

**Feedback from the Field:
Ways to Improve the Illinois State Assessment Program
Gathered in 2021-22**

**Final Report
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**Submitted to the
Illinois State Board of Education
by
The Center for Assessment**



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Background

State Assessment Priorities

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is committed to having the highest quality, most useful state assessment program possible, within practical constraints. ISBE staff have repeatedly heard calls to improve the state assessment program. While there might be many possible positive changes, over the last year ISBE focused on three main ways to improve the state assessment that were suggested by the field.

Main ways to improve the state assessment, starting points for the project
1. Providing more instructionally useful information, in more timely ways
2. Reducing the accountability assessment footprint, especially the amount of time required for the end-of-year state assessment
3. Supporting more equitable access to quality assessments for all districts

One area of suggested improvement is making the information from the state assessments more useful. Users say that returning the results more quickly would be helpful, especially since currently student and school results are returned months after students complete the test in late spring near the end of the school year. Users also asked for reports that would provide more information that would be useful to informing instructional decisions by educators and students to inform actions to improve student learning.

A second area of suggested improvement is reducing the amount of time and pressure associated with the state's assessment and accountability programs.

A third area of suggested improvement is for the state to provide opportunities of interim assessment information to all districts. ISBE has heard that a sizable percentage of districts do not use an interim assessment because the district feels it cannot afford to purchase such an assessment.

Why Gather Feedback

ISBE felt a need to gather input regarding the state assessment program for several reasons. ISBE was interested in gathering feedback in a more widespread effort than had been done recently. ISBE also wanted to consider possible modified goals and new designs for the state assessment as the time for a new contract for the state assessment is approaching. Further, the recent infusion of federal funds made a one-time major effort to improve the state's assessment system more fiscally feasible.

A key desire was for input that might inform possible new assessment designs. Members of the State Board and ISBE staff wanted to gather feedback from more than just a few select people,

such as might be done through the state’s standing advisory committees or a specially created task force. ISBE also felt the feedback process should be conducted by an organization other than ISBE. Not only would an external partner supplement ISBE’s assessment expertise, having the work coordinated by a third-party signals ISBE’s commitment to being impartial.

ISBE contracted with the [Center for Assessment](#) to partner in gathering and analyzing feedback regarding the state assessment program and possible future directions. The Center for Assessment, a 501(c)3 (not for profit) company has extensive experience supporting states with their large-scale assessment and accountability programs.

Key Results and Recommendations

In addition to meeting initially with the State Board, the State Assessment Review Committee (SARC), and the Illinois Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), ISBE staff and the Center worked together to design two major ways to collect feedback: a survey that would be available throughout the state, and a series of focus groups. The survey was designed to collect information on several assessment design questions from a very large number of people; the focus groups were designed to elicit more nuanced information about issues from the survey from a wide range of users of state assessment information. The results from both types of feedback were combined to inform the Center’s recommendations to ISBE for possible future directions for the state assessment.

The survey was made available statewide for approximately six weeks, from mid-December 2021 through the end of January 2022. ISBE advertised the availability of the survey through its communication channels. ISBE and Center for Assessment staff also met with several educational organizations to provide an informational briefing regarding the survey and answer questions. The main purpose was to encourage each organization to send information and invite their constituencies—everyone the organization felt whose voices should be heard—to participate in the survey. The survey and background information could be accessed through a simple link.

The success of this strategy to “share an open invitation” is reflected in the response:

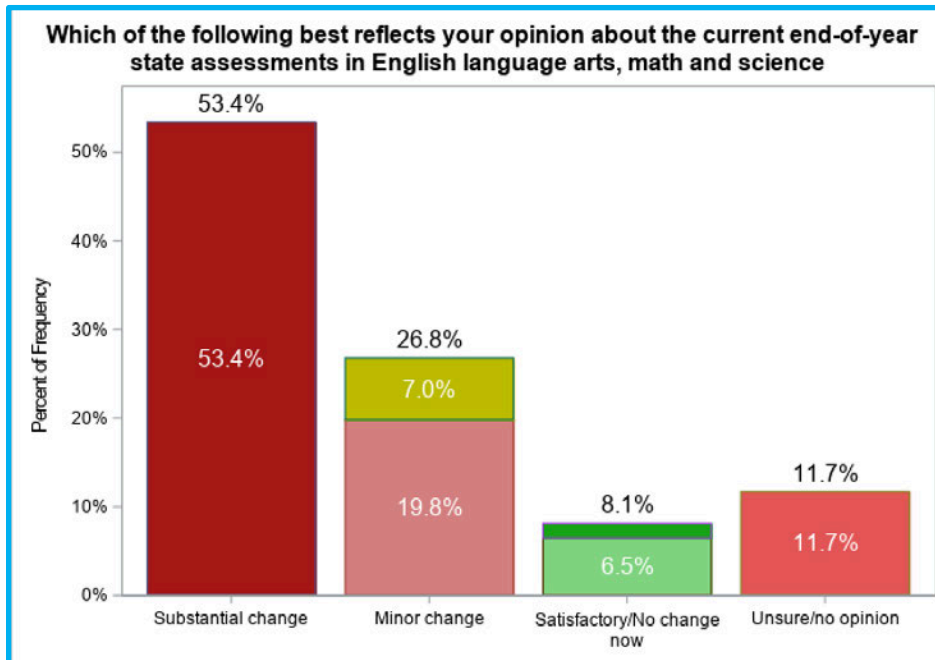
- Over 5200 people responded to the survey
 - About 70% teachers and other classroom personnel
 - About 20% school or district administrators and staff
 - About 4% parents
 - About 4% students
 - About 2% other

Most survey questions used a simple rating format (Strongly Reject to Strongly Support) or Yes/Undecided/No. However, several open-ended questions associated with clusters of questions (issues) were provided to allow those taking the survey to write anything they wished.

- Over 2700 people wrote comments to at least one of the open-ended opportunities—usually describing or explaining why they had rated positive/negative

These open-response comments were very helpful in providing context about the rating and yes/no questions in the survey.

Over 70% responded in the survey that they agreed or strongly agreed that the current state end-of-year assessment could and should be improved.



A majority of respondents (about 53%) indicated they felt the current assessments needed “substantial change.” An additional about 20% indicated they were “not satisfied” and thought minor changes were needed; about 8% indicated they were “satisfied” and thought minor

changes were needed. About 8% of respondents indicated they felt no changes should be undertaken now, and about 12% said they were unsure or had no opinion.

However, there was little agreement about how the state assessment should be improved. Responses to survey questions that probed for several possible design aspects were consistently split. Occasionally, a greater proportion of responses were favorable or unfavorable, but there was always a substantial amount of disagreement.

ISBE invited many organizations to nominate persons to participate in the Focus Groups. Over 80 total persons nominated by over 30 organizations participated in the eight Focus Groups held virtually in February and March 2022 and facilitated by the Center for Assessment.

Synthesizing feedback from the Survey and Focus Groups, the Center for Assessment has formulated options ISBE can consider regarding two main areas:

- How should the state provide more instructionally useful information?
- How should the state summative end-of-year assessment be improved?

Recommendations regarding the third interest, “How could more equitable access be provided for districts to procure effective interim assessments” is subsumed within the two areas.

How Should the State Provide More Instructionally Useful Information?

Based on the feedback gathered from the Survey and Focus Group, ISBE may consider several possible options for providing more instructionally useful information.

Recommendation 1: Develop state interim assessment supports and/or resources that are decoupled from summative uses

In order to provide more instructionally useful information during the year ISBE may consider providing statewide interim assessment supports or resources to districts and schools. The feedback from the survey and focus groups suggests that there is not sufficient support to make such assessments compulsory statewide or use these assessments for summative purposes.

Rationale and Considerations

While there was mixed support in the survey for a through year model, both the survey and the focus groups revealed strong support for local control over curriculum and assessment choices.

- Most feedback was that districts would prefer to retain control over interim assessments, as districts have reasons to choose different interim assessments and administer them at different times. In addition, several districts voiced they have used certain assessments for many years, and had considerable investments in data trends, integrated software systems, and developed expertise in interpreting the specific reports. For these reasons the large proportion of respondents who weighed in on this issue strongly preferred to retain the interim assessments they currently use. This perspective was reinforced in focus group discussions.
- Because current federal law requires a state to use a single interim assessment for accountability purposes, ISBE would not be allowed to incorporate multiple companies' interim assessments into forming a summative determination for accountability purposes. Therefore, ISBE would need to select or develop a single assessment and not allow other interim assessments for the purpose of generating assessment scores for accountability. That position was not supported by respondents. Thus, an interim assessment adopted or developed by the state would disrupt or duplicate the interim assessments used by many districts.
- Using an interim assessment for accountability would probably require the state to designate which content standards should be assessed and when. Most feedback disagreed with this role for state assessment, saying such decisions about curricular scope and sequence should be left to the districts and not done by the state, especially indirectly through adoption of interim assessments.
- Most respondents were supportive of the state being able to require some aspects they deemed necessary if the interim assessment information were to be used by the state. For example, the state should be able to specify administration conditions to ensure appropriate security, comparability, and state access to required data.

- Many respondents expressed concern that it would not be possible to use the same assessments for both instructional and accountability purposes. Specifically, respondents worried that interim assessments, currently used for instructional purposes, would be “corrupted” if higher stakes associated with state accountability were attached to them.

Some suggestions arose in the Focus Groups that could inform options to support this recommendation. One set of options involved ISBE facilitating local identification and acquisition of high-quality interim assessments, *without* using interim assessments for summative accountability purposes. Another alternative is to provide some training and professional development for using local assessments more effectively. Still another option is for the state to provide some model interim assessment resources (e.g., a bank of items, tasks, or forms) that districts or schools could use if desired in lieu or in addition to local resources. Some support was voiced for each of these options among those who recognized a need for interim assessments but who opposed using them for summative purposes. These alternatives are elaborated as recommendations 2A and 2B.

Recommendation 2A: Develop criteria for “high quality” interim assessments

ISBE may consider developing criteria for “high quality” interim assessments and provide professional training to districts so districts could be more certain the interim assessments the districts procure are technically sound and appropriate for their intended purposes.

Recommendation 2B: Create model resources and/or a “vetted list” of interim assessments

ISBE may consider applying the criteria described in recommendation 2A to create model resources available as options to districts, such as a bank of items, performance tasks, or tests. ISBE may also create a vetted list of interim assessments that would help guide districts in procuring an interim assessment. ISBE might provide financial support for districts that participated, especially districts with financial needs.

Rationale and Considerations

Most respondents indicated they preferred an interim assessment design where each interim assessment during the year was matched to the content that was recently instructed, in chunks perhaps 2-3 times a year, but not as small as a single content standard. The criteria for “high quality” assessments should articulate how districts could know what content each interim assessment was aligned to, so a district could evaluate how good a match the assessment is to the district’s needs.

Recommendation 3: Provide professional training to support more effective assessment practices

ISBE may consider providing professional training, directly or through regional or other appropriate groups, to support educators using assessment information more effectively. This assessment literacy could focus on use of summative, interim, and/or formative assessment information to support better teaching and school programmatic decisions.

Rationale and Considerations

- Many respondents said the state could play a very valuable role in articulating the need for balanced assessment systems, and in supporting districts especially in establishing and improving such systems, without the state directly providing more than the state summative assessment.
- This option was emphasized by those who felt a barrier to useful assessment information was not only in shortcomings in the assessment instruments but also in the ability of people to use the information effectively.

