



IDEAL LEARNING IN COLORADO: ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

What is Ideal Learning?

Ideal Learning (IL), or whole child education programs, encourage academic, social, and emotional growth for children. These pre-kindergarten through third grade models (i.e., Montessori, Tools of the Mind) honor each child's unique interests and promote the internal drive to learn. There are many successful private and charter IL programs, but bringing these programs to Colorado's public schools has been challenging. One key reason is the lack of alignment between IL practices and the state's assessment and accountability system.

State & Federal Assessment Laws

The 2000's brought a movement to set clear academic expectations and to ensure students were ready for 21st century jobs. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 increased the federal government's role in assessment and accountability. The NCLB created stricter student assessment requirements and set state standards for progress.

In Colorado, students are tested in reading, writing, and math in grades three and eight; and in science in grades five, eight, and eleven. School and teacher evaluations are based on student results. Some schools and districts also evaluate factors like student engagement, but there is no standardized reporting process.



A POLICY TIMELINE

2008

The Colorado Growth Model

Measures students' yearly progress on state standards
Compares student growth at the school and district level
Compares the results between groups of students at the state, district, and school level

2009

Education Accountability System (SB09-163)

Set up a new accreditation process, aligned with the Colorado Growth Model
Awards high-performing schools and schools with large improvement

2012

Statutory Changes to K-12 Education (HB12-1240)

Required new assessments in line with state standards
Adopted Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers standards for core areas
Funded the development of assessments in other content areas

2015

Changes to Assessment in Public Schools (HB15-1323)

Limited English and math testing in grades 3-9 to once per year
Let parents opt-out of testing
Gave school districts more choice around early reading and school readiness testing

2018

Public Education Accountability System (HB18-1355)

Changed school accreditation measures and categories
Changed the way the state measures and addresses low-performing schools
Changed how schools turn-around plans are supported

2019

Local Accountability Systems (SB19-204)

Created grants to support pilots of new approaches to local accountability
Set up a process for evaluating the pilots

OPPORTUNITIES

There are no specific barriers for Ideal Learning in state assessment and accountability policy. One challenge to scaling IL programs is the state's narrow testing focus on content knowledge, rather than skills. To scale, teaching in some subject areas may need to be tailored to required assessments. There is growing interest in evaluating **essential skills**.

- Proponents of Ideal Learning can support updating assessment tools that align with IL approaches and are focused on what children know and are able to do.
- The link between IL models and the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDGs) should be emphasized. The ELDGs include important whole child skills like social-emotional development.
- Districts using IL models may want to participate in Local Accountability Systems (SB19-204) pilots to explore broader definitions of student progress. (Note: Funding for these pilots has been paused due to budget constraints, but pilot work is proceeding.)

