



Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results

FULL REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Background	1
Data Collection Process	1
Sample	2
Analysis	3
District Assessment Findings	3
State Assessment Findings	5
Additional Findings	9
Appendix	A-1

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.

Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Groups

Background

In April, May, and June of 2016, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), under the guidance of the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation and West Comprehensive Center at WestEd, conducted an audit of the Nevada State Assessment System and district-level assessments. The audit was intended to provide information to NDE about current assessments being used within the state and help to determine future direction for statewide assessment. This assessment audit utilized three methods: a local education agency assessment inventory; an online survey for district assessment directors and charter school representatives; and focus groups in three Nevada regions.

This summary presents the results of the focus groups, which asked Nevada's District Test Directors (DTDs), district and building administrators, teachers, union representatives, School Board members, parents, and community members to provide feedback on the perceived benefits and burdens of state and district assessments.

Data Collection Process

To ensure an understanding of state testing, researchers reviewed assessments currently in place. A one-page state assessment summary chart was distributed containing the following information:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) Assessments — Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment and End-of-Program Technical Assessments for students who complete a program course sequence.
- College and Career Readiness Assessment — The American College Test (ACT) given to high school juniors.
- English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) — This test is known as WIDA Access for ELLs and measures fluency in the English language.
- High School End-of-Course Exams (EOC) — Tests taken when students complete high school courses in English/Language Arts I and II, Math I and II, and Integrated Math I and II.
- High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE) — Mathematics, English/Language Arts, and Writing assessments that measure content mastery. These tests will be administered to high school seniors for the last time in 2016. Only fifth year seniors and adults will take these exams after June 2016.
- National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) – Students in grades 4, 8, and 12 are selected randomly to take this nationwide assessment.

- Nevada Alternate Assessment (NAA) – This is the assessment for the 1% students who are unable to take the general education summative assessment due to identified disabilities.
- Science Grades 5 and 8 – This assessment was first administered online in 2016 with field test items aligned to the Nevada Academic Content Standards and Next Generation Science Standards.
- Science Grade 10 – This assessment was administered via paper and pencil in 2016. The 2017 administration will be administered online.
- Smarter Balanced Assessments — These online assessments are aligned to the Nevada Academic Content Standards and are based on the Common Core Standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics for students in grades 3–8. They are criterion-referenced tests.

Participants in focus groups were informed that the purpose of the discussions was to understand the combined impact of state and local assessments and capture a more comprehensive picture of current assessment practices across the state. Focus groups were facilitated in three regions (remote town, mid-sized city, and large city) to inform next steps and potential redesign of Nevada’s assessment plan.

Sample

Six focus groups were conducted with a total of 39 participants. Exhibit 1 shows the distribution of stakeholders across the sample. About a quarter were from testing or assessment offices and a quarter were teachers. The rest were union representatives (teachers), students, community members/parents, and central office staff.

EXHIBIT 1. NEVADA ASSESSMENT SYSTEM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS JULY, 2016

Role	Number	Percent
Testing/Assessment Office	9	23.1
Teacher	9	23.1
Principal/Vice Principal	5	12.8
Students	4	10.3
Union Representatives	4	10.3
Community Members	3	7.7
Other Central Office	2	5.1
Parents	2	5.1
Board Members	1	2.6
TOTAL	39	100.1

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed to identify trends in response to each question, and then larger themes were extracted from these trends.

District Assessment Findings

Focus group members identified 13 different assessments collectively administered by their districts. Exhibit 2 includes a list of name, type, and estimated frequency of administration for each assessment. District assessments were administered across K-12. Assessments are predominantly formative. Participants reported that some districts in Nevada use a common assessment system while other districts do not, in which case assessments vary across schools. The content areas that participants identified for district assessments were varied.

The most commonly 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, and for informing school improvement efforts. Participants identified consistency and the ability to access and manipulate data to extract relevant information as being particularly important aspects of MAP®.

Estimates of the frequency of district assessments varied. As shown in Exhibit 2, frequency of formative assessment varied from twice a year to once every few weeks. Many focus group participants expressed a general sentiment that there was too much testing.

EXHIBIT 2. DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS IDENTIFIED BY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS JULY, 2016

Assessment	Type	Estimated Frequency
Accelerated Reader	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>
Acuity Assessment	Formative	3 times a year
Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)	Formative	3 times a year
Common formative assessment (CFA)	Formative	Every 3 weeks
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS)	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>
Developmental Reading Assessment, 2 nd Edition (DRA)	Formative	Twice a year
Discovery Education Assessment	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>
Evaluate assessments	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>
High school semester finals	Summative	2 times a year
i-Ready Adaptive Diagnostic	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>
Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP)®	Formative	2-3 times a year
Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>
STAR Assessments	Formative	<i>Not estimated</i>

Estimates of the time dedicated to testing varied from several minutes to three hours. Again, many expressed a general sentiment that district assessments took too much time. Overall, the frequency and time dedicated to testing varied between districts and, in some cases, schools.

Benefits of District Assessment Systems. The most commonly discussed benefit of district assessments was the immediacy of results. Participants noted that district assessments were used primarily by teachers, and that the assessments served multiple purposes, including:

- guiding professional learning communities and informing instruction;
- communicating to parents about student progress;
- identifying struggling students;
- assessing knowledge;
- monitoring progress; and
- predicting scores on state tests.

Other benefits of district assessment systems mentioned by focus group participants varied by geographic location.

Benefits of district assessments from participants in the remote town category included:

- examining longitudinal trends;
- focusing more on what was taught (compared to state tests); and
- more accurate results since students reportedly value district assessments more than state assessments.

Benefits of district assessments from participants in the mid-sized city category included:

- examining longitudinal trends;
- comparing school performance; and
- consistency within districts.

Concerns about District Assessment Systems. The primary concern about district assessments was the possibility of data being misused or misinterpreted. Other concerns that were expressed about district assessment systems varied by geographic location. A concern about district assessments from participants in the remote town and mid-sized city category included teachers focusing too heavily on tests. Participants in the large city category were concerned about the scoring of tests (e.g., norming and cut scores) and a lack of alignment with state assessments.

Suggestions for District Assessment Systems. Participants had many different ideas about what an ideal district assessment system would look like. The only consistent suggestion for district assessments was that they be useful to inform instruction. There was widespread disagreement about the relation between state and district assessments: some participants in mid-size city and large city categories suggested that district assessments be aligned to the state assessments. Participants in the remote town category suggested that district assessments

inform state assessments. Some participants in the large city category said they should be independent of the state system. There was no consensus about the frequency, scheduling, or content of district assessments.

Other suggestions for district assessments varied by geographic location. Participants in the remote town category suggested that the district assessment system include:

- results useful to inform instruction;
- clear purpose and vision;
- collective buy-in; and
- exam results that contribute to student grades.

Participants in the mid-sized city category suggested that the district assessment system include:

- formative assessment; and
- ensuring results are useful to inform instruction.

Participants in the large city category suggested that the district assessment system include:

- formative assessment;
- clear purpose and vision;
- collective buy-in;
- alignment to standards and curriculum;
- streamlined or shortened versions; and
- the ability to make comparisons to state and national results.

State Assessment Findings

Focus group participants were given a list of individual tests that comprise the state assessment system. Benefits and challenges of the ACT, CTE, and WIDA were all noted. In addition, concerns about Smarter Balanced and EOCs were raised.

ACT. Participants reported that the ACT was particularly useful for college-bound students to assess their readiness and identify areas where students need improvement. However, participants were also concerned about the lack of usefulness for non-college bound students, and noted that the assessment was a burden on students.

CTE. Participants reported that students received their CTE results quickly, and so could use them to assess their own progress. They thought that having the tests for alternative classes was positive because it provided standards and a benchmark of progress. However, some participants indicated that other benchmarks of mastery, such as industry certifications, would be more useful in the areas CTEs are designed to assess.

WIDA. Participants said that the WIDA test for English language proficiency was helpful for assessing language acquisition, so they could determine services and placement for individual

students. Participants also noted that the results could be used to inform training. However, participants also remarked that the test placed a high emphasis on vocabulary, and was very time-consuming to administer.

Smarter Balanced. Participants noted that Smarter Balanced offered a “snapshot in time,” but they were skeptical about the reliability of the test. Some participants believed the test results could be difficult to understand, that the testing window was too long, and that the directions for administration were not communicated in a timely manner.

EOCs. Participants thought that EOCs represented a duplication of assessments already given by teachers as part of their grading systems. They questioned the alignment of curriculum and teaching with the standards in EOCs. Participants also questioned state plans for re-testing. There also appeared to be some confusion about EOCs: participants reported that students did not always take EOCs immediately after completing the course. Participants also mentioned High School Proficiency Exams (HSPEs), suggesting that they may not be aware of the transition from HSPEs to EOCs.

Benefits of the Current State Assessment System. Benefits of the state assessment system included the ability to assess student achievement and growth over time, identify areas for remediation, and assess school performance.

Other benefits of the state assessment system varied by geographic location. Participants in the mid-size and large city categories indicated that benefits of the state assessment system included:

- promotion of the alignment of curriculum to state standards;
- the ability of staff to use assessments to inform instruction;
- consistency across districts; and
- comparison of individual schools to state and national performance.

Concerns about the Current State Assessment System. The most common concern that participants raised with respect to state assessments was the timeliness of results. In every focus group, participants reported that they have not received test results, and therefore could not use the results for any purpose. Many participants said they have not received results for multiple years for some tests; others noted that even when results are provided, the data come after the school year ends, too late to inform instruction. The lack of results appeared to be a particular area of frustration given the amount of time and energy that went into the testing process. Some participants were under the impression that online administration of the test would lead to more timely results, and so were disappointed that this was not the case. Participants strongly believed that a key feature of an ideal assessment system would be the timely delivery of results.

Participants consistently reported that there were too many state assessments that took too long to administer. Participants in every focus group believed that there were redundancies

within the state assessment system that should be eliminated, resulting in fewer tests. They expressed a desire for shorter administration periods for tests.

Participants identified a number of ways that assessment negatively impacted the educational system. The most common concern was loss of instructional time; estimates of the instructional time lost directly to test administration ranged from four days for one set of students to one month for all tests in a school. Participants also noted that instruction is negatively impacted due to pressures to “teach to the test” and imposes time constraints on instruction. Participants identified ways that state assessments indirectly affected instructional time through accommodations made to school schedules. For example, participants reported that their schools had to alter their schedule in the spring, that computer labs would not be available for regular use, and that some schools instructed students to stay home on days they were not being tested to accommodate test administration. Participants were also concerned about the effects on students, noting that the frequency and duration of the state assessment system led to adverse behavioral outcomes (e.g., disengagement in the classroom, not trying hard on tests, test fatigue, missing classes) and adverse psychological outcomes (e.g., test anxiety, stress, malaise, etc.).

