

Make Assessment Work for All Students:
Multiple Measures Matter



“The findings from this year’s study confirm the need to innovate so that all assessment activities return value to teaching and learning cycles for all kids.”

–MATT CHAPMAN

Letter From the CEO

I am proud to present ***Make Assessment Work for All Students: Multiple Measures Matter***. This is the third installment of the NWEA Assessment Perceptions Study, our ongoing investigation into public perception of K-12 assessment. This study comes at a crucial moment as the nation transitions K-12 assessment policy under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Among the many important provisions, this law shifts from a single measure — grade-level proficiency — under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to multiple measures under ESSA. The findings from this year’s study confirm the importance of this shift and the need to innovate so that all assessment activities return value to teaching and learning cycles for all kids.

Another key finding is the need for clearer communication on the purpose and value of different assessment types. As in our last edition of the study, we especially emphasize the importance of hearing students. They are so often ignored in the decisions that impact their education — and they have much insight to offer. It’s time we listen.

We launched this initiative in 2012 by surveying parents, teachers and administrators. In 2014, we added a first-ever look at what students themselves think, feel and believe about assessment. This year, in partnership with Gallup, we present our most comprehensive survey to date. It includes students, parents, teachers, administrators and — for the first time — principals. The diverse voices bring to light an important theme about equity and assessment. We felt it was significant enough to reference it in the title — ***Make Assessment Work for ALL Students***.

As we rebalance our approach to assessment in this country, it is imperative that we foster a robust dialogue that includes perspectives from all stakeholders — and we hope that the voices represented in this study can provide real and important input.



Matt Chapman
Chief Executive Officer
Northwest Evaluation Association

Executive Summary

Educational assessments are powerful tools that can provide valuable feedback to teachers and students, but they are also at the center of political debates, particularly as the nation transitions to new laws and rules under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Ideally, education policy is informed by the voices of those most impacted by it, but all too often those voices seem to go unheard. ***Make Assessment Work for All Students: Multiple Measures Matter*** provides a timely opportunity to hear from these stakeholders by examining student, parent, teacher, principal and administrator perceptions of assessment. The findings suggest that most parents value classroom tests; teachers value multiple types of assessments; and surprisingly, students are on board with the amount of testing they receive. But there is considerable confusion around state accountability tests, as fewer stakeholders — particularly parents — grasp the intended purpose of these assessments.

Last month, Dr. W. James Popham called for “purposeful educational testing” during his Robert L. Linn Distinguished Address at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, arguing that it is an important time to rethink how we are doing testing in the United States. The findings from this report echo his call to action and highlight the need for increased communication among schools, families, assessment experts and policymakers, where all stakeholders understand the importance of matching the right assessment with the right purpose.

Key Findings

1. EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS VALUE ASSESSMENTS BROADLY, BUT VIEWS VARY BY ASSESSMENT TYPE AND PURPOSE

3/4

OF STUDENTS
and more than

1/2

OF PARENTS

believe that students spend the right amount of time or too little time taking assessments.

MORE THAN

7 in 10



TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS
AND SUPERINTENDENTS

say students spend too much time taking assessments.

PRINCIPALS find many assessment types useful (see page 48 for assessment definitions), underscoring the importance of supporting multiple types of assessments:

- ✓ Results from **formative assessment** that provide immediate feedback to students in the moment: **92%**
- ✓ Results from **classroom tests or quizzes** developed by teachers to evaluate their students' learning process: **86%**
- ✓ Results from **interim assessments** that are given to students two to three times over the year so teachers can see where students are growing and where students still need to learn more: **83%**
- ✓ Results from **state accountability tests** that indicate if students are meeting state or federal standards: **37%**

PARENTS consider **multiple types of assessments**, including interim and formative assessments, **helpful to their children's learning**; however, they are skeptical that state accountability tests improve the quality of teaching.



Large majorities of **TEACHERS** report that assessment data are used for a **variety of instructional and administrative purposes** in their schools.



Key Findings

2. PARENTS NEED MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ASSESSMENTS



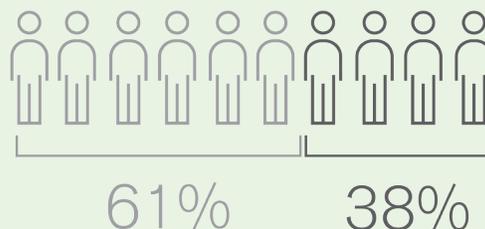
While most **PARENTS** understand that state accountability tests are used to **evaluate school and district performance**, many mistakenly believe that these types of tests are used to **monitor student achievement and to inform instruction**.

MORE THAN

6 in 10

PARENTS

say their child's teachers rarely or never discuss their child's assessment results with them.



Key Findings

3. ADMINISTRATORS ARE STILL GETTING TO KNOW ESSA, BUT SUPERINTENDENTS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ITS IMPACT

The majority of PRINCIPALS and nearly half of SUPERINTENDENTS are not yet familiar with ESSA.

MORE THAN

2/3 

OF SUPERINTENDENTS

say they have developed an assessment plan for their district. And of these, the majority say the number of assessments will not change under ESSA.

Of the rest, more say the number of assessments will decrease rather than increase.



SUPERINTENDENTS are significantly more likely than PRINCIPALS to believe ESSA will have a **positive impact** on their schools,

53%
vs.
32%



The majority of PRINCIPALS

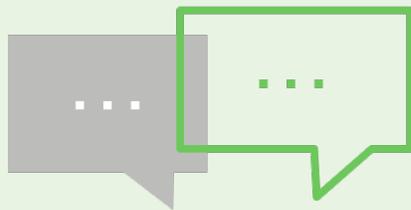
62%

say the impact will be neutral.

Key Findings

4. GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENTS REMAIN

MOST
**TEACHERS,
PRINCIPALS and
SUPERINTENDENTS**
DO NOT BELIEVE
that state and federal
policymakers understand the
purpose of different types of
assessment, **highlighting the
need for dialogue** around
ESSA implementation.



TEACHERS
ARE LARGELY
DOUBTFUL THAT
PARENTS
understand formative or
interim assessment — **the
diagnostic tools and
practices** teachers frequently
use to gauge student
understanding and to adapt
the instruction process.



Key Findings

5. TEACHERS NEED ADDITIONAL TRAINING TO MAXIMIZE THE POWER OF ASSESSMENT DATA TO INFORM INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

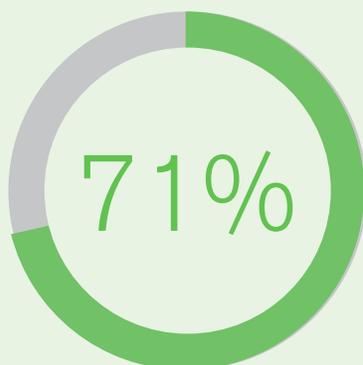
TEACHERS

mostly feel prepared to deal with all aspects of assessment tests and data, but they are more confident about administering these tests than **interpreting them or communicating with parents about the results.**



DATA COACHES

are available in a relatively small proportion of schools and districts, but among principals who have access to data coaches, **71% say they have improved student learning.**



MORE THAN

7 in 10

TEACHERS

say they collaborate on assessment results at least monthly with other teachers, including **45% who do this daily or weekly.**

But a sizable minority

28%

engages in this critical activity **ONLY QUARTERLY OR LESS OFTEN.**

Introduction

Make Assessment Work for All Students: Multiple Measures Matter is NWEA's third look at perceptions of K-12 assessments, and it is the largest and most comprehensive research effort on this topic to date. This report comes at a crucial juncture in K-12 accountability, as school systems across the country consider how best to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the new education law passed in December 2015. ESSA represents a chance for education leaders to consider new approaches to accountability, providing states with the flexibility to develop accountability systems built on more varied inputs than they could under the previous national education law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Under NCLB, the American public's views of testing requirements in U.S. schools grew steadily more negative. In a 2015 PDK/Gallup poll, 64% of Americans and 67% of parents with children in public schools said there was too much emphasis on standardized testing in the country's public schools. One of the most common criticisms of high-stakes accountability tests is that they force schools and teachers to narrow their curricula and "teach to the test," thereby undermining a teacher's ability to individualize instruction according to the needs of each student.

