

A GUIDE TO K-12 LEA/District Local Assessment Systems



Designing a Local Assessment System

With careful planning, LEAs can create a high-quality, local **assessment system** – a comprehensive and robust design to measure student learning – that can truly inform instruction and support learning. An assessment system requires monitoring, as well as ongoing review to ensure it is meeting the needs of students and informing teachers and leaders about the performance of individual students and groups of students.

Pennsylvania’s Chapter 4 speaks to local assessment systems. Each school entity shall design an “assessment system” to do the following, including, but not limited to:

- *Determine the degree to which students are achieving academic standards under § 4.12 (relating to academic standards).*
- *Use assessment results to improve curriculum and instructional practices and to guide instructional strategies.*
- *Provide summary information, including results of assessments under this section, to the general public regarding the achievement of students.*

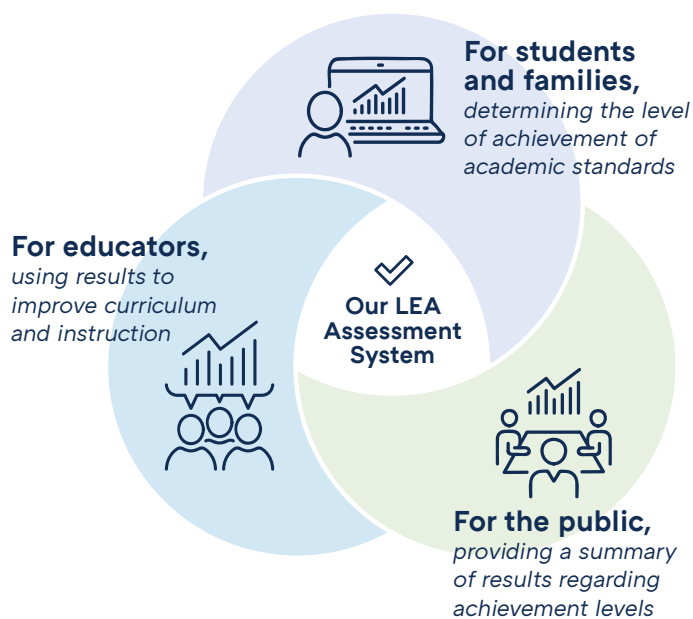


Figure 1. Chapter 4 –
An Assessment System

The local assessment system shall be designed to include a variety of assessment strategies which may include the following: written work by students, scientific experiments conducted by students, works of art or musical, theatrical or dance performances by students, other demonstrations, performances, products or projects by students related to specific academic standards, examinations developed by teachers to assess specific academic standards, nationally-available achievement tests, diagnostic assessments, evaluations of portfolios of student work related to achievement of academic standards, and other measures as appropriate, which may include standardized tests.

Types of K-12 Student Learning Assessments

Assessing student learning is essential to effective instruction! Assessment is a fundamental practice providing valuable information that informs, supports, and measures student achievement and growth. When teachers are engaged in effectively assessing student learning, they are able to reflect on and adjust their own practice, and therefore enhance their own professional growth.

Download and share these definitions:

[Types of K12 Student Learning Assessments \(PDF\)](https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/k12data/typesofk12studentlearningassessments.pdf)

<https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/k12data/typesofk12studentlearningassessments.pdf>

Let's dig in on the four types of student learning assessments and their key characteristics:



Benchmark Assessments

“Where are we?”

Benchmark assessments are formally defined as assessments that measure progress towards an end of year desired outcome. They are typically administered three times per year, at beginning (BOY), middle (MOY), and end of year (EOY). A benchmark assessment can serve as a universal screener as well, as they surface data on students who score below the benchmark.



Diagnostic Assessments

“What do we need?”

Diagnostic assessments are given to pinpoint students' levels of knowledge, skills, and understandings to inform the planning and delivery of instruction, including instructional support and intervention needs. Typically, students who are not meeting benchmarks, or have evidence of falling behind an expected level of performance, are given a diagnostic assessment to further determine specific areas of need. A diagnostic assessment is typically not graded/evaluated with letter grade, percentage or performance measure.



Formative Assessments

“Along the way”

Formative assessments confirm that learning has or has not occurred. They provide the teacher with information to plan continued instruction. Formative assessments assist the student in reflecting on their own learning. Formative assessments can be both formal and informal. They can be thought of as “along the way” assessments leading to summative assessments and are not typically graded/evaluated, but instead “inform” instruction.







Summative Assessments

“At the gate”

Summative assessments evaluate student learning at the end of a specific period of instruction, which can be a unit or chapter, a quarter, a semester, or the end of the year. These are considered “at the gate” assessments that are typically graded with letter grades or percentages or some overall rating to “sum up” the learning during the defined window of time.

