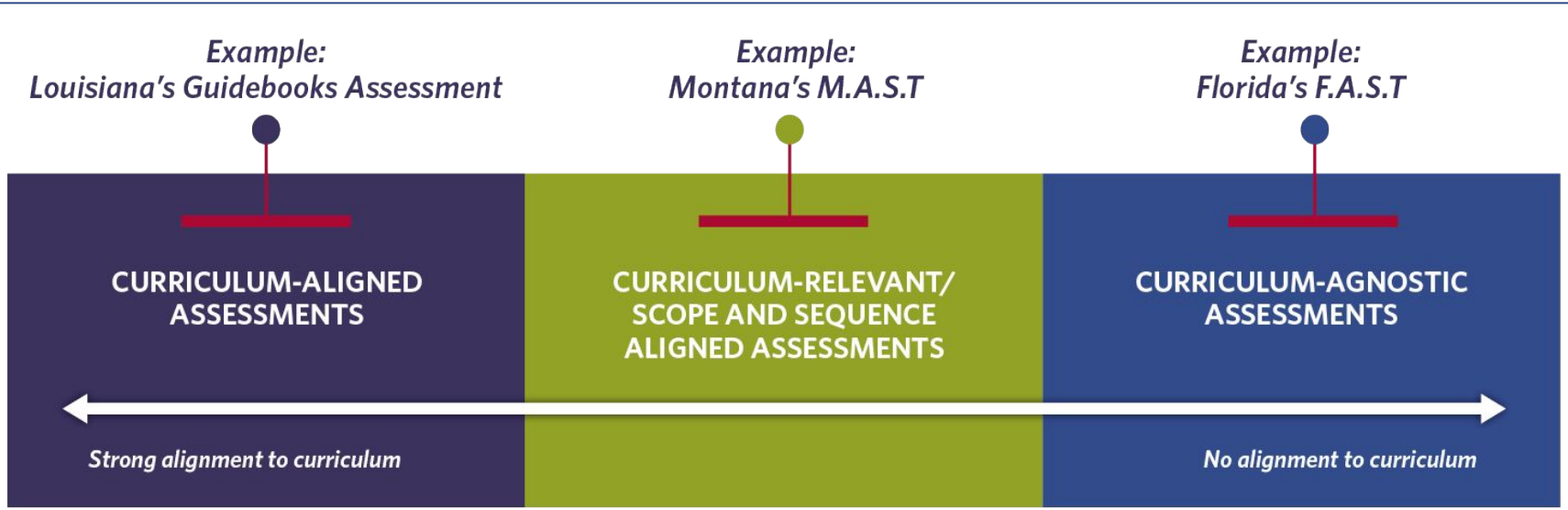
These definitions are continuing to evolve as the field develops.

Our thinking on definitions has also evolved as we've continued to learn about through-year models.



All through-year assessment models involve multiple administrations, but they vary in the degree to which they connect to curriculum and instruction

We've seen a spectrum of models and approaches in the states we studied.



Adapted from Dadey and Badrinarayan (2022)

In this report, we use the following definitions that build on our prior thinking and the work of others in this field:

Through-Year Assessment Models	Through-year assessment models administer multiple tests throughout the school year as part of an assessment system designed to produce a single summative score meeting federal and state accountability requirements. Through-year assessment models are also referred to as "through-course" by some states.
Curriculum-Agnostic Approach	Through-year assessment models that **test the entire content domain (or grade-level standards) throughout the year at each testing administration**, and do not try to align content tested to curriculum.
Curriculum-Aligned Approach*	Through-year assessment models that directly **draw on the content found in specific curriculum**. This model is also referred to as "curriculum-specific" or "curriculum-embedded."
Curriculum-Relevant Approach	Through-year assessment models that can be **flexibly aligned with multiple curricula, a scope and sequence or pacing of content**. This approach is also referred to as "scope and sequence aligned", "instructionally relevant" or "instructionally aligned."

*In previous publications, we referred to this as curriculum-specific embedded

Sources: Education First (2022) Dadey and Badrinarayan (2022) Dadey, N., & Gong, B. (2023)

With these definitions in mind, this publication explores the following research questions

Primary Research Questions:

What are the lessons learned from a group of states who piloted through-year models in the 2022-2023 school year?

What are key implications and recommendations for scaling the models?

