

# Peer Review Assistance

The U.S. Department of Education’s review of State assessment systems is an evidence-based, peer review process for which each State submits evidence to demonstrate that its assessment system meets a set of established criteria, called critical elements. Critical Elements represent the ESEA statutory and regulatory requirements that State assessment systems must meet. The six sections of critical elements that cover these requirements are: (1) Statewide System of Standards and Assessments, (2) Assessment System Operations, (3) Technical Quality – Validity, (4) Technical Quality – Other, (5) Inclusion of All Students, and (6) Academic Achievement Standards and Reporting.

Each State must submit evidence for its assessment system that addresses each critical element. The Department’s assessment peer review focuses on the processes for assessment development employed by the State and the resulting evidence that confirms the technical quality of the State’s assessment system. Based on the evidence a State submits, the reviewers evaluate the State’s assessment system against ESEA requirements. Per the [non-regulatory guidance](#) issued by USED, the assessment peer review notes serve as both the “record of the assessment peer review team’s evaluation of a State’s evidence” and are sent to the State as “technical assistance and preliminary feedback prior to a formal decision regarding the outcome of the review”. “The assessment peer review notes, however, do not necessarily identify the final set of additional evidence, if any, that a State may need to submit to demonstrate that its assessment system meets all of the critical elements.” A State should consider such feedback as technical assistance and not as formal feedback or direction to make changes to its assessment system. Instead, for information regarding the adequacy of submitted evidence, states should refer to the formal feedback received from the USED Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education (formal feedback is submitted to states and can be found in publicly published decision letters, while the peer review notes are sent directly to states and are not publicly posted).

Formal feedback is provided to a State regarding whether the State has provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that its assessment system meets all applicable ESEA statutory and regulatory requirements following the assessment peer review. If a State has not provided sufficient evidence, the formal feedback will identify the additional evidence necessary to address the critical elements. Per the [non-regulatory guidance](#) issued by USED, “The Department will work with the State to develop a plan and timeline for submitting the additional evidence for assessment peer review.” To support states and ensure that the correct evidence is submitted for each critical element, CSAI can provide technical assistance supporting the different requirements.

The data organizers on the following pages highlight critical elements of peer review, specifically, those critical elements for which the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI) can provide support and/or resources.

## 1

## Statewide System of Standards and Assessments

## CRITICAL ELEMENT

## CSAI OFFERED SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

## 1.1

State Adoption of Academic Content Standards for All Students

- Recommendations for and insight into appropriate documentation for demonstrating evidence of alignment between states' content and achievement standards.
- Support in gauging the rigor of state adopted academic content standards.

[National Benchmarks for State Achievement Standards](#)

## 1.2

Coherent and Rigorous Academic Content Standards

- Assistance determining the alignment and rigor of state content standards, as compared to other sets of standards or expectations.
- Support for determining the rigor, coherence, and expectations embedded within state content standards.
- Addressing the need for a broad and diverse stakeholder involvement in the development of state content standards.

[States' Content Standards Revision Processes](#)    [Web Alignment Tool](#)

## 1.3

Required Assessments

- Provision of sample documentation that outlines state inclusion of all required assessments, including annual general and alternate assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics (in grades 3–8 and at least once in high school) and science (at least once in each of three grade spans: 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12).

[State of the States](#)    [Testing Action Plan Spotlight](#)

## 1.4

Policies for Including All Students in Assessments

- Support for state plans and policies around accommodations for all students.
- Assistance in crafting policies that ensure students of special populations have the needed supports to participate in state assessments.
- Clarify different options that states have for including newly arrived English learners in state assessment and accountability systems.

[Principles and Characteristics of Inclusive Assessment Systems in a Changing Assessment Landscape](#)

## 1.5

Participation Data

## 2 Assessment System Operations

### CRITICAL ELEMENT

### CSAI OFFERED SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

#### 2.1

Test Design and Development

- Assistance in demonstration of alignment between assessment purposes and data use, as well as between assessment items and content standards.
- Support for assessment blueprint analysis and addressing identified gaps and weaknesses in the alignment between assessment items and content standards.

[Alignment and Evaluation of College and Career Ready Standards and Assessments](#)

[Evaluating Content Alignment in the Context of Computer-Adaptive Testing: Guidance for State Education Agencies](#)

#### 2.2

Item Development

- Guidance on best practices for item development, item exemplars, or feedback on item development process.

[Item Writing Guides and Item Exemplars \(ELA & Math\)](#)

[Science Assessment Item Collaborative](#)

#### 2.3

Test Administration

- Support in the creation of clear and effective communication tools that outline policies and procedures related to test administration.

[Communications 101: Getting Your Message Out](#)

[Helping SEAs Communicate Effectively Around Shifts in Assessment Scores](#)

#### 2.6

Systems for Protecting Data Integrity Privacy

- Guidance on the establishment of minimum n size for accountability determinations.
- Provide examples of other states' policies and procedures regarding the confidentiality of test materials, test results, and students' identifiable information, supporting creation of state policies and procedures that are consistent with FERPA and applicable state laws.

#### 2.5

Test Security

- Examples of state policies and procedures regarding security and the prevention of test irregularities.

