

Through-Year Assessments:

Practical Considerations for
LEA Implementation



Prepared for Smarter Balanced by
the New Teacher Center

June 2022



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Overview of Through-Year Assessment	4
Potential Content Distribution for Through-Year Models	5
Practical Implications at the LEA Level	6
Implications of the Instructional Use Aim at the Classroom Level	12
Summary	17
References	18

Acknowledgements: NTC is so grateful to and would like to thank Magda Chia, Saul Fernandez, Rebecca Mayer, and Sue Pimental for their thought partnership and insight. NTC would also like to thank Amy Youngman for her invaluable contributions to the content of the paper.

Suggested citation:

New Teacher Center. (2022). *Through-year assessments: Practical considerations for LEA implementation [White paper]*. Retrieved from Smarter Balanced website: <https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/through-year-assessments-lea-implementation.pdf>

Executive Summary

Through-year assessment has entered the national educational dialogue as an alternative to the end-of-year summative assessment model. As state educational agencies (SEAs) weigh the advantages and disadvantages of embracing this emergent assessment system, it is important to consider the impact such a decision would have on local educational agencies (LEAs).

This paper explores the practical considerations for LEAs managing the implementation of a statewide through-year model with an instructional use additional aim. We will outline the work required at the LEA level to effectively implement a through-year approach, including defining a theory of action, developing a plan for supporting teachers and students, communicating with key stakeholders, and administration management. Importantly, this paper will also address potential implications of a through-year assessment model at the classroom level through teacher and student vignettes. The paper aims to answer the question: How might a through-year assessment system more effectively serve the primary purpose of assessment: improving teaching and instruction? Ways of knowing are relevant to assessment because, in addition to knowledge on the content assessed, they shape how students understand assessment tasks (items) or activities, and how they respond to them. Properly addressing ways of knowing offers the possibility of ensuring that assessment activities and tasks are meaningful to multiple learners.

Assessments remain a critical tool for school districts. They support a deeper understanding of student needs and the development of instructional strategies to meet them. In the past 20 years, dozens of SEAs and hundreds of LEAs have

embraced the concept of a balanced assessment system in which “assessments at all levels—from classroom to state—work together in a system that is comprehensive, coherent, and continuous” (National Research Council, 2001). The call for balanced assessment systems was motivated by a desire to enhance the utility of assessments for improving learning and teaching, as well as an acknowledgement that summative assessments are designed to provide information regarding systems improvement as opposed to information that is instructionally relevant. However, once again, summative assessments are in the national dialogue and SEAs are exploring alternatives. These end-of-year accountability benchmarks are increasingly seen as outdated, inequitable, and inefficient to transform on-the-ground instructional practices. Through-year assessment—a collection of data points aggregated over time to generate a summative accountability score—is one assessment approach that promises better conditions for students and educators. Proponents of through-year assessments claim that investing in smaller assessments over time would help improve understanding of instructional successes and challenges while offering opportunities to make adjustments as needed. How might a through-year assessment system more effectively serve the primary purpose of assessment: improving teaching and instruction?



Overview of Through-Year Assessment

The introduction of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) opened the door for changes to the predominant summative assessment model. ESSA allows states to collect data points over time to provide valid, reliable, and transparent information on student growth (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). While many design options exist, the most common definition of through-year assessment is “those assessments administered multiple, distinct times across a school year, designed to support annual summative determinations of proficiency and at least one additional aim” (Marion, 2021).

Proponents of through-year models believe three categories of additional aims can be achieved (Marion, 2021):

- A** **Logistical:** The logistical aim attends to reducing or reconfiguring the footprint of the summative assessment by: (a) decreasing the time spent engaging with and preparing for end-of-year tests; and/or (b) allowing for increased flexibility for administration timelines.
- B** **Monitoring:** The monitoring aim addresses intentions to provide statewide standardized data to monitor progress at the school or system (e.g., district) level to ensure that LEAs have data available to inform system-wide programmatic changes that support instruction throughout the school year.
- C** **Instructional:** The instructional aim involves making available standardized statewide assessment data at the classroom level to inform instruction throughout the school year.