What are the outstanding questions, needs and considerations for the future of innovations in assessment?

Across the states we reviewed for this publication,

over

2.5 million

students tested using a through-year assessment during the 2022-2023 school year.

We answered these research questions through stakeholder engagement, literature reviews and interviews

Methodology:

1. Synthesis of stakeholder engagement findings, surveys, prototyping and piloting reports from three assessment developers and two states
2. Literature and artifact review
3. Interviews and focus groups with 20 state leaders, assessment developers and field leaders

We examined the following models and discussed lessons learning in-depth with the leaders implementing them

Delaware (DE)	Through-Course Assessment

Florida (FL)	Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST)

Indiana (IN)	Through-Year Assessment (ILEARN (State Summative) Redesign)

Louisiana (LA)	Guidebooks and Wit & Wisdom	CrawFish Model

Montana (MT)	Montana Alternative Student Testing Pilot Program (MAST)

Nebraska (NE)	Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS)

North Carolina (NC)	North Carolina Personalized Assessment Tool (NCPAT)

Texas (TX)	Texas Through-Year Assessment Pilot (TTAP)

Districts in MD and WI	CenterPoint's Through-Year Illustrative Mathematics-Aligned Interims

Each of the states vary in how they approach the design of their through-year assessment, the degree to which they connect to curriculum and the goals they aim to achieve

Feature	LA*	LA**	MT	DE	FL	IN	NE	NC	TX
Each administration assesses the **depth and breadth of grade-level standards**	+	+			+		+	+ *ELA*	+
Each administration assesses assesses a **subset of standards**			+	+		+		+ *Math*	
Curriculum-**aligned**	+								
Curriculum-**relevant**		+	+	+		+			

*Guidebooks and Wit & Wisdom **CrawFish Model

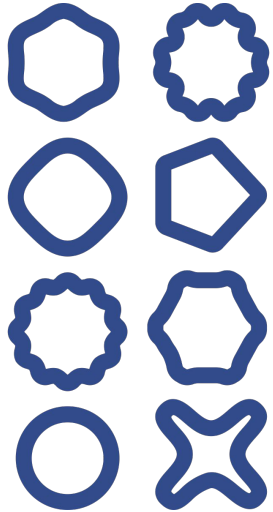
Note: CenterPoint's Through-Year Illustrative Mathematics-Aligned Interims studied in districts is curriculum-aligned and assess the depth and breadth of standards.

Key Findings & Recommendations

Each state's approach to through-year assessment design depends on the problem(s) they are attempting to address, their underlying beliefs and their state's context

These solutions are not one-size-fits-all. States have come up with a myriad of solutions based on…

1. **The problems they intend to solve for**
2. **Underlying beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning** *(Including how and when students should acquire, retain and demonstrate knowledge)*
3. **Individual state contexts** *(local control of curriculum, adoption of HQIM)*



In this publication, we studied a range of through-year approaches and will share what we've learned about the considerations and trade-offs.

The field is nascent in understanding the degree to which different approaches may solve for different problems and more research is needed to demonstrate impact

There is currently limited data on the impact of different approaches on student outcomes or educator experience with implementation.

For example:

- **To what extent might curriculum-aligned through-year assessments reduce inequity caused by disparities in background knowledge?**
- **How does a scope and sequence aligned or curriculum-relevant model provide flexibility for teachers and support students based on the science of learning and development? What might be different in ELA compared to math?**

In addition to looking across the 8 states in this publication, we take a deep dive into three assessment developers' and their state and district partners' through-year model designs

Developer	Partner	Model
NWEA	Louisiana	**CrawFish Model**: curriculum-relevant, through-year assessments for ELA that can work with two HQIM (Guidebooks and Wit & Wisdom)
New Meridian	Louisiana, Montana*	**MasteryGuide Assessments**: curriculum-relevant, through-year ELA and math testlet designs
CenterPoint	Two urban districts	**Illustrative Mathematics (IM)-Aligned Interims**: curriculum-aligned, through-year math assessments aligned to the Illustrative Mathematics scope and sequence

*Montana refers to this as MAST

States and developers we interviewed are grappling with both their aspirations for through-year assessments and scaling the model

1

Our partner states and assessment developers are making a bet that if you test throughout the year, align those tests to what is taught and provide timely reporting–student learning and outcomes will improve.

