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Superintendent of Public Instruction Study – Interim Education Assessments

SECTION 10. SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION STUDY - INTERIM EDUCATION ASSESSMENTS - REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT. During the 2021-22 interim, the superintendent of public instruction shall study interim education assessment systems. The study must include consultation and collaboration with education stakeholders and the kindergarten through grade twelve education coordination council. The study also must include an evaluation and review of existing vendors, data standardization, statewide longitudinal data system compatibility, the costs associated with the interim assessment systems, and the benefits of local and statewide interim assessment systems. Before June 1, 2022, the superintendent of public instruction shall report the findings and recommendations of the study, including any proposed legislation necessary to implement the recommendations, to the legislative management.

Section 9 of S.B. 2141 repealed previous language in the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) (15.1-21-17) that pertained to interims.

Findings and recommendations from the completed study are provided in this report.

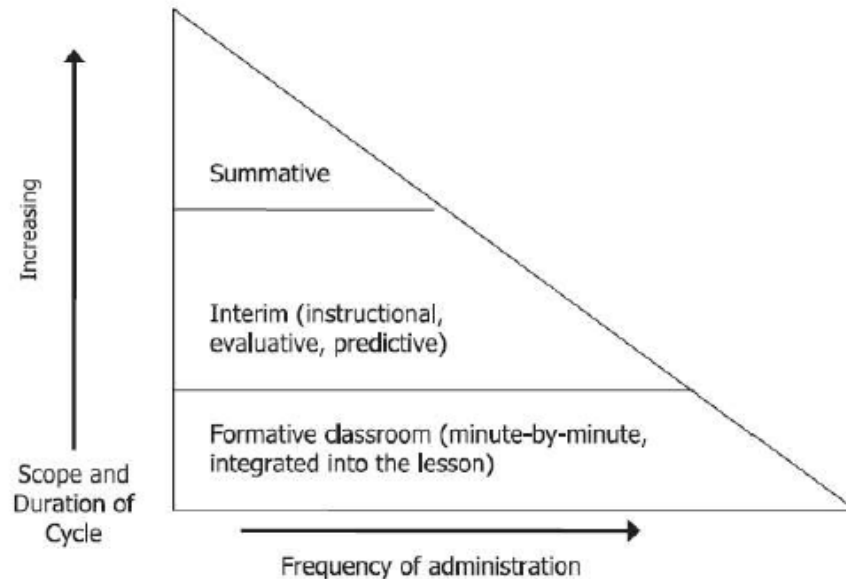
Interim Assessment Definition

First, it is essential to establish a clear framework around the concept when studying interim education assessment systems. Names and classifications of assessments in education are not always standard. Assessments are typically named or classified via their use and purpose, scope and duration, and frequency of administration. North Dakota does not have a codified definition for interim assessments. Other states have included a description of an interim assessment in their state law. California and Kentucky are examples. California details an interim assessment as “an assessment that is designed to be given during the school year to evaluate a pupil's knowledge and skills relative to specific academic standards to provide timely feedback, used in combination with other sources of information teachers have about their pupils' progress, for purposes of continually adjusting instruction to improve learning, and that produces results that can be aggregated by classroom, course, grade level, or school.” Kentucky describes interim assessment as “assessments that are given periodically throughout the year to provide diagnostic information and to show individual student performance against content standards.”

Nationally known assessment experts Perie, Marion, and Gong produced a standard and baseline definition of an interim assessment in 2009. This definition describes interim assessments as, “Assessments administered during instruction to evaluate students’ knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic goals to inform policymaker or educator decisions at the classroom,

school, or district level.” Along with a definition, three commonly accepted purposes of an interim assessment were defined: 1. Instructional, 2. Evaluative, 3. Predictive. The figure below (Figure 1) is a good visual for where interim assessments fit into the assessment continuum. (Attachment 1)

Figure 1



History of Interim Education Assessment in North Dakota

The 61st Legislative Assembly (2009) saw House Bill 1400 add a new chapter to 15.1-21 dealing with interim assessments. Section 19 of the bill created 15.1-21-17 - Interim Assessment and it stated: “Each school district shall administer annually to students in grades two through ten the measures of academic progress test or any other interim assessment approved by the superintendent of public instruction.” The measures of academic progress test referred to in law is more commonly referred to as the MAP or the NWEA MAP test in North Dakota.

