

Data literacy and its direct influence in guiding instruction, alongside a balanced approach including the use of formative and interim strategies ensures all children have fair and equitable opportunities to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging academic content standards.

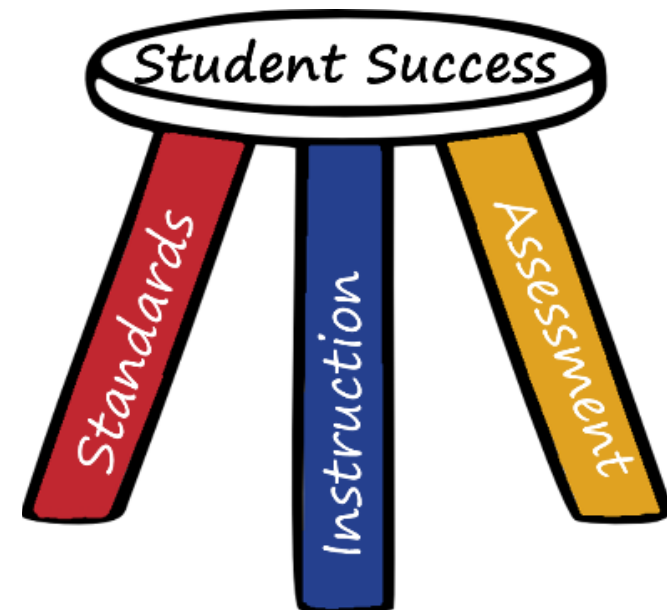
Defining Standards, Instruction, and Assessment:

- **Standards** are what students should know and be able to do to be college and workforce ready.
- **Curriculum** is the instructional strategies and resources teachers use to ensure students are making progress towards the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their K-12 education.
- **Assessment** is the gathering, organizing, and evaluation of information about student learning in order to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the instructional program (see Administrative Rules for Montana ([ARM 10.55.602](#))).

Assessment is a process for eliciting evidence of achievement from the learner. The outcomes from that process can be used to immediately inform the instruction while actively engaging in the learning (formative assessment) to help monitor the student learning progress and proficiency and perhaps predict future success through interim assessments. The end-of-year marks the end of the instructional sequence as the summative assessment which “sums-up” the learning.

These data can inform educators to make decisions and leverage resources to improve instruction and supports for students.

Montana's Standards – Curriculum – Assessment Model

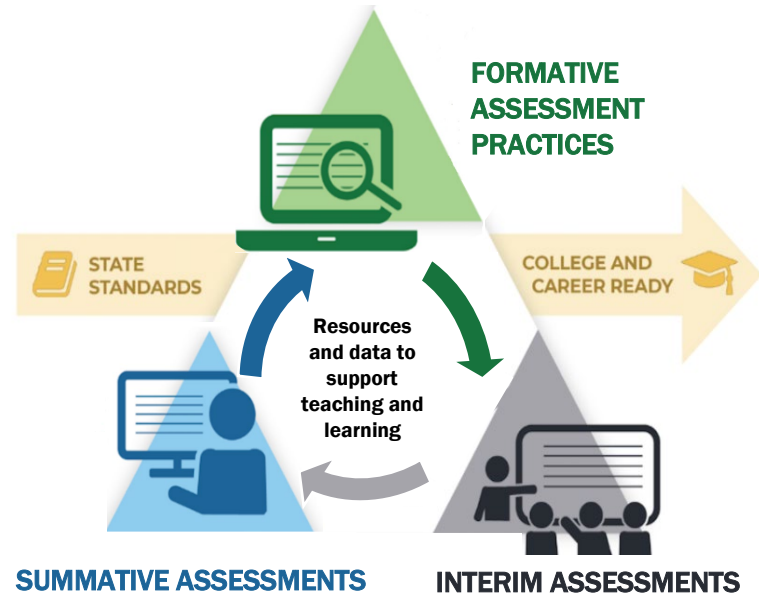


What is a Balanced Assessment System?

Per [ARM 10.56.101](#), “A balanced assessment system including formative, interim, and summative assessments aligned to state content standards, will provide an integrated approach to meeting both classroom learning needs and school and state level information needs...”