Research supports the claim that providing timely feedback, making course corrections and increasing the coherence between instruction, curriculum and assessment bolsters student learning.

2

State leaders identified three key enabling conditions critical for any state considering a transition to a through-year assessment:

Strong partnerships and external support

Coherent and expert internal capacity

Diligent planning and communication

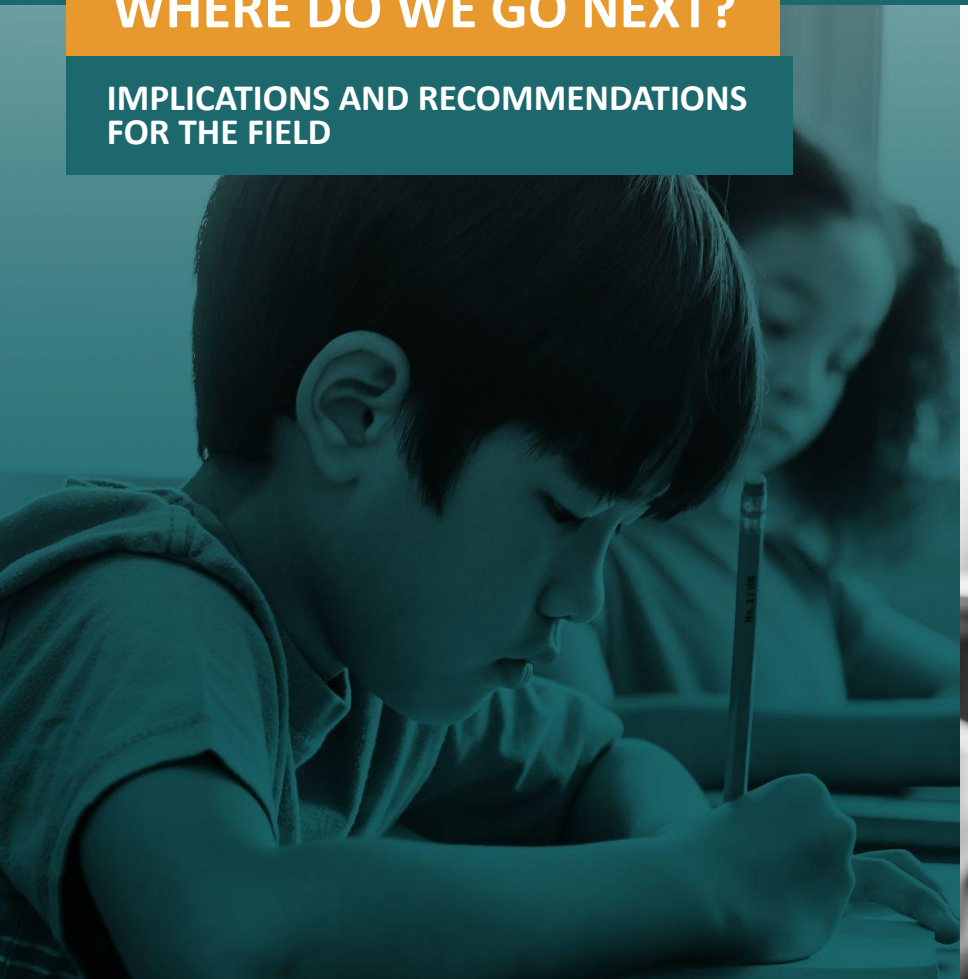
3

States are confronted with the ways current assessment systems, behaviors and incentives are oriented to support traditional end-of-year summative assessment models.

A transition to through-year models would require fundamental shifts to build buy-in, supportive infrastructure and ensure implementation fidelity.

WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD



There is a compelling evidence base that supports connecting what is taught to what is tested

Research supports the hypothesis: **Through-year assessments that connect more closely to what students are taught have the potential to improve student learning.**

*This includes through-year models that are directly aligned with a specific curriculum (**curriculum-aligned**) or that can be flexibly aligned with multiple curricula, a scope and sequence or pacing of learning (**curriculum-relevant**).*

These models have the **potential to solve for concerns with summative assessment** related to:

- utility for instruction
- disparity in background knowledge
- incoherence between assessment, curriculum and instruction.

