
Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems:

A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency
in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS: A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ROLE OF THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY IN IMPROVING QUALITY AND REDUCING BURDEN

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OVERVIEW: ASSESSING OUR ASSESSMENTS

States across the country have been moving to more rigorous learning standards aimed at ensuring all students are prepared for college and careers. Our expectations for students are higher than ever before and our understanding of what they need to know and be able to do has evolved to meet the demands of today's economic realities. With this shift comes a change in the way we evaluate if our students are meeting those expectations. Given these transitions, the moment is right for state leaders to take stock of the full scope of assessments that are administered in their states and make decisions about how those assessments work together as a coherent and comprehensive system. This evaluation is critical to ensure that we are deliberate about the amount of time students and educators spend on assessments each year and about the vital role of assessments in improving teaching and learning.

High-quality assessments are effective tools that students, parents, and educators can use to understand and measure student progress in a meaningful way. Without assessments given at least once a year, educational leaders would not have the information they need to know about which students are learning and which students are falling behind. We use tests – at the classroom, school, district and state levels – to make critical decisions about instruction, interventions and support, advanced educational opportunities, and policies. A comprehensive system of high-quality assessments should be an efficient system, which produces the necessary information with the least amount of assessment. And state leaders have a critical role to play (working with their districts) in framing and leading efforts to improve assessment quality and reduce unnecessary burden.

In October 2014, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) released a joint set of [commitments](#) to support state and districts leaders in ensuring that their students take high-quality and thoughtfully selected assessments as part of a comprehensive system. CCSSO and CGCS set forth the following principles as a guide:

- ✓ **Assessments should be high-quality.** We cannot waste student or teacher time with low-quality tests. Assessments must be aligned with college- and career-ready standards. Assessments must measure students' abilities to think critically, synthesize material from multiple sources, analyze problems, and explain and justify responses.
- ✓ **Assessments should be part of a coherent system.** Assessments should complement each other and adhere to a system of connected metrics. Assessments should only be administered in necessary instances. Multiple assessments of the same students that measure similar outcomes should be minimized or eliminated.
- ✓ **Assessments should be meaningful.** Assessments are critical to improving instructional practice in the classroom and helping parents make decisions. Therefore, the results of assessments should be timely, transparent, disaggregated, and easily accessible to students, parents, teachers and the public so they can interpret and analyze results, as needed.

Operationalizing these principles is a challenge for state and district leaders and that is what this Framework is intended to support.

Key Action Steps

Define the goal and determine the state's role:

Start by stating a clear purpose for evaluating assessments.

Get the facts: Gather data to better understand the assessment landscape in your state.

Involve the community: Engage all stakeholders in meaningful two-way conversations about assessments at the state and local level.

Move from data collection to evaluation: Consider assessment quality, quantity, time and purpose before making decisions about keeping, changing, or eliminating tests.

Make recommendations and implement them: Based on your data and stakeholder feedback, develop clear recommendations for an efficient and effective comprehensive assessment system in your state and continue to work with stakeholders to implement them.

Communicate early and often: Be transparent throughout the process you set up and clearly communicate decisions to stakeholders. Develop ongoing communications to make sure all teachers, parents, and other stakeholders stay informed as they enter the public education system in your state.

Define your goal and determine the state's role

The state's role depends on the approach that best enables each state to achieve its goals. Each State Education Agency (SEA) will need to determine its role for advancing an efficient and effective system of high-quality assessments.

The purpose of this Framework is to support states who want to take action on this issue and learn from those who already have taken action. The Framework presents different approaches states can take and key considerations with which all states will likely grapple. Appendix A has specific examples from states that have taken action on this issue already. The strategy that works well for one state may not work well for another. Regardless of the approach, the goal is to ensure that all students in the state are taking high-quality assessments that are part of an efficient and effective assessment system and improve student achievement.

