



Make Assessment Matter

Students and Educators Want
Tests that Support Learning



MAKE
ASSESSMENT MATTER

Students and Educators
Want Tests that Support Learning



in cooperation with

GA GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES LLC

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MAKE ASSESSMENT MATTER



Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) was formed in 1977 by researchers and educators in Pacific Northwest school districts to share ideas on measuring student learning. As a mission-driven not-for-profit, we have a longstanding commitment to bringing data to the conversation on teaching and learning. So it is with pride that we release our new report, *Make Assessment Matter*, conducted by Grunwald Associates LLC.

We released the first comprehensive study of assessment perceptions two years ago, surveying parents, teachers and district administrators. In the intervening years, the landscape has shifted dramatically—indeed, it continues to shift every day. For this reason, we felt a special urgency to add the student voice to this dialogue. With new standards, accountability assessments and ways of evaluating the impact of teachers on student achievement, we wanted to gauge their awareness of the changes, and understand what value—if any—they perceive in educational testing. Students' candor and sophistication in parsing educational activities are among the most notable findings in the survey. We hope you will find them as compelling as we do.

The surveys also queried teachers and district administrators on their attitudes and beliefs about assessment. Striking here is the trend data that show how perceptions are shifting over time. The results show surprising alignment around the need for assessment that supports the learning process. They also reflect the divisions and noise of the education community coming to terms with enormous change.

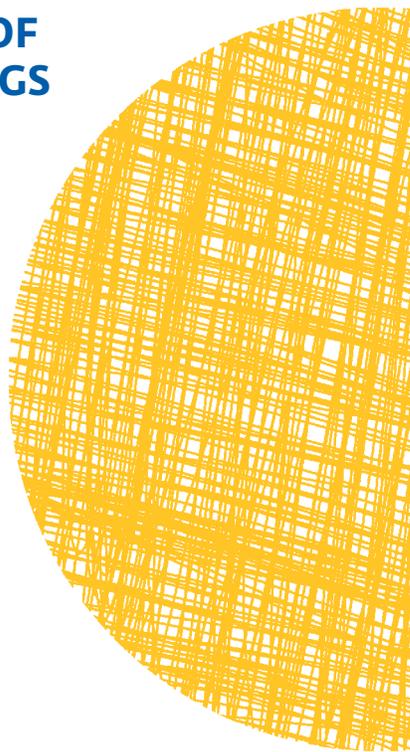
NWEA remains as driven to understand what it means to measure learning as we were in the years of our formation. We invite you to review the findings and accompanying recommendations. We hope the data spark an important conversation and meaningful action that helps shift the emphasis back where it belongs—to helping educators do the hard but rewarding work of ensuring that all kids learn.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Chapman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Matt Chapman
President & Chief Executive Officer
NWEA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



In a climate of intense change and high stakes, different stakeholders are making different assumptions about assessments. Common understanding is scarce. Research can help us gain a better understanding of the changing assessment and accountability landscape from those whose lives are affected most by assessments.

1 STUDENTS WANT A VOICE ON ASSESSMENTS AND ON THEIR EDUCATION

- Students are knowledgeable, thoughtful and frank about different kinds of tests—and their test-taking experiences and preferences—and they want to join the conversation about assessment changes.
- At a minimum, students want to be informed about coming changes in standards and accountability assessments.
- Students know what they want from their teachers and from tests—and they have a greater grasp of how assessment can serve them than teachers give them credit for. There is a gap between what students and teachers believe about the role of assessment.

2 THERE ARE NOTABLE DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENTS AND SCHOOL

- While students are in strong agreement in their overall perceptions about school and tests, striking differences are evident among boys and girls, younger and older students, and students in different income, racial and ethnic groups.
- Boys are significantly less happy than girls with school and with their own school performance—and boys care less about the impact of tests.
- Gender stereotypes persist in students' perceptions of their own strengths in school subjects and skills.

3 STUDENTS & EDUCATORS VALUE ASSESSMENTS—WHEN THEY SUPPORT LEARNING

- The vast majority of students recognize that tests play a valid role in their education—and in their futures. Like students, teachers believe that assessments play a valid role in education—and many teachers believe they could not be good teachers *without* assessments.
- Students perceive classroom tests as far more personally relevant to their learning than state accountability tests. Teachers and district administrators believe that classroom assessments are more useful than state accountability tests for supporting student learning.
- Performance on a classroom test prompts more feedback to students and, for poor performance, more instructional support than on a state accountability test. The vast majority of students receive their results on classroom tests, but more than one-third of students report that they never see the results of accountability tests.
- Students, teachers and district administrators all agree that multiple measures should inform student—and teacher—evaluations.

4 COLLABORATION EMPOWERS EDUCATORS TO INTERPRET AND USE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

- Educators who collaborate on assessment results are more confident in their ability to interpret and use these results to support teaching and learning.
- Educators who participate in professional learning communities tend to have regular, formal time to collaborate on assessment results.
- Despite the apparent value of collaboration in the use assessment results to drive learning, teachers are spending less time discussing all types of assessments in staff meetings or conversations with colleagues than they did two years ago.

5 MAJOR GAPS PERSIST IN ASSESSMENT LITERACY

- Most teachers and district administrators think they understand different types of assessments; the reality is that the survey results paint a very different picture.
- Most district administrators feel prepared from their training to use assessment results; teachers do not feel as prepared.
- District administrators overwhelmingly believe teacher preparation programs need to better prepare teachers to integrate assessment results into instructional practice.
- Teachers use assessment results frequently, and in many different ways, to inform their teaching.
- Districts use assessment data widely to evaluate students, teachers, principals, schools, instruction, programs and districts.
- Some educators do not know whether or how states or districts use student growth for teacher and principal evaluations.

6 READY OR NOT, STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS SEE SILVER LININGS IN TECHNOLOGY-BASED TESTING

- Most students still typically take state accountability tests with paper and pencil.
- Some students who have taken state accountability tests on computers and tablets have encountered technology glitches, although some say that interactive features make the test-taking experience more fun and engaging.
- Most teachers believe that many of their students are ready to take tests on technology devices. Teachers and district administrators also say that adaptive technology-based assessments are valuable for engaging students in learning.

INTRODUCTION

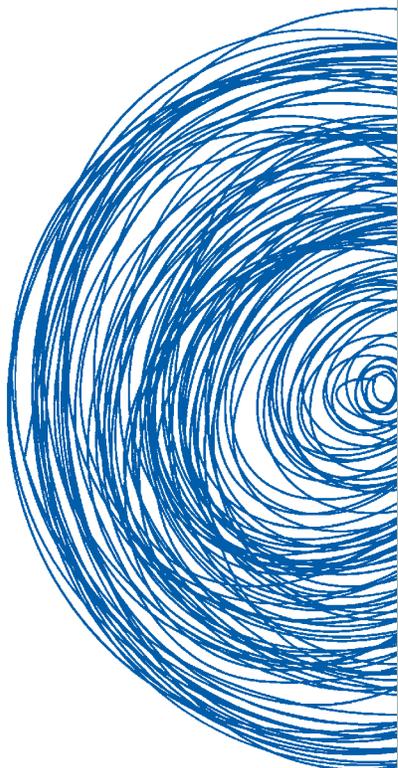
When the first edition of this study, *For Every Child, Multiple Measures*, appeared two years ago, the educational landscape was dominated by looming change. The Common Core State Standards had been agreed upon by 46 states, and two assessment consortia had been created to develop next-generation assessments intended to supplant the array of state accountability tests. Into that landscape, the first study opened the door to a better understanding of how parents, teachers and district administrators perceive assessment—something that had not been explored.

In 2014, this new study lands in an equally fascinating and even more polarized educational arena. The Common Core State Standards are undergoing intense public scrutiny, the two test consortia are field-testing their summative tests, and teachers in particular are increasingly calling into question the role of testing in measuring teacher effectiveness. We also decided that it was essential to add the student voice to this new research. So for the first time, students speak directly on what

assessment means to them, and how they believe that assessments shape their learning.