However, high-quality, balanced assessment systems do just the opposite. They provide education stakeholders — from state officials to teachers and principals, to students and parents — with the necessary information to adapt the learning process at various levels to meet the needs of each and every student. In shifting from a single-measure accountability framework (under NCLB, defined as grade-level proficiency) to a multiple-measure approach, ESSA enables schools and districts to change the public dialogue about assessment systems, clarifying how each component — formative and interim evaluations, as well as summative, year-end tests, etc. — contributes to the education value chain.

This study provides a comprehensive look at perceptions of K-12 assessment among the full range of education stakeholders, using surveys of superintendents, principals, teachers, parents and students. For the first time, this research includes the views of K-12 school principals, whose role in shaping and implementing assessment systems is as important as those of teachers and superintendents. Surveying students in grades five through 12 and parents of children in those grades allows us to identify key points of similarity and difference in perceptions of assessments across a range of affected populations. Including the perspectives of students is essential, as student voices are often excluded from public conversations around assessments and assessment policy. The surveys on which this report is based can help inform the dialogue on how K-12 education evolves by shedding light on current perceptions of the role and application of assessment in U.S. schools among those most impacted by policy. In providing perspective on participants in this dialogue, *Make Assessment Work for All Students: Multiple Measures Matter* harnesses data toward their common goal: maximizing academic growth and achievement for all students.

Section 1: Making Sense of Different Assessment Types

For more than a decade, the growing debate over NCLB requirements has preoccupied U.S. education leaders and the general public with questions about the value and purpose of statewide standardized tests. Unfortunately, there has been little consideration of the broader assessment systems within which state-level tests are conducted — systems that also include the numerous evaluative tools that educators use at the school or classroom level to monitor and promote student progress. Rebalancing the mix of professional development, collaboration and resources that districts and schools devote to summative, year-end tests versus interim and formative assessments that provide educators with instructionally useful information is an important consideration as states begin to plan their ESSA implementation.

The new law expands the conversation about K-12 assessment with its call for multiple measures to replace the single-measure approach taken by NCLB. One implication is that, more than ever, education leaders and policymakers need a well-informed view of the different assessment types that take place in the classroom. This will help them understand the options available to address ESSA requirements and have the context required to match the right assessment with each need.

PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF ASSESSMENT POLICY, BUT MANY DO NOT EXPECT ESSA TO AFFECT THEIR SCHOOLS SIGNIFICANTLY.

More than four in 10 principals (41%) and more than half of superintendents (55%) surveyed report being familiar or very familiar with ESSA. Most superintendents (53%) predict that the new statute will have a very positive or positive effect on their districts, and 43% expect a neutral effect. More principals (62%) expect a neutral impact of ESSA on their schools. Only 6% of principals and 4% of superintendents expect a negative impact. These results represent widespread optimism about the future of assessment policy among those who will be on the front lines of implementing it. That optimism may be a promising foundation on which to establish greater consensus — from the statehouse to the classroom — on ideal assessment systems that serve all constituents.

FIGURE 1

How familiar are you with the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), known as a revision to No Child Left Behind, recently passed by Congress?

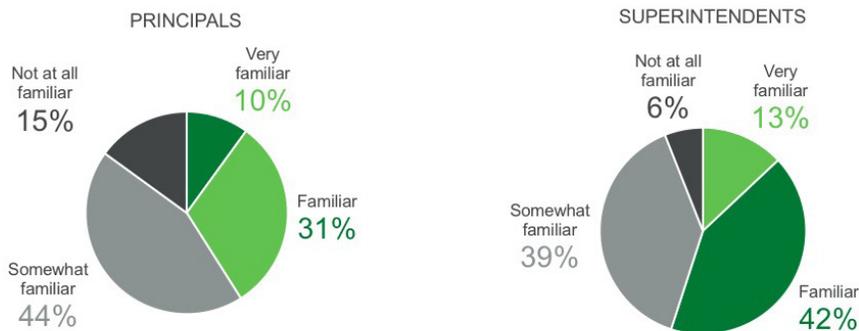
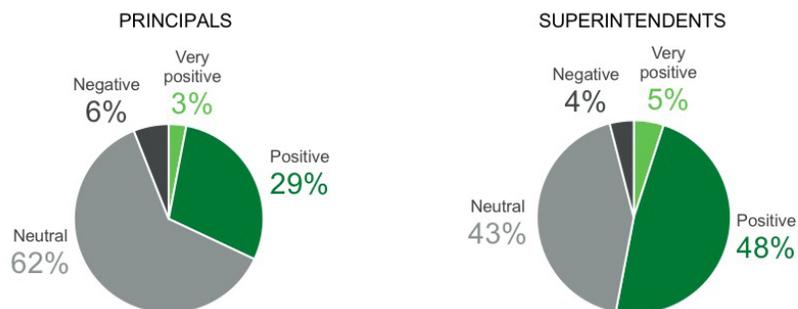


FIGURE 2

Which of the following best describes the impact you think ESSA will have on your school/district?



TEACHERS ARE NOT ANTI-ASSESSMENT; THEY ARE MOST INTERESTED IN MULTIPLE MEASURES.

Most teachers say they use assessment data to:

- 92% adjust instructional strategies
- 87% discuss student progress with parents
- 86% set instructional goals
- 85% plan and differentiate instruction for students
- 83% collaborate with peers and administrators
- 77% set learning goals with students
- 76% collaborate with grade- or subject-level teachers

Though these findings indicate that teachers make frequent use of assessment data in many aspects of their work, most students (59%) say that teachers rarely or never change instruction based on how that student has done on a test or assessment. This may simply reflect teachers' ability to make such adjustments smoothly behind the scenes. However, to the extent that teachers believe that it is beneficial for students to know instructional adjustments are being made, it also may imply that teachers need to communicate better with students about changes they are making and why.

TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS SAY THAT MANY POLICYMAKERS, PARENTS AND STUDENTS DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF SOME ASSESSMENTS.

While teachers and administrators believe that educators understand multiple types of assessments, they feel there is ample room to improve understanding among students, parents and state policymakers. Alarming, just 20% of principals believe that state policymakers — who develop assessment policy — understand the purpose of state accountability tests. In fact, large majorities of principals, superintendents and teachers think policymakers do not understand the purpose of various assessment types, highlighting the mistrust that sometimes exists between policymakers and education professionals over accountability requirements. ESSA offers an opportunity to rebuild that trust by bringing educators and policymakers together in discussions focused on rebalancing the assessment portfolio.

U.S. principals are far more likely to believe that students and parents understand how data from classroom tests and quizzes are being used than to understand the purpose of state accountability tests. This may reflect principals' assumption that students and parents are simply more familiar with classroom assessments, given their frequency, and have direct awareness of the link between these assessments and classroom instruction.

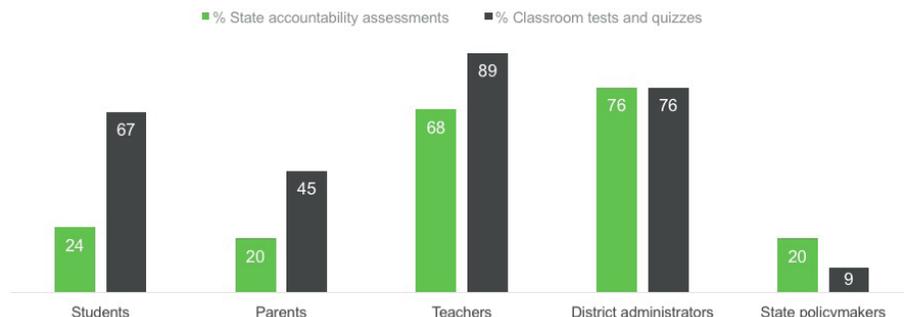
20%

OF PRINCIPALS

believe that state policymakers understand the purpose of the state accountability tests.

FIGURE 3

Principals: Do you believe the purpose of data from [state accountability assessments, classroom tests and quizzes] in your district is well understood by each of the following?

