

# Connecting district and state assessments to increase impact

How Alaska is amplifying teaching and learning to drive student outcomes



## ALASKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEMOGRAPHICS

**505**  
SCHOOLS

**54**  
DISTRICTS

**130,000**  
STUDENTS

## APPROACH

Connecting fall and winter interims to a spring summative test

## SUBJECTS AND GRADE LEVELS

**ELA:** Grades 3–9

**Mathematics:** Grades 3–9

## BENEFITS

- Efficiency with fewer tests
- Cohesion across assessments
- Utility for all stakeholders
- Opportunity to show growth

### The challenge: Making statewide assessments more actionable

In 2016, the state of Alaska embarked upon an effort to strategically address its education challenges. The multi-year, multi-pronged effort was driven by a focus on transforming the system to address historical opportunity and achievement gaps. As part of this effort, the state recognized a need to reevaluate statewide assessment, examining ways that it could better support the educators and students the system is designed to serve.

Most Alaska districts (49 out of 54) administered and appreciated the instructional value they received from MAP® Growth™, an interim assessment designed to reveal student learning needs independent of grade level and show student growth throughout and across school years. However, administering both the spring MAP Growth assessment and the state summative test contributed to a lot of testing in the spring term. Districts had a hard time reconciling the purpose and value the summative assessment provided when there was a lack of coherence between the district and state assessments and an absence of cohesive, timely information to support their efforts in helping students learn.

### The goal: Creating a balanced, useful statewide assessment system

Dr. Michael Johnson, Alaska's Commissioner of Education, began to explore opportunities to shift from a stand-alone summative test to a balanced system focused on supporting educators and students in their efforts to foster learning. This system would do more than provide the summative data that is so important to ensuring equitable access to a high-quality education. It would also produce instructionally useful data to support educators in addressing students' individual learning needs and enable schools and students to celebrate and reveal the growth achieved during and across school years on the journey to proficiency.

The exacerbation of educational disparities caused by the pandemic added urgency to the mission, but also highlighted the need to maintain continuity of district data on student performance as well as a consistent experience for districts, who could potentially find a sudden shift to a new assessment system burdensome.

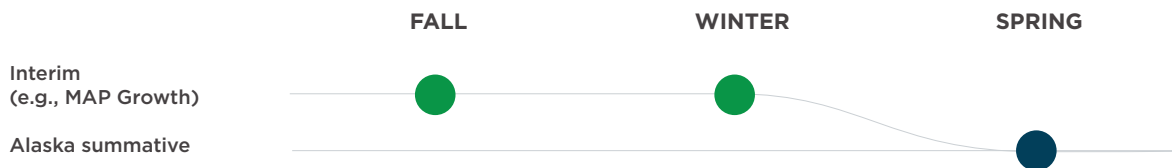
Dr. Johnson called for a creative approach that could be implemented in 2021–22 to impact student learning and improve student outcomes while minimizing disruption for students, families, and educators. Along with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), he sought to shift the statewide assessment system from a focus on compliance to a focus on impact. The system would need to streamline testing and increase cohesion across interim and summative tests, helping districts to find value in each component. It would also need to include meaningful professional learning that would support educators in using assessment data to drive change at the local level.

*“We must answer essential questions for every student about their learning. An effective assessment system is essential for student success and educational effectiveness.”*

Michael Johnson  
DEED Commissioner

### The solution: Connecting MAP Growth interim assessments and the annual summative

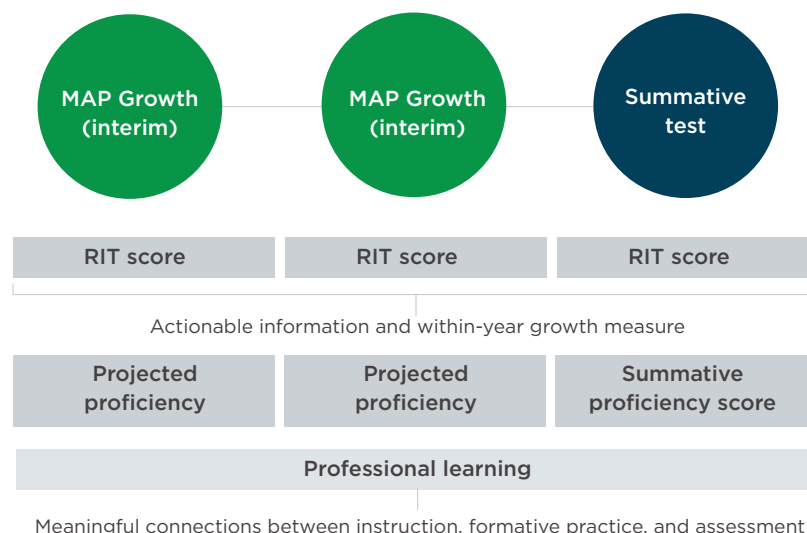
Ultimately, Alaska DEED decided to partner with NWEA® to create an innovative statewide assessment system that would enable districts to continue administering MAP Growth, an assessment they know and love, while reducing overall testing and increasing the value of summative tests. The Alaska statewide assessment system connects fall and winter MAP Growth assessments that provide grade-independent indicators of student learning level (called RIT scores) with an adaptive spring summative test that provides the same information, plus proficiency scores for accountability.



