



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 21, 2020

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Venessa A. Keesler, Ph.D., Deputy Superintendent 
Division of Educator, Student, and School Supports

SUBJECT: Benchmark Assessments MEMO #COVID-19-095

Approved Benchmark List

Michigan's "Return to Learn" legislation—House Bills 5911, HB 5912, and 5913—was signed into law by Governor Gretchen Whitmer on August 20, 2020. The bills were assigned Public Acts [147](#), [148](#), and [149](#) of 2020, respectively, and ordered to take immediate effect.

As outlined in Public Act 149 of 2020, districts are required to create an extended COVID-19 learning plan for the 2020-21 academic year. As part of these plans, districts must identify educational goals expected to be achieved for learners during the 2020-21 academic year. The law states:

The goals must include an assurance that the district shall select a benchmark assessment or benchmark assessments that are aligned to state standards and an assurance that the district shall administer the benchmark assessment or benchmark assessments to all pupils as prescribed under section 104 to determine whether pupils are making meaningful progress toward mastery of these standards.

Public Act 149 of 2020 also amends section 104 of the state School Aid Act. The amendments to section 104 outline requirements for the implementation of benchmark assessments for the 2020-21 academic year within subsections (8), (9), (10), and (14).

Section 104(8) requires districts to administer one or more benchmark assessments from the following:

- a provider approved by the department under subsection (9),
- benchmark assessments described in subsection (10),
- local benchmark assessments,

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- or any combination thereof.

The assessment(s) must be administered to all pupils in grades K-8 within the first nine weeks of school to measure proficiency in reading and mathematics. The assessments related to each of these sections are described below.

Section 104(9): Approved Providers of Benchmark Assessments

Section 104(9) requires that the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) approve at least four but no more than five providers of benchmark assessments to meet the requirements of this legislation. The providers approved at this time are:

- NWEA
- Curriculum Associates
- Renaissance Learning
- Data Recognition Corporation (DRC)

MDE will continue to review and evaluate information as appropriate on other providers and may add a fifth to this list in the coming weeks.

Pursuant to the legislation, these providers may offer any **products** that meet the requirements of subsections 9(a) to (9)(h). These products include (but may not be limited to): MAP (NWEA), iReady (Curriculum Associates), STAR (Renaissance Learning), and MDE's early literacy assessment and Smarter Balanced (DRC). MDE has requested that these providers make available to the department and to districts documentation that verifies how their assessments satisfy the criteria subsections 9(a) to (9)(h). Districts may request this information directly from their selected provider.

Section 104(10): Assessments with Progress Monitoring Tools and Enhanced Diagnostic Assessments

Section 104(10) provides districts with the ability to administer additional "benchmark assessments" toward meeting the requirement under subsection (8).

The additional assessments described include progress monitoring tools and enhanced diagnostic assessments. While these types of assessments do not meet the standard definition of a benchmark assessment, they do provide meaningful and helpful information about students and assist with progress monitoring, which is critical during a pandemic. The new law makes clear that these types of tools satisfy the requirements under Section 104(8).

Districts may wish to administer an assessment in reading for students in grades K-9 that contains progress monitoring tools and enhanced diagnostic assessments, and they may administer a benchmark assessment in math for students in grades K-8 that contains progress monitoring tools. These assessments include but are not limited to: DIBELS/Acadience, AIMSWEB, and any others that meet those criteria.

Section 104(14): Benchmark Assessment Provided at No Cost to Districts

Section 104(14) requires that MDE make available one of the benchmark assessments available by a provider named in subsection (9) at no cost to districts. To this end, MDE will make available the Smarter Balanced benchmark assessments

(administered through MDE's administration contract with DRC) at no additional cost to districts. MDE will also continue to provide MDE's early literacy assessments for grades K-2 at no cost to districts, as has been the case since 2017. Additional details will be forthcoming.

Other Important Information

When administering assessments, the law encourages districts to administer the same assessments to students that they have administered in previous years, to the extent possible. This reflects the need for consistent data to assist with informing decisions focused on improving learning for all students and performing reasonable comparisons over time.

Section 104(12) requires that districts send benchmark assessment data to regional data hubs. MDE and the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) will then do a **statewide aggregate** analysis of the data. MDE and CEPI will work with the regional data hubs to determine the form and manner of this reporting and will communicate more information about this in the future. Please note that any data obtained by districts from local benchmark assessments (as opposed to those from assessments in Section 104(9) or (14)) are not required to be submitted to the data hub.

Updates on other assessment requirements

- A. Districts administer alternate assessments to students with a disability to meet accommodations as outlined in an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Districts must ensure that they remain compliant with student IEPs and are encouraged to reach out to the selected providers to meet the needs of all learners as well as to consider the use of local assessments to meet the requirements of Section 104(8). MDE will provide additional guidance and technical assistance in this area in the coming weeks.
- B. Section 104(4) of the state School Aid Act, as amended by Public Act 149 of 2020, states that the "statewide implementation of the Michigan kindergarten entry observation tool (MKEO), as described in this subsection, will be suspended for 2020-2021."
- C. Districts are still required to screen K-3 students in reading within 30 days of the start of school. Additional guidance for meeting the screening requirements of the Read by Grade Three (RBG3) law will be provided soon.

As most of you are aware, the consequences associated with the RBG3 law, including but not limited to the retention of students reading significantly below grade level, are associated with performance on state summative assessments. The department has requested a waiver from the United States Department of Education (USED) to allow the state to set aside state summative assessments for the 2020-21 school year.

- D. Districts are still required to identify English learners. MDE has recently provided temporary guidance to districts while students are learning at a

distance. This guidance can be found in the [Temporary Guidance for Identifying Potential English Learners During Remote Learning](#) document.

Training and question and answer sessions based on implementation of the new state law will be announced shortly and provided soon thereafter.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors