

The Two Percent Solution: Weighing Value against Burden in Statewide Standardized Assessments

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Balancing Assessment Value and Burden

- President Obama announced the Testing Action Plan on October 24, 2015
- The plan includes, but is much more than, a proposed assessment cap of 2% of instructional time
- It contains best practice recommendations, not legislation
- ESSA passed shortly thereafter; we will discuss how the two inter-relate
- The challenge is to realize the promise of a balanced assessment system while minimizing the burden it imposes

Assessments

Understanding the Situation

Council of Great City Schools report

- In 2014-2015, students in the 66 districts that were part of the Council of Great City Schools took an average of 112.3 tests between grades 3 and 12 (including all statewide and district-wide assessments)
- Students in these districts took an average of 8 standardized tests per year
- In grade 8, the average student was tested for 4.22 days

Source: <http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/Testing%20Report.pdf>

Testing Action Plan

“In moderation, I believe smart, strategic tests can help us measure our kids’ progress in school. As a parent, I want to know how my kids are doing, and I want their teachers to know that, too. As President, I want to hold all of us accountable for making sure every child, everywhere, is learning what he or she needs to be successful.... I’ve heard from parents who worry that too much testing is keeping their kids from learning some of life’s most important lessons. I’ve heard from teachers who feel so much pressure to teach to a test that it takes the joy out of teaching and learning, both for them and for the students. I want to fix that.”

President Obama, October 24, 2015

Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/10/26/open-letter-americas-parents-and-teachers-lets-make-our-testing-smarter>

Testing Action Plan

Principles for Fewer and Smarter Tests

Assessments must be:

1. Worth Taking – Part of good instruction and require complex student work; provide timely, actionable feedback. Tests should not given solely for educator evaluation.
2. High Quality – Cover the full range of standards and elicit complex student demonstration of knowledge. Tests should provides an accurate measure of student achievement *and* growth.
3. Time-Limited – Recommend students spend no more than 2 percent of classroom time taking statewide standardized tests; “drill-and-kill” test prep must be eliminated.

Testing Action Plan

Principles for Fewer and Smarter Tests

4. Fair – and Supportive of Fairness – in Equity in Educational Opportunity – **Accessible and fair** measure that accurately reflects what students really know and can do, including students with disabilities and English learners.
5. Fully **Transparent to Students and Parents** – Every parent gets understandable information about the assessments their students are taking.
6. Just one of **Multiple Measures** – No single assessment should ever be the sole factor in making an educational decision about a student, an educator, or a school.
7. Tied to **Improved Learning** – Inform and guide additional teaching, supports, or interventions.

Source: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-testing-action-plan>

Testing Action Plan

Administration Actions to Reduce Over-Testing

ED is committed to supporting states and districts as they evaluate their assessment systems and reduce or eliminate unnecessary, redundant, and low-quality tests.

- 2016 Enhanced Assessment Grants notice of proposed priorities
- President's FY16 budget request
- Guidance on using Federal funds to support this work
- OSS “office hours” for states
- Case studies of state and district work in action

Source: www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/saa.html#Related_Programs_and_Initiatives

Every Student Succeeds Act

ESSA focuses on reducing over testing

- Maintains the requirement that states annually assess all students in reading/language arts & math in grades 3-8 and once in high school and once each in elementary, middle, and high school in science
- States have discretion to “set a target limit on the aggregate amount of time devoted to the administration of assessments for each grade, expressed as a percentage of annual instructional hours” (section 1111(b)(2)(L) of the ESSA)
- Continues the Enhanced Assessment Grants program (section 1203(b))
- Creates innovative assessment demonstration pilot (section 1204)

Every Student Succeeds Act

State and Local Assessment Audits

Beginning with FY17 funds (SY 2017-18), section 1202 of the ESSA provides for state grants, and for states to make sub-grants to districts, to:

- Conduct state and district audits that include such things as –
 - Schedule, purpose, and feedback on the tests from stakeholders
- Develop state plans to improve and streamline the State assessment system, such as –
 - Eliminating unnecessary tests, disseminate best practices, and support district efforts to streamline assessments and regularly review assessments

State Examples

- CO assessment implementation study (2014)
- NV assessment inventory (2016)

CO Study: Purpose

Discern and examine issues and concerns associated with implementation of the new state assessment system

Provide feedback to CDE that informs policy, practice, and future directions

CO Study: Approach

Phase I, February-April

- Document review
- 8 mixed-role, district focus groups
- 3 role-alike focus groups
- Survey of district assessment coordinators

Phase II, May-June

- Follow-up conversations with 8 districts
- Focus group of large, metro-area districts
- Interview multi-district, online provider
- Follow-up survey of district assessment coordinators

Phase I: Issues & Challenges

1. Time to teach — Impact on instructional time
2. Readiness — management, devices, capacity
3. Quantity, frequency, duration of assessments
4. Results — timely, relevant, useful, accurate information about student growth
5. High school burden and utility
6. Recognition of local assessment

