State Adoption and Implementation of K–2 Assessments

MICHELLE CROFT, PHD, JD

Learning gaps often start prior to elementary school.¹ For instance, a recent study found that gaps in preliteracy skills emerged between Mexican American and White children by age 2.² Similarly, researchers have found that by the time children are two years old, low-income children's vocabularies are six months behind high-income children's vocabularies.³ These gaps persist and often widen throughout students' educational careers, and it is very difficult for students—particularly at-risk students—to catch up.⁴

The early presence of these learning gaps has drawn considerable attention in the last few years. In 2011, the Obama administration funded the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge competitive grant program for states.⁵ A key component of the program was the collection of data to measure outcomes and progress, particularly through the creation of two types of assessments, which were designed to inform preschool instruction and to measure readiness for kindergarten, respectively.⁶ These assessments were designed to provide a “critical link” to the K–12 system;⁷ however, part of this link is currently missing—in grades K–2. Once students start elementary school, they are not required under federal law to test using a standardized assessment until grade 3.⁸

Although states are not required to administer standardized assessments in grades K–2, they may opt to do so to better gauge student progress, to help identify students who may be academically lagging so that they can receive remediation, to help with program evaluation and continuous improvement, and/or as part of a state accountability system.⁹ Despite the potential advantages of collecting such data for K–2 students, some experts believe that certain types of standardized assessments for K–2 students may be inappropriate (or can be appropriate only if close attention is paid to proper implementation). For example, the National Education Goals Panel asserted that young children may not be familiar enough with the goals of formal testing to properly understand testing interactions, develop at different rates, and in any case are better at demonstrating what they know by means of talking and writing than by taking tests.¹⁰ Opponents also contend that the standard assessments for young students may cause inappropriate stress¹¹ and that assessment for high-stakes purposes, particularly for teacher evaluation (often an element of state accountability systems),¹² may be inappropriate.¹³

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Given these differing perspectives on the administration of standardized assessments in grades K–2, I conducted a study to better understand how states that are implementing such assessments are using them. To do so, I relied on publicly available information from the websites of state departments of education, coding assessments into categories indicating the purpose of the assessment; how the assessment instrument was chosen for use; the grade levels and subject areas/domains covered; whether the assessment is mandatory or optional; and whether the results of the assessment must be reported to the state. The study focuses on assessments that would be administered during or at the end of the school year, but does not include kindergarten readiness assessments that are administered in the first months of kindergarten.

**Results**

Overall, 35 states had some form of state assessment in grades K–2 (Figure 1). In the majority of these states (n = 29), the assessments were mandatory for all students. The remaining states required participation only in particular schools (n = 1) or provided assessments for optional use by districts (n = 5). New Hampshire was still developing K–2 assessments, and Oregon and South Dakota simply encouraged districts to adopt assessments for K–2 students. These three states are excluded from the discussions that follow.

Of the state-provided assessments, only six were end-of-year summative assessments; two of those states also offered either a diagnostic or screening assessment. More often, states administered only diagnostic or screening assessments (n = 23) or only formative/interim assessments (n = 4) (see appendix). Two states—Louisiana and Wyoming—offered both a diagnostic and a formative assessment (see appendix).

All 35 states assessed reading and literacy, and sixteen also assessed other areas: One administered an arts assessment; twelve administered math assessments; and three assessed math plus one or more other areas such as writing, behaviors, social studies, science, and motor skills (Figure 2).

The assessments often spanned more than one grade level, such as K–2, K–3, or grade 2 only. Given the various combinations of grade levels, I looked at the individual grade levels that would cover each grade span and found that slightly more assessments were administered in grade 2 (n = 34) than in kindergarten (n = 29) and grade 1 (n = 30) (see appendix).
State involvement varied by state. In terms of test selection, just under half of the states provided a single statewide assessment \((n = 15)\), whereas the remaining states allowed districts to choose, typically, but not always, from a list of state-approved assessments \((n = 18)\). Two states that administered more than one assessment had a state-selected assessment for one assessment and allowed for district choice for the other assessment (Figure 3).

Among states that required assessments, there was often no public information regarding districts' obligation to report the data to the states. Approximately half of the states required districts to report data to the state for all students. Two states required reporting for certain targeted districts or schools. There were also instances (for example, in Washington and Wisconsin) where the state explicitly noted that data are not reported to the state. Some of the states that did not have explicit reporting requirements are using online assessment systems, making it likely that districts are indeed reporting data to the state (Figure 3).