Recommendation 4: Accelerate and improve assessment reporting

ISBE may consider working with its current or future state assessment contractors to accelerate the response time for summative assessment results and to expand and/or improve assessment reports so they are more useful to educators, parents, and others.

Rationale and Considerations

There was near universal agreement that returning assessment results more quickly was needed and would contribute to the assessment results being more useful and in the state assessment program being viewed more favorably. Some people noted previous advisory groups had provided more detailed recommendations regarding reports and reporting. A few people raised specific ways the state end-of-year assessment might be changed to support returning results more quickly (e.g., pre-equating) but evaluating such designs is beyond the intended scope of this feedback process.

Some of the options above are complementary—recommendations 3 and 4 could be done on their own or with recommendations 1 and 2.

How Should the State Summative Assessment Be Improved?

The feedback informed recommendations regarding how the state summative assessment might be improved, in addition to returning results more quickly, with support to educators to understand the use the results (recommendations 3 and 4 above).

Recommendation 5: Develop a theory of action for state assessments

ISBE should consider developing a clear, detailed theory of action of what purpose(s) the state assessment should serve and what actions will lead to those purpose(s) being accomplished. In particular, the role of assessments should be clearly articulated in terms of what assessment information is needed to support the actions leading to the goals.

Rationale and Considerations

The feedback encouraged the state to be clear about the intended purpose(s) of the state assessment which would inform design decisions. There was some skepticism of the state assessment being able to serve multiple purposes well—in particular, instructional purposes—especially when it was closely associated with the federally mandated accountability uses. This issue is addressed in more detail in focus group theme 5.

Recommendation 6: Explore strategies to shorten the end-of-year test

ISBE should explore options to shorten the end-of-year state assessment, and make sure that any reduction in length of testing time minimizes unintended negative consequences. ISBE should work with their technical advisory groups and their contractors to determine technically defensible and feasible strategies to pursue this option.

Rationale and Considerations

Reducing the footprint of the state's accountability assessments was one of the original core issues identified and was generally supported especially in focus group discussions as elaborated in theme 3. However, respondents were split about specific possible approaches to shortening the state test, including reducing the number of questions, increasing the proportion of questions that used simpler formats such as multiple-choice, or eliminating writing. Cautions voiced about shortening the test included making sure the test would be long enough to be sufficiently valid and reliable and include the range of content and skills to signal what is valued to be taught.

ISBE should also consider whether any adjustments to the blueprint that necessitate a break in longitudinal comparability is acceptable.

Recommendation 7: Consider transitioning from fixed form to an adaptive design

ISBE could consider an adaptive design for the state assessment, where the difficulty of questions would be adjusted to the student's ability level.

Rationale and Considerations

A majority of respondents supported making the state test adaptive. There are several possible adaptive designs, for different purposes and with different advantages and disadvantages. Since the feedback gathered was not detailed, ISBE would need to determine its main goals—such as whether to make the test shorter for some students, or to increase the precision for certain types of students—and consult on the practical implications, such as costs and timelines for developing the larger item bank required for adaptive tests.

Recommendation 8: Proceed deliberately and responsively

ISBE should develop and carry out plans to improve the state assessment and support improved local assessment instruments and uses of assessment information. In doing so ISBE will need to reconcile the often competing demands from different stakeholders and users, and the need for unassailable quality in high-impact assessments with the urgency to make improvements.

Rationale and Considerations

There is high agreement about the need to improve state assessment, but less consensus about what improvement consists of. ISBE can play a central role in providing leadership, building up trust, and developing plans that balance moving forward with maintaining needed quality.

Feedback Survey

Background

The State Board and ISBE staff desired to gather input from a very wide range of people. A variety of approaches was considered. The decision was to develop a survey that would be accessible by educators, parents, and community members. It was also decided that the survey would be as widely distributed as possible, and not distributed to a particular target group. The Center for Assessment would be responsible for designing, administering, analyzing, and reporting the survey results to ISBE.

Procedures

The Center for Assessment developed the Survey to gather information on specific issues related to the main areas for improvement identified by ISBE. ISBE approved the final version of the survey. The survey was web-based and available through a standard internet link.

To provide some background to the survey—purpose, orientation to the issues, etc.—the Center for Assessment and ISBE worked together to develop a short video. The video led directly to the survey link so that a person could watch the video and then immediately take the survey. The video was made available through internet links to both Vimeo and YouTube platforms.

Because ISBE desired to have the survey made as widely available as possible, ISBE advertised the availability of the survey through its communication channels. In addition, ISBE identified several educational organizations throughout the state representing various educational constituencies. ISBE and the Center for Assessment met with all of the organizations that accepted an invitation to meet. In the meeting, the goal of the survey, to get input on how to improve the state assessment, was explained and the video was played so the organizational members could see what they were being asked to share with their constituencies. The link for accessing the video was shared, and an invitation extended to share the link with as many persons as the organization felt appropriate.

The survey was open for responses from mid-December 2021 through the end of January 2022.

The Center for Assessment analyzed the data, including responses to the open-ended comment opportunities.

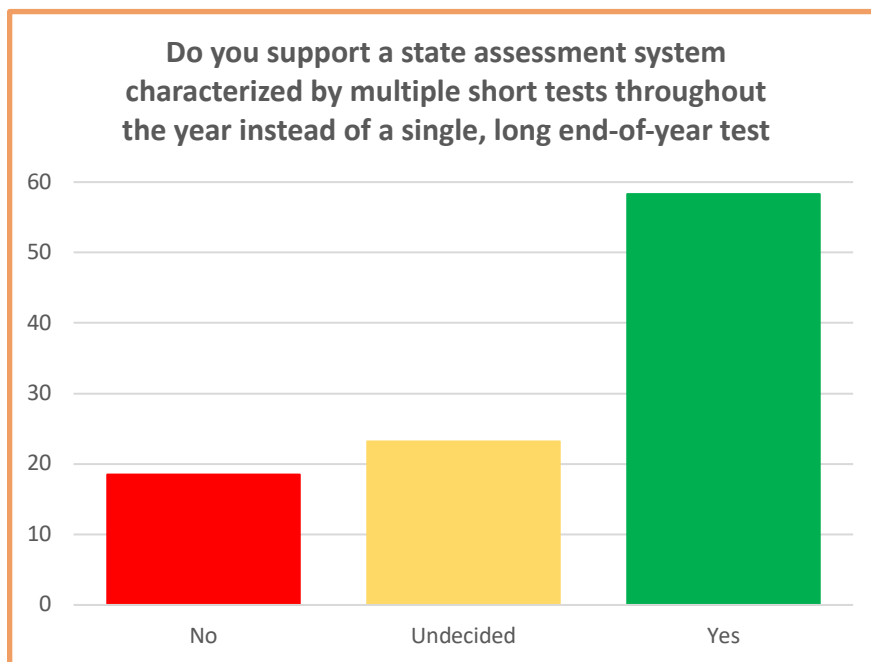
Results

The survey results are presented below following the structure of the survey in three main areas:

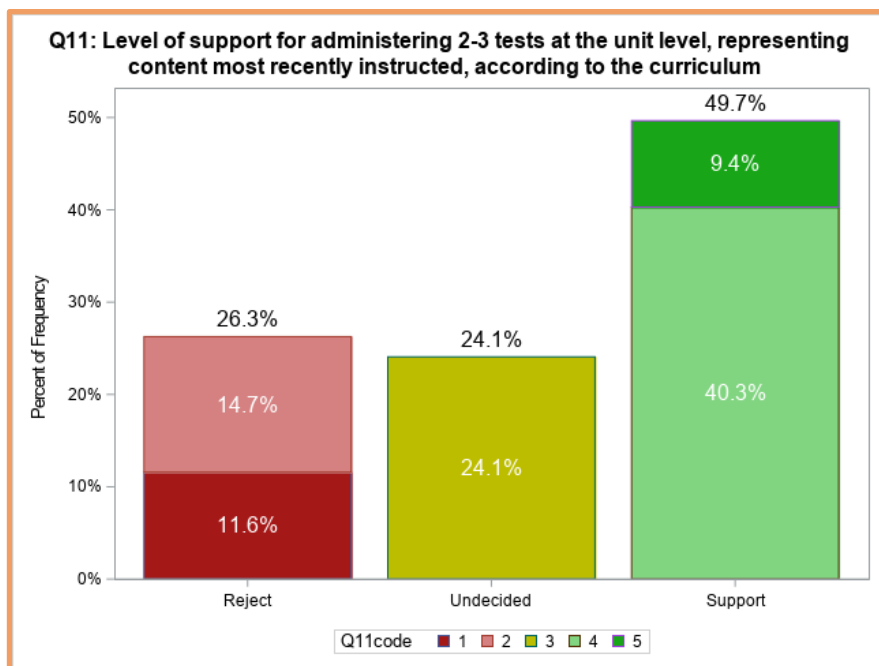
- Possible designs/approaches other than a single end-of-year assessment that would address shortening the end-of-year assessment and providing more instructionally useful information
- State role in a balanced or through-year assessment system
- Recommendations to improve the end-of-year assessment

Possible designs/approaches other than a single end-of-year assessment

Result 1: Respondents were favorable/mixed for a “through-year”-type design (multiple assessments prior to end-of-year), with highest support for least restrictive conditions. This is shown by responses to three related survey questions.



Almost 60% of respondents indicated they supported the idea of a state assessment that would incorporate multiple short tests administered during the year instead of a single, long test administered at the end of the year.

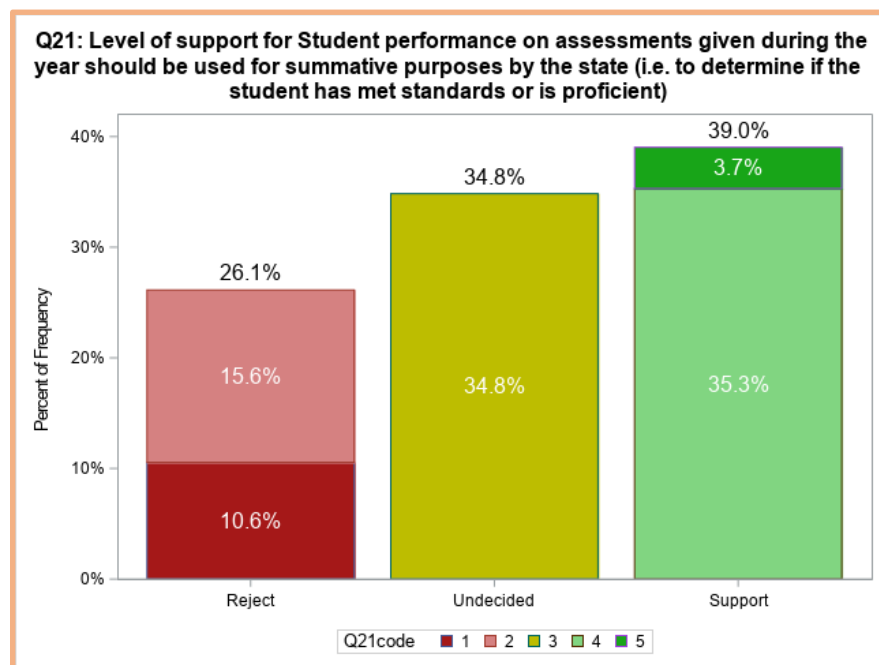


About 50% of respondents indicated they supported, or strongly supported, the design of administering 2-3 tests during the year, each of which would assess content most recently instructed and related to the curriculum, which would be like a unit level test.

