



Innovative Assessment Pilot:

Louisiana's LEAP 2025

Humanities Assessment

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NOVEMBER 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Louisiana is one of the first four states to be approved to participate in the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Districts participating in the state’s pilot are free of federal requirements that the same summative assessments be administered in math and English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 3-8 and that all students in the state, with some exceptions¹, participate in the same statewide assessment.

Louisiana’s innovative assessment pilot has its origins in efforts to better align classroom instruction in English Language Arts (ELA) with state academic standards and evidence-based reading instruction to provide more equitable opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. The new assessment will build on the state’s existing “LEAP 2025” assessment system by creating “LEAP 2025 Humanities,” an interdisciplinary (i.e., ELA and social studies) assessment that will consist of three interim assessments and a shorter summative assessment. The interim assessments will allow students to engage background knowledge recently learned in the classroom, an aspect that LDOE believes will improve reading instruction based on a solid body of evidence showing the importance of content knowledge in reading comprehension.

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Once LEAP 2025 Humanities has been scaled statewide, local education agencies (LEAs) can choose between administering: the LEAP 2025 ELA and LEAP 2025 Social Studies; or, LEAP 2025 Humanities. Those districts that elect the humanities assessment will then choose three of five end-of-unit assessments that will be administered throughout the year followed by a common summative assessment, which will be substantially shorter than traditional year-end assessments. State accountability scores will be determined through a combination of student performance on all four assessments from throughout the year.

The pilot is starting with middle schools, then will expand to elementary and high schools in subsequent years of the pilot. The end goal is that all students in Louisiana will be assessed using a test that best reflects the curriculum and instructional model of their respective schools.

LEAP 2025 Humanities has some significant potential benefits as well as some prospective shortcomings.

Opportunities. LEAP 2025 Humanities has the potential to:

- Combine the measurement of both ELA skills and content knowledge, an approach based on a solid body of scientific evidence that could improve the quality of instruction in ELA;
- Level the playing field for students from historically disadvantaged groups by eliminating the effects of any gaps in background knowledge; and
- Provide educators with actionable data throughout the year through interim reports that are directly related to what students are already learning in the classroom.

Risks. However, the assessment also has a couple of inherent risks:

- Different LEAs will be using either different tests or different permutations of items, making it difficult if not impossible to compare results across all schools and districts;

- Currently LEAP 2025 Humanities is aligned to the ELA Guidebooks 2.0 curriculum. Aligning assessments to a single curriculum will advantage students in schools using ELA Guidebooks 2.0, potentially exacerbating inequities between districts using curricula of different quality. Amending the assessment to align with additional high-quality curricula used by school systems, the state’s long-term plan, will also be a significant hurdle.