Unfortunately, no Administrative Rules were created by the previous NDDPI administration for interim assessments. Thus, no process was developed for the superintendent of public instruction to approve “any other interim assessment approved by the superintendent of public instruction.” This resulted in a variety of un-approved models of interim assessment being used in schools throughout North Dakota and defeating the purpose of HB 1400. The language added to NDCC remained static until the 67th Legislative Assembly (2021). Senate Bill 2141 repealed 15.1-21-17 and created this study to be conducted on interim education assessments to restore original intent of HB 1400.

Currently, it is unknown how many different interim assessment vendors are being used in North Dakota districts. Six major interim assessment vendors were identified in a data collection effort that occurred in the school year 2019-2020. NWEA (114), Renaissance (48), and Pearson (39) were the three most common. Through conversations and committee work anecdotes, we believe there are over fifteen different vendors/companies providing variations of their interim assessment products to North Dakota districts. Currently, no data standardization is required of the chosen assessment tools, and no required sharing of the assessment results in the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS).

Interim Assessment in Other States

It is essential to understand how other states manage interim assessments and what exists in their state law or code. To assist in this part of the study, partners were required. Education Commission of the States (ECS) performed a state statute scan that provide nine different state statutes and three State Education Agency (SEA) scans (Attachment 2). Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Deputy Executive Director, Scott Norton, assisted in sharing a quick five-question survey to collect state interim assessment information, and seventeen states shared feedback (Attachment 3). The state survey inquired about SEA levels of determination with interim assessment, mandates, grade levels and SEA access to data. Lastly, an organization called Assessment Solutions Group (ASG) conducts one of the most well-known and respected state assessment surveys. In February of 2022 the results of this survey were revealed. Forty-four states and DC took part in the survey. The survey consisted of online questions, an excel file data entry on assessment information, and a follow-up interview to collect additional clarifying information. (Attachment 4).

Below is a snap-shot culmination of the data collected from the ECS and CCSSO scans:

Figure 2

<u>State</u>	<u>SEA Involvement</u>	<u>Interim Vendor Mandates</u>	<u>Grade Levels</u>	<u>SEA access to data</u>
Hawaii	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8, 11	Yes
West Virginia	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8	Yes
Utah	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8	Yes - do not review
Nevada	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8	No
Wisconsin	None	No	Local choice	No
Wyoming	Choice & State Provided	No	K-10	Yes
Oklahoma	Choice - state alignment study	3rd grade reading, K	NA	Yes
New Hampshire	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8, 11	Yes
Vermont	Choice & State Provided	No	Local choice	Yes, on provided (not stored)
Texas	Choice & State Provided (aligned)	No	3 to 8, HS	No (no accountability)
Minnesota	None	No	NA	No
Maryland	None	No	Local choice	No
Nebraska	Choice & State Provided	No	K to 10	Yes
California	Choice & State Provided	Approved List	1 to 12	No
Indiana	Choice & State Provided	No if local fund, Yes if State	K to 10	Yes, on provided
South Dakota	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8, HS	Yes, on provided
Montana	Choice & State Provided	No	3 to 8	Yes, on provided
South Carolina	Choice & State Provided	Approved list - funded	NA	NA
Michigan	Choice & State Provided	Approved list	K to 8	Yes, on provided
Colorado	Choice	Approved List, K-3 screener	NA	NA
Georgia	Choice	No	K to 8	NA
Kentucky	Choice	No	Local choice	No
Louisiana	Choice & State Provided	No	Local choice	No
Rhode Island	Choice (grants available)	No	Local choice	No

The scans revealed that most states have a portion of law or requirement for schools to administer an interim assessment. No states that were a part of the scan have a mandated vendor or assessment tool. Alaska is currently studying requiring interims as part of a statewide assessment system. Oklahoma has a required 3rd-grade assessment, and Colorado has a mandated Most commonly, states and SEAs provide an interim assessment at no cost to all districts. These are not mandated assessment providers, but they can be used to fulfill interim assessment requirements at no additional cost to the local district. These states also allow districts to choose a vendor or tool of their choice. In the figure (Figure 2) above, these states are indicated by

Choice & State-Provided. A few states from the scan do not have a state-provided option, but allow local choice, defined as Choice. Both categories include states that have created an approved vendor list. This means that an interim assessment/vendor must be on the approved list to be used. Districts and schools can then choose which assessment or vendor they want to use from this list. Some states that do not have an approved list and any assessment/vendor can be used. The last category for SEA involvement is None.