We've learned that there is an urgency felt on the part of students, teachers and district administrators to emphasize assessment for learning rather than for accountability. The overwhelming preference for all parties is that assessment results be used to inform learning.

Another fascinating result is the impact of collaboration. When educators collaborate to make meaning of assessment results, their ability to use them effectively during instruction increases. But while district administrators feel confident about their understanding of assessments, most teachers and students are not yet fully aware of the differences in assessment types and their intended uses. This lack of assessment literacy matters because only with a good understanding of assessment can everyone, including students, monitor and move learning forward.



The findings of this study are relevant to current efforts to reinvigorate U.S. public education for an internationally competitive economy. As noted, even with the flux, most states and K–12 school districts continue with the implementation of new standards, including the Common Core State Standards, and new common summative assessments designed to measure deeper learning and to ascertain students’ true readiness for college and careers.

Notably, we learned that students are just beginning to hear about the new standards and accountability assessments—and they want to know more, as this impacts their learning directly. Teachers, students and district administrators want assessment that matters and that helps them be better at teaching and learning. Yet frustration persists on the part of educators because this need is not necessarily being met by the current policy and practice around assessments.

Therefore, as a nation, we must first do a better job of communicating with all educators, students and their parents regarding the purpose of assessments and the role of assessments to improve teaching and learning for all students.

The message of students and educators is clear. Our focus must be on learning that is supported by a balanced range of assessments.

A SNAPSHOT OF STUDY TRENDS, 2011—2014

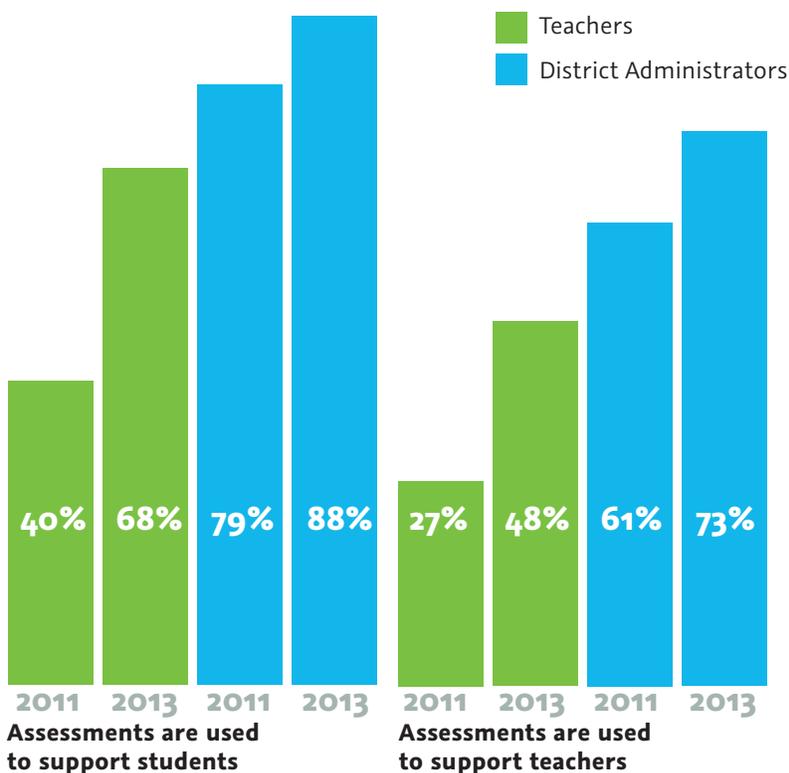
To gauge shifts in assessment perceptions, district administrators and teachers were asked some of the same questions in 2013 for this 2014 report that were asked in 2011 for the 2012 report. Figure 1, Table 1 and Figure 2 show some of the most salient findings:

Both district administrators’ and teachers’ views of the role of assessments have grown more positive in 2013, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Teachers and District Administrators Express Stronger Agreement: Assessments Support Both Students and Teachers

Q. Considering your experiences, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

“Collaborating with colleagues on student instructional needs” now appears in the Top Five most important priorities to teaching and learning for teachers, as shown in Table 1.

Teachers' priorities have shifted since they were surveyed in 2011. Providing extra support to students in regular classrooms now tops the list.

Table 1.

Providing Extra Support to Students Now Tops Teachers' Priority List

Q. In education, many things are important to successful teaching and learning. From the list below, please select the things you consider to be most important to you as an educator.

2011 Rankings	2013 Rankings
1 Monitoring individual student performance	1 Providing extra support to students in regular classrooms
2 Monitoring growth in student learning over time	2 Identifying students with specific strengths/weaknesses
3 Providing extra support to students in regular classrooms	3 Collaborating with colleagues on student instructional needs
4 Personalizing education for the individual student	4 Monitoring growth in student learning over time
5 Identifying students with specific strengths/weaknesses	5 Setting learning goals with students

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Teachers' and district administrators' perceptions about the time students and teachers spend on assessments have shifted, with more indicating that "just the right amount" of time is spent, as shown in Figure 2.

In 2011, 28 percent of teachers and 29 percent of district administrators believed that students spent "just the right amount" of time on assessments. In 2013, despite the intense national dialogue on this subject, those numbers show marked increases for both groups—38 percent for teachers and 48 percent for district administrators.

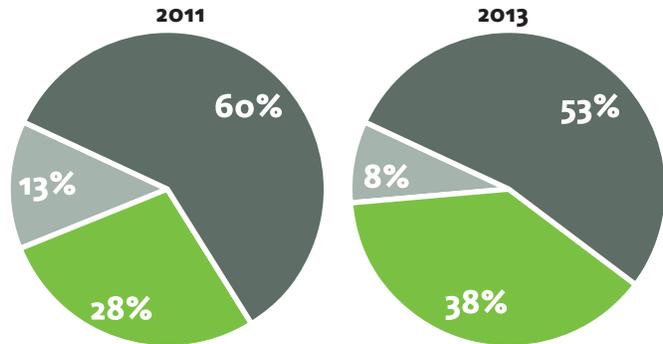
However, there are disparities about time spent preparing for and taking different kinds of assessments, with teachers (70 percent) and district administrators (55 percent) saying in 2013 that the focus on state accountability tests takes too much time away from learning.

Figure 2.
More Teachers and District Administrators Say "Just the Right Amount" of Time Is Spent on Assessments

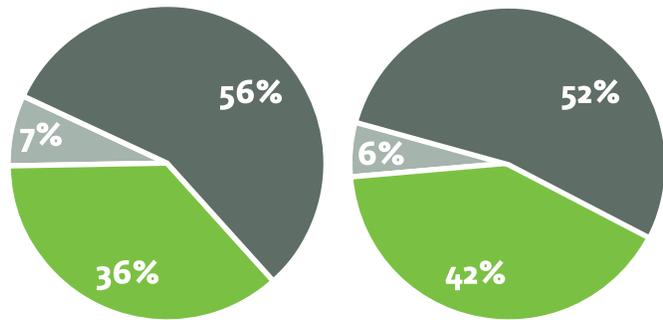
Q. For each of the following, please indicate how much time you feel is spent preparing for and taking (or administering) assessments.