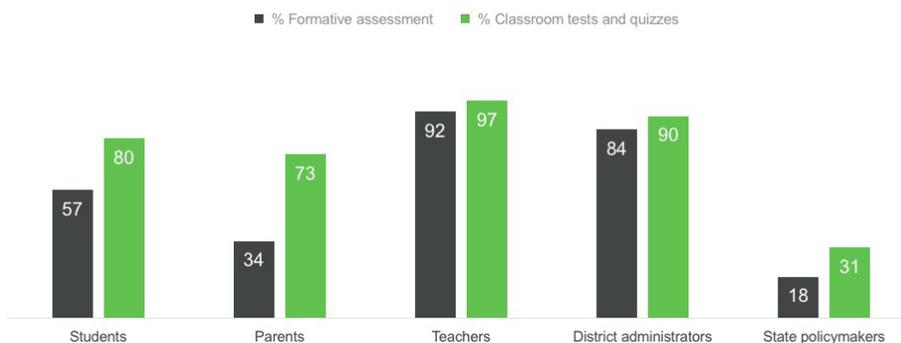


Teachers are even more likely than principals to feel classroom tests and quizzes are well-understood by students (80%) and parents (73%). However, they are less likely to say these groups understand formative assessments — the day-to-day methods teachers use to gauge student understanding and adapt the learning process. Fifty-seven percent of teachers say students understand the purpose of formative assessments, and just 34% say parents understand their purpose. As one parent noted, “I’m not familiar enough with the different strengths of each assessment.”

These findings suggest a need for more targeted conversations with parents about how different types of evaluation work together in a balanced assessment system and how teachers use the results to support their students' progress.

FIGURE 4

Teachers: Do you believe the purpose of data from [state accountability assessments, classroom tests and quizzes] in your school is well understood by each of the following?



HOW DO STAKEHOLDERS PERCEIVE ASSESSMENTS ARE CURRENTLY BEING USED?

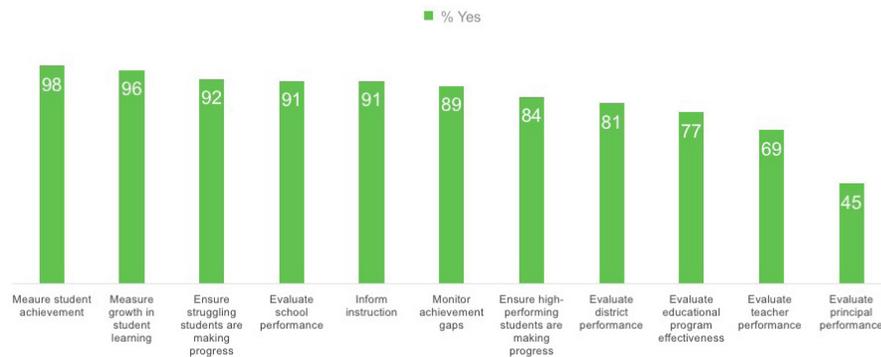
Perceptions of how schools use assessment data ultimately influence public dialogue about the purpose of and need for assessments. The study reveals important points of similarities and differences in teachers', principals', superintendents' and parents' views of how assessments are used.

Teachers were asked to say whether their school is using “assessment data” in 11 different ways, while parents and principals were asked how their — or their child's — school uses data only from state accountability tests.

Large majorities of teachers report that assessment data are used for 10 of the 11 different purposes at their schools, both in the classroom and for evaluative purposes. This ranges from 90% or more saying the results are used directly to measure or improve student learning and to evaluate school performance. The smallest percentages say it is used to evaluate the performance of principals (45%) and teachers (69%).

FIGURE 5

Teachers: To the best of your knowledge, in which of the following ways are assessment data used in your school?



Parents perceive that data from state accountability tests are being used in a variety of ways, as Figure 6 shows. Their most common perception is that state test data are used to evaluate school and district performance. However, most parents also believe that such tests are being used for direct applications in the classroom — such as to inform instruction and identify student learning needs.

FIGURE 6

Parents and Principals: To the best of your knowledge, in which of the following ways does your (or your child's) school currently use data from state accountability tests?

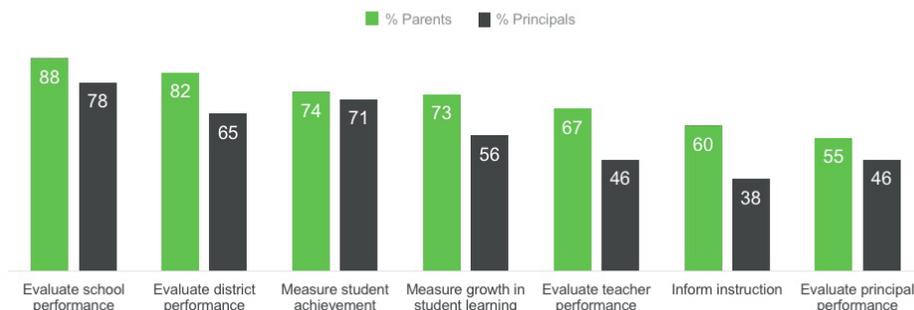


Figure 6 also shows that most principals agree with parents that data from state accountability tests are used to measure student achievement and school and district performance. But far more parents (60%) than principals (38%) believe that state data is used to inform instruction. This illustrates that many parents may be misinformed about the uses of assessment data. ESSA presents an opportunity to break down silos of information that prevent parents and other community members from accessing more detailed information about the effects and applications of assessments in their children’s schools.

HOW SHOULD ASSESSMENTS IDEALLY BE USED?

Teachers were asked to say which of six uses of test data is the most relevant for each of three types of assessments: state accountability tests, formative assessments and classroom tests and quizzes.

Figure 7 shows that the largest segment of teachers (36%) say the most important use of state accountability test data is to determine if students are meeting critical benchmarks. Informing decisions about curriculum and instruction is the second-most common answer, at 22%, while relatively few (10%) say it is to identify students who need more support. Thus, teachers view state tests as tools to contextualize student performance and improve teaching, but not necessarily to directly affect an individual student's learning progress. This lends greater context to the findings, discussed later in this report, showing that educators do not believe that *summative* assessments, like most state tests, improve learning.

On the other hand, 40% of teachers view the central purpose of *formative* assessment as identifying students who need additional support, followed by 21% who say it is to indicate what students are learning. Roughly one-third of teachers (34%) believe the most important use of classroom test and quiz data is to indicate what students are learning, while an additional 30% say it is to determine if students are meeting critical benchmarks.

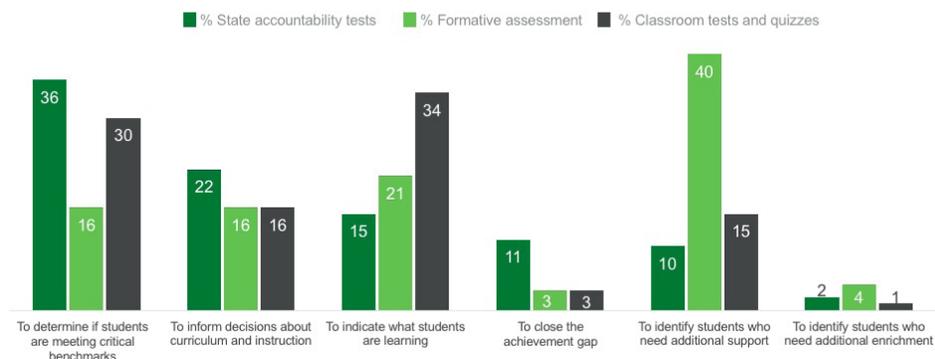
40%

OF TEACHERS

say the most important use of formative assessment is to identify students who need additional support.

FIGURE 7

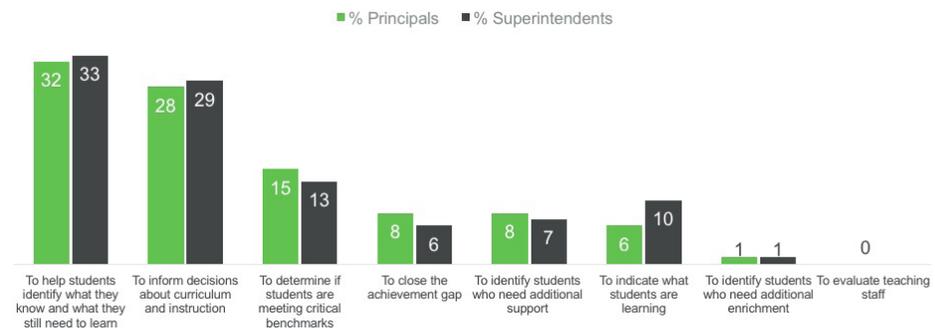
Teachers: In your opinion, which of the following is the most important use of each of the following types of assessment data?



