CRITICAL AREA OUTLINE: INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY PILOTS

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides an opportunity for states to rethink what kinds of student outcomes are most valued,[1] and to redesign how state assessment and accountability models more meaningfully measure progress toward those outcomes. How states design their assessment systems will signal and incentivize educators to focus on the kinds of student outcomes that are assessed, and will shape how well educators are able to tailor instruction based on real-time assessment results. States may consider innovative approaches to assessment and accountability that will provide:

- More valid, varied, and richer measures of student learning and progress,
- Assessment and reporting of a broader set of skills that more clearly signal the nature of college and career readiness for students, educators, parents, and policymakers,
- More timely and useful data that allows educators to make real-time adjustments to student instruction, and
- Assessment systems that are more student-centered and are seamlessly aligned with innovative models of learning and instruction, such as personalized or competency-based education, that are designed to achieve high learning expectations for all students.

In considering the opportunity to advance innovative assessments, states should consider the following:

STATE VISION

1. What is my chief's vision for education, and what are the implications for assessment, both in the short- and long-term?
2. What kinds of outcomes are most important?
3. What does my chief hope to achieve with this area of work?

OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

For states that will take advantage of the opportunity under ESSA to revise their systems of assessment, there are three key design decisions to consider:
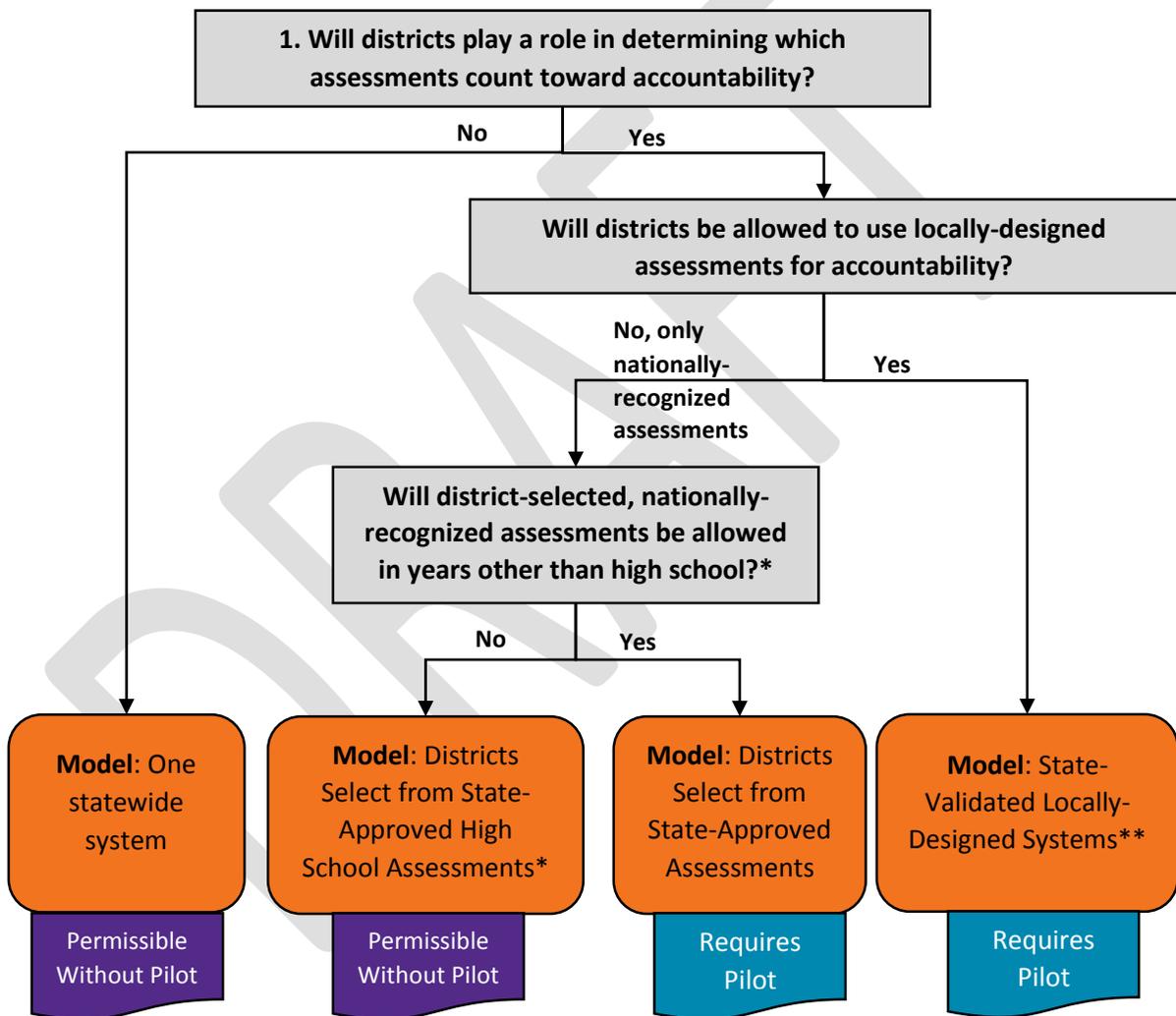
1. <u>Uniformity of the system across districts</u>: Will the assessment system be uniform statewide, or will there be some flexibility for districts to select or pilot other forms of assessment?
2. <u>Timing and adaptability of assessments</u>: Will there be flexibility in the timing of when assessments are administered?
3. <u>Types of assessments</u>: What types or forms of assessment will comprise the assessment system?

