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MetaMetrics®

Delivering Assessments in the Age of COVID-19

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT REMOTE PROCTORING

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the educational landscape in the United States and around the world was abruptly altered. With little or no notice, brick-and-mortar schools were shuttered, and schools immediately switched to remote learning out of an abundance of caution during the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Education leaders grappled with the logistical challenges of this unanticipated change, ranging from ensuring that students had access to devices and connectivity to issues of food insecurity and potential learning loss. As it became obvious that this change in the learning environment was going to need to be sustained for longer than a few short weeks, educators and education companies were faced with figuring out how to measure student learning remotely in a secure and effective way.

As an education company with more than 35 years of experience creating measures that link assessment to instruction, **MetaMetrics**® had a deep interest in learning more about how the education industry – both in the United States and around the world – was dealing with the challenges of remote test administration and proctoring. The challenges of proctoring student assessment remotely secured headlines this past year, particularly for higher education, where issues such as student privacy and increasing test anxiety were among the hot topics. Others were concerned online proctoring services only motivated college students to try to game the system – causing exactly what they were trying to prevent: cheating. Many at K-12 education companies told us that, (like much of the education community) ensuring their assessments would work in a remote learning environment felt like "building the plane while flying it."

To learn more, particularly about the use of remote proctoring with K-12 students, we talked with representatives from companies in the United States and internationally as well as leaders in the assessment community.

The need to pivot classroom assessments quickly

Last spring's switch to remote learning happened out of the blue and edtech companies had to respond just as swiftly to ensure the schools, teachers and students they support had access to learning assessments that worked well in a remote environment. For example, edtech company, **Istation**, innovated quickly to make at-home progress monitoring available in March 2020 to help schools and teachers continue to deliver instruction to students and track their progress. Even more importantly, they created tools to help districts communicate with parents about the assessment.

Curriculum Associates Vice President of Assessment and Research Kristen Huff told us, "Our first instinct last March was to recommend no testing in the spring. We quickly had to pivot as it became clear that we were looking at a longer disruption to schools. Districts needed insight into their students' learning last spring and beyond and our goal was to help them make the most of the spring assessment no matter where it was taking place."

Nonprofit assessment organization, **NWEA**, also saw the need to quickly pivot. Adam Wolfgang, NWEA product manager, said, "We realized spring testing was at risk and the needs in the fall were going to be pretty significant for districts. They were quickly entering into the world of distance learning – we didn't know what we would see from schools in the spring."

Luckily, the organization had experience to build on. Wolfgang said, "We've worked with virtual schools for a number of years. We talked to them and found out about their best practices; what do you need for remote testing? We took that information and developed a cross collaborative internal team to address this need. Our goal was to encourage schools to keep their test administration practices as similar as possible to when they are in their school buildings."

Edmentum was quick to change course as well. Michelle Barrett, Ph.D., vice president of research and learning engineering said, "We decided very early to allow our Exact Path diagnostic assessment to be administered outside of school. We did this because we believed that getting information to teachers was critical for students in fall 2020. The diagnostic places students in a learning path, so inconsistencies between their assessment result and ability to work in the learning path create a fast feedback loop with a teacher to remedy the situation."

To help ensure the fidelity of the test, Edmentum provided parents and caregiver proctors with administration guidelines as well as asked students whether they were taking their assessment at school or elsewhere.

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>
> **Curriculum Associates**

Lesson #1: Districts and assessment companies developed creative approaches to remote proctoring

NWEA's MAP assessments have a built-in function for in-classroom proctoring that provides a foundation for remote administration. Wolfgang continued, "Our system is designed to drive student engagement. Students' log in through a proctor session where the teacher facilitates a student's test experience. We monitor student test behavior to identify when they are rapid guessing and not as engaged as they might be. With remote testing, our goal was to keep that culture of engagement encouraged by teachers in a remote setting – Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft – whatever is used to create a classroom environment."

Wolfgang said they saw a variety of creative approaches from districts. "Some schools attempted to run remote test sessions with thousands of students. In some cases, it worked; in a lot it did not. One district did drive-thru testing. Parents drove to the school parking lot, the student got a device, took the test and then they could go. This works for a 15–20-minute test. Other districts had equipped the vehicles delivering lunches to students with Wi-Fi so that students could test when they got their lunch."

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> *Product Manager*
>
> SANTILLANA

Nicolás Dantaz, product manager at **Santillana** Global Languages in Latin America, told us that teachers there have innovated when it comes to proctoring classroom assessments. He said, "The remote teaching situation is making some teachers more creative. There was one who used a service called Remote Viewer to directly observe the computer of each student. This way, you can see what students are doing and looking at and verify that they are not cheating by looking up answers online."

