Early Literacy Assessment Systems that Support Learning

A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING, IMPLEMENTING, AND SUPPORTING DISTRICT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Michigan, it is recognized that literacy rates among our students should be better than they are. At the same time, there is recognition that improved literacy requires focused attention at all levels of development and instruction, but most critically on *early literacy* development.

Fortunately, we have an excellent foundation and momentum to improve literacy instruction in the state, led in large part by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF), whose *Literacy Essentials* work offers a Literacy Theory of Action and undergirds an active program of professional learning across Michigan.

But at the same time, collectively we need to give more deliberate and informed attention to the role that assessment can and should play in supporting literacy. Attention to assessment is especially important since districts are required by law to implement "assessment systems" that should help to improve literacy rates. As we shall point out, *assessment systems* are much more than arbitrary collections of assessments; the components of such systems must be carefully chosen so that they:

    a) focus on important aspects of literacy and its development,
    b) serve the needs of different stakeholders, and
    c) are conceptually and operationally coherent.

Organizing and Design Principles

Recommendations

PHASE I — Planning for and Designing an Early Literacy Assessment System (ELAS)

Principle #1: The ELAS must be designed to ALIGN AND INTEGRATE WITH ALL SCHOOL- AND DISTRICT-LEVEL SYSTEMS; this includes the systems of curriculum, instruction, professional learning, as well as the overall assessment system.

Principle #2: The ELAS must reflect ASSESSMENT SYSTEM DESIGN FEATURES that make it coherent, comprehensive, and continuous across time and contexts of use.

PHASE II — Implementing an Early Literacy Assessment System (ELAS)

Principle #3: The ELAS must reflect what we know from theory, research, and practice about the LITERACY DEVELOPMENT.

Principle #4: The ELAS must reflect what we know about the PURPOSES, USERS, AND TECHNICAL ADEQUACY OF EARLY LITERACY ASSESSMENT.

PHASE III — Supporting and Monitoring an Early Literacy Assessment System (ELAS)

Principle #5: The ELAS must be supported and monitored by a sustained program of collaborative, inquiry-based PROFESSIONAL LEARNING and FEEDBACK.

This chart represents at a glance five key **Organizing and Design Principles** that should guide districts in creating an Early Literacy Assessment System (ELAS). Each Principle gives rise to a set of related **Recommendations** through Three Phases: planning & design, implementation, and support & monitoring of a district's ELAS. The Principles and Recommendations are described in greater detail—and supported with suggested resources—in a full-length Guide available at www.MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org/ELAS.

PHASE I — Planning & Design

1.1: **DISTRICT LEADERS** should form an **ELAS Leadership Team** charged with guiding the Planning and Design, Implementation, and Supporting and Monitoring Phases of the ELAS.

The **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM** should:

1.2: Establish compatibility and coordination of the ELAS with other district- and state-level systems of curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, and accountability.

1.3: Plan thoughtful strategies for engaging with families and the community as key participants in the ELAS process, both as contributors to and recipients of assessment data.

1.4: Develop and adopt a logic model and theory of action for the structure, functioning, and evaluation of the proposed ELAS.

1.5: Identify the educational decisions to be made, assessment information needed to support those decisions, and the stakeholder(s) who will be making the decision(s).

1.6: Construct a framework for the ELAS that includes clearly articulated relationships among the assessment tools and practices relative to a model of competency development in reading, writing, speaking, or listening.

1.7: Use the framework to conduct an audit of all existing district- and school-level assessment tools and practices currently in use to determine whether they meet criteria for inclusion and should remain part of the system.

PHASE II — Implementation

2.1: The **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM** should use the logic model and theory of action (called for in Phase I) to guide the selection and implementation of assessment tools and resources for inclusion in the system.

To accomplish Recommendation 2.1, the **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM, in collaboration with PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS,** should:

2.2: Select individual assessment resources on the basis of evidence of their capacity to provide construct-relevant and instructionally valuable information about a student's literacy development and growth in a given literacy domain – reading, writing, speaking, or listening.