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[1] See the Council of Chief State School Officers' *Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions: The Innovation Lab Network State Framework for College, Career, and Citizenship Readiness, and Implications for State Policy*

Depending on a state's decisions with regard to these design elements, states may or may not need to apply for the Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority (herein referred to as "the pilot") outlined in Sec. 1204 of ESSA. **It should be noted that further regulation of ESSA and Section 1204 will greatly impact what is permissible with and without the demonstration authority.** That said, the decision trees below are designed to help give states a preliminary sense of whether it may be necessary for them to apply for the demonstration authority ("the pilot"), or whether they may be able to implement their assessment model under the general provisions of ESSA.

DECISION #1: UNIFORMITY OF THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

1. Will districts play a role in determining which assessments count toward accountability?

No → | Yes →

Will districts be allowed to use locally-designed assessments for accountability?

No, only nationally-recognized assessments | Yes →

Will district-selected, nationally-recognized assessments be allowed in years other than high school?*

No | Yes

Model: One statewide system
Permissible Without Pilot

Model: Districts Select from State-Approved High School Assessments*
Permissible Without Pilot

Model: Districts Select from State-Approved Assessments
Requires Pilot

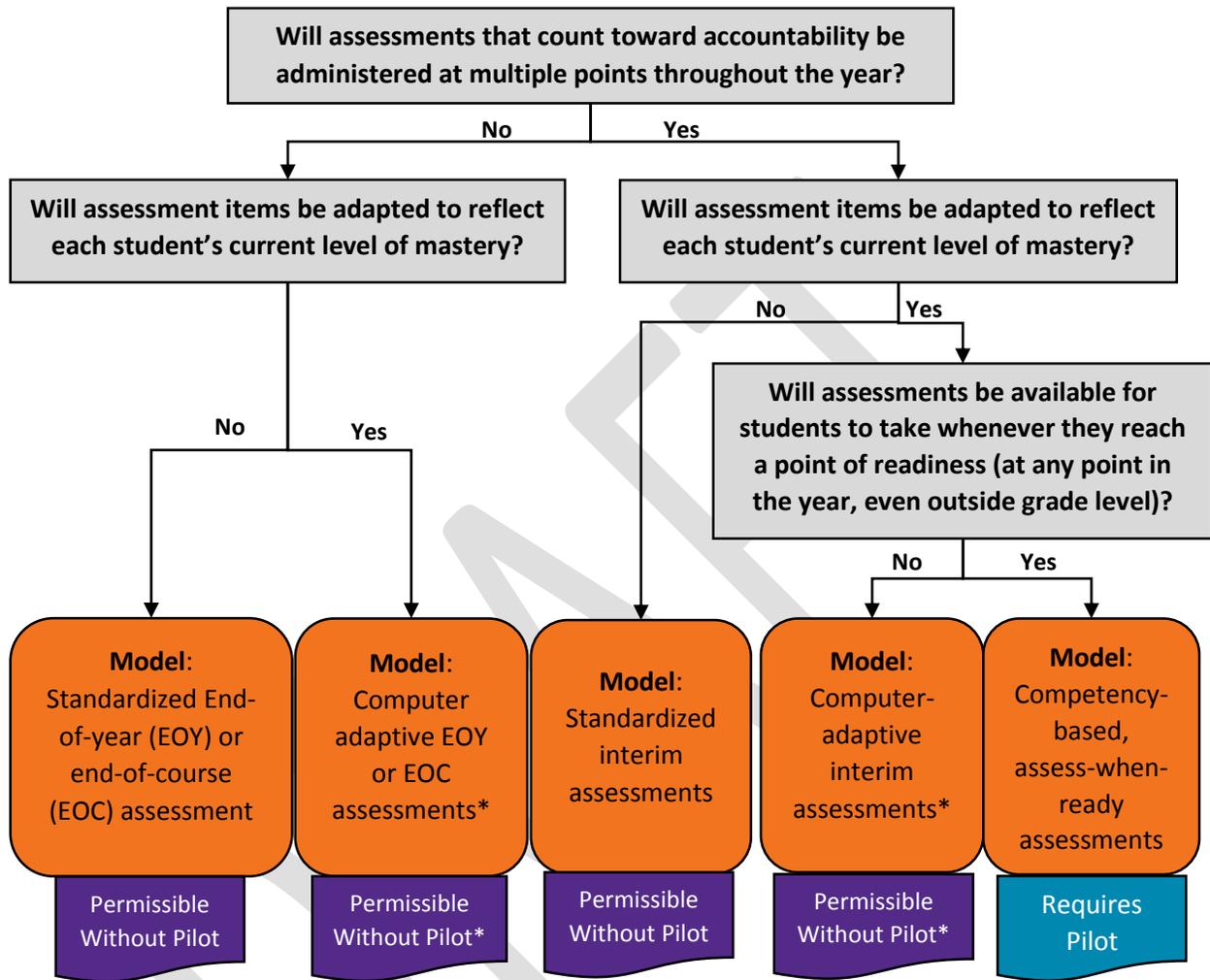**Model**: State-Validated Locally-Designed Systems**
Requires Pilot

