MAST Pilot Implementation Recommendations
July 6, 2022

Note to Task Force: At our June 20-21 meeting, you were asked "What needs to be in place for the successful implementation of the pilot?" We present below a summary of your recommendations and suggestions with questions from us highlighted. Please consider these questions in preparation for our meeting on Wednesday, July 6th.

After considerable work on the draft theory of action and the assessment design considerations for the MAST pilot, the MAST Task Force began discussing at its June 20-21, 2022 meeting recommendations for the successful implementation of the pilot. The recommendations of the Task Force were grouped into the following major categories, with several topics subsumed by assessment literacy and professional learning.

- Timeline for pilot and full implementation
- Technology infrastructure
- Administration guidance
- Assessment literacy and professional learning
    - Score interpretation and use
    - Curriculum and instruction guidance and professional learning
    - Leadership support
    - Interim assessment guidance
- Role of grant schools with required interim (and other) assessments
- Small school impact
- Communication with stakeholders

For each of these major assessment components, we present the Task Force's recommendations regarding assessment design as well as the rationale tied to the theory of action.

Timeline for pilot and full implementation

The Task Force's main recommendation regarding the timeline can be captured by the motto, "slow makes fast." The Task Force was well aware of the timeline desires of OPI leadership, but Task Force members insisted that the pilot must be "fully vetted" and that it was not rushed. To that end, the Task Force recommended continued planning, item development, and soliciting buy-in during the 2022-2023 school, with some item tryouts and other small-scale pilot activities occurring during this next year. For example, this could involve trying out various configurations of the modules (e.g., length, standards covered, grain size). Task Force members also suggested using the 2022-2023 school year as an opportunity to conduct increased outreach to the multiple stakeholder audiences regarding their perceptions of the current assessment system and their desires for an innovative approach. Further, the Task Force recommended figuring out ways to best incentivize schools to participate in the pilot such as relieving other state requirements.

The Task Force then recommended moving to a full pilot during the 2023-2024 school year and then perhaps full implementation in 2024-2025. The extra year could help with technical aspects of the pilot such as developing a scoring model for producing annual determinations and then communicating the approach and its rationale to pilot participants and others. Finally, collecting data regarding the implementation successes and challenges during the pilot can lead to recommendations regarding professional development needs and other aspects of pilot implementation.

Again, while this timeline is a little slower than originally planned, the Task Force recommended clearly communicating the timeline and the associated rationale to the various stakeholders. Further, in addition to the timeline, OPI must clearly communicate the expectations and clear guidance for all who are participating throughout the process. The Task Force members noted that this level of transparency is crucial for building support for the pilot and the innovative assessment program.

Technology infrastructure

Task Force members were concerned that all Montana schools did not currently possess the technology infrastructure necessary to participate in the pilot. Therefore, OPI and Montana legislature need to provide the resources (e.g., bandwidth, devices) necessary for all schools to successfully engage in the innovation without causing a disruption to teaching and learning for which technology may be required. Therefore, OPI and its contractors should conduct an audit of technology capabilities, unless one has already been conducted, and evaluate the results of the audit again the demands of the innovative system. Pilot schools must be given support and guidance with this process because technology issues can cause the pilot to falter faster than almost any other aspect of the proposed pilot.

Administration guidance

OPI and its partners must be explicit about the administration rules and conditions (e.g., test security) before launching the pilot and then clearly communicate the rules and expectations to educators, leaders, and parents. Pilot schools must be provided with adequate professional learning opportunities to ensure the successful administration of the assessment modules. The professional development should focus on the big picture of the pilot such as goals, intended uses of the through-year data, and connections to the district and classroom assessment systems.

As part of the pilot process, OPI and participating pilot schools should clarify how the pilot, specifically the modular assessments, are intended to interact with the district's existing assessment system. As we discuss below in the interim assessment guidance section, this could include recommendations that districts pause or limit their current use of interim assessments to avoid over-testing and mixed messages. Task Force members requested allowing pilot schools to be granted relief from the current state summative assessments during the pilot. Unfortunately, such relief from the federal testing requirements could be granted only if OPI applied for and received flexibility as part of the ESSA Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA). Thus, Task Force members suggested that OPI apply for the IADA as soon as the application re-opens.

Questions for the Task Force:
1. Do all Task Force members agree with the administration recommendations, particularly regarding the IADA constraints? Are any recommendations missing?

Assessment literacy and professional learning

The Task Force stressed the importance of providing extensive professional learning opportunities associated with multiple dimensions of the pilot and at various levels of the system. Members suggested establishing regional education centers that could more regularly provide professional development, technical support, respond to questions, and provide other forms of outreach to local schools throughout the process. Further, rather than professional development coming solely from the State, Task Force members suggested partnering with local district and school leaders to ensure all that stakeholders are responsible for professional learning. In the following sub-sections, we present the recommendations from the Task Force regarding specific types of professional learning needs.

Score interpretation and use

The theory of action offers considerable detail about the importance of accurate interpretation of the various test scores generated through the innovative assessment system. The instructional

utility of the pilot system rests on educators and leaders taking appropriate actions, based on test scores, to improve student learning. Thus, if these educators do not properly interpret the scores, their resulting actions will not be as effective as they otherwise could.

