Making Assessment Reports More Meaningful for Students & Families

By Shayna Levitan, Policy Analyst, and Nicholas Munyan-Penney, Assistant Director, P-12 Policy

TO THE POINT

- Students and their families have a right to know how their schools are serving them.

- Although assessment results offer a valuable signal about a student's academic performance and progress, individual score reports are largely underutilized, and seldom considered as a primary resource for families.[1]

- Reporting must be clear, actionable, adaptive to the feedback from communities, and framed in a way that recognizes students' assets and aspirations.

- Improvement efforts must go beyond enhancing the reports themselves: Individual reports of results must be situated within the broader systems and engagement opportunities that parents depend on for trusted communication about their child's academic performance and progress.

- To effectively integrate individual score reports into broader conversations about a student's academic progress, teachers, school leaders, and community groups must receive support to incorporate these results into asset-based family engagement opportunities.

Introduction

At their core, statewide annual assessments are designed to help guide educational decisions by evaluating student growth and learning, so resources can be equitably distributed. Statewide annual assessments also provide valuable individual results that summarize how each student is progressing against grade-level academic standards, identify additional ways their school system can support their academic success, and allow families to demand appropriate actions from their education leaders.

WHY DO INDIVIDUAL ANNUAL ASSESSMENT RESULTS MATTER FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

- **Individual annual assessment results ("score reports") show individual student performance against grade-level standards.** Compared to other signals of student achievement, such as grades or classroom and district assessments, statewide annual assessments evaluate how students are progressing in relation to the state-level learning standards. Classroom grades typically incorporate information on effort or participation, while district assessments may also be focused on non-grade-level content.

- **This data can help families make educational decisions** and advocate for additional supports and opportunities, based on their student's results and a host of other measures.

Students and families must be able to access and understand this data. Unfortunately, most statewide annual assessment individual reports fail to meet this standard.

Individual assessment reports are not currently designed to be accessible, meaningful, or culturally affirming for students and their families. According to recent focus groups conducted by EdTrust, families have a hard time accessing and understanding individual student reports because of technological and language barriers: Participants shared that online portals were difficult to navigate, reports were often not in a caregiver's native language, and/or the information lacked clear explanations about what the scale scores or percentile ranks mean that might put the results in context.[2]

Equally worrisome, assessment results are rarely integrated within broader conversations about students' academic progress, performance, and experiences. This may be complicated by the fact that there are few opportunities to engage with families to begin with. Based on recent nationally representative polling conducted by EdTrust, schools may be missing opportunities to engage with families at school events, and few schools are meeting the lowest bar for family engagement.[3] Consider this:

- About 1 in 2 parents (45%) were unaware that information was available to them on whether their student is meeting grade-level expectations.

- 1 in 3 parents were unaware of opportunities for parent-teacher conferences at their child's school.

- Fewer than 10% of parents were aware of other opportunities, such as parent information hotlines in multiple languages, data nights, and resources and training for at-home academic support.

- Fewer than half of parents (43%) and teachers (45%) said that their school had informed them about plans to ensure that students are on track to meet grade-level standards.

- Fewer than half of parents (39%) said that information was available on how to access extra academic support for students.

These concerns, and other perspectives heard from students, families, educators, and district leaders in focus groups, informed the development of an EdTrust framework and set of federal policy recommendations for the future of assessments, which were outlined in a recent report, "Future of Assessments: Centering Equity and the Lived Experiences of Students, Families, and Educators."

This brief focuses on Equity Pillar 3 of that framework, "Provide Timely, Actionable, and Easily Accessible Results," and highlights actions that advocates can take at the state level. **This brief will also look at how individual assessment reports could be made more meaningful, actionable, and culturally affirming for every student and family.** Specifically, this brief:

- Calls for individual assessment reporting results to be integrated into existing communications with families;

- Highlights the role that trusted voices play in communicating this information;

- Identifies best practices for designing individual score reports for students and families; and

- Highlights promising strategies and policy recommendations that advocates can push for to improve assessment reporting at the state level.

