



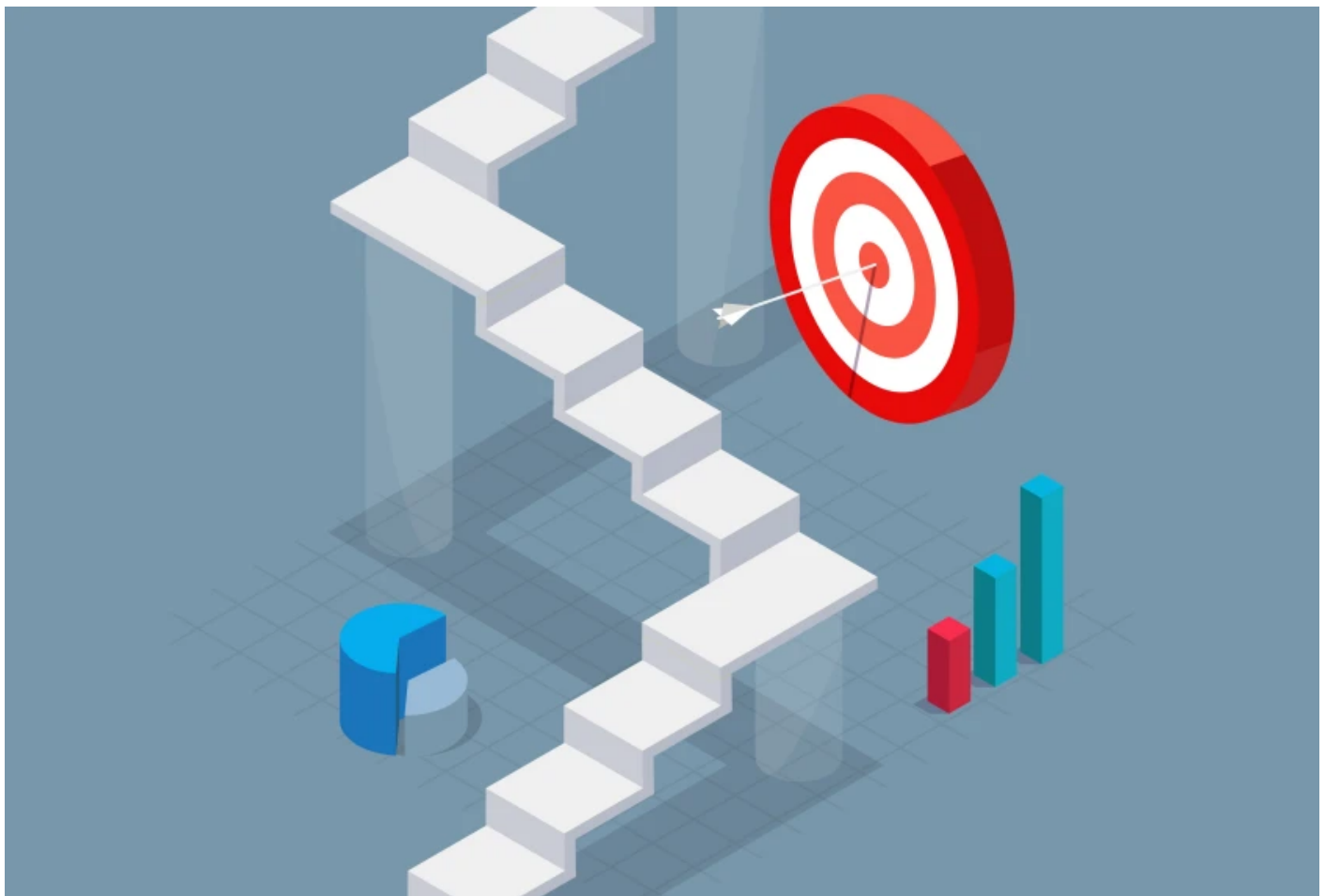
1. Remove the overall summative rating so parents and communities can better understand what is working well and what needs to be improved.
2. Advocate to include non-test based indicators alongside Math and Reading STAAR scores to provide a more holistic view of school effectiveness for elementary and middle schools.
3. Advocate to include a weighted “academic lift” / equity index to recognize the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and that not all students start in the same place academically.
 - Similar to what HB 3 did for the school finance system by including census block groups to determine weighted comp ed funding, an academic lift / equity index weight would adjust for factors outside the school’s control that impact student learning and achievement.
4. Require each domain and overall rating to have a weak or little correlation to family income to identify effective schools regardless of where wealthy or poor students are located.
5. Advocate to better align and increase CCMRs with workforce education; eliminate required ‘connectors’ such as only awarding credit for completing a program of study AND receiving an IBC; continue asking if the legislative intent for K-12 is ‘readiness’ or ‘attainment’?