Each SEA should start by defining goals for its assessment system. A primary focus of the effort may be on reducing the amount of time spent taking assessments, reducing the number or frequency of assessments, reviewing the quality of assessments students are taking, or a combination of these. In any case, the SEA is in a unique and important position to help frame efforts in the most positive and productive manner – to help establish (now and over time) high-quality systems of assessment that can best advance

teaching and learning toward college and career ready outcomes for all students. For example, the Ohio Education Department clearly articulated that in analyzing its assessment system, the state sought to strike a balance between testing time and student learning time. In Connecticut, the goal was to support local districts in evaluating and eliminating tests that were outdated and did not contribute to student learning, increasing time for teaching, and to improve the quality of student assessments already in use.

To help frame the conversation, states should consider several key questions to guide efforts at all levels. For example: (1) What are the key elements of a high-quality system of assessments that

can best and most efficiently advance college and career ready teaching and learning? (2) What current assessments are being administered at all levels and which, if any, can be eliminated or reduced because they are low-quality, duplicative, and/or do not serve a core purpose as part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of assessments? And ultimately, (3) what can and should be done to enhance the system of assessments to improve quality and build a more comprehensive system that can best measure the full range of knowledge and skills, improve teaching, and advance growth of all students toward college and career ready outcomes? Having a shared vision for the work will help to inform every step of the process including what data is collected, how assessments are analyzed, and how decisions are made.

The role the SEA plays in this process will depend on the overall goal of the process. If the goal is to change state policy or improve the state assessment system, then SEA will have the primary leadership role. Establishing a state task force can be a valuable way to engage stakeholders and create increased ownership for the process and results. The responsibility of a task force can range from an assessment review process, to reviewing results, to providing feedback during the analysis. State leaders have taken different approaches to establishing a task force as part of this process. For example:

- **Tennessee.** Education Commissioner Candice McQueen formed a special Tennessee Task Force on Student Testing and Assessment to study and identify best practices in testing at the school level and how those assessments align with required state tests.
- **Colorado.** The Colorado legislature mandated a task force charged with studying the implications of Colorado’s State and local assessment system for school districts, public schools, charter schools, educators and students and making recommendations for streamlining the system where appropriate. The Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force’s recommendations focused on high school and statewide tests.
- **Florida.** At the request of Governor Rick Scott, Commissioner Pam Stewart formed a committee to review standardized testing in Florida schools.

If the goal is to support school districts in evaluating their assessments then the SEA role will be more of a support and catalyst role which might be accomplished by supporting collaboration among districts, supporting regional service centers in partnering with districts, providing or developing resources (e.g., assessment literacy resources, templates for conducting the process), providing funds to support the process, or a combination of these. Some examples of how an SEA has supported a district-led process include:

- Providing relevant resources.
 - Achieve has created a process for supporting district leadership on this issue. The [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#) assists district leaders in completing a comprehensive review process of their assessment systems at a local level. Several states and districts have already utilized this tool and have adapted it to fit the specific needs of their assessment system.

- o The Illinois State Board of Education has developed a balanced assessment initiative that supports assessment literacy and the streamlining of local assessment systems. ISBE has adapted Achieve’s Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts and developed [additional balanced assessment resources](#) to support districts engaging in this initiative.
- Providing data about statewide assessments and intended use.
 - o The Ohio Department of Education [surveyed districts and collected data](#) on the Ohio testing landscape.
- Providing financial support.
 - o The Connecticut State Department of Education issued an [assessment reduction grant](#) which would provide local education agencies with funds to implement assessment inventory reviews.

The SEA role, whether a state-led process or a district-led, state-supported process, will be clear once the goal of the process is defined.

Creating a transparent process

Engaging key stakeholders is essential throughout the process. Transparency in communication is important to building trust. To that end, states should consider how they will communicate to all stakeholders consistently throughout the analysis process. Considerations for developing a communications plan:

- **Share your goal:** Be specific and transparent about what you are working to accomplish.
- **Identify your audience:** Clearly identify your key stakeholders. These might include teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, or other special interest groups. As you identify your audience, try to be as specific as possible. For example, it is best to say “parents of school-age children in our state” rather than “the general public.”
- **Agree on key message(s):** Throughout the process, agree on key messages you will use when discussing the work. These messages may differ by audience. Agreeing on key messages does not necessarily mean agreeing on specific positions or results; instead, it helps the group communicate more effectively to explain the goal you have set and the progress being made.
- **Determine the best tactics or strategies:** After you identify your audience(s), determine how you will reach the various stakeholders at different points throughout the process (e.g., email, press releases, newsletters, public forums, social media, etc.). Each point of contact should be tailored by audience and employ multiple avenues of communicating to that specific group. For example, one email or one press release is not sufficient for reaching parents of school-age children. Instead, you may need to reach out to members of the media, the state PTA, and social media. Keep in mind that you should continue to be transparent and communicate with your audiences and key stakeholders throughout the entire process, not just the beginning or the end.

