



MAST Pilot Program and Alternative Testing Waiver

Background

The vision of Montana’s innovative Montana Alternative Student Testing (MAST) assessment is to craft and refine a through-year assessment model designed to address and alleviate several general concerns with the current end-of-year testing model while still satisfying federal testing requirements. The MAST assessment creates a formative system structured to continuously improve teaching and learning and to inform education policy by yielding actionable and instructionally relevant information to drive student learning. Additionally, the MAST assessment more adequately captures a student’s true level of knowledge and skills in multiple-testing opportunities throughout the year which are more closely administered to the actual time the content and skills are learned. Furthermore, the MAST assessment creates a system that is local-led not state-driven.

Year 1 and Year 2 Comparison

During Year 1 and funded by the Ed First Grant, Montana piloted a small-scale MAST assessment in SY 2022-2023 with grades 5 and 7 in math and English Language Arts. There were 41 Montana school districts and over 4,000 students that participated in the pilot. As Montana enters Year 2 (SY 23-24) and is funded by the Department of Education CGSA grant, participating schools have expanded to include 54 school districts and over 20,000 students (about 30% of the tested population) across grades 3-8 in English Language Arts and math. Statewide implementation of the MAST is planned and on track for SY 2024-2025.

SY 2022-2023

Year 1 Participants (Grades 5 & 7):

Level	Total
Students	4,386
Districts	41
Schools	67

SY 2023-2024

Year 2 Participants (Grades 3-8):

Level	Total
Students	20,682
Districts	54
Schools	129



Double Testing Waiver

In May 2023, Superintendent Arntzen petitioned the United States Department of Education striving to ensure Montana’s students, teachers, and district leaders would not be overburdened with double testing. On August 10, 2023, the Montana Office of Public Instruction secured the Field Test Flexibility Waiver for the Montana Assessment system. This **one-year waiver** honors participating MAST schools by granting them focus on one statewide assessment, the MAST.

- First federal waiver granted for the transition from a summative to through-year assessment:
 - “With rare exceptions, the Department has not waived assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements to permit a State to conduct a field test of a new assessment,” said Adam Schott, deputy assistant secretary for policy and programs at the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, in his letter to Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen.
- Had bi-partisan support from all Montana legislators.
- Had support from three civil rights organizations.
- Montana was recognized for its transparency, innovation, and rigorous stakeholder engagement:
 - “This one-year waiver will encourage more Montana schools to participate in an innovative field test that will provide more timely, actionable information on student progress to parents, educators and the public, while continuing to hold Montana’s students to rigorous academic standards,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona in a statement on Thursday.

Year 2 Field Testing

As our great Montana state pioneers into its second year of field testing a new “through-year” testing model, the primary objectives for SY 2023-2024 include:

- Developing the configurator tool to help districts align the MAST English Language Arts and math testlets to their unique scope and sequences.
- Improve usability based on user experience data.
- Refine psychometric models.
- Continue to develop and expand reporting tools with information at the student, classroom, school, district, and state levels.
- Create additional items for grades 3-8 in preparation for operational statewide testing in SY 2024-2025 by utilizing teacher test item writing and review cadres.

Currently, curriculum surveys have been sent out to new participating schools aligning the MAST English Language Arts and math testlets to the scope and sequence of individual districts’ curriculum. Schools will soon have access to asynchronous training videos and live Q&A sessions preparing them to roster students for the first testing window which will commence on October 23, 2023. Montana teacher recruitment will contribute to test item writing and review cadres.