*Note: ESSA outlines a process for districts to select from state-approved assessments for use in high school, which is permissible without requiring a pilot. However, this provision will be subject to negotiated rulemaking.

**Note: Our understanding is that states will be required to assess academic achievement in mathematics and language arts for all students in every subject in grades 3-8 and once in high school; and in science once in elementary, middle, and high school. Under the pilot, however, states may have flexibility to determine when data from locally-developed assessments can be used in lieu of state-administered assessments.

DECISION #2: TIMING AND ADAPTABILITY OF ASSESSMENTS

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│ Will assessments that count toward accountability be │
│ administered at multiple points throughout the year? │
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         No                          Yes
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Will assessment items be adapted to reflect each student's current level of mastery? (left, under No)

Will assessment items be adapted to reflect each student's current level of mastery? (right, under Yes)
- No / Yes

Will assessments be available for students to take whenever they reach a point of readiness (at any point in the year, even outside grade level)?
- No / Yes

Model: Standardized End-of-year (EOY) or end-of-course (EOC) assessment — Permissible Without Pilot

Model: Computer adaptive EOY or EOC assessments* — Permissible Without Pilot*

Model: Standardized interim assessments — Permissible Without Pilot

Model: Computer-adaptive interim assessments* — Permissible Without Pilot*

Model: Competency-based, assess-when-ready assessments — Requires Pilot

*Note: Computer-adaptive assessments will be subject to negotiated rulemaking.