Participants noted a number of logistical concerns about administration of state assessments, including the capacity to administer the test online (e.g., bandwidth issues); equipment (e.g., sufficient number of computers for testing days); scheduling and accommodating restricted testing windows; and preparation for administration. A lack of communication about test administration and lack of support for trouble-shooting from the DOE were also noted by participants in the large city category.

Other concerns about the state assessments included the observation that the content was too advanced, and online administration relied on irrelevant skills, particularly for younger students. Teacher stress related to testing was also mentioned, along with concerns regarding political and media misuse of assessment results.

Other concerns identified by focus group participants about the state assessment system varied by geographic location. Concerns from participants in the remote town category included the following:

- tests do not accurately assess student knowledge;
- state assessments are not sensitive to individuality, including student issues like IEP status, and district issues like region, location, or funding;
- the number of parents who choose to opt-out for their students is increasing;
- inconsistency in what assessments are used at state level from year to year;
- purpose of assessments being unclear;
- lack of financial resources to support assessment;
- inadequacy of state tests to accurately represent what a school is accomplishing;
- negative atmosphere adversely affecting teacher recruitment;
- lack of relevance to instructional practices; and

- students blaming teachers for poor performance because tested material was not covered.

Concerns from participants in the mid-sized city category included observations that:

- teachers do not have enough information to prepare students, but the results are being used for their evaluations;
- inconsistency in what assessments are used at state level from year to year;
- purpose of assessments is unclear; and
- lack of financial resources to support assessment.

Concerns from participants in the large city category included observations that:

- teachers do not have enough information to prepare students, but the results are being used for their evaluations;
- tests do not accurately assess student knowledge;
- state assessments are not sensitive to individuality, including student issues like IEP status, and district issues like region, location, or funding;
- increasing number of parents choosing to opt-out for their students; and
- timing of tests for 9- versus 12-month schools is unfair due to available instructional time before tests.

Suggestions for the State Assessment System. Participants suggested that the state assessment system include:

- quick turnaround of results;
- fewer redundancies across tests;
- briefer administration times for each test;
- communication of a clear, practical purpose for assessments;
- increased funding and access to resources to support administration of assessments; and
- teacher input in developing the assessments.

Other suggestions for the state assessment system varied by geographic location. Participants in the remote town category suggested that the state assessment system include:

- alignment to standards and curriculum;
- alternative assessments, such as portfolios and capstone projects;
- options for test administration that account for disabilities; and
- ability to assess growth.

Participants in the mid-sized city category suggested that the state assessment system include:

- alignment to standards and curriculum;
- alternative assessments, such as portfolios and capstone projects;
- options for test administration that account for disabilities;
- professional development to prepare teachers for the state assessments;
- frequent and clear communication about administration of assessments;

- long-term stability (i.e., tests that are used consistently over time); and
- high quality tests (e.g., developmentally appropriate, valid, reliable, and equitable).

Participants in the large city category suggested that the state assessment system include:

- professional development to prepare teachers for the state assessments;
- frequent and clear communication about administration of assessments;
- long-term stability (i.e., tests that are used consistently over time);
- a review of state policy and practice;
- research based assessments; and
- no graduation requirement.

There was no consensus among participants about the content of state assessment systems. Some participants wanted to focus on reading, writing, and math, while others wanted a focus on workplace readiness. Others wanted to focus on areas like social studies and civics.

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) have 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.

Confusion Regarding State Assessments. Participants occasionally appeared confused about the difference between state and district assessments. Further, participants from the remote town category were confused about the difference between state and district assessments and current versus old tests (e.g., discussing the old CRT and the new Smarter Balanced), the high stakes nature of tests, outcomes, and norming years.

APPENDIX

Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Groups

Background

In April, May, and June of 2016, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), under the guidance of the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation and West Comprehensive Center at WestEd, conducted an audit of the Nevada State Assessment System and district-level assessments.

Method

This appendix includes notes collected during focus groups, which asked Nevada's district test directors, district and building administrators, teachers, union representatives, school Board members, parents, and community members to provide feedback on the perceived benefits and burdens of state and district assessments. Qualitative data were analyzed to identify trends in response to each question, and then larger themes were extracted from these trends. This document is organized based on the themes that emerged. Notes listed under *Miscellaneous* could not be reliably coded.

Text in black indicates themes identified in the analysis. Colored text indicates participant comments; orange text refers to comments from participants in the *remote town* category; red text refers to comments from participants in the *mid-sized city* category; green text refers to comments from participants in the *large city* category. Color coding of focus group categories was used to demonstrate consistency or discrepancy in participant comments by category.

District Assessments

Types of Assessments: Findings

Focus group members identified 13 different assessments collectively administered by their districts. District assessments were administered across K-12. Assessments are predominantly formative. Participants reported that some districts in Nevada use a common assessment system while other districts do not, in which case assessments vary across schools. The content areas participants identified for district assessments varied. Participants identified consistency and the ability to access and manipulate data to extract relevant information as particularly effective aspects of MAP.

Estimates of the frequency of administration of district assessments varied. Frequency of formative assessment varied from twice a year to once every few weeks. Many focus group participants expressed a general sentiment that there was too much testing.

The most commonly discussed district assessment among all focus groups was 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 MAP assessments are the consistency and the ability to access and manipulate data to extract relevant information.

Types of Assessments: Supporting Data ¹

MAP

- MAP is good—the test helps us for school improvement. Lots of longitudinal data to track kids over time
- MAP allows for tracking individual progress
- MAP—the only longitudinal data we hang our hats on
- Wish there was a high school version of MAPS
- 50% (estimate) use MAP; mostly Title I schools, because they have the funding to purchase it
- Elementary (MAP)
- Districtwide K-12 (MAP)
- Kids enjoy success on MAP
- MAP is given 2-3 times a year
- 2 times per year (MAP)
- 3 times per year (MAP)
- 3 times per year (MAP)
- With our MAP, we have found success in our district. We look at it at a district level. Schools get info, break into grade levels, and then classroom teachers look where their kids are, analyze students by quartiles, look at learning continuum, what kids can do, what is their next step. They set goals for those students to meet and they plan their instruction. We find success in that program
- When you're using that district wide, one assessment, and everyone is tracking the same data, everyone is trained in how to use the results
- MAP measures growth. Can track growth
- Our district uses MAP three times a year; district-wide, for all grades in math and reading

AIMS

- At elementary level, AIMS is the best that is used; teacher can use results as part of instruction in classroom
- Totally agree, but students are trained to AIMSweb, so they can game the test. Test results may be a bit skewed, particularly if students read “super fast.” Even though they may have a lot of mistakes, it can be easily manipulated. I like Star, personally, because there is no teacher involvement, questions change up so students can't look at each other's' tests
- There are more accurate results, and tells next steps for teachers. AIMSweb has math stuff that has nothing to do with standards, but it's there. How can you get a perfect score when it's not a standard? I tend to teach that so my students who want a perfect score can get it
- I think it's good because it's a short test
- Yes, but we need to easily manipulate it
- AIMS

¹ Orange text refers to comments from the *remote town* category; red text refers to comments from the *mid-sized city* category; green text refers to comments from the *large city* category. If themes appeared only for one category, the theme with the most frequently occurring comments appears first.

- Because we don't have any data from state, we started with AIMS three times a year; reading comprehension and basic computation
- We use AIMS in elementary as well; reading fluency, comprehension, math computation

Acuity

- K2 assessment online for reading and math: Acuity, three times a year, mandated for all elementary
- They're trying to put Acuity into HS, but then there are the same scheduling problems
- Acuity was rolled out much like state assessment, without much training

Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS)

- My students have said that taking ALEKS has helped them with SBAC; [Response] Your kids use ALEKS, but when they get to high school, not all students have used ALEKS; [Response] It works if you collaborate with feeder schools, but not all will agree to that

Common Formative Assessments (CFAs)

- CFAs are given every 3 weeks

Developmental Readiness Assessment (DRA)

- DRA – 2 times a year
- K-12 – DRA

Discovery Education Assessment

- Discovery

Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

- Grades K-2: testing using DIBELS [Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills]. It is a one to one test (meaning one adult must administer to one student at a time); will ask for parent volunteers and retired teachers to come in and give the test. Very time consuming

Evaluate

- Evaluate
- Evaluate doesn't tie into all the standards, and there is no writing

i-Ready

- some have i-Ready

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)

- some give SRI

STAR

- some give STAR
- STAR

- STAR used in majority of schools
- We are using the STAR assessment to have students track their own reading level; it's powerful

Accelerated Reader

- We use AR for goal setting. There are super hero themed rewards and the kids really buy in. I love this assessment

Semester Finals

- High School: end of semester finals (2times a year), plus additional tests and exams embedded in course schedule. These are mostly paper and pencil exams

Grade levels

- [All grades at some point]
- Elementary (K-5): Reading and math
- High school: Final exams in all courses (core and elective)
- 3-5th grade
- K-5 (all students)
- Most elementary uses some type of assessments
- High school – all subjects (EOCs)
- High school – all subjects (EOCs)
- District K-12 common assessments
- Districtwide K-12
- Elementary
- Elementary – ELA, Math, Science plus assessments for all other content areas like physical education, arts, social studies
- Grades 3 and higher
- K-9 – MAP
- K-11 – MAP
- Elementary – math, ELL, reading
- in 11th grade
- 10th grade
- All groups and grade levels are assessed at multiple points

No Standardized District Assessments

- Want common district benchmark assessment [does not exist; not consistent across district]
- Difficult to deal with [in-district] transfers (because testing is not same school to school)
- Want common assessments within grades and subjects, to create alignment for all
- Each school has their own testing system; they are able to create and tweak their own test
- Schools use testing for screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring, but there is no uniform method in the district, it varies from school to school
- Some schools use assessments quite a bit, others have abandoned it; now we don't know what to do
- For local assessments, funding interferes with district ability to make consistent across schools
- For local assessments, it is a struggle to get all teachers in all schools on same page
- For local assessments, it is time-consuming when standards switch; new standards mean you have to restart the process, and it takes time to change what happens institutionally
- Different schools use different assessments
- We used to have common assessments at the math level, but those have gone away

Content Area

- High school: Final exams in all courses (core and elective)
- Elementary (K-5): Reading and math
- [Reading, math, science, letter recognition, the usual]
- High school – all subjects (EOCs)
- High school – all subjects (EOCs)
- Elementary – math, ELL, reading (K-12 – DRA)
- Elementary – ELA, Math, Science plus assessments for all other content areas like Physical Education, Arts, and Social Studies
- They should all be assessed

Frequency and Timing for Assessments: Findings

Estimates of the time dedicated to testing varied from several minutes to three hours. Many expressed a general sentiment that district assessments took too much time. Overall, the frequency and time dedicated to testing varied between districts and, in some cases, schools.