- **Be clear about their role:** Different groups of stakeholders will be involved in different ways throughout the process. Be clear about how you will engage with stakeholders upfront, including when you will solicit feedback and how you plan to address that feedback.
- **Measure the results:** Measure the effectiveness of your communications throughout the process to make sure you are reaching the audiences you need to reach. Measurement tactics include focus groups, pre-surveys and post-surveys, and social media measurement tools. If you find that one communications tool is not working well, you may need to divert resources elsewhere.

It is important to be proactive and plan for communications with a goal of providing transparency. Engaging stakeholders is discussed in more detail in the *Involving the Community* section below.

GET THE FACTS: DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING THE ASSESSMENT LANDSCAPE IN YOUR STATE

In order to make informed decisions about a state’s assessment system, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the assessments administered. Because decisions about assessments are made by a variety of people, it is no small undertaking to gain a comprehensive understanding of what assessments are given, what the purpose of each assessment is, which students are assessed, how long each assessment takes, and how information from those assessments is used. There are many ways a state could conduct this review.

Determining who will collect the data and how

The SEA

In collaboration with district leaders, the SEA can work with districts to identify the best process for collecting and analyzing information. For example, in Ohio, the SEA developed a comprehensive survey of assessments statewide (please see Appendix B for an example). An SEA could also work with an outside vendor, university, or other partner to complete a study of the state’s assessment system.

A Task Force

A Task Force might be the best option for your state. This approach is helpful for states that face capacity challenges or where state boards or state legislatures have asked for a review. In Colorado, for example, the Standards and Assessments Task Force played an active role by releasing a Request for Proposal and selecting a third party vendor to support this work.

Data Collection Process

Florida: The Florida Department of Education developed a survey for districts to record the district-level assessments, why students take the test, how much time is given for the test and more.

Colorado: The Colorado Department of Education formed the Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force. This Task Force worked with Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (APA) on completing a study of their assessment system.

School Districts

In some states it may be more effective for district leaders across the state to lead the data collection process. [Achieve](#) has been working closely with districts across the country to develop a comprehensive process for district-led reviews. A central tool in that process is the [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#). This tool supports a process by which districts evaluate the assessments students are taking, to determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional and accountability purposes, and work to ensure that every district-mandated test is high-quality, provides the information needed for specific school and district purposes, and is supported by structures and routines so that assessment results actionable and used to help students.

The SEA can support districts leading this effort by providing information to the district leaders and facilitating collaboration across districts.

Other Partners

Universities or regional education service centers can support districts in this process. Working regionally may encourage collaboration among school districts and provide support for districts that may have limited capacity to conduct a comprehensive review. For example, the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio is working with four suburban and rural districts as they use Achieve's [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#) to take stock of their assessments and build towards actionable recommendations. The Educational Service Center convenes district leaders, shares knowledge across participating districts, and serves as a critical thought partner throughout the process.

Defining what data to collect

In order to make thoughtful decisions about assessment administration, it is useful to have detailed information about each assessment such as:

- Grade and course/subject assessed
- Students who are eligible or required to take the assessment
- Type of assessment (diagnostic, formative, interim, benchmark, or summative)
- Item type(s) (e.g., multiple-choice, multiple-response, constructed response, open-ended)
- Mode of administration (e.g., paper and pencil, computer based)
- Test administration time
- Testing window
- Test frequency
- Number of years assessment has been administered
- Intended purpose of the assessment (e.g., measure overall mastery of 3rd grade English language arts standards)
- Current use of the assessment (e.g., program evaluation, student promotion, academic growth, instructional planning, accountability)

Defining an "Assessment"

Defining what constitutes an "assessment" is an important first step. There may not be one right answer but in order to consistently collect information, the SEA should set the parameters for what the review covers.