DECISION #3: TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS
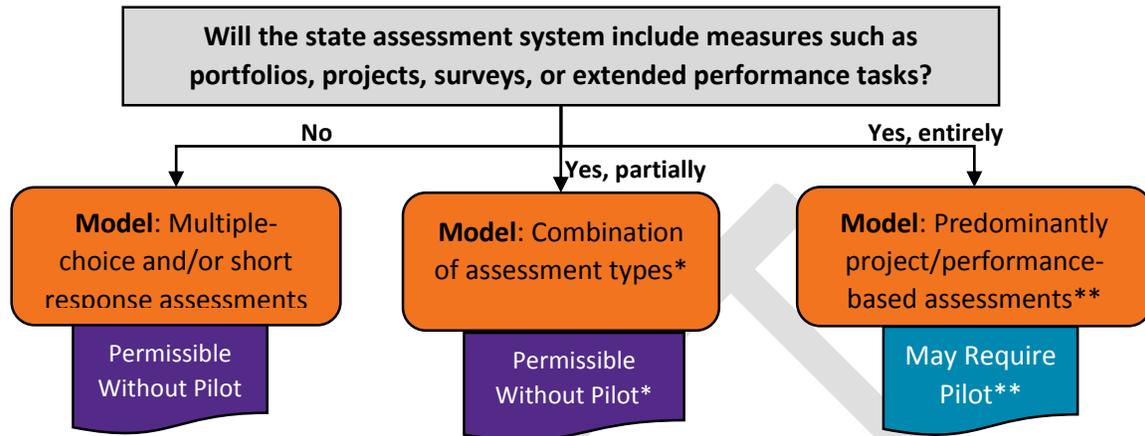
*NOTE: ESSA permits "measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding, which may include measures of student academic growth and may be partially delivered in the form of portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks." The term "partially delivered" was *not* further clarified in draft regulatory language from negotiated rulemaking.

**NOTE: States designing a system of assessments that relies predominantly on performance-based assessment may not be required to apply for the pilot if the system of assessments can meet current federal peer review requirements for state assessment systems. However, if states intend to run a smaller-scale pilot of a predominantly performance-based assessment system as they build capacity, they will likely need to apply for the ESSA Sec. 1204 pilot.

SUMMARY DECISION TABLE

Depending on the type, timing, and uniformity of assessments across districts, your state may or may not be required to apply for the Sec. 1204 Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority ("the pilot"). The following table summarizes and pulls together the three decisions from the trees above:

Key: | Permissible without Demonstration Authority ("Pilot") | Requires Demonstration Authority ("Pilot")

		Decision #2: Timing				
	Decision #3: Type of Assessment ↘	**Standardized EOY/EOC**	**Computer-adaptive EOY-EOC**	**Standardized interim**	**Computer-adaptive interim**	**Competency-based, assess-when-ready**
Decision #1: Uniformity	**One statewide system**	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response
		Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination
		All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance
	Districts select from state-approved high school assessments	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response
		Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination
		All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance
	Districts select from state-approved assessments	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response
		Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination
		All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance
	State-validated locally-designed systems	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response	MC/short response
		Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination	Combination
		All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance	N/A	All project/ performance

Hypothetical State Examples:

The following examples would be permissible without ESSA Sec. 1204 Demonstration Authority ("Pilot"):

- **State W** designs a: (Decision #1) uniform statewide assessment system, that relies on (Decision #2) standardized assessments that are given at interim points throughout the year and that are (Decision #3) a combination of multiple-choice and standardized performance-based assessments.
- **State X** designs a: (Decision #1) uniform statewide system, with the exception of high school assessments, for which states can select from a pre-approved list. All assessments are (Decision #2) standardized, end-of-course exams, and are (Decision #3) multiple-choice/ short response in nature.