Principals and superintendents were asked to name the most important use of assessment data generally (i.e., not state accountability test data, formative assessments or classroom tests, specifically). About one-third of each say the most important use of assessment data is to help students identify what they know and what they still need to learn. Only 15% of principals and 13% of superintendents believe the most important use of assessment data is to determine if students are meeting critical benchmarks. However, the central purpose of standardized state tests is indeed to determine whether critical benchmarks are being met. Since principals and superintendents do not see that as the central purpose of assessments *overall*, the finding suggests that they see state tests as just one component — and certainly not the most valuable — within a larger assessment system.

FIGURE 8

Principals and Superintendents: In your opinion, which of the following is the most important use of assessment data?



Section 2: How much value do different groups attach to assessments?

MOST STUDENTS THINK THAT THEY SPEND THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF TIME ON ASSESSMENT — WHEREAS AMONG ADULTS, MOST FEEL TOO MUCH TIME IS SPENT ON IT.

Controversy over state accountability tests is likely an important influence on the widespread perception that U.S. students are tested too much. Common criticisms of accountability assessments are that they take time that could be better used to meet the specific needs and interests of students and that they detract from teachers' ability to differentiate instruction.

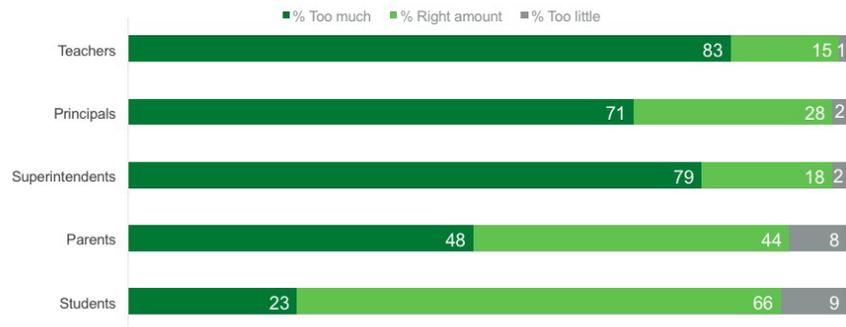
This study identifies an important contrast in views of testing time: Three-quarters of students and more than half of their parents (52%) say students spend the right amount of time or too little time taking assessments. Meanwhile, more than seven in 10 teachers, principals and superintendents say that students spend too much time on assessments. Since education assessments are for and about students,

79%
OF SUPERINTENDENTS
say students spend
too much time
taking assessments.

perhaps this finding will lessen educators' and policymakers' concern about the impact that testing has on students. However, further research into the disconnect between student and adult stakeholders on this question is warranted.

FIGURE 9

Please indicate if you feel students spend too much, just the right amount or too little time taking assessments.



Assessments and Equity

Some parents, teachers, principals and superintendents in low-income and urban districts view assessments quite differently than those in middle- and high-income districts. These differences reflect that assessments have the potential to reveal social cleavages and the promise to unite diverse communities. Assessment policy under ESSA must support the goal of equity for all of our children in all U.S. schools.

Civil rights advocates use data from state accountability tests to advocate for equity in schools and for fair treatment of students of color, students with disabilities, English learners and low-income students. Last spring, 12 of the most influential national civil and human rights groups expressed their support of standardized testing.

Our commitment to fair, unbiased, and accurate data collection and reporting resonates greatest in our work to improve education. The educational outcomes for the children we represent are unacceptable by almost every measurement. And we rely on the consistent, accurate, and reliable data provided by annual statewide assessments to advocate for better lives and outcomes for our children. These data are critical for understanding whether and where there is equal opportunity. ... At the heart of that debate is whether or not we will have the courage to make the necessary investments in each and every child, no matter their race, ethnicity, class, disability status, or first language. But we cannot fix what we cannot measure.¹

¹<http://www.civilrights.org/press/2015/anti-testing-efforts.html>

The view that accountability testing advances equity by forcing schools to grapple with achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status helps explain why lower-income parents are more likely than higher-income parents to agree or strongly agree that state tests improve learning. One-third of parents (33%) with a household income under \$60,000 agree or strongly agree that state tests improve learning, compared with 16% of parents with an income of \$60,000-\$89,999; 17% of parents with an income of \$90,000-\$119,999; 21% of parents with an income of \$120,000-\$179,999; and 15% of parents with an income above \$180,000.

On the other hand, educators working in low-income districts are more likely to express concerns about too much testing than those in middle- and high-income districts, indicating that the connection between assessments and promoting equity is not always clear.

- Principals in low-income schools (77%) are more likely than those in middle- and high-income schools (65%) to say students spend too much time taking assessments.
- Teachers (80%) and principals (68%) in low-income schools are more likely than teachers (71%) and principals (58%) in middle- and high-income schools to say teachers spend too much time preparing for assessments.

ESSA's requirement that states assess school performance using more than just state test scores — including factors such as access to advanced coursework, measures of school climate and measures of school engagement — will, if implemented properly, direct greater resources to schools serving low-income students and students of color.

U.S. Secretary of Education John King cautions that the details of ESSA implementation are crucial to the new law's role in advancing opportunities for underserved students:

“The use of these new indicators of school success has tremendous potential to advance equity, but that will require the vigilance of parents, of educators and of the civil rights community as each state creates its system of accountability. Otherwise, these new indicators could serve to mask some of the equity and achievement gaps we are working so hard to close.”

For assessments to be powerful tools for publicizing and combating inequality, as well as meeting educators' data needs, more resources must be steered toward data coaching and assessment tools that fit the needs of educators, while also promoting equity. Our data show that these important types of resources are more likely to exist in low-income schools, compared with middle- and high-income schools.

- Principals in low-income schools (37%) are more likely than those in middle- and high-income schools (24%) to say they have a data coach.
- Principals in low-income schools (75%) are more likely than those in middle- and high-income schools (62%) to have developed an assessment plan.
- Teachers in low-income schools are more likely than those in middle- and high-income schools to say they are very prepared to interpret assessment results (43% vs. 31%), modify teaching based on assessment results (49% vs. 33%) and use results to collaborate with peers (48% vs. 33%).

TEACHERS GIVE MIXED RATINGS TO ASSESSMENTS CURRENTLY IN USE.

A balanced assessment system contains multiple assessment types with distinct purposes. Some assessments primarily assist teachers in evaluating student performance and modifying instruction to meet student needs. Others gather data primarily to evaluate school and district performance. The surveys conducted for this study indicate that teachers, principals, superintendents and parents evaluate assessment types differently.

6 in 10

TEACHERS

rate the state accountability tests currently used in their school as fair or poor.

Six in 10 teachers nationwide rate the state accountability tests used in their schools as fair (34%) or poor (26%). In contrast, most teachers give positive marks to classroom tests and quizzes developed by teachers to evaluate their students' learning processes and to formative assessment designed to provide immediate feedback to students. These findings suggest that assessment types that are related to instructional decisions are rated more favorably by teachers.

FIGURE 10

Teachers: Overall, would you rate the following types of assessments used in your school as excellent, good, fair or poor?



The low rating of state assessments by teachers may, in part, reflect their feeling that accountability tests do not inform instruction for themselves or their students. In explaining his view of assessments, one public school teacher focuses on timeliness and the transparency of the results:

“Collecting data about students is not new for teachers. Teachers want to use data to support and inform instruction, and technology can help serve a practical purpose in improving the efficiency of this process. Data gathering can and should be in real time, present a holistic view of the student and be viewable by all stakeholders, including parents and, particularly, the students themselves.”

This view reflects a common but limited understanding of the purpose of different assessment types. For example, state-level tests — which provide a *summative*, macro-level picture of the extent to which various student groups in the state are reaching grade-level proficiency — typically are not designed to inform instruction or provide diagnostic information about individual students. The current study highlights the detachment with which education stakeholders — particularly teachers — view accountability tests. It also suggests that those perceptions may be improved through creative, technology-based efforts to provide instructionally useful information in meeting ESSA's accountability requirements.

PARENTS AND STUDENTS VALUE ASSESSMENTS THAT SUPPORT LEARNING.

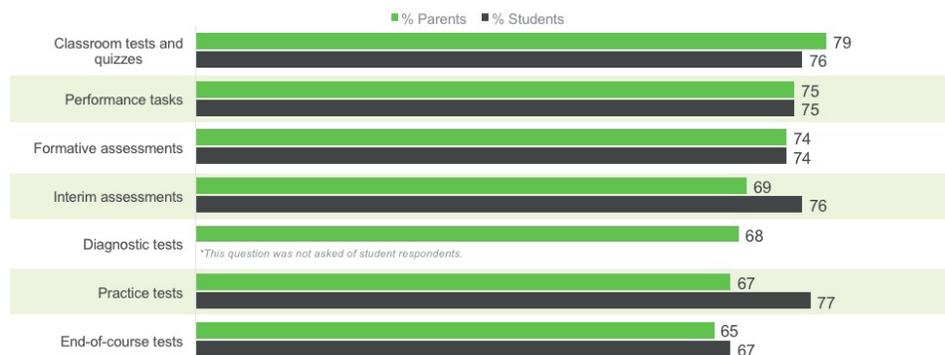
Although parental opposition to testing often makes news, this study shows that most parents consider multiple assessment types helpful or very helpful to their child's learning. In Figure 11, large majorities of parents give credit to all types of testing, including classroom tests and quizzes (79%), performance tasks that apply learning to real-world situations (75%), formative assessments (74%), interim assessments (69%), diagnostic tests (68%), practice tests (67%) and end-of-course tests (65%).

Like their parents, Figure 11 shows that students say that a variety of assessments help them learn. Only 41% of students say state accountability tests are helpful or very helpful to their teachers in helping them learn. But roughly three out of four students say classroom tests and quizzes (76%) and formative assessments (74%) are helpful.

- 77% Practice tests
- 76% Interim assessments
- 76% Classroom tests and quizzes
- 75% Performance tasks that require students to apply what they have learned to a real-word problem or situation
- 74% Formative assessments
- 67% End-of-course tests

FIGURE 11

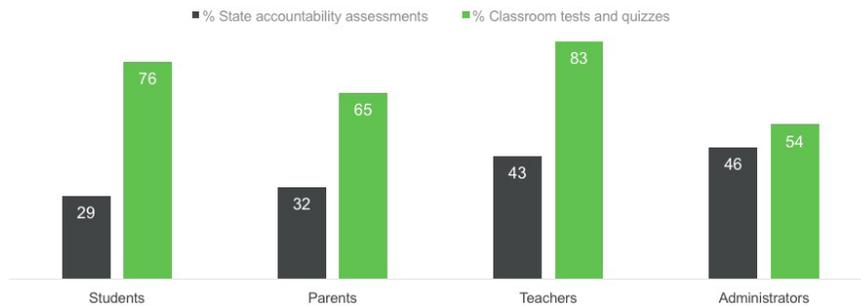
Students and Parents: How helpful are each of the following in helping [you, your child] learn? [percentage who say helpful or very helpful]



Separately, strong majorities of parents say that classroom test and quiz results are helpful to themselves (65%), their children (76%) and their children’s teachers (83%). Figure 12 shows that only 46% of parents consider state accountability test results to be useful to the people for whom they are designed — school administrators. And the percentages thinking the tests are valuable for other groups — teachers, parents and students — decline from there. These findings highlight the need to educate parents about the purpose of state tests to build broader public support for the testing system.

FIGURE 12

Parents: How useful are results from [state accountability assessments, classroom tests and quizzes] for each of the following groups of people? [percentage who say useful or very useful]



“Taking the tests helps me better understand the topic.”

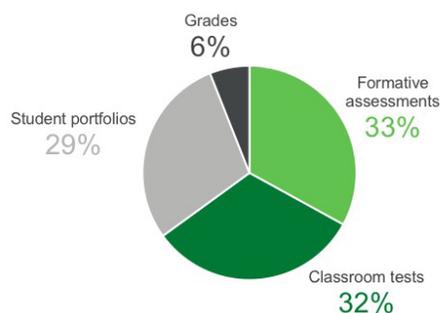
—STUDENT

TEACHERS ARE DIVIDED OVER FAVORED METHODS TO MEASURE STUDENT LEARNING.

Teachers are divided on which type of classroom assessment they rely on most to measure student learning. Close to one-third choose each of three types: formative assessments (33%), classroom tests or quizzes (32%) and student portfolios (29%). A small minority (6%) choose grades. These findings suggest that teachers are open to the use of different assessment types to measure student learning. In contrast to some portrayals, the survey suggests that teachers are not “anti-assessment.” They rely on a range of options for measuring student learning to inform their day-to-day instruction.

FIGURE 13

Teachers: If you were provided only these options to measure student learning, which would you MOST rely upon to measure this?



PRINCIPALS CONSIDER FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT THE MOST USEFUL TYPE OF ASSESSMENT.

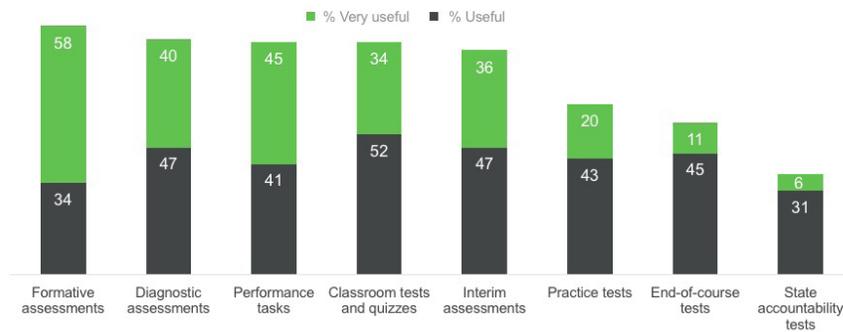
When principals are asked about the specific types of assessment they consider useful for all other stakeholders — students, parents, teachers and administrators — they are most likely to cite the following as useful or very useful:

- 92% formative assessments
- 87% diagnostic assessments that help teachers understand students' academic strengths and where they need support
- 86% performance tasks that require students to apply things they have learned to a real-world problem or situation
- 86% classroom tests and quizzes developed by teachers to evaluate their students' learning progress
- 83% interim assessments that are given to students two to three times over the year so teachers can see where students are growing and where they need to learn more

Principals are less likely to value summative, end-of-course tests at the school level (56% rating them useful or very useful), instead highlighting the crucial role of interim and formative assessments in guiding the education process. Just 37% of principals and 31% of superintendents consider state accountability tests useful for students, parents, teachers and administrators. This is not surprising given the different role those tests play in the overall assessment system.

FIGURE 14

Principals: In your opinion, how useful are the following types of assessment results to parents, teachers, students and administrators?



Section 3:

How can educators, parents and students embrace new insights from multiple measures?

Ideally, assessment systems work in ways that make classrooms, schools and school districts function more efficiently and effectively, engaging teachers and students more fully with curricula and with one another. The current study offers compelling evidence that, as states and school districts grapple with the changes required by ESSA, one area of focus should be the development of more scheduled, meaningful communication among teachers, administrators, parents and students regarding the use of different assessment types in the classroom.

WHAT IS AND IS NOT BEING COMMUNICATED TO VARIOUS AUDIENCES?

The study suggests there is considerable room for improvement in communication among principals, teachers, parents and students about assessments. More than six in 10 parents say their child's teachers rarely (39%) or

More than six in 10 parents say their child's teachers

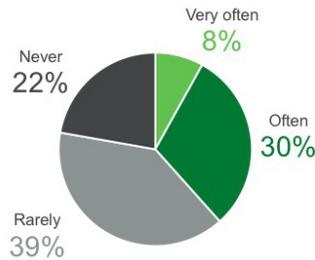
RARELY **OR NEVER**
39% **22%**

discuss assessment results with them.

never (22%) discuss assessment results with them. Parents whose children attend large schools and schools in suburban areas are more likely than those with children at small- or medium-sized schools, or urban schools, to say that teachers never discuss results with them. These findings reinforce the notion that teachers, depending on their school's population and environment, face different challenges in engaging parents around their child's assessment results.

FIGURE 15

Parents: How often do your child's teachers discuss your child's assessment results with you either in person, by phone or via a personalized email?



COMMUNICATION ABOUT ASSESSMENTS AMONG EDUCATORS IS HAPPENING, BUT NOT ENOUGH.

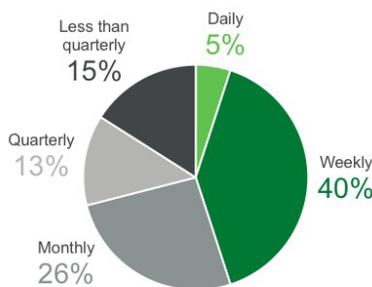
Communication among educators regarding assessment results is also important for balanced assessment systems to be effective. One teacher stated, "As colleagues, we [teachers] need to collaborate more together, and assessments can drive that."

As noted in NWEA's 2014 assessment perceptions study, *Make Assessment Matter*,

"Educators who collaborate on assessment results are more confident in their ability to interpret and use these results to support teaching and learning." Although it is not clear what the optimal frequency is, 45% of teachers say they meet weekly (40%) or even daily (5%) with peers, while another 26% meet monthly. Thus, the vast majority of teachers meet fairly often with other teachers and administrators about assessment results. However, for 28% of teachers, such meetings are relatively infrequent. As shown in Figure 16, 13% only meet quarterly, and 15% meet less often than that.

FIGURE 16

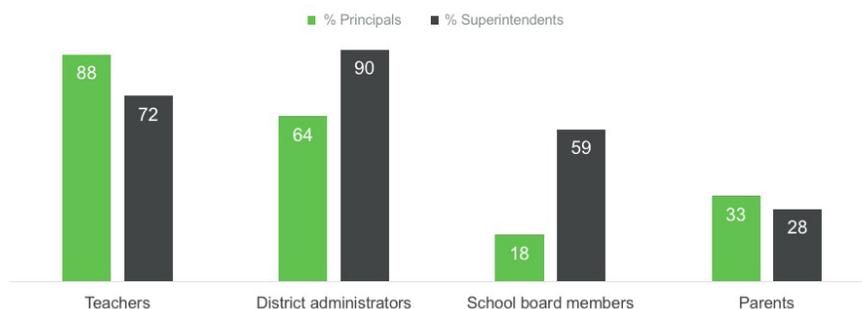
Teachers: About how often do you meet with other teachers and administrators about results from various types of assessments including results from formative assessment, classroom tests and quizzes and state accountability tests?



Most principals say they meet often or very often with teachers and other administrators about assessment results, though fewer (33%) communicate directly with parents that frequently. Demonstrating different communication patterns at different levels within the education system, superintendents are more likely than principals to say they meet often with administrators and school board members about assessments, while principals are somewhat more likely to say they meet often with teachers.

FIGURE 17

Principals and Superintendents: How often do you meet with each of the following groups about assessment results? [percentage who say often or very often]



Almost all principals (96%) say their meetings with teachers about assessment results are helpful or very helpful, while two-thirds (68%) say the same about similar meetings with administrators. Principals are somewhat less likely to say meeting with parents about assessment results is helpful (55%), and just 24% say this is true of assessment meetings with school board members.

District superintendents almost uniformly say they regularly (often or very often) request input from teachers (93%) and administrators (96%) when making assessment decisions in their districts, but far fewer regularly request such input from school board members (27%), students (22%) or parents (19%).

More communication will go a long way toward creating a shared understanding among students, parents and educators about the appropriate role of assessment in supporting student learning.

One district superintendent in Maine describes the rationale for increasing dialogue about assessments:

“Educators need to have more conversations about testing with students and parents. Having regular, informative conversations should help to reduce anxiety and provide clarifying answers. We need to explain to students and parents that the purpose of testing is not to define who students are, but rather to provide valuable information regarding what the student has learned and has yet to learn.”²

Opting Out

Concern about state accountability tests has given rise to a public conversation around “opting out” of assessments. Some parents in particular school districts are now seizing the option to exempt their children from certain assessments being held in their schools, raising questions about whether and when this practice should be allowed, and whether the opt-out movement may have an effect on assessment policy. In this study, however, more than six in 10 parents (61%) say that while they believe parents should have the right to opt their children out of assessments, only 15% say they are planning to opt their own children out.

Despite media attention to this issue, the survey results suggest only a limited number of parents and educators discuss opting out of assessments. More than one-third of principals (36%) and 23% of superintendents say they have never had a conversation with parents about opting out, while half of principals (51%) and 59% of superintendents have rarely had such a conversation. Similarly, the vast majority of teachers have never (59%) or rarely (28%) had a conversation with parents about opting out.

²<http://www.sunjournal.com/news/columns-analysis/2016/03/20/testing-schools-has-positive-side/1890376>

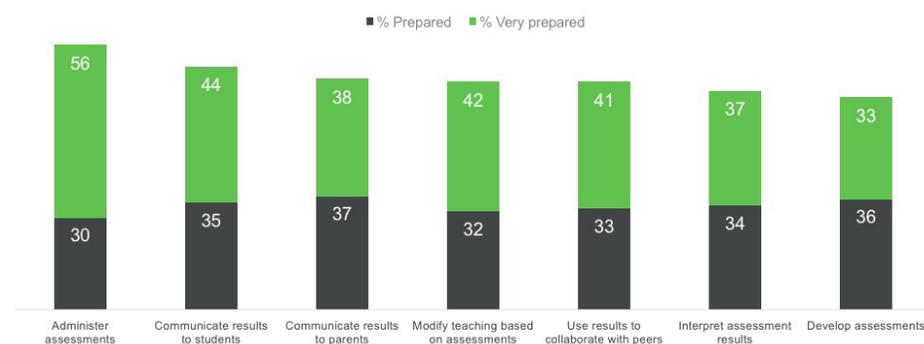
TEACHERS ARE GENERALLY WELL-PREPARED TO ACCOMPLISH ASSESSMENT-RELATED ACTIVITIES.

Student assessments are only valuable to the extent that the results are used to inform the education process and refine instruction. And while test data must be evaluated at many levels, putting remedies into action ultimately comes down to the teacher.

Most teachers feel they are prepared or very prepared to engage in a variety of assessment-related activities, as Figure 18 demonstrates. However, only with regard to *administering* assessments do most teachers (56%) say they feel very prepared. Just 37% say they feel very prepared to interpret assessment results, and 38% feel very prepared to communicate those results to parents. Teachers in low-income schools are more likely than those in middle- and high-income schools to say they are very prepared to interpret assessment results, to modify teaching based on assessment results and to use results to collaborate with peers.

FIGURE 18

Teachers: How prepared do you feel to do each of the following? Would you say you feel very prepared, prepared, somewhat prepared or not at all prepared?



More than nine in 10 principals (91%) believe that most teachers are prepared or very prepared to administer assessments — the highest percentage out of all assessment-related activities. Most principals also believe teachers are prepared or very prepared to interpret assessment results (69%), to use those results to inform student groups (74%) and to inform their own instruction (70%).

Smaller majorities of principals say that teachers are prepared or very prepared to select assessments for specific purposes (60%), develop assessments (58%), create assessment items (58%), provide professional development opportunities to other teachers based on assessment results (53%) or create valid assessments (52%).

Superintendents similarly believe that teachers in their districts are prepared to pursue all assessment-related activities outlined above. The largest share of superintendents (90%) state that teachers are prepared or very prepared to administer assessments, and the smallest share (48%) state that teachers are prepared to create valid assessments. Most principals and superintendents also feel prepared or very prepared to pursue these assessment-related activities themselves.

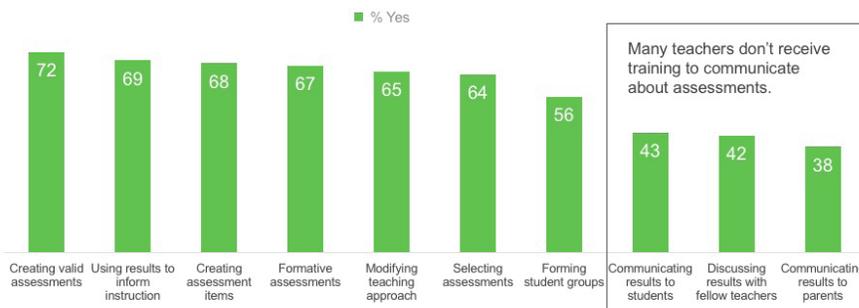
TEACHERS NEED ADEQUATE TRAINING TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY ABOUT ASSESSMENTS.