This paper explores the practical implications for LEAs managing the implementation of a statewide through-year model, with particular attention given to the instructional use additional aim. The instructional aim focus is a response to a national paradigm shift in education. There is a growing appetite for formative measures that impact classroom instruction instead of summative accountability scores (O’Keefe and Lewis, 2019). Furthermore, by addressing the instructional use aim, this paper will indirectly touch on the motivations underlying the other two aims. Inherent in the logistical aim is a desire to improve instruction by reclaiming instructional time, and embedded within the monitoring aim is the desire to enhance instruction through more strategic, data-driven support.

2

Potential Content Distribution for Through-Year Models

A through-year assessment system that attends to the instructional use aim must primarily address the issue of content distribution for each of the assessments used to provide valid, reliable, and transparent information on content mastery. In the first of a series of webinars designed to understand and unpack the issues surrounding through-year assessment, the Center for Assessment remarked heavily on this key design feature. “How the content domain is structured across time is critical to achieving the intended uses and associated claims that support that use,” said Nathan Dadey, senior associate for the Center for Assessment.

There are many emerging models for how content could be structured across the multiple assessments within a through-year assessment system with corresponding measurement considerations. This paper centers on content distribution that is the most logistically streamlined with the greatest potential for instructional use in a through-year assessment system. At a high level, the model will be aligned to the “Modular Standards Domain” design presented by Dadey.

In the “Modular Standards Domain” design, content typically assessed at the end-of-the-year summative test is distributed among through-year interim assessments aligned to a domain of content standards. This approach would have a clearly articulated blueprint of content standards addressed in each assessment, known as “different blueprint” (Dadey and Gong, 2017), include discrete administration windows, and provide student achievement data on that specific subset of content standards after each assessment administration.

A through-year assessment system that attends to the instructional use aim must primarily address the issue of content distribution for each of the assessments used to provide valid, reliable, and transparent information on content mastery.

3

Practical Implications at the LEA Level

Deciding to shift from a balanced assessment system model with an end-of-year summative to any through-year model, regardless of design, will require LEAs to understand its practical implications while reimagining their assessment approach to align with the new system.

We have selected a scenario with optimal conditions for a through-year model to streamline implications at the LEA level. Due to the complexity of English Language Arts (ELA) and the inherent challenge of distributing ELA content standards, this paper is grounded in mathematics. The mathematics content standards lend themselves more easily to discrete content distribution within the modular standards domain design than ELA.¹ Additionally, the practical implications outlined in this paper presume the LEA has standards-aligned scope and sequences that are consistently used across the district. Multiple strategies and approaches are employed by LEAs to implement standards-aligned instructional materials and scopes and sequences. LEAs charged with integrating a statewide through-year assessment model with a different blueprint approach may avoid added complexity if their standards-aligned mathematics materials provide an articulated scope and sequence of content standards. Furthermore, we focus on grades that require a summative score for federal accountability.

We aim to explore the practical implications of such a shift on LEAs and to outline the work required at the LEA level to support the effective implementation of a through-year approach. We center our discussion on a scenario where one state adopts a modular standards domain design model to support instructional use and look specifically at how this might look for fifth grade mathematics. To do so, we needed through-year interim assessments aligned to the cognitive demands and content of the Grade 5 mathematics standards in order to ensure the assessments would serve to support annual summative determinations of proficiency. We elected to use the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks for Grade 5 mathematics as they contain items aligned with the end-of-year performance expectations and provide a model of discrete content distribution.

¹ Cole, Shelbi K. & Swanson, Carey. (2022). *Content progressions & clustering across instructional materials: viability for supporting the design of a through-year assessment model [White paper]*. Retrieved from Smarter Balanced website: https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/sb_content-progressions_through-year-assessment.pdf

The following illustrates this model over the course of the school year:

Interim Assessments Blocks (IABs)
Operations and Algebraic Thinking
Number and Operations—Fractions
Measurement and Data
Number and Operations in Base Ten
Performance Task

Month/Interim	Assessment Name
October / Interim #1	Number and Operations in Base Ten
January / Interim #2	Number and Operations—Fractions AND Performance Task—Turtle Habitat
March / Interim #3	Operations and Algebraic Thinking
May / Interim #4	Measurement and Data

Since this paper aims to explore the practical implications for LEAs, we do not attend to the measurement considerations of this model. We are using it solely to anchor our discussion of the changes LEAs will have to undergo to implement any through-year system.