WHAT CAN STATEWIDE ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS TELL FAMILIES, EDUCATORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND POLICYMAKERS?[4]

- Annual statewide assessments provide a measurement of individual student achievement against state academic standards for a student's current grade level.

- The results of these assessments allow policymakers, as well as school and district leaders, to compare performance among students and across student groups, schools, and districts. This information can inform decisions to equitably allocate resources to schools that require additional support.

- Results allow educators to see year-to-year trends and patterns that can inform instruction in future years: For example, if students are struggling in one math concept, a teacher could tailor their instruction to spend more time on that area, and school leaders could provide professional development opportunities to support teaching in that area.

- **However, assessment results are but one source of many that can help create a holistic snapshot of students' academic progress and their school experiences.**

While statewide summative assessment results provide valuable information to a variety of stakeholders, this brief focuses solely on assessment reporting for **students and their families**. This is not to suggest that assessment reporting for other stakeholders — such as state policymakers, teachers, or the public — is not valuable or in need of improvement; just that these audiences are outside the scope of this brief.

Charting a Path Forward

Assessment reporting can empower students and their families, and every family has a right to know how their school is addressing the academic needs of their child. However, students and families may need help understanding assessment results, how results should be considered alongside other information, and how to use this information to hold their school system accountable.

Moreover, effectively conveying assessment results hinges on integrating this information into the broader context of a student's educational experiences and centering trusted voices in these communication efforts. Individual assessment reporting must leverage the people trusted most by students and their families: often teachers, principals, and members of community-based organizations. These people can help to reinforce, interpret, and personalize the assessment results and their implications.

Advocates can help call attention to this issue, first by clarifying the imperative of improving individual assessment reports, and second, by urging their state leaders to act on two fronts:

1. Work with vendors — in close coordination with students, families, and communities — to improve the design of individual score reports, so these reports can become more meaningful, accessible resources for students and their families.

2. Designate supports, guidance, and funding to ensure that assessment results are integrated in broader conversations about academic progress with trusted voices and partners.

Incorporating Assessment Results Into Asset-Based, Integrated Conversations

Score reports often exist as isolated documents, divorced from other information that is sent home to students' families, and are often mailed more six months after students have completed assessments.[5] While a score report may suggest a particular conclusion and set of actions, other sources (such as classroom assignments, unit tests, or district-level assessments) may send different, or even conflicting, messages. These mixed messages are a growing concern, as relaxed grading practices during the pandemic led to wider gaps between classroom assignment grades and summative test results in many schools and are causing confusion among students and families, who are struggling to decide which information to prioritize.[6] Because class grades and individual tests and assignments represent an assessment of learning that is closer to everyday student experiences, parents tend to trust these sources of information about their child's academic progress over statewide assessment results, even though the former are highly subjective and can provide an inflated picture of how a child is progressing against grade-level standards. According to the latest annual survey by Learning Heroes, roughly 9 in 10 parents believe their child is performing at or above grade level in reading and math, despite national data indicating that only one-third of students are performing at grade level.[7] This trend is consistent across several years of this survey.[8]

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TIMELINESS IN ASSESSMENT REPORTING

This disconnect is exacerbated when assessment results and individual score reports aren't released in a timely manner. Belated results and score reports can also limit their utility in the eyes of parents, who may be more inclined to discount these assessment results in favor of other information coming home on a timely basis. **The timely receipt of statewide annual assessment results, and by extension, individual score reports, is, therefore, a prerequisite for stakeholders to perceive the data as useful and actionable.**

In their advocacy for more meaningful assessment reporting, advocates should learn about barriers that may prevent results from being released in a timely manner. The delayed release of assessment results might, at times, be a political choice, though state leaders often cite technical barriers, such as extensive statistical checks and data quality reviews — some of which may have simple workarounds — as factors in the delays.

Once advocates have a better understanding of these barriers in their state, they can then offer potential solutions (e.g., if the state emphasizes the importance of data quality checks before releasing results, advocates can engage with their state administrators to better understand these processes, so advocates can lobby for potential solutions that maintain the validity and accuracy of reporting claims, while also releasing individual reporting information in a more timely manner to families). In doing so, advocates can highlight the need for timely results.