Only about half of principals and superintendents believe that teachers are prepared to create valid assessments, which demonstrates the need for schools and districts to build their arsenal of validated assessment tools before the implementation of ESSA.

Relating to the findings above, most teachers report that they have received training on how to use assessments, but most say they have not received training on communicating the results of assessments.

FIGURE 19

Teachers: While enrolled in undergraduate, graduate or teacher training programs, did you receive training on each of the following?



Notably, a 2016 study conducted by the Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research found that teachers are relatively unlikely to say they feel prepared to help their students with regard to a specific type of assessment. The study, *Teaching Higher: Educators' Perspectives on Common Core Implementation*, found that only one in three teachers feel quite prepared or extremely prepared to teach their students what they need to know to succeed on assessments aligned with Common Core.

NWEA's study asked educators to speak to their preparedness regarding assessment more broadly, but the differences between this study's findings and the Harvard findings suggest the need for further research and attention.

DATA COACHES IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING.

A data coach is responsible for collaborating with teachers and school administrators to understand, use and develop a variety of assessments that are of high quality and have a clear purpose. Data coaches help ensure that assessments are being used effectively to enhance instruction to improve learning for all students, while using professional development to build the capacity of teachers and administrative staff to sustain student growth.

About one-third of principals (31%) say a data coach is available to teachers in their school; those in low-income schools (37%) are more likely than those in middle- and high-income schools (24%) to say they have a data coach in their school.

Among principals who report the presence of a data coach in their school, 82% say teacher practice has improved as a result, while 71% say this has improved student learning. Principals are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences with a data coach: 51% of principals with data coaches find them very helpful, and 35% say they are helpful.

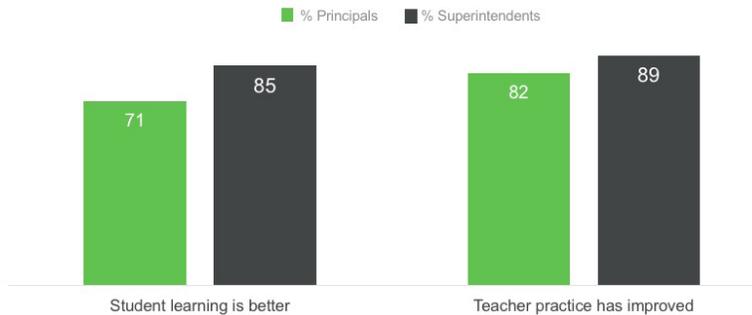
FIGURE 20

Principals: Is there a data coach available to teachers in your school?



FIGURE 21

Principals and Superintendents: Is student learning better because of this data coach?
Has teaching practice improved because of the data coach?



One teacher from a charter school in New Mexico says, “Data coaching allows us to bring all staff together to talk about data specifically within our school’s culture. The coach truly addressed the concerns and needs of our staff, while still moving us down the road to create a data-driven culture at our school.”

Superintendents, 38% of whom report the presence of a data coach in their district, offer even more positive feedback about the effects of data coaching than do principals. Eighty-five percent of superintendents with a data coach say student learning is better because of the data coach, and 89% say teaching practice has improved because of the data coach. Ninety-one percent of superintendents say that data coaches are either helpful (37%) or very helpful (54%) to teachers in their districts.

91%

OF SUPERINTENDENTS

say that data coaches are helpful (37%) or very helpful (54%) to teachers in their districts.

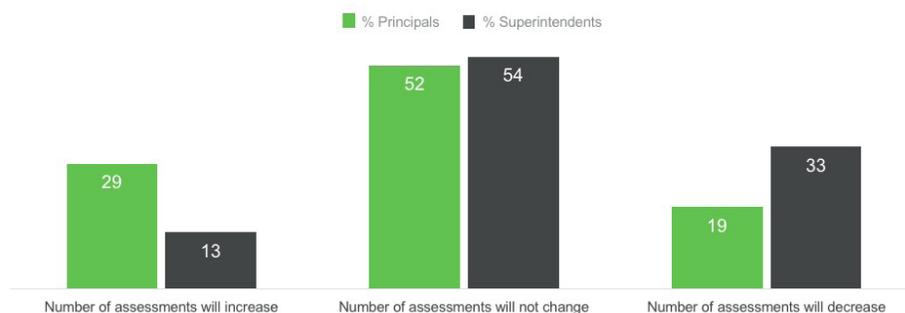
These findings clearly highlight the effectiveness of data coaches. As assessments become more numerous, versatile and tailored to specific districts, schools, classrooms and students under ESSA, data coaches who can personalize the findings for a specific venue will become even more essential.

ASSESSMENT PLANS: MOST ARE KEEPING THE SAME NUMBER OF ASSESSMENTS.

More than two-thirds of principals (69%) have developed an assessment plan for their school. Among this group, 52% say the number of assessments will not change, while 29% say the new plan increases the number of assessments, and 19% say it reduces the number of assessments.

FIGURE 22

Principals and Superintendents: Does the most recently created assessment plan change the number of assessments given in your district this year?



It should be noted that principals often have limited control over the district-level assessment plan for their school. Moreover, superintendents tell a somewhat different story: 54% of superintendents who have developed an assessment plan for their district say their plan will not change the number of assessments; 33% say it will decrease the number of assessments; and 13% say it will increase the number of assessments.

Conclusion

The president and Congress have provided an important new frame and flexibility around assessment in K-12 education within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This new law addresses the importance of everyone being accountable for the learning growth of all students, especially those who struggle the most, and provides an opportunity to rebalance assessment systems. ***Make Assessment Work for All Students: Multiple Measures Matter*** provides valuable insight from key education stakeholders, providing opportunities for discussion and action as we enter this pivotal moment in education policy.

An important finding of this study comes from parents, teachers, principals and superintendents in low-income and urban districts. We learned that their views on assessments differ from those in middle- and high-income districts — more specifically, that assessments are seen as powerful tools to fight inequality but can also be too onerous and disconnected from educators' data needs. It will be important to further examine the successful, data-driven educational practices being used in low-income/Title I schools.

The timing of this study also gives insight into how school administrators and principals are thinking about ESSA in the first few months of the law. Their survey responses indicate that they think the law will impact their schools or districts very little, which suggests that we should not underestimate the need for education and communication to all of these stakeholders. What opportunities might a state, district or school miss if they don't understand their new options under ESSA?

Additionally, the law's flexibility on assessments and data as part of a state accountability system creates tremendous opportunity for innovation. This study highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and communication around assessment literacy so that key decision-makers can identify the right assessment for the intended purpose. They must be able to focus on the value of an assessment, rather than the time required to conduct it. Teachers must be ready to use new data sources to inform their practice.

Finally, this third national study on assessment perceptions has come at a critical moment in K-12 assessment. As school systems rebalance their approach to assessment, it behooves everyone to listen to the various voices represented in this study — the students, parents, principals and district leaders whose lives are impacted the most by education policy. To keep abreast of the views and needs of these key stakeholders, additional assessment perception studies will be carried out in 2017 and 2018.

Recommendations

1. **Let's get ESSA implementation right. Foster open dialogue and provide education about the law now for administrators, principals, teachers, students and parents all across the country.**

Many educators don't yet fully understand what has changed from NCLB, leaving students and parents even more in the dark. As the final rules for ESSA implementation are developed, state and district leaders have the opportunity to reconsider their assessment systems. They can even conduct assessment audits to help ensure they are delivering the right tests for the intended purpose. How might they rebalance their assessment systems? What additional measures could work best for their districts and schools? How might they measure both proficiency and growth? Providing learning opportunities will help ensure that ESSA flexibility is understood and utilized to the best advantage.

Recommendation:

Education thought leaders, national education organizations, teacher unions, state departments of education and assessment publishers, among others, should partner to develop local, regional and national education forums for these important stakeholders. Town halls, webinars and other information-sharing events would be a good start to this ongoing process.