Define a Theory of Action

One of the primary actions an LEA must take is to define their theory of action for assessment. A strong theory of action outlines the role each type of assessment plays in supporting the broader LEA vision for teaching and learning while adhering to state and federal guidelines for assessment and accountability.

In the current model, LEAs have significant autonomy to define their assessment approach and to select assessments that align with their vision and support their theory of action. In the event that SEAs shift to a through-year summative assessment model, they effectively take a role that was previously allocated to LEAs. A statewide adoption of a through-year model would diminish the LEA autonomy to define their theory of action and to identify assessments that support their vision because of the increase in the number and type of assessments required throughout the school year.

In the sample through-year model previously discussed, there would be a shift from one end-of-year summative mathematics assessment to four mathematics assessments spread throughout the school year. Although we're focusing specifically on Grade 5 mathematics as a proxy, it's important to note that a system would need to contend with the same increased assessment load for all tested grades across both English Language Arts and mathematics. LEAs would need to reimagine their existing theory of action to align with the through-year model, including eliminating or repurposing local assessments currently in use to offset the increased statewide testing demands. It will be essential for LEAs to engage in an assessment audit to ensure students are not overburdened by locally required assessments on top of the additional statewide through-year assessment administrations. These locally required assessments may include curriculum-embedded assessments, district-level assessments, and other content state-required assessments (e.g., science).

One of the key challenges an LEA tends to face is that assessment decisions are often made in silos, resulting in misalignment between the assessment approach and other aspects of the LEA's strategy. This often stems from how LEAs are organized with key functions like curriculum, instruction, assessment, accountability, and professional learning frequently existing across multiple departments. Each has a role to play in assessment decisions. The implementation of a through-year assessment model necessitates the integration of these functions in defining the theory of action.

One of the most critical responsibilities of an LEA regarding instruction is to ensure alignment and coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Reimagine Alignment of Assessments to Instruction and Curriculum

One of the most critical responsibilities of an LEA regarding instruction is to ensure alignment and coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment. LEAs with strong theories of action consistently focus on ensuring that coherence exists in alignment with the broader vision for teaching and learning. Assessment systems used most effectively to inform instruction include blueprints and reporting structures that connect assessment activities (e.g., items, tasks), curricular content, and standards (Shephard, Davidson, & Bowman, 2011).

Having transparent communication regarding assessment blueprints is key to achieving the instructional use aim of a through-year assessment system. Educators need to know what content will be assessed in each assessment to make informed decisions to align instruction and assessment at the classroom level. LEAs will need to work collaboratively with their SEA to design assessment blueprints that align with the scope and sequences and pacing guides of high-quality instructional materials or standards-aligned instructional materials used within their local agencies.

The Grade 5 mathematics example assumes standardized sequence and timing of the assessment blocks. In order to implement these assessments in a coherent manner an LEA would need to have access to four assessment blueprints that contain information regarding how the content from the standards is allocated to each of the four assessments. An educator or group of educators would then map the standards for each blueprint to their sequence of standards addressed within the Grade 5 mathematics instructional material. If the assessed Grade 5 math standards outlined by SEA assessment blueprints don't align with the scope of the Grade 5 math instructional material, LEAs will need to recommend adjustments to curriculum pacing guides.

Alignment of assessment blueprints and curriculum scope and sequences is crucial to ensuring the through-year assessments are serving to assess content that has been taught and that students have had sufficient opportunities to learn prior to assessment.² This would require a pedagogical shift for educators, from that of following a progression of content driven by curriculum scope and sequence to a progression of content driven by an external assessment scope and sequence. For example, in the current model, we know that division of fractions is assessed in the end-of-year Grade 5 summative assessment. However, LEAs and teachers have autonomy to decide when in the year students will learn, practice, and be formatively assessed on this content. This autonomy would be revoked with a through-year assessment model that dictates when in the school year students would need to demonstrate mastery of dividing fractions.