# 3 Technical Quality – Validity

## CRITICAL ELEMENT

### 3.1

Overall Validity,  
including Validity  
Based on Content

### 3.2

Validity Based on  
Cognitive Processes

### 3.3

Validity Based on  
Internal Structure

### 3.4

Validity Based on  
Relationships with  
Other Variables

## CSAI OFFERED SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

- Leverage extensive experience establishing and documenting content validity on behalf of states for the purposes of peer review compliance.
- Provide examples of the documentation states produce to demonstrate that assessments are cognitively appropriate for students at each grade level.
- Provide examples of the documentation states produce to demonstrate that assessments are consistent with sub-domain structures of state content standards.
- Provide examples of the documentation states produce to demonstrate that assessments' external validity matches with that of other variables, including those of other assessments.

[Item Writing Guides and Item Exemplars \(ELA & Math\)](#)

[Science Assessment Item Collaborative](#)

# 4 Technical Quality – Other

## CRITICAL ELEMENT

## CSAI OFFERED SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

### 4.2

Fairness and Accessibility

- Communication support for states as they outline and detail the steps taken to ensure that assessments are accessible and fair for all students, without fundamentally altering assessment constructs.
- Resources that guide the development and implementation of an assessment system that is inclusive and accessible for all students, including how to document procedures for identifying potential bias in assessment items.

[Fairness in Assessment of English Learners](#)

[A State Guide to the Development of Universally Designed Assessments](#)

### 4.1

Reliability

- Support in determining which pieces of evidence to submit and/or create for demonstration of assessment reliability.
- Insight into and examples of what states may use in their peer review documentation to demonstrate criterion-related validity evidence, inter-rater reliability, structural consistency, and scoring and analysis for all assessment types and forms.

[Alignment and Evaluation of College and Career Ready Standards and Assessments](#)

[Evaluating Content Alignment in the Context of Computer-Adaptive Testing: Guidance for State Education Agencies](#)

### 4.4

Scoring

- States can draw upon CSAI leaders' prior work in ensuring that assessments are reliable and produce valid score interpretations.

### 4.5

Multiple Assessment Forms

- Support to ensure that all assessment options are properly aligned to state content standards.
- Support regarding efforts to compare score interpretations to gauge the level of comparability between across different assessments.

### 4.6

Multiple Versions of an Assessment

- Examples of documentation outlining how to compare score interpretations across different assessments.
- Guidance on demonstrating alignment between statewide assessments and alternate assessments/assessments in languages other than English.

# 5 Inclusion for All Students

## CRITICAL ELEMENT

## CSAI OFFERED SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

### 5.1

Procedures for Including Students with Disabilities

- Guidance on policies and practices that ensure students with disabilities are fully included in a state's assessment system, including information on appropriate and needed assessment accommodations.
- Support for demonstrating alignment and coherence between academic standards and alternate achievement standards.

[Students with Disabilities](#)

[Assistive Technologies for Computer-Based Assessments](#)

[Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts: Considerations for Special Education Assessment Systems](#)

### 5.2

Procedures for Including ELs

- Resources that guide policies and practices that ensure English learner students are fully included in a state's assessment system, including information on appropriate and needed assessment accommodations.
- Guidance on how newly arrived English students are to be included in states' assessment and accountability systems.

[English Language Learners](#)

[Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts: Considerations for Assessing English Language Learner Students](#)

### 5.3

Accommodations

- Examples of appropriate assessment accommodations that states can consider for implementation into their assessment system.

[Accessibility Review](#)

[Policies for Accessibility and Accommodations](#)

[Principles and Characteristics of Inclusive Assessment Systems in a Changing Assessment Landscape](#)

### 5.4

Monitoring Test Administration for Special Populations

- Assistance in documenting plans and policies to monitor students who receive assessment accommodations to make sure accommodations are appropriate for students' needs and consistent with the accommodations provided to students during instruction.

# 6 Academic Achievement Standards and Reporting

## CRITICAL ELEMENT

## CSAI OFFERED SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

### 6.1 State Adoption of Academic Standards for All Students

- Support for gauging the rigor of state achievement standards to ensure that states have formally adopted challenging academic achievement standards for all students in each grade and content area, including alternate academic standards.

### 6.2 Achievement Standards-Setting

- Support in developing technically sound standards setting processes.
- Guidance in the documentation of the achievement standards setting process and its descriptors for each grade and content area.

### 6.3 Challenging and Aligned Academic Achievement Standards

- Alignment support for states looking to ensure that achievement standards are aligned with content standards, including conducting external and impartial alignment studies.
- Support of state efforts to document how cut scores are determined to delineate performance levels, providing students with understanding of how each achievement level corresponds with performance.

[Achievement Level Setting](#)

### 6.4 Reporting

- Guidance in developing communication tools that allow states to effectively communicate results for all assessments and the meaning of scores to various audiences (students, teachers, school staff, community members).
- Support to properly document processes for creating data reports, ensuring that reports are disseminated in a timely manner and that reports include necessary score analyses and descriptions and performance levels.

[Communications 101: Getting Your Message Out](#)



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