2. Keep student learning at the center of new assessment systems, and keep students and families informed.

Most students do not think they are being tested too much. Rather, they value assessments that are relevant, provide timely and meaningful feedback, and help them achieve their learning goals. More frequent and targeted communication can create a shared understanding among students, parents and educators about the appropriate role of assessment in supporting student learning.

Recommendation:

Consider how new systems might include assessments and data that are more relevant to student careers and college goals, and involve students in school, district and state planning processes. Determine the purpose(s) to be served and then find the best assessment to achieve that goal. Couple these efforts with an ongoing communication plan that engages all stakeholders throughout the year.

3. Dedicate resources for assessment knowledge and data-use training, especially in low-income schools, to promote equity and to improve learning for *all* students.

A high percentage of principals responded favorably about the positive impact on student learning that resulted from the use of data coaches in their schools. This suggests that teachers benefit from guidance in the effective use of data for teaching and learning. Many pre-service institutions are improving their preparation of teachers in the use of assessments and assessment data, but district and school leaders should address this need for their in-service teachers.

Recommendation:

Support districts in understanding the options for appropriate use of federal and state funds for ongoing assessment education for teachers. Help teachers develop best practices for assessment use in their classroom and school, and provide time for teacher training and collaboration to use assessment results effectively.

4. Change the national dialogue about assessment.

All stakeholders in this study value assessment — classroom tests, formative, interim and summative. What is especially important to these stakeholders is how each assessment type directly supports teaching and learning. While there is considerable discussion about assessment generally, this report demonstrates misunderstanding about assessment that can have a negative impact on student learning.

The National Task Force on Assessment Education for Teachers recently developed standards on assessment literacy for each of the key education stakeholder groups, which can be found at www.assessmentliteracy.org. The Task Force believes that all education stakeholders should contribute and be responsible for making the right decisions regarding assessment of student learning.

Recommendation:

Federal, state and district leaders should foster opportunities for regularly scheduled dialogue on assessment among stakeholders. Resources could be allocated for cross-stakeholder partnerships to promote education on assessment literacy. It is crucial that educators and families understand the different assessment types and the purpose that each serves in order to promote school and community support to advance equity and excellence for *all* of our nation's students.

About This Study

Results for the *Make Assessment Work for All Students: Multiple Measures Matter* report are based on surveys conducted with students, parents, teachers, principals and superintendents.

Telephone interviews were conducted for students and parents and teachers currently living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia using the Gallup Panel. The Gallup Panel is a proprietary, probability-based panel of U.S. adults selected using random-digit-dial (RDD) and address-based sampling methods. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel. Student and parent interviews were conducted in English only.

Student telephone interviews were conducted Feb. 10-29, 2016, with a sample of 1,005 students in grades five to 12.

Parent telephone interviews were conducted Feb. 10-29, 2016, with a sample of 1,011 parents with at least one child in grades five to 12.

Telephone interviews were conducted for teachers currently living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia using a combination of two sample sources: the Gallup Panel and the Gallup Daily tracking survey. The Gallup Daily tracking survey sample includes national adults with a minimum quota of 60% cellphone respondents and 40% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Prior to September 2015, a minimum quota of 50% cellphone respondents and 50% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within regions were used. Landline and cellphone numbers are selected using RDD methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household based on which member had the most recent birthday. Eligible Gallup Daily tracking respondents who previously agreed to future contact were contacted to participate in this study. Teacher interviews were conducted in English only.

Teacher telephone interviews were conducted Jan. 4-28, 2016, with a sample of 1,004 teachers. Teachers who teach only art, only foreign language, only music or band, or only physical education or health were not included in this study because those subjects include fewer assessments.

Student and parent samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. Student data are weighted to match national demographics of age, gender, race, ethnicity and region. Parent data are weighted to match national demographics of age, gender, education, race, ethnicity and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on the Current Population Survey 2015.

Teacher samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of age, gender, education, race, ethnicity and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on Gallup Daily tracking information compiled over the last three years.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

- For results based on the total sample of students, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the total sample of parents, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the total sample of teachers, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Web surveys were completed by principals and superintendents contacted using a sample provided by established education sample providers. The sample sources are comprehensive but not representative of all principals and superintendents currently in the U.S. Interviews were conducted in English only.

Principal and superintendent Web surveys were conducted Feb. 1-15, 2016. The sample of principals at the elementary, middle and high school levels was 597, while the sample of school district superintendents was 632.

Superintendent and principal samples are weighted to correct for nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of urbanicity, size of enrollment and census region. Demographic weighting targets are based on information from the sample list.

- For results based on the total sample of principals, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the total sample of superintendents, the margin of sampling error is ± 5.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- Results listed in this report may not add to 100% due to rounding and non-response.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion survey. Differences between telephone respondents and Internet respondents are not perfectly comparable because of the lack of representativeness of Internet samples and potential differences introduced by conducting interviews via phone with a live interviewer versus via Internet.

This year's study relates to NWEA's 2014 study of perceptions of assessments in the following ways:

1. NWEA staff carefully reviewed the research study questions developed in 2014 by Grunwald Associates LLC as part of a consulting agreement with NWEA.
2. NWEA staff compared the licensed Grunwald Associates LLC questions from student, teacher and administrator surveys with the survey questions that were developed in 2015 with Gallup as part of a consulting agreement with NWEA.
3. Results from the comparison for each survey clearly indicated that none of the questions developed by Gallup in partnership with NWEA were identical or included verbatim language to those developed by Grunwald Associates LLC in 2014.
4. As such, we performed no comparisons between 2014 findings and the findings contained in this report.

NWEA would like to thank Grunwald Associates LLC for their contribution to this research. Their work is commercially available, and they can be contacted at <http://grunwald.com>.

ASSESSMENT DEFINITIONS AND PURPOSES

Classroom/Teacher-developed assessments

Assessments created by teachers to evaluate their students' learning progress during instruction. Their purpose is to provide frequent feedback to students. These include quizzes, reflection activities and student self-evaluation.

Formative assessment practice

We're not talking about a "test"; formative assessment practice is a planned process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides in-the-moment feedback for adjusting ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' learning. Its purpose is to help teachers gather evidence of learning, make adjustments to instruction in process and help students identify and internalize their learning goals, reflect on their own understanding and evaluate the quality of their work.

Diagnostic assessments

Assessments used to identify academic strengths and areas of need. Their purpose is to diagnose problems in students' understanding or gaps in skills and to help teachers decide next steps in instruction. These include skill inventories, oral fluency, phonemic awareness tests, etc.

Interim/Growth assessments

Assessments used to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and measure academic growth over time. These assessments may be administered multiple times to measure progress or growth. Their purpose is to help educators or administrators track students' academic trajectory toward long-term goals.

Performance tasks

Authentic, meaningful tasks that require students to synthesize knowledge and skills learned and apply them to a real-world problem or situation. Creating a product and/or performance that demonstrates their level of understanding.

Summative assessments

Culminating assessments that measure and report whether students have learned a prescribed set of content. Their purpose is to give an overall description of students' status and evaluate the effectiveness of the educational environment. Large-scale summative assessment is designed to be brief and uniform, so there is often limited information to inform instruction or diagnose learning issues. These include end-of-year subject or course exams.

Accountability assessments

The purpose of these assessments is to provide summaries of whether or not students are meeting required state or federal standards (such as Common Core standards). This includes end-of-year state or district assessments.

System-level assessments and international benchmark assessments

These assessments are used to understand the learning needs of education systems, providing school-, district-, state- and country-level comparison data. Unlike the other assessment types, these measure at the school level (not the individual student) and are not aligned with any specific set of standards. Only a small representative sample of students take them. Results are used to inform school leaders and policymakers about system-level best practices that they can use to develop strategic improvements.

About Gallup

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For more information, visit www.gallup.com or education.gallup.com.

About NWEA

Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) is a global not-for-profit educational services organization. To better inform instruction and maximize every learner's academic growth, educators currently use NWEA assessments with nearly 8 million students. More than 7,600 partners, including U.S. schools, school districts, education agencies and international schools, trust NWEA to offer pre-kindergarten through grade 12 assessments that accurately measure student growth and mastery. NWEA also provides professional development that fosters educators' ability to accelerate student learning and research that supports assessment validity and data interpretation. Learn more at nwea.org.

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GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.202.715.3045

www.gallup.com