Statewide annual assessment results can be powerful tools when used alongside other sources of information, but results must be integrated into broader educational conversations about a student's academic progress and experiences, and these conversations must be led by trusted people.

Teachers are particularly well-positioned to lead these discussions. Parents generally put stock in the information coming directly from teachers and are likely to view them as trusted messengers in discussions about specific individualized assessment results and how the results fit into the big picture about a student's performance and progress in school.[9]

Parent-teacher conferences are an ideal forum for these conversations and provide space to discuss student progress in an asset-based, encouraging, and individualized environment. Teachers should explain how assessment results fit into the big picture on how a student is progressing academically, what annual statewide assessments are designed to measure, and how they differ from other assessments. Together, teachers and families can design an appropriate plan of action that identifies a student's needs and additional supports to address them.

However, it is imperative to provide teachers with the necessary time, tools, formal training, and support to navigate these conversations and build their own assessment literacy. Some teachers may need assistance in recognizing the value of assessment results. Others may need guidance on how to conduct these conversations in an asset-based way.
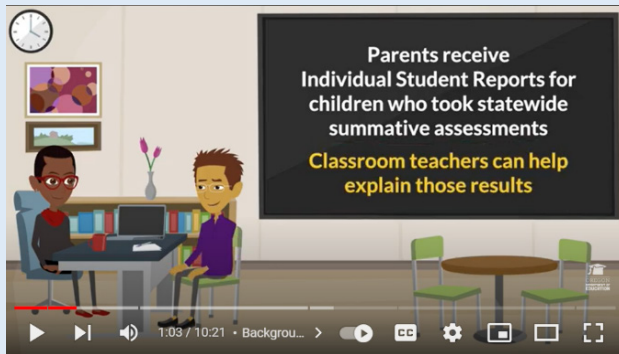
Learning Heroes and Technology Access Foundation developed Professional Learning modules to strengthen home-school partnerships between teachers and families. One in this set of four modules models how to effectively share assessment data with families using asset-based framing, as well as language and attitudes to avoid when discussing assessment data with families.

These modules are available to all teachers in **California** and the Highline Public Schools in King County, **Washington**, and are customized to align with and support state and district assessment data.

In **Oregon**, the state education agency developed a set of modules to increase parents' assessment literacy. Working alongside partners at Behavioral Research & Teaching at the University of Oregon and other education and community partners, Oregon's Department of Education created five modules on topics such as the purpose of statewide assessments, how to make sense of assessment results, and how to support learning at home. Each module includes a fact sheet and video in both English and Spanish and has users "listen in" on a conversation between a teacher and a parent or guardian.

For many teachers, it may also be difficult to strike a balance between delivering information in an asset-based manner and communicating that a student is far behind grade level.[10] For teachers who have minimal experience or training on how to engage with parents effectively and authentically, having the support and trust of their school leaders is imperative.

Community groups also play a fundamental role here. By highlighting the overall importance and purpose of assessments, reinforcing asset-based key messages, and mobilizing parents to ask about assessment results during parent-teacher conferences, community-based organizations act as cultural brokers that link communities to district- and state-level priorities.[11] It's also important that the same or similar community-based groups be engaged in authentic partnership throughout the entire feedback and stakeholder engagement process, as we note later in the report (Best Practice 1). Their support role, as it pertains to messaging, should be an extension of an existing partnership, rather than a one-time, top-down ask from a state or district.

Best Practices for Meaningful Assessment Report Design

Integrating assessment reporting into broader discussions about a student's educational experiences is paramount to understanding the value of the assessment results. However, these conversations will be much more meaningful, productive, and actionable if they are informed by individual score reports that employ smart design choices. Moreover, states and their assessment development vendors must design effective individual score reports, so that students and their families can use them as springboards for additional conversation and action. The following section lays out five essential best practices to support this imperative.

Best Practice 1: Involve students and families in the report design process

Assessment development companies should consult students and families of color, students and families from low-income backgrounds, and multilingual families in the assessment design process and elicit feedback from them on the report design. But this must be a targeted effort. Open calls for feedback are insufficient, as they may be inaccessible for racially, linguistically, and economically diverse individuals who have been traditionally underserved by our education systems. State leaders should use their relationships with community groups to help conduct outreach, be aware of people's time constraints, mindful about the location of meetings, and compensate individuals for their time.