Over 25% of respondents indicated they rejected or strongly rejected this design. Almost a quarter of respondents indicated

they were undecided.

In this graph and others like it in this document, the dark red indicates “Strongly reject,” the light red indicates “Reject,” the light green indicates “Support,” and the dark green indicates “Strongly support.” So, for this question there were slightly more respondents who strongly rejected the design than there were who strongly supported it.



About 40% of respondents indicated they supported or strongly supported using information gathered from assessments administered during the year for accountability purposes, with somewhat fewer people strongly supporting than strongly rejecting. A large proportion—about one-third—were undecided.

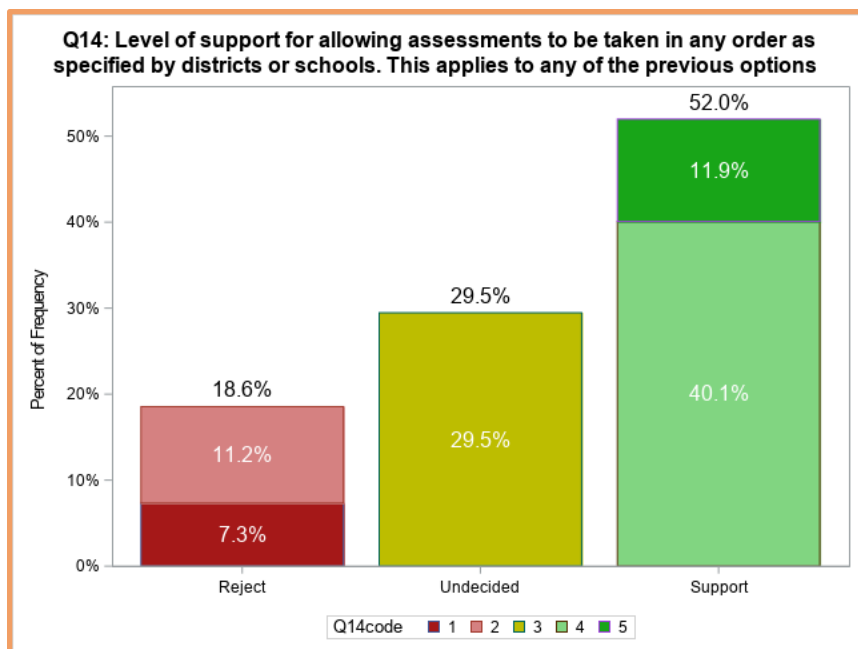
The written comments given in the open-response sections provided important context to understand the answers to these three questions about the use of prior-to-the end-of-year assessments.

When in favor of prior-to-the end-of-year assessment, most respondents indicated their support was under certain conditions. Especially, respondents wanted what might be termed “local control over assessments”:

- They supported using the interim assessments currently used by their districts/schools. Respondents often mentioned the assessments by name, e.g., commercial assessments such as NWEA’s MAP assessment, Renaissance Learning’s STAR assessment, Curriculum Associates’ iReady assessment, among others; others mentioned their districts had developed their own non-commercial assessments.
- Some who supported wanted to use the results from their own district assessments *instead* of a state summative assessment.
- Some supported *combining* the data from locally chosen and administered interim assessments with a state assessment for summative purposes.

When not in favor, respondents expressed concerns about various aspects of a loss of local control or local utility of assessments:

- Some respondents were not in favor because of a perceived increase in state testing time.
- Respondents were not in favor because they opposed loss of local control, especially loss of the ability of districts to choose their own interim assessments, or the loss of the benefits of those district-chosen interim assessments. Benefits included fit with the district, investment in developing systems and human expertise to support using those particular assessments’ reports and data, and trend data.
- Some respondents expressed concern that using interim assessments for accountability purposes would result in a “corruption” of the instructional usefulness of the interim assessments. For example, teachers might be fine with students showing what they do not know in an assessment intended to inform instruction, but those same teachers might not want their students to reveal weaknesses if the results were to be used for accountability.

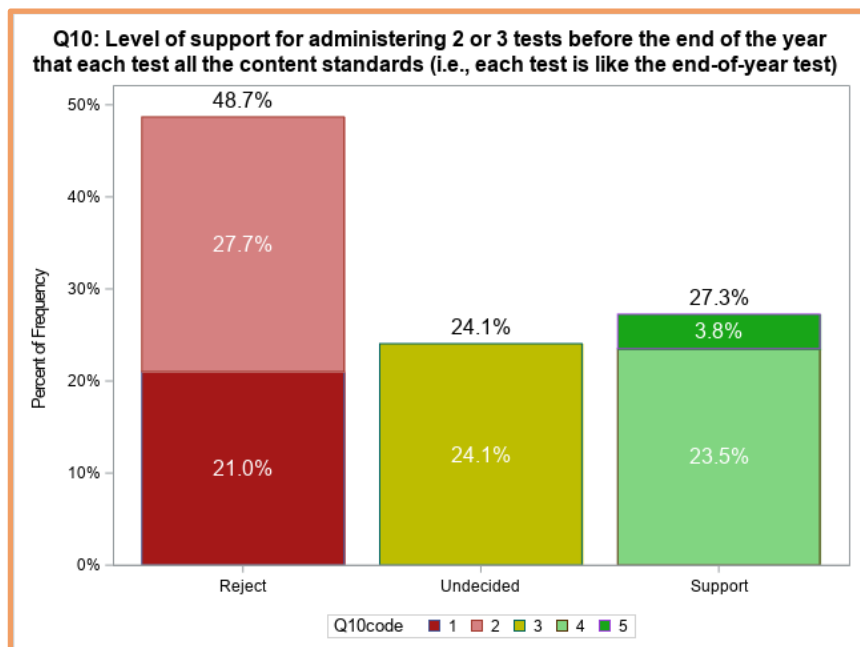


In a similar way of favoring local control, most respondents supported being able to specify the order in which assessments during the year could be taken. A sizable proportion of respondents were undecided or did not support this flexibility.

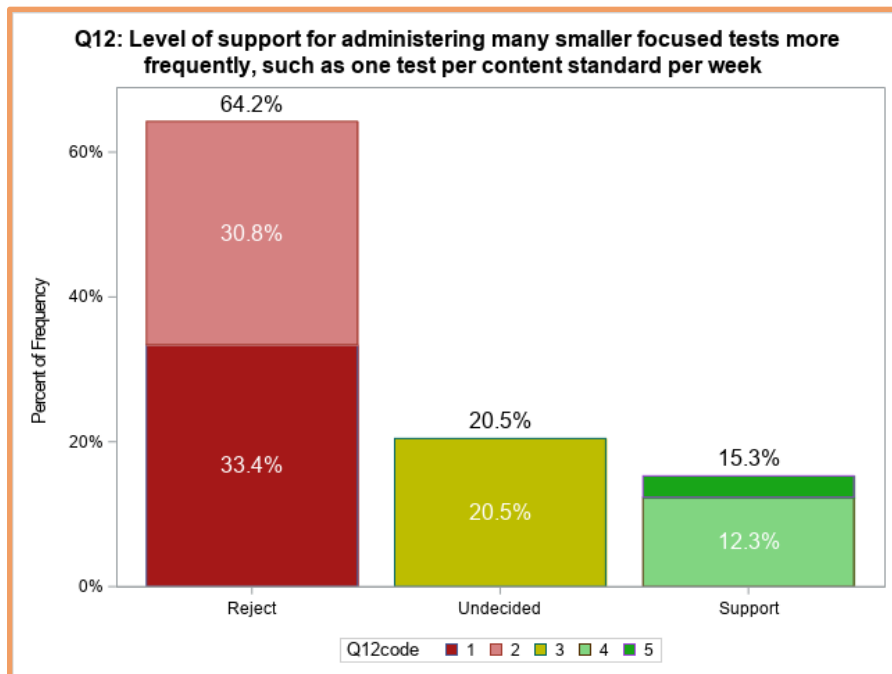
Respondents who favored flexibility in ordering of assessments cited the desirability of fitting assessments to the

different “scope and sequence” of local curricula for instructional purposes.

Result 2: When in favor of interim assessments, respondents supported 2-3 assessments a year focused on the content recently instructed. They rejected testing much broader content 2-3 times a year or testing more focused content much more frequently.



Almost 50% of respondents rejected the design of having interim assessments test all the content a student should know by the end of the year, with over 20% strongly rejecting. About 25% were undecided or supported this design.



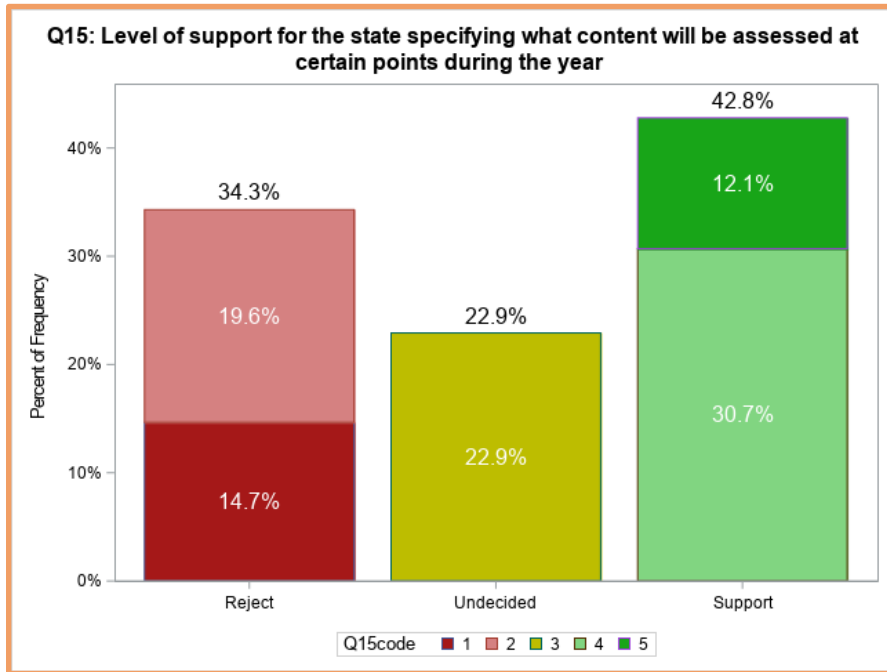
Almost two-thirds of respondents rejected the design of having interim assessments structured as tests that could give very specific feedback at the individual content standard level, through testing more frequently, perhaps once a week.

