

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

### *Case for Change in Literacy Assessment*

Being a literate adult necessitates not only strong reading skills but also background knowledge on the world and how it works. Adult readers comprehend and evaluate news articles, workplace documents, novels, biographies, web pages, and social media posts not only because they know what individual words mean. They must also know something about the topic each text contains. Without that knowledge, readers are lost. In an age of media overload, bots, and fictional news stories, this imperative for literate citizens becomes all the more evident and all the more important.

While Louisiana and other states have made strong gains in elementary school reading over the last decade, adolescent and adult reading in the U.S. has made minimal progress. In light of evidence that background knowledge is essential to improving reading among older students, English language arts curriculum in Louisiana has knowledge domains as its foundation. Students in Louisiana read texts organized around general themes and “anchor texts,” bringing to each read an increasingly robust base of background knowledge derived from reading.

ELA formative and summative assessments in Louisiana, however, continue to measure specific reading skills, such as summarizing passages and locating main ideas, without measuring whether students have developed a deep base of knowledge. Consequently, in many schools a focus on discrete reading skills predominates the English classroom, with minimal attention paid to knowledge.

To improve this situation, Louisiana will pilot an innovative English and history assessment that assesses student understanding of pre-identified knowledge and pre-identified texts. Rather than being tested on texts with which students have no familiarity, students taking the pilot assessment will draw on deep knowledge of content and books they knew would be on the test already.

The benefits of this new assessment will include:

- *Equity*: All students have the opportunity to develop background knowledge, rather than advantaged students accessing knowledge never made available to others.
- *Focus*: Rather than drilling individual skills, teachers can focus on background knowledge and making meaning of full texts.
- *Integration*: Social studies knowledge and literacy proficiency can be measured in one instrument, building knowledge of the world and blending non-fictional and fictional texts.

### *Design Components*

The following design principles will guide the development of the work and may be incorporated into the end product, contingent on the success of the pilot process.

- The pilots will blend social studies and science, allowing for the reduction of one statewide test.
- Assessments will identify and incorporate a specific set of knowledge and texts; teachers and students will know the sources of knowledge and texts before the tests.
- LEAs may have an option to choose texts and knowledge domains; there may be some ability to select some units over others.
- Assessments will involve short tasks throughout the school year as students complete units of study rather than one long process at the end of the year.

### *Pilot Assessment Structure Overview*

Pilot districts are those using the Louisiana ELA Guidebooks. These specifications remain in draft form, but they serve as a frame for the project.

Design Feature	Proposed Details
Required units to be assessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 units per grade level, per year</li></ul>
Timing of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Immediately following each unit completion</li><li>• Assessments can occur throughout the school year and lead to a cumulative score</li></ul>
Unit assessment focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specific to the texts in that unit</li><li>• Specific to the knowledge built in that unit</li><li>• Some “warm reads” new texts associated with the topic of that unit</li><li>• ELA standards are fully assessed within the context of the texts and knowledge of the units</li><li>• All texts and knowledge available for assessment are pre-identified for teachers and students</li></ul>
Score and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All items are secure and securely scored</li><li>• Results come back real time throughout the year</li><li>• Cumulative score at the end of the year</li><li>• If more than 3 units are assessed, best of scores count</li></ul>

*Timelines*

	Y1 (18-19)	Y2 (19-20)	Y3 (20-21)	Y4 (21-22)	Y5 (22-23)
Design process	Overall framework  High school item design	High school Form building  Middle school item design	High school Form building  Middle school item design	All districts can administer	All districts can administer
Test administration in schools	High School item field test	High school admin (pilot)  Middle school item field test	High school admin (potential scale)  Middle school admin (pilot)  Elementary field test	High school admin (potential scale)  Middle school admin (potential scale)  Elementary admin (pilot)	3-12 potential scaled assessment admin