There is an obvious need for professional development to support appropriate score interpretations, but the Task Force noted the importance of designing high-quality score reports to make the interpretations as easy as possible. The Task Force enumerated several requests for the types of data they would like to see on score reports such as indications whether students have "mastered" certain knowledge and skills and in what areas the students might need instructional support, but most importantly, the Task Force recommended engaging in a deliberative score report design process to make sure the needs of the various stakeholders are well-understood.

Task Force members suggested trying to automate several intended interpretations by pushing results to teachers that flag certain students, student groups, and/or entire classes for certain types of performance. The Task Force also suggested developing tools (e.g., apps) that will run and develop some of the more common data requests and types of reports on an as-needed basis (understanding some of this functionality is already built into many applications).

Questions for the Task Force:
1. Do all Task Force members agree with the scoring and interpretation recommendations? In particular, do you agree with the additional recommendation regarding a deliberate process to ensure the score reports are designed as well as possible? If not, what's missing or what needs to be changed?

Curriculum and instruction guidance and professional learning

The Task Force members emphasize the strong local control ethic in Montana over things like curriculum, personnel decisions, and instructional approaches. Nevertheless, the Task Force recognized that for a project such as this pilot to be successful, OPI may need to offer more professional learning opportunities and guidance than is normally the case.

The Task Force suggested that OPI evaluate and report on the alignment, in terms of both sequencing and the targeted knowledge and skills, between the through-year assessments and the major curriculum packages being used in Montana. This evaluation should offer insights, to the degree possible, regarding instructional best practices related to Montana content standards. The Task Force members also suggested engaging the College of Deans so that the entire strategic plan begins to come together across constitutional and statutory entities.

Questions for the Task Force:
1. Do all Task Force members agree with the curricular guidance recommendations, particularly in terms of evaluating the degree of alignment between the through-year assessment and common curricular packages?
2. What is the College of Deans?

Leadership support

The Task Force recognized that the success of the project hinges on the buy-in from school and district leaders. As such, OPI and the project personnel will need to support and provide professional learning opportunities for education leaders so they will feel confident in their capacity to serve as the assessment leaders in their schools and districts.

These professional learning opportunities must be much more than simply training for the administration of the pilot. Rather, the professional development must focus on helping leaders interpret the assessment results and use that information to guide and support educators in making appropriate instructional decisions. Helping leaders feel more efficacious about their ability to use the assessment resources available through the pilot may help them motivate teachers to engage in the pilot and their own professional learning.

Questions for the Task Force:
1. Do all Task Force members agree with the leadership support recommendations? If not, what's missing or needs to be changed?

Interim assessment guidance

<mark>The recommendations generated by the Task Force for this aspect of implementation guidance focused on using the pilot through-year assessments. However, the intention of the initial question was about whether OPI should provide guidance to districts regarding each district's current interim assessment program. For example, OPI could issue guidance to participating districts along the lines of "OPI suggests that schools/districts participating in the new assessment system should curtail the use of its current interim assessment system to avoid over-testing and potential mixed messages." Should OPI consider such guidance?</mark>

Role of grant schools with required interim (and other) assessments

Several Task Force mentioned that "grant schools" are required to use scores from a commercial interim assessment program to monitor and report on their progress. Task Force members strongly recommended allowing grant schools to substitute the scores from the pilot initiative for commercial interim assessments.

Small school impact

Task Force members note that small schools, of which there are many in Montana, would need extra support, resources, and incentives to join the pilot. Several of the issues discussed above—e.g., technology infrastructure and professional capacity—are exacerbated in small schools. In addition to providing targeted support for small schools, the Task Force stressed that if small schools were to participate in the pilot, additional approaches including small-scale evaluation methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups), would be needed to evaluate the efficacy of the pilot in these contexts.

Communication with stakeholders

As discussed elsewhere in this document, clear and consistent communication strategies, differentially targeted to various stakeholders are critical to the successful implementation of the pilot and the full system. The Task Force emphasized that OPI must clearly communicate the rationale for this pilot and the intended outcomes, which is to improve student learning at scale.

For example, Task Force members noted "We need to share with our districts the what and why of this process. Some people think that this is to change the alternate assessment provided for students with disabilities. We will need to clarify this as needed."

The Task Force strongly recommended using multiple channels to spread the information to all stakeholders. The Task Force thought it was critical for all state and local board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers, through their respective professional organizations, to receive early and regular communication about the pilot. Further, the Task Force recommended collecting student, teacher, and parent feedback during and after the pilot and transparently sharing the results with all relevant stakeholders.

Questions for the Task Force:
1. Do all Task Force members agree with the communications recommendations? If not, what's missing or needs to be changed?

The continuing role of the Task Force

While it sounds self-serving, the Task Force strongly recommended that the Task Force or a group like the Task Force, representative of Montana educators and stakeholders, should be empaneled throughout the pilot process, and likely beyond, to provide advice to OPI and its contractors regarding various aspects of implementation.

Questions for the Task Force:
1. OK, I made this one up😊. Do all Task Force members agree with this recommendation? If not, what's missing or needs to be changed?