State role in a balanced or through-year assessment system

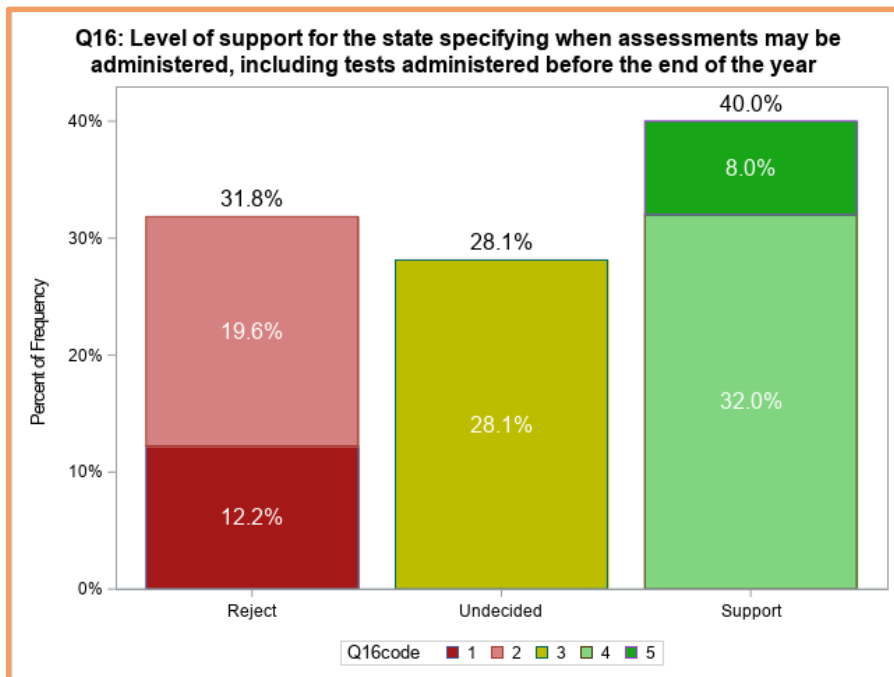
Because having a balanced or a through-year assessment system¹ involves having interim assessments administered during the year, a set of questions was asked regarding the state's role. How much did respondents support the state having control over the content of the assessments administered during the year (similar to the state having control over the content of what is assessed at the end of the year), the timing of when assessments would be administered, the administration conditions (such as security), and whether the state would have access to the data produced by the assessment administered during the year.

Result 3: Overall, respondents were split but slightly favorable regarding state control over content and timing, and largely supportive of the state being able to specify some important administrative conditions and having access to the data if a through-year design were pursued.

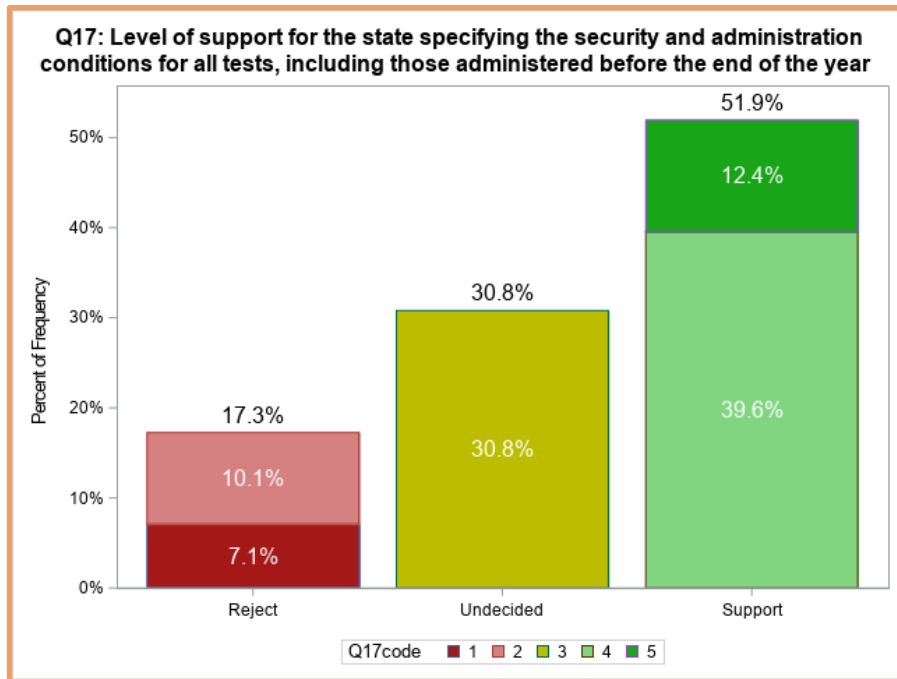
¹ A balanced assessment system may be defined as consisting of multiple assessment components (e.g., summative, interim, and formative assessment) each targeting a specific information need. A through-year assessment system typically includes interim and end-of-year components where information from the two types of assessment is combined to produce a summative score, and the interim component is also intended to produce information to inform instruction during the year.



Respondents were split, with slightly more (about 43%) supporting the state being able to specify what content would be assessed at certain points during the year. Sizable proportions of respondents rejected (over one-third) or were undecided (about one-fifth).

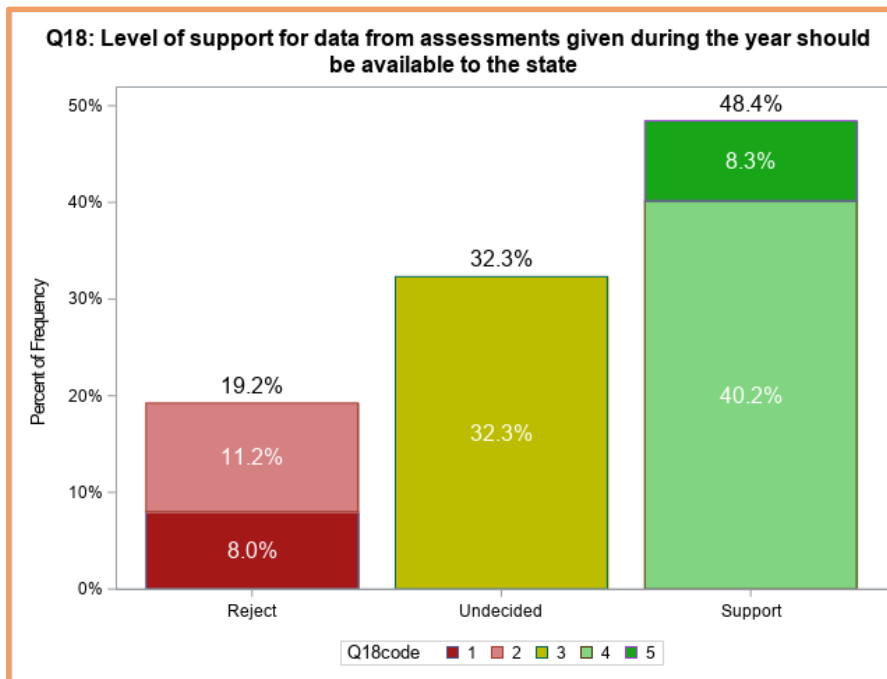


Respondents were split, with slightly more (40%) supporting the state being able to specify when assessments would be administered, both toward the end of the year and before the end of the year. Sizable proportions of respondents rejected (about 32%) or were undecided (about 28%).



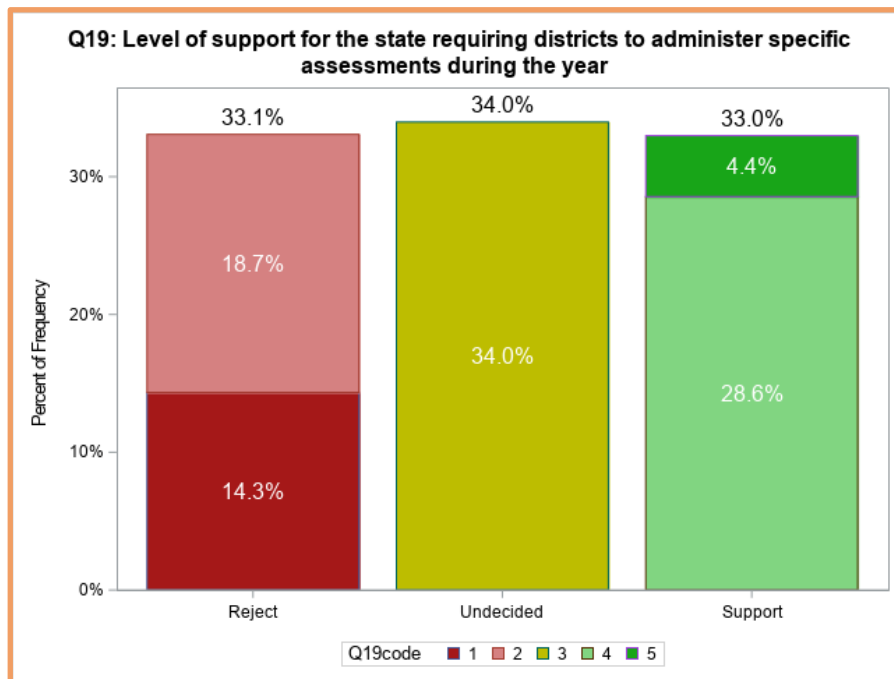
Respondents were split, with a majority (about 52%) supporting the state being able to specify security and administration conditions for all tests, including those administered before the end of the year if a through-year approach were pursued. Other administration conditions the state specifies include those intended to promote comparability through

standardization and fairness (such as providing accommodations). Sizable proportions of respondents rejected (about 17%) or were undecided (about 31%).



Respondents were split, with most (about 48%) supporting the state being able to access the data from assessments given during the year, including from assessments given prior to the end of year if a through-year approach were pursued. Of course, to implement a through-year approach where information from interim assessments is combined with end-of-year to produce a summative score, the

state would need to have access to the interim assessment data. Sizable proportions of respondents rejected (about 19%) or were undecided (about 32%) about affording the state such access.



In the key question of level of support for the state being able to require districts to administer *specific* assessments during the year for a through-year assessment, respondents were evenly split, with about one-third supporting (33%), one third rejecting (about 33%), and one third undecided (34%).

Comments from many of those who supported

the state being able to require districts to administer specific assessments during the year echoed responses to previous questions: they were supportive *if* the required assessments were the interim assessments the districts were currently using. Others who responded supportively said they would support if the interim assessments were of “high quality,” at least as good or better than the assessments they were currently using. A third comment about support was that it was conditioned on the through-year assessment (including an end of year assessment) not having a cumulative testing time greater than the current end of year test.

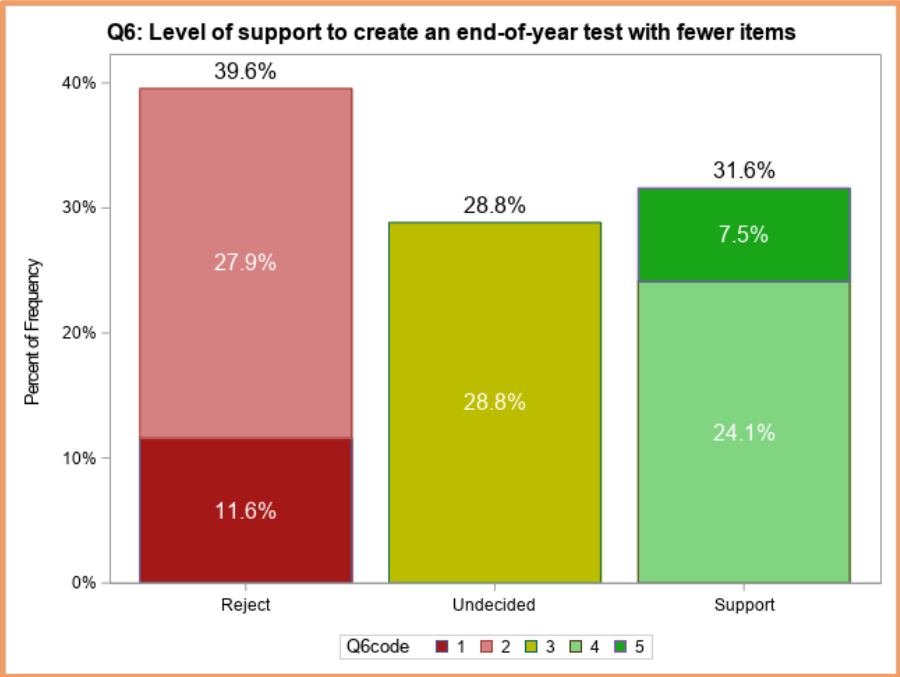
Comments from those who rejected the state being able to require districts to administer specific assessments during the year objected, assuming this meant that districts would not be able to choose their own or use their currently adopted interim assessments. Another reason given for rejecting was that the respondents thought that it would require a shared state-wide scope and sequence to accurately assess during the year, which respondents were opposed to either because they favored local control over what they viewed as a curriculum matter, or because they felt it was impractical, given the diversity of curricula used in the state. A third reason for rejecting was that the respondents felt that multiple state assessments would be too time intensive.