When eliciting feedback, state education agencies and vendors should ensure they are relying on a clear theory of action that articulates the purpose of their statewide annual assessments and highlights the value of this data to specific stakeholder audiences, including families. This theory of action on what these assessments are meant to accomplish and how they fit into the larger assessment system should inform draft reports that are used when engaging with families.

Vendors can then conduct a user test or cognitive lab interviews to gather feedback. In user-test processes and cognitive lab interviews, an interviewer asks targeted questions to learn how families come to certain conclusions. The findings should help guide iterative design decisions and determine whether it is important to include additional or different information. This technique should also assist vendors in designing a report that's specifically tailored to meet the needs of students and their families. It also ensures that vendors aren't relying on false assumptions about what's significant to students, families, and communities, or how they will interpret elements of the report. These opportunities for directed feedback should create a positive feedback loop in the design and development process and establish clear and accessible channels for authentic engagement between students, families, and communities and score report developers at assessment development companies, that ultimately lead to tangible improvements that will enhance the report's value for families.

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Best Practice 2: Use asset-framing in reports

Data, while extremely useful, can be susceptible to misuse, and results can be weaponized to support inaccurate and harmful conclusions about the capabilities of certain students (and student groups), particularly those from historically underserved backgrounds. To protect against this, asset-based language and beliefs are fundamental to strong assessment reporting. Asset-framing in assessment reporting:

- **Explicitly acknowledges system-level responsibility.** While these reports can provide useful information on individual students and their performance, it is the responsibility of schools and districts to provide the supports necessary for all students to acquire grade-level knowledge and skills. Score reports must call out this distinction and emphasize system-level action and not fault or place blame on individual students.[12]

- **Highlights a student's strengths and capabilities.** This entails prominently and affirmatively underscoring a student's specific skills and competencies at their current level of performance, in addition to what they still need to do to demonstrate proficiency. For areas in need of improvement, reports should avoid using language that reinforces deficit mindsets (e.g., "weak use [of something]" or "student cannot") and instead focus on language that stresses the need for additional support and improvement (e.g., "has yet to demonstrate," "may need support in").[13]

It should be noted that asset-framing of assessment results isn't about hiding achievement gaps, nor should it used to justify lowering expectations for students. It's about highlighting the systems at work and holding them accountable for providing sufficient resources, accurately recognizing students' aspirations and contributions, and celebrating existing knowledge and individual backgrounds.[14] This approach to assessment reporting holds schools responsible for meeting the needs of every student and puts the primary responsibility of solving problems on the school, rather than on individual students.

In **Massachusetts'** score report, the description beneath the "not meeting expectations" label notes that: "The school, in consultation with the student's parent/guardian, should determine the coordinated academic assistance and/or additional instruction the student needs to succeed in this subject." By including this language, the report acknowledges that additional support is needed, and that it is the role of the school system (alongside the family) to ensure that the student is succeeding. In contrast, the language used in Delaware and Idaho unfairly places the onus on the student: "The student has not met the achievement standard and needs substantial improvement to demonstrate the knowledge and skills …."

Additionally, states should not use performance-level indicator levels to label students. For example, using an adjective like "novice " to categorize the lowest level of performance — as New Mexico does in its most recent report — reduces a student to this catch-all label, and does not make room for other sources of information — such as teacher observations, classroom assignments, etc. Performance-level descriptors should not stigmatize the student, and descriptors should emphasize the role of additional support and improvement, such as "needs support," which the state used in 2021.

Best Practice 3: Clearly communicate the purpose of assessments

Statewide annual assessments serve several purposes. Assessments may help monitor student progress toward learning objectives, help shine a light on inequities, and/or hold schools accountable for educating all students. Whatever the purpose or purposes of a state assessment, they each must factor into the design choices in the report. In other words, a state's theory of action (which lays out a state's broad vision for annual assessments and what they are designed to measure) should be a guiding light in the design of the report, alongside community feedback and engagement. Reports should also explicitly explain these objectives. A failure to communicate the purpose (and provide context to reinforce it) can undermine the utility of assessment reports, and a failure to communicate the aims of assessment data can fuel negative stereotypes about students' abilities, instead of identifying how schools and districts can better serve their students.