Interim Assessment Study Committee

The study calls for consultation and collaboration with education stakeholders. A committee was formed to ensure this requirement was met, consisting of state administrators and content experts. On July 22, 2021, an email was sent to members of Superintendent Baesler’s Administrator Cabinet requesting recommendations for educators to assist in the study. The roster for the interim assessment study committee is pictured below (Figure 3):

Figure 3

<u>Name</u>	<u>District/School</u>	<u>Position</u>
Erica Carney	Richland	Literacy Coach
Robert (Bob) Grosz	Fargo	Associate Superintendent
Andrea Seibel	Bismarck	MTSS District Support
Jerry Standifer	West Fargo	Elementary Principal
Richard Schmit	Lisbon	3rd grade teacher
Amy Braddock	West Fargo	Special Ed. teacher
Anna Sell	Oakes	Elementary Principal
Ashley Seykora	Rugby	Instructional Coach

The committee had representation from varying school sizes and different positions within their respective schools/districts. Three virtual meetings occurred on September 9, 2021, October 7, 2021, and November 29, 2021. The committee’s work dealt with reviewing research on interim assessments, discussing and researching the five required elements of the study, and building a recommendation and proposed legislation to implement the proposal. The meeting agenda and notes can be found in Attachment 5. The outcome of the committee is this document that serves as the report of findings and will include a recommendation and any necessary proposed legislation to implement the recommendations. A progress update was given via NDDPI Assistant Director of the School Approval and Opportunity office, Jim Upgren, on September 29, 2021 to the K-12 Education Coordination Council - Legislative Approval Initiatives Subcommittee (Attachment 6). The study draft and recommendations will be presented to the K-12 Education Coordination Council (or subcommittee). The finished study and recommendation will then be given to Legislative Management (before June 1, 2022) and a report presented to the 67th Legislative Interim Education Policy Committee.

Evaluation and Review of Existing Vendors

When national interim assessment vendors are used, the test items are typically the same in other states regardless of the vendor. Without having a customized version that is explicitly created, the level of alignment in all grades and subjects would be less than our state assessment. Some standards are commonly found in almost all state standards and similar grade levels. Interim

assessment vendors provide an umbrella coverage of multiple state standards so that alignment exists, but variation in the level of alignment is inevitable with this approach.

One way to analyze the alignment between interim assessments and state content standards is to conduct a comparative alignment analysis. A quote for an interim assessment alignment study, that included four interim assessment vendors and two grade levels (4th and 7th), revealed a cost of \$82,764. While a third-party alignment study can be helpful, the committee felt it would be more beneficial to survey once action has been taken with the information garnered from the study.

Although a comparative alignment analysis for North Dakota was not conducted at this time, we can draw on work from other states. A recent alignment study was conducted in Oklahoma comparing four interim assessment vendors (Attachment 7). Oklahoma commissioned the comparative analysis study to provide schools in the state with a resource to use when selecting an interim assessment vendor. The study used test items from the interim assessment and the state standards to look at assessment features, targets, Depth of Knowledge (DoK), and if items match the state standards in certain grade levels and subjects.

Wyoming has created a nationally known series of assessments (WY-TOPP) through a task force review of its educational assessment system. The task force provided recommendations related to interim assessments. The recommendations included designing the summative and interim assessments to measure the same learning targets, use the same test questions, and provide the same item formats to create coherence between assessments. Their current interim assessment vendors had different learning targets, different assessment approaches, and varying test item designs. The task force recommended that Wyoming not require districts to use the state-provided interim assessment but instead allow districts to choose an interim state-approved assessment, with the district responsible for the cost. (Attachment 8).