TEACHERS

Time STUDENTS spend preparing for and taking assessments



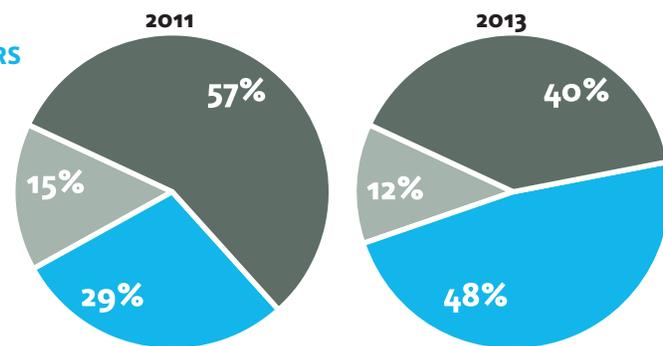
Time TEACHERS spend preparing for and administering assessments



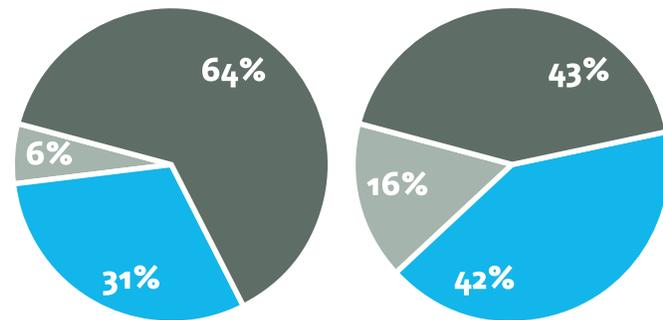
■ Too much ■ Just the right amount ■ Too little

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS

Time STUDENTS spend preparing for and taking assessments



Time TEACHERS spend preparing for and administering assessments



■ Too much ■ Just the right amount ■ Too little

Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

KEY FINDINGS STUDENT PERCEPTIONS



**“Tests help
motivate us and
push us forward.”**
—5TH GRADER

STUDENTS WANT A VOICE ON ASSESSMENTS AND ON THEIR EDUCATION

The vast majority of students recognize that tests play a valid role in their education—and in their futures. Students understand that tests, overall, are important for keeping track of their learning in school and for their postsecondary pursuits.

Ninety-five percent of students agree that tests are “very” or “somewhat” important for helping them and their teachers know if they are making progress in their learning during the year and for getting into a college, as shown in Figure 3.

Ninety-four percent of students agree that tests are important for understanding what they are learning, getting into a good college and knowing whether they will move on to the next grade. Elementary school students (96 percent) and middle school students (97 percent) express stronger agreement that tests are important for advancing to the next grade than do high school students (91 percent). Most students (88 percent) agree that tests are important for setting goals for their learning, for getting a good job (83 percent), getting a job (80 percent) and doing what they want to do in their lives (79 percent). Students perceive tests as less important for allowing them to join the military.

Many students have a remarkably accurate understanding of the purposes and uses of classroom and state accountability tests, as shown in Figure 4 on page 12. The majority of students see classroom tests as helpful on a number of levels, all of which provide feedback on their learning—including understanding whether they are performing at grade level expectations (57 percent) helping their teachers see what they have learned (55 percent), helping them see what they’ve learned (54 percent), allowing them to track their progress (53 percent) and notably, discovering if they need extra support (47 percent).

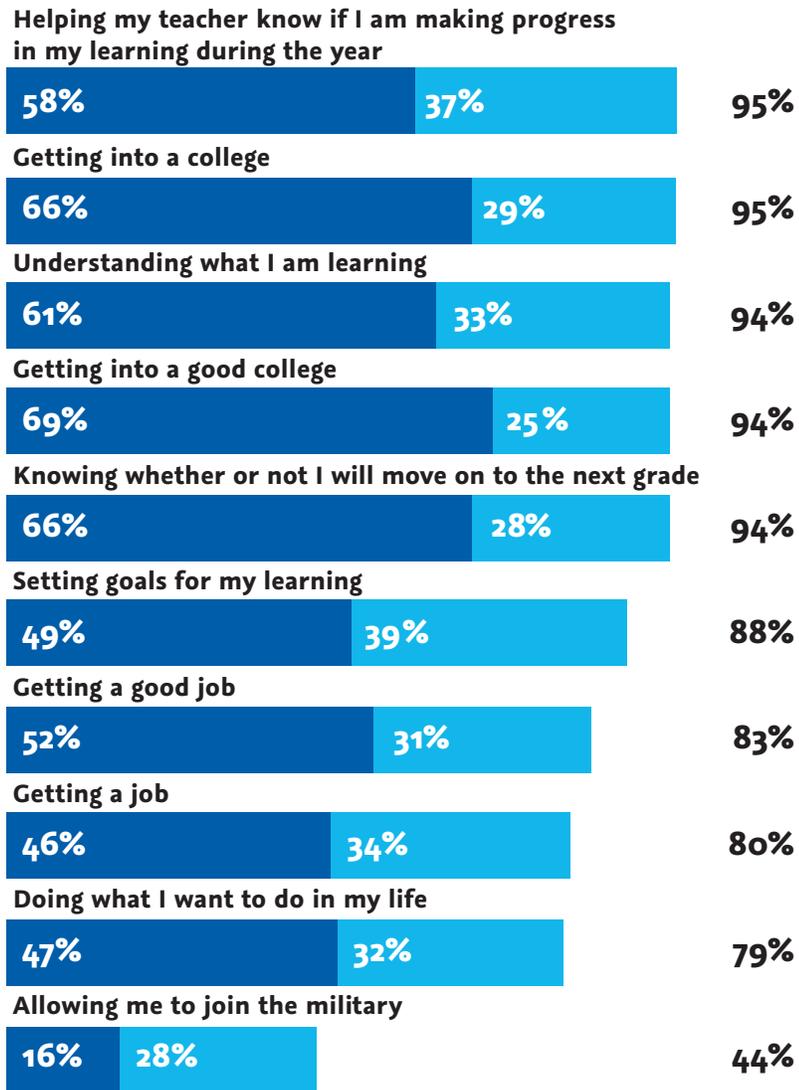
Most students (55 percent) believe they take state accountability tests to evaluate their schools; only 19 percent believe they take classroom tests for this purpose.

Students are significantly more likely to report that state accountability tests, as opposed to classroom tests, are given to evaluate their teachers, teaching programs and administrators.

Figure 3.
Tests Are Important, Students Agree

Q. Thinking about tests overall, how important are tests for ...

Percentage of students responding
 "very important"
 "somewhat important"



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

STUDENT VOICES



“ When we were younger, [state accountability tests] didn’t even matter, but once you get older they start mattering more.”
 —10th grader

“ [Subject/classroom] tests tell me if I need to work on this and I need to work on that.”
 —5th grader

“ When we were in middle school they allowed us to go into higher math classes if you got a higher score [on a state accountability test].”
 —9th grader