Given that not all states collect the assessment data and that much of the data is used for diagnostic purposes, few states reported the data to the public. When the states did so, it was typically aggregated by state, district, and/or school; very few aggregated by student characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, special education, or economic status.

**Policy Recommendations**

This study was not exhaustive, particularly because districts are given a lot of autonomy in the selection of instruments. However, the study does identify some areas where states can improve their policies or practices with respect to K–2 assessments:

1. **More states should consider requiring early screening in reading and other content areas.**

   Early identification and intervention is essential in helping students get and stay on track. Not all states require universal diagnostic screening, and of those that do, it is largely limited to reading. Although reading is an important skill that helps students in other content areas, states should investigate whether screening may be useful in other areas such as math or academic behaviors.

2. **States should better communicate the presence and use of the assessments.**

   With many states, identifying the existence of K–2 assessments was a challenge, because the division responsible for the assessments could vary (e.g., assessment, early childhood, literacy, response to intervention). Once the assessments were identified, details about the purposes and uses of the assessments was lacking online in many states. Whether online or via other mechanisms, states should strive to make it clear to parents and the public what assessments are being administered, why the assessments are being administered, and how the results will be used.

3. **States should collect assessment data to enable research and evaluation.**

   Not all states require collection of the assessment data. The failure to collect and report—even at the state level—is likely due in part to the flexibility that states provide to districts in selecting the assessment instruments; this may also prevent schools from putting undue pressure on students. However, despite the variety of instruments, the data may be useful for research and evaluation purposes, particularly for identifying schools or districts that excel at helping students improve.
## Appendix

### Table A1. Detailed State K–2 Assessment Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Name</th>
<th>Summative</th>
<th>Diagnostic/Screener</th>
<th>Formative/Interim</th>
<th>Grade Levels Administered</th>
<th>Reported to State</th>
<th>State Reports</th>
<th>Select Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Alaska     | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, “Early Literacy Screeners.”  
4 AAC 06.713, “Early Literacy Screening.” |
| Arkansas   | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Arkansas Department of Education, “K-2 Assessment.”  
| California | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | California Department of Education, “California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System.”  
California Department of Education, “Grade Two Diagnostic Assessments.” |
| Colorado   | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Colorado Department of Education, “Colorado READ Act.” |
Connecticut State Department of Education, “CSDE Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Publications: Research-Based Universal Screening Reading Assessments for Grades K-3.” |
| Delaware   | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Delaware Department of Education, Response to Intervention (RTI) Frequently Asked Questions. |
| Florida    | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Florida Department of Education, “Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading.” |
| Georgia    | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Georgia Department of Education, “Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills.”  
Georgia Department of Education, “GKIDS Statewide Results.” |
| Idaho      | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Idaho State Department of Education, “Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) FAQ.”  
Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho Performance Data IRI Comparative Reports.” |
| Illinois   | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Illinois State Board of Education, “Innovation and Improvement.” |
| Indiana    | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Indiana Department of Education, “IREAD K-2.”  
| Iowa       | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Iowa Reading Research Center, “Iowa’s Early Warning System for Literacy.” |
| Kansas     | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Kansas State Department of Education, “Early Reading Assessment.” |
| Kentucky   | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Kentucky Department of Education, FAQs on Kentucky’s New Assessment and Accountability System for Public Schools. |
| Louisiana  | Y         | Y       | Y   | Y   | Y   | Y   | Louisiana Department of Education, “EAGLE 2.0.”  
Louisiana Department of Education, “DIBELS NEXT.” |

Note: Only states with operational assessments are included.
### Table A1. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Name</th>
<th>Summative</th>
<th>Diagnostic/ Screener</th>
<th>Formative/ Interim</th>
<th>Grade Levels Administered</th>
<th>Reported to State</th>
<th>State Reports</th>
<th>Select Citations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
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<td>Yes (Y), Select Schools (S)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Maine Department of Education, “Screening &amp; Progress Monitoring.”</td>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Minnesota Department of Education, “PreK-Grade 3 Reading Assessment.”</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
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<td>Mississippi Department of Education, “MKAS1- Mississippi K-3 Assessment Support System.”</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>New Mexico Public Education Department, “New Mexico Statewide Assessment Program: Required Assessments.” New Mexico Public Education Department, K-3 Plus Education Annual Report for the School Year 2013-2014 (2014).</td>
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<td>New York</td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
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<td>The University of the State of New York and the State Education Department, Response to Intervention Guidance for New York State School Districts (The University of the State of New York and the State Education Department, 2010). New York State Education Department, “Office of Early Learning Frequently Asked Questions.”</td>
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<td>North Carolina</td>
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<td>Public Schools of North Carolina, “About the K-3 Assessment.”</td>
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<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA) Implementation Guide.</td>
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<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Rhode Island Department of Education, “Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).”</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>South Carolina Department of Education, “Gifted and Talented Assessment Program for Grade 2.”</td>
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<td>Utah</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Utah State Office of Education, “Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Virginia Department of Education, “Early Intervention Reading Initiative.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, “English Language Arts: Second Grade Reading Assessment.”</td>
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<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Yes (Y)</td>
<td>Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “PALS Early Literacy Screener.”</td>
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</table>