Frequency and Timing for Assessments: Supporting Data

Frequency

- K-5: Quarterly in both math and reading (so, 4 tests in 2 subjects = 8 assessments a year)
- 3-5: Quarterly, often at end of unit
- High School: end of semester finals (2 times a year), plus additional tests and exams embedded in course schedule. These are mostly paper and pencil exams
- [too much testing.]
- MAP is given 2-3 times a year
- 2 times per year (MAP)
- 3 times per year (MAP)

- 3 times per year (MAP)
- Math and ELL – 2 times a year;
- We have options; 2-3 times per year
- 3 times per year
- Every week, or at least it feels like it
- There is a lot of test prep then we don't touch the content again
- Testing is happening all the time

Time for Assessments

Specific estimate of time:

- Grades 3-5: Typically given 30 minute tests
- For high school, it varies: 45-90 minutes, administered at end of semester (usually fill one class period, which varies based on block versus class period scheduling)
- 1 hour/subject/semester for each student.
- 1 hour 45 minutes 2 times per year during class
- MAP – an hour or full period per content area three times per year
- 2-2.5 hours per classroom
- 3 hours a year for each content area

Perceptions of time:

- Grades K-2: testing using DIBELS [Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills]. It is a one to one test (meaning one adult must administer to one student at a time); will ask for parent volunteers and retired teachers to come in and give the test. Very time consuming
- [Too much time]
- Too much time
- Long periods – usually multiple hours of quiet nothingness
- Too much time to hold the attention of the test takers

Benefits of District Assessment Systems: Findings

The most commonly discussed benefit of district assessments was the immediacy of results. Participants noted that district assessments were used primarily by teachers, and that the assessments served multiple purposes, including:

- guiding professional learning communities and informing instruction;
- communicating to parents about student progress;
- identifying struggling students;
- assessing knowledge;
- monitoring progress; and
- predicting scores on state tests.

Other benefits of district assessment systems mentioned by focus group participants varied by geographic category.

Benefits of district assessments from participants in the remote town category included:

- examining longitudinal trends;
- focusing more on what was taught (compared to state tests); and
- more accurate results since students reportedly value district assessments more than state assessments.

Benefits of district assessments from participants in the mid-sized city category included:

- examining longitudinal trends;
- comparing school performance; and
- consistency within districts.

Benefits of District Assessment Systems: Supporting Data

By teachers...

...to guide PLCs and inform instruction

- Assessment is part of instructional process; a necessary part of quality instruction, as it “fills in the gaps”
- Gives ability to drive instruction (based on results)
- Formative assessment is being used but not documented; used for day to day influence on lesson plans
- Instruction
- Timely feedback for teachers, students, and parents
- Adjust instruction before the state test
- Common points for accountability for teachers – can compare to see what types of instruction worked best
- Discussed during PLCs to improve instruction
- Use results to drive instruction
- Talk about them in PLCs
- Teacher collaboration
- Teachers use results to guide PLCs and instruction.
- Teachers discuss results during PLCs and use to improve instruction
- Individual teachers use to plan instruction and/or reteach
- Teachers base next year’s teaching on previous year’s AP scores
- Data from assessments used to evaluate pacing of curriculum, allocate resources to schools, and identify professional development opportunities

...for parent communication

- Teachers: report back to parents, identify students who are struggling; can focus intervention and enrichment; can be targeted to individual students
- Parents use assessment results to see how well students are doing
- Inform parents of progress
- Parent communication

...to identify struggling students and take steps to remediate

- Teachers: report back to parents, identify students who are struggling; can focus intervention and enrichment; can be targeted to individual students
- Reading: determine grade level and apply intervention if not proficient
- Some are good for special education and for remediation
- Can use to identify areas of concern
- Used to identify students for special education programs

...to determine student placement

- Usefulness for student placement decisions
- Placement
- Because we don't have any data from state, we started with AIMS three times a year reading comprehension, basic computation, just so we could place our students, Comp-in-caps (?), just to identify "super lows" and "super highs;" Grades 6-8

...to assess knowledge and learning

- Teachers use assessment results to see how well students retain knowledge
- Local assessments test what is being taught
- Captures mastery teaching approaches
- Used to assess mastery and assign grades
- Mastery v. grades
- Visual evidence that students are learning

...for progress monitoring

- Progress monitoring for IEP

...as benchmark for state tests

- Benchmark toward CRT

...to assess alignment to standards

- Used to assess alignment to standards

By students...

...to assess performance

- Students use assessment results to see how well they did

District assessments are valued because of immediate feedback

- Immediate, targeted feedback
- Getting immediate feedback
- A benefit of local assessments is immediate results
- Immediacy of results
- Timeliness of results
- Local assessments provide real time results

Regional finding: Remote town and mid-sized city:

Allows examination of longitudinal trends

- Provide baseline of knowledge from year to year
- Examine longitudinal trends

Regional finding: Remote town only:

More targeted to students

- A benefit of local assessments is they are more targeted to students

Students value district assessments more than state assessments

- Kids have more value in local assessments; may not take state tests seriously

Regional finding: Mid-sized city only:

Allows comparisons to other schools

- Compare to other high schools in the district

Aligns with higher education

- Alignment with higher education

Promotes consistency within districts

- Value common tests

Concerns about District Assessment Systems: Findings

The primary concern about district assessments was the possibility of data being misused or misinterpreted. Other concerns that were expressed about district assessment systems varied by geographic location. Concerns about district assessments from participants in the remote town and mid-sized city category included teachers focusing too heavily on tests. Participants in the large city category were concerned about the scoring of tests (e.g., norming and cut scores) and a lack of alignment with state assessments.

Concerns about District Assessment Systems: Supporting Data

Data misused, misinterpreted, or not understood

- A lot of pockets get lined to say that we are failing
- Data aren't understood or used as intended
- Growth is not understood
- Data being misused and misinterpreted

Regional finding: Remote town and mid-sized city:

Teachers overly focused on test

- NCLB caused us to give up on some students because educators knew that they would never be proficient
- Encourages teaching to the test
- Too much PLC time devoted to them

Regional finding: Large city:

Concerns about scoring of tests

- Need to collect data to norm the test
- If you are measuring mastery of content there should not be an arbitrary cut score, it should be how much information you need to move forward. I do not understand changing cut scores; is Nevada the only state using a test like this? We didn't invent these tests there must be benchmark data available from other states

Lack of alignment in state and district assessments

- Lack of alignment (in wording) between state and local tests

Suggestions for District Assessment Systems: Findings

Participants had many different ideas about what an ideal district assessment system would look like. The only consistent suggestion for district assessments was that they be useful to inform instruction. There was widespread disagreement about the relation between state and district assessments: some participants in large and mid-size city categories suggested that district assessments be aligned to the state assessments. Some participants in the large city category said they should be independent of the state system. Participants in the remote town category suggested that district assessments inform state assessments. There was no consensus about the frequency, scheduling, or content of district assessments.

Other suggestions for district assessments varied by geographic category. Participants in the remote town category suggested that the district assessment system include:

- results useful to inform instruction;
- clear purpose and vision;
- collective buy-in; and
- exam [scores] that contribute to student grades.

Participants in the large city category suggested that the district assessment system include:

- formative assessment;
- clear purpose and vision;
- collective buy-in;
- alignment to standards and curriculum;
- streamlined or shortened versions; and
- the ability to make comparisons to state and national results.

Participants in the mid-sized city category suggested that the district assessment system include:

- formative assessment; and
- results that are useful to inform instruction.

Suggestions for District Assessment Systems: Supporting Data

Ideal assessment system relation to state testing:

...aligned to state

- Need more and better collaboration between SEA and LEAs
- Aligned with state system
- Same ones as the state
- It would look like the state assessment system
- [Currently there is] lack of alignment (in wording) between state and local tests

...independent of state

- State would have nothing to do with it
- School based, targeted to individual community needs

...related to state tests

- It should inform the state ones. It should have predictive value years into the future
- Local assessments should impact the state level too

Results useful to inform instruction

- Used for screening process
- Used for diagnostic testing
- Used to monitor progress
- Common formative assessments aligned with classroom instruction
- People are valued and allowed to prepare for the test. Learn from mistakes. Show students what they got wrong
- Performance-based, not paper and pencil
- Help teams of teachers develop formative assessments – that's the most powerful
- Immediately useful
- It would be a prep for the final

- Flexible, [allowing teachers to] make adjustments [in instruction]

Regional findings: Remote town and large city only:

Clear purpose and vision

- Have a clear purpose
- Beyond that, we need to determine purpose of assessments; if punitive, it screws up the system; if short term, it is also detrimental. Cannot be used as “leverage”
- Everything in our state is “build the cart while driving it.” Things are delayed, there is no training, [it’s just] “make it happen.” To improve, have to start by making sure that they know what’s happening in advance.

Collaboration and collective buy-in

- Buy-in at all levels for the tests
- Collaborative effort; communication

Frequency and Scheduling

- It would be nice to have Grades K-12 rather than Grades K-8 and then stop
- Assessments should be given in the subject [time period] rather than having a testing day
- Pre-test, interim, and the final
- We need the same instructional time before assessment for every kid, whether they are enrolled in a year-round or 9-month school
- If online, why held to a calendar?

Regional findings: Remote town only:

Use as exams that contribute to student grades

- [use as] final exams, use the results as part of the grade

Regional findings: Large city only:

Content

- English/Language Arts, Math, and Science
- Workplace readiness (not just for CTE driven kids)
- Social skills
- Social Studies/Civics

Aligned to standards and curriculum

- One that is aligned with whatever interim assessment we have, aligned to curriculum and whatever benchmark assessment we are giving with timely feedback that is used in non-punitive ways to allocate resources and professional development and evaluate pacing

Streamlined

- It should be as streamlined as possible

Can make comparisons to state and nation

- It should allow us to compare ourselves to other districts around the country and allow us see what others are doing that is working

State Assessments: Findings

Focus group participants were given a list of individual tests that comprise the state assessment system. Benefits and challenges of the ACT, CTE, and WIDA were all noted. In addition, concerns about Smarter Balanced and EOCs were raised.

ACT. Participants reported that the ACT was particularly useful for college-bound students to assess their readiness and identify areas where students need improvement. However, participants were also concerned about the lack of usefulness for non-college bound students, and noted that the assessment was a burden on students.