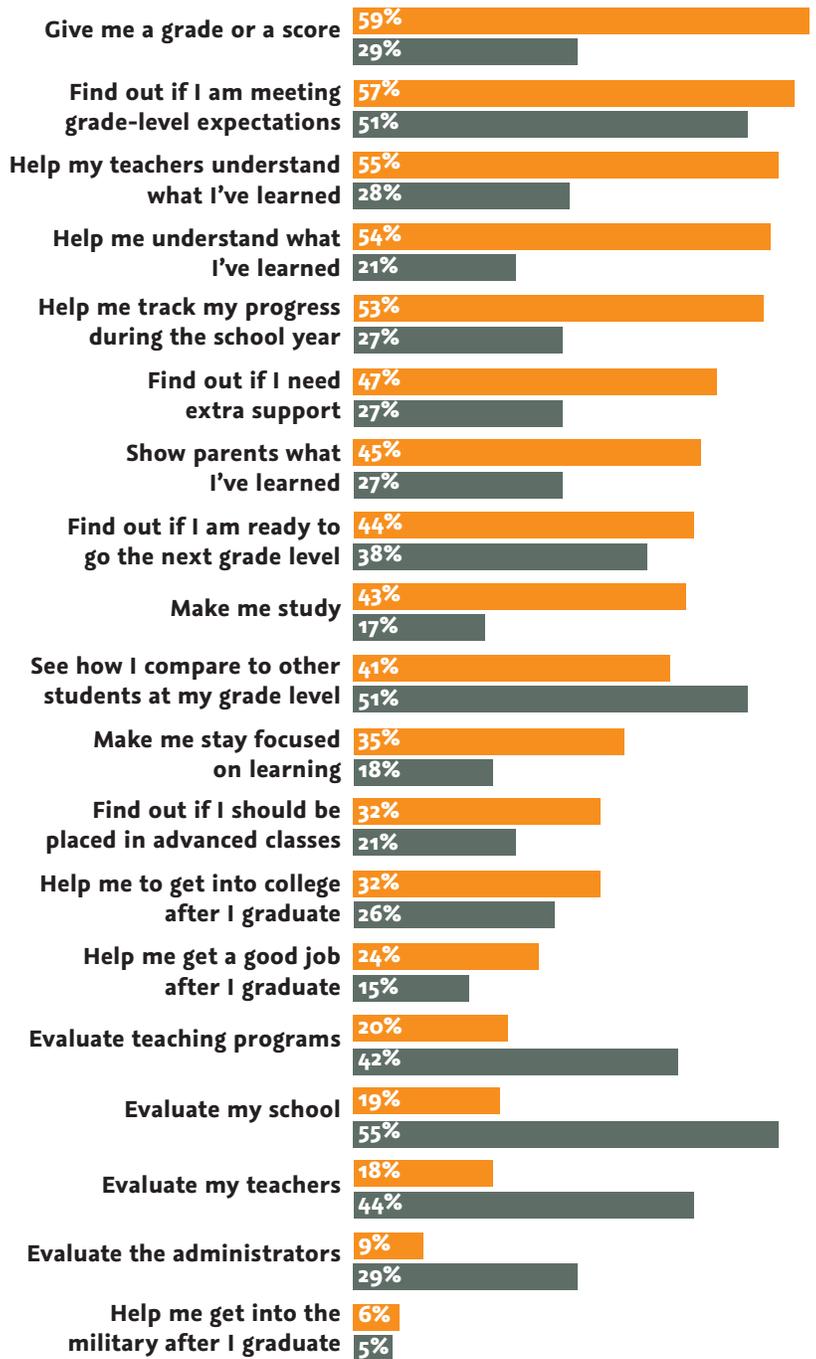
Students have a greater grasp of how assessment can serve their learning than teachers give them credit for. From their responses, students clearly believe they take tests to support their learning in a variety of substantive ways, also shown in Figure 4. Most teachers, on the other hand, believe that students think the role of assessment is largely to give students a grade or a score (68 percent), show their parents what they've learned (46 percent), find out if they are ready to go to the next grade level (37 percent), find out if they are meeting grade-level expectations (36 percent) and make them study (36 percent).

Students (45 percent) and teachers (46 percent) are in virtual agreement, however, that tests are needed to show parents what students have learned.

Figure 4.

Why Students Believe They Take Classroom and State Accountability Tests

- Q. Select all the reasons why you think you need to take tests during class (such as spelling, English, math, science or social studies).
- Q. Select all the reasons why you think state tests (such as [your state accountability test name]) are given to you at school.



■ Classroom tests
■ State accountability tests

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Students want feedback on performance, but gaps exist in how assessment results are used to direct learning.

Doing well on a classroom test typically prompts no extra instructional support, many students (42 percent) say. On average, however, about one in four students report that when they do well on a test, their teacher or school gives them more advanced material to work on (27 percent), moves them into a more advanced group or class (27 percent), or gives them more independent study (22 percent). Fifteen percent of students say they are provided with special classes after school and 11 percent say they are moved up to the next grade if they perform well on classroom tests.

Teachers and schools provide more instructional support to students who do poorly on classroom tests. According to student responses, that extra help includes before- and after-school support (43 percent), one-on-one support in class (32 percent), access to additional resources (29 percent), small-group support in class (24 percent),

online tools or other web-based programs (23 percent), summer school (22 percent), and office hours after school (20 percent). Elementary school students are more likely to receive small-group support in class, while high school students are more likely to receive before- and after-school support and summer school. One in five students (20 percent) say no extra support is provided if they do poorly on a classroom test.

Nearly twice as many students (38 percent) report that poor performance on state accountability tests prompts no extra support. When teachers and schools do provide extra help for poor performance on state accountability tests, they provide less of it, as shown in Table 2 on page 14.

And, while students clearly prefer interaction with their teachers and peers, teachers report that they are only able to provide an average of three minutes of feedback per student on assessments.



Students recognize state accountability and classroom tests—but not the education terms used to describe them.

Most students (80 percent) say they have heard of state accountability tests—by the name of their own state accountability testing program—and most students (72 percent) also say they have taken state accountability tests. Only quizzes are more familiar to students, with 84 percent saying they have heard of these tests and 78 percent saying they have taken them; 73 percent have heard of subject tests taken in class and 67 percent have taken them.

STUDENT VOICES



“ I like math or spelling tests better [than state accountability tests] because you can study for them. For the [state accountability tests], I wonder what will be on them this time.”

—5th grader

“ Since [state accountability] tests do not impact us at all, it seems silly that it takes so much of our time.”

—9th grader

“ A [state accountability test] is used to measure what this kid knows vs. what that kid knows. It’s used for comparisons.”

—10th grader

“ No one learns from state tests. It’s testing what you know. You’re not learning anything from it.”

—12th grader

At the same time, students' awareness of assessment terms is substantially lower when it comes to interim, formative and summative assessment—education lingo that describes and categorizes some of the tests students say they have actually taken. Only 16 percent of students say they have heard of interim assessment, 10 percent say they have heard of formative assessment and 7 percent say they have heard of summative assessment—despite their overwhelming familiarity with their state accountability test (which is summative). Even fewer students (7 percent or less) say that they have taken interim, formative or summative assessments.

3 MINUTES
THE AVERAGE AMOUNT OF
TIME TEACHERS SPEND
PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH
WRITTEN OR VERBAL FEEDBACK
ON A TEST TO EACH OF THEIR
STUDENTS, REGARDLESS
OF ASSESSMENT TYPE

Table 2.

Poor Performance on Classroom Tests Spurs More Instructional Support

- Q. What types of extra help, if any, does your teacher or school give you if you do not do well on a test taken in class (such as spelling, English, math)?
- Q. What types of extra help, if any, does your teacher or school provide if you do not do well on a state standardized test?

	Classroom test	State standardized test
Percentage of students who say their teacher or school provides support		
Before- and after-school support	43%	24%
One-on-one support in class	32%	19%
Access to additional resources	29%	22%
Small-group support in class	24%	17%
Online tool or web-based program	23%	15%
Summer school	22%	19%
Office hours after school	20%	11%
Whole-class support in class	14%	13%
No extra support provided	20%	38%