The following examples would require ESSA Sec. 1204 Demonstration Authority ("Pilot"):

- **State Y** designs a: (Decision #1) district-designed assessment systems that are state-validated, and that rely on (Decision #2) competency-based assessments that are given whenever students are ready, and include (Decision #3) a combination of multiple-choice and performance-based assessments.

PILOT READINESS QUESTIONS

For states seeking to leverage the Sec. 1204 assessment and accountability demonstration authority under ESSA ("the pilot"), states should consider how they will pilot or implement their new assessment model while still ensuring quality, equity, transparency, and fairness. For example, states should remain committed to ensuring there are valid and rigorous measures of student performance for every school and that comparisons can be made across schools and districts; that all students are progressing and remain focused on closing achievement gaps; that there is transparency and active engagement of stakeholders, including parents and students; and that there is in place a a rigorous evaluation process to determine what is working well and where improvement is needed throughout the first several years of implementation.

In this vein, the following table contains a series of "readiness questions" that states should consider as they construct their pilot assessment systems. These questions follow the structure of CCSSO's 2011 *Principles for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems[2]*, as shown below:

Principles for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems	Additional "Readiness Questions" for Innovative Assessment and Accountability Pilots
1. **Alignment of performance goals to college- and career-ready standards.** The performance goals underlying the state's accountability system, and the design of the accountability pilot, will continue to be aligned with the state's goals for college- and career-readiness in order to promote continuous growth for every student toward that performance level and beyond.	➢ *Comparable Student Expectations*: Does the state have a clearly articulated plan for ensuring that districts participating in the pilot demonstrate the alignment and comparability of their student learning expectations and proposed system of assessments to state-adopted college- and career-readiness definitions, standards, and assessments? (Note: alignment to standards should be demonstrated for the assessment *system* as a whole, which means that multiple assessments, each covering only a portion of the grade level standards, may be used in order to ensure coverage of the complete depth and breadth of the state adopted standards. This may be subject to further federal regulation.)
2. **Annual determinations for each school and district.** The state will continue to make annual accountability determinations for all publicly funded schools	➢ *Capacity to make annual determinations*. Does the state have a clearly articulated plan for ensuring that the proper assessment data, data analysis, and reporting capacities will be in place to ensure that annual determinations can be made based on the pilot district's new assessments?

Principles for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems	Additional "Readiness Questions" for Innovative Assessment and Accountability Pilots
and districts.	
3. **Focus on student outcomes.** The state will continue to make accountability determinations that focus on student outcomes, including both status and growth toward college- and career-readiness.	➢ *Review of assessment quality and comparability*: Does the state have a clearly articulated plan for how pilot districts will demonstrate that the annual determinations resulting from the innovative assessment system meets state review requirements for validity, reliability, accessibility, and comparability (including, for example, alignment to CCSSO's *High Quality Assessment Principles[3]*)? Is there a well-defined process for reviewing and validating the district's proposed assessments and the success of their implementation? Is there a role for continued administration of a statewide summative assessment as an audit of the pilot assessment system in at some check-points throughout elementary, middle, and high school?
4. **Continued Commitment to Disaggregation.** The state will continue to support public reporting of disaggregated of student data for <u>all</u> districts to ensure that the needs of particular subgroups are not masked by aggregate student achievement.	➢ *Equity:* How will the state commit to ensuring pilot assessment systems are fair and accessible; that they can produce data disaggregated by student subgroup; and that disaggregated student data factors into pilot district quality review processes?
5. **Reporting of timely, actionable, and accessible data.** Data related to school and district performance will continue to be reported in a manner that is timely, actionable, and accessible—to improve teaching and learning and support policy improvements at all levels.	➢ *Data and reporting*: Does the state have a clearly articulated plan for ensuring that the proper assessment data, data analysis, and reporting capacities will be in place so that meaningful data can be used for instructional decision-making and is reported to parents and other stakeholders on a regular basis?
6. **Deeper diagnostic reviews.** Each state will continue to include, as appropriate, deeper analysis and diagnostic reviews of school and district	➢ *Use of assessment data for continuous improvement*: How will the state leverage data from the pilot assessments in its plans to identify and provide effective supports to schools in need of intervention?

