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BLUUM

Feasibility Study: Assessment Analytics and Reporting

COMPARING PERCEPTIONS, CAPABILITIES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN USING ISAT INTERIM AND MAP ASSESSMENTS

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This report presents findings to inform the Bluum charter school network on the feasibility of using the ISAT interim assessments as both a tool to guide instruction and to monitor school and network-level performance. Currently, Bluum network schools use NWEA's MAP Growth assessment, at a minimum, to meet this purpose. However, questions have recently arisen as to the potential for using the ISAT interims instead, both to preserve financial resources and to more tightly Bluum network schools' performance monitoring to Idaho's content standards while avoiding double testing.

In addition to this primary objective, two secondary aims guided the work: first, to identify opportunities for Bluum to provide feedback to the Idaho Department of Education that could strengthen the ISAT user experience; and second, to determine whether the Idaho Charter School Association could play a useful role in supporting charter schools' effective use of ISAT data beyond just Bluum partner schools. Drawing on educator interviews, consultations with IDE staff, and a review of ISAT training materials and NWEA documentation, the report outlines key areas of alignment and divergence between MAP and the ISAT interim system and identifies opportunities for more coherent and cost-effective assessment practice across the Bluum network.

Perceptions of each assessment tool are shaped by familiarity and historical use. We found it reasonable that educators could make far greater use of ISAT interim data with targeted, accessible training and more intuitive reporting tools. ISAT already supports color-coded grouping, popular in MAP reporting, and IDE has multiple existing trainings. ISAT interims have strong potential as a primary progress-monitoring tool in grades 3–8 and 11, offering instructional guidance, fast results, and alignment to standards, but usability improvements and additional training are needed, MAP may still be needed in grades K–3 due to its early-grade diagnostics and foundational skills screening capabilities.

Methods of Investigation

To understand how BLUUM charter school educators and other Idaho stakeholders perceive and use the MAP Growth assessment and the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) interim system, we conducted a multi-method qualitative review. Our work consisted of the following activities:

Stakeholder Discussions

We held **seven** in-**depth discussions**, including:

- **Six conversations with BLUUM network administrators** representing a range of school models and levels of ISAT/MAP usage.
- **One conversation with a classroom teacher from an Idaho public school** outside the BLUUM network who regularly uses ISAT interim assessments in instructional planning.

These discussions explored assessment practices, perceived utility, reporting features, instructional applications, and barriers to implementation.

Consultations With the Idaho Department of Education

We conducted **multiple discussions with Idaho Department of Education (IDE) staff** responsible for ISAT interim and summative assessment implementation. These conversations provided insight into:

- Available training modules and supports
- Constraints and possibilities related to reporting, item banks, and system usability

Document and Materials Review

We conducted a targeted review of:

- **IDE training materials** related to ISAT Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs), Shortened Interim Comprehensive Assessments (SICAs), Target Reports, and Tools for Teachers.
- **NWEA's website and public documentation** describing the MAP Growth assessment, reporting features, professional learning offerings, and instructional connections.
- **Example teacher and parent-facing reports** for both MAP and ISAT interim assessments.
- **A test instance of the ISAT reporting portal** to examine current capabilities.

This review helped contextualize stakeholder perceptions and identify structural differences between the two assessment systems.

Through our investigation, we were able to gain information on how, within Bluum charter schools, educators perceive and use the MAP assessment and the ISAT interim system. Among those interviewed, MAP had strong support, largely due to its familiarity, user friendly reporting, and built in instructional support. However, among interviewees who regularly utilize ISAT interims, there was evidence and support that ISAT interims can offer equally powerful insights into student learning and instructional needs.

Perceptions of the ISAT Interims and MAP

For many educators, MAP remains the favored assessment tool because of how intuitively it presents data. The color coding, quadrant charts, and student friendly profiles create what one leader described as an immediately accessible snapshot of both "growth and achievement," which helps teachers know "which quadrant students fall into." Several leaders noted that MAP's structure naturally supports grouping students for intervention and extension. One interviewee

explained that teachers "actively use [MAP] to sort kids for instruction… identify kids who need intervention and are on track," a process that has become embedded in the culture of their school.