ASSESSMENT

Don't Use State Tests 'Punitively,' Ed. Secretary Cardona Warns



By [Sarah Schwartz](#) — September 23, 2022 ⌚ 5 min read



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As states begin to release results from their 2022 assessments, the U.S. Department of Education has emphasized that the scores must be used for accountability—but also that states should be cautious in how they interpret the results.

That's the message conveyed in a [“dear colleague” letter](#) released earlier this month by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, as the department restarts the federal accountability process that it paused at the start of the pandemic.

In spring 2020, as COVID forced schools to abruptly shut their doors, then-Secretary Betsy DeVos let states cancel the tests, which are required annually under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. The next school year, Cardona's administration required that states resume the tests, but waived participation rules and the accountability consequences.

Now, the whole system is grinding back into gear. Cardona's letter underscores just how complicated that process could be—and why interpreting the effects of the pandemic on student achievement will be an ongoing challenge.

Student participation in the tests varied greatly during the 2020-21 school year. More students took the tests this past school year, but not every state reached pre-pandemic levels of participation. All the while, student enrollment in many states has dropped or shifted during the pandemic, meaning that the students who took a state's test in 2019 likely aren't the same students who took it last year.

All of this makes it hard to reliably evaluate how much progress students have actually made over the past year, assessment experts say.

Cardona's letter acknowledges this. "Local context matters in the interpretation of achievement results," it reads. And it urges states to avoid using results "punitively," to ding educators on evaluations or prevent students from graduating.

The department offered states some flexibility on how they calculate results from the 2021-22, and more than half the states plus the District of Columbia have been approved for that flexibility. Even so, the score releases will inform how states identify schools for improvement, and the letter insists that the test results will provide important information that can help states target support.

"We know that some education stakeholders would have preferred the Department to waive assessment requirements over the past two years, but it was not the time to do so, just as now is not the time to lower standards for students," the letter reads. "Used in the right way, data from high-quality systems of assessment can inform instruction and help school leaders drive resources to the schools and students that need them the most."

The message here is, "don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good," said Derek Briggs, the director of the University of Colorado Boulder's Center for Assessment Design Research and Evaluation.

These variations in local context provide a reason to be cautious, Briggs said. “That said, is it better to have no information rather than some information that has to be given some contextual flags?”

Experts advise careful interpretation, multiple sources of data

States and districts have offered up different answers to that question.

In Denver, for example, district officials have said that low student participation rates and the state’s modified testing schedule mean that the data are “no way an accurate representation of an entire student body at most of our schools.”

“In the past, many considered [school rating] data as a tool to compare schools’ performance to other schools, districts and statewide results. Some also used it as a way to find a school’s strengths and identify areas for improvement. We do not believe that the 2022 [school rating] data should be used in that way,” Denver’s Superintendent Alex Marrero wrote in a [letter published Sept. 9](#).

On the other hand, some states—including [Mississippi](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Texas](#)—have reported increases in scores from spring 2021 to 2022, in some cases reaching or exceeding prepandemic levels. In those states, education officials have claimed that the gains are evidence of academic recovery.

Still others have postponed releasing their results. California has delayed its public reporting process, despite telling districts that they can share the data on their own, [the news site EdSource reported this week](#).

In general, though, states should be cautious when making comparisons between 2021 and 2022 results, assessment experts say.

It’s possible to do, but states need to report the data in ways that ensure they’re comparing apples to apples, said Scott Marion, the executive director of the Center for Assessment, a technical assistance group.

That means making clear how many students were enrolled at both timepoints, and what percentage of those students participated in testing. The question for states, he said, is: “How

confident are you in your ability to put the 2022 scores on the same scale as 2019, or 2021? And what evidence do you have that worked as intended?”

It’s also important for systems to be able to track how the same students are progressing over time, said Briggs. This year’s 3rd graders might score higher than last year’s, but that could be because less of their formal education was disrupted by the pandemic—it doesn’t necessarily mean that schools are helping students regain lost ground, he said.

Experts also stressed the importance of triangulating multiple sources to get a fuller picture. For example, state-level results from the reading and math National Assessment of Educational Progress will be released later this fall, and could provide an “interesting check” on state test data, Briggs said.

It’s still too early to know whether some states that reported strong test results this year have started an upward trend, or “if it’s just a blip,” said Marianne Perie, the director of assessment research and innovation at WestEd, a research and consulting group.

For now, she emphasized the importance of continuing to collect data, including on where pandemic funding is going, and what kind of impact it has. It might not always show up in test scores, she added.

Hiring bus drivers, for example, might not have a direct effect on student achievement, “but that doesn’t mean it’s not a good place to put the money.”



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THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

September 13, 2022

Dear Colleague,

The last two years have had a profound impact on our students and schools. National data released earlier this month from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) confirm this impact and should call on us all to redouble our efforts to help our students recover.