2.3: Select individual assessment resources on the basis of evidence that they are developmentally appropriate and respectful with regard to the cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, and performance demands they place on children.

2.4: Select individual assessment resources on the basis of evidence of appropriate levels of technical quality with respect to validity, reliability, and fairness given the intended interpretive use(s) and the potential consequences for students:

High-stakes judgments call for **high levels** of technical quality.

Lower stakes decisions require **sufficient levels** of technical quality

2.5: Provide assistance and guidance to the system's various assessment users to help assure that they can select assessments that best meet their information needs and then use the results from those assessments in appropriate and technically defensible ways.

PHASE III — Support and Monitoring

3.1: The **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM** should use the logic model and theory of action to develop plans for professional learning and formative evaluation of the ELAS.

To accomplish Recommendation 3.1, the **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM**, in collaboration with **PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS,** should:

3.2: Gather information about the current level of knowledge and capacity related to literacy, assessment, and professional learning (strengths and gaps) among staff (teachers, administrators, coaches), students and their families, and local policymakers, and use these data to guide the implementation and support of an ELAS.

3.3: Create a cohesive master professional learning plan (Michigan's Professional Learning Policy and associated Standards for Professional Learning) to support all stakeholders responsible for early literacy development and assessment. The plan should address early literacy development and assessment and meet the learning needs of children and instructional needs of teachers based on evidence of need as well as research.

3.4: Budget for and plan to provide substantive resources and support for content-focused professional learning about early literacy development and assessment that is collaborative, intensive, sustained, and job-embedded.

3.5: Participate in statewide efforts to prepare, support, and generate teacher leaders and instructional coaches to promote effective early literacy development and assessment practices, with an emphasis on the use of classroom formative assessment practices.

3.6: Develop a plan for formative evaluation of the ELAS that includes ongoing monitoring and feedback from the field about the quality, utility, and effectiveness of the assessment system as it is implemented and becomes operational.

Beyond identifying the possible components of such systems, and possible plans for implementation, assessment literacy is needed among multiple stakeholders so that educators at all levels have the knowledge and support structures to implement assessment systems that improve literacy achievement for all of Michigan's children.

This Guide is intended to serve as the foundation for the development of policy, resources, and professional learning opportunities that serve to outline assessment systems and practices that effectively support literacy development. The Guide represents the work of a diverse group of scholars and practitioners who have identified five key **Organizing and Design Principles** to guide districts in creating an early literacy assessment system (ELAS). These five Principles can be understood individually and collectively as districts work to create an ELAS. Each Principle describes a major idea that give rise to a number of **Recommendations** for design, implementation, and support of a district's ELAS. The five Principles are clustered in three **Implementation Phases**. These Principles and Recommendations are presented in one concise **table** within this Executive Summary, and are described in greater detail—and supported with suggested resources—within the full Guide.

The complete Guide and associated resources are available at www.MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org/ELAS.

Principal Contributor Group

Principal Contributors brought to this project a wide range of expertise in cognitive science, educational assessment, literacy development, professional learning, and organizational development. Principal Contributors were responsible for researching, drafting, reviewing, and revising all content in this Guide. The group is chaired by Jim Pellegrino, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Education, and Co-director of the Learning Sciences Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Jim Pellegrino (chair), Co-Director, Learning Sciences Research Institute
Brandy Bugni, Literacy Manager, Michigan Department of Education (MDE)
Eunsoo Cho, Assistant Professor, Michigan State University
Amy Colton, Executive Director, Learning Forward – MI
Kathy Dewsbury-White, CEO, Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC)
Nell K. Duke, Professor of Education, University of Michigan
Miranda Fitzgerald, Assistant Professor in Reading and Elementary Education,
    University of North Carolina-Charlotte
Annemarie Palincsar, Chair, Educational Studies, Professor of Education,
    University of Michigan
Ed Roeber, Assessment Director, MAC
Adrea Truckenmiller, Assistant Professor, Michigan State University
Melissa Usiak, Executive Director, MI-ASCD
Linda Wacyk, Communications/Publications Director, MAC
Tanya Wright, Associate Professor, Michigan State University