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

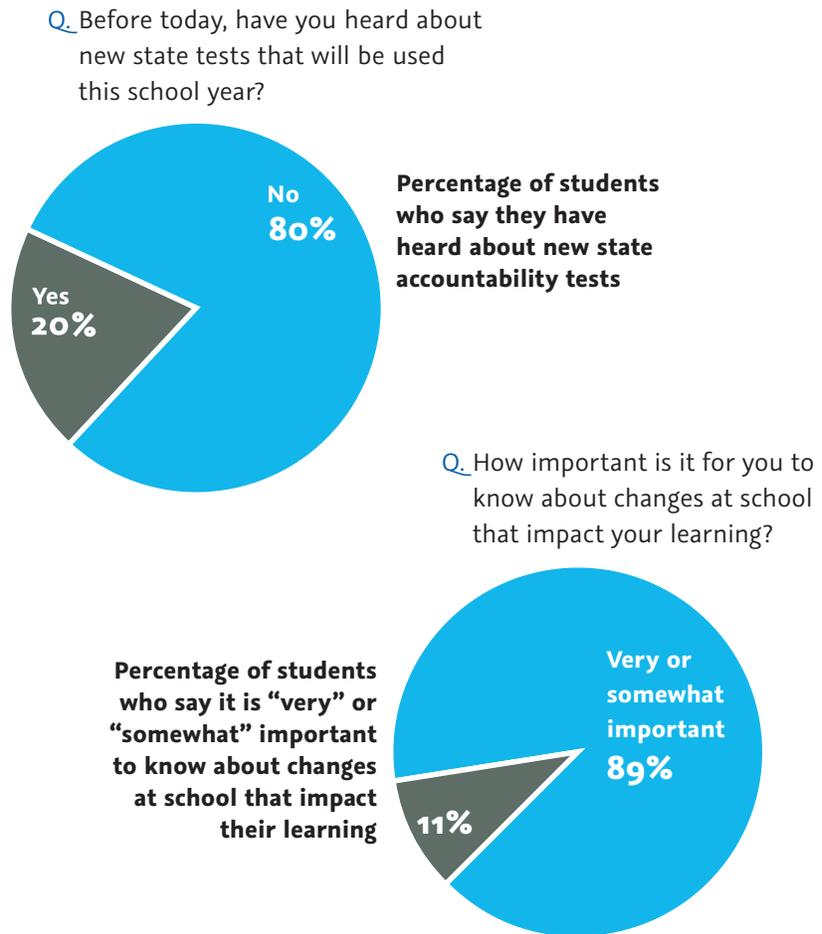
Most students are in the dark about the Common Core—and they may want to know more.

Only 29 percent of students say they have heard of the Common Core State Standards, and fewer (20 percent) have heard about new state accountability tests (aligned to the Common Core) that are on the horizon, as shown in Figure 5.

The two major state assessment consortia have had two large-scale field tests of the new assessments under way in the 2013–14 school year, with full implementation of the assessments planned in many states beginning in the 2014–15 school year. While questions about the new assessments, state participation in the consortia and their implementation timelines are escalating, it is striking that most students are completely unaware of new state accountability tests in the works.

Equally striking is that most students (89 percent) say that it is “very” or “somewhat” important for them to know about changes at school that impact their learning, also shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. **Little Knowledge of—But Keen Interest in—Coming Changes to State Accountability Tests**



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

STUDENT VOICES



“ I think the students should have a much more active role in what is happening in their school.”

—10th grader

“ The students don’t get told anything about [new tests]. Most of it is through the grapevine—hearsay rumors.”

—12th grader

THERE ARE NOTABLE DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENTS AND SCHOOL

Girls are happier and more motivated in school than boys.

Students overall feel positive about school, are mostly satisfied with how they are doing, try hard on tests and care about their test performance. Boys, however, are somewhat less enthusiastic than girls about school and their school performance, as shown in Figures 6 and 7. Boys also are more likely than girls to agree that there are “too many” classroom and state accountability tests.

Figure 6.

For More Than One in Five Boys, School Is a Waste of Time

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with each statement about school?

My teacher cares about my learning



I feel like I learn a lot in school



I like school



I feel like school is a waste of time



Percentage of students who agree “a lot” or “a little”

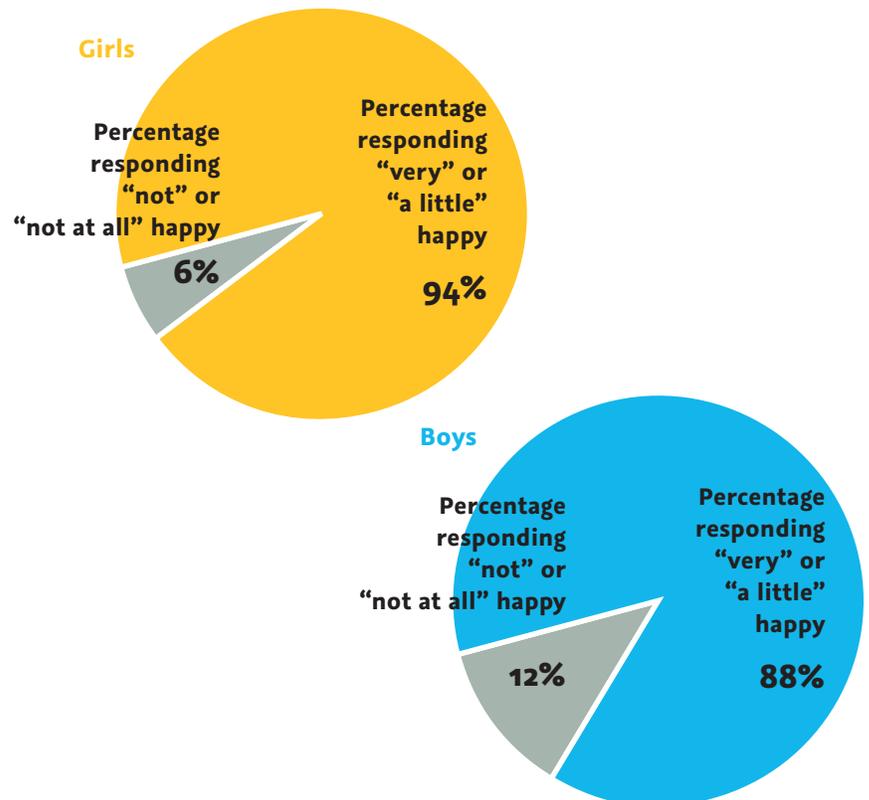
Girls
Boys

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Figure 7.

Boys Are Less Satisfied with Their School Performance

Q. How happy are you with how you are doing in school?



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

1 WEEK
THE POINT IN TIME AFTER WHICH 89 PERCENT OF STUDENTS SAY TEST RESULTS ARE NOT VERY HELPFUL TO THEM OR THEIR TEACHERS

STUDENT VOICES



“ You need to get a certain score [on a state accountability test] to get into certain schools.”

—12th grader

“ I know a lot of people that don’t test well, so that’s not the best way to show people you understand ... ”

—10th grader

“ [State accountability tests] are something that’s created for a large group of people so it’s not that specific to your classes or what you are learning.”

—9th grader

Figure 8 raises questions about student perceptions about tests. On the one hand, the vast majority of students, boys and girls, say they try hard on most tests and care about doing well on tests, among other findings that indicate how seriously they take tests and learning. On the other hand, some boys (46 percent) and girls (39 percent) say that tests are a waste of time.

It’s clear that students feel that certain kinds of tests are not very relevant to their learning, and so it’s not surprising to hear some students identify tests as a waste of time. In tandem with other findings, the message is clear: students want high-quality, engaging assessments that are tightly connected to learning.

Figure 8.

Boys Care Less About the Impact of Tests

Q. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each statement about tests.