There are tensions and trade-offs with different approaches, but through-year assessments have the potential to *reduce* overall testing

While the assessments **may require more time over the course of the year**…

…it may provide an opportunity for local education agencies to **limit or supplant their interim, benchmark and diagnostic assessment systems** and reduce overall testing during the year…

…while also **providing more timely and useful data** back to educators.

States and assessment developers, like the work of **NWEA and New Meridian in Louisiana and Montana**, are piloting this approach.

State leaders shared recommendations for others considering piloting through-year assessments

Start with and communicate with your stakeholders

Consider **assessment developer capacity and alignment**

Make sure you **fully understand what through-year assessment models entail**

Be clear on your **theory of action and goals**

Ensure you have **buy-in from relevant stakeholders**

Create a coalition

The Center for Assessment outlines Ten Key Considerations for states considering through-year assessment

Check out Education First's Through-Year Assessment Toolkit to explore tools and resources to navigate the change

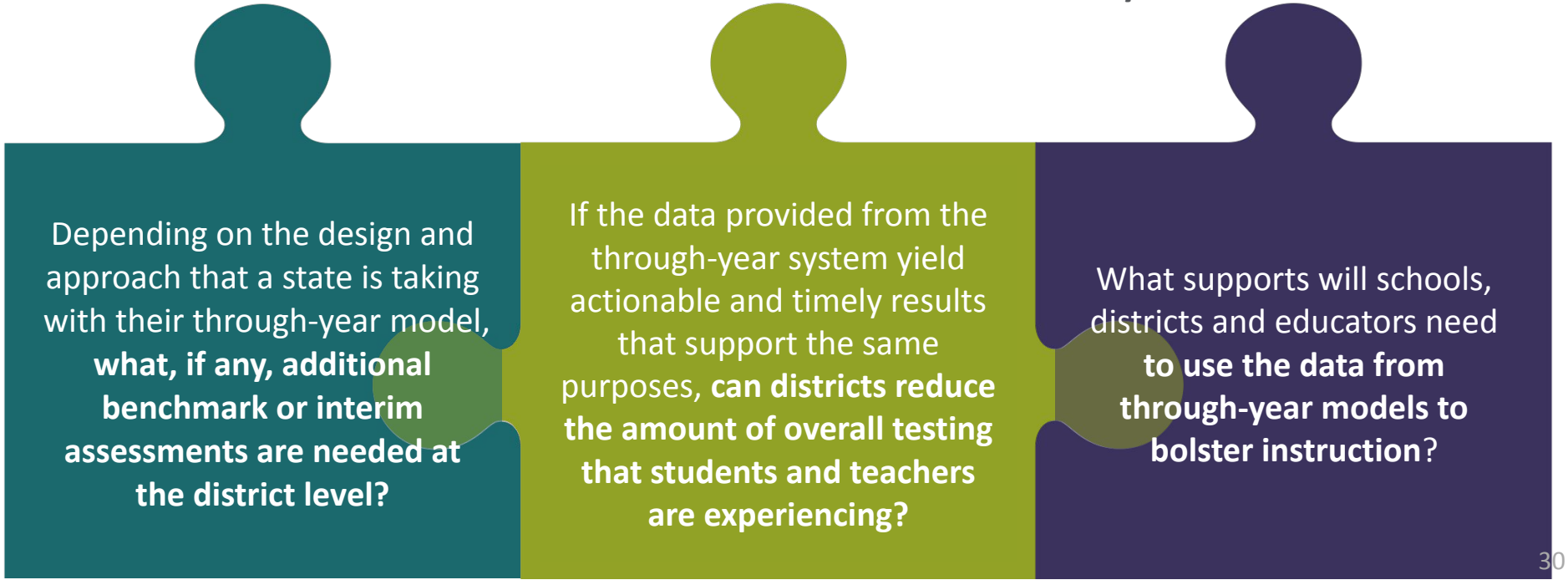
Words of wisdom from a state leader on starting on a path towards through-year assessments…

"Is the purpose you have identified and the use you've identified—is it worth getting there? Are you creating purpose that actually brings value to the experiences of teachers and students?... Make sure you have listened to the folks that count, the ones who will have to live with this system."

