



Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**West Comprehensive Center at WestEd
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Executive Summary

Background and Method

Focus groups were conducted on behalf of the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) to investigate perceptions of the purpose, value, and burden of local and state assessments, and solicit suggestions for implementing a high quality assessment system in Nevada. Six focus groups were conducted with a total of 39 participants in three locations across Nevada. Participants represented a variety of stakeholder groups, including testing/assessment office staff, principals, teachers, students, union representatives, and members of the community.

District Assessment Findings

The most frequently discussed district assessment among all focus groups was the Northwest Evaluation Association™ Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®). Participants noted that MAP® assessments are helpful for tracking individual student progress over time, as well as informing school improvement efforts. Particularly effective aspects of the MAP® assessment system were perceived to be its consistency and the ability to access and manipulate data to extract relevant information.

Benefits of District Assessments. The immediacy of results was the most commonly discussed benefit of district assessments. District assessments are used primarily by teachers to:

- guide professional learning communities and inform instruction;
- communicate with parents about student progress;
- identify struggling students and take steps to remediate;
- assess knowledge;
- monitor progress; and
- benchmark for state tests.

Concerns about District Assessments. The primary concern about district assessments was the potential for data to be misused or misinterpreted.

Suggestions for District Assessment Systems. The only consistent suggestion for district assessments was that they be useful to inform instruction. Disagreement occurred about whether district assessments should be aligned with the state assessment, be independent of the assessment, or inform how to prepare for the state assessment. There was no consensus over the frequency, scheduling, or content of district assessments.

State Assessment Findings

Focus group participants were given a list of individual tests that comprise the state assessment system, and discussions were based on this list. Five state assessments were identified by participants as particularly noteworthy. Benefits and challenges related to the American College Test (ACT), Career and Technical Education (CTE) assessments, and the WIDA English Language

Proficiency Assessment were all noted. In addition, concerns about Smarter Balanced Assessments and High School End of Course (EOC) Exams were raised.

Benefits of Current State Assessment System. Participants noted that general benefits of the state assessment system included the ability to assess student achievement, student growth over time, areas for student remediation; and school performance.

Concerns about the Current State Assessment System. Primary concerns included:

- *Timeliness of results.* State assessments were not considered useful because a number of constituents claimed that they have not seen the results, and this was frustrating;
- *Amount of testing.* The number of tests and time committed to administering them was related to a significant loss of instructional time, and adverse behavioral (e.g., disengagement) and psychological (e.g., stress, test anxiety) effects on students;
- *Logistics.* Challenges related to online administration, necessary equipment, and planning emerged; and
- *Content.* Concerns about the validity, content level, and clarity of assessments were expressed.

Suggestions for the State Assessment System. Suggestions for the state assessment system included:

- provide quick turnaround of results;
- reduce redundancy across tests;
- have shorter administration times for each test;
- communicate clear, practical purposes for assessments;
- increase funding and access to resources to support administration of assessments; and
- solicit teacher input in developing the assessments.

Additional Findings

State and District Assessment Stakeholders. Participants across focus groups were consistent in identifying who should benefit from assessment results. For both state and district assessments, the most frequently identified stakeholder groups were teachers, administrators, students, parents, district staff, legislators, and state education agency staff.

Disparate Beliefs about Assessments. Participants expressed many different beliefs about the use of assessments. Some participants believed that aggregate scores (e.g., average school and district scores) have no validity. Some participants believed that individual scores (e.g., a single student score) hold no validity. Some participants believed that individual scores can be meaningfully compared to state results. These disparate beliefs suggest that there was not a shared vision regarding the purpose of assessments among participants.