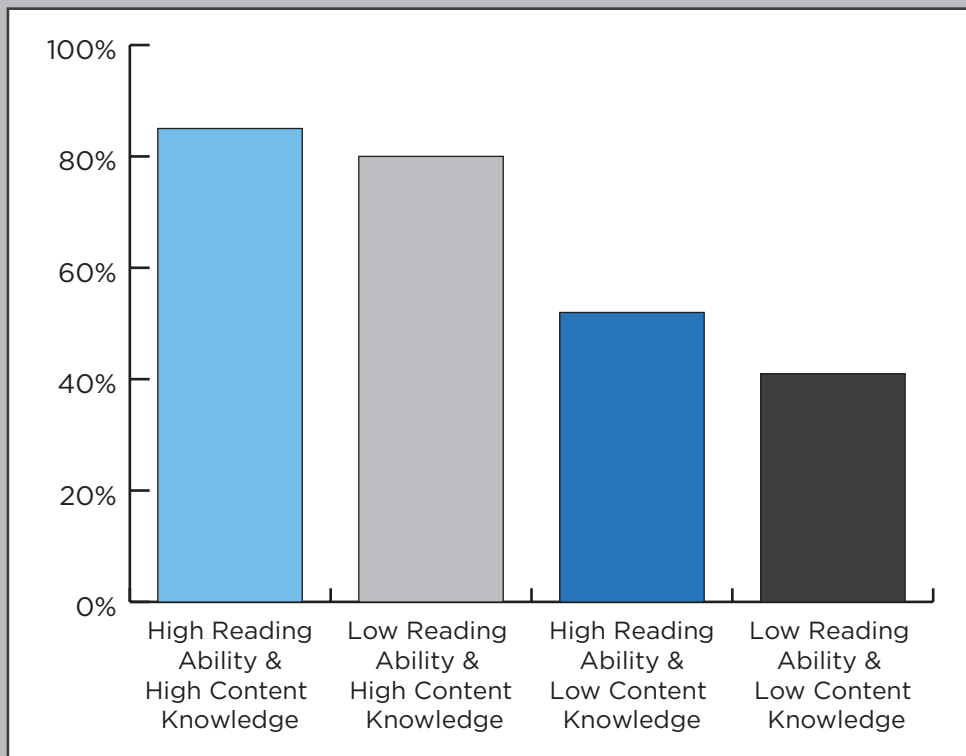
OVERVIEW

Beginning in 2013, Louisiana sought to spur the adoption of high-quality curricula in schools around the state by creating curriculum review tools, publishing ratings of widely used curricula, and providing incentives for the adoption of “Tier 1” curricula. Additionally, teacher leaders from around the state worked with LearnZillion² to release a comprehensive, open-source ELA curriculum called “ELA Guidebooks 2.0.” Feedback on

In the 1990’s, two Wisconsin researchers published what has come to be known as “The Baseball Study” that showed student content knowledge of baseball was a much better predictor of reading comprehension than more abstract reading skills.

ELA Guidebooks 2.0 suggested that the teaching practices the Guidebooks encouraged were not fully reflected in the summative LEAP 2025 assessments and suggested that the background knowledge teachers were building with their students should better prepare them for LEAP 2025 so that no student was at a disadvantage due to a lack of life experiences.

BASEBALL STUDY: MEASURE OF COMPREHENSION



LEAP 2025 Humanities builds on this approach by integrating content into its assessment system, emphasizing the link between subject matter knowledge and reading comprehension. In the 1990's, two Wisconsin researchers published what has come to be known as "The Baseball Study" that showed student content knowledge of baseball was a much better predictor of reading comprehension than more abstract reading skills. Students rated high on baseball knowledge and low on reading skills actually performed better than students with low baseball knowledge and high reading skills.³ The findings were subsequently replicated for several other knowledge domains. The content integration of LEAP Humanities acknowledges that assessments cannot be content agnostic, and therefore is specifically designed to counter disadvantages of low-income students by assessing texts students have encountered in the classroom.

Louisiana is the first state to combine, into a single summative assessment, ELA and social studies. It deserves credit for pioneering what could be a breakthrough model of assessment that more accurately measures reading skill and better aligns classroom instruction with academic standards. However, a second, separate aspect of Louisiana's LEAP system—allowing districts to choose different assessments—presents unique challenges and could work against the state's equity goals.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

LDOE will be relying heavily on their external assessment vendor to determine the validity and reliability of the LEAP 2025 Humanities assessments. In collaboration with the LDOE, NWEA is working to develop, pilot, administer, score, evaluate, and report the new assessment, with LDOE acting as project manager while focusing on developing local capacity

WHY COMPARABILITY MATTERS

One key theme throughout ESSA is that standards and assessments must be the same, statewide, for all students. The words "all," "same," and "statewide," as applied to standards, assessments, schools, and students appear, consistently, multiple times across what is really the heart of the entire 400-page law. As words go, "all," "same," and "statewide" are about as precise as it gets and, generally speaking, these provisions have a 25 year history under various iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Local assessment systems have broad policy and political appeal but two key reasons ESSA, outside the innovation pilot, requires that state assessments be the same for all students are:

- 1) Such measures cannot be compared against one another; and
- 2) Students in different local education agencies could be held to very different standards, even though they would ultimately be applying to the same colleges and competing for the same jobs.