See the table on the next page for examples of each type of assessment, how often each type of assessment might be administered, and what questions the assessment type can answer about growth and achievement.

Compare and Contrast Student Learning Assessment Types

	 BENCHMARK	 DIAGNOSTIC	 FORMATIVE	 SUMMATIVE
Examples <i>(Examples are not limited to those listed here.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firefly from PDE • Acadience®/DIBELS Next® • Aimsweb® • DIBELS® 8 • MAP® • STAR Math • STAR Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Diagnostic Tool (CDT) from PDE • Core Phonics Survey • i-Ready® Diagnostic and Growth Monitoring • MAP® • PALS • Reading Rockets • TOWRE • STAR Math • STAR Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAS Assessment Center from PDE • Exit tickets • Pre-tests • Progress Checklists • Questioning • Technology tools (Kahoot, etc.) • Formal progress monitoring probes (e.g. Acadience® progress monitoring, aimsweb®, Curriculum Based Measures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit/chapter tests • Quizzes • Performance tasks/projects • Mid-terms/Final exams • ACCESS for ELLs • NOCTI/NIMS • SAT, ACT, PSAT • Advanced Placement (AP) • PSSA/Keystone Exams
Frequency/Who	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3x/year (BOY, MOY, EOY) • All students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As needed, typically 2 to 3x/year • CDT typically 3x/yr, but as much as 5x/year if warranted • Typically given to students who are targeted for tiered supports but can be used with all students (ex: CDT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily: before, during and after instruction • All students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of unit • End of course • End of year • All Students
Questions Answered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are students mastering PA Core Standards? • Are there specific students exceeding the benchmark? • Which students are not on track with meeting PA Core Standards/established benchmarks? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are an individual student's strengths and needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective was my instruction/lesson? • What should happen next in my instruction? • Do I need to reteach before moving on? • Which students are in need of scaffolding, differentiation, reteaching? • Is a student's intervention working? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well did students learn the content taught? • Which students are falling behind and in need of additional supports?

*Please note: Assessments listed in table above are examples only. Lists are not all-inclusive.

Download and share this table:

[Types of K12 Student Learning Assessments \(PDF\)](#)

<https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/k12data/typesofk12studentlearningassessments.pdf>

What is an Assessment Map?

Definition and Benefits

An **assessment map** is a visual representation of your locally administered assessments, as well as state assessments, including K-12 student learning assessments that are required in an LEA or school. It is typically created at the LEA/system level, but a map may also be created at the individual school level.

Assessments included on the map can range from summative, to benchmark, to diagnostic assessments, with some LEAs choosing to also include required formative assessments. Locally administered assessments and statewide assessments are typically included in an overall assessment map.

Key Features

While assessment maps vary in style or formatting, the common components of a map include:

- **Which** student learning assessments are required at each grade or subject level
- **When** the assessment is to be given (administration windows; see Fig. 2)
- **For which students** (all or targeted group; see Fig. 2)

Assessment maps may also:

- **Identify the type and purpose** of the assessment (benchmark, diagnostic, formative, summative)
- **Document data meeting schedules** that correspond to the administration dates, so that each assessment administered is analyzed and acted upon by a data team in a meaningful and useful timeframe
- **Indicate who is responsible** for the administration of the student learning assessment
- **Identify administration dates/windows** each year for each assessment

The Benefits of Creating a Map

An assessment map can offer your LEA/district or school:

- **A sharpened focus** with consistency and alignment across schools and teachers within an LEA/district (horizontal and vertical articulation)
- **A deeper understanding** of types of assessments and their purposes
- **Transparency and visibility** for all stakeholders (families, students, staff)

Assessment Tool	Grades	Windows	Data Review Expectations
Lit CDT	10 th Grade Literature	Semester 1 Courses Sept 14, 2021 (Window Sept 13-24, 2021) Dec 1, 2021 (Window Nov 30-Dec 10, 2021) Semester 2 Courses Feb 1, 2022 (Window Jan 31-Feb 11, 2022) April 5, 2022 (Window April 4-13, 2022) Full Year Courses Sept 14, 2021 (Window Sept 13-24, 2021) Dec 1, 2021 (Window Nov 30-Dec 10, 2021) April 5, 2022 (Window April 4-13, 2022)	Data will be reviewed by District Level Leadership, by School Leadership Teams, and Lit Department/Grade Level Teams following the close of each assessment window.
Alg I CDT Subtests	Alg I Course	As needed	Teachers will review and use data for planning and instruction.