In addition, one charter school leader emphasized the specific value of MAP within an International Baccalaureate context, noting that their school is an **International Baccalaureate school** and therefore "*should be well above the Idaho State standards*." For this reason, the leader explained, they "*need to know where we compare across the country*," and that, "*if we drop MAP, we won't have data to compare*."

This highlights a unique rationale for preferring MAP's norm referenced data in settings where national or international benchmarking is preferred.

However, several educators articulated a preference for standard-referenced measurement. As one leader put it: "ISAT is standards referenced… [it] answers: did your kids learn what they were supposed to learn this year." This perspective suggests that comparing students to standards, rather than to other students, may provide clearer alignment with Idaho's instructional expectations.

It was also noted, though not pervasively, that because the final ISAT summative results take months to arrive, the ISAT interim results must be similarly slow. However, frequent users of the ISAT interims indicated that interim ISAT data are available immediately, replicating MAP's feature. In addition, one administrator explained that their school receives preliminary ISAT summative data "within 48 hours of the test" and that the data can quickly be pulled at the student, class, or school level. Others described using ISAT Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) and Shortened Interim Comprehensive Assessments (SICAs) to identify standards that require additional instruction and to guide upcoming units. An ISAT user interviewed outside the BLUUM network shared that they use "the shorter [ISAT] tests coming into and going out of units… to guide instruction in the lesson, and then to see growth at the end."

In summary, perceptions of these two assessment tools are shaped by a history of use (or, as often is the case for the ISAT interims, disuse). While these perceptions are valid, it is important to acknowledge, as done below, the true capabilities of each tool. In addition, educational philosophies that distinguish between the use of normed versus standards reference inevitably shape whether educators might view MAP or the ISAT interims more useful.

Comparing Capabilities

MAP

MAP's most frequently mentioned strengths relate to its interpretability and the instructional resources tied directly to students' scores. MAP provides robust multi-audience reporting, including performance over time graphs, spring to spring growth scores, explanations of scores, and parent-

friendly visuals, which is an area where ISAT interims are less developed. Leaders highlighted how MAP effortlessly connects to Read180, Khan Academy, and Imagine Learning, giving teachers a ready made set of lessons and pathways. One interviewee noted that MAP "has the ability to see areas for extension… through Imagine Learning pathways or a program such as Khan Mappers," helping educators differentiate for both high achieving students and those who require remediation.

Several leaders referenced recurring, high quality PD that helps staff make meaning of MAP's reports. One leader noted that newer teachers are "just getting a grasp," while more experienced teachers engage deeply with the MAP data because they have been supported by NWEA training. By contrast, although the Idaho SDE has created trainings for ISAT interims, educators repeatedly mentioned that these are not widely known or easily accessible at scale.

Still, the argument that MAP uniquely enables grouping appears overstated. While its adaptive structure makes grouping intuitive, multiple interviewees demonstrated that ISAT interims also support similar practices. For example, one school uses IABs early in the year to determine whether students are "progressing as we should" and then uses SICA results in December "to plan second semester." MAP's emphasis on student percentiles as a means of comparison was often cited, however there does not appear to be anything preventing percentile score reporting (within the Bluum network, for example) if that is desired.

One limitation that appears difficult for ISAT to replicate currently is MAP's breadth and depth of linked instructional resources. Several teachers described the ISAT's Tools for Teachers library as insufficient compared to the kinds of supports MAP provides. "ISAT just gives you the information of what you need to teach," one educator explained, contrasting it with MAP's more "push and play" functionality.

ISAT

The ISAT interim system presents a different set of strengths and challenges. Some leaders expressed concern that the platform does not easily allow instructional leaders to prescribe specific blocks, raising the risk of teachers selecting the wrong content when they assess their students. Others noted that ISAT lacks a specific beginning of year diagnostic, something particularly important for schools where they rely on beginning of year MAP data to establish a baseline.

Feedback on reporting was mixed. Some leaders described ISAT interim reports as overly focused on scale scores and less parent friendly than MAP's visuals. Others pointed out that the data can be powerful if school leaders provide clear guiding questions. For instance, in one example, teachers use ISAT interim data to identify students who are underperforming on specific standards, reteach them, and rotate students through intervention intentionally. Identifying underperforming standards is inherently not possible using MAP, since the tool is not aligned to standards. The consensus was that interpreting ISAT reports did require teachers to spend more time reviewing data at the student and class level to determine individual and general areas of strength and

improvement, in comparison to the MAP generating more intuitive reports. However, one administrator noted this was not a limitation but a strength, as it required teachers to more intimately engage with the data and better understand student performance.