In North Carolina, the SEA categorized testing into three different types of assessments: Statewide assessments, interim/benchmark assessments, and classroom assessments.

- Users of the assessment data (e.g., 3rd grade teachers, English as a Second Language program coordinators)
- Time between test administration and results to users
- Time spent preparing for the assessment (e.g., time spent taking practice tests and learning or practicing test taking skills)

Key information to collect about the assessments in your state

1. **Include all known district and state-level assessments.** Assessment systems have many different components. Most assessments can be categorized as teacher or classroom assessments, district assessments for district requirements, district assessments for state requirements, or state assessments. For the purpose of a state-led review, states will likely focus on district and state-level assessments. States can develop a survey that lists all the known assessments at the district and state-level and provide districts and schools the opportunity to list additional assessments.
2. **Define the purpose of each assessment.** Assessments serve different purposes, and these should be identified to determine if assessments serve similar purposes. Teacher assessments drive daily instruction and provide teachers with immediate feedback on student progress. State assessments are administered for a number of intended uses, including adhering to state and federal accountability systems, providing data about the performance of different subgroups of students to help to ensure equity, and providing information about whether students meet grade level expectations overall. Other assessments may provide interim benchmarks or serve as college admissions exams.
3. **Collect data on the number of hours spent preparing for an assessment.** One of the many reasons for developing a high-quality assessment system is to maximize instructional time not devoted to assessment preparation. Along with administering assessments, teachers have to spend time teaching test skills and administering practice assessments which take away from valuable learning that should take place in the classroom. States should provide a clear definition of what constitutes test prep, and understand the amount of instructional time being devoted to test prep so they can take the most effective next steps.

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY: ENGAGE IN MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, TESTING COORDINATORS AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Decisions about which assessments are administered, what these assessments look like and the use of assessment data come from state and district leaders, as well as classroom teachers. Creating a coherent system of assessments will therefore require the engagement of a range of stakeholders.

To complete a full analysis of an assessment system, SEA leaders should gather consistent feedback from

Stakeholder Feedback

In Colorado, the Task Force received stakeholder feedback through email, participation in public hearings, and attendance at Task Force meetings. The Task Force received over 500 comments by email, over 600 people participated in public hearings, and Task Force meetings consistently had between 15 and 50 public stakeholders.

stakeholders. A state can engage in direct conversations (e.g., interviews, focus groups) with stakeholders, provide stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback through email or public hearings, or take a combination of approaches.

Example Stakeholder Representation Table

	Elementary	Middle	High	Students with Disabilities	English Language Learners
Teachers					
School Administrators					
District Administrators					
Parents					
Community Members					

Stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, students, parents, etc. should be included. However, consideration should be also be given to important subcategories or unique stakeholders such as early-career teachers, veteran teachers, teachers of English language learners, elementary parents, high school parents, middle school parents, parents

of students with disabilities, school administrators, district administrators, teachers, or community advocacy groups. Because a stakeholder might represent more than one category, a table or matrix can be useful to ensure representation of all important stakeholders.

Key items to address in stakeholder conversations

1. **Determine the use or value of an assessment.** While every assessment has a purpose, they are not always used in the right way. Conversations with teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents, and other stakeholders will give states more information on the use and value of an assessment.
2. **Gather information on issues that arise from testing besides testing time.** For example, taking an assessment can impact both a student taking the test, as well as students not taking the test. A teacher may be assessing a small group of students but the whole class may be losing instructional time. Similarly, administering an assessment on computers may prevent those same computers from being used to provide intervention to students who need it. By receiving input from teachers and principals as well as other stakeholders, states can learn if there are additional unintended consequences due to testing.

MOVE FROM DATA COLLECTION TO EVALUATION: CONSIDERING QUALITY, QUANTITY, TIME AND PURPOSE

The purpose of collecting data is to analyze the information gathered and develop recommendations on how to ensure an efficient and effective comprehensive assessment system to best drive student performance.