Name of Assessment	Students to be Tested	Testing Window
AIMSweb (Reading only)	Identified students targeted for reading intervention support	BOY 9/1-9/17 MOY: 1/4-1/21 EOY: 5/16-6/3
Keystone Algebra	Identified 8 th grade students	5/16-5/27

Figure 2. Excerpts from assessment maps

For step-by-step instructions to building a map, download the guide:

[Creating and Auditing Your Assessment Map \(PDF\)](#)

<https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/k12data/creatingandauditinganassessmentmap.pdf>

Read about techniques to balance and streamline your assessment system:

[“Zero-based Assessment System Design” from the Center for Assessment >](#)

<https://www.nciea.org/blog/zero-based-assessment-system-design/>

Auditing Your Assessment Map

Assessment maps are best analyzed on an annual basis to identify whether the map/plan is comprehensive and appropriate to the LEA/school's context and needs. This can be done by a team of educators (administrators, school psychologists and teachers) who have an interest in and knowledge of student learning assessments. The process is best done with significant input from the school staff and transparency across the LEA to promote commitment and buy-in from all stakeholders.

The overarching question is:



*Are we using the right assessments,
for the right purposes,
for the right students,
at the right time?*

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Specific questions are included below for the committee to explore and make decisions about the existing assessment map. Deep discussion of each question will help to avoid some of what might be typical responses (“we’ve tried this before and no one liked it” or “we’ve always used this, so it’s time to change it up”, etc.). The goal is to implement an annual process of reviewing the existing assessment map/plan to keep, discontinue and revise as appropriate.

- 1. Are the student learning assessments we are using providing us with the data needed to improve student outcomes?**
 - a. Do we have appropriate representation K-12 of summative, benchmark, diagnostic and formal progress monitoring (formative) assessments?
 - b. Is there a missing, yet important assessment type at any levels?
- 2. Are we clear on the purpose of each assessment?**
 - a. Do we know what the assessment will tell us?
 - b. Do the assessments answer our questions?
- 3. Do we know the validity and reliability of the assessment?**
 - a. Is there a technical manual available?
 - b. Has this been reviewed by educators with expertise in student assessment?
- 4. Is there redundancy across assessments?**
 - a. Are we “over-testing”?
 - b. Are the same skills unnecessarily assessed on more than one assessment?
- 5. Do we have planned repetition?**
 - a. Are assessments used aligned vertically so that student achievement and growth can be measured across grade levels?
 - b. Do assessments follow a student through his/her elementary years into middle school years? (longitudinal monitoring)
- 6. Are the reports/data available from each assessment user-friendly for teachers to act on the data?**
- 7. Is the time to administer and score the assessment reasonable and doable at the school level?**
 - a. Can we assess the same skills using a more efficient assessment?
 - b. Are data meetings scheduled to occur in a timely fashion after each administration window?
- 8. Are the chosen assessments cost effective?**
- 9. Is the training needed to effectively use the data appropriate for its’ use?**
- 10. Have we identified specific assessment tools for targeted student groups?**

BETTER TOGETHER: K-12 Student Learning Assessment Tools to Support Continuous Improvement

These free PA assessment tools can offer data insights to schools and LEAs/districts throughout continuous improvement.

View additional free PA tools that support LEAs with continuous improvement work:

[Better Together Quick Reference Guide \(PDF\)](https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/k12data/bettertogetherquickrefguide.pdf)

<https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/k12data/bettertogetherquickrefguide.pdf>

What are our big areas of strength?
Opportunities for improvement?



FUTURE READY
PA INDEX

futurereadypa.org

Provides multiple indicators of school performance

In what areas of student growth
do we need additional focus?



pvaas.sas.com

Combines achievement data with growth and student projection data, mapping students' path towards proficiency and beyond

In what areas of achievement
do we need additional focus?



Data Interaction™
for Pennsylvania Student Assessments

pa.emetric.net/login

Houses all state assessment data with detailed achievement data at the district, school, and student levels

Are students on track
to meet their goals?



PENNSYLVANIA
FIREFLY
Student Progress Indicators

bit.ly/pafirefly

An interim benchmark assessment providing a prediction of how students may perform on the PSSA or Keystone assessment*

**Predictions added after SY2024-25*

Which standards or reporting
categories point to a need for
differentiated instruction?

C L A S S R O O M
D I A G N O S T I C T O O L S

tinyurl.com/PACDTResources

A set of online assessments that measure specific academic strengths and areas of need in order to guide instruction

What adjustments in daily instruction
are needed to prepare students for
assessments, and address gaps in learning?



pdesas.org

Resources for standards-based systems in schools and LEAs/Districts