Recommendations to improve the end-of-year assessment

Several questions were asked regarding how to improve the state’s end-of-year assessment with a focus on making it shorter, since one of the primary areas identified was a desire from the field to reduce the footprint of the state’s accountability tests. Another question asked

about the state providing an optional K-2 assessment to support districts with early elementary students. Respondents also offered suggestions for how to improve the state’s end-of-year assessment in their open-ended survey responses.

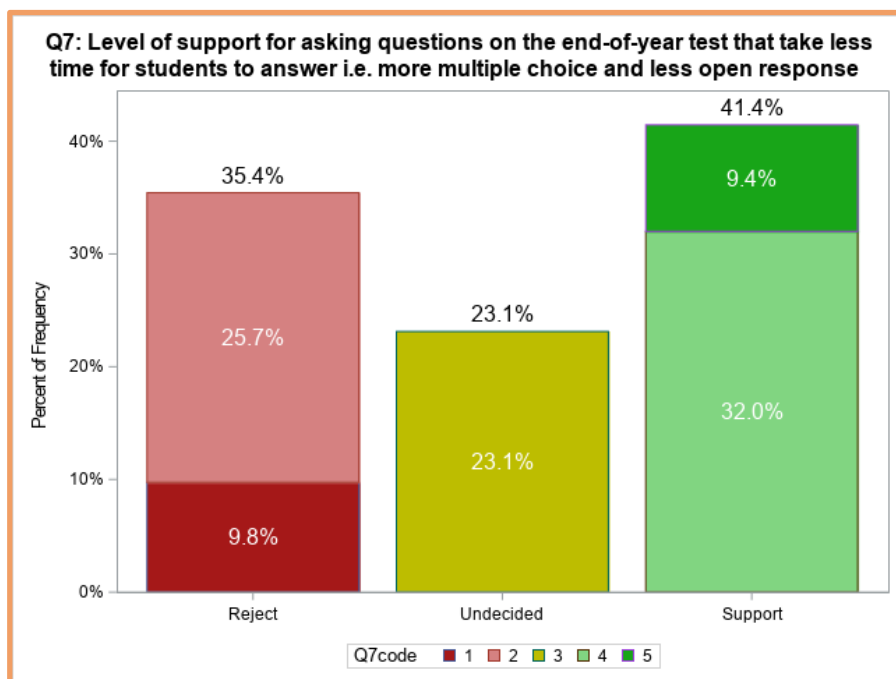
Result 4: Respondents were split about specific ways to shorten the end-of-year test, with slightly more rejecting having fewer items, and slightly more favoring having more items that students could answer quickly (e.g., multiple choice format).



Respondents were split, with more (about 40%) rejecting having an end-of-year assessment with fewer items. Sizable proportions were supportive (about 32%) or undecided (about 29%).

Some who rejected shortening the test by having fewer items expressed concerns that a shorter test might not be sufficiently valid or reliable, or that valued

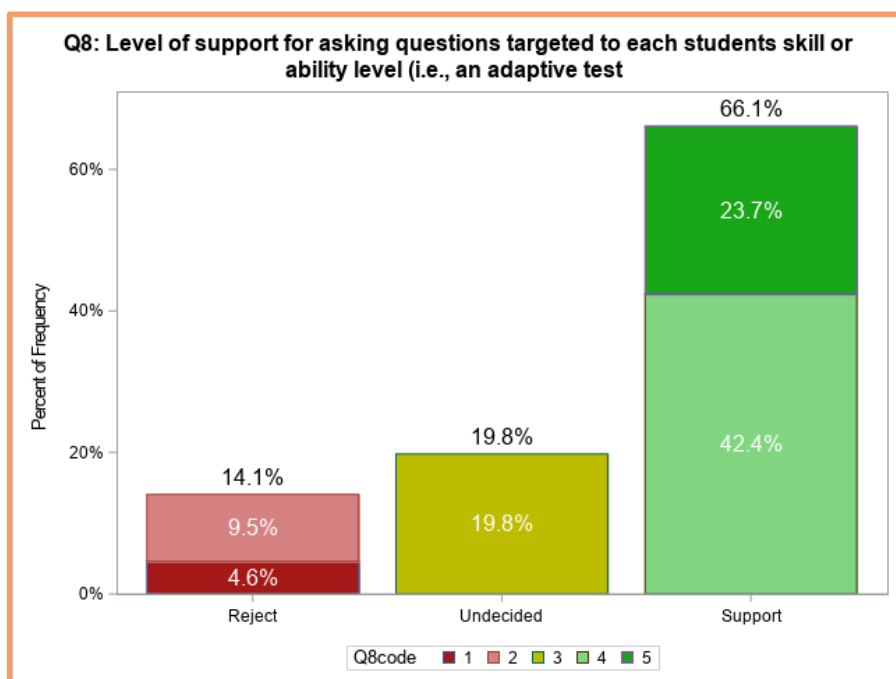
types of assessments—such as those that require students to write and construct their responses—might be lost, and that would have a negative effect on what was then taught.



Respondents were split, with slightly more (about 41%) supporting having an end-of-year test that would take less time by including more questions that would take students less time to answer, such as more multiple-choice format questions and fewer open response. Sizable proportions rejected that approach (about 35%) or were undecided (about 23%).

Some who rejected indicated that the test should assess higher order thinking skills and complex skills through direct evidence, such as writing.

Result 5: Respondents favored an adaptive assessment design.



A large majority—almost two-thirds (about 66%) of respondents supported having an adaptive assessment, whether for the end-of-year or for assessments administered during the year. About 14% rejected, and about 20% were undecided.

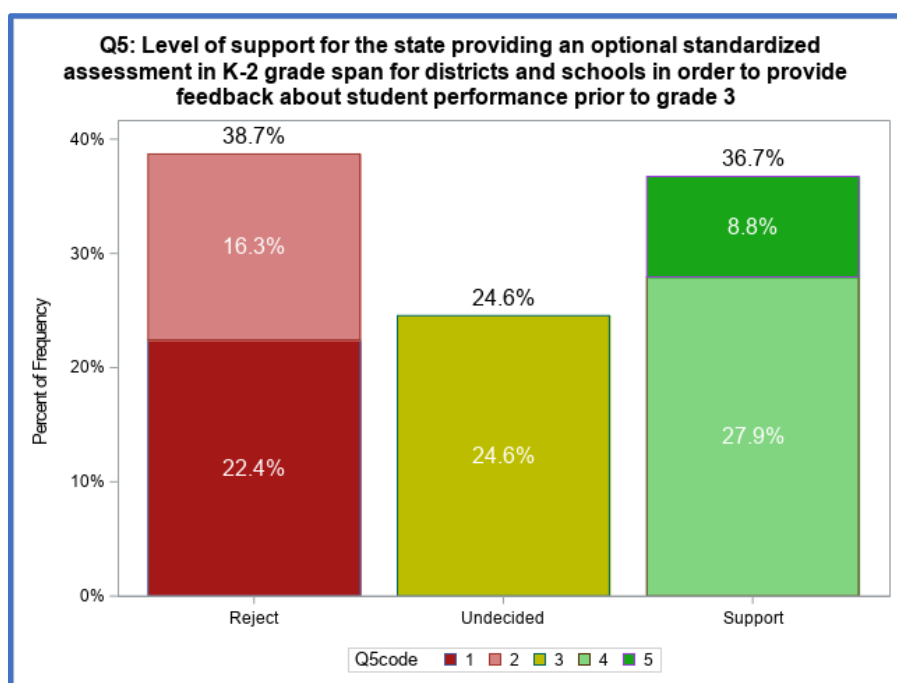
Some respondents who supported an adaptive designed mentioned they currently used interim assessment with

an adaptive design and were pleased with the advantages. Other respondents were in favor of

having an assessment that would be less burdensome and more accurate particularly for lower-performing students. Still other respondents favored an adaptive test under the assumption that it might shorten testing time, at least for some students.

Some respondents who rejected the adaptive assessment cited technical concerns for a high-stakes summative assessment.

Result 6: Respondents were split regarding the state providing an optional assessment for early elementary students in grades K-2.



Respondents were split regarding the state providing an optional standardized assessment to provide feedback for early elementary students in grades K-2, since the currently earliest state assessment is in grade 3. About the same proportion supported (about 37%) as rejected (about 39%), although the proportion that strongly rejected (about 22%) was much larger than the proportion

that strongly supported the idea (about 9%). About 25% were undecided.

Some respondents who supported cited the importance of high-quality instruction in the early grades and felt having optional high-quality assessments provided by the state could be helpful.

Some respondents who rejected said that for students in these early grades, a standardized assessment was inappropriate. Some responded that they did not think a state assessment option was needed since they already had early assessments they were satisfied with. Some respondents cited a lack of trust that the state could develop high quality early childhood assessments, or that the assessments would remain optional, opening the door for increased testing and accountability in the early elementary grades.

Result 7: Respondents suggested several other ways they thought would improve the state assessment program, including returning results more quickly, reporting the assessment results in more useful ways, providing more instructionally useful information, supporting non-

summative local assessments, supporting development of assessment literacy and associated systems for better using assessment information, eliminating the state assessment system, and not changing the assessment system to allow some stability.

In their open-response comments to the survey, respondents suggested several ways they thought the state assessment program could be improved. The more frequently mentioned suggestions are summarized below.

- Return results more quickly – There were many respondents who felt the state assessment was less useful than it should be because assessment results were returned months after students completed taking the assessment. Returning the results in a timelier manner could dramatically increase the usefulness of state assessment data.
- Return assessment results in more useful ways – There were many respondents who suggested the state assessment data could be reported and shared in ways that would make the data more useful. Suggestions included having student and aggregated reports that were easier to understand by the intended users of educators, parents, students, as well as the broader community.
- Provide more information that users can use to inform instruction – There were many respondents who felt the level of information provided by the end-of-year state assessment was not specific enough to help inform the types of instructional decisions they cared about most. Other respondents noted that there are many ways assessment might provide information to improve instruction, ranging from more diagnostic information during the course of instruction (not feasible for an end-of-year or even interim assessment) to information to evaluate and improve program effectiveness. Different types of reports are needed for these different purposes.
- Support non-state assessments – There were some respondents who advocated that the state could help most not by expanding state assessments, but by supporting non-state assessments. Such support might include helping districts evaluate the quality of their interim and formative assessments; perhaps by the state publishing a list of commercial assessments the state had vetted as meeting the state’s quality criteria. The state might also support districts’ conducting assessment audits to help check for gaps, redundancies, and coherence. The general thrust was that the state might be most helpful by helping districts build up the quality of local assessment systems rather than improve or expand the state assessment system, which has limited impact.
- Support better use of assessments through fostering assessment literacy and systems that support effective use of assessment information – There were some respondents who expressed the view that the biggest challenge was not in getting better assessment information, but rather in using the assessment information well. Respondents suggested the state could support the increased use of assessment information by supporting development of assessment literacy by the various users of assessment

information—especially state assessment information—including teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members, and policy makers. The assessment literacy supports would need to be fit to each audience. Another way the state could help support more effective use of assessment information is to support development and use of systems that reduce barriers and foster good practices, such as integrated data systems and/or interoperable data exchange standards.