Additionally, LEAs will need to revise assessment calendars with aligned administration support to incorporate the assessment windows for through-year interim assessments. Standards-aligned instructional materials typically leverage end-of-unit or module assessments to provide the teacher with formative data on how students are progressing toward proficiency on grade-level content standards. With the addition of multiple through-year interim assessments, LEAs and teachers will need to strategically eliminate unit and module assessments to avoid over-assessing students.

Develop a Plan for Supporting Teachers and Students

The effective use of the data provided by components of an embedded through-year system requires clear expectations from the LEA, guidelines for data analysis and usage, and the time and support needed for teachers to engage in analysis (Abrams, McMillan, & Wetzell, 2015). Using the Grade 5 mathematics example from above, the LEA will need to provide teachers with training over the summer focused on understanding the progression of content over the year as outlined in the state-determined assessment system and how the new assessments will support teaching and learning. Likewise, this process would need to be replicated for all content areas and grade levels for which a through-year assessment approach is being leveraged.

Before starting each unit or module, teachers will need opportunities to incorporate blueprint analysis of each through-year assessment into their instructional planning along with content standards, curricula summaries, and pacing guides. This analysis is crucial to ensure that students receive appropriate instruction in light of the content standards addressed in each assessment window. While the practice of previewing assessments in order to build instructional coherence is not new, the quantity of assessment previewing opportunities would increase to account for the additional through-year interim assessment administrations.

² Cole, Shelbi K. & Swanson, Carey. (2022). *Content progressions & clustering across instructional materials: viability for supporting the design of a through-year assessment model [White paper]*. Retrieved from Smarter Balanced website: https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/sb_content-progressions_through-year-assessment.pdf

After each through-year interim administration, teachers will need time to collaborate to review student performance data and identify instructional modifications based on that data. To honor the instructional use aim, the LEA will need to ensure site leaders and coaches are equipped to support Grade 5 mathematics teachers in using the through-year interim assessment data to diagnose student misconceptions and develop an action plan to accelerate student learning. It will be vital that educators receive through-year interim assessment reports promptly, as well as support with interpreting results and developing responsive plans to support learners.

Educators will require additional assessment support and expertise from school leaders and instructional coaches. In the absence of effective analysis support, teacher use of interim data can lead to a “relatively superficial approach to instructional planning and response” (Oláh, Lawrence, & Riggan, 2010).

Communicate with Stakeholders

Another important role LEAs play is in ensuring families and caregivers are provided with information about student performance on state-level assessments. This includes education to help families and caregivers understand their child’s performance. National PTA and Edge Research findings from parent focus groups show that families prioritize such assessment reports.³ “Parents are looking for actionable reports that clearly identify what specific academic areas need work and how to improve them” (Oláh, Lawrence, & Riggan, 2010). It will be essential that score reports for each through-year interim assessment administration use parent-friendly language with actionable next steps in order to fulfill the goals of through-year assessment with an additional instructional aim.

How families receive feedback on their child’s academic progress also matters. Families turn to teachers as experts and trusted messengers when it comes to understanding their child’s academic needs. According to “Findings from Virtual Focus Groups among Parents,” a research study commissioned by Smarter Balanced in partnership with National PTA and Edge Research, LEAs “must ensure that teachers are equipped to clearly understand, value, and appropriately communicate the purpose of assessments and provide support to help them explain to parents both student results and how they plan to utilize those results in the classroom.” Within a through-year model, LEAs will need to create opportunities for building educator and parent assessment literacy and will want to consider the connection to other student achievement information sent home, including report cards.

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zZ_u4GhZR_K6HdbhssWdRNW1mdTDpyuQ/view?usp=sharing

Administration Management

A final practical implication for the LEA of shifting from the current balanced assessment system model to a through-year model is administration management. In the current system, LEAs manage testing administration training to ensure those administering required assessments follow clearly defined protocols that ensure reliability and security. LEAs also provide technical training that builds the capacity of teachers and test administrators to make required assessments fully accessible to all students, including embedded supports and appropriate test environments. Within the through-year model, LEAs will need to ensure these trainings are available to test administrators and test coordinators for each through-year interim assessment administration. These additional trainings may lead to increased time commitments and levels of stress for educators expected to lead the administration of multiple standardized through-year interim assessments.