CTE. Participants noted that students received their CTE results quickly, and so could use them to assess their own progress. They thought that having the tests for alternative classes was positive because it provided standards and a benchmark of progress. However, some participants indicated that other benchmarks of mastery, such as industry certifications, would be more useful in the areas CTEs are designed to assess.

WIDA. Participants said that the WIDA test for English language proficiency was helpful for assessing language acquisition, so they could determine services and placement for individual students. Participants also noted that the results could be used to inform training. However, participants also remarked that the test placed a high emphasis on vocabulary, and was very time-consuming to administer.

SMARTER BALANCED. Participants noted that Smarter Balanced offered a “snapshot in time,” but they were skeptical about the reliability of the test. Some participants believed the test results could be difficult to understand, that the testing window was too long, and that the directions for administration were not communicated in a timely manner.

EOCs. Participants thought that EOCs represented a duplication of assessments already given by teachers as part of their grading systems. They questioned the alignment of curriculum and teaching with the standards in EOCs. Participants also questioned state plans for re-testing. There also appeared to be some confusion about EOCs: participants reported that students did not always take EOCs immediately after completing the course. Participants also mentioned High School Proficiency Exams (HSPEs), suggesting that they may not be aware of the transition from HSPEs to EOCs.

State Assessments: Supporting Data

ACT Benefits:

- College/Career Readiness (ACT): can be used to determine whether remedial courses are needed for college-bound students
- I do like that students can take the ACT for free; it lets you see the content of the test and where you stand, particularly useful for college-bound students
- ACT and the content is a good transition. We could use just that alone if we used that information
- Keep ACT exam
- Every kid can still take the regular ACT, even if they want to join the workforce
- ACT helps determine college readiness and opportunities for students
- The ACT is useful for college bound students

ACT Drawbacks:

- Would like to use ACT for placement and identification of students for remediation but can't because the results come too late
- Worry about usefulness for non-college bound kids
- ACT is a huge burden on high schools; take an entire day off of school to administer it. And only participation matters (not scores). We are the only state that requires ACT participation for graduation. What would we use it for? It's amazing to give free ACT to kids but it's a requirement for graduation for student who aren't going to college
- ACT could not be administered without cancelling all classes. We don't have space. Because it is a requirement, it mandates a day of canceled classes

CTE Benefits

- CTE: Having a standard for those programs is good
- CTE: could see how well you were doing, and will help future employees see how much you know in a specific trade area
- Keep CTE; that's of value
- CTE tests work well. We get the results right away, but these are kids who have selected the program on their own, continued on, and taken the test. Of these tests on the list, this is the one that works well
- A [best practice] for state assessments is the CTE. We get results fairly quickly for CTE, and we can use the results for program development, for students to move through programs for completion, or to assess progress. And those kids appreciate it

CTE Drawbacks

- For CTE exams like welding and construction, industry certifications [should be used] instead. Like judging welds, for example
- Use certificates for certified welder instead of a test score
- Some kids can weld but can't pass tests
- Electrical, construction, cabinetmaking, electrical, automotive, computer science all have standards they can test on

WIDA Benefits:

- ELPA: useful to determine what services to provide students, and whether a student is ready to transition out of services [In reference to previous statements on CTE and ELPA]: Otherwise, state tests are largely not useful
- ELPA: Determine language acquisition
- We have received WIDA results back, working on training for next year based on that. Planning on training principals on results. Can see benefit from getting those results back, to plan for next year
- WIDA is probably the best one, from a data standpoint
- WIDA is used to help with placement, and to make adjustments for kids

WIDA Drawbacks:

- Current ELL test disadvantages ELL students because it places too much emphasis on vocabulary
- ELPA is especially time-consuming
- ELPA has a different format than ASPIRE
- I have a 46-page manual to read student and parent results for WIDA. How are parents going to understand, especially those who are already second language learners? The reports are amazing, but what do they mean?

Smarter Balanced (SBAC) Indicated:

- Smarter Balanced: elementary snapshot in time

Smarter Balanced (SBAC) Benefits: [none identified]

Smarter Balanced (SBAC) Drawbacks:

- Sometimes it's difficult for teachers to understand the SBAC numbers
- Smarter Balanced is too new and the results are not reliable. Students were fatigued
- SBAC testing window is too long
- When we went back to when WIDA started, it was also a train wreck (good now), as far as communication timelines, including when and how info came out. For example, [for the] SBAC this year: there were five different manuals, several hundred pages long, and we got them right before the test; it was like "Don't screw anything up!"
- District is pushing CCR. How does SBAC prepare for college/career? What jobs will students be able to seek out and prosper in by taking SBAC?

EOCs Benefits: [none identified]

EOCs Drawbacks:

- There shouldn't be an exit exam for high school; use state certified teachers to determine graduation
- There shouldn't be exit exams; rely on certified teachers and their expertise to decide if student is qualified in a given subject
- Using tests as grad requirements is "tough"; is a duplication of efforts that course assessments are designed for
- HSPE: Determine whether student can graduate or not
- HSPE is not correlated to standards so it is not helpful
- EOC was too time consuming so students did not take them seriously, so results were not informative
- Districts need to know about state plans for EOC re-testing
- Need to determine the alignment of curriculum and teaching with standards, especially for End-of Course (EOC) assessments
- Did use the HS results, to determine what students needed for schedules, etc.
- We give EOC exams, but they aren't given at the end of the course. Now they're taking the test a year after they take the course.

Benefits of the Current State Assessment System: Findings

Benefits of the state assessment system included the ability to assess student achievement and growth over time, identify areas for remediation, and assess school performance.

Other benefits of the state assessment system varied by geographic location. Participants in the mid-size and large city categories indicated that benefits of the state assessment system included:

- promotion of the alignment of curriculum to state standards;
- the ability of staff to use assessments to inform instruction;
- consistency across districts; and
- comparison of individual schools to state and national performance.

Benefits of the Current State Assessment System: Supporting Data

Assess student achievement, growth over time, and areas for remediation

- Help determine "where [students are] at"
- Try to remediate, the high stakes test. There is just too many [tests]
- Measure growth over time
- Measure student growth (it's one way, but not the only way)
- To target students for intervention and remediation
- To inform remediation
- Used for targeted support in schools
- Teachers look at the whole body of evidence for a student

Assess school performance

- Help determine what schools are doing
- Inform program improvement
- Used for allocation of resources
- To look at cohorts and identify teachers who are excelling and what they are doing that works
- To facilitate conversations about why classroom and testing results may differ

Regional findings: Mid-sized and large cities:

Promote alignment of curriculum to standards

- Need to determine the alignment of curriculum and teaching with standards, especially for End-of Course (EOC) assessments
- Show how well the curriculum is aligned to standards
- To ensure that students are learning what they are supposed to learn
- Used to evaluate pacing of curriculum

Staff use to inform instruction

- To improve instruction, especially in science
- Some try to use them to understand alignment and to improve instruction
- Teachers base next year's teaching on previous year's AP scores

To promote district organization and consistency across the state

- To have consistency across districts

Encourages consistency

- Encourages a common curriculum
- There is a value in commonality
- Consistency is a benefit

Can make comparisons to state and nation

- Statewide comparisons are valuable
- Can compare your class and school with the rest of the state (state assessments)
- They give a good external check point for local educators to see how they are doing compared to national standards
- Like the SBAC assessments, these will allow us to compare ourselves to others around the country

Concerns about the Current State Assessment System: Findings

The most common concern that participants raised with respect to state assessments was the timeliness of results. In every focus group, participants reported that they have not received test results, and therefore could not use the results for any purpose. Many participants said they have not received results for multiple years for some tests; others noted that even when results are provided, the data come after the school year ends, too late to inform instruction.

The lack of results appeared to be a particular area of frustration given the amount of time and energy that went into the testing process. Some participants were under the impression that online administration of the test would lead to more timely results, and so were disappointed that this was not the case. Participants strongly believed that a key feature of an ideal assessment system would be the timely delivery of results.

Participants consistently reported that there were too many state assessments that took too long to administer. Participants in every focus group believed that there were redundancies within the state assessment system that should be eliminated, resulting in fewer tests. They expressed a desire for shorter administration periods for tests.

Participants identified a number of ways that assessment negatively impacted the educational system. The most common concern was loss of instructional time; estimates of the instructional time lost directly to test administration ranged from four days for one set of students to one month for all tests in a school. Participants also noted that instruction is negatively impacted due to pressures to “teach to the test” and imposing time constraints on instruction. Participants identified ways that state assessments indirectly affected instructional time through accommodations made to school schedules. For example, participants reported that their schools had to alter their schedule in the spring, that computer labs would not be available for regular use, and that some schools instructed students to stay home on days they were not being tested to accommodate administration. Participants were also concerned about the effects on students, noting that the frequency and duration of the state assessment system led to adverse behavioral outcomes (e.g., disengagement in the classroom, not trying hard on tests, test fatigue, missing classes) and adverse psychological outcomes (e.g., test anxiety, stress, malaise, etc.).

Participants noted a number of logistical concerns about administration of state assessments, including the capacity to administer the test online (e.g., bandwidth issues); equipment (e.g., sufficient number of computers for testing days); scheduling and accommodating restricted testing windows; and preparation for administration. A lack of communication about test administration and lack of support for trouble-shooting from the DOE was also noted by participants in the large city category.

Other concerns about the state assessments included the observation that the content was too advanced, and online administration relied on irrelevant skills, particularly for younger students. Teacher stress related to testing was also mentioned, along with concerns regarding political and media misuse of assessment results.

Other concerns about the state assessment system varied by geographic location. Concerns from participants in the remote town category included:

- tests do not accurately assess student knowledge;
- state assessments are not sensitive to individuality, including student issues like IEP status, and district issues like region, location, or funding;

- increasing number of parents choosing to opt-out for their students;
- inconsistency in what assessments are used at state level from year to year;
- purpose of assessments being unclear;
- lack of financial resources to support assessment;
- inadequacy of state tests to accurately represent what a school is accomplishing;
- negative atmosphere adversely affecting teacher recruitment;
- lack of relevance to instructional practices; and
- students blaming teachers for poor performance because tested material was not covered.

Concerns from participants in the mid-sized city category included:

- teachers do not have enough information to prepare students, but the results are being used for their evaluations;
- inconsistency in what assessments are used for at the state level from year to year;
- purpose of assessments is unclear; and
- lack of financial resources to support assessment.

Concerns from participants in the large city category included:

- teachers do not have enough information to prepare students, but the results are being used for their evaluations;
- tests do not accurately assess student knowledge;
- state assessments are not sensitive to individuality, including student issues like IEP status, and district issues like region, location, or funding;
- increasing number of parents choosing to opt-out for their students; and
- timing of tests for traditional calendar schools versus year-round schools is unfair due to variations in instructional time before tests.