One instructional advantage ISAT may offer that MAP does not is the ability for teachers to view item level student responses, allowing for more precise diagnosis of misconceptions. This is not possible with MAP's adaptive test because students receive different items. This advantage is strengthened by the structure of the ELA and math interim assessments, which are fixed form and identical statewide. Because the forms do not change, all students see the same items, allowing for clear comparison across classrooms and schools at the item level. In contrast, the ISAT science interim assessment is computer adaptive, meaning students receive different questions, limiting item level comparisons. IDE indicated uncertainty about whether the next assessment vendor will maintain fixed forms or move toward full adaptivity across all subjects.

ISAT interims are tightly aligned to Idaho standards, with clear connections to the ISAT blueprint and target level reporting, which is a strength for alignment and coherence. When using standards aligned curriculum, schools should be able to address areas for improvement among students using curricular materials already at hand. It is also important to note that ISAT science is administered as a grade band assessment (grades 1–5, 6–8, and 9–11). When students take science interims in grades 5, 8, or 11, the assessment covers the full grade band, whereas ELA and math interims are grade specific for grades 3–8.

One of the most highlighted strengths of the ISAT interim system was how closely the interims mirror the end of year summative testing format. This familiarity helps reduce student anxiety and increases comfort with the types of questions they will encounter when taking the summative assessment in the spring.

Importantly, both MAP and ISAT interims deliver results instantly, contrary to some assumptions based on the delayed nature of the ISAT summative public reporting. IDE also shared that the initial interim data delivered to schools is typically very close to the final summative results; when changes do occur, they are usually only a few percentage points and result primarily from removing students who were not enrolled long enough to count for accountability purposes.

Regarding network level reporting, IDE noted that they cannot produce a single report that encompasses the full BLUUM network. However, they confirmed that BLUUM can aggregate its own network level interim data by having each school download its individual Excel based reports and compiling them.

Finally, IDE data show that ISAT interims are already widely used statewide: approximately 68% of Idaho schools have at least one teacher using the interim assessments, and 76% of districts have at least one school where a teacher uses them. The Shortened Interim Comprehensive Assessment (SICA) is currently the most frequently used interim option.

Table 1: Feature/Function Comparison of MAP versus ISAT Interims

Feature / Function	MAP Growth	ISAT Interims
Alignment	Not as specifically aligned to Idaho standards; it is more difficult to identify performance on specific standards.	Directly aligned to Idaho Content Standards, supports identification of underperforming standards.
Instructional Resources	Deep ecosystem: Khan Academy, Read180, Imagine Learning; push-and-play.	Tools for Teachers available but perceived as insufficient.
Report Types & Interpretability	Robust visuals supporting instructional grouping, growth over time, and parent friendly.	Visuals provided supporting instructional grouping, however more complex, scale-score heavy; less parent-friendly, requiring more teacher analysis.
Instructional Diagnostics	No item-level comparison (adaptive).	Item-level analysis is possible for ELA/Math fixed forms; not for adaptive science.
Grade Coverage	K–12.	ELA/Math grades 3–8; science grade-banded 1–5, 6–8, 9–11.
BOY Screener	Beginning-of-year screener available.	No BOY diagnostic.
Ease of Use	Highly intuitive; established familiarity within the network	Requires more interpretation time, PD required for majority of network educators
Professional Development	Extensive NWEA PD.	ISAT PD exists but awareness is low.
Reporting Timelines	Immediate.	Immediate.
Comparability among students on similar items	Hard due to adaptive format.	Easy for fixed forms; difficult for adaptive science.
Comparability with other states/IB schools	Provides national comparisons	Does not provide comparisons outside of Idaho
Similarity to State Summative Assessment	Less similar.	Identical; increase student familiarity and assessment expectations
Network-Level Reporting	NWEA provides network summaries.	IDE cannot produce BLUUM-wide report; schools must export Excel and BLUUM (or other partner) aggregates.