Director of Statewide Assessment, Nebraska

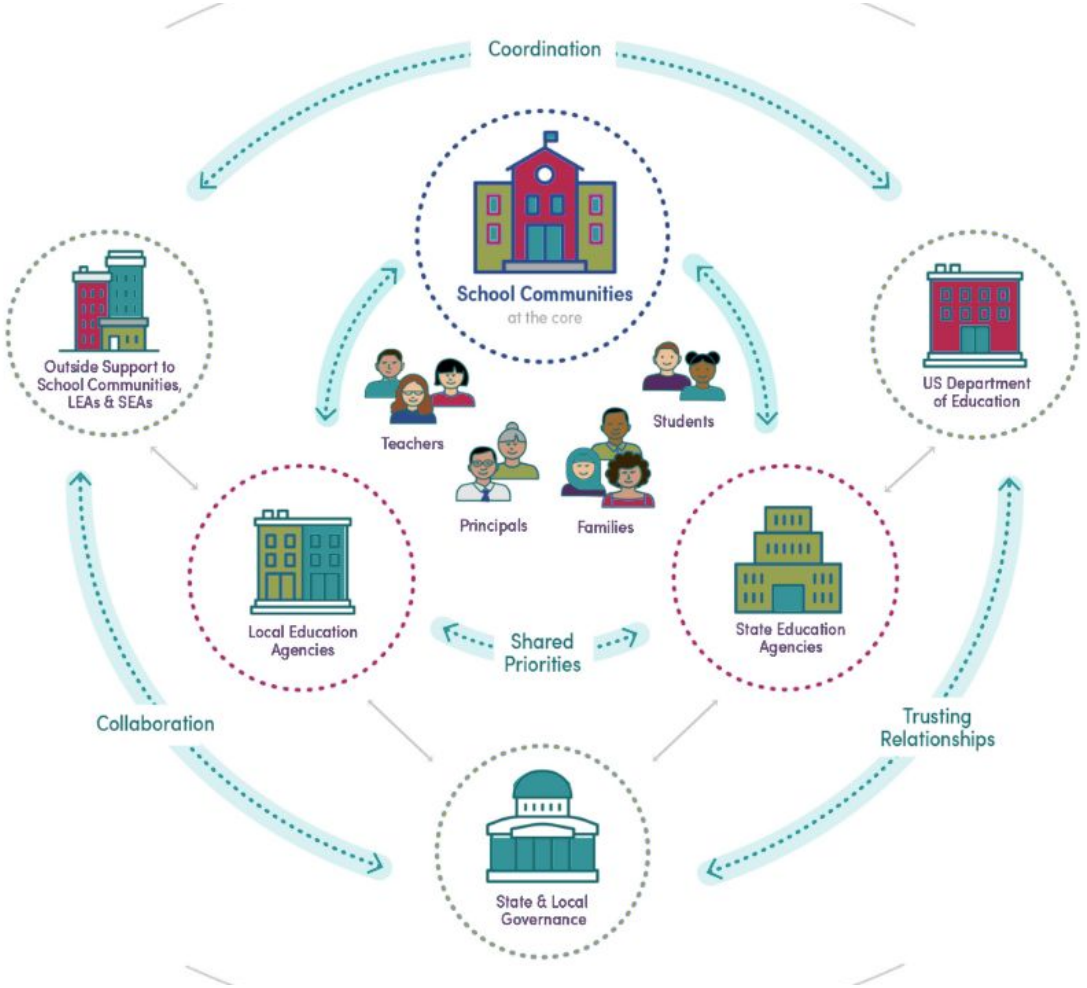
As through-year models scale and integrate into accountability systems, we recommend states and districts consider reducing duplicative testing and aligning intended purposes with the tests used

States, their partners and districts must consider the ways that a through-year summative system should be situated within a balanced assessment system.



States and their partners must also focus on **clear, coherent and systematic implementation** in a way that **builds and deepens buy-in of stakeholders.**

Iterating on the **test design, utility, reporting and information with key stakeholders** including teachers, parents and students can **ensure buy-in through the change process.**



Overall, the field still has a lot to learn about the impact of and process of designing and implementing through-year assessments

It is too early to tell the degree to which each model or approach will improve student outcomes. **Each state needs to define the problems they are solving for and develop the model that best meets their local contexts**.

For states interested in:

- Testing what students are taught closer to the point of instruction
- Providing timely results that support teachers to use the data from the tests to inform instruction
- Creating balance within an assessment system and reducing the overall footprint of testing over the course of the year

The research and lessons learned from states described in this report support aligning through-year assessments to curriculum and/or scope and sequence.

