



STATE ASSESSMENT REVIEWS: EVALUATING QUALITY AND ALIGNMENT

A quality K-12 education is built on a foundation of rigorous K-12 academic standards that ensure that students graduate from high school with the academic content and skills they need for success in college and careers. End-of-year state summative assessments are one important tool used to measure the performance of students, schools, districts, and the system as a whole against the state's standards.

The value of assessment results—to help student and parents understand how their students are doing; inform educators in ways that can benefit instruction; monitor the performance of schools, districts, and the state; identify challenges and bright spots; target resources and drive improvements—are all highly dependent on the assessments actually testing what the standards expect students to know and be able to do in each grade in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics. In other words, ***the alignment of state tests to standards is critical to ensuring that states are administering tests that are worth students' and educators' time and attention.***

Whether states are participating in a multi-state assessment consortium, such as Smarter Balanced (SBAC) or PARCC, purchasing off-the-shelf tests, or developing their own tests or a hybrid, all state summative assessments should undergo an independent review of the focus, content, skills, practices, rigor, and cognitive demand of their assessments; the clarity of the resulting score reports; and a review of cut scores to ensure they are of high quality, aligned to state standards, and that results are transparent.

Achieve, building on its own 20-year history of developing and evaluating state assessments, is prepared to work with states to conduct content and quality reviews of their summative assessments. The goal of these reviews is to improve quality and ensure alignment to standards by working with states and their vendors through a lens of continuous improvement.



WHAT WILL STATES RECEIVE FROM AN ACHIEVE ALIGNMENT REVIEW?

- **Formative, in-depth, and actionable feedback** for the state and its assessment vendor on the alignment of the assessment with the content and cognitive complexity of the state's standards, using a vetted methodology tied to CCSSO's Criteria for High Quality Assessments;
- Feedback on the **clarity of score reports** and the information provided for teachers, parents, students, policymakers, and the public;
- **Involvement of local practitioners** to provide feedback on the usefulness of state assessments for improving teaching and learning;
- Expert analysis of the **rigor of cut scores** for performance levels in regard to the readiness of students to move onto the next grade, college, and/or career; and
- Feedback on the **accessibility** of the assessment for students with disabilities and English learners through a partnership with the renowned National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO).



IS MY STATE A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR A REVIEW?

An assessment review would be beneficial under any of these conditions:

- The state has recently reviewed and revised academic content standards and needs to revise its assessment to match.
- The state has had standards and a statewide summative assessment in place and a multiyear contract with its vendor and seeks to make continuous improvements to its assessment.
- The state has challenges with policymakers, educators and/or the public around the quality and usefulness of its assessments and wants to address these issues in an evidence-based manner.
- The state is using PARCC or SBAC and desires a review for the grade levels not covered by the Fordham review.
- The state must meet federal peer review or state requirements for alignment reviews such as those required by their state boards of education or the state legislature.



HOW ACHIEVE WORKS WITH STATES:

- Achieve has a 20-year history of working with states on education policy and practice issues and will bring its collaborative, critical friend approach as it has with other state work. The state is the client for the review, and Achieve will work with its assessment vendor to secure blueprint information, test forms, meta-data, and other documentation.
- Achieve's expert panel of content reviewers will use the methodology developed by the Center for Assessment to examine the alignment, quality, and cognitive complexity of the state's ELA/literacy and mathematics assessments at selected grade levels. Accessibility reviews can be arranged through NCEO.
- The state is encouraged to select a set of educators to examine the usefulness of assessment items and reporting for improving teaching and learning. Achieve will lead these practitioners through a facilitated process to provide this important feedback.
- Following the review, state leaders will be invited to examine draft findings and provide feedback. The final report will be public facing.



WHY CHOOSE ACHIEVE FOR AN ASSESSMENT REVIEW?

Since our founding in 1996, improving the quality and rigor of both state standards and assessments has been a core part of Achieve's mission – ensuring all students are college and career ready when they graduate from high school. We first piloted an assessment review process in 1998, with reviews of summative tests from Michigan and North Carolina and published an overview of our criteria and methodology for evaluating state standards and assessments in 2002 (*Benchmarking and Alignment of State Standards and Testing*). Since then, Achieve has conducted content analyses of assessments for 13 states. In 2004, we conducted comparative analyses of the content and rigor of high school graduation tests for half a dozen states

(*Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?: A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams*), and in 2007 we analyzed the content covered on the SAT, the ACT, Compass, Accuplacer, and 22 additional state, system, or institution-level tests used to place students into first year college courses (*Aligned Expectations?: A Closer Look At College Admissions and Placement Tests*). Achieve also has experience in overseeing the development of multi-state assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards. In 2007, we helped 14 states develop the American Diploma Project Algebra I and II end-of-course exams, and from 2010 to 2014, we served as the project management partner for states developing PARCC.