Further, while it's important to include additional contextual information to help users understand and interpret score reports, what supporting information is provided (Best Practice 4) will depend entirely on the report's purpose. Since space is limited on the reports, states must carefully decide which data needs additional explanation and how best to provide supporting context. Moreover, states must consider how the accompanying information they include illustrates the purpose of the report.

Accentuating the report's purpose and integrating it into the design also helps highlight that state assessments are just one of several measures to gauge academic progress and are largely meant to inform accountability considerations at the federal level (though they may also be useful for other stakeholders) and help allocate resources equitably.

> The **District of Columbia** sends a [letter](#) of introduction with the report to reinforce messages to parents about the use of assessments and how to view their child's assessment results. From the letter:
>
> - "**We know that assessment scores do not tell your child's entire academic story. The results are one of several measures** — including report card grades, classroom performance and teacher feedback — **that together create the full picture of your child's progress in school.** Within that picture, annual assessments are designed to help you and your child's teachers better understand the progress your child has made on the state content standards for ELA and math during the past year. Assessments also help us to better understand what resources schools need to support the needs of all learners."
>
> - "**Please note that your child's score, as well as the district and state averages, may look lower than you expected this year.** This is the first year that statewide assessments were given since the beginning of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which brought significant challenges that impacted instruction and students' learning. This year's results will inform schools' decisions about how best to support academic recovery and establish a new performance baseline from which to build."
>
> **Illinois** stresses in its report that "It's important to remember that past performance does not determine future academic growth and success. High-quality education and student effort and engagement help shape future performance."

Another crucial part of communicating purpose is to provide an overview of an assessment system. States and school districts should clearly tell parents about the assessment and accountability system that's in place at their child's school. Parents should be notified, ideally by teachers, of required assessments, their purpose, when they will occur, and when results will be available. Additionally, families should be notified about how educators will use assessment data and how parents can use the information to support their child's academic growth and achievement.[15] While teachers are in a strong position to help communicate this information, they must also feel equipped to do so, and many may need additional support or professional development to assist them.

Best Practice 4: Help users make sense of the data, so they can reach accurate conclusions

If students and their families are going to be able to understand assessment data, states must play a role in demystifying it **by highlighting key takeaways, pointing users to accurate conclusions, simplifying concepts and language,** and **including relevant information that helps users interpret the data and encourages them to use it.**

- **Provide the main takeaway.** Every individual score report should provide a clear, top-line message. Score reports should prioritize and clearly communicate the information that is most relevant to students and their families — based on prior consultations with students and families during the assessment design process (see Best Practice 1).[16]

- **Reports should be well-organized and use a "bottom line up front" design that prominently highlights key takeaways,** such as a performance level (e.g., proficient, advanced), makes the most of limited available space, and includes clear descriptions about the knowledge, skills, and abilities that provide meaning to that classification to help students and families draw accurate conclusions.[17]

- **Reports should clearly state the results and how to interpret them,** instead of inundating users with data and hoping that they will reach accurate conclusions on their own. It is inevitable that users will come away with some sort of takeaway from the report, and states play a vital role in designing straightforward and accurate reports.[18]

- **Point users in a clear direction.** Individual score reports should also incorporate guiding questions that can help a user distill the information and findings into a clear story. This approach not only streamlines the organization of assessment results but ensures that the information presented directly addresses students' and families' questions and concerns.[19]

South Carolina's report includes clear, guiding questions, such as:

- What does my child's score mean?

- How do my child's scores compare with his/her [subject] scores from previous years?

- How does my child's [subject] score compare with other students' scores?

- How did my child perform on the [subject] academic standards?

Texas's [report](#), for example, clearly indicates, in large, bold text, the performance level in each assessed subject, notes the percentile rank in a full sentence below it, and explains the performance descriptors.