Opportunities

Findings from our investigation indicate opportunities to strengthen the network's utilization of ISAT interims. First, color coded grouping is available through the ISAT interim system, but teachers will need effective training and be allowed time to ensure they are aware of this capability and can interpret the data. Because MAP's report formats have become such an ingrained part of how many teachers think about data, creating or templating a crosswalk or set of analogous ISAT interim reports could help reduce cognitive load and facilitate adoption.

Second, interviewees underscored that ISAT interims can guide instruction, provided teachers know how to use them. This suggests a need to invest in training that does not feel like "one more thing," but instead builds practical routines, such as a SICA-reteach-Interim Comprehensive Assessment cycle. Multiple ISAT trainings already exist (60–90 minutes each), but educators are generally unaware of them, suggesting that a primary barrier may not be capability but communication and visibility.

Third, although ISAT's reporting speed is not a barrier, report usability is underwhelming for some. Enhancing report clarity, especially for parents, could address lingering concerns about the usability of reports.

Overall, the interviews indicate that there is a path forward for Bluum network school to use the ISAT interims as their progress monitoring tool for grades 3–8 and 11, thereby removing the need to administer both ISAT interims and MAP assessments. However, there may still be a need in grades K–3 to utilize MAP, as ISAT does not cover these grades, as well as MAP's enhanced screening and diagnostic capabilities for foundational reading and mathematics skills.

Recommendations

Our primary objective with this project is to collect information that allows us to recommend to Bluum whether piloting the use of ISAT interim assessments as a school and network performance monitoring tool could be productive. There are also two secondary objectives. The first is to allow Bluum to provide feedback to the Idaho Department of Education that could enable IDE to make improvements to the ISAT user experience. The second is to learn whether it could be useful for the Idaho Charter School Association to aid charter schools pertaining to the effective use of ISAT data.

1. **Bluum should pilot using ISAT interim assessments within some classrooms in the network.** We uncovered a great deal of misconceptions about the usefulness of ISAT interim data. We spoke to educators who preferred the interims to MAP, and those who preferred the reverse, and while both viewpoints are valid and justified, there was no consensus that one tool was more useful for monitoring progress and contributing to student learning than the other. Given the reduced cost to the network that using the ISAT interims could provide while eliminating double testing, we believe piloting the ISAT interims and gathering feedback from educators is an important next step.
    a. **We do not believe that it is necessary to enlist support to develop new or additional ISAT interim reports for teachers.** This would risk extending turnaround time, and ISAT teacher reports already seem to be of acceptable quality.
    b. **It may be worthwhile to enlist support to develop new ISAT interim reports for parents.** These could be produced with a small, two-three day lag time without compromising timeliness for parents while likely improving parents' ability to interpret the results.
    c. **If it does not have the internal capacity, Bluum should enlist support in preparing network-level reports.** ISAT interim and summative data can provide intuitive and actional data at the network level, but currently IDE will not be able to provide this analysis.
2. **Providing feedback to IDE about ISAT functionality and capabilities is an important role for the Bluum network.** The instructional leaders in Bluum's network are invested in using data to inform instruction and are willing to be critical friends to improve the end experience for students, teachers, and parents. IDE is receptive and eager to use feedback to improve its support to educators. There is a strong potential for further collaboration here.
3. **To effectively pilot the use of ISAT interims, let alone rolling such use out to the entire network, training is essential.** While IDE is a willing partner and has already prepared training materials, we recommend that Bluum and/or ICSA play an active role in developing or co-developing customized training specifically for educators who are piloting a transition from MAP to the interims. Such a change is akin to switching from an iPhone to an Android,

which would be difficult for anyone. Training will make or break a transition if the decision is made to proceed.

4. **Consider maintaining optional access to MAP Growth to support reading and mathematics interventions across the network.** MAP uses a vertically scaled assessment that measures student skills across grade levels, making it particularly useful for identifying where students who teachers know require additional support need to focus. Its sensitivity to incremental growth allows educators to see progress even when students are not yet meeting grade-level standards. Some educators may find value in using MAP in a more limited capacity to monitor growth trajectories for students receiving interventions and ensure that instructional responses are effectively impacting learning, especially in grades K-2.

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