Drawbacks to the Current State Assessment System: Supporting Data

Cannot use tests because results are not returned

- Online format is nice because results in no paperwork; but also, no results have come back
- Have not seen scores for past 3-4 years, so can't adjust teaching accordingly
- They just provide a snapshot, and kids have moved on by the time the results are back
- Smarter Balance: elementary snapshot in time, again difficult to use because no results have come back
- Don't know how they are used; we might see the scores by the end of the year if we are lucky
- We don't get feedback, really, not for the last two or three years, except for End of Course (EOC) which are required for graduation
- We don't even know what the cutoff is, what proficiency is
- Kids have to take tests, but when they don't get any feedback, they can't learn from their mistakes

- Theoretically, we should be [able to use assessments]; but we don't see these scores, so we can't
- In PLCs (professional learning communities), the work is based on knowledge of students and teacher's own testing to identify gaps and guide intervention strategies; teachers do not use state tests
- In terms of the usefulness of tests "it's really a matter of timing" of when results come back in order to be useful (or not)
- When results used to come back quickly, fifth grade teachers use to guide intervention strategies; but now, kids have moved on before results are back
- Students get some scores back but not all
- We haven't received anything to value yet (alluding to fact that state results haven't been returned to schools)
- Lack of feedback
- Lack of results back
- When CRT tests were used in past, scores were in by the end of year; so, could use incoming grade information to provide services needed.
- Scores [need to be] available before August
- Quick turnaround is essential
- Sometimes it's difficult for teachers to understand the SBAC numbers
- Not at all useful since the results come too late in the school year
- Would like to use ACT for placement and identification of students for remediation but can't because they come too late
- Would like to use ACT for placement and identification of students for remediation but can't because they come too late
- They don't because it comes in too late
- Would like to use for remediation for high school students but they come too late
- Timeliness
- No results yet so it just causes frustration
- Results aren't returned in time to be useful
- Proficiency, teachers could use strand results, teachers could adjust instruction based on what we were given from that one. Those are the kinds of results we would expect from EOC
- We don't get scores back, so no use
- We've used the test for two years, and we haven't got any scores
- Last year's test fell apart. Don't have this year's scores, yet
- And EOC hasn't come back yet either, so we can't identify areas of strength or weakness. "If we're going to spend that much energy on it, give us something positive back"
- We have received WIDA results back, working on training for next year based on that. Planning on training principals on results. Can see benefit from getting those results back, to plan for next year. But we have the same frustration with the EOC and Smarter, no results, and teachers are anxious out there. "And the results aren't going to be back for quite a while

- Especially when 40% of your evaluation is going to be based on these assessments, it is important to have feedback
- Especially on elementary level for Smarter Balanced; we have administered it for three years without results because of the pilot
- No results to drive what you do in your building
- That includes the interim assessment; we got immediate feedback on MC, but not on writing. We have no idea whether students are doing well on writing. Would like immediate feedback on writing
- And this is a graduation requirement for this set of kids
- If we truly had data to drive instruction, that would be a benefit, but for last three years, there have been no data
- As a parent, no data to show me at open house. Nothing to see where my kids are and how to help them
- I haven't bought textbooks in three years, because I've had to upgrade technology on my own for a test that gives me no information back
- Timely information
- Went to tech to get immediate feedback, but when is that going to happen?
- Lack of timeliness of results
- If there were data from SBAC, we would use it to drive instruction, but there is no data. And are the formatives connecting with the summative from the state? There are no data to compare

Testing takes too much time and there are too many tests

- 10 hours for English, 6 hours for math, science is 2 hours
- It messes up the schedule for 3 weeks
- Time consumption
- Energy
- Less is more. Fewer, better assessments
- Too much
- 1400 kids, 4 grades, 7 periods a day: pulling kids out in particular subgroups to do well on a particular test is very difficult from a scheduling perspective
- It's known as "Test season"
- Grades 3-8 testing over three months. It used to be 1 week. When considering cost-benefit, the benefit is not seen by the schools or districts
- Too long – students get fatigued (MAP); MAP needs new life breathed into it—students are tired of them
- SBAC testing window is too long
- ELPA is especially time-consuming
- Too many tests
- We did the math, and students had some sort of assessment every single day in the spring
- Too many
- Too many tests
- Too many tests

Loss of instructional time:

- Scheduling nightmare: had to use alternate schedules, keeping kids home to accommodate testing, using resources for testing instead of teaching
- Over testing, lost instructional time
- So much time lost in the spring for testing. Spring semester courses are really tough
- There has to be a flow and the amount of testing disrupts that flow
- One week out of instruction time to administer tests, plus the time to prepare for the tests
- For example, with WIDA: had 80 kids to test, couldn't get more than 6 kids taking it at a time (because of technological constraints). In order to support online, had to shut down school Wi-Fi, which influences classroom instruction that relies on internet access
- A lot of instructional days are taken for testing (i.e. 8 half days in spring semester). It takes away instructional time
- Sophomores lost 16 hours of instruction for regular tests and then they also took science and AP
- Two full weeks of instruction were lost for EOCs and math took another week
- Time required for test prep
- Impact on instructional time
- Too much time away from being an instructional leader
- Instructional time lost
- Huge loss of instructional time
- Reduces instructional time
- Reduces instructional time
- The entire month of May was shot
- Hard to put a value on the test as an educator, and to communicate that to our students. I just said "it's a graduation requirement for you"
- [How is CTE, WIDA, Proficiency used?]
- Proficiencies were never used for program development, just a graduation requirement
- For those three assessments, we get results within weeks, not months and months
- I'm very protective of my classroom time. I get irritated when my kids have to leave class for anything. High school kids want to do extracurricular activities, but it makes me even more protective
- Too much testing time
- They're trying to put Acuity into the high school, but then there are the same scheduling problems. I lost an entire month of instruction because entire month of May was dedicated to assessment. Teachers were displaced, and the whole school environment affected
- I don't want to give up so much of my classroom time. I already had to give up May. I know these tests are good and they're out there, but I don't want to give up more time throughout the year. The logistics of it was driving me nuts. I want something clear
- EOC, AP, CTE, final exams, test after test. We say "to protect instruction," but that's not how we act

Teaching to the test, time constraints, and student preparation for tests

- State system: learning to take tests, not learning
- Want classroom experience to be more meaningful
- Prepare them for taking the test, but not getting them ready for the test
- Students learning to take tests; all we are doing is filling in bubbles
- Students are learning to take tests, not learning
- It makes it dysfunctional. You have to stop your unit instruction to test—it throws your entire year off
- Teachers tell me that they didn't get through half of the stuff they wanted to because they are preparing to test
- Will stop teaching to review materials for the test
- Encourages teaching to the test
- Limits the teachers on what they can teach and how much time they have to teach
- It limits it
- If you are teaching to a test or preparing for a test you are not actually teaching
- All about pacing, because I know testing starts at a certain time, I know I have to get through all my standards before testing. "Most of you kind of got it, so let's go."
- My calendar is already made for next year, and there is no wiggle room
- When students fall behind, there is no room to make it up, would like to have coaches back to build support
- I feel like I'm in a race
- It ties their hands, causes them to teach to a test, doesn't allow them to think outside the box
- Focus is on kids passing the test so they can graduate, it is not about what they learn, just about the test
- Tests are a time suck
- We used to have interim assessments and aligned with standards. Could use data to drive instruction, gave time for midcourse corrections. Could use data for instructional purposes; but not now
- I ask "what will my best teacher think about this" and it makes them uncomfortable, not acceptable
- It is just test after test. We are learning to test. After tests we don't really touch on material again except maybe on the final exam
- Each subject only gets a week or so and then we never use it again
- What is this remediation piece? Is it a class? Is it test prep? I don't know if I have to change schedules. It needs to be defined

Adverse behavioral student effects

- Kids don't give credence to test number 37 out of 52 [kids are over tested]
- Some kids practice and try to study (Khan Academy videos, etc.) but can't
- Impact on culture, especially students who end up stressed and frustrated; many give up. It takes an emotional toll
- Number of tests causes burnout for kids

- Number of tests causes burnout for kids [repeated]
- High flier sophomores don't know whether they passed. They have to take an English, Math, Science, and AP for the high fliers; and it's all happening during one window. All of these are grad requirements. And high fliers want to do the absolute best. Takes a long time for testing. It's just too much
- Getting burnt out
- And missing class
- Kids talk about teachers not wanting to go home and prepare but kids have to have their faces in their books until 10-11pm at night
- Devalued the test. And there are a lot of kids who don't give effort because just another test. [And my evaluation is going to be based on that]

Adverse psychological student effects

- Test anxiety occurring at the elementary level
- Building high anxiety in students by all these tests
- When student has to retake proficiency exam, leads to high anxiety, especially as approaching the "last chance" test
- Some kids have huge test anxiety. Siblings talk about how hard the tests are
- Chaos, tested and over tested kids
- Tension in families; pressure from parents to succeed, pass
- Stressful
- Destroys the educational environment. Mushroomed into this thing that is test, test, test. Kids are crying. We are destroying them at an early age
- Disrupts community building at assemblies
- Most kids do not want to come to school especially during testing week
- The students don't really care
- STRESS – before, during, and after
- Makes it really stressful on some families. Some kids are sibling caretakers
- The current system is oppressive, causes anxiety and frustration
- Students are exhausted, feel bad about themselves and are anxious
- The number of tests students take is associated with test anxiety, frustration, and fatigue
- The number and types have changed the whole school culture in a negative way
- Negative school climate from all the emotions described
- Has residual effects [on students] so teaching after the test is hard
- Stress on children
- Impact on culture, especially students. They are stressed and frustrated, and many give up. It's an emotional toll
- Stress on children
- Emotional impact on school building, students and teachers, whole culture
- Residual effects from stress and frustration
- Stress, on younger students, in particular
- Students are grumpy

- Stress levels are high. Parents notice
- Negative impact on students' self-image
- Stressed to the max
- You said "anxious," I would say "pissed off" is where my kids are

Lack of information interfered with prep for administration

- Our district actually started back when the window first opened
- Manuals didn't come out until the window opened
- I agree, as a teacher, it's been nerve wracking, swimming in the ocean without a life preserver; I depend on those tests to differentiate instruction, etc. Having nothing is devastating; I have no idea what they need to get them ahead
- Teacher evaluations are tied to something we have no idea what they look like
- We practiced based on other state tests, hoping NV test will be like them. It's totally unfair
- I used SBAC practice tests, either ridiculously hard or ridiculously easy. What are the expectations like? I'm confused, I want something clear, directions clear, practice tests that look like final test, interim tests with immediate feedback, that's what I want and I'm not getting that
- Never should be surprises in assessment, should know what's going to be tested, know how it will be tested, but we're blindfolded. Tied to evaluation, and we have no idea what it will look like, can't give practice tests. If you could list things you should not do in assessment, all these things are on the top of the list
- Were told it would be only MC, but then advanced item types were on test, couldn't practice with them the procedures for how to manipulate computer, couldn't get them on the computer
- We got no information