Note: Only states with operational assessments are included.
Notes
1. E.g., Chrys Dougherty, College and Career Readiness: The Importance of Early Learning (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2013).
7. Ibid.
8. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) only requires annual testing in grades 3–8 and once in high school, (20 USC § 6311(b)(3); 34 CFR § 200.5). The ESEA adopted the same grade levels for testing (Every Student Succeeds Act, Section 1111 (b) (2)(B)(v)(I)).
9. A second reason for adopting standardized assessments in K–2 is for teacher evaluation. The ESEA Flexibility Waiver required that states implement teacher evaluation systems that include measures of student growth, prompting many states to adopt such evaluation system (US Department of Education, 2012). For states using a value-added method to evaluate teachers, without tests beginning in kindergarten, there is no way to calculate value-added scores for first-, second-, and third-grade teachers, because the scores require students’ previous-year test results. Thus, some states may wish to extend assessments to lower grades as part of their state evaluation systems.
14. It is important to note that districts may offer assessments independent of state requirements. This study is limited to state requirements.
15. Initially, I focused on the assessment and data reporting division sections of the state websites. However, upon review there were a number of states that required assessments not as part of the state assessment program, but as a component to a literacy initiative. I conducted a subsequent search for assessments required under statewide literacy initiatives.
17. Georgia is included as having a K–2 assessment. Despite the state assessment being named Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, it is a yearlong assessment. Georgia Department of Education, “Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS),” www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Appearance/ Pages/GKIDS.aspx.
18. See appendix for a state-level table.
19. Identifying the existence of the assessments was a challenge in many states as the division responsible for the assessments could vary from those responsible for assessment to early childhood to literacy to response to intervention.

22. Michigan offers an assessment that is called an “interim assessment.” However, to date there is only a pre- and post-test; therefore, it is operationally more like a summative assessment. Michigan Department of Education, “Michigan Interim Assessment Program,” www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_63192--,00.html. See appendix for more detailed information regarding the classification of the assessments.


24. Although this report is limited to assessments, states may have other mechanisms for diagnosis. A study conducted by Education Week identified 35 states that required a reading assessment or diagnosis of reading deficiency any time between preschool and grade 3 (Christina A. Samuels, “Early Grades Crucial in Path to Reading Proficiency,” Education Week, Jan. 2, 2015, www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/01/08/early-grades-crucial-in-path-to-reading.html).


28. Maine offers behavioral screening through a Response to Intervention initiative (ibid.). Georgia has a yearlong performance-based kindergarten assessment that includes a personal/social development component (Georgia Department of Education, “Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills [GKIDS],” www.gadoe.org/curriculum/Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/GKIDS.aspx).

29. Georgia includes an optional motor skills component to its performance-based kindergarten inventory (Georgia Department of Education, “Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills [GKIDS],” www.gadoe.org/curriculum/Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/GKIDS.aspx).

30. As mentioned previously, kindergarten readiness assessments are excluded from this count.


33. Thirteen states explicitly required districts to report data to the state, and two others required reporting in particular districts. More states may require reporting, but the information is hard to discern from the state websites.


35. In Connecticut, only “priority” schools are required to report results from the diagnostic assessment. Connecticut Department of Education, “CSDE Curriculum, Instruction
and Assessment Publications”). In New Mexico, K–3 Plus schools (which provide additional instructional time for disadvantaged students) are required to report results, but it is unclear whether non-K–3 Plus schools are required to report (New Mexico Public Education Department, *K–3 Plus Education Annual Report for the School Year 2013–2014*, available at ped.state.nm.us/ped/LiteracyEarlyChildhoodEd_K3plus_index.html). In California, the districts only report to the state the number of students assessed. California Education Code § 60644.


37. For example, North Carolina does not explicitly discuss reporting, but the state uses the mCLASS Reading 3D, which is an online testing platform.

38. For example, Idaho disaggregates by race/ethnicity, Title I, LEP, and special education at the state and district levels (Idaho Performance Data IRI Comparative Reports, www.sde.idaho.gov/ird/ir/irAnalysis.asp).