


# MEMORANDUM

TO: Vermont Administrators and Educators  
FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary   
SUBJECT: A Strong and Healthy Start: Refocusing on Assessment  
DATE: September 28, 2020

---

## Purpose

As the important work of reopening continues, the Agency of Education (AOE) would like to share an update related to assessment, acknowledging the critical area of identifying students' specific learning and support needs during this uncertain time. While our plan is to gradually return to our usual assessment programming, we will need to adjust where we can. This memo provides an orientation to assessment for SY21 by explaining how we plan to address the complexities of student learning as well as pursue quality measurement.

Overall, there is still much to be learned from our federal partners about the parameters we will be working within as we move through the school year. Until we know more, we will prepare to the best of our ability for a series of possible eventualities. We will prioritize keeping our field partners informed about state level plans for assessment during SY21 as they evolve.

## What to Expect

Supervisory Unions and School Districts (SU/SDs) should anticipate additional communication from the AOE in the coming weeks regarding our direction and approach for SY21 assessment. There are a few announcements to share related to the Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE) system updates and (National Assessment of Educational Progress) NAEP communication.

## TIDE

- The Secure Browsers for the 2020-2021 school year are now available for download on the [Secure Browsers](#) page of the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment portal. The new version of the Secure Browser is **not required** for all 2020-2021 online **interim test administrations**.
  - The General Test Administrator Certification Course is now available on the portal. This course must be completed, and the quiz passed, to administer the Smarted Balanced Interim and Summative Assessments, Vermont Science Assessment, and Vermont Alternate Assessment. Completion of the certification course will be indicated in
-

TIDE. We recommend that you print and/or save a copy of the completion certificate that is generated at the end of the course for your records.

- Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments are now available and results for students that have completed an interim assessment can be found in the Reporting System. Both can be accessed on the [Comprehensive Assessment Program Portal](#).

## **NAEP**

- Districts and schools should expect to receive letters regarding NAEP participation a little later than usual this year. As of now, the testing window remains unchanged, but our communication has been intentionally delayed out of respect for your focus on reopening.
- NAEP communications will be sent out starting Oct. 9, 2020.

## **How the Agency of Education is Supporting Field Partners**

Educators across the nation are looking to formative classroom assessments to help identify instructional and learning needs. For now, the AOE is providing support to the field by encouraging districts and schools to draw upon tools immediately available to us to scaffold student learning at close range.

Special attention should be paid to how we are using these tools and what they are capable of. Formative assessments and instructional tools serve the specific purpose of immediately informing instruction and identifying areas of need at the individual or classroom level.

Among tools readily available are Vermont's Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments, which include Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs). These IABs provide targeted student-level information that can assist educators in tailoring instruction without significant interruption to instructional time. The AOE is in the process of developing ways to support use of these assessments for our field partners who choose to leverage them. If you have questions about Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks; please see the resources included toward the end of this memo (specifically, please see the [2020 Back to School Assessment Playbook](#), which is available in the Portal).

- Smarter Balanced Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICAs) – BREADTH, aligned with summative assessment
- Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) – DEPTH, 20 questions, 8 targets
- Smarter Balanced Focused Interim Assessments Blocks (FIBAs) – DEPTH, 20 questions, 1-2 targets

These assessments answer questions like: “What does this student know and what are they ready to learn?” or “What topics should I be reteaching in my classroom before I move forward?” Formative assessments do not provide a comprehensive evaluation of instructional practice or resource allocation.

## **Existing Guidance and Resources Available**

The AOE has compiled a list of helpful resources related to assessment, made available by our federal and vendor partners.

These resources are available via the links below:

- [2020 Back to School Assessment Playbook](#): Using the Smarter Balanced Assessment System to Improve Student Learning
- [Revising the Definition of Formative Assessment](#) (CCSSO)
- [Classroom Assessment Learning Modules](#) (Center for Assessment)
- [Restart & Recovery: Assessment Considerations for Fall 2020](#) (CCSSO)
- [How Should We Assess Students in Fall 2020? Formative Assessment Wins Again](#) (Center for Assessment)
- [Key Takeaways for Assessment in 2020-2021](#) (Center for Assessment)
- [An Assessment Response to Anticipated Learning Gaps](#) (Center for Assessment)
- [Issues and Considerations that the COVID-19 Pandemic Presents for Measuring Student Growth](#) (Center for Assessment)
- [Remote Learning Provides an Opportunity to Rethink Assessment \(and Learning\)](#) (Center for Assessment)

## **Introducing New Director of Assessment**

The AOE's Data Management and Analysis Division (DMAD) welcomes Dr. Amanda Gorham to her new role as Vermont's Director of Assessment. Dr. Gorham completed her doctorate at UMass Amherst in Research, Education Measurement, and Psychometrics this spring. Her research focused on developing, piloting and testing the psychometric quality of an innovative screening tool with an overall goal of expanding the screening tools available to new mothers for identifying probable postpartum depression. Amanda specifically focused on ways to increase access to early detection and treatment for historically marginalized populations. Amanda's mission as a psychometrician and educational researcher is to contribute to the identification and development of ways in which assessment can justly serve and benefit all people, regardless of their social identities.

Amanda also comes to us with on-the-ground experience. She began her career as a licensed educator and went on to spend five years at the Worcester Public School District, in Worcester, Massachusetts. During four of those years she served as the Testing and Evaluation Lead. There she oversaw the administration of large-scale assessments and facilitated transitions to computer-based testing and hybrid assessments. In that role, she prioritized advocating for proper assessment and data use, facilitating mutually beneficial research partnerships, and building genuine and long-lasting relationships through all levels of the community and the school district.