Analyzing the data

States will need to examine the purpose of each assessment, the amount of time spent taking assessments, and the input that provides additional information on the impact of assessments. This analysis can be done by the SEA, by a task force, or by a third-party partner. The underlying goal is to determine which assessments provide meaningful information. Assessments should be considered both independently and as part of a comprehensive system. Results of the analysis can vary: a district that administers two high-quality assessments that serve the same purpose might consider eliminating one. Likewise, a district that administers a low-quality assessment that serves a particular purpose could consider eliminating it and replacing it with a higher-quality assessment.

Key items to address in the analysis

1. **Quality of the assessments.** Simply reducing the amount of time students spend on assessments is not sufficient; education leaders are also working to ensure that all assessments are high-quality. If an assessment is not high-quality, students should not spend time taking it.

Evaluating the quality of assessments includes evaluating its reliability, validity, alignment, and accessibility, especially for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs). Each state will determine its process and criteria for this evaluation.

To support states in establishing or adopting high-quality systems of assessments, CCSSO has released [High-Quality Assessment Principles](#) and [Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments](#). These resources focus on English Language Arts and mathematics and highlight that high-quality assessments should:

- Align to college- and career-ready standards

Testing Time

Ohio was able to determine that the average student spent 19.8 hours completing assessments which is about 1-3% of the average school year depending on grade. Students in 3rd and 10th grade spent the most time taking assessments in a school year at 28 hours and 28.4 hours respectively. Ohio also found that students spent 15 hours preparing for assessments which is roughly 1.4% of an average school year. This information helped to inform where they may be able to reduce testing time.

Quality vs. Cost

With assessments moving beyond simple multiple choice questions to gain a more sophisticated understanding of student learning, there are concerns about additional costs. States cannot compromise on the quality of tests to save money. Overall, the cost per student is not significantly greater for high-quality assessments, and in some cases may be less expensive. States can also explore creative ways to cut down on costs, by collaborating with other states on assessment development or item sharing.

- Yield valuable reports on student progress by focusing on progress to readiness and providing timely data that informs instruction
- Adhere to best practices in test administration by maintaining necessary standardization and ensuring test security.
- Provide accessibility to all students by following the principles of universal design, offering appropriate accommodations and modifications, and ensuring transparency of test design and expectations.

The [Criteria for High-Quality Assessment](#) (2013) published by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education also provide guidance for any assessment that is designed to promote deeper learning of 21st century skills.

For states that are implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), there are specific references within the Criteria for Procuring and Evaluation High-Quality Assessments that address the expectations of these standards. In addition, resources have been developed to help educators to determine whether or not assessments are aligned to the key instructional shifts and major features of the CCSS. A set of comprehensive assessment evaluation tools are available at www.achievethecore.org.

2. **Determine the overall quantity of assessments.** SEA staff should have a complete picture of the state assessment landscape including differences in the number of assessments administered at different grade levels and in different subjects.
3. **Determine the amount of time spent on testing in a school year.** States can use the data to determine the average amount of time spent testing at each grade level as well as the overall average time. This information can then be used to determine what percent of a student's school year is spent completing assessments. States may also want to take into account the amount of time spent preparing students for assessments since this time also impacts instructional time.
4. **Identify the purpose and impact of each assessment.** By examining the information gathered from a survey as well as other stakeholder input such as interviews or focus groups, states can identify assessments that are low-quality or redundant. For example, a school district might be administering an assessment for universal screening of reading skills and another assessment to measure growth in reading and language arts. It might be possible that one or other of these assessments could serve both purposes. Another example might be a school is administering an assessment for diagnostic purposes but the district also administers an assessment which provides diagnostic, instructional planning, and program evaluation information.
5. **Consider feedback from stakeholders that provide additional insight on assessments.** States should also consider how to account for other issues that may arise during the review process. The main focus of a survey and stakeholder conversation is to determine the quality and quantity of assessment but there may be other areas that need to be addressed. For example, there may be discussions about whether there are grades where keyboarding assessments are seen as problematic or assessments on which students should not use calculators. States can identify these issues and then develop solutions to enhance the quality of their assessment system.

DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AND IMPLEMENT THEM

With completion of data collection and evaluation of the information, states will be ready to make recommendations on how to modify its assessment system. States may identify grades where testing time needs to be limited, identify assessments that qualify for elimination, identify a need for a high-quality assessment, or modify accountability systems to account for changes in assessments. A state can either identify state education agency staff that has the experience to develop recommendations, similar to Ohio's process, or a state could organize a Task Force, similar to Colorado's process. The state context will determine the best approach for developing recommendations.

Key items to address when developing recommendations

1. **Consider how assessments create a coherent, comprehensive assessment system.** "Coherent systems must be composed of valid measures of learning and be horizontally, developmentally, and vertically aligned to serve classroom, school, and district improvement" (Herman, 2010). This statement speaks to both quality and design. An effective assessment system does not happen by accident. A system is designed to be logical and organized. Considerations for designing an effective system include:
 - Does the system of assessments provide the necessary information to users at all levels with a minimum of assessment?
 - Is the balance of assessments administered and information provided what it should be?
 - How much assessment should be devoted to providing feedback for accountability purposes vs. program evaluation purposes vs. instructional or diagnostic purposes?

Recommendations should lead to a coherent, comprehensive system of assessment that addresses these questions.

2. **Consider whether assessments might be modified.** Once states clarify the intended purpose and use of each assessment as part of a coherent and comprehensive assessment system, they should evaluate whether any assessments can or should be modified. Some examples of when an assessment might be modified include:
 - An assessment intended only for providing accountability information might be shortened in length if sufficient information is provided by another assessment.
 - An assessment that is administered four times a year to evaluate growth might be administered three times a year once it is clear that three administrations provide sufficient feedback for program evaluation and adjustment.
 - A low-quality assessment that has an important purpose could be modified to increase the quality.
 - An assessment that is administered for program evaluation might be administered to one grade level instead of several grade levels or to a sample of students rather than all students.

3. **Consider elimination of assessments that are not meaningful or are redundant.** States should consider the following questions:

- Are there assessments that are not high-quality or that provide basically the same information as another assessment?
- Is each assessment providing value as part of efficient and effective comprehensive system of assessment?

Elimination of Assessments

Florida: Commissioner Pam Stewart identified the grade 11 Florida State Assessment for ELA for elimination. In April 2015, a bill was passed that eliminated this assessment.

Assessments that are not supporting an overall high-quality, comprehensive system might be eliminated. When trying to make a decision between two high-quality assessments that are redundant, consider other factors, such as the cost benefit of each assessment. While overall cost or cost per student should certainly be considered, there are other, less visible costs such as administrative and opportunity costs that should be considered. Administrative costs include the personnel (e.g., district, principals, teachers, etc.) and resources (e.g., paper, technology) required to manage, administer, implement, and access and use the results of the assessment. Opportunity cost is the benefit, value, or resources that must be forgone in order to implement an assessment. For example, it may take more personnel to administer one assessment vs. another. Or the opportunity cost of using an assessment may be that the technology needed for the assessment is not available to students who need interventions that require the same technology.

4. **Consider whether to limit the overall time students spend taking and practicing for assessments.** Following the comprehensive review of an assessment system, states will be able to evaluate their assessment systems as a whole and determine if it makes sense to limit the amount of time students take assessments. As an example, Ohio placed a 2 percent limit on the amount of time students can spend taking tests, and limited the amount of time spent practicing assessments to 1 percent. The decision to limit time based on a percentage was because the number and length of tests vary by grade level. A Florida law requires that no more than 5 percent of students' total school hours can be spent taking standardized assessments and district-required local assessments.
5. **Consider how any changes to the assessment system impact accountability systems or educator evaluation systems.** Certain assessments are administered to fulfill a requirement in an accountability system or to evaluate the performance of teachers or principals. States may need to modify accountability systems and educator evaluation systems based on the recommendations developed to guarantee all federal and state requirements are still being fulfilled.

Implementation of the recommendations will depend on who has the authority to change the assessment requirements. If the process for reaching these recommendations has been inclusive, implementation of the recommendations will likely be easier to achieve.

Reporting back: communicating with stakeholders about changes you are making and how their feedback influenced those changes

Once decisions have been made about what changes to make to the state’s system of assessment, it is important to establish a comprehensive stakeholder communications strategy to share that information. Specifically, states should let people know how their input informed the SEA or district decision-making process. Stakeholders should understand their role in the process and feel ownership of the results.