- **What is a System?** A thoughtful, coordinated, and comprehensive process for assuring that the curriculum, the instructional program, and the assessment process are in fact part of a cohesive vision.
- **What is Coherence?** All components of the curriculum, instruction, and the assessment process are aligned and form a coherent set of expectations for learning.
- **What is Balance?** Appropriate weighting and distribution of learning. Balanced assessments are used for (1) different purposes, (2) at different times, and (3) to fulfill different data needs.

Balanced assessment system is needed because state assessment systems that focus on once-a-year summative testing do not provide sufficient information to improve student learning and school capacity. Balance occurs when we don't rely on one measure to tell the entire story of a student's growth as a learner. The idea is not to have an equal amount of each type of assessment, but rather, as many different data points from assessments to guide teaching that will, in turn, improve student outcomes.



Reference:

Gong, B. (2010). Using Balanced Assessment Systems to Improve Student Learning and School Capacity: An Introduction. Council of Chief State School Officers.

To ensure continuous education improvement, the Montana Board of Public Education established the requirement for a continuous school improvement plan.

The school district and each of its schools shall develop, implement, and evaluate continuous school improvement plans and make the plans available to the public. These plans shall be reviewed on a yearly basis to reflect a continuous improvement process ([ARM 10.55.601](#)).

Below are some ideas to support the annual Continuous Improvement Cycle using the resources from the Smarter Balanced Assessment System:

- Review the **Montana Content Standards** so you are familiar with the grade level requirements for each subject;
- Make sure the district **curriculum aligns** with the Montana Content Standards and goes through the district review process every five years;
- Use **data-driven** instruction practices guided by the Montana Content Standards, district curriculum, and assessment feedback loop;
- Provide **immediate feedback** combined with formative strategies to enable educators to individualize instruction for all students;
- Use end-of-year **summative assessments** to review progress toward district goals and system programmatic effects;
- Annually evaluate district, school, and student summative **results** to ensure the district is meeting content standard goals and showing growth; and
- Send home **individual score reports** from summative tests to engage parents in the district plan.

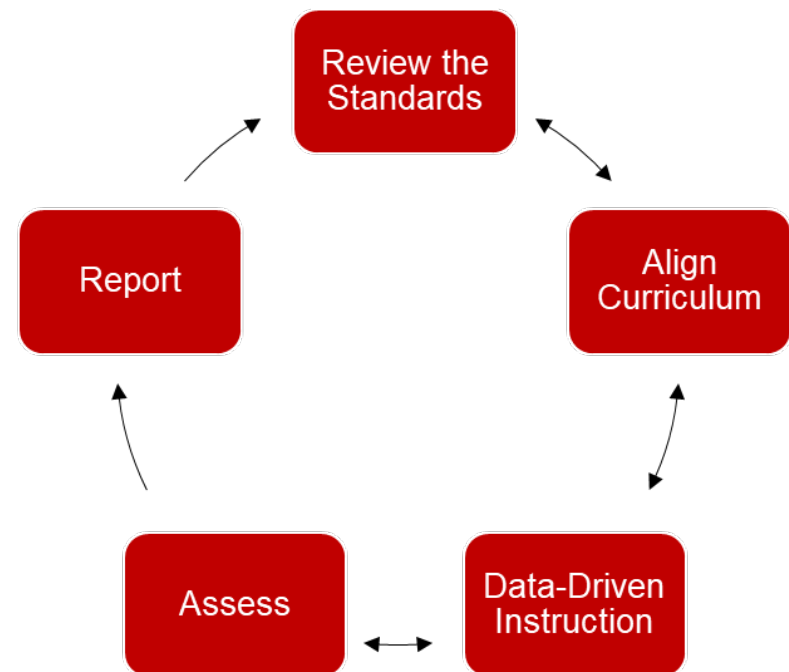
Content Specifications

The [content specifications](#) in ELA/literacy and math ensure these assessment tools cover the range of knowledge and skills within the Montana Content Standards for math and ELA. These specifications serve as the basis for summative, interim, and formative assessments.