Despite the best intentions, there are immense political and economic pressures at the local level to cast schools in the best light possible. If we abandon statewide assessment systems, poor and minority students, students with disabilities, and English Learners—who historically, prior to advent of the standards and assessment movement, were held to lower standards—might return to a time when they repeatedly were told they were doing fine, only to graduate from high school and discover they didn't have the skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace. Moreover, resources that are now allocated on the basis of accountability systems geared to a single and apples-to-apples comparable set of state tests—those, for example, for after-school and summer programs, tutoring, teacher training, and new curricula—might be misdirected away from areas that actually need them most, because each district or school would then be measured by different standards and different yardsticks.

While innovation is to be valued and encouraged, we need to be mindful of the reasons that statewide standards and assessment systems were implemented in the first place lest, in years ahead, we see an ever-accelerating race to the bottom.

to fully implement and scale the pilot across the state. Much of the success of the pilot will hinge on this being a successful partnership. Appendix A summarizes what we know about the reliability and validity thus far of the LEAP 2025 Humanities assessment system.

Comparability

ESSA requires, as has every ESEA law since 1994, that all students, with the exception of a small percentage of students with the most severe cognitive disabilities, be administered the same statewide assessment.⁴ This provision is meant to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, are held to the same high standards and that results are comparable across districts. Louisiana departs from those two principles in two clear areas: 1) between LEAs using LEAP 2025 Humanities and LEAP 2025 ELA, and 2) among LEAs using LEAP 2025 Humanities but picking different combinations of modules.

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- 2) among LEAs using LEAP 2025 Humanities but picking different combinations of modules.**

First, districts will have the option of using either: LEAP 2025 ELA and LEAP 2025 Social Studies; or, LEAP 2025 Humanities. It's not clear how different those two tests will be, but with the stated purpose of LEAP 2025 Humanities measuring ELA in a different way and being tied to instructional approaches, differences seemed to be intentionally built into the model. Additionally, in the long term, for districts who haven't adopted ELA Guidebooks 2.0 LDOE will work with districts' "Tier 1" curriculum vendors to develop different forms of the LEAP 2025 Humanities assessment.

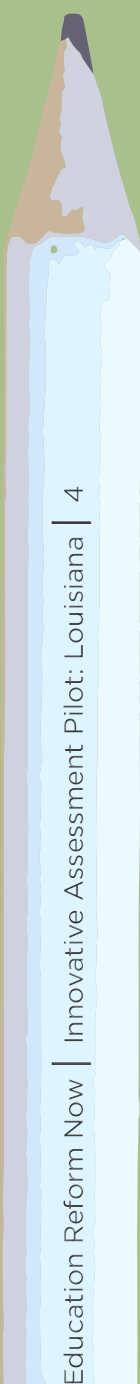
Given that the end goal of the assessment pilot will allow districts to choose LEAP 2025 ELA and LEAP 2025 Social Studies or LEAP 2025 Humanities, ensuring comparability between the two LEAP assessments is critical for the success of the program. LDOE notes a few ways that it will establish comparability and is working closely with the Center of Assessment to ensure these efforts are successful.

For instance, LDOE will require districts considering adopting LEAP 2025 Humanities to pilot items the previous year, creating a sample of students that will take test items from both the ELA and humanities versions of the assessment. They also plan to use propensity score matching (comparing similar students in participating and non-participating districts) and compare LEAP results to those on other assessments, such as ACT, AP, and other end-of-course exams. Importantly, both assessments will be designed to align to Louisiana's state standards.