I try hard on most tests

97%

95%

I care about doing well on tests

97%

93%

My tests results help me track my progress during the school year

91%

85%

My grades or scores are very helpful in showing how much I’ve learned

90%

83%

I generally do well on tests

88%

83%

I believe tests will help me in my future

79%

72%

Tests are a waste of time

39%

46%

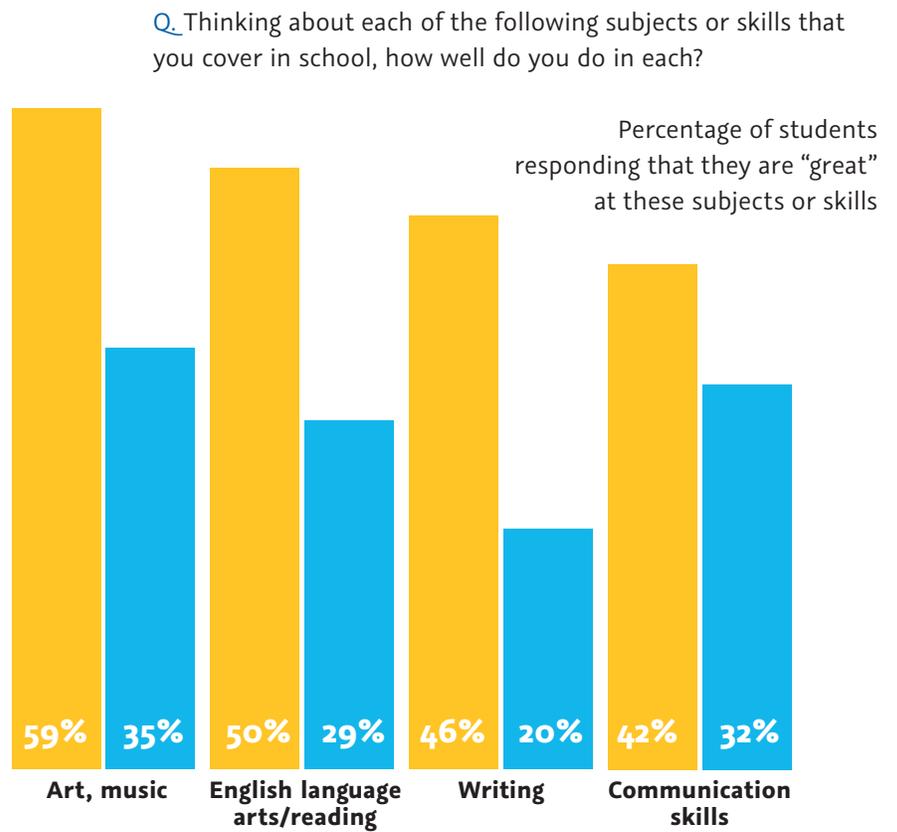
Percentage of students who agree “a lot” or “a little”

Girls
Boys

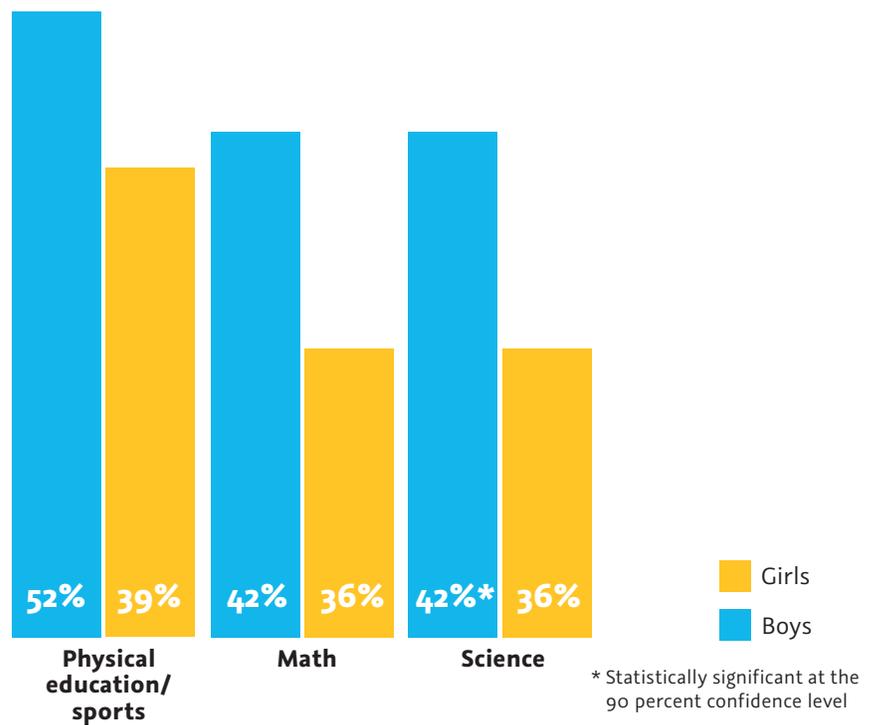
Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Gender stereotypes persist in students' perceptions of their strengths. Boys and girls express decided differences in their perceptions of the subjects and skills in which they think they do well. Girls believe they are strongest in the arts and English language arts, reading, writing and communicating. Boys favor physical education and sports, math and science, as shown in Figure 9. Still, some might consider the gaps in perceptions between girls and boys when it comes to math and science, while statistically significant, surprisingly narrow.

Figure 9. **Girls Take to the Arts, Reading, Writing and Communicating ...**



... and Boys Prefer Physical Education, Sports, Math and Science



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

AGE, HOUSEHOLD INCOME, RACE AND ETHNICITY IMPACT STUDENT VIEWS ON SCHOOL AND TESTS

High school students are much less satisfied with school than elementary and middle school students:

- High school students are significantly less likely to report that they like school. Forty-eight percent of elementary school students and 42 percent of middle school students say they like school, compared to 33 percent of high school students.
- High school students are significantly less likely to report that they learn a lot at school. Sixty percent of elementary school students and 49 percent of middle school students say they learn a lot at school, compared to 42 percent of high school students.
- High school students are significantly less likely to feel that their teachers care about their learning. Seventy-one percent of elementary school students and 54 percent of middle school students believe their teachers care about their learning, compared to 42 percent of high school students.
- High school students (45 percent) are significantly more likely than middle school students (35 percent) to think that classroom tests have too much impact on their grades.
- High school students are significantly less likely to think that tests help them learn new things. Asked this question, 29 percent of high school students say, “no, not really” or “no, not at all,” compared to 20 percent of elementary school students and 19 percent of middle school students.
- High school students are significantly less likely to think that test scores on either state accountability or classroom tests reflect what they have learned. Thirty-nine percent of high school students say state tests don’t really or don’t at all reflect what they have learned, compared to 33 percent of middle school students* and 31 percent of elementary students. Nineteen percent of high school students feel the same way about classroom tests, compared to 10 percent of middle school students and 11 percent of elementary school students.

* Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level

Students whose household incomes range from \$25,000 to \$49,000, and students from higher-income households (\$100,000 to \$149,000), are significantly more likely than other students to report that they like school. Students from the higher-income households also are significantly more likely to report that their teachers care about their learning.

Students from the highest-income households (\$150,000 or more) are significantly more likely to feel that they are performing above their classmates and friends in school. These affluent students, and Asian students, are significantly more likely to think that test scores are important for getting into a good college.

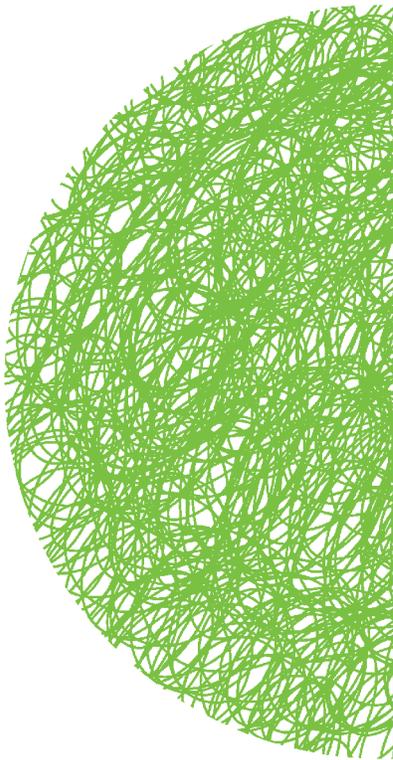
African-American students (56 percent) are significantly more likely than white students (46 percent), Hispanic students (43 percent) or Asian students (35 percent) to report that one reason they take classroom tests is to find out if they need extra support. African-American students (74 percent) also are significantly more likely than white students (57 percent) and Asian students (52 percent) to report that their parents have met with teachers to discuss student test results.

Asian, African-American and Hispanic students are significantly more likely than white students to believe that classroom and state accountability tests are very important to their futures (getting into the next grade, getting into college or the military). Sixty-five percent of Asian students, 64 percent of African-American students and 61 percent of Hispanic students believe state accountability tests are very important to their future, compared to 47 percent of white students who believe this.

African-American students (79 percent) are significantly more likely than white students (68 percent) to believe that college entrance exams, such as the PSAT, SAT and ACT, are very important to their futures. African-American students (51 percent) also are significantly more likely than white students (35 percent) to believe this about quizzes.