No state has yet undergone federal peer review to operationalize their through-year assessment system

In partnership with Foresight Law & Policy, we conducted research to **explore how the peer review process is set up to accommodate innovations in assessment.**

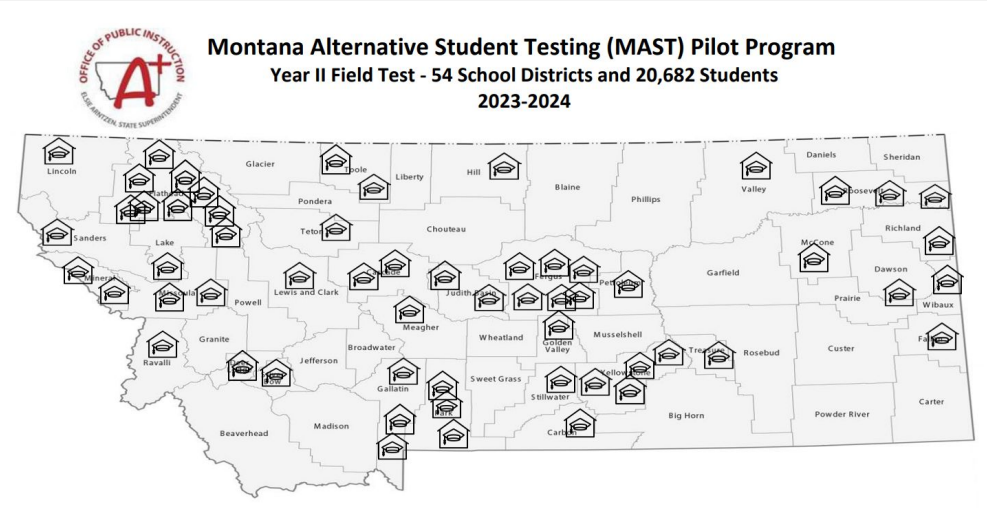
- Our findings indicate that **there are opportunities for state leaders to pursue more innovative approaches within the current requirements**, but **ambiguities in these requirements undermine confidence** that innovative approaches will pass peer review.
- The Peer Review Guide **does not address the multiple assessments approach** allowed by ESEA, nor provide examples of evidence for such an approach.

We submitted five recommendations to USED to better position peer review for innovative assessments

1. Elevate and clearly signal the path states can take for innovative approaches by communicating what is possible under currently law
2. Update the Guide, including updating or changing the examples of evidence and clarifying ambiguities
3. Increase opportunities for engagement between Department staff and state leaders
4. Recruit, select and assign peer reviewers who are experts on proposed innovative assessment systems
5. Integrate tutorials on innovative assessment systems into current training process

However, Montana submitted and were approved for a Field-Testing Flexibility Waiver from the U.S. Department of Education

- Montana's OPI submitted the waiver in May 2023 and was approved in August 2023
- **The waiver ensures that students, teachers and district leaders participating in the Montana Alternative Student Testing Pilot Program (MAST) are not overburdened with double testing** during the 2023 - 2024 school year
- Montana received public support from a number of education-based advocacy groups



- The Department approved Montana's waiver because of how the through-year assessment is **"expressly designed to provide educators with more frequent and timely feedback on their instruction"** and they **"determined that this waiver will advance student academic achievement."**

Read the full letter from the Department of Education here

We suggest additional research and future efforts focus on the following key questions

- What types of professional learning would support educators in using the data from through-year assessments to drive instruction?
- What behaviors might be incentivized as a result of the shift to incorporating accountability into testing throughout the year?
- What changes in the federal peer review process, guidance and examples of evidence can support states transitioning to through-year assessments?
- What types of supports will families, students and policymakers need to understand, interpret and use new types of data and reports throughout the year?

Ed First plans to continue partnering with states implementing through-year assessments and supporting policy changes needed

In our next phase of work, we plan to:

- Facilitate a community of practice of states implementing through-year assessment models
- Deepen understanding of trade-offs, tensions and promises of new summative models
- Host a convening for state leaders, assessment developers and experts in the field on through-year assessments
- Continue sharing our learnings and thought leadership with the field

APPENDIX

Acknowledgements

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- **Elizabeth Gilbert**, **Jim Mirabelli**, **Laura Slover** and **Melissa Peplinski,** CenterPoint Education
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