Second, LEAP 2025 Humanities will also allow districts to choose three of five end-of-unit assessments. This doesn't sound like it allows for a lot of variation, but there are, in fact, 10 different combinations of three measures from a total of five which could mean that few districts have identical assessments. LDOE argues that these choices are constrained in a couple of important ways. First, LEAs must select one common end-of-unit assessment at each grade. Additionally, within these categories the main differences in assessments will be the anchor texts used, while the standards and skills assessed will be the same.

Accessibility for students with disabilities and English learners

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) has said that NWEA created LEAP 2025 Humanities using principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure the test is accessible to as many students as possible, particularly SWD and EL. The new assessment will also include all the accessibility tools currently offered to all students in the current LEAP system, including read-alouds and translations of directions, color contrasting, and highlighting tools. LDOE also includes accessibility trainings in all existing assessment



trainings and will continue to do so with LEAP 2025 Humanities. Importantly, LEAP 2025 Humanities will likely increase accessibility for SWD and EL by including texts students have already encountered in the classroom.

IMPLEMENTATION

Unlike other IADA states, at the end of the pilot period LDOE will expand the *option* to take LEAP 2025 Humanities to all districts, rather than require the use of LEAP 2025 Humanities.

That being said, LDOE has a clear timeline for implementing LEAP 2025 Humanities. The pilot will start with middle schools in 20 school systems. In the first year, these schools will pilot test items, before implementing the full assessment the following two years. In year four, all interested middle schools will be able to administer the humanities assessment rather than LEAP 2025 ELA and LEAP 2025 Social Studies. Based on the recommendation of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) elementary and high schools will begin a similar timeline in subsequent years.

Last school year (2019-20), 7th graders in participating districts were taking the full LEAP 2025 Humanities assessments, and 6th and 8th graders are participating in item field testing. However, while districts were able to administer assessments during the first two testing windows, they were unable to complete summative assessments due to coronavirus related closures.

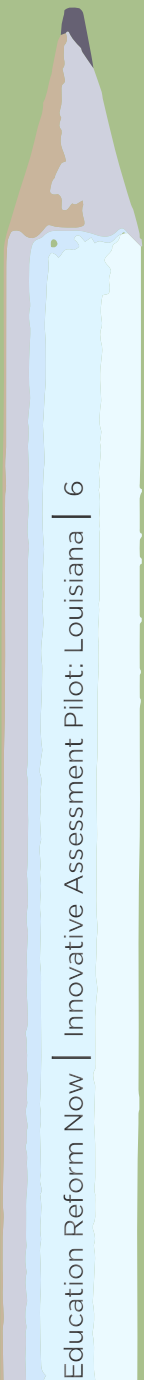
Additionally, due to the combined crises of COVID-19 and a record-breaking hurricane season, LDOE has refrained from administering the fall LEAP 2025 Humanities assessment in grade 7. As a result, the pilot is currently about a year behind its original planned timeline. Though LDOE is confident that students will be back in school buildings in the spring to administer summative assessments, state officials will determine whether to administer pilot assessments based on local implementation of ELA Guidebooks 2.0 during this unprecedented year. Not administering the pilot assessments would push the amended timeline (below) back even further.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Grades 3-5	N/A	N/A	TBD based on BESE approval	TBD based on BESE approval	TBD based on BESE approval
Grade 7	Pilot Test Items	Full test in pilot districts*	Pilot summative as feasible based on local conditions	Full test in pilot districts	Full test available to all districts
Grade 6 & 8	N/A	Pilot test items*	Pilot test items as feasible based on local conditions	Full test in pilot districts	Full test available to all districts
High School	N/A	N/A	TBD based on BESE approval	TBD based on BESE approval	TBD based on BESE approval

*COVID closures resulted in only partial pilot testing.

In order to have strong piloting phase, LDOE has set strict requirements for early-adopting districts and schools; schools must demonstrate strong implementation of ELA Guidebooks 2.0 for at least one year and agree to administer LEAP 2025 Humanities in all grades. While this will certainly lead to a strong roll-out during the early phases of the pilot, LDOE is likely to encounter difficulties as the assessment expands to districts with weaker implementation or different curriculum.

