

The SAI Executive Leaders strongly believe the goals of the statewide assessment system should reflect a commitment to improving instruction and student learning by addressing the following components:

- A. **Alignment to the Iowa Core** – The Iowa Core is the curriculum that is being taught in Iowa schools. The assessment system *must* align with the Iowa Core because effective assessment systems *must* assess what is written in the curriculum and being taught.
- B. **Measurement of Individual Student Growth** – A sound assessment system *must* include a rigorous growth model for all students in order to identify individual growth targets scaffolded toward rigorous expectations.
- C. **Valid and Reliable Data** – Information gathered from the assessment system *must* provide accurate and usable information that reflects individual student, grade-level/cohort, building, and district performance as related to mastery of the curriculum. This data *must* clearly communicate information to all stakeholders so important decisions can be made to improve the instructional process.
- D. **Timely Feedback** – Information gathered by the assessment system *must* be communicated in a timely manner in order to provide meaningful feedback to all stakeholders regarding what students know and are able to do. Timely feedback expedites the process of improving instruction and learning.
- E. **Purpose Driven** – The purpose of the statewide system *must* be clearly stated to all stakeholders. Is the system strictly about accountability, or are there other purposes that will help the overall educational process? Providing clear and common expectations about the accountability system for everyone involved will get people “on the same page” so there are no surprises or misconceptions about the system.

Recognizing that choosing a statewide assessment system to meet these goals is a difficult task, the SAI Executive Leaders believe the following statements should guide the decision-making process:

1. The Department of Education should provide leadership and have the direct authority to develop a statewide system that will best meet the identified goals and needs of the primary stakeholders in this conversation - the students.
2. The authority to determine the summative instrument lies with the State. However, local school districts should still retain the right to develop formative assessment processes to help guide their decision-making regarding what is needed by their students to better prepare them for the summative statewide test. Formative assessments are classroom-driven and provide the best timely feedback for students and teachers in order to change/adjust instruction. Therefore, formative assessments should be designed and developed at the local level with training and guidance provided by the DE and the AEAs.

3. The total cost of the assessment should not be the determining factor in the selection of an assessment instrument. An assessment should be chosen that best meets the goals and objectives of the statewide assessment system, regardless of cost. Furthermore, districts should not incur additional expense as a result of the State mandating a new assessment. Ideally, the State should fund any mandated summative assessment.
4. Time demands of test implementation should reflect a minimal loss of instructional time. There must be a balance of adequate time for assessments and for instruction. For fidelity purposes, the SAI Executive Leaders support a common “testing-window” to provide consistency in administration of the tests.
5. Technological resources can facilitate the administration of assessments. However, technology should not be a hurdle or barrier for districts in facilitating the test-taking process. Proper bandwidth and hardware can be issues for some districts in Iowa. Districts need flexibility to choose the mode of test administration that best meets the needs of their students in order to produce the best possible results.

Though SAI Executive Leaders do not advocate for any specific assessment, we do advocate for a consistent assessment statewide that is aligned with the Iowa Core. Such assessment must provide timely, reliable feedback, which will help guide decisions for improving instruction. Although the statewide summative assessment should focus on students in grades 3-11 for accountability purposes, we understand the importance of assessing student growth in the whole system. In addition, we value student performance information in the early years of instruction to help foster improvement.