- Eliminate the state assessment program – There were some respondents who favored not having a state assessment program at all. Some felt the time spent on the state assessment would be better spent in locally determined activities, such as more instruction. Some felt having a state assessment and accountability program reflected an unwarranted and resented lack of trust in the local systems and personnel. None of the respondents who advocated eliminating the state assessment program addressed the federal requirement of having a state assessment and accountability system to qualify for certain federal funds.
- Keep the current system stable for a period to allow users to become used to the current system and adept at using its information, rather than changing it now. Respondents noted that there have been several major changes in the state’s assessment system over the past several years, including a succession of vendors and programs with somewhat different designs, platforms, and reports. Even if improvements are needed, these respondents felt that stability was more important to allow users to become more expert and avoid burnout. Some respondents also noted that stability would provide an opportunity to build trust in the state assessment program and department, that the assessment program would be administered well.

Focus Groups

Background

To elicit more detailed feedback from Illinois stakeholders, a series of Focus Group sessions were conducted throughout February and March 2022. Whereas the survey enabled large numbers of respondents to provide feedback on a wide range of topics, the focus groups were designed to enable small groups of participants to explore a limited number of priority topics more deeply. In this manner, the survey and subsequent focus groups worked together to give ISBE a better sense of the breadth and depth of stakeholder perspectives.

Procedures

As noted previously, ISBE invited many organizations to nominate persons to participate in the Focus Groups. Over 90 people nominated by over 30 organizations participated in the eight Focus Groups held virtually on the dates listed below.

Session	Date	Time
Focus Group 1	February 22, 2022	5:30 – 7:00pm
Focus Group 2	February 22, 2022	2:00 – 3:30pm
Focus Group 3	February 24, 2022	10:00 – 11:30am
Focus Group 4	February 24, 2022	5:30 – 7:00pm
Focus Group 5	February 25, 2022	11:00am – 12:30pm
Focus Group 6	March 1, 2022	5:30 – 7:00pm
Focus Group 7	March 3, 2022	4:30 – 6:00pm
Focus Group 8	March 4, 2022	4:00 – 5:30pm

All Focus Groups were facilitated by at least two of the three following staff members from the Center for Assessment: Dr. Brian Gong, Dr. Erika Landl, or Dr. Chris Domaleski.

Focus group participants are listed in Appendix A.2. A summary agenda for the meeting indicating the prioritized discussion topics is presented below.

Activity	Description
Welcome and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- ISBE staff introduction and welcome- Center facilitator introduction- Participant introductions
Meeting Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Center facilitators describe purpose of the focus groups- Share process to date- Review agenda- Discuss role of focus group and norms

Overview of Survey	- Provide a broad overview of the survey
Discussion #1: Through Year Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review applicable survey data related to through-year assessment - Discuss whether a through-year model that informs summative determinations is promising. Why or why not? What design choices are highest priority and why?
Discussion #2: Interim Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review applicable survey data related to interim assessments. - Discuss whether the state should adopt a role with interim testing. What should be the nature of the role? What implications does that have for local assessments in use?
Discussion #3: Improvements to State Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review applicable survey data related to state assessments. - Discuss recommendations to improve end of year summative assessments.
Wrap-Up and Adjourn	- Thank participants and conclude meeting

Results

The results of the focus group meetings are summarized with respect to six common themes. For each theme, the salient recommendations or concerns are described, followed by examples of comments provided by focus group participants. While these themes do not (and could not) comprehensively cover the full range of ideas discussed across all eight meetings, they clarify shared values and priorities which informed the options presented in this report.

Theme 1: Minimal support for a through course model

There is minimal support for a through course model in which state-selected or state-designed interim assessments are used for purposes of accountability.

Focus group participants were not in favor of any solution that mandated the administration of common, state-dictated interim assessments. This was true in general, but specifically within the context of a through-course model that was intended to inform high-stakes school accountability decisions. Three common concerns related to the use of a through-course model are addressed below.

Inability to use existing local interim assessments

Some participants supported the idea of using interim assessment results to inform or replace state summative results for purposes of school accountability; however, in most cases this was contingent on the use of existing local assessments. One member indicated that they “*would support multiple assessments in a through year if we can have local control around selection and procedures*” but also acknowledged that comparability of results across schools would be an issue. Another participated indicated that the state should “*not spend the money to replace*

what we already do with multiple point-in-time assessments unless they can find a way to offer flexibility for a menu of assessments.”

Others pointed out that mandating a common interim solution would likely require *“shifts in all grade levels with respect to scope and sequence”* to ensure that students are prepared to address the expectations associated with each interim assessment. This would take a significant amount of time and, potentially, interfere with established strategies to scaffold content in a manner that prepares students for the IAR.

Feasibility and utility of a through-course solution supporting the dual role of accountability and informing instruction

Many participants questioned whether interim assessments could be developed that would both provide educators with timely, meaningful information to inform instruction and meet the technical requirements necessary to support federal accountability. Concerns focused on the content and logistical requirements necessary to have instructionally useful results. For example, one participant pointed out that *“Assessments need to have a narrow focus to be effective instructionally”* and that it would take *“a variety of short accountability assessments to both support that goal and meet ESSA standards,”* referring specifically to the requirement that summative assessment results address the breadth and depth of the state’s grade-level content standards. Another indicated that to be *“instructionally useful the results need to be close enough in my decision cycle”* for me to use them. If assessments are designed to measure higher order thinking (e.g., students’ ability to respond to complex problems in writing) and align to college and career ready standards – both federal requirements – expedited results can be a challenge, as sufficient time must be provided for scoring.

Others were concerned about the utility of any data resulting from a through course assessment model given the unique structures, expectations and priorities driving local curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. For example, one participant indicated that their school was part of the state’s competency-based education pilot and questioned whether the model would align with locally established expectations for student performance. Another discussed the significance of social emotional learning (SEL), suggesting that any efforts to move to a new assessment system or model would need to *“be mindful of the importance of this initiative”* to be useful.

Absent a common state-mandated scope and sequence, a common belief was that interim assessments administered within a through-course model would be limited in their utility. *“A generalized or standardized solution for all schools will not really be useful or instructionally relevant because it is not aligned to what is going on in your curriculum.”* Further, a through course model cannot account for the different types of assessment opportunities already in place across districts and schools. That is to say, the type/degree of information needed by one school will not be the same as that of another due to the assessments they already have in place. For this reason, it was suggested that if a change were to be made that the state

“explore a range of models, and don’t just focus on through year” in order to *“make sure that we focus on models that are most promising”* and account for schools’ differential needs.

Unintended negative consequences

Participants shared concerns about the unintended negative consequences that could result from the implementation of a through course model. Specifically, they indicated that administering multiple high-stakes interim assessments throughout the year could increase overall testing time, disrupt school programming, and negatively impact the scope and pacing of instruction. Consistent with this last point one participant indicated that *“if it goes into a summative score that become the central focus of work and instruction.”* Another indicated that the shift to a through year model would be a *“logistical nightmare”* and that the *“hooplah”* often associated with high-stakes assessments (e.g., pep rallies; test preparation sessions) could result in multiple distractions throughout the year.

A common concern was that a through course model would inadvertently increase testing time and reduce instructional time. Participants indicated that many districts would likely continue to give their legacy interim assessments in addition to the state-required tests because *“it would be hard to move away from an assessment that provides historical/trend data”*. Consequently, even if the through course model were designed to reduce time spent on the state summative assessment the overall testing time throughout the year would increase. Finally, it was suggested that administering additional assessments throughout the year could be inappropriate and unduly burdensome for some populations such as students with disabilities and English Language Learners who already participate in a variety of state and federally mandated assessments. A state assessment system predicated on multiple interim assessments could inadvertently harm rather than support efforts to improve outcomes for these students.

Theme 2: Support for local and more balanced assessment systems

Provide support for the selection and use of local assessment products and professional development to help implement more balanced assessment systems.

While participants stressed the value of local control related to assessment choice, there was a strong desire for the state to take an active role assisting local efforts to develop balanced assessment systems.

Many commented on the need for tools and resources that would serve to inform the selection and use of local assessment options. For example, it was suggested that the state help evaluate the quality of local assessments so that districts know they are using products that provide for *“credible and reliable information”* and *“are doing what they are intended to do.”* There was also a call for state-provided professional development focused on improving assessment literacy and building local capacity related to assessment use. One contributor declared that *“The state should provide more professional learning on how to use assessments well and work with curriculum staff to provide good professional learning to support strong*

instructional practices linked to assessment.” Another suggested that “the state should provide tools and protocols that helps schools and district leaders connect the dots between data and its intended use.”

Others indicated that the state should advance and strengthen local efforts to improve formative assessment practices. For example, one participant stated that *“More focus needs to be put on teachers and formative assessment”* as *“interim assessments will not be as closely tied to what teachers are doing in the classroom.”*

Theme 3: Reduce and improve the state summative assessment

Reduce the footprint of the state summative assessment while improving the procedures and structures in place to support effective use of summative data.

One of the questions posed to the focus groups was “How could the current summative assessment be improved?” This question resulted in two of the most strongly shared recommendations: reduce the footprint of the summative assessment and improve the reporting of IAR results.

Reduce the footprint of the summative assessment

A common suggestion across the eight groups was that the time and emphasis placed on the summative assessment should be minimized as much as possible while still supporting the primary intended purposes of the assessment (e.g., federal accountability, program evaluation and curricular improvement). Some participants urged the state to *“do the bare minimum required federally”* and *“decrease the time spent meeting federal testing requirements”* so that educators could focus on activities better suited to supporting student’s needs. Some proposals for supporting this goal included reducing the length of the test using abbreviated test blueprints, a computer adaptive test, or a matrix-based test design.

Improve the reporting of IAR results

Changes were recommended with respect to the timing, content, and structure of IAR results. Participants suggested that ISBE focus on improving both the speed and quality of reporting so that results could be used for more than federal accountability. For many, summative assessment results are provided too late to support district-or school level programmatic decisions related to professional development and curricular quality. From a content perspective, participants suggested that changes were needed for the results to be used in a meaningful way by stakeholders. One commented that *“We do not report in ways that are accessible to teachers and school leaders to inform other types of assessment.”* Another indicated that the state needed to *“differentiate the way in which results are shared and explained”* using *“language that resonates with the test user and meets their needs.”*

Theme 4: Support for voluntary interim assessments

There is moderate support for the development of voluntary interim assessments that can be used to inform instruction for districts that do not currently have tools available.