★STAAR **Performance:** 5th Grade

JONATHAN HERNADEZ-JONES   **ENROLLED GRADE:** 5

Student ID: ******9999   **Local Student ID:** 999999999   **District:** 999-999 DISTRICT NAME

Reading Language Arts   Test Date: Spring 2023

DID NOT MEET GRADE LEVEL

Your child scored the same as or better than 25% of all grade 5 students in Texas.

SCORE 1400

| Did Not Meet Grade Level (861-1469) | Approaches Grade Level (1470-1581) | Meets Grade Level (1582-1666) | Masters Grade Level (1667-2016) |

Knowledge and Skills Categories for Reading Language Arts

| Reading | 6 Points Earned out of 26 Total Points | Writing | 5 Points Earned out of 26 Total Points |

Mathematics   Test Date: Spring 2023

MASTERS GRADE LEVEL ⭐

Your child scored the same as or better than 100% of all grade 5 students in Texas.

SCORE 2052

| Did Not Meet Grade Level (965-1499) | Approaches Grade Level (1500-1624) | Meets Grade Level (1625-1723) | Masters Grade Level (1724-2095) |

Knowledge and Skills Categories for Mathematics

| Numerical Representations and Relationships | 8 Points Earned out of 9 Total Points | Computations and Algebraic Relationships | 19 Points Earned out of 20 Total Points | Geometry and Measurement | 8 Points Earned out of 9 Total Points | Data Analysis and Personal Financial Literacy | 4 Points Earned out of 4 Total Points |

⭐ This badge indicates that your child is ready to meaningfully engage in advanced math course material. This is one of many tools to help gauge their readiness for advanced math.

Science   Test Date: Spring 2023

MEETS GRADE LEVEL ✔

Your child scored the same as or better than 77% of all grade 5 students in Texas.

SCORE 4250

| Did Not Meet Grade Level (1250-3549) | Approaches Grade Level (3550-3999) | Meets Grade Level (4000-4401) | Masters Grade Level (4402-5586) |

Knowledge and Skills Categories for Science

| Matter and Energy | 5 Points Earned out of 6 Total Points | Force, Motion, and Energy | 7 Points Earned out of 9 Total Points | Earth and Space | 7 Points Earned out of 11 Total Points | Organisms and Environments | 8 Points Earned out of 13 Total Points |

Performance Level Descriptions

❗ DID NOT MEET GRADE LEVEL
No basic understanding of course expectations is shown—student may need significant support in the coming year.

➡ APPROACHES GRADE LEVEL
Some knowledge of course content but may be missing critical elements—student needs additional support in the coming year.

✔ MEETS GRADE LEVEL
Strong knowledge of course content—student is prepared to progress to the next grade.

🏅 MASTERS GRADE LEVEL
Mastery of the course knowledge and skills is shown—student is on track for college and career readiness.

999999 Want to help support JONATHAN's progress? Use this code to log in.   ❯ **TexasAssessment.gov**

Test Result ID 12346780   999-999.999.1

- **Explain key terminology and minimize jargon.** Score reports must break down statistical concepts and avoid jargon and technical terms (such as acronyms) that are inaccessible to students and families and may prevent them from understanding the data, reaching accurate conclusions, and taking appropriate action.[20] Reports should use the most simple, straightforward term available: for instance, "learning environment" more clearly conveys what is being measured than buzzwords such as "school climate" or "school culture," which may baffle many students, families, and community members, or make their eyes glaze over. In parent focus groups, some participants thought that "school climate" referred to the temperature or weather in or around a school building, and others thought that "school culture" referred to the ethnicity or racial demographics of a school.[21]

- **Add elements to enhance understanding and use.** Assessment reports should incorporate various elements — including narrative explanations alongside data,[22] high-quality translations of reporting, hover-over boxes on graphs that explain data points and their significance in sentences, and simple definitions of key terms, labels, and scales.[23]

High-quality translation of score reports and accompanying resources into languages other than English is increasingly a must.[24] And similar considerations for translating information in state report cards should be applied to score reporting as well.

Rhode Island includes a QR code that takes users to a personalized video — available in both English and Spanish — which walks families through the report and breaks down their child's results.