The LEA also manages the district-wide reporting and rostering infrastructure aligned to required assessments. For each required assessment, accurate teachers of record need to be given administration and reporting access, and students need to be properly rostered to the appropriate teacher or course. **Especially important in the through-year model, LEAs will need to ensure that back-end systems are up to date and accurately reflect any teacher of record and student school placement changes throughout the school year.** As part of district-wide reporting infrastructure, LEAs manage test completion rates and implement test make-up protocols; these will need to be in place and monitored for each interim administration in the through-year model. If teachers and families need actionable information beyond summary score reports, there will need to be a shift in reporting infrastructure.

The LEA also manages internal data management systems. Data validations and imports into data management systems will need to occur four times annually, not one time. Additional data analysis and reporting to stakeholders (e.g., board of trustees, community members) will also need to be scheduled within a communication plan for student results.

While many of the implications outlined above reflect work that LEAs currently engage in, the move to a through-year model would require significant change at the LEA level to ensure all of these systems are operating appropriately and in alignment with one another. It is not an easy lift for LEAs to undertake and will require sustained effort and time to adequately resource and address.

4

Implications of the Instructional Use Aim at the Classroom Level

Equally as important as considering the implications at the LEA level are the implications at the classroom level, particularly for the instructional use aim that proponents of through-year assessment believe they can achieve. The vignettes below provide practical examples of the potential lived experiences of the people closest to the impact of these decisions: students, families, and teachers.

Vignette #1

In the first vignette, we meet Alicia and Mr. Rigby, a math student and teacher. They are navigating the impact of using a through-year model with an emphasis on proficiency scores as the instructional information provided to students, families, and teachers.

Alicia – Student Point of View

Walking out of Mr. Rigby’s math class today, Alicia was excited to tell her mom about her math assessment score, which indicated she had demonstrated proficiency. Math had always been her favorite subject, but taking tests made her nervous. Earlier in the week, her nerves grew when she walked into class and noticed Mr. Rigby had changed their desks from the groups of four they normally worked in to straight lines. He asked the students to sit in alphabetical order. She took slow, deep breaths to calm her nerves and tried very hard to stay engaged the entire time. The test was long, and Alicia took a few brain breaks at her desk to keep up her stamina. Although Alicia was confused by some of the questions – they were phrased differently throughout the test module – she felt confident about her work on the assessment. Today, as the class reviewed their math data, Alicia was surprised when she asked Mr. Rigby about where she had made mistakes. He didn’t offer his usual feedback and opportunity to make corrections to the assessment. Mr. Rigby always told them assessments were just opportunities for him to see what they knew so he could help them get better. Earlier in the year, he had even shown the class how he answered all the math problems before they did, so he would know where they got stuck! She liked that about Mr. Rigby; he cared enough about their learning to do all the math problems first. Today, though, he reminded her that he couldn’t look at these assessments like he normally looked at their work. ***“It’s okay; I was still in the green band of proficiency,”*** she thought to herself as she left class. She might not have known exactly what she got right or wrong, but she knew she must be on the right track.

Vignette #1 (continued)

Mr. Rigby – Teacher Point of View

Mr. Rigby left his data meeting unsure how to provide affirming and adjusting feedback to his students. On the one hand, he was hopeful that between the first two assessments he had given the class, 60 percent of students had demonstrated proficiency in both. This allowed Mr. Rigby to provide more targeted attention to a smaller subset of students who had not yet shown mastery of the content. On the other hand, due to the current testing security measures, he and his colleagues could not engage in the item analysis that had become an integral part of their data meeting practice. This posed an additional challenge, given that content had been assessed differently from how Mr. Rigby and his colleagues had taught it during the module. **He was unsure how many of his students' errors were due to unfinished learning or the formatting and phrasing of questions. The lack of transparency into the assessment did not provide access to students' thinking.** While his PLC had spent time grouping students by proficiency ratings to provide additional support, they agreed they would need to administer an additional assessment to gain both the clarity and data to further support their students.