Except for assessments in early grades (K-2), participants were generally agreeable to the state providing districts with a *voluntary* interim assessment option. However, previous concerns related to the utility of a common interim assessment solution across districts and schools with different curriculum, priorities and initiatives were acknowledged. Comments provided by participants included the following:

- *I think interims are appropriate and can be used effectively, potentially if not defined at a state level and used at the summative determination level.*
- *If the state can help out there is an equity opportunity there, but that (the solution) would need to be aligned to local assessment system and be optional.*

Theme 5: Clarify purpose and use of assessment

Clarify the purpose and use of existing or newly proposed assessment options.

Many comments focused on the need for the state to clarify intended purpose and use of assessments currently in use across the state and the components of any newly proposed assessment system solution. Stakeholders are often confused about the purpose of the state summative assessment and the role it should/should not play in supporting the needs of schools and teachers. Participants urged the state to clearly define the intended role of the state assessment system (as it currently exists and for future proposals) and distinguish it from those assessment systems which are locally defined. This should be done in a way that accounts for the needs and concerns of different stakeholder groups including parents, teachers, school leaders and communities.

A common sentiment was that the state should not try to do too much through the design of the state assessment system. Participants pointed out that that *“the state assessment is one piece of what we have”* to work with and that the state assessment system should not attempt to *“be all things to all people.”* Instead, the state should make sure that the *“purposes of different types of assessments are really clear and note that there are specific roles for specific assessments.”*

Theme 6: Don't rush

Don't rush into any new solutions that affects all schools.

Participants applauded efforts taken by the state to collect feedback from stakeholders about proposed changes to the state assessment system but also suggested that additional work was needed. Some participants indicated that the state should identify and consider a broader range of models, as the initial focus appeared constrained to a limited number of options prominently associated with through course solutions. Others pointed out that parent participation in the survey was extremely limited and that additional effort should be taken to

obtain feedback from these stakeholders, especially in historically underserved communities. Illustrative comments include:

- *"I recommend that ISBE should examine other models of assessment that meet federal requirements but do not distract and detract from teaching and learning-- and to explore these models and their impacts with educators, families, and students with a particular emphasis on seeking input from Black and Brown families and students."*
- *"Engage more stakeholders in decision making. Collect more information and invite more engagement before moving forward with a focus on improving teaching and learning, advancing equity, and thinking through possible unintended consequence."*
- *"The fact that we have 4% parent response means that we need more engagement with parents. We need to engage families more. What do they want to know about their children? What information do they find valuable?"*

In addition to these types of recommendations, participants suggested that the state pilot and evaluate new models before implementing them at scale. For example, in response to the through course proposal, one participant suggested *"if ISBE is going to go to this model while they still have IAR they should run them parallel to see if they are getting good data or better results."* Others emphasized the importance of development to *"teach educators to use assessments effectively to support instruction."* Another suggested that ISBE *"contract with an independent research organization to study and report to the full State Board on how end-users (parents, students, teachers district leaders) are experiencing new models on the ground."*

Notes and Discussion

These notes and discussion are intended to help provide a more complete context for the feedback regarding improving the state assessment system.

Survey Sample

A total of 5,274 people responded to the survey. Of these respondents, 14 completed the Spanish language version and 5,260 completed the English language version.

The survey data was reviewed to for quality. The responses that were obtained and used appear to represent intentional responses by thousands of persons. A relatively few multiple responses from the same persons were detected (around 30 out of over 5200 total responses). In each case the persons had logged on once and then logged on again later. The latest time-stamped response was kept for each person. (All were at least as complete as the first response). The multiple log-ons did not appear to be attempts to “stuff the ballot box,” but rather changes in opinion since there were usually some differences between the two versions. There seemed to be serious commitment by all the respondents, as indicated by the lack of off-topic comments and in that only a handful of responses had only a first name or left the name blank; no “prank” names were detected (e.g., “Donald Duck”).

The survey was clearly a self-selected sample, not a representative sample of all valued constituencies. Educators—administrators (about 20%) and teachers (about 70%) constituted the very large majority of the respondents. In one way, the high numbers of educators who responded attest to the efficacy of the outreach effort, including by the organizations specifically solicited by ISBE to invite all they felt should be heard to participate. On the other hand, the relatively lower numbers of parents, students, and community members²—although totaling in the hundreds—indicates that those networks that were so effective at stimulating educator input were not nearly as effective with other audiences. It is not known whether this is because the invitations were not sent by the organizations to parents, students, and community members, whether invitations were sent but not accepted, or some other reasons. If ISBE wishes to gather input in the future about assessment-related topics from specific constituencies or groups, ISBE should review the dissemination and engagement strategies to ensure those outreach connections will be met satisfactorily.

Local Control, State Summative Assessments, and Federal Requirements

In several times and ways throughout the feedback process, many respondents indicated they wished the state to allow a high degree of local control—from districts’ selecting which interim assessments might be used—strongly preferring being able to use the assessments they are

² The survey asked respondents to identify one role. The numbers of persons in each role category reflect the role the respondent chose. Some respondents noted in a Comment that they qualified for multiple roles, e.g., “Teacher” and “Parent.” These multiple roles were not analyzed because there were not many and

currently using—to desiring the assessment content, timing, ordering, and retesting policies match local situations. This is natural when thinking the assessment should be instructionally useful. It creates a tension when the assessments must also be able to be used for summative purposes, and especially when they must meet federal requirements for summative assessments for use in the state’s federally approved accountability system. There are many technical characteristics, notably validity, reliability, fairness, and comparability. In addition, the current federal law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), both allows a state to use a “through-year” assessment design for federal assessment and accountability purposes, but also poses some additional crucial requirements. The most limiting federal requirement from the perspective of the local control feedback gathered in Illinois is the statutory requirement that the state must have a “single system of assessments.” The U.S. Department of Education has clearly stated that a “single system of assessments” means that a state would need to use a single interim assessment—it is not permissible to use multiple interim assessments from different companies. In promulgating the regulation for Title I state assessments, in the section allowing multiple statewide interim assessments, U.S. Department of Education noted that the suggestion was made in a comment on the proposed ESSA assessment regulation to permit different interim assessments across different schools in a through-year model. The U.S. Department of Education declined to modify the regulation to allow that.

Comments... Another commenter expressed that it should not be necessary for all students to take the same test across schools in the State due to variations in instructional methods...

Discussion: Section 1111(b)(2)(B)(viii) of the ESEA, specifies that State assessments may be administered through a single summative assessment or multiple statewide interim assessments during the course of the year that result in a single summative score, and we appreciate the commenters’ support of reiterating this provision in the proposed regulations... We reaffirm the statutory and regulatory requirements to assess all students in the State using the same assessments... This is essential to promote ongoing transparency, meaningful and fair school accountability, and equity.

Changes: None.

Federal Register, Department of Education, 34 DFR Part 200, “Title I—Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged—Academic Assessments,” December 8, 2016. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-12-08/pdf/2016-29128.pdf> (pp. 88892-88893)

Thus, even if ISBE wished to do so, it would not be allowable under current federal law. Some people might urge ISBE to set up separate state and federal assessment systems, or to design the state assessment system for a possible change in federal law. Those options and others like them are beyond the scope of consideration of this project.

Appendices

A.1 Feedback Survey Introductory Video

ISBE and the Center for Assessment developed an introductory video presentation to provide background about the assessment feedback survey. The video allowed the viewer to proceed directly to the survey.



The video was watched 12,004 times on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8n59k6MsGZU>

A.2 Focus Group Membership

The 97 Focus Group members are listed below, with their nominating organizations.

Name	Nominating Organization
Molly Allen	IARSS
Amy Alsop	Illinois Federation of Teachers
Nastassia Ballard	STAND
Paula Barajas	State Assessment Review Committee
Dave Beedy	DuPage County Curriculum Directors
Aaron Bingea	CTU
Dr. Meryll B. Brownlow	South Cooperative of Public Education
John Burkey	Large Unit District Association
Dara Carr	Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools
Harrison Clinton	ISBE Student Advisory Council
Shain Crank	<i>IARSS</i>
Dr. Dan Krause	State Assessment Review Committee
Benjamin Ditkowsky	Chicago Area Directors of Curriculum and Assessment
Dr. Amy Dixon	Illinois Principals Association
Christine Droba	South Cooperative of Public Education
Dr. Kathleen Dugan	State Assessment Review Committee
Dr Dwayne Evans	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Angela Farwig	Advance Illinois
Melissa Figueira	Advance Illinois
Carrie Fogarty	DuPage County Curriculum Directors
Licinio Garcia	Latino Policy Forum
Raul Gaston	Illinois Principals Association
Bob Geddeis	IASB
Jessica Handy	Stand for Children
Jennifer Harth	Illinois Association of School Administrators
Annette Hartlieb	ISBE Student Advisory Council
Sarah Hartwick	IMA

Tonia Havard-Dew	Illinois Federation of Teachers
Alison Hawley	ED-RED
Avery Heinonen	ISBE Student Advisory Council
Kyle Hillman	NASW
Jami Hodge	IAASE
Kelley Hopwood	AIRSS
Felice Hybert	Large Unit District Association
Janiece Jackson	Lindop Supt
Mike Jacoby	IASBO
Crystal Jameau	Teach Plus
Dr. Lori James-Gross	Illinois Association of School Administrators
Carla Jones	Teach Plus
Emily Kerlin	Illinois Advisory Council for Bilingual Education
Ashley Lanfair	Teach Plus
Peter Leonard	State Assessment Review Committee
Lauren Lipsey	Lake County ROE Directors of English Learners Network
Darin Loepker	Illinois Principals Association
Eboney Lofton	DuPage County Curriculum Directors
Gabe Lopez	SWOP / Logan Square Neighborhood Assn
Chris Martelli	Chicago Area Directors of Curriculum and Assessment
Jim McCabe	IASB
Shay McCorkle	Lake County ROE Directors of English Learners Network
Daniel Medina	IPTA
Donn Mendoza	ED-RED
Shawn Messmer	ED-RED
Dea Meyer	Data Assessment and Accountability
Vicki Mikos	Illinois Education Association
Tracey Miller	Chicago Area Directors of Curriculum and Assessment
Brian Minsker	IPTA
Dr. Matthew Montgomery	Illinois Association of School Administrators
Dr. Nicole Moody	Springfield 186 Assessment Director

Jim Morpew	SLP Association
Melissa Murphy	Leadership and Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities
Sheila Nelson	IASB
Tiffany Nelson	IASSW
Patrick W. Nolten	Large Unit District Association
Dr Jennefer Norrell	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Dr. Lori Owens-Stranc.	South Cooperative of Public Education
Dr Kimako Patterson	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Ginger Payne	IAASE
Yolanda Payne	IAASE
Erika Pettus-Millhouse	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Roselene Quick	Regional Office of Education 12
Sinthu Ramalingam	Teach Plus
Monique Redeaux-Smith	Illinois Federation of Teachers
Sophia Redmond- Jones	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Dr Anita Rice	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Jeremy Rinkel	AIRSS
Dr. Sharon P. Rivers	South Cooperative of Public Education
Nick Sciponi	Illinois Education Association
Jamar Scott	Springfield 186 Assessment Director
Peggy Staehlin	IPTA
Patricia Steinmeyer	IASSW
Pam Stewart	Springfield 186 Assessment Director
Nicole Stroup	Lake County ROE Directors of English Learners Network
Simeon Stumme	English Learners Advocacy Council in Higher Education
Dr. Pete Sullivan	IARSS
Debbie Thomas	Springfield 186 Assessment Director
Dr. Gary Tipsord	Illinois Association of School Administrators
Rocio Torres	Illinois Advisory Council for Bilingual Education
Mark Twomey	Macomb Supt
Theresa Ulrich	DuPage ROE Directors of English Learners Network

Eric Veal Jr	ISBE Student Advisory Council
Kris Webster	Chicago Area Directors of Curriculum and Assessment
Liz Wendel	Chicago Area Directors of Curriculum and Assessment
Ann Whalen	Advance Illinois
Sonya Whitaker	Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics
Dr. Joe Williams	Leadership and Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities
Diana Zaleski	Illinois Education Association
Paul Zavitkovsky	Data Assessment and Accountability

A.3 Feedback Survey

State Assessment Survey

ISBE is exploring improvements to the state assessment system. We are collecting feedback regarding priorities and possible designs for an improved state assessment system.