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[3] http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2013/CCSSO%20Assessment%20Quality%20Principles%2010-1-13%20FINAL.pdf

Principles for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems	Additional "Readiness Questions" for Innovative Assessment and Accountability Pilots
performance, particularly for low-performing schools, to create a tighter link between initial accountability determinations and appropriate supports and interventions.	
7. **Building school and district capacity.** Each state will continue to focus on building district and school capacity for significant and sustained improvement in student achievement toward college- and career-ready performance goals.	➢ *Supports for district capacity*: Does the state have a clearly articulated plan for providing technical assistance to districts as they design and implement new approaches to assessment to ensure they are high-quality, comparable, and successfully implemented (for example, the state or its external partners may develop: state model performance tasks or other assessments and/or an open online bank of approved and validated assessments; technical criteria for locally-designed assessments; assessment implementation guidance; and common definitions of "mastery" or "proficiency," etc.)? ➢ *Supports for educator capacity*: Does the state have a clearly articulated plan to support districts in providing educator training and professional development to build educators' assessment literacy, ability to interpret and make instructional decisions based on assessment data, and ensure scoring reliability? (For example, the state or its external partners could support the development of local assessment experts, provide live training and professional support for teachers and leaders, such as in-person and/or virtual professional development institutes, organize regional task validation sessions, regional scoring sessions, etc.) ➢ *Supports and interventions for students with special needs:* Has the state developed and implemented systems to ensure that the progress of students with special needs (for example, special education students, English language learners, or students in poverty) will be monitored, and appropriate interventions will be given? ➢ *Plans for scaling*: To ensure that the pilot initiative produces scalable models – and to avoid creating a permanently bifurcated system of pilot and non-pilot districts – does the state have a clearly articulated plan for scaling the pilot initiative as a pathway toward system transformation? How will this plan leverage assessment data, district feedback, and other information to both improve the system and successfully implement it at scale? In addition, this plan

Principles for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems	Additional "Readiness Questions" for Innovative Assessment and Accountability Pilots
	should include how districts that currently lack capacity to pilot will be developed, and how the state will eventually bring along districts which currently have little interest in participation.
8. **Targeting lowest performing schools.** The state remains committed to targeting significant interventions on, at minimum, the lowest-performing schools and their districts and those districts with the largest achievement gaps.	➢ *Use of assessment data for school identification*: How will the state leverage data from the pilot assessments in its plans to identify lowest-performing schools?
9. **Innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.** The state's accountability system will continue to drive innovation and itself be dynamic—promoting innovative accountability approaches with rigorous evaluation to drive continuous improvement over time.	➢ *District requirements for participation*: Does the state have a clearly articulated set of readiness requirements for districts to participate in the pilot initiative? However, as noted in number 7 above, the state should also have a clearly articulated plan for building capacity in non-participating districts and schools the pilot initiative progresses and scales across the state. ➢ *Stakeholder engagement and community involvement*: Has the state developed and implemented mechanisms for engaging system and community stakeholders in both the development and ongoing review of the pilot initiative? ➢ *Pilot evaluation process*: Does the state have a clearly articulated plan to work with each pilot district to develop a quality review process throughout the first few years of implementation, so that mid-course adjustments can be made as necessary and to support continuous improvement? The plan should leverage research partners as appropriate and include processes for terminating pilot status if a pilot district does not meet expectations for demonstrating improvement within pre-determined time frame. ➢ *State capacity*: Has the state taken measures to build capacity (including through partnerships) to carry out the commitments stated in this document, including but not limited to defining readiness criteria for pilot sites; reviewing district applications to participate in the pilot; supporting district and educator capacity-building; and partnering with pilot districts and external researchers, as appropriate, to evaluate the progress of pilot districts against pre-determined performance targets?