58%
OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BELIEVE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS ACCURATELY PREDICT COLLEGE SUCCESS

STUDENT AND EDUCATOR COMPARISONS



STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS VALUE ASSESSMENTS—WHEN THEY SUPPORT LEARNING

Teachers clearly recognize that tests have a valid role to play in education. Fifty percent of teachers say they need assessments to be good at their jobs. Still, more than one-third of teachers (39 percent) say they could do *without* assessments, while 11 percent don't know, as shown in Figure 10.

Like students, teachers and district administrators would prefer to focus on tests that inform student learning. Most teachers (54 percent), and the vast majority of district administrators (89 percent), say that the ideal focus of assessments should be frequently tracking student performance and providing daily or weekly feedback in the classroom. This sentiment tracks with students' attitudes about tests. Students express overwhelming agreement that tests are important for helping them and their teachers know if they are making progress in their learning and

for understanding what they are learning.

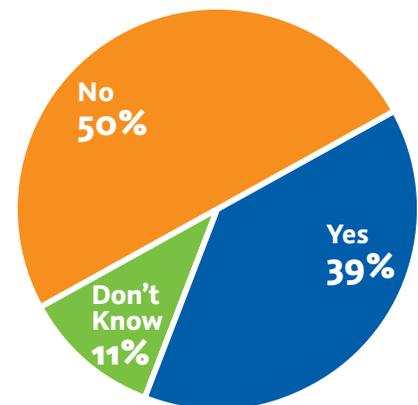
Teachers say that teacher-developed classroom tests, performance tasks and formative assessment practice work best for supporting student learning in their classrooms, while state accountability tests are the least effective. Teachers say they use assessment results relatively frequently—10 times a month, on average—to inform their teaching.

Both students and educators agree that multiple measures should inform student—and teacher—evaluations. Students at all grade levels would apply multiple measures to teacher evaluations. Students don't think it's fair to evaluate teachers solely based on student test scores. Instead, students would use a mix of student grades and test scores and student, principal and parent evaluations of teachers, as shown in Figure 11. Notably, many students believe their voices on teacher effectiveness should be heard—and they think their voices are considerably more important than those of principals or parents.

Figure 10.

Half of Teachers Say They Could Not Be Good Teachers without Tests

Q. Do you think you could be a good teacher without any assessments in your teaching?



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

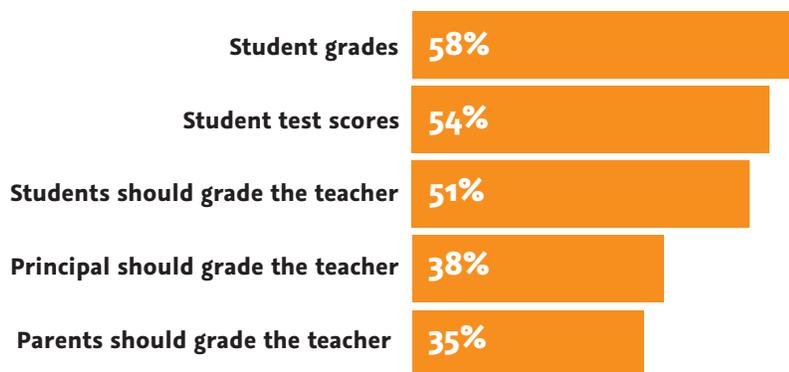
“I like pre- and post-tests because you get to see the progress you’ve made.”

—4TH GRADER

Figure 11.

How Students Would Evaluate Teachers

Q. Which of the following should be used to let the school know whether a teacher is doing a good job at teaching or not?



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

READY OR NOT, STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS SEE SILVER LININGS IN TECHNOLOGY-BASED TESTING

First, the sobering reality: Most students (86 percent) say they still typically take state accountability tests with paper and pencil. Another 23 percent of students say they typically take state accountability tests on a computer, and 3 percent say they typically take these tests on a tablet, an indication that some schools are using both legacy paper-and-pencil tests and new digital testing platforms. Many states, of course, are gearing up to implement technology-based state accountability tests.

Most students (78 percent) think that taking tests on computers has a positive impact on their engagement during tests. Most district administrators (95 percent) and teachers (76 percent) agree that adaptive technology-based assessments are “extremely”

or “very” valuable for engaging students in learning.

Among the roughly one in four students who typically take state accountability tests on a computer or tablet, some have experienced technology glitches during test administration, including slow response times (reported by 36 percent of these students), “freezing” of the test (30 percent) and difficulty navigating the online test (18 percent). Eighteen percent of these students also report that there were not enough computers or tablets for all students.

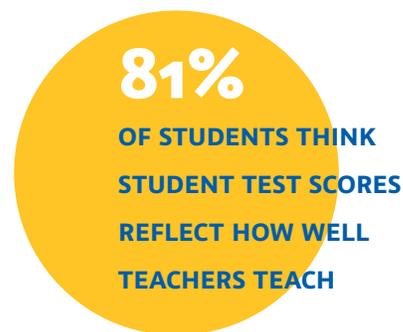
On the flip side, students who typically take state accountability tests on a computer or tablet also report a number of benefits:

- Graphics that help make the test better (cited by 25 percent of these students)
- Online test tools and features, such as highlighting and calculators (24 percent), and “tagging” tools to mark and

review questions and return to them later (20 percent)

- A more fun and engaging test because of the interactive features (23 percent)

For their part, most teachers (88 percent) believe that at least some of their students are ready to take tests on technology devices. Specifically, 38 percent of teachers say some of their students are ready, 34 percent say most of their students are ready and 16 percent say all of their students are ready. Notably, however, 12 percent of teachers say none of their students are ready for technology-based testing.



TEACHER AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS



COLLABORATION EMPOWERS EDUCATORS TO INTERPRET AND USE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Most educators collaborate with their colleagues frequently to plan and adjust instruction based on assessment results. Eighty percent of teachers and 91 percent of district administrators report that they work with their peers to use assessment results to inform instruction, as shown in Figure 12. Teachers in elementary schools (84 percent) and middle schools (80 percent) are significantly more likely than teachers in high schools (69 percent) to report that they collaborate for this purpose.

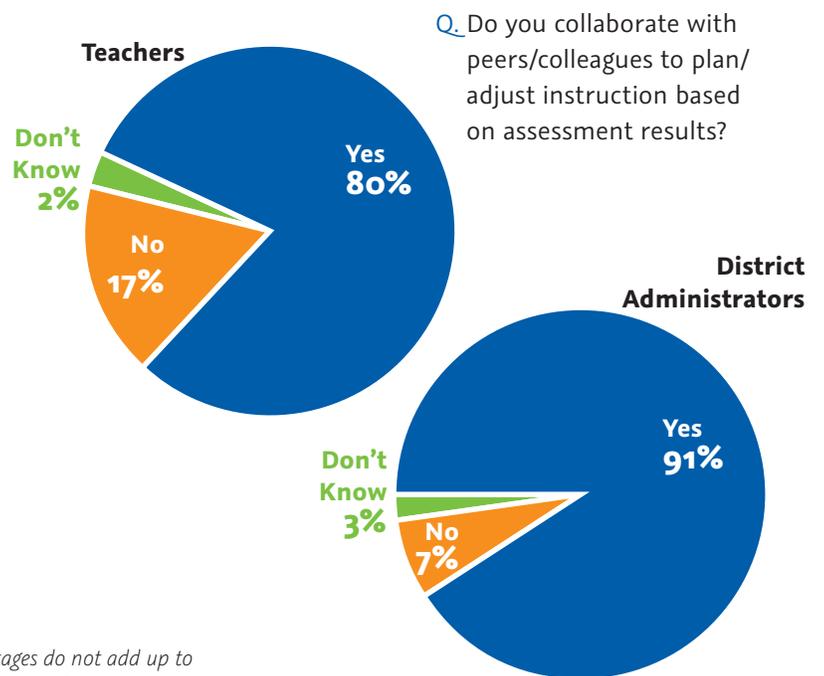
The many educators who do collaborate on the use of assessment results do so frequently. Among

teachers who collaborate for this purpose, 90 percent collaborate at least once a month, including 54 percent who say they collaborate at least once a week and 36 percent who say they do this a few times a month or at least once a month. Again, elementary and middle school teachers who collaborate on assessment results do so more frequently than high school teachers.