[Mathematics Content Specifications](#)

[ELA/Literacy Content Specifications](#)

Steps to Instructional Cycle



(1) Review the Content Standards

Per [ARM 10.55.603](#), “The information obtained [from statewide assessment score reports] shall be considered in curriculum and assessment development.” Standards review should always be coordinated with properly aligned assessment score reports.

Montana Content Standards

Montana Content Standards define what students should know and be able to do. Montana uses the Smarter Balanced assessment that is aligned to Montana's Content Standards for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) as adopted in the fall of 2011 and implemented July 1, 2013. Review the Montana Content Standards to understand the grade level benchmarks for each subject area:

Smarter Balanced Content Explorer

This is a [site](#) designed for educators to understand the connection between the Smarter Balanced interim and summative assessments and the Montana Content Standards.

Common terms within the Smarter Balanced system surrounding standard alignment include:

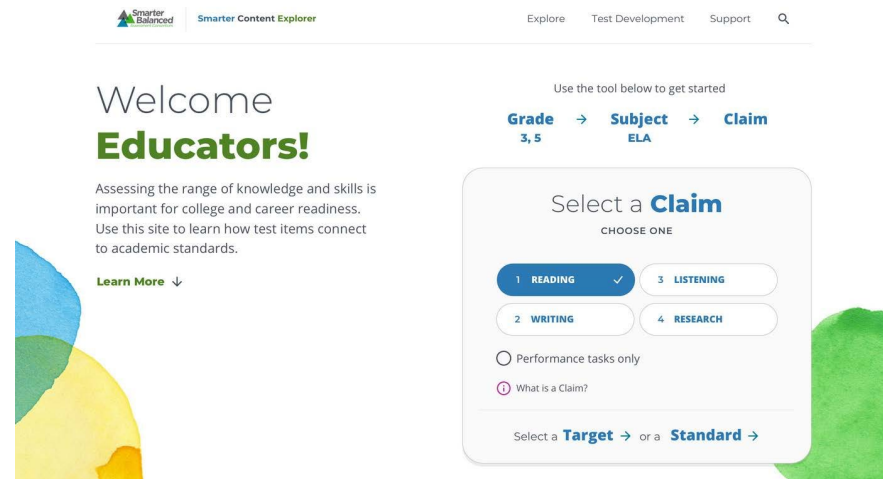
- **Subjects** are defined as a department of knowledge, (i.e. math and ELA).
- **Claims** are broad categories that summarize the knowledge and skills students are expected to demonstrate for a specific aspect of the content standards. Both [ELA and math include four claims](#).
- **Targets** are at a more granular level than claims in explaining the knowledge skills, and/or abilities expected at a grade level as defined by the standards. A target can be aligned to one or more standards. In fact, some are aligned to part of a standard.

Montana K-12 Content Standards

[Math](#) Standards

[ELA](#) Standards

Explore the Content!



The screenshot shows the Smarter Balanced Content Explorer website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Explore', 'Test Development', and 'Support'. Below the navigation bar, the main heading reads 'Welcome Educators!'. A sub-heading states: 'Assessing the range of knowledge and skills is important for college and career readiness. Use this site to learn how test items connect to academic standards.' There is a 'Learn More' link with a downward arrow. On the right side, there is a 'Use the tool below to get started' section with a breadcrumb trail: 'Grade → Subject → Claim'. The 'Grade' dropdown is set to '3, 5' and the 'Subject' dropdown is set to 'ELA'. Below this, there is a 'Select a Claim' section with the instruction 'CHOOSE ONE'. There are four buttons: '1 READING' (selected with a checkmark), '2 WRITING', '3 LISTENING', and '4 RESEARCH'. Below these buttons are two radio button options: 'Performance tasks only' and 'What is a Claim?'. At the bottom of the interface, there is a prompt: 'Select a Target → or a Standard →'.



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(2) Align the Curriculum

Per [ARM 10.55.603](#), “local school districts shall ensure their curriculum is aligned to all content standards and the appropriate learning progression for each grade level...” which includes using assessment results to “...examine the educational program and measure its effectiveness.”