> We worked quickly to provide our districts with the right messaging for their families to ensure that we could collect valid and reliable data and to provide parents with access to the information and tools to make that happen."
>
> – Julie Kalinowski, *Special Projects Lead*

Istation

Lesson #2: Communicating with parents is key

Julie Kalinowski who heads up Istation's professional development said, "We recognized from the start that parents were going to be an integral part of the success of our tests in a remote environment. We worked quickly to provide our districts with the right messaging for their families to ensure that we could collect valid and reliable data and to provide parents with access to the information and tools to make that happen."

She continued, "We created a webinar for parents, both in English and Spanish, to help them understand why it was so important that they didn't help their students, emphasizing that our assessment was not a pass-or-fail test, but rather designed to give educators the tools they need to reach students at their appropriate levels."

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>
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> ***VP, Research and Learning Engineering***
>
> edmentum

Curriculum Associates also developed a wealth of resources for administering tests remotely. Huff said, "One of the pivots was that we had to communicate directly with parents and that was different for us. We give our support directly to districts, but we had a line for people to call and for the first time we were getting calls from people in the home rather than people in the school."

She continued, "There was nothing unicorn about our advice. We told parents to be sure that the students are prepared to take an assessment and that they are doing the work independently. Let's face it, a parent wouldn't help a child take an eye exam."

Victoria Locke, Ph.D., Istation's vice president of research and assessment, concurred, "We've been getting more calls from parents. They want the assessments explained and are curious about test items. It is great to hear from parents who are actively involved in their children's learning and to support them and help them understand the assessments."

When it came to parents helping students, Edmentum's experience was similar to the other edtech companies. Barrett explained, "Based on trends in our own Exact Path data and in findings we've seen presented by other providers of similar adaptive assessments, we suspect that in the lower grades (K-1), parents may be supporting students more than is recommended yet with very good intentions."

She continued, "Our diagnostic is adaptive so when this happens, the students quickly find themselves with content they clearly haven't had the opportunity to learn. This is one of the reasons we recommend that parents allow learners a degree of productive struggle on the assessment and not be too quick to help. In some cases, we have advised a new test event when parents have reached out to teachers with concern about the level of the assessment."

Lesson #3: Insights into remote testing environments are important to ensuring equity

Issues of equity when delivering assessments remotely was a concern across the board. Amanda Centorbi, customer success web content manager at Istation, said, "We worried about kids without devices and connectivity. Some kids might not have a quiet environment, they live in a one- or two-bedroom apartment with multiple siblings who are also learning from home so that might skew their test results. If they are in school, they are in a lab taking the test with teachers observing."

Concerns about equity arose for NWEA as well. Megan Kuhfeld, Ph.D., senior research scientist there, shared, "We saw some differences by student race/ethnicity. If you're in an environment where you don't have a quiet place to test, that could have an impact on measuring what students know. If you're doing testing with two other kids right there at the kitchen table, you're probably not as engaged as if you are in your room with the door shut. Home environment factors unequally."

Our international partners reported equity concerns as well. They said many families don't have the hardware/software at home that meets the minimum requirements for home testing. Others didn't have the internet bandwidth and the testing companies had to recommend that others in the household didn't use the internet while the student was taking the test.

Interestingly, the companies didn't see the difference in scores when the tests were administered remotely that they might have expected. Istation's Locke said, "The effect sizes were not what one would anticipate. The biggest difference in data was kindergarten and first grade. There is a possibility that younger students were getting more help from parents or siblings than older students. There are too many variables to contribute to one thing."

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> ***Customer Success Web Content Manager***
> **Istation**

NWEA's Kuhfeld shared similar results, "Young kids were showing improvements that were very unusual and very different between remote and in person because of parental help. We didn't put much weight into the fall K-2 findings."

Huff said that Curriculum Associates also saw grade inflation in K-1 and 2 and some in the middle grades. "Our explanation is that people were innocently helping the smaller children with their tests. Older kids were doing what kids do. Guess what they have at their fingertips, at home: their phone, their browser. We also heard a lot of anecdotes that some kids were more productive and more relaxed at home."

To get more insight into the environment, Curriculum Associates added a simple survey question at the beginning of the assessment: "Are you working in school building today?" The responses allowed them to separate testing in-school data from not in-school data to view score differences compared to historical averages. The data showed out-of-school testers were scoring higher than historical trends, especially in lower grade levels.

Lesson #4: States are not administering end-of-grade tests remotely - yet

While concerns about students getting assistance or just plain cheating when taking remote formative assessments are important, they take on greater significance when it comes to tests for accountability. As the **Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO)** Deputy Executive Director of Programs Scott Norton, Ph.D., reported, a spring 2021 survey they conducted revealed only about eight states were even thinking about remote testing for their state assessments and most of those didn't go remote in 2021.

The technology for remote administration exists, but Norton said that state comfort levels and the ability to get their systems up and running quickly contribute to the reluctance. "My sense is that the higher the stakes associated with the test the more reluctance there is to do that test online. Plus, even if the vendor is ready to put the test online, it's not that easy. The state board of education has to approve the move, districts have to buy in, someone has to write an administration manual and there needs to be a way to include students who need accommodations. This year, states weren't ready for that."