COMPLETING THE SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENTS PUZZLE: SUPPORTING USE OF ASSESSMENT DATA

Developing a coherent and comprehensive statewide system of high-quality assessments is a critical part of the overall educational process. It is equally important to support educators and other stakeholders in understanding the purpose of an assessment and how data from different assessments can be used, and prepare them to make thoughtful decisions about how each assessment fits into a comprehensive system. Communicating this information to everyone in the educational process is critical. As mentioned in the Engaging Stakeholders section above, planning for multiple means of communicating to each stakeholder group is essential.

SEA leaders can also reach out to their legislators to help them understand the purpose of different types of assessments, how data from assessments is used, and how new assessments get added. Keeping them informed will help when it is time to make key decisions about test reduction.

In addition to communicating key information about the assessment system frequently and in multiple ways, states should consider additional supports they can provide to further efficient and effective use of the assessment system. In Illinois, for example, the Illinois State Board of Education has developed a range of [resources](#) for educators, including assessment literacy training modules and guiding principles for classroom assessments. States might also collaborate with teacher and leader preparation programs to ensure people entering these roles have the necessary knowledge and understanding of the statewide assessment system.

CONCLUSION

Assessments serve an important and necessary purpose in our education system. Evaluating our state assessment systems is an essential and worthwhile task. It is important to consider the number and quality of assessments, the purpose of those assessments, and how they work together as a coherent and comprehensive system. These issues should be considered at the state, district, school, and teacher level to help ensure coherence across the system.

There are several key action steps in evaluating an assessment system addressed by this Framework.

Define the goal and determine the state's role: Start by stating a clear purpose for evaluating assessments. Is the goal to develop a more efficient and effective state assessment system? To gather information about best practices of school districts? To support school districts in conducting an evaluation of their district and school level assessments?

Get the facts: Start by gathering data to better understand the assessment landscape in your state. Collect basic information about assessment such as the grade/subject, assessment type, purpose, testing time, and time preparing for the assessment.

Involve the community: Engage all stakeholders in meaningful two-way conversations about assessments at the state and local level. Use interviews, focus groups, and public forums to get feedback on the value and use of assessments and about unintended consequences of an assessment.

Move from data collection to evaluation: Consider assessment quality, quantity, time and purpose before making decisions about keeping, changing, or eliminating tests. Consulting with assessment experts can be very helpful in making these evaluations.

Make recommendations and implement them: Based on your data and stakeholder feedback, develop clear recommendations for an efficient and effective comprehensive assessment system in your state and continue to work with stakeholders to implement them.

Communicate early and often: Throughout this Framework, there is an emphasis on communicating about this work. Be transparent throughout the process you set up and clearly communicate decisions to stakeholders. Develop ongoing communications to make sure all teachers, parents, and other stakeholders stay informed as they enter the public education system in your state.

Completing a review of the statewide assessment system as described in this document will support states in implementing a coherent and comprehensive high-quality assessment system. Given the continuous evolution in the education landscape, this type of statewide review should occur on a regular basis to ensure assessment systems remain useful, coherent, comprehensive, and high-quality.

APPENDIX A

States Taking Action towards High Quality Assessment Systems

The Colorado legislature mandated a Task Force charged with studying the implications of Colorado's State and local assessment system for school districts, public schools, charter schools, educators and students and making recommendations for streamlining the system where appropriate. The Task Force focused on high school, statewide tests. The Task Force released on January 28, 2015 [The Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force \(HB14-1202\) Report of Findings and Recommendations](#).

In September 2014, Governor Malloy [announced](#) the convening of the High School Assessment work group that would explore ways to reduce the testing burden for 11th graders. The work group has submitted an interim recommendation to the State Board of Education. Connecticut is also providing [Assessment Reduction Grants](#) to districts for technical assistance to reduce testing. On February 23, 2015 the state [announced](#) the winning districts and these districts must complete an assessment inventory by June 30, 2015.

In Delaware, Governor Markell launched a review of tests administered by the state, districts, and individual schools with the goal of decreasing the testing burden on students and teachers and increasing instructional time. Delaware is providing financial resources through the Assessment Inventory Project Grants to support all districts and charter schools completing an inventory. The state is also completing an inventory specifically focused on state-mandated assessments.