While trainings smoothly transitioned from in-person to virtual educator trainings as a result of the pandemic, the state is taking a few months off so teachers can focus on implementing hybrid instructional models. LDOE plans to resume related training, either in-person or remote in the coming months. LDOE references the success of recent state-wide initiatives—mostly notably their curriculum work—to demonstrate their capacity to effectively scale LEAP 2025 over the course of the IADA timeline. In particular, LDOE points to their yearly Teacher Leader Summit and the statewide cohort of Teacher Leader Advisors as key levers for spreading information about the innovative assessments and building buy-in.



ENDNOTES

1 ESSA allows an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The law and accompanying regulations cap the use of alternate assessments at 1% of all students statewide although a number of states have applied for and received waivers of the 1% cap.

2 According to EdSurge, “LearnZillion is a website that provides teachers with a library of interactive math and language arts lessons, videos, quizzes, and assignments for students. LearnZillion tracks student progress and achievement on the lessons and quizzes and reports the results to the teacher’s dashboard for assessment. A free version of LearnZillion is available for teachers, but a premium subscription to LearnZillion is also available for purchase by districts.” More at: <https://www.edsurge.com/product-reviews/learnzillion>

3 Recht, D. R., & Leslie, L. (1988). Effect of prior knowledge on good and poor readers’ memory of text. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.80.1.16

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APPENDIX A

Reliability

Type	Explanation	Evidence from LEAP 2025 Humanities	Implications
Reliability of student performance	One student should be able to take a test on Monday and then again on Tuesday and get very similar results each day.	LDOE's chosen vendor will be responsible for establishing evidence of reliability.	In theory, LEAP 2025 Humanities should be strong in this area given that it is administered throughout the year to coincide with instruction.
Inter-rater reliability	The results should be the same no matter who scores the test and when they score it.	LDOE's chosen vendor will be responsible for scoring LEAP 2025 Humanities.	This should be easily achievable given the format of LEAP 2025 Humanities is similar to many standardized assessments and scoring norms are well established.
Reliability between different forms of the same test	Different forms of a test have slightly different questions in a slightly different order. However, the content and difficulty level are the same and a student should perform similarly on both tests.	Different forms of the same tests within LEAP 2025 Humanities will be different, given that districts can choose from five different interim items. Additionally, LEAP 2025 ELA, LEAP 2025 Social Studies, and LEAP 2025 Humanities will be functioning as different forms of the same test for accountability purposes.	LDOE and their chosen vendors need to provide substantial evidence that LEAP 2025 ELA and Humanities can reliably be considered part of the same assessment system as they claim. This is the most problematic aspect of the state's pilot and should be monitored closely.

Validity

Type	Explanation	Evidence from LEAP 2025 Humanities	Implications
Construct Validity	The adherence of a measure to existing theory and knowledge of the concept being measured.	LEAP 2025 Humanities will be aligned to the both ELA Guidebooks 2.0 curriculum and the state's academic content standards.	As with other aspect of LEAP 2025 Humanities, LDOE will be working with their vendor to ensure strong construct validity.
Content Validity	The extent to which the measurement covers all aspects of the concept being measured.	LEAP 2025 Humanities will break up the skills and content covered in the standards across the three interim assessments. LDOE has limited choice among these assessments to ensure full coverage of the standards. The year-end summative will add to the coverage of all aspects the state standards. Like the differences between assessments, this aspect warrants close examination as the pilot continues.	LEAP 2025 Humanities has the potential to better ensure that students learn and are assessed on all aspects of the standards by assessing students throughout the year.
Criterion Validity	The extent to which the result of a measure corresponds to other valid measures of the same concept.	N/A	LDOE's chosen vendor will be responsible for establishing evidence of criterion validity.