Suggested Steps for selecting high-quality instructional materials:

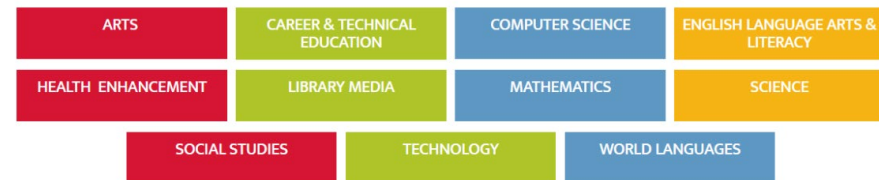
1. Establish district process, parameters and a timeline,
2. Create a curriculum review group,
3. Engage educators early and often,
4. Collect key evidence-based research and resources,
5. [Evaluate materials](#),
6. Make a decision,
7. Create a rollout and implementation plan, and
8. Continue to assess the effectiveness of the selected instructional materials and implementation.

Review Schedule

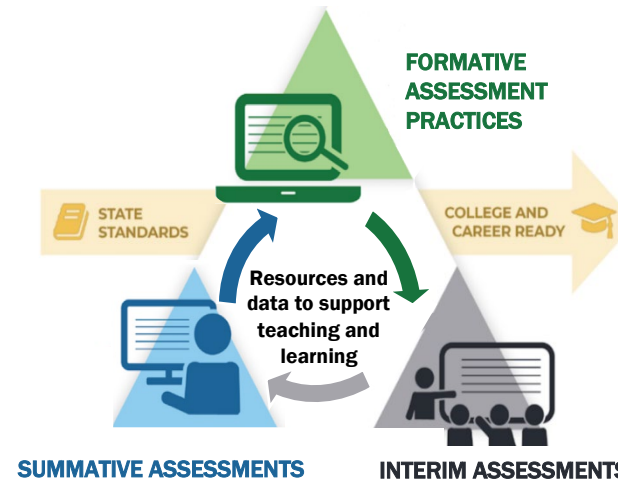
Montana's school accreditation rules require that school districts review curricula every five years while also reviewing the materials necessary for implementing those curricula.

Montana's K–12 Content Standards

Content Standards & Resources



The Montana State Standards are the foundational input for the Balanced Assessment System.



(3) Data-Driven Instruction

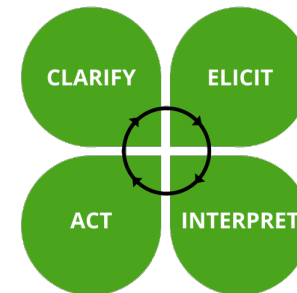
Per [ARM 10.56.101](#), “A balanced assessment system is structured to continuously improve teaching and learning...” by including the use of formative and interim assessments.

A) [Interim assessments](#) offer Montana teachers the option to periodically check student progress throughout the year, giving actionable feedback to improve instruction and help students meet the Montana Content Standards. There are three types of interims:

- a. **Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICAs)** measure similar content to the summative assessment and may be helpful for determining the knowledge and skills of students who are new to the district or state.
- b. **Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs)** focus on smaller sets of related concepts and provide more detailed information for instructional purposes.
- c. **Focused Interim Assessment Blocks (FIABs)** are the smallest set of interims that are often between 5-10 questions and can be completed as a warm-up with immediate feedback.

B) **Formative Assessment:** [Tools for Teachers](#) is a website for instructional resources and professional development built by educators, including Montana classroom teachers. A few of its features include:

- a) Interactive Connections Playlist that help guide next steps after interim assessments are given
- b) High-quality lesson plans aligned to learning standards,
- c) Embedded formative assessment strategies in every lesson,
- d) Accessibility instructional strategies, and



Formative Assessments





- e) **Interim Assessment Item Portal (IAIP)** that allows educators to customize interim items, download to a PDF, print and administer in a paper-pencil format.
- C) [smART](#) is newly-developed and provides a collection of annotated student writing samples for each score level to be used as part of the formative process.

(5) Annually Assess

Per [ARM 10.56.101](#), “the Board of Public Education adopts rules for state-level assessment in the public schools and those private schools seeking accreditation” to include annual summative assessments recognizing that “a balanced assessment system is structured to continuously improve teaching and learning and to inform education policy.