Capacity to administer the test online

- Bandwidth issues—Internet has to be shut down for testing, which frustrates students
- The online administration was difficult; the server crashed because they didn't have the capacity
- Online administration was actually more work, and took a lot of time away from the testing itself
- Like the online testing: however, there's a learning curve with administration; bandwidth issues, causing to restart and then having to reload tests
- Tech issues: Wi-Fi, physical location of servers
- Bandwidth needed to test [for internet connection]
- Bandwidth with computers should be dealt with. One computer took 11 hours to set up
- We are seeing a lot more forward thinking about how to take tests. We are not thinking about paper tests any more
- Positive of online: in past, had certain groups that had to ensure had same testing booklet, and would have to order more, whereas this takes all of that at appropriate levels. And checking out manuals and counting back in etc. At end of assessment, having to check all bubbles and ensure bubbled correctly. And re-bubbling for name, student number, etc. was

very time consuming. Online piece has helped in that aspect. But does not outweigh the train wreck

- 3.5 hours to load create and recreate an assessment if a student was absent during original administration

Equipment

- Need to find resources to fund technology improvements needed to support testing
- Cost, especially for technology
- Logistics: scheduling, personnel, funds to cover substitute teachers, supervision for students who took the test last year, not enough testing rooms, not enough devices
- Number of devices we have and ratio to students; if I don't have enough computers, have to schedule and break classes apart
- Classes of 45 kids but only 35 computers
- We had 65 kids in one room; it was noisy, and the students don't have room to write on scratch paper
- On a positive note, I really like that they're pushing more technology. I think it's ridiculous that students come to school with no computer access. I like the idea that they're trying to push us in the 21st century. But, doing that with no computers is ridiculous. It becomes another unfunded mandate; I like the idea, but there's no support whatsoever
- Software doesn't cooperate so have to reset for different kinds of tests
- [We need] more technology. Every school needs to have 1-1. [Response] "That's not going to happen"
- Online testing, but no consideration of available equipment

Scheduling and restricted test windows, and preparation for administration

- 1400 kids, 4 grades, 7 periods a day: pulling kids out in particular subgroups to do well on a particular test is very difficult from a scheduling perspective
- Admin and counselors: managing the assessment system logistics is a huge burden in addition to the full-time job they are expected to complete
- Scheduling issues mean stressed out counselors
- Trying to accommodate the schedule
- There are always student absences, so you have to have a Plan B
- Logistics, set-up issues
- Logistics: scheduling, personnel, funds to cover substitute teachers, supervision for students who took the test last year, not enough testing rooms, not enough devices
- Too many systems; there needs to be just one, and it needs to be more efficient
- Our IT is way underpaid, does so much for how much paid
- Also setup for making labs ready to go
- Rostering and loading was not pleasant. With current vendor, it took 3-5 hours to load individual students into EOC exams manually, and then separate out which students due to IEP. Filtering data by hand. Not having that info available from state

- Time period doesn't fit with school scheduling. Now there are 3 weeks in which business and computer teachers aren't in labs because of testing, for test we won't get the results. True in all high schools. Elementary as well
- Logistically, don't have the ability to do that
- Even figuring out which students took the test is a challenge
- ACT is a huge burden on high schools; take an entire day off of school to administer it. And only participation matters (not scores). We are the only state that requires ACT participation for graduation. What would we use it for? It's amazing to give free ACT to kids but it's a requirement for graduation for student who aren't going to college
- ACT could not be done without cancelling all classes. Don't have space. Requirement mandates a day of canceled classes.
- And our middle schools are burdened with all assessments, SBAC and EOC for high fliers and all in the same windows. There's only one window for all tests. Makes it very difficult to support all schools for three months
- Test tickets were ridiculous
- And every day re-evaluating test administration plan because of absences

Lack of state support and communication from DOE

- **NDE oversight is lacking, e.g. with vendor management**
- If I communicated with my teachers and the community the way the state communicated with us, I would be fired [as a principal]. If there had been communication, it could have worked
- State department didn't understand the administrative process of administering online assessments. They came down to learn it with me. Made it difficult to have a well-oiled machine to administer assessments across schools. For example, I had group of 15 people whose full time job was to transfer kids from schools. Going to online system, but still have to do a lot manually
- Called state and they didn't have answer, help desk was useless, and it depends on who answered. State would say "call vendor and get back with me." They were not prepared to support us
- The timeline has to recognize how schools work. Right now I'm building calendar for next year, and when state doesn't come out with stuff weeks or days before, it makes it impossible to plan for the year

Content: too advanced

- **Don't make the questions hard, they should cover what they are supposed to cover**
- **Don't give college level tests**
- **It's all too much. Our teachers took the EOC and thought the demand was too high**
- **The content is too rigorous**
- The test is always at that high level, honors kids probably did well, but not regular kids. There are no surface questions. What I like about the test is that it's targeted (for example, Algebra and Geometry). But why isn't there a Biology/Chemistry test, instead of just a general Science test?

Content: online tests rely on irrelevant skills (for younger students)

- Not evaluating them in what they know, it is how long they can sit and take tests
- Computerized version is hard
- The online tests measure both ability to deal with technology and content. Lots of younger children (3rd grade) do not do well because they cannot keyboard well; students are too young to take the test (8 years old)
- Third graders are being asked to write essays on a computer, but they don't know how to type. "Tick mark" was a huge deal this year (terminology-wise)

Teacher stress

- Teachers stress out about it; student can tell when mother who is teacher comes home – "it was a long day"
- "Teachers own this" – the results come back to the individual teacher
- Stress, frustration, and other challenges already mentioned
- I'm stressed out
- I don't know if I'm doing a good job. I don't know if what I've been doing is what was intended. Because we haven't seen what it looks like, how our kids are doing
- Feel out of control because don't know the intended end
- I used CRTs to drive instruction, but with SBAC, it's a shot in the dark. Stresses me out
- Stressful and demoralizing for teachers, when your kids don't do well you take it personally

Political and media use and misuse

- "We are giving feed to the enemy" – those pro-charter, anti-union ("we're not using the results, but they are")
- Hate the headlines
- Makes education a competition
- Only one data point – played up in media
- Data being misused and misinterpreted

Regional findings: Mid-sized and large cities only:

Teachers don't have enough information to prepare students, but results are being used for evaluations

- Assessments came before curriculum – without resources
- Use of results for teacher evaluation – encourages coverage, not depth
- That's what makes teachers nervous when they don't get anything out
- I used CRTs to drive instruction, but with SBAC, it's a shot in the dark. It stresses me out
- Teachers finally understand what kids are going to be assessed on, because none of the practice or information given actually aligned with final test. Setting kids up for failure
- Teacher evaluations being tied to assessments
- Devalued the test. And there are a lot of kids who don't give effort because just another test. [And my evaluation is going to be based on that]

- There should never be surprises in assessment; we should know what's going to be tested and how it will be tested, but we're blindfolded. Results are tied to evaluation, and we have no idea what it will look like and can't give practice tests. If you could list things you should not do in assessment, all these things are on the top of the list

Regional findings: Remote town and large city only:

Perception that tests do not accurately assess student knowledge

- Not sure if accurate results
- Use of vocab in math
- "I don't value it": much preferred the CRTs, because better indication of what kids know
- I've never seen the test, but students talk about it (feel like we should see the test), but they've said the math test is a reading test. Three problems on the entire EOC algebra that didn't have so much reading. Some of them were ambiguous, didn't know what they were supposed to do. We have some really low kids that need to pass this to graduate
- Feel like district is lacking a strategy for students to take a computerized test. Can't highlight and take notes, like on paper. There's highlight, but it's not connecting. And it's tripping them up; especially geometry, because we draw all the time. I told my kids to put paper on screen and trace it. How do I get students to understand that test we take in class is the same as the computer?

State assessments are not sensitivity to individuality (e.g., IEPs, regional differences, etc.)

- What kids in different regions need are two different worlds
- Elko region has particular challenge because of diverse population; it's the largest geographic region, ranging from reservations to casino towns. Need to pay attention to equity in questions to eliminate bias. Are state questions taking that into consideration?
- Mask individuality
- We assess all kids at the high standard, and you have kids that are significantly below grade level who have special needs, etc. and yet we have one assessment to assess kids equally even though kids are not equal
- IEP accommodations in the SBAC are ridiculous. They're in computer pod with other kids, and when you have kid with learning disabilities, they need the accommodation for smaller quiet test setting. You don't get that in computer pod with 50 kids

Parents opting out

- Issues also arise when parents opt-out their students, but the students want to take the test when they are in school that day (because other students are taking it; on a computer)
- Discussion of opting out. Facebook frenzy shares how to get kids out of taking the test
- Kids asking parents to write the opt-out letter
- Some realize that these tests don't help the kids, so there is opt out
- Seeing more parents opt out

Regional findings: Remote town and mid-sized city only:

Inconsistency at state level, from year to year

- State assessments are “all over the place;” [inaccurately] drawing conclusions about how students are doing
- Need same target for a period of time; right now, inconsistency from year to year
- Inconsistency sends message to student that the tests are not important; when took tests as a benchmark, many students didn’t care
- Changes in systems drive changes in LEA; too many changes in the past few years
- Pushing things out without a pilot and then changing them the next year

Unclear purpose of testing

- Not clear on the purpose of testing
- Not telling students the reasons for the tests

Money

- Billions spent on assessment; redirect those resources
- Have not had funding for years for new textbooks; makes it difficult to align to new standards
- [Challenge to find] funds to cover subs needed during testing

Regional findings: Remote town only:

State testing does not accurately reflect schools

- High stakes testing is a shame game. The star system doesn’t capture what “our kids” do. For example, local school system got 3 stars, but they have sent kids to Dartmouth, Harvard, and MIT
- State test results are “an indicator of sorts” but doesn’t tell you what’s going on inside a building
- State assessments: Challenge to have reputation of school based on a rating; have to fight negative perception of community, where individuals use rating to “create a crisis” that’s not an accurate reflection of the school
- Comparing one school to the rest of the state based on state assessments is unfair; local assessments are more targeted, based on “us”; captures individual attention
- One reason it’s not fair is because schools in Elko region are being judged against schools elsewhere in the state who have more resources

Negatively affects teacher recruitment

- Makes it harder to find teachers
- Some want to teach in non-tested areas
- Depends on how the merit pay is structured
- Challenge of the teachers needed at the Title I schools

Tests are unclear

- Questions are confusingly worded, ask things in a “roundabout” way
- Directions are unclear
- Hard to know what is being asked
- “Wording is awful” (hard to understand what question is asking)

Can’t improve instruction with state tests

- Better system of state testing could be designed to inform instruction
- Right now, state testing is based on accountability model that is external to the classroom; does not inform instruction

Teacher blaming

- Kids say “you didn’t teach me what you were supposed teach me, and that was on the test”

Scheduling of tests for year-round schools

- For year-round, a huge concern is that 9-month schools get from 20-40 extra days of instruction for their kids depending on track over the year-round teachers, but we’re all held to the same level of expectation, and those teachers will be held to same expectations, with fewer instructional days. We test significantly before the end of our year

Suggestions for the State Assessment System: Findings

Participants suggested that the state assessment system include:

- quick turnaround of results;
- fewer redundancies across tests;
- briefer administration times for each test;
- communication of a clear, practical purpose for assessments;
- increased funding and access to resources to support administration of assessments;
- and
- teacher input in developing the assessments.