Principles for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems	Additional "Readiness Questions" for Innovative Assessment and Accountability Pilots

STRATEGY

CROSS-CUTTING ACTIONS

In addition to the "readiness questions" listed above, the following cross-cutting actions may be considered:

Stakeholder Engagement

Your SEA will likely have an overall engagement strategy for working with stakeholders in the ESSA transition process. Be sure to coordinate with the overall agency strategy before proceeding. Questions to consider:
1. Do you have an existing coalition of districts that will participate in the pilot, or do you need to build one?
2. Do you have existing structures to engage teachers, parents, and "stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, and other vulnerable children" as you design your innovative assessment system?
3. Do you have partners (e.g. local or national philanthropies) that can support educator capacity-building at the local level?
4. If you don't have a list of these groups in your state, how will you get one and how will you establish outreach? How can CCSSO provide assistance?

Communications and Messaging

The new law presents a communications and messaging challenge that states should be proactive in discussing with key stakeholders. Questions to consider:
1. Have you identified the audience(s) with whom you will need to communicate about the assessment pilot (examples: media, legislators, parents, teachers, school administrators, business community, civil rights leaders)?
2. How will you communicate with each audience throughout the implementation process?
   - Do you have a central location for providing updates on your website?
   - How are you being transparent with the public throughout the process?
   - Have you established regular updates and/or meetings with key groups?
3. Have you developed key messages for communications across the agency?

Data Use and Technology Supports
As you consider the pilot, it is important to address the implications of these changes on your data collection and reporting process from the start so you have the infrastructure in place to deliver on your goals. Questions to consider:

1. What data and technology infrastructure will be needed to support the innovative assessments?
2. What infrastructure investments will be needed as the pilot scales statewide?

Advocacy

As part of your overall ESSA transition strategy, the state will need to identify the school improvement support issues for which advocacy will be useful or necessary. Questions to consider:

1. Do you need to make changes to state policy to implement your innovative assessment pilot?
   - Are the policies in place to make your implementation successful? (e.g. changes to state law, policy, SEA practice)
   - Do you need additional state resources to carry out the work?
2. Do you need any clarification from USED before you can move forward?
   - Have you identified concerns with USED timeline for implementation?
3. How does the innovative assessment demonstration authority timeline align with state legislative calendar or State Board meetings?

IMPLEMENTATION

Structure

What staff, time and money will need to be dedicated to this endeavor? What additional resources might you need? Can you repurpose some resources/staff?

1. Who is the single person responsible for this strategy's success?
2. Is there a team of people who will support your point person?
3. What time, money, technology, or technical assistance providers will be needed for successful implementation of this strategy?
4. Do you have data and information systems in place to track outcomes and measure success?
5. Who are the key stakeholders you need to help implement this strategy?

Measuring Success and Continuous Improvement

How will the SEA know that they have been successful? What is the plan for continued improvement? How will the state conduct formative evaluations of the pilot?

Fiscal Considerations under ESSA

The Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations act clarified that the ESSA provisions affecting formula grants will not take effect until the 2017–2018 school year. The formula funds (for Titles I, II, and III, etc.) that states will receive in July 2016 and use mainly in 2016–2017 will be carried out under No Child Left Behind. ESSA provides the Secretary of Education with the authority to "take such steps as are necessary for the orderly transition" from NCLB to ESSA, so the U.S. Department of Education (ED) will likely issue additional guidance on the transition in the coming months.