

# WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT ASSESSMENTS THIS YEAR?

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted most aspects of education in the 2020-2021 school year, including annual statewide assessment. As a result, the process for student test taking and the results from this year's tests may look very different than previous school years. This resource is intended to provide more context about the factors that may have impacted the results.

## LEARNING DISRUPTIONS

Students experienced various learning disruptions this school year, which may include reduced instructional time, limited access to internet and technology to allow full participation in remote learning, and lack of learning supports such as tutoring and afterschool programming. It's likely the impact of these learning disruptions was uneven. Some students, such as students from low-income families or English learners, were likely hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic due to having fewer resources and supports.

## TEST MODIFICATIONS

As a result of the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the education community had to reassess the assessment system and prioritize changes to existing blueprints to meet the new demands of an ever-changing educational environment. Montana had to make changes to tests this school year to accommodate the needs of school districts including [but not limited to] shifting school schedules, health and safety requirements, and other outside influences. To provide flexibility to schools and students across Montana, the OPI extended all testing windows to the greatest extent practicable using a balance with reporting information to families and educators. Further, the OPI leveraged all feasible assessment flexibilities allowed by the U.S.

Department of Education, including:

- (1) [Shortened Smarter Balanced Blueprint](#)
- (2) [Medical Exemptions for COVID Reasons](#)
- (3) [Accountability and Reporting Federal Waiver](#)

Modifying the actual test complicates comparison, and experts agree that scores from tests administered this year may not be directly comparable with past years due to the various outside factors.

## PARTICIPATION RATES

Some students were able to take tests this school year while others weren't due to safety concerns, challenges with technology, or other interferences. This means that some participation rates for districts, schools, or student groups are lower than in past years. As participation rates decrease, challenges with interpreting results increase. In addition, the wide availability of different learning settings—in-person, remote learning, or hybrid—means that students had varying access to take state tests. Thus, some student groups will be overrepresented in the results and others may be underrepresented.

Due to these factors and many more challenges experienced during the pandemic, states may not be able to make direct comparisons within or across years using 2021 assessment data. However, states can use this year's results, combined with other data, as a temperature check to better track and address COVID-19 school recovery.

### WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE 2020-2021

## ASSESSMENTS

# THIS YEAR?

### RESULTS MAY BE IMPACTED BY



### LEARNING DISRUPTIONS

- Reduced instructional time
- Remote learning challenges
- Lack of learning supports such as tutoring or after school programming



### TEST MODIFICATIONS

- Reduced test length
- Changes to test content
- Medical exemptions for COVID reasons



### PARTICIPATION RATES

- Fewer students testing
- Some student groups over or underrepresented

While we may not be able to use 2021 test scores to compare student achievement, we can still use them as a temperature check to better track and address COVID-19 school recovery.