Texas provides a PDF walkthrough of the score report in 12 languages, which includes a "math badge" (identified as "C" in the key) as one of many tools to help 'parents decide if their student' may be ready to participate in a future advanced math course in grades 6–8. Texas also provides a helpful video explainer that breaks down a score report.

Ohio's report includes clear guiding questions to help identify student strengths and weaknesses in each area covered by an assessment. The document also highlights tasks that students who are proficient in a given area can perform, describes a student's general understanding of the content in a given area based on their performance level, and offers tailored recommendations, based on a student's results, and information about activities that may help a student build on their strengths and improve where needed. This information is valuable, but its inclusion makes the report text heavy. This is a trade-off that states must balance.

Best Practice 5: Provide actionable information

More than just providing clear and meaningful data, score reports, if designed and disseminated effectively, should provide students and their parents with actionable guidance and next steps.[25]

Assessment reports must not only help users to interpret results and guide them toward accurate conclusions, but also provide insights on how to use the data to help students to improve.

Score reports should lay out next steps that families, in partnership with their teachers and school system, can take. More specifically, reports should include practical resources, such as:

- a helpline or contact number that families can call with questions

- appropriate next steps — based on what the report is showing — to delve deeper into the data

- guiding questions to help parents initiate conversations with their child's teacher.

Parents can use assessment results to spark conversations with teachers about their student's academic progress, but parents first need to understand the data report and know what to ask.

Providing actionable next steps can also prevent students and their families — who can easily be confused by too much data and information on the page — from feeling overwhelmed.[26] Reports should provide essential information without drowning users in statistics.

Illinois' score report includes questions and prompts for families to use in discussion with their child's teacher, based on the information in the score report:

- What does this report say about my child's current strengths and challenges in language arts and literacy?

- What will teachers be doing this year to help my child make strong progress?

- What can we do at home to help my child make strong progress this year?

The report also suggests actions based on the student's readiness level (higher, middle, lower) and notes that "knowing your child's performance in critical content domains enables you to have a more effective conversation with your child's teachers to support future academic growth."

To stay on track for college and career readiness, students need to learn a wide range of skills, content knowledge, and critical-thinking abilities at every grade level. Often, these develop at different rates because of differences in the curricular priorities of individual teachers and schools, differences in students' interests and out-of-school experiences, and many other factors.

The IAR describes readiness in five areas of reading and writing by placing your child's performance at either the **H-Higher, M-Middle, or L-Lower** level of the range for each area. Knowing your child's performance in critical content domains enables you to have a more effective conversation with your child's teachers to support future academic growth.

(H) For **Higher** level readiness estimates, ask your teacher(s) how your child can be challenged to build even deeper strengths both in school and at home.

(M) For **Middle** level readiness estimates, ask your teacher(s) how your child can be helped to exceed in this area through work at school and activities at home.

(L) For **Lower** level readiness estimates, ask your teacher(s) about the additional supports your child needs at school to meet grade-level expectations and what resources are available to help you support your child at home.

Students who are ready in these five areas are successfully doing the following:

(H) LITERARY TEXT

Reading and analyzing fiction, drama, and poetry

(M) INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Reading and analyzing non-fiction, history, science, and the arts

(M) WRITTEN EXPRESSION

Composing well-developed writing from what students have read

(L) KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

Composing writing using the rules of standard English

Louisiana has a "family toolbox" that is easy to find and navigate to from the department's website. The toolbox has an assessment resources section that includes direct links to parent guides, an assessment calendar, and a library of resources in multiple languages (Arabic, English, Spanish, Vietnamese).