Key Takeaways

- Test security prohibits teachers from using the assessment and resulting data in ways that support stronger, more targeted instruction.
 - ▷ Teachers are not able to analyze student responses in relation to the specific item and/or task students were asked to complete. This limits teachers' ability to understand student misconceptions and respond effectively.
 - ▷ Additional unsecure assessments would need to be administered in order for teachers to get the instructional information they need to remedy gaps in unfinished learning or to provide specific opportunities for extension.
 - ▷ Teachers are also unable to provide students with specific feedback on the assessment or use the items instructionally with students to help them correct their errors and misunderstandings.
 - ▷ Coherence between assessment and instruction is limited to the blueprint. Teachers can align instruction to the specific standards that will be assessed but are limited in using the assessment to define grade-level expectations.
- A through-year model may cause additional testing anxiety for students who must cope with increased summative testing environments.
- Given the frequency and consistency in testing, families will have a more regular flow of communication about student proficiency in class. However, the depth of information will be limited unless additional assessments are administered.

Vignette #2

In the second vignette, we share the experiences of Sam and his teacher, Ms. Tanya. We learn how an instructional use aim can be accomplished within the context of the current balanced assessment system model, particularly when an LEA has a theory of action aligned to its vision for teaching and learning.

Sam – Student Point of View

Sam arrived home already thinking about the homework assignment from math class. Ms. Tanya typically asked him and the other fifth graders to complete tasks at home that involved talking to family members about their learning experiences; it was one of the things his mom loved about his teacher. When his mom asked the dreaded question, it was nice to have some prescribed content. “How was your day?” came from the kitchen, as though she had read his mind. “Ms. Tanya has another family homework assignment,” he said as he walked towards his mom’s voice. “She wants us to talk about our experience taking our math interim assessment today.” “Well...?” his mom said with anticipation. Sam’s mom knew about the assessment. They all did. They’d been preparing for the Numerical Expressions FIAB throughout this first module of the school year. “Ms. Tanya was right,” he began. “The problems were really similar to the ones she has been giving us feedback on, and they got harder throughout the test. I was glad she had us do some of our exit tickets on the computer last week because the format of the problems was similar.” His mom waited for him to continue. “For me, the hardest one asked us to identify the correct math expression from just the words. It was tricky because I had to pick the one that had the correct operations and parentheses in the right place.” His mom looked reflective and asked, “When will you know if you got that one right?” Sam replied, **“We will do error analysis tomorrow. Ms. Tanya will give us our results alongside the answer key. We’ll get a chance to revise our wrong answers and add our thinking so she knows whether or not we understand.” Sam hoped he had gotten all the answers right but was able to relax knowing that he’d get a chance to fix any mistakes.**

Ms. Tanya – Teacher Point of View

Ms. Tanya left the data meeting with her coach and grade-level team feeling purposeful and reflective. When they had met weeks ago to backward map tasks and exit tickets in the first module to the Numerical Expressions FIAB, they had all felt nervous about the rigor and formatting of some of the items. Now, having administered the test, they were meeting again to review the overall scores to determine which items to investigate more deeply. They found that #10 was by far the most challenging item across the department. They discussed the connection between module one lessons and tasks that required students to identify expressions similar to #10. They quickly realized that they had never asked students to write or identify equations with three different operations. Most students had selected C, focusing on the numbers in the word problem and forgetting the key term “quotient.”

Vignette #2 (continued)

As a group, the teachers created four similar expression problems with three different operations. They planned to spiral these into student do-now's in the upcoming week. The team also crafted an email to families explaining the data report each student would receive along with a screenshot of item #10 and the team's plan for addressing the learning gap across all classrooms. Overall, the students had done well, and she was looking forward to the students' error analysis the following day.

#10 - 15424

Which expression correctly shows the quotient of the sum of 220 and 80 and the difference between 135 and 60?