This Administration knew that a historic disruption to schooling and to our society would likely result in significant, negative impacts on students' learning. This is why the Biden-Harris Administration called on schools to reopen and provided historic levels of support to safely enable this goal from day one. Today, with the help of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds, nearly all schools are open for in-person learning versus the 46 percent of schools that were open when the President was inaugurated. Funds from the ARP should continue to be spent urgently to meet the immediate needs of students and provide the necessary academic and mental health supports.

As States begin to release student assessment data from the 2021–22 school year, the Department of Education (Department) expects academic performance will reflect these impacts—as well as the inequities in educational opportunity that preceded it—across communities, grade spans, and student groups. The Department remains especially concerned about disproportionate impacts for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students experiencing homelessness, and migratory students.

I want to be clear that State assessment results, and results from other assessments of student learning, should serve as a further call to action to accelerate investments in high-quality instruction and other evidence-based strategies (such as acceleration, tutoring, and summer and afterschool programs) that support academic recovery, student mental health, and other needs; to further focus these resources on students who have experienced the most disruption in their education and have the fewest opportunities for success; and to better support teachers and school leaders, including by bringing more qualified and caring adults into the education profession.

The purpose of this letter is to remind all who report and interpret student outcomes this year that assessment data has always been meant to be used constructively—to help inform parents and families about their students' schools and to ensure schools receive the necessary resources to help support students. Further, this letter is intended to support our communities in countering efforts to misuse these results by applying them punitively.

We know that some education stakeholders would have preferred the Department to waive assessment requirements over the past two years, but it was not the time to do so, just as now is not the time to lower standards for students. Used in the right way, data from high-quality

systems of assessment can inform instruction and help school leaders drive resources to the schools and students that need them the most. Furthermore, parents want to know how their children are doing in school and what is needed to move them forward. Even when identifying schools for support and improvement, as required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's (ESEA) accountability and school improvement requirements, the goal is not to penalize, but rather to make sure these schools receive the additional ARP and other funding and assistance they need to improve.

In this context, I want to share some considerations around possible interpretation, use, and communication of school year 2021–22 assessment data:

- We know that State and local context matters in the interpretation of achievement results. For a handful of States, and a substantial number of local educational agencies (LEAs), school year 2021–22 results reflect the first large-scale administration of federally required assessments since 2019. Other States had reasonably high and representative assessment participation in both the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years, allowing for more definitive evaluation of school and student progress since our collective efforts to reopen schools began.
- Given this, and [consistent with our previous guidance](#), we continue to urge States to take additional steps to reduce the high stakes of assessments in such State decisions as graduation or promotion requirements or in educator evaluations. Please do not confuse this with a recommendation to lower standards; rather, standards for students should remain high as this will lead to stronger outcomes in the long run.
- We encourage states to emphasize the original intended uses of statewide annual assessments: to provide comparable data to identify outcome gaps; to provide educators, parents, and families with data to inform education planning and decision making; to help evaluate academic programs across districts and schools; and to prioritize additional funds, resources, and supports to the schools, educators, and students who need them most.
- We continue to emphasize that statewide annual State assessment results are one of several important measures of school performance and progress. Additional measures required by ESEA include high school graduation rates, English language proficiency, another academic indicator, and an indicator of school quality and student success. Multiple measures provide a more complete perspective on resources, supports, and student success—and help to more effectively identify appropriate strategies and interventions. Some states are using academic growth, extended-year high school graduation rates, regular school attendance and reductions in chronic absenteeism, indicators of college and career readiness, and indicators of a positive and inclusive school climate.

- In addition, there are some promising State practices to implement other valid and reliable measures of school progress, including opportunity to learn data. Examples of opportunity to learn indicators are included in [*ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs*](#).

This year, in particular, it is vital that States publicly report clear, timely, and concise information in an accessible format to help educators, parents, and families chart progress towards academic recovery. I appreciate the complexities of this work and offer the Department's support in communicating and making effective use of these data. For example, the Department's [Regional Education Labs](#) and [Comprehensive Center Network](#) are excellent forums for engaging with other State leaders and measurement experts around data communication, visualization, and interpretation.

It is time for State and district leaders to answer this call to action and meet the scale of our current challenge with solutions that will help our students reach their highest potential. Through ARP, the Department has provided critical resources for success. With bold actions like the launch of the National Partnership for Student Success and the Engage Every Student Initiative, we are here to partner with you and hope to elevate and bolster efforts to raise the bar in education.

As States release achievement and other data, the Department will celebrate initial successes in learning recovery and acceleration; applaud the heroic work led by America's educators, who make them possible; and underscore the need for additional investments, supports, and evidence-based interventions to meet the needs of our school communities—especially our most underserved students.

Sincerely,

/s/

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education