It also points families to a "parent assessment portal," developed by Learning Heroes, that features various tools and resources — including practice tests, and guidance on test and score reports — that are specifically geared toward parents.
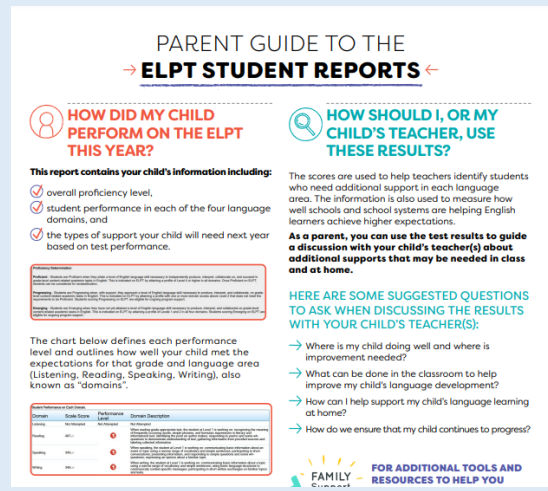
To avoid overwhelming a user with excessive information, reports should be gateways to deeper exploration, not data dumps.[27] By letting users "opt-in" to access more details, via clickable links or file downloads, assessment reports become a valuable resource for those seeking additional insights and remain accessible and user-friendly for everyone else.

In **Texas**, Learning Heroes and the Texas Education Agency invest in a marketing push called "Log In Learn More," aimed at providing districts with optional templates and a suite of customizable resources to use to communicate with families about how and when to access their child's scores.

Thanks to this campaign, nearly 1 million families logged into the Texas assessment portal to learn about their student's assessment results.

The latest Log In, Learn More Communication Toolkit included a one-pager about how to log on to the portal to see 2023 assessment results, sample emails that can be customized and sent to families, social media content and graphics for Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and parent-teacher planning tools. All resources were available in English and Spanish.

Advocacy Opportunities and Recommendations

Students and their families deserve access to meaningful individual assessment results that they can understand and use to check on student learning and progress. Unfortunately, assessment reports fail to meet these goals in their current form. Advocates should be pushing state leaders to (1) enhance the reports themselves, and (2) invest in improving the assessment literacy of trusted voices (e.g., teachers), so they can help reinforce the key messages presented in individual score reports. Below are five recommendations advocates can push their state leaders to adopt to assist in these aims:

Recommendation 1: Require vendors to user test assessment reports

State leaders should be holding vendors accountable for how well the design of their score reports meets the needs of families. However, few states leverage the several tools at their disposal that would help do so.

Therefore, advocates can urge their state leaders to require vendors to engage in community-centered improvement processes. Importantly, this includes user-testing reports with students and families from historically marginalized backgrounds and families whose first language is not English. Advocates should also encourage their state leaders to set aside additional funds (via state budget line-item or directly in their assessment vendor contract) for vendors to implement design changes that respond to the feedback raised during user-testing activities.

Recommendation 2: Provide professional development funds for assessment literacy and family engagement training and resources for teachers and principals and require these resources to be made available to them

Advocates can push their state leaders to invest in efforts that will increase assessment literacy among school leaders and teachers, which will, in turn, allow teachers and other school staff to communicate about individual assessment results more effectively. These investments and opportunities should focus on how to interpret and discuss student-level state summative assessment performance in culturally affirming, asset-based ways with students and their families, and emphasize the role of teachers (and other trusted people) in communicating and explaining results during parent-teacher conferences.

Recommendation 3: Prompt states to help families understand and use individual score report data

Advocates can encourage their state education agency to invest in programs, resources, and comprehensive communication efforts that will improve assessment literacy and employ family-school communication best practices that are specifically aimed at helping families understand how to use assessment results.

Recommendation 4: Engage organizations that mobilize communities to be messengers

Advocates can identify organizations that can help carry the torch and tap trusted people within the community to communicate the importance and value of statewide summative assessments and clear up common misconceptions about assessments. Advocates can identify new and existing partnerships that can help disseminate their advocacy message about engaging students and families to improve assessment reporting and highlight the importance of having trusted voices leading messaging efforts.

Recommendation 5: Include assessment results alongside students' final end-of-grade report cards

Advocates can lobby for integrating assessment reports into broader conversations about a student's academic progress, including at parent-teacher conferences, by pushing for students' final, end-of-grade school report card to include a separate section on assessment results, which would provide a measure of a student's progress toward grade-level standards directly alongside their course grades. The slow release of individual assessment results might be a barrier to implementing this recommendation, but advocates can offer this suggestion and note that releasing assessment results sooner would increase their value.

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