At the request of the governor, Florida completed an [Assessment Investigation](#). Commissioner Pam Stewart made several [recommendations](#) on how to reduce the number of tests. On April 9, 2015, Florida passed a [bill](#) that would cap the amount of time students spend taking tests to 45 hours a year.

Idaho has completed the [Idaho Comprehensive Assessment Program Inventory](#) and has also documented the average [testing times](#). The state is working on piloting an assessment inventory in districts.

Illinois has a [State Assessment Review Task Force](#) that is reviewing the use of standardized assessment by local districts. The Illinois State Board of Education also released the [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#), which is an adaptation of Achieve's assessment inventory. Additionally, Illinois developed the [Assessment Inventory Facilitation Process](#) which is a companion guide for districts using the assessment inventory.

Maryland lawmakers passed a [bill](#) that established the Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments and Testing in Public Schools. This Commission will be required to survey local, state, and federally mandated tests and report their findings by July 1, 2016.

Minnesota convened a [Testing Reduction Advisory Group](#) that made several [recommendations](#) on how to create a high quality balanced assessment system.

The New Jersey legislature has mandated [Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey](#). This commission issued an [interim report](#) in December 2014.

New Mexico has completed the [New Mexico Statewide Assessment Program: Required Assessments](#).

North Carolina has released a [testing report](#). The North Carolina State Board of Education has convened a Task Force on Summative Assessments that is considering testing options beginning in 2016-17. The Task Force will focus on reduction of testing time and burden.

Ohio released [Testing Report and Recommendations](#), a comprehensive evaluation of the Ohio testing landscape focused on the amount of time students spend on testing. The Ohio Department of Education surveyed districts and had conversations with education stakeholders regarding testing time. Based on the data and conversations, Ohio was able to make more informed decisions and propose recommendations on how to reduce the testing time for students.

Rhode Island is conducting a multifaceted [Assessment Project](#) that will review state and local assessments in an effort to streamline the assessment system. Rhode Island will work closely with several districts to examine their assessment systems.

In response to concerns about too much testing taking place Tennessee Education Commissioner Candice McQueen [announced](#) the establishment of a testing task force to examine school-level tests to determine how those assessments align with state tests. The task force will discuss the results of a district assessment survey and will issue a report on its findings this summer.

APPENDIX B

Example of a State-Developed Survey

Test	K	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	Student Growth Measure	Reading Diagnostic	Interim Benchmark	Practice Test	CCR Exam
ACT	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
ACT Aspire	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
ASVAB	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
PSAT	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
SAT	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
PARCC	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
mCLASS: Dibels Next	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Dibels Next – Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Terra Nova Language	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Terra Nova Math	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Terra Nova Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Terra Nova Science	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Terra Nova Social Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
Terra Nova Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
WIDA	<input type="checkbox"/>																	
WISC	<input type="checkbox"/>																	

**Number of Hours Spent Practicing for Tests
(Practice tests and practicing test taking skills)**

Grade	Total number of hours
K	
1 st	
2 nd	
3 rd	
4 th	
5 th	
6 th	
7 th	
8 th	
9 th	
10 th	
11 th	
12 th	

District Tests not listed

Vendor	Test and Subject	Number of times Test is administered	Time Scheduled for Test	K	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												
				<input type="checkbox"/>												

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RESOURCES

Achieve’s [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts and related resources](#) (Available at www.achieve.org)

[CCSSO High-Quality Assessment Principles](#) (Available at www.ccsso.org)

[CCSSO Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments](#) (Available at www.ccsso.org)

Darling-Hammond, L., Herman, J., Pellegrino, J., et al. (2013). *Criteria for high-quality assessment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

Gong, Brian (2010). *Using Balanced Assessment Systems to Improve Student Learning and School Capacity: An Introduction*.

Herman, J. L. (2010). *Coherence: Key to Next Generation Assessment Success* (AACC Report). Los Angeles, CA: University of California.

Student Achievement Partners [Assessment Evaluation Tool](#) (Available at www.achievethecore.org)



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