2020-21 Benchmark Assessment Guidance for Learning at a Distance

Introduction

For the 2020-21 academic year, districts have created COVID-19 preparedness and response plans to identify modes of instruction. Such plans include learning at a distance, in-person learning, or a hybrid of the two. Regardless of the mode of instruction, districts are required to meet the following benchmark assessment provision requirements as provided in the Return to Learn legislation.

The benchmark assessments:
1. Must be administered to all students in grades K-8
2. Must measure proficiency in reading and mathematics
3. Must be administered at least twice a year – within the first nine weeks of school and again before the end of the school year

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Assessment Considerations if Remote Administration is Required

It is possible that at times during the 2020-21 school year, at least some students will be learning at a distance and districts will need to determine how to best administer assessments to these students. In this situation, schools should consider the following:

1. Choice of Assessment and Technology Considerations

Consider the usefulness of the results of an assessment that is typically administered in-person and is now being administered at a distance. Determine student connectivity and device needs and work with benchmark assessment providers to determine the specific technical requirements related to their assessment tool(s).

2. Administration Procedures

The assessment administration procedures are likely to change when an assessment is administered in a remote environment. These assessment opportunities must show what the student can do independently to inform appropriate instructional decisions for the student. Special consideration for families of English learners and students with disabilities, especially those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, may be necessary.

3. Assessment Validity

Benchmark and progress monitoring assessments may not have been thoroughly vetted for remote administration. Remote administration is typically considered a non-standard administration because of variations in student and teacher experiences and the presentation of materials. These variations can influence the validity of the assessment results. Districts are cautioned against making high-stakes decisions without additional reliable and valid data.

4. Training

It might be most efficient and effective to train a small cadre of staff as "experts" in remote assessment administration. Give clear and explicit directions to those providing support from home about their role and purpose in assessment administration. Support to the student should be limited to technical issues.

5. Practice

Before administering an assessment, provide clear instructions, modeling, and practice on the device and platform that students will use for learning and testing.

6. Incorporate Other Data

It is important to use multiple data points to inform decisions about student instruction. These other data points can be used to triangulate data about what students know and can do. In addition, student perception data (such as a student survey) can be important for matching instruction methods and student learning needs and interests.

For more information related to the benchmark assessment provisions in the Return to Learn law, visit MDE's Benchmark Assessment web page (www.michigan.gov/mde-benchmarkassessments).