Evaluating the Federal Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority: Early Implementation and Progress of State Efforts to Develop New Statewide Academic Assessments

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Education officials have long hoped that the statewide academic assessments most students take each year could be used not only for accountability but also to guide instruction. Congress established the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) program in 2015 to help address this goal, offering up to seven states flexibility from federal requirements so that they may more easily make progress toward replacing their current assessments with more innovative ones. This report describes the early progress of the first five IADA systems to help policymakers consider expanding the program to more states. The report is primarily based on analyses of states' IADA applications and annual performance reports through the 2020-21 school year and is part of a broader evaluation of IADA required by Congress.

Key Findings

- *All five IADA systems sought to increase the usefulness of assessment data for classroom teaching, but few were ready to try out their assessments within a year of starting IADA—both program goals.* All systems were working to include interim (multiple) assessments to provide more frequent information about student progress and cover less, and often more targeted, content per test to better inform instruction. Only one system began IADA ready to soon administer the expected "operational assessment," a trial of all IADA testing components for a given grade and subject that results in a valid determination of whether students are proficient against the state's academic standards.

- *After 2 or 3 years of participation, the IADA systems had made limited progress and may not be on track to meet the program's 5-year statewide scale-up goal.* As of the end of the 2020-21 school year, a few systems still had to complete at least some initial planning and preparation activities, and only one system had administered an operational assessment (see exhibit).

Activity	IADA system status at end of 2020-21				
	NH PACE	**LEAP 2025 Humanities**	**NC PAT**	**GMAP Through-Year Assessment**	**Navvy**
Initial planning	●	●	⊘	⊘	⊘
Prepare for operational assessment	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Administer operational assessment	●	○	○	○	○
Post-administration activities	○	○	○	○	○
Continuous improvement activities	●	○	○	○	○
Scaling up system	○	○	○	○	○

● = completed all sub-activities; ⊘ = completed at least one sub-activity;
○ = no sub-activities completed. Each activity includes one or more sub-activities (see Exhibit 3 in the report for details).
NH PACE = New Hampshire; LEAP = Louisiana; NC PAT = North Carolina;
GMAP = Georgia; Navvy = Georgia (Georgia was approved for two IADA systems)

- *States reported challenges hampering assessment development and implementation activities, with the COVID-19 pandemic causing major disruptions.* Pandemic-induced cancellation of statewide testing and limitations on in-person activities were universally cited challenges. But other common challenges not specific to the pandemic included persuading districts to adopt the new systems, coordinating roles and processes, and developing technical specifications and supporting materials for the assessments.

These findings suggest that most IADA states did not appear to be very far along in assessment development at the start, and they experienced many challenges, not all pandemic-related, in moving towards the program's scale-up expectations. In fact, since this report's analysis was completed, two IADA states (New Hampshire and Georgia) have withdrawn from the program. While IADA does not directly provide funding to states, complementary federal programs such as the Grants for State Assessment have been available to offset costs. Other programs, such as the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers, are similarly intended to support state education efforts but via technical assistance.