

## Report Primer

### *Recipe for Success: What State Lawmakers Need to Know About K–12 Accountability Assessments*

State legislators around the country have become increasingly involved in helping to select state K-12 assessments for accountability in recent years. With this new responsibility comes the need to deeply understand an inherently complex issue—educational assessment. As [Recipe for Success](#) details, there is an important balance policymakers must strike between responding to constituent concerns and weighing the complex requirements and tradeoffs in selecting assessments for state and federal accountability. Just as there are steps to a recipe that must be followed, there are steps to the process of choosing an assessment system. [Recipe for Success](#) lays out this process for policymakers, and includes key considerations and questions for those involved in selecting assessments for accountability.

#### Key Considerations:

Though each state context is unique, there are several key considerations that all state policymakers should keep in mind:

- **Start with goals, not tests:** Rather than starting the selection process with a test in mind, states should begin with their goals for improving schools. Working in this order, policymakers are more likely to select assessments that are good tools for helping to meet their state's goals.
- **One test cannot meet all uses:** Any given assessment is designed for one or several specific uses. Extending any given assessment to meet many different uses risks compromising the assessment's validity.
- **Trade-offs are inevitable:** Because one assessment cannot meet all uses (nor all design specifications), policymakers should expect to make trade-offs when selecting new assessments.
- **Coherence is key:** States must view their assessments as part of a coherent system that spans kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Goals for student learning build on one another, and assessments must do the same.
- **Constituents don't uniformly dislike standardized testing:** It would be a mistake to assume that assessment in K-12 schools is uniformly unpopular. Recent public opinion research paints a conflicted picture of Americans' views of testing in K-12 schools (for more, see [Recipe for Success](#), **pg. 11: What Do Americans Think About Testing?**).

#### Key Questions:

As policymakers navigate the process of selecting assessments, they would also do well to ask the following questions:

- What are the federal requirements for annual testing? What new flexibilities are available to states under ESSA?
- What are the state's goals for its accountability assessment system, and how do they build on one another? How do those goals translate into claims (statements that describe what an assessment measures about a student, teacher, or school)?
- Does the assessment's use meet the claim the state wants to make? How many uses can one assessment reasonably support?
- How much can the state afford to spend to meet its goals for assessment? How much autonomy does the state want over its assessment system, and how much is it willing to pay for that level of control?

*Note: These are key considerations and questions taken from a longer piece. To read the entire paper, visit: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/recipe-for-success/>.*