Other suggestions for the state assessment system varied by geographic location. Participants in the remote town category suggested that the state assessment system include:

- alignment to standards and curriculum;
- alternative assessments, such as portfolios and capstone projects;
- options for test administration that account for disabilities; and
- ability to assess growth.

Participants in the mid-sized city category suggested that the state assessment system include:

- alignment to standards and curriculum;
- alternative assessments, such as portfolios and capstone projects;

- options for test administration that account for disabilities;
- professional development to prepare teachers for the state assessments;
- frequent and clear communication about administration of assessments;
- long-term stability (i.e., tests that are used consistently over time); and
- high quality tests (e.g., developmentally appropriate, valid, reliable, and equitable).

Participants in the large city category suggested that the state assessment system include:

- professional development to prepare teachers for the state assessments;
- frequent and clear communication about administration of assessments;
- long-term stability (i.e., tests that are used consistently over time);
- a review of state policy and practice;
- research based assessments; and
- no graduation requirement.

There was no consensus among participants about the content of state assessment systems. Some participants wanted to focus on reading, writing, and math, while others wanted a focus on workplace readiness. Others wanted to focus on areas like social studies and civics.

Suggestions for the State Assessment System: Supporting Data

An ideal system would have timely results

- Provide timely feedback
- Immediate feedback from the tests
- Receive feedback quickly
- Immediate feedback
- Immediately useful
- Faster results
- Quick turnaround for results
- Results come quickly
- Immediate feedback

Redundancies eliminated in tests

- We already have a lot of that data and now we are adding another test on. 8 year olds sitting for six hours [is a problem]
- Condense state-level testing
- Get rid of a lot of these tests, there are just too many
- Form common assessment system
- If there is perfect alignment, state and local tests could be one and the same; would increase student buy-in
- End of course and high school proficiency tests are duplicating efforts of high school teachers
- Have one system
- Fewer tests

- Some tests are redundant and/or duplicative, e.g. CTE, Science and English EOC, and ACT Writing
- More consistency across measures
- Redundancies need to be eliminated
- We need to streamline the testing system (Venn diagram type of assessment) to increase the information we get from each test and decrease the number of tests given
- I gave an EOC on Tuesday, and the following week they took the final. Students were livid. But it's not up to me
- Duplication
- What can we use that tests multiple areas at the same time?
- State and local assessments should be on the same page; why do they have to be different?
- Too many tests, there has to be a way to consolidate assessments
- We need to streamline testing

Briefer administration times

- Redundant test giving instructions
- Shorten time commitment; tests were supposed to take 3-5 hours, were taking 8 hours instead
- Unrealistic training of test administrators; there was a 63-page manual for testers. Really?
- Shorter blocks of time
- Scale down volume of tests; don't need 100+ questions
- Shorter
- Be only as long as it needs to be. Don't test little kids for 10 hours. Are you testing kids on their longevity to take a test?
- [Concerned about] time for administration
- Shorten administration time
- Efficient without too much time burden
- Less is more
- What is the reasonable length of testing time for students, 3 hours is too long?
- For SBAC CAT, kids can stop and resume, but with writing performance task, have to do it all in one shot, ridiculous to do 3 essays
- Maybe if they had 4 parts instead of 2 parts. But that requires more scheduling. Ideally I take my kids to the lab and it doesn't affect everyone else. Instead of requiring one setting

Communicate clear, practical purpose of state assessment system

- Science tests have no value because they don't mean anything; give them a purpose or remove them
- What is the purpose of what the state is doing?
- How does this test help the student year after year after year?
- When kids passed math test as sophomores think they don't need any more math
- Purpose needs to be determined; need an "honest purpose" and "state vision"
- Should know what it is all about

- Need info from colleges about what they want; e.g., Harvard, you need to get this score, UNR, UNLV, you need this. Careers, you need to get this. [Response] 75% have no desire to go to the university when they can make more money welding
- What is our goal as a state? Pass high school, or be functioning adults? [Response] There are two goals. For primary grades through middle school, teachers should be able to see what is lacking in some individuals. At the high school, the goal is to say this is where you are, what choices do you want to make about how to spend the rest of your life?
- Long-term vision for assessments, with timeline and rollout plan communicated to districts
- Don't give test until you know why you are giving it – what need are you meeting
- Balance value and burden better
- To have a clear purpose for the assessment. What is the purpose what is the expectation for the results and what do schools need to be accountable for? We don't have that for our assessments

Increase funding and access to resources to support administration of assessments

- District has been searching for funding to create common assessment system (Read by 3, Victory Schools, state grants). Will need to supplement with grants, and cover rest of costs through general fund
- Don't tie up so many resources
- Provide more resources to schools to cover the hidden costs of testing (e.g., computer purchases, subs, etc. as mentioned previously)
- Need to stop having unfunded mandates that are left upon districts and schools to figure out. One way is to make sure that legislation or mandate is connected to funding source. If they did that, it would be a solution to our problems
- Sufficient support

Tap local expertise in developing a state assessment system

- Give teachers representation in developing state tests; “they know what they are teaching”
- More tests written by teachers; allow common understanding of standards, allow students to be prepared; increase teacher buy-in
- Local input to increase validity
- NDE should tap district expertise
- Items written by educators, leveled for high school and middle school
- Test written by educators
- Why do you have to outsource everything? We can create something just like the state is paying other people to do, and would cost so much less

Content

- The basics—Reading, Writing, Math. We do a lot of STEM stuff
- Measure only core knowledge, like reading comprehension (some disagreed)
- English/Language Arts, Math, Science
- Workplace readiness (not just for CTE driven kids)
- Social skills

- Social Studies/Civics

Regional findings: Remote town and mid-sized city only:

Aligned to standards and curriculum

- Aligned to instruction
- Alignment with standards and curriculum
- Aligned with content standards
- Support to LEAs re: developing curriculum aligned to standards and assessments

Alternative assessments

- Capstone projects would be amazing. I could train kids to do a capstone project
- Take the money from the tests and put it into projects
- Think about strengths assessments; give students choices about which to emphasize for accountability
- Portfolios
- I loved capstones, and so did the parents and students. Bring those back

Useful for instruction

- More consistent with formative assessment
- Useful to improve instruction

Provide options for test administration that account for disabilities

- Account for disabilities—typing, etc.
- Better options for students who can't test online
- Choice of online or paper and pencil

Regional findings: Large and mid-sized cities only:

Provide professional development to prepare teachers for the state assessments

- Provide more training
- Training and professional development
- Support people well trained before test starts
- Teachers need to be able to see the test prior to testing so that they understand the wording or vocabulary of the test and can teach students the appropriate vocabulary and know what they are trying to teach to. [Response] I agree and disagree they need to know what they are being assessed on, but I do not agree with teaching to the test. If teachers do not know what is coming at them the results can have a grey area of effectiveness. [Response] Wouldn't the standards dictate vocabulary? [Response] Yes they do, and there are sample items and practice tests posted by NDE, but not all teachers know these resources exist. Communication is key
- Hardest thing is teacher time to participate in trainings. It is very difficult as a teacher to find time for this, as you do not want to leave your classroom and your students. You don't have time after work; do you really want to spend time on your weekend learning? Cops have mandated training and professional development worked into their days and are

accountable for the content. Something similar needs to be designed for teachers. Teachers should not have to go outside their workday to receive professional development

- Training that goes along with it and funding for mandates is provided for you. Getting manuals well in advance. Kids should know expectations because teachers should be able to make them clear
- It is hard as a teacher to find professional development

Increase frequency and clarity of communication about assessments

- Better planning and communication from NDE
- Information from NDE needs to be distributed in a timely fashion
- Need more information on EOCs
- timeline and rollout plan communicated to districts
- No consistent message to different zones in Clark County schools
- Blueprints for assessments provided to teachers to plan formative assessments and instruction. Need to know what we're held accountable to

Marked by long-term stability

- Long-term vision for assessments
- I don't like the turnover. NY Regents is established. Give us something and make it stick, and we'll adjust

Regional findings: Remote town only:

To assess growth

- Pre/post growth (would need to be short)

Regional findings: Mid-sized city only:

High quality tests

- Make them developmentally appropriate
- Ensure they are valid and reliable, well written, and unbiased
- Make them equitable

Regional findings: Large city only:

Review state policy and practice

- State review policy vs practice. We have amazing teachers and schools, what's holding us back? Policy or practice?

Research based, not political

- Legislature is about flavor of the month, whoever had the best sales pitch. Need to be research based, and talk to people before they say what's going to happen

Remove graduation requirement

- Don't put the burden on the students as grad requirement. Schools can take the hit, not the students

State and District Assessment Stakeholders: Findings

Participants across focus groups were consistent in identifying who should benefit from assessments. For both state and district assessments, the most common responses were teachers. Administrators, students, parents, districts, legislators, and the state were also identified.