Test Development & Design

Test blueprints describe the content of the ELA/literacy and math end-of-year tests for grades 3–8 and high school and how that content should be assessed.

ELA & math (Smarter Balanced) Test Blueprints

ELA/Literacy Blueprints	Mathematics Blueprints	Estimated Testing Times	Enhanced CAT Blueprints
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Testing Calendar

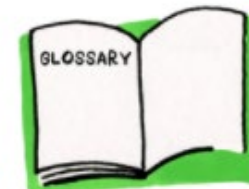
The assessment windows (i.e. dates) are available for review on the [OPI Assessment Unit](#) webpage.

Accessibility

Accessibility resources provided on Smarter Balanced assessments must be turned on/off at the local level to ensure equitable access for students with diverse needs and preferences. See the [Montana Accessibility](#) page.

Participation & Eligibility

Montana state law and accreditation rules require all students to participate in the Board approved grade and content specific statewide assessments. As a local control state, the Montana OPI relies on districts to work towards student inclusion to the fullest extent possible. Review the [Six Things Stakeholders Should Know About Participation and Testing in Montana](#) document.



(6) Evaluation: Using the Data

Per [ARM 10.55.603](#), “The district shall use assessment results, including state-level achievement information obtained by administration of assessments pursuant to [ARM 10.56.101](#) to examine the educational program and measure its effectiveness.”

Data Literacy

Data literacy is the single most important component in any balanced assessment system; without such the value of assessments is curtailed. The following resources are the essential starting points in using data to drive instruction:

- [Reporting System](#) manuals, tutorials and user guides to access district, school, and individual student level score reports within the Montana testing portal.
- [Data Literacy Course](#) on the Teacher Learning Hub.

Parent Engagement

Under the [ESSA State Plan](#), districts are required to [provide parents/guardians](#) with their child's summative score reports and an accompanying letter of support.

- [Starting Smarter](#) is a website for parents and families to better understand their child's test scores.

Public Facing Reports

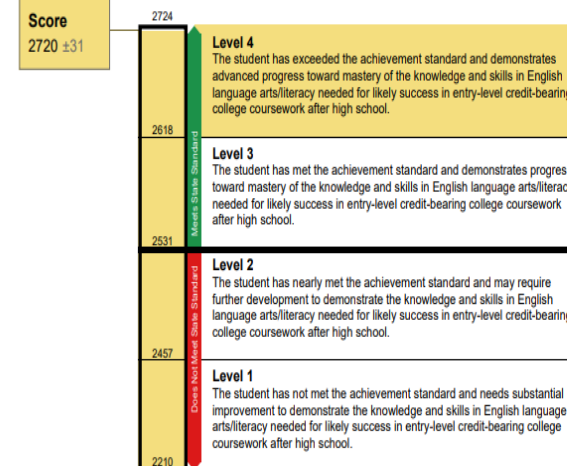
Score reports are aggregated to permit the general scores to be published for a public audience. The public facing score report sites are:

- [GEMS](#) is Montana's state-wide longitudinal education data system.
- [Montana Report Card](#) provides annual state, district, and school report cards to show how Montana's schools are performing.

Montana Office of Public Instruction | Reporting | Smarter Summative ELA/Literacy Grade 6 2020-2021

Demo, Student | Student ID: 99999999 | Student DOB: 12/16/2008 | Enrolled Grade: 7 | Date Taken: 5/7/2021 | Demo District | Demo School

Achievement Level: Level 4 | Scale Score: 2720±31



Name	Average Scale Score
Montana	2527
Demo District	2587
Demo School	2587

Information on Standard Error of Measurement
A student's score is best interpreted when recognizing that the student's knowledge and skills fall within a score range and not just a precise number. For example, 2300 (±10) indicates a score range between 2290 and 2310.

2020-21 State Report Card



Licensed K-12 Staff & Paraprofessionals: 16,304

Public School Districts: 405

Public Schools: 829

Student Enrollment: 145,632

Per Pupil Expenditures: \$12,944.33