The connected approach Alaska is adopting increases cohesion across district and state assessments and reduces testing events by eliminating the need for the administration of an interim test (e.g., MAP Growth) in the spring. The spring summative test not only meets accountability requirements, showing how Alaska students are performing relative to the Alaska standards, but also produces the grade-independent and normative information that districts normally obtain by administering MAP Growth in the spring.

As the first state implementing this solution, Alaska districts will administer MAP Growth in fall, winter, and spring of year one (2021-22) so research studies can be conducted to support the production of RIT scores by the summative test starting in the following year (2022-23). In 2022-2023 and beyond, testing events will be reduced, as only the spring summative test will be necessary in the spring (see figure below).

Together with NWEA, Alaska DEED also created a high-quality professional learning program to help educators use assessment data to differentiate instruction and foster learning within classrooms. The program engages Alaska educators as certified facilitators, leveraging educator leadership and insights and giving districts the freedom to tailor offerings to their own needs and schedules. Combined with flexible onsite and online delivery models, this approach supports cost-effective scaling of locally relevant professional learning and builds capacity across the state to drive change and impact student outcomes.

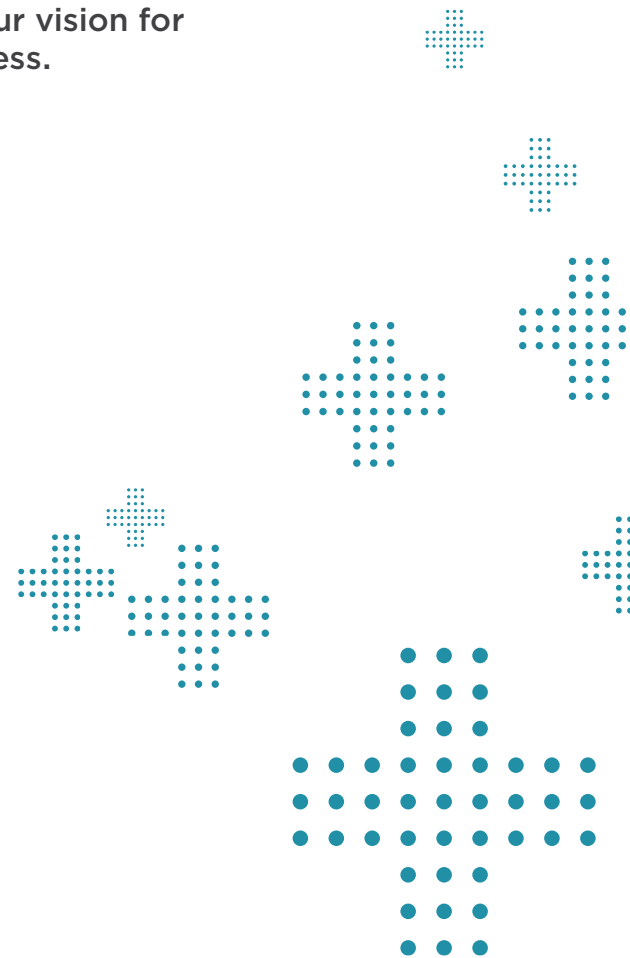


Consistent information provided by each assessment connects the interim and summative tests.

*“Alaska’s innovative assessment will provide families and teachers with valuable information to adapt instruction to meet the needs of individual students and help ensure the most appropriate and effective learning opportunities possible. In addition, the interim assessments will provide families with information they need to feel confident their students are learning and progressing.”*

Michael Johnson  
DEED Commissioner

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to learn how we can partner with your state  
to create a system that reflects your vision for  
student learning and success.



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