Before you complete the survey, we invite to watch a 15-minute video that provides some important background information we think you'll find useful in completing the survey. You can watch the embedded video below or use this link to access it separately:

<https://youtu.be/8n59k6MsGZU>

After you watch the video, please click 'next' to start the survey.

State Assessment Survey - Contact Information

* Required

1. Please provide your first and last name *
2. Please provide your title and organization *
3. Which of the following best describes your primary role? *
 - ☐ Educator
 - ☐ School leader/ administrator
 - ☐ District leader/ administrator
 - ☐ State leader/ administrator
 - ☐ Higher education faculty or administrator/ researcher
 - ☐ Representative from a policy or advocacy organization
 - ☐ Community representative
 - ☐ Parent/ Guardian
 - ☐ Student
 - ☐ Other:
4. Please check all of the following that apply *
 - ☐ I am a resident of Illinois
 - ☐ I work in an Illinois public school or district as an educator or education administrator
 - ☐ None of the above apply to me
5. Please provide your email in case we need to contact you to get clarification about any of your responses *

Perspectives About Current State Assessment System

6. Which of the following best reflects your opinion about the current end-of-year state assessments in English language arts, math and science *
- ☐ I feel strongly that the current end-of-year state assessment system is inadequate and substantial changes are necessary.
 - ☐ The current end-of-year state assessment system can be improved, but substantial changes are not necessary.
 - ☐ The current end-of-year state assessment system is generally satisfactory; any changes should be relatively minor.
 - ☐ I'm very satisfied with the current end-of-year state assessment system and I am reluctant to support any changes at this time.
 - ☐ I am not satisfied with the current assessment system but I am reluctant to support any changes at this time.
 - ☐ I am unsure or have no opinion about the current-end-of year state assessment system.
7. Do you support a state assessment system characterized by multiple short tests throughout the year instead of a single, long end-of-year test? *
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Undecided
8. If you work for a public Illinois district or school, does your district or school administer a standardized test for students in grades K-2? *
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Uncertain or not applicable
9. If you are a parent/ guardian of a K-2 student in an Illinois public school, does or has your student participated in a standardized assessment in the K-2 grade span? *
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Uncertain or not applicable

10. Do you support the state providing an optional standardized assessment in K-2 grade span for districts and schools in order to provide feedback about student performance prior to grade 3? *

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

11. Please share any additional comments to help us understand your perspectives about the current state assessments.

Options to Decrease Testing Time for End-of-Year State Tests – Background and Overview

The state summative assessments are designed to provide valid and reliable information at the student, school, district, state, and student group levels suitable for summative purposes, and meet federal accountability criteria. It is possible to create a state assessment that would take less time to administer than the current state assessments. But most ways of taking less time will provide less valid or reliable information, present technical challenges, and/or will cost more. The following items ask you to consider whether you support some options for shortening the test. Each option is presented along with a brief statement about the possible implications of that choice.

12. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:

Create an end-of-year test with fewer items *

Option A	Implications
Create an end-of-year test with fewer items	The state is already using a shortened test and the length cannot be reduced much more. Shorter tests generally produce less information, such as fewer sub scores, and are usually less reliable

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

13. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: Ask questions the end-of-year test that take less time for students to answer (i.e., more multiple choice and less open response)? *

Option B	Implications
Ask questions on the end-of-year test that take less time for students to answer (i.e., more multiple choice and less open response)	The assessment could be less valid because it does not assess more complex skills

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

14. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: Ask questions targeted to each student's skill or ability level (i.e., an adaptive test.)? *

Option C	Implications
Ask questions targeted to each student's skill or ability level (i.e., an adaptive test.).	It may provide more reliable test information for some students. It may take the state longer to develop this option and may be more costly for the state. Also, the reduction in testing time may not be substantial.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

15. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Combine score from tests taken during the year with a shorter end-of-year test?

*

Option D	Implications
Combine scores from tests taken during the year with a shorter end-of-year test.	Combined, total testing time is likely more than a single end-of-year test, but it may provide more useful information during the year.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

16. Please provide any additional feedback about your perspectives related to decreasing testing time for end-of-year state tests

Options for Producing more Instructionally Useful Information from State Assessments - Background and Overview

Current state summative assessments provide broad information about individual student overall proficiency each academic year (and can provide growth information from spring to spring). Many people have pointed out that summative assessment results are currently returned too late to inform instruction, and that the information provided does not pinpoint students' strengths or weaknesses on the content or skills assessed. In addition, because the assessments are designed to assess the state content standards for that grade, the assessments do not provide specific information about student performance on content standards above or below that particular grade. It is possible to create an assessment that assesses more specific content and skills—even varying for individual students—and that is administered and returns information during the school year. However, no one design can produce both fine-grained diagnostic information and overall proficiency in a feasible amount of testing time. The less content is standardized, the more difficult it is to produce comparable scores. Some options for producing more instructionally useful information from the state assessments are presented in this section, along with implications for these options.

17. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Administer 2 or 3 tests before the end of the year that each test all the content standards (i.e., each test is like the end-of-year test?) *

Option A	Implications
Administer 2 or 3 tests before the end of the year that each test <u>all</u> the content standards (i.e., each test is like the end-of-year test.)	This option more easily allows direct comparison of performance among the tests and can support measures of progress during the year. However, it would require testing students on content they have not been instructed on.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

18. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Administer 2-3 tests at the unit level, representing content most recently instructed, according to the curriculum? *

Option B	Implications
Administer 2-3 tests at the <u>unit</u> level, representing content most recently instructed, according to the curriculum.	If a common curriculum is followed, students would be tested on content they have been recently taught and it could yield more specific descriptions of student performance.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

19. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Administer many smaller focused tests more frequently, such as one test per content standard per week? *

Option C	Implications
Administer many smaller focused tests more frequently, such as one test per content standard per week.	This option could produce more specific descriptions of student performance but would require more planning to administer.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

20. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Allow students retake tests. This applies to any of the previous options. *

Option D	Implications
Allow students to retake tests. This applies to any of the previous options.	This option would allow students to demonstrate potential improvement on what was tested previously. However, it will increase testing time and requires a decision about which score to count.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

21. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Allow assessments to be taken in any order as specified by districts or schools. This applies to any the previous options. *

Option E	Implications
Allow assessments to be taken in any order as specified by districts or schools. This applies to any of the previous options.	This would likely be a better match to the curriculum. Requires more planning to administer and raises some important questions about how to combine results to produce an overall score.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

22. Please provide any additional comments regarding your perspectives on providing more instructionally useful information on state assessments.

Options for Administration: Background and Overview

Research and practice have shown how standardization supports many desired interpretations and uses of test results. Standardization is routinely required for comparability, for fairness, and for empirical evaluations. At the same time, measurement theory and practice have shown that validity and utility sometimes require non-standardization, such as the use of accommodations, which are modifications to an assessment instrument or administration procedures that are necessary to support valid inferences without changing the construct. Equitable opportunity incorporates a more complex notion: things are not necessarily absolutely the same to be fair, but they are in proportion to starting point, to challenge, to need, or so on. Much of the research and innovation in assessment currently is to press how flexibility can be incorporated and still provide assessment results that are acceptably valid, reliable, fair, and useful (including appropriately comparable). Several aspects of standardization/flexibility regarding the state assessment administered prior to the end of the year are described below.

23. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: The state should specify what content will be assessed at certain points during the year? *

Option A	Implications
The state should specify what content will be assessed at certain points during the year.	Greater specification of <u>what</u> content is to be learned within the school year will support comparability, reduce complexity, and may improve the instructional utility of some assessment options. However, school districts in Illinois have local control over curriculum and could choose a scope and sequence that does not align with the assessment, reducing the validity of the results.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

24. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: The state should specify when assessments may be administered, including tests administered before the end of the year? *

Option B	Implications
The state should specify when assessments may be administered, including tests administered before the end of the year.	Greater specification of <u>when</u> content is to be learned within the school year will support comparability, reduce complexity, and may improve the instructional utility of some assessment options. However, school districts in Illinois have local control over curriculum and could choose a scope and sequence of curriculum that does not align with the assessment, thereby reducing the validity of the results.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

25. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: The state should specify the security and administration conditions for all tests, including those administered before the end of the year? *

Option C	Implications
The state should specify the security and administration conditions for all tests, including those administered before the end of the year.	The state summative test requires high security for results to be valid and comparable. Currently administered local assessments may not have the same security and administration requirements.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

26. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: Data from assessments given during the year should be available to the state.

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Option D	Implications
Data from assessments given during the year should be available to the state.	Typically, data from interim assessments have been accessible only to users at the district, school, or teacher level. The state will need access to test data (with appropriate safeguards for security, confidentiality, and privacy) if they will be used for summative purposes.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

27. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following: The state should require districts to administer specific assessments during the year?

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Option E	Implications
The state should require districts to administer specific assessments during the year.	If summative scores depend on evidence collected from assessments during the year, then all districts and schools must administer these state specified tests. Districts should reevaluate their current local assessment program to ensure an overall balanced assessment system is in place in concert with any new state assessment model.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

28. If your district already administers local assessments during the school year, do you support replacing those assessments with state required through-year assessments? *

- ☐ No, I would be concerned about losing longitudinal data for year-over-year comparisons
- ☐ No, for other reasons
- ☐ Yes, I would want to reduce testing time
- ☐ Yes, for other reasons
- ☐ Uncertain
- ☐ Not applicable

29. If applicable, please provide any additional comments regarding your perspective on maintaining or replacing current district assessments.

30. Which of the following best describes your level of support for the following:
Student performance on assessments given during the year should be used for summative purposes by the state (i.e., to determine if the student has met standards or is proficient.) *

Option F	Implications
Student performance on assessments given during the year should be used for summative purposes by the state (i.e. to determine if the student has met standards or is proficient.)	If tests during the year are going to be used to shorten the end-of-year test, they should 'count' to some degree. This requires a high degree of standardization. Also, it requires a decision about how to count scores, since students may perform better or worse at the end-of-year than they did during the year.

- ☐ I strongly reject this option
- ☐ I reject this option
- ☐ I am unsure or neutral about this option
- ☐ I support this option
- ☐ I strongly support this option

31. Please provide any additional comments regarding your perspectives on test administration.

This completes ISBE's state assessment survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your perspectives. We appreciate your feedback.

32. If you have any additional comments about the future of state assessment in Illinois, please provide them below.