



At-Home Progress Monitoring During School Closures Due to COVID-19

April 17, 2020

The worldwide coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on schools across the country. Most schools closed during March 2020, with some schools closing in April. School and district administrators are considering whether using Istation at home, especially the progress monitoring tool, is an effective way to monitor student progress and provide online instruction for their students during the school closures. Preliminary analysis of Istation assessments administered at home indicates that most have scores similar to previous months and could be used to inform instruction if students' individual home environment considerations are taken into account. However, we do not recommend they be used for any high-stakes decisions.

Istation provides a formative assessment for reading, math, and Spanish reading, known as the Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP™). They are used for progress monitoring. Istation also provides supplementary curriculum for students. Istation will route a student to a place in the curriculum based on their score on the formative assessment. Istation also provides an at-home curriculum known as Ipractice, which allows students to select activities that are appropriate for their reading or math ability. Schools and districts have the option to select the formative assessment, supplementary curriculum, or both. Istation made progress monitoring at home available shortly after schools closed.

Progress monitoring provides teachers and parents valuable information regarding a student's progress in critical reading and math skills. When used correctly, formative assessment can help teachers provide individualized instruction based on students' needs. Testing at home is different from testing under more controlled conditions at the school, and several considerations need to be taken into account before a decision is made on whether the scores obtained at home can be considered reliable and valid for informing instruction.

Access to Technology

The first consideration is whether students have access to technology at home. Some households will have a limited number of devices with multiple children needing them for school. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may not have access to tablets, computers, or headphones at home, and other students may not have access to the internet. Students who are housing insecure will have extreme difficulty accessing online assessment and curriculum. Students in homes with an internet connection may have one that is unreliable, and there may not be anyone in the home that can help troubleshoot technical difficulties.

Home Instruction

There will also be differences in the amount and type of instruction the student is receiving at home. Students who have access to technology and can have video or phone conferences with their teacher will have an advantage, as will students who have parents in the home that are able to help them with assignments or homework. Other students will not have these advantages and may receive little or no instruction. This may also impact the reliability of the results from the assessments obtained on Istation.

Testing Environment in the Home

Typically, the Istation assessments are administered in the classroom with proctoring by a teacher. The teacher is responsible for ensuring that the classroom is quiet, the students are on task, and the testing conditions are conducive for students to do their best on the assessment. In contrast, testing conditions will vary across households. Some students will not have access to a quiet, distraction-free environment. Other students may be disturbed by pets, siblings, or a chaotic environment. Some students will experience economic hardship due to parent job losses. Still other students may have a conducive environment, but have parents that interfere with the process and want to help the student with the assessment. These factors can have an impact on a student's score.

Reliability of the ISIP Score

Istation conducted analyses on scores conducted at home from April 1-10 and compared them to students' previous months' scores. Across all grades, the reliability of scores was lower in April than in other months, indicating that there was an impact for testing at home, since test scores fluctuated.

As part of the analyses, we looked at how much time each student was spending on Istation. The results from these analyses indicate that while the reliability of the April scores is lower than the preceding months, approximately 90% of the scores fall within an acceptable range of reliability. The reliability is higher for students in upper grades, and it is lower for younger students, especially those in kindergarten. Some students have lower scores, and some have much higher scores than would be expected if the assessment had been administered in the school. Teachers can identify the reliability of the assessment by looking at previous months' data and the student's overall trendline. If the student's April score is unexpectedly high or low, then the score is unreliable and should not be used to make instructional decisions.

Recommendations from Istation

Students who have access to technology, teachers, and parents that can help deliver instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic will have advantages over those that do not, and they will likely have less learning loss than other students when they return to school. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds will likely experience more hardship, and teachers may not always be aware of what is occurring in the home that is preventing students from participating in online instruction. Therefore, Istation is making the following recommendations for the use of progress monitoring and the Istation curriculum.

FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- Note that Istation flags assessments that were administered at home.
- Scores from these assessments can help inform instruction, guide students and parents for at-home learning, and monitor progress.
- Scores from tests administered outside the school should not be used for any high-stakes decisions.

FOR TEACHERS

- Teachers should evaluate the scores based on the previous trendline to determine if the scores are valuable for informing instruction. If the scores appear to be out-of-pattern, teachers should make instructional decisions based on the overall trendline and not the score obtained at home.
- We recommend students be assessed monthly. If a student's scores appear out-of-pattern, an on-demand assessment can be administered.
- Remind parents that the assessment will help place students in the supplementary curriculum. Helping students with the assessment will interfere with the learning process as the students will then receive instruction that is too difficult for them.
- Students should not be penalized if they do not participate in online instruction using Istation since they may not have access to the resources to do so. Students who are participating may have advantages that other students do not have.

FOR PARENTS

General Information

- Istation has provided instructions for accessing the program at home. They are available at www.Istation.com/Home/SchoolClosures.
- Students should have access to a computer or tablet with a reliable internet connection. If the internet goes out during the assessment, the student can complete the assessment, and the data will be uploaded to Istation when they log back in.
- If the student is using headphones or earbuds, make sure they are working properly, and check the volume level.

Progress Monitoring

- The progress monitoring assessment will appear the first time a student logs in to Istation during a calendar month. While it is preferable for a student to finish the assessment in one sitting, if a student has fatigue or is distracted during the assessment, they can log out and finish it later when they have better focus.
- Parents, siblings, and other household members should not assist a student with any of the test questions. Providing assistance with the assessment will yield unreliable results, and if the student is using the curriculum, they will get routed to lessons that are too difficult.
- If a student asks for help with a test question, encourage them to do their best.
- The testing and learning environment should be quiet and free of distractions.
- Provide scratch paper for the math assessment.

Istation Curriculum

- Establish a set location and time of day for students to participate in Istation instruction.
- The student's instructional path automatically appears as soon as the assessment is complete.
- Remind the student that clicking on wrong answers means the lesson will redirect to a reteach piece. To move through the program, students must work to the best of their ability.
- Allow some choice of activities within Istation, Books, Ipractice, Writing, etc.
- Check your child's progress regularly through the Parent Portal or their classroom teacher.

Resources Available for Parents

- Istation has a Parent Portal available with resources including printable lessons, books and passages, and games.
- The portal also provides guidance for Lexile™ levels to help you find books for your child. Most public libraries have books available online.
- Videos are available on Facebook and YouTube to help you with at-home learning. Our Red Cape Classroom series offers brief and insightful information and actionable tips for at-home instruction. Red Cape Classroom is available at www.facebook.com/istationed or www.youtube.com/user/IstationEd.