

## **Literate Citizenry in Public Schools: A New Vision for Assessment in Louisiana**

Being a literate member of society necessitates not only strong reading skills but also knowledge of the world and how it works. Adults comprehend and evaluate news articles, workplace documents, novels, web pages, and social media posts not just because they know what individual words mean, but because they know something about the topic each text contains. Likewise, it is widely known that students with large amounts of background knowledge read at more advanced levels. Yet states have built reading and writing tests that do not always value the background knowledge students bring to them, including students' deep understanding of books and texts they have studied previously. Instead, state tests preference reading and writing skills over the content that renders them rich and meaningful.

In the last decade, Louisiana has taken steps to improve reading and writing instruction, adopting higher standards and developing an optional text- and content-rich English language arts (ELA) curriculum to match (ELA Guidebooks 2.0), with knowledge domains as its foundation and units built around general themes and “anchor texts.” As students increase their background knowledge derived from reading through completion of texts on the same topic within the same unit, students are better-prepared to access more complex texts and subjects over time. Tests are a critical part of this infrastructure; along with standards, curriculum, and teacher training, they round out the tools that signal what most matters in the classroom. Though improved dramatically in the past three years, the Louisiana Assessment of Education Progress (LEAP) continues to measure the ELA standards, including specific skills such as summarizing passages and locating main ideas, but it does not go above that to measure whether students have developed a base of knowledge. Consequently, in many schools a focus on discrete reading skills predominates the English classroom, with minimal attention paid to knowledge. Building assessments in a new way—bringing ELA and social studies standards, curriculum, and assessments into full alignment—would make the academic systems more meaningful. and reinforce the same vision for student learning.

Louisiana is applying for Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) to build an innovative LEAP format, covering both ELA and social studies, that encourages standards-based instruction and content-rich curriculum in all Louisiana classrooms. Louisiana will pilot a new LEAP

format that measures student understanding of pre-identified knowledge and texts, drawing on students' deep knowledge of content and books from their daily classroom experiences—rather than a random assortment of texts, as are typically used on large-scale assessments. By developing the new format in a way that is standards-aligned, valid, reliable, high-quality, and comparable to the current, content-agnostic LEAP ELA test, Louisiana districts will have the flexibility to choose the LEAP format that best matches their curricular program. In this way, the IADA will make assessments more relevant and connected to the classroom for Louisiana teachers and students, while still providing valid, reliable, and transparent data on student achievement and growth.

Through the IADA, testing can evolve in its role to promote equity, deepen instructional focus via knowledge- and text-rich pedagogy, and build integration of knowledge across subject areas. Louisiana will begin using the innovative LEAP format in a subset of 20 high schools, across three districts and two charter networks, serving nearly 21,000 students, field testing items before giving the operational assessments in the 2019–2020 school year. Each section of the assessment will identify and incorporate a set of knowledge and texts from the ELA Guidebooks 2.0, and participating districts may have an option to choose which set of prioritized texts (out of the available sets) to assess. The sections will be taken throughout the year as students complete the unit of study, and will combine with a shorter, summative assessment to provide an overall determination of student progress against the grade-level standards, texts, and content knowledge. Louisiana will subsequently build innovative formats for grades 6–8, and then grades 3–5. The state will work with an assessment vendor to develop the frameworks, blueprints, and items, ensuring alignment with the depth and breadth of the Louisiana ELA standards. The vendor will also oversee a standard setting process, which will use the same performance standards and descriptors as current LEAP tests for comparability. Louisiana will rely on external partners to evaluate the pilot annually, including the alignment, quality, reliability, validity, and comparability of both LEAP formats, and develop a suite of resources and tools, such as assessment guides, trainings, and collaborative networks to support educators—helping to ensure high-quality implementation and continuous improvement.