In discussion with committee members and through conversations with districts, deciding which interim assessment vendor was chosen came down to ease of use and cost. Providing a state-wide interim assessment or having a list of approved interim assessment vendors in the state, conducting a third-part comparative alignment analysis would give schools and districts a solid set of information to use in a decision-making process. In 2021, three states (Oklahoma, Indiana, and Michigan) shared their state role in evaluating interim assessments (Attachment 9) at the National Conference on Student Assessment.

Data Standardization

Data standardization of interim assessments does not exist within North Dakota currently. We have no data on the exact number of different interim assessments or vendors in North Dakota. Data standardization is easily done with one vendor but still possible with fewer known assessments and vendors. Each vendor has its own test items, scale scores, number of questions used, standards the items relate to for each subject and grade level. Also, and as mentioned earlier, interim assessments typically serve one of three primary purposes. An interim used for predictability on another assessment does not necessarily yield comparable results to an interim used to give instructional feedback. For example, ACT Aspire, commonly used in high school to predict how well a student might perform on an ACT and yield benchmark data, can be considered an interim assessment and this would not be directly comparable to an NWEA Map (target instructional feedback and growth monitoring over a period of time). The use and purpose of the assessment itself and the assessment's standards need to be considered.

In summary, the fewer the number of interim assessments and vendors in a state, the more manageable data standardization becomes. North Dakota researched NWEA scores since it is the most common interim assessment used to understand students where students were in their academic learning after the pandemic. The constraints and limitations discovered during that research process revealed the deficits of our current interim assessment structure.

Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Compatibility

In conversations with the more prevalent interim assessment vendors currently in North Dakota, uploading data files from an assessment vendor's system to a state's system is no issue. In other words, the capability is not a hurdle. This process already occurs in multiple states and is done in a various ways. For instance, some states request that a particular set of specifications or templates are used by vendors when sharing these data files. Rather than capability, the issue with SLDS usage of interim assessment data in North Dakota is that it is not required or standardized. Some interim assessment data is loaded into SLDS, but it is estimated that more than half do not. Currently, no NDDPI analysis occurs with the interim assessment data at a state level.

The committee members felt strongly that SLDS is underutilized in terms of interim assessment data. Some were unsure if their school even uploaded their data into the system and were unsure if anything was done with the data if uploaded. If SLDS and EdPortal were utilized better, students who transferred could have interim scores shared from the systems to the school in which the student was transferring. Lastly, having SLDS create data reports and assist with analysis could be timesaving for districts and schools with limited personnel. The potential for data analysis, reporting, and assisting in the usability of interim assessment data is essentially untapped. Increasing data standardization, increasing reporting to SLDS, and creating a template/data upload specifications all increase the effectiveness of using SLDS with interim assessment data.

Cost Associated with Interim Assessment Systems

For a look at the cost of current vendors quotes were received from Renaissance and NWEA. The cost proposals included the vendor's main interim assessment package, as vendors typically have different and customizable options for schools. Renaissance has Star 360 with an annual subscription for a district being \$14.89 per student and an additional \$750 for the web platform service. For a one-year state-wide purchase the per students price drops to \$13.50, and the web platform service fee is waived. For a state-wide purchase of three years, and paid upfront, the price is \$10.00 per student, and the fee is also waived. NWEA provides the MAP assessment. Districts currently pay \$12.50 - \$14.50 per student. A state-wide purchase would be set at \$12.50 per student.

Cost savings at a local level would depend on the district's size. For a district with 150 students in grades two through ten (old interim assessment law grade requirements), the state-wide Renaissance Star 360 (1 year) would be \$1.39 cheaper per student, equating to around a \$200 savings (plus the web platform fee waiver of \$750). If the district had 5000 students, with the same hypothetical situation and set price, the savings would be about \$7000 (plus the same \$750 is waived). With NWEA, the districts above would most likely be paying the highest in the range. This would be a \$2.00 per student savings or \$300. The larger districts would most likely pay the lowest amount, so no savings exist. Even though the larger district would save \$7000 with the state-wide Renaissance Star 360, compared to the district pricing, the NWEA would still be cheaper at the district and state-wide levels (\$67,500 for Renaissance Star 360 v. \$62,500 for NWEA MAP).