State and District Assessment Stakeholders: Supporting Data

District Stakeholders

*[District results used] by teachers...
to inform instruction*

- **By the educator at that moment in time**
- Teachers, to improve instruction
- Teachers and administrators would use the results formatively. Families would like to know

... to discuss performance

- By teachers, this is timely data that should be used in conversations with kids and parents to talk about where they are now and this is where we need to be

By students to monitor their own performance

- **Elementary level: give tests back to let students monitor their own progress**
- Student ownership would increase a lot, local assessments do that more than the state assessments

By parents to monitor students' performance

- Teachers and administrators would use the results formatively. Families would like to know
- Something standard for my parents to see. Hard for them to believe the teachers themselves, but standard reports help them believe

Everyone

- **By teachers, staff, students, parents**
- **For all, seeing results of tests to see where student went wrong is very useful**
- Teachers, parents, admin, same people
- Same folks as state assessments

State Stakeholders

[State results used] By teachers

- The teacher should be the primary beneficiary of the data
- Teachers
- The information needs to get to the teachers

...to inform instruction

- If you want to inform instruction, needs to be given and developed at local level
- Teachers should use results to inform instruction

...to inform professional development

- Inform professional development

By administrators for school change

- If summative: for future planning, but don't need to be high-stakes
- Teachers and schools, for school improvement programs
- Look at data as a whole school, compare to other schools and the state
- More localized then could look at district to plan professional development (current system doesn't allow for that)
- Used by administrators to inform decisions at higher levels (e.g., school, district, regional levels)
- To inform about and change the environment of the school

Everyone

- Everybody. Students, parents, etc.
- Everyone. Students, teachers, families, administrators, districts, and state
- Results used by district, school, teacher, and family. Need to be given to families in a way that they can understand. See student growth

By state

- Legislature needs to be better informed about appropriate uses and misuses of assessment results
- State has shown they are incapable of doing this. Should hire people who can
- State should set policy, put it on to districts to run assessments like we know we can

By families

- parents should know how their kid did compare to other third graders
- As a parent, I hate those score letters
- Results used by district, school, teacher, and family. Given to families in a way that they can understand. See student growth

By high school counselors

- Counselors at the high school could really benefit—career and technical

By students

- The students, the community

Disparate Beliefs about Assessments: Findings

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) have 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

Disparate Beliefs about Assessments: Supporting Data

Use of results: individual versus school:

- Individual state test results (for each student) lets a single student compare themselves to the rest of the state
- Some tests show the class or school results, but not for an individual
- We misuse assessment results when we focus on individuals, not on fixing the system
- I know that aggregated test scores are useless, the value of tests is at the individual level, showing what each person retained

Confusion about Assessment Systems: Findings

Participants occasionally appeared confused about the difference between state and district assessments. Further, participants from the remote town category were explicitly confused about the difference between state and district assessments and current versus old tests (e.g., discussing the old CRT and the new Smarter Balanced), the high stakes nature of tests, outcomes, and norming years.

Confusion about Assessment Systems: Supporting Data

Questions about difference between state and district tests, and what district tests are administered

- Some confusion about which are district and state tests
- [Confusion about which test results are even available, or used. Discussed the old CRT, the new Smarter Balanced, MAP, End of Course, etc.]

State Assessments named when discussing district assessments

ACT

- ACT in 11th grade

EOC

- Once per semester (EOC)
- End of Course/Proficiency exams in 10th grade

CTE

- CTE End of Course

Confusion about tests

- Confusion about high stakes, outcomes, norming years

Miscellaneous (Uncategorized)

- There is not a lot of value in a written welding test
- Personal finance test for high schoolers
- In the state testing, kids may just have a bad day, and a lot more is a stake on that one bad day [Response] In contrast to regular [district or school] assessments, which are recurring
- We want to know if they are functioning adults when they leave the high school
- A lot of what we do is directed by Reno and Vegas
- Suggestion: Ask sophomores in college what they got out of state assessments
- Teachers are educators, not just proctors
- Need the ability to “drill down” into data to get feedback from CRTs
- Want system that can improve student performance
- Tracking kids 2-5 years out [of high school]; use broader indicators like jobs and the economy
- Take it easy on third graders
- Be realistic when providing test proctoring instructions
- Stop spending a lot of money on testing. Higher paid teachers, better bandwidth, materials, etc., instead
- Teachers should be able to say that you are not getting tested today, you can take it later
- I did performance based tasks in Geometry but had to pull it because of time
- Rube Goldberg machines, Catapults, slingshots, trebuchets, etc.
- Projects are a great way for some kids to demonstrate what they know who don’t do well on regular computer-based tests. [Response] Making boats that float—real practical experience. [Response] Not time to do that anymore
- Incorporating what is learned into a true, task-oriented environment. Makes it relevant. Otherwise, kids will cheat, take pictures of the test, etc.
- What are kids going to retain from a test versus building a cardboard boat?
- If testing kids made them smarter we would have a world full of geniuses, and we don’t
- Does the data go to the data hungry people in Carson City?
- This year was such a train wreck
- These test results dictate which packages the companies give to the schools. There is a black helicopter flying around the table
- Students like taking tests online
- 5th grade science test is helpful to teachers
- Good political measure for the community
- Can use to set goals
- Can use to remediate for college

- Parent communication
- Growth measures
- Tie to grade span testing. Not every year (some disagreed)
- Teachers need to be taught how to use data
- Need to educate and communicate with parents
- Current assessments focus too much on memorization, not on creativity
- Conduct similar focus groups with students, parents of special education students
- Help people know how to discuss the data well during PLCs
- Don't just assess facts... assess application
- Make sure people use common assessments so they can learn better from each other
- Treat teachers like professionals
- Parents are afraid to ask for help – it puts up another barrier between parents and schools
- Don't make this a "gotcha" – make it collaborative
- Postmortem after assessments would be beneficial for everybody. Would help drive information to state. When state is sitting there they don't see teachers, assessment, they only get info if they ask or tell them. But if we don't have that avenue of communication
- Why something else for 11 if SBAC is CCR
- One assessment is holding back from Algebra
- Students from other states have to take EOC for past courses
- We have a lot of people sending their kids out of state to graduate because their standards are not the same as our standards for graduation
- Where's the fairness in changing grad requirements (from year to year)?
- Don't want the whole focus of education to be on the test. Focus on creative, PBL. Standardized tests don't reach all kids and their potential
- Tests aren't aligned with grad measures (e.g., two math tests, but three math courses required)
- Only one avenue for graduation, no compensatory measure, etc.
- Whole reason for testing has been lost. Before it was basic skills to graduate high school, now something different
- A lot of testing due to NCLB, ESSA may change this
- Kids who excel are tested on old content from previous years, they have to relearn material to pass the tests
- Have tests moved from theory to application? It is not just what is being tested but how it is being tested
- Remember talking about end of course exams but we never found out any information about it, were told it was okay if we did poorly because the teachers didn't know if it would count towards graduation
- I was told they would not get testing results for two years as their student was taking the class two years early
- Used to be a time when you could go to one place and pull up all your data. Easy to access and meaningful, that all went away. Multiple assessments have to go to multiple sources

that don't always report the same way. Bright teachers can navigate the systems, but other teachers have a hard time. So they don't pull and use their data

- I like the finals. This is what everyone is giving, and this is where we all are. But, it's not consistent. [Response] They stopped rewriting the test when the standards changed [Response] We stopped using it because of that. [Response] It's a false sense of security
- State interim assessments give teachers checkpoints and provide pretest to material that has not yet been covered, with these interim assessments state testing scores should not be a surprise
- Something consistent; anything consistent would help
- Schools have autonomy to choose formative assessments and purposes based on what they want to do. Formative, not punitive. Concern: three initiatives that use formative assessments in summative fashion. Tied to teacher evaluation based on a formative assessment, because we have no summative assessments
- Students may know the material, but because students have to take a test without format practice, may be making mistakes
- I run a first-grade collaboration in our district, [we do] reading assessments, running records, [These are] not necessarily common assessment but still [provide us with] reading levels. Collab to set common targets for each quarter. Meet and try to be aligned
- Teachers make it up (in the absence of textbooks)
- I have no idea whether I've done it right (developing curricular materials)
- We're developing our money and time to develop curricular materials
- No blueprints for these assessments
- Some schools don't have the option for local placement tests
- Too few CTE classes; too much of what we teach is paper and pencil not practical
- Classes are too specialized, very little work across subjects
- Ability to look at benchmarks
- With AR, love that students are taking ownership of their own reading
- Local assessments are fantastic; I give a test every Friday. I love assessments, it's the best thing I do; I'm all about the local, pointed assessments. Those are great. The huge EOC and finals etc. are not useful to me
- For secondary schools, it works in this district because we're given some leeway to create and/or use assessments we want. If you spoke to turnaround schools, they're mandated local, and they may have same burden. [Response] At least they have some data
- Need to reevaluate which standards are assessed. What kind of questions are going to be asked? Make standards a little less vague
- Speaking ideally, I like that you get more than one answer, more than one choice. Multiple select items. Get credit, in theory
- Pre assessment at beginning of year, from same vendor. EOC and interim from same source
- Interims and final, p-values to help with focus (from CRT system)
- We have common quarterly, semester exams, and a common 8th grade placement test, but we have nothing we can use to compare otherwise
- Teachers were dying for something to place kids, so 8th grade placement test

- We do something similar with 5th graders. Common assessments to drive instruction. If there were data from SBAC, we would use it to drive instruction, but there is no data. And are the formatives connecting with the summative from the state? No data to compare
- Students may know the material, but because students have to take a test without format practice, may be making mistakes
- I wish as a community we would build into our structure time for teachers and staff to have professional development as part of their work day
- There has to be the ability for administrators to set standards for what is being taught – the ability to have expectations and hold teachers to these expectations
- There need to be repercussions, the ability to fire teachers
- Teachers need to be required to keep up with current standards (e.g., technology use); current thought it 1/3 will do it, 1/3 will be pulled along by students, and we just have to wait for the final 1/3 to retire
- There need to be new requirements for teachers to keep their licenses (building additional skills)
- Need to balance the needs of the adults and the students
- We need to change the way that assessment is viewed, assessment should be viewed or used as a supportive measure; it should not be scary. Should be used as a communication tool, not a punitive measure. Assessment should be used to support the kids
- Assessments are a tool, they should only be used as tools
- Teachers should be paid based on their individual accolades
- I would like to see an emphasis on student growth in addition to standards
- If the standards are static time can't be static too, you can't have time and end results static, problems with kids who progress faster and those for whom it takes longer
- We lose too many kids to dropouts
- When testing comes, students are pushed into adult education so that their test scores don't count
- What does this mean for my child? I know for the CRTs, a certain score dictate what class you'd go into. What do scores mean now for my kid?
- I just need to know, what they do well in, what they need support to succeed, give me something to do at home to work on
- Customized by school
- Competency vs compliance is critical; many teachers just teach compliance
- Kids need to be prepared for real life
- Kids need to see results and repercussions
- We need to figure out how to help kids whose parents struggled with navigating the system
- Kids need to be held accountable, learn lessons, and move forward
- Teacher pay should be based on the results they produce
- The compensation system in schools need to be changed, painters in schools should not be paid more than classroom teachers