- A. $220 + (80 \div 135) - 60$
- B. $220 + (80 + 135) - 60$
- C. $(220 + 80) + (135 - 60)$
- D. $(220 + 80) \div (135 - 60)$

Key Takeaways

- With teacher access to materials, there is greater coherence between the content students experience on a daily basis in instruction and how students are assessed.
- Teachers have greater insight into student misconceptions due to transparency of the items being used in the assessment and their ability to use those items instructionally with students.
- Reducing testing security measures enhances teacher access into student thinking after the assessment has been administered and creates additional chances to make instructional adjustments prior to assessing student proficiency.
- With a faster turnaround possible for formative and interim data, teachers are able to more effectively utilize their learning communities to analyze proficiency data and the root causes behind student achievement scores.
- This deeper understanding offers the potential for teachers to partner with families by providing insight into their student's progress through grade-level content. However, it also comes with a less prescribed consistency when engaging with families in data reporting.

The question states must grapple with is: what approach achieves the instructional aim and, in turn, best supports student achievement?

Summary of Trade-Offs

The following table outlines the trade-offs in moving from the current balanced assessment system to a through-year model.

Balanced Assessment System	Through-Year
–ability to get deeper information about student thinking	–emphasis on production of a score as the primary “instructional” information; additional assessing required to access student thinking
–item transparency for teachers and students	–limited blueprint transparency
–prioritizes instructional use and formative assessments	–prioritizes summative accountability measure with additional aim “add on”
–testing conditions aligned to individual assessment purposes	–standardized testing conditions
–less prescribed consistency across the year about student progress	–consistency in family communication about student progress
–faster turnaround of formative and interim assessment data; very delayed summative data	–longer turnaround time for reporting as compared to curriculum-embedded formative assessments

5

Summary

While many elements of a through-year model may be appealing, the practical implications of implementing such a model requires support to alleviate LEA work required to manage the changes needed for the model to be successful. At the same time, it is not evident that a through-year model would achieve the instructional use aim more effectively than the current balanced assessment system model, given the limitations of administering assessments to meet federal accountability. Additionally, Smarter Balanced’s existing infrastructure provides LEAs with several assessment types and instructional resources—available through Tools for Teachers—to support a robust assessment approach that, when used effectively, can support the instructional use aim.

References

Abrams, L.M., McMillan, J.H, Wetzel, A.P (2015). *Implementing Benchmark Testing for Formative Purposes: Teacher Voices about What Works*. Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, v27 n4 p347-375 Nov 2015.

Cole, Shelbi K. & Swanson, Carey. (2022). *Content progressions & clustering across instructional materials: viability for supporting the design of a through-year assessment model [White paper]*. Retrieved from Smarter Balanced website: https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/sb_content-progressions_through-year-assessment.pdf

Dadey, N. & Gong, B. (2017). *Using interim assessments in place of summative assessments? Considerations of an ESSA option*. Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved March 4, 2022 from: https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/ASR_ESSA_Interim_Considerations-April.pdf

Marion, S. (2021, November 30). *Centerline: Collaboratively Learning About Through Year Assessments*. From Center for Assessment: <https://www.nciea.org/blog/through-year-assessment/collaboratively-learning-about-through-year-assessments>

National Research Council. 2001. *Knowing What Students Know: The Science and Design of Educational Assessment*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/10019>

O’Keefe, B. & Lewis, B. (2019). *The State of Assessment: A Look Forward on Innovation in State Testing Systems*. From Bellwether Education Partners: <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/state-assessment-look-forward-innovation-state-testing-systems>

Oláh, L.N., Lawrence, N.R., & Riggan, M. (2010). *Learning to Learn From Benchmark Assessment Data: How Teachers Analyze Results*, Peabody Journal of Education, 85:2, 226-245, DOI: [10.1080/01619561003688688](https://doi.org/10.1080/01619561003688688)

Shepard, L., Davidson, K., & Bowman, R. (2011). *How middle-school mathematics teachers use interim and benchmark assessment data* (CRESST Report 807). Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST).

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and National PTA. 2022. *Findings from Virtual Focus Groups Among Parents*. Retrieved April 2, 2022, from <https://smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-and-national-pta-research-finds-parents-eager-for-more-information-on-how-assessment-systems-support-their-childs-academic-progress/>

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Application for new grants under the Enhanced Assessment Instruments Grant Program (EAG) (CFDA 84.368A). Retrieved March 4, 2022, from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/eag/eag2016application.pdf>.