The most significant cost savings would be the three-year prepaid option from Renaissance. The smaller district (compared to current district pricing) saves \$4.89 per student plus a \$750 web platform fee; this equates to about \$900. The larger district (compared to the current district price) saves the same \$4.89 per student plus a \$750 platform fee; this equates to about \$25,000. This model makes Renaissance cheaper than NWEA in the larger district (\$50,000 for Renaissance STAR 360 v. \$62,500 for NWEA MAP).

Benefits of Local and Statewide Interim Assessment Systems

Comparing a local and statewide interim assessment system is not straightforward, instead a continuum. The committee used this continuum (a list of all possible options) to create a recommendation. The strictly local and strictly statewide system options were eliminated immediately. A strictly local system exists when nothing is guiding or mandating which interim assessments to use or how/when to administer. This system creates the maximum amount of local control but also the minimum amount of data standardization, SLDS usage/compatibility, and cost savings. A strictly statewide system creates the least amount of local authority because all districts use the same interim assessment, have the same number of administrations, and a window where the assessments need to be administered. Inherently, this increases data standardization, SLDS compatibility, and cost savings. The committee reasoned that a strictly statewide system removes too much local control and does not allow districts to decide what works best for their schools.

The state research and committee discussion helped lay out the continuum of options to consider (Attachment 5 - Page 4). On this page, the continuum of options is visually represented. As one moves down the page from 1(A) to 2, the choices represent different points from a strictly statewide to a strictly local interim assessment system. Options 1(A) and 2 were removed first. Those would represent the strictly local and statewide interim assessment systems. 1(D) was removed next, representing North Dakota's environment in place before the study. This left 1(B) and 1(C). Each point on the continuum has advantages and disadvantages. The committee's job of the committee was to find which point they felt best fit North Dakota.

Recommendation

The recommendation that the committee shared was for a state-provided interim assessment that could be used by all districts in the state, along with a state-approved list of interim assessment vendors if a district chose not to use the state-provided option. Administering an interim assessment would be mandatory, but using the state-provided assessment tool would not be required. If a district opted not to use the state-provided assessment, it would need to choose a vendor from the list approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The district would be fiscally responsible for the cost of this interim assessment.

The state-provided and state-approved list model is typical among other states; the number of states that currently have this model is trending upwards. This option allows the state to contract with an interim assessment vendor through a process that could increase the alignment of the test items to the state standards and SLDS compatibility. Besides mandating a single interim assessment, this option would create the highest amount of data standardization and be the most cost-effective. Using an average of about 9,000 students per grade, in grades K-10 (about 100,000 students), and a price of \$12 per student would be approximately \$1,200,000. It is unlikely all schools would opt into the state-provide, so at 75% of students, it would be about \$900,000 and at 50% of students, it would be around \$600,000.

The committee had discussed standardizing the number of administrations and timing. Most districts use (and common recommendations call for) three administrations (Fall, Winter, Spring). The committee felt mandating three administrations would be too extensive and instead settled on a recommendation of requiring at least two administrations. The state-provided and state-approved interim assessment would make three administrations available, but only two would be required. The grade levels required for either option would be K-10, with the state-approved lists grade-banded as K-2, 3-8, and 9-10. The subjects to be assessed are Mathematics and Reading at a minimum.

Proposed Legislation Necessary to Implement

A proposed bill would add section 15.1-21-17.1 to North Dakota Century Code (15.1-21-17 was repealed). The committee's recommendation is below.

Recommendation:

15.1-21-17.1 Interim Assessment – State-Provided and State-Approved List

1. Each public school district must annually administer at least two assessments to grades kindergarten through tenth grade in mathematics and reading. Each public school district has two options for administration.
 - a. the state-provided interim assessment that requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to contract with an interim assessment vendor and, at no charge to school districts, provide interim assessment administrations for the grade levels and subjects provided in Section 1.
 - b. the state-approved interim assessment list created and maintained by the Superintendent of Public Instruction provides options for an interim assessment vendor to be selected by school districts. The district is fiscally responsible and must ensure that interim assessment data is shared with the statewide longitudinal data system.
2. An interim assessment vendor must electronically share data with the statewide longitudinal data system to be a state-provided or state-approved vendor.
3. The superintendent shall write rules to develop the selection and approval criteria.