Juan D'Brot, Ph.D., senior associate at the **Center for Assessment**, a nonprofit consulting firm, also sees the shift to remote testing for state assessments making slow progress. "Everyone was assuming that as the school year went on we realized we need to rethink testing. However, making a pivot for large scale assessments to move online within a single year in the best of conditions would be a gargantuan task."

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> **– Scott Norton, Ph.D.**
> ***Deputy Executive Director of Programs***

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>
> – Juan D'Brot, Ph.D., *Senior Associate*

Center for Assessment

D'Brot also said he is seeing high degrees of reticence with states in terms of using remote proctoring. He said, "Many people are afraid that the backlash from parents and communities will minimize all credibility in the assessments and that alone is going to keep states away from remote proctoring."

But the future might be different. Norton shared that one state assessment administrator told him that while his state didn't go remote this year, he doesn't see a future in state testing that doesn't include remote administration. Norton said, "I don't think that 100 percent of the kids are going to go back in the classroom 100 percent. That isn't realistic. This hybrid approach is here to stay and that will impact testing moving forward."

Lesson #5: Testing companies around the world innovated, realized benefits from remote testing

High stakes tests delivered in other countries around the world have also had to consider remote delivery because of the pandemic. A partner in Asia told us that their exams used to be delivered in classrooms and test centers, and are now being delivered globally at home, with proctors monitoring the students remotely.

Initially, they had to make a rapid transition from in-person testing to remote testing using Zoom for monitoring, which had major limitations and was unsuitable for remote proctoring. Then they were able to move to an integrated technology platform solution that combines assessment and proctoring in one. All of this happened in the space of a few months.

They also found that having a proctor monitor all tests remotely in real-time was key to success. Guidelines are that a single proctor can video-monitor about 15 students simultaneously, assuming that the right software is available to allow this.

In fact, some international partners sang the praises of remote testing for high stakes tests. They shared that logistically, it is much easier to handle than in-school testing because facilities and classrooms do not need to be prepared, there is no need for test booklets and other printed materials. Scoring is faster, and students can take the tests from home and proctors can work from any location. As one partner said, "The pandemic has changed the landscape permanently, and remote testing is here to stay. Security and convenience will only increase and get better from here."

Long-term impact of the 2020-2021 pivot to remote assessments

Just like with the switch to remote learning, remote assessment delivery presented challenges for schools, parents, students, states, education companies – some were anticipated, others not. Regardless of geographic location, education leaders were concerned about issues of test integrity and educational equity as well as how to effectively proctor the tests to ensure that students remained engaged and, of course, did not cheat, particularly on high stakes tests. In some cases, schools, education companies and

states developed creative solutions to overcome these dilemmas. In others, they determined the hurdles faced by remote test administration and proctoring may be insurmountable. One thing that we do know, however, is the impact of the 2020-2021 school year on the way we deliver and evaluate learning in the United States and around the world will more than likely result in longer-term systemic change. As Curriculum Associates' Huff said, "Different people have different crystal balls about whether schools will offer a remote option after this is over. Our goal will be to support them in getting the most accurate data possible. Over the past year, we've been working on building that muscle."

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ABOUT METAMETRICS

MetaMetrics is an award-winning education technology organization that offers the only scientifically valid, universal scales for measuring silent and oral reading and listening (Lexile®) and math (Quantile®) with plans to develop measures for writing. The Lexile and Quantile Frameworks measure student ability and the complexity of the content they encounter. Lexile and Quantile measures and related technologies link assessment to instruction and provide next steps for students of all ages and abilities. The measures also provide valuable insights about students' potential for growth. MetaMetrics' measures, products and services are licensed to dozens of education product companies to help achieve that growth. For 35 years, MetaMetrics' work has been increasingly recognized for its research-based approach to improving learning. For more information, visit **metametricsinc.com**.

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Alistair drives innovation in assessments and helps organizations make sense of measurement and test scores. Before joining MetaMetrics in 2017, Alistair was President of Pearson's Knowledge Technologies group, where he managed artificial intelligence scoring services for speaking and writing. He also oversaw development and delivery of standardized assessments for tens of millions of learners. Alistair has worked as a teacher, examiner, director of studies, university lecturer, and test developer, in the US, UK, Japan, and Thailand.

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Before joining MetaMetrics, Luci worked in publishing and testing at both Curriculum Associates and Smarter Balanced. For eight years, Luci led the daily operations of the Idaho State Department of Education as the Chief of Staff. She worked directly with the Legislature, Governor's office, and national education groups, passing more than 100 education policy changes in the state of Idaho. Luci is a women-in-business leader in her home state of Idaho and currently serves as the president of Go Lead Idaho, a non-profit organization.