Phase II: Feedback on Options

Technology Readiness – Do not revert to paper/pencil

Access to Devices – Request emergency funds

Length of Assessments – Strong support for fewer, shorter tests

Number of Assessments – Strong support for optional school readiness tests and moving to the federal minimum

Recognition of Local Assessments – Support varies by district location with rural and small, metro-area districts valuing local assessments more than large, urban districts

Sampling – Divided with 1/3 supporting, 1/3 neutral, and 1/3 seeing no benefit

Next Steps

1. Address the impact on instructional time
 - a) Move to the federal minimum
 - b) Reduce the number and length of assessments
 - c) Make school readiness assessments optional
2. Request funding for devices and facilities
3. Consider local flexibility
4. Continue the dialogue

NV Assessment Study: Purpose

Collect information from district test directors and charter school leaders about the type, purpose, value, and burden of local and state administered assessments

Provide feedback to NDE that informs policy, practice, and future directions

NV Assessment Study: Approach

Planning, March-April

- Prepare inventory framework and survey instrument
- Develop focus group protocol

Data Collection, April-June

- District test directors complete local assessment inventory and district-specific survey
- 3 mixed-role focus groups: Elko City, Las Vegas, and Reno

Data Analysis, June-July

- Analyze and summarize data
- Review findings with NDE

Relevant Resources

The Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI) provides technical assistance to regional comprehensive centers and state education agencies on assessment and accountability issues.

<http://www.csai-online.org/>



Spotlight: Testing Action Plan

- Testing action plan
- CSAI developed, DOE approved summary handout
- Relevant recent publications
 - Student Testing in America's Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis
 - Testing Overload in America's Schools
- Tools and guidance
 - Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts
 - Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems: A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden
 - Criteria for High-Quality Assessment
 - Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments
 - Guidance for Developing and Selecting Assessments of Student Growth for Use in Teacher Evaluation Systems

State and District Initiatives - 1

State and District Initiatives to Review Testing Systems and/or Reduce Testing Time

States and districts across the country have identified the issue of over-testing as a key concern. Recent examples of how state and local leadership have addressed this concern are highlighted here.



New York

In 2014, the New York State Education Department launched 31 competitive grants to support evaluation of local testing systems. The funding has allowed districts to identify high-quality assessments that support instructional goals, form action plans that will eliminate testing redundancy, and establish professional development programs to aid teachers in identifying high-quality assessments and improving assessment practices.

- [NYSED Announcement](#)
- [RFP Materials](#)



North Carolina

In 2014, North Carolina's Research Intern Program released a report describing the number of assessments and time spent taking assessments for K-12 students, the purpose of those assessments, and recommendations on reducing testing burden. In the wake of the report, the State Board of Education convened a task force focused on reducing testing time and burden.

- [Report](#)
- [Article on the Task Force](#)



Delaware

In 2015, Delaware completed a [comprehensive assessment inventory](#) with the goal of decreasing testing burden and increasing instruction time. The project was funded by grants that allowed all districts and schools to conduct in-depth inventories, creating opportunities for local-level recommendations and action plans.

- [Project Resources](#)
- [Assessment Inventory Tables](#)
- [Assessment Inventory Template](#)
- [Delaware Senate Joint Resolution no. 2](#)

State and District Initiatives - 2



Florida

Following a comprehensive review of all standardized assessments used in Florida's school districts, the Florida Department of Education released a report recommending substantial reductions in required assessments. Miami-Dade County Public Schools, in particular, responded by eliminating 24 benchmark assessments and 300 end-of-course tests.

- [Assessment Investigation Report](#)
- [Governor's Press Release](#)
- [Miami-Dade County Press Release](#)



New Mexico

Despite shifting to assessments aligned with more rigorous standards, New Mexico has gradually decreased state-mandated testing time across all grades by an average of 30 minutes per year since 2010. The state has also been partnering with districts to review local assessment implementation and eliminate redundant tests.

- [Testing in New Mexico](#)



District of Columbia

In preparation for the 2015-16 school year, the District of Columbia Public Schools assembled a task force to review the district's assessments. After the review, the task force recommended that the district: ensure the quality of required assessments; improve school supports for analyzing assessment results; and improve communication to families.

- [DC's Response to Task Force Findings](#)

State and district initiatives - 3



Rhode Island

In 2014, the Rhode Island Department of Education and the state's School Superintendents' Association began a review of state and local assessments. The examination included focus groups and community meetings, as well as a working group of four districts for the purposes of streamlining assessment systems.

- [RIDE News Article](#)

Maximize Value, Minimize Burden

- It's about balance, not simply reduction; each state must determine where adding assessment burden will outweigh the value of additional information
- Many times the work starts with a forensic examination into what is happening at the district level
- It includes helping states find and communicate with other states facing similar challenges

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