Among district administrators who collaborate on assessment results, 83 percent collaborate at least once a month. District administrators don't collaborate as frequently as teachers who collaborate, however; most (53 percent) say they do so a few times a month or at least once a month; 30 percent do so at least once a week.

Figure 12.

Most Teachers and District Administrators Collaborate to Explore Assessment Results



Percentages do not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Participation in professional learning communities comes with a bonus: regular, formal time to inform instruction using assessment results. Three-quarters of district administrators (76 percent) report that they participate in professional or teacher learning communities. Of these, 91 percent say they have regular, formal time to collaborate with their peers—and 97 percent say they discuss assessment results—in these communities.

Teachers are significantly less likely to participate in professional or teacher learning communities—but the majority of those who do report that they, too, have regular, formal time to collaborate on assessment results. In fact, 56 percent of teachers report that they participate in professional or teacher learning communities. Of these, 81 percent say they discuss assessment results in these communities.

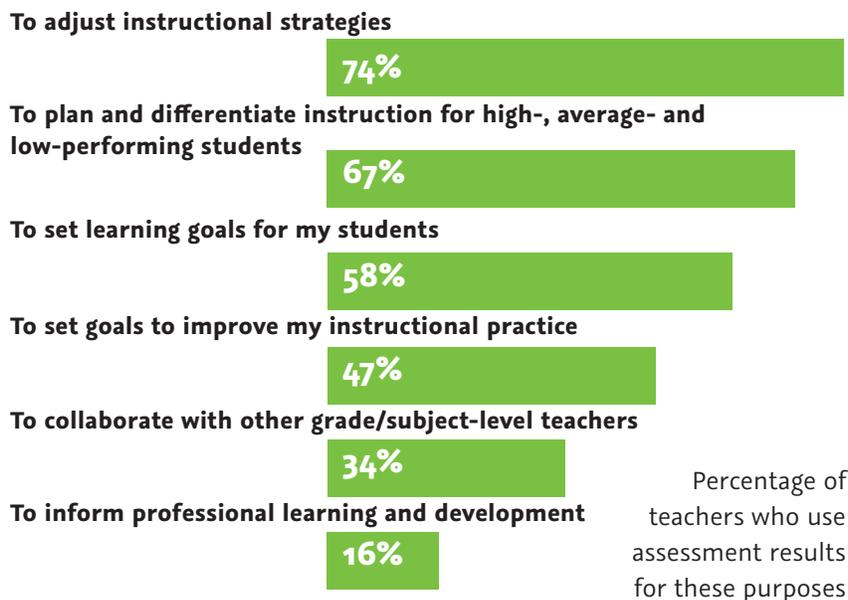
Educators who collaborate on assessment results are more confident in their ability to interpret and use these results to support teaching and learning. The perceptions of educators who collaborate on assessment results differ markedly from those of their peers who do not. For example, teachers who collaborate on assessment results are more

**10 TIMES
A MONTH
MEAN FREQUENCY WITH
WHICH ALL TEACHERS USE
ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO
INFORM TEACHING**

Figure 13.

Teachers Put Assessment Results to Work for Student Learning

Q. You mentioned that you have used assessment results to inform your teaching. In which of the following ways, if any, are you doing that?



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

convinced than teachers who don't that they are "extremely" or "very" prepared to interpret and use these results by a significant margin of 56 percent to 37 percent.

Yet, despite the clear benefits associated with collaboration for both teachers and district administrators, both groups report spending less time on this than in 2011, when the first data were collected.

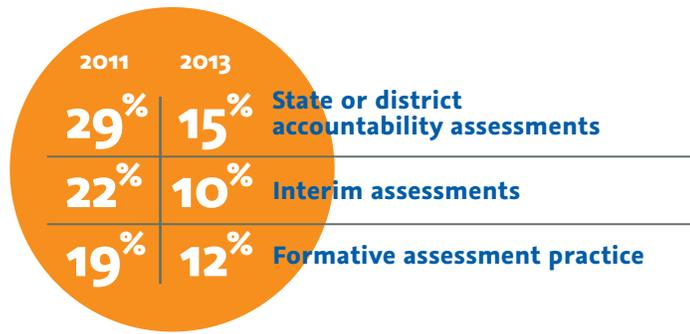
Teachers rely on assessment results to inform teaching.

Teachers use assessment results frequently, and in many different ways, to inform their teaching. The 96 percent of teachers who say they use assessment results do so to improve teaching and learning where it counts—in their

classrooms. Seventy-four percent of these teachers use assessment results to adjust instructional strategies, 67 percent use them to plan and differentiate instruction for high-, average- and low-performing students, and 58 percent use them to set learning goals for their students, as shown in Figure 13.

To a lesser extent, teachers who use assessment results also do so to set goals to improve their own instructional practices (cited by 47 percent of teachers) and collaborate with other grade-level and subject teachers (34 percent). Fewer of these teachers (16 percent) use assessment results to inform their professional learning and development.

THE MEAN PERCENTAGE OF TIME TEACHERS REPORT SPENDING IN AN AVERAGE MONTH DURING STAFF MEETINGS OR CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEAGUES DISCUSSING ASSESSMENTS



Notably, teachers who collaborate with their peers on assessments results are significantly more likely than their peers to use these results to inform their teaching across the board—for every one of the six purposes about which they were asked. Elementary and middle school teachers also are significantly more likely than high school teachers to use assessment results to set learning goals for their students and collaborate with other grade-level and subject teachers. Elementary school teachers are significantly more likely than middle or high school teachers to use assessment results to plan and differentiate instruction as well.

MAJOR GAPS PERSIST IN ASSESSMENT LITERACY

Most district administrators feel prepared with their training to use assessment results; teachers do not feel as prepared. District administrators are more likely than teachers to report that they currently receive training or professional development on the interpretation and use of assessment results; 77 percent of district administrators report current training for this purpose, compared to 60 percent of teachers.

District administrators also have a higher estimation of the impact of assessment training on their preparedness to use this training in their jobs. Seventy-nine percent of district administrators who have received this training report that they feel “extremely” or “very” prepared to use assessment results in their jobs; 20 percent say they feel “somewhat” prepared. Most district administrators (67 percent) also feel that their current assessment training is “extremely” or “very” useful to them.

In contrast, fewer teachers (53 percent) report that they are “extremely” or “very” prepared after training; 40 percent say they are “somewhat” prepared. Notably, among teachers who receive training, those who also collaborate with their peers on assessment results find the training more useful. Based on their training, teachers who collaborate are more likely than teachers who don’t collaborate to report that they are “extremely” or “very” prepared to use these results in their jobs.

Compared to district administrators, teachers also are less likely to report that current assessment training is useful to them. Thirty-six percent of teachers say this training is “extremely”

or “very” useful; most teachers (49 percent) report that it is only “somewhat” useful. Again, however, teachers who collaborate with their peers on assessment results, and elementary and middle school teachers, are more likely to report that their current training is “extremely” or “very” useful.

Overall, each assessment training session tends to be a half a day or less in duration; most district administrators (66 percent) and teachers (67 percent) who participate in this training attend as many as four sessions every year. However, teachers who collaborate with their peers on assessment results are more likely than other teachers to report that they attend five or more assessment training sessions a year.

District administrators and teachers who do not currently receive assessment training disagree on whether this training would be important; 72 percent of district administrators, but only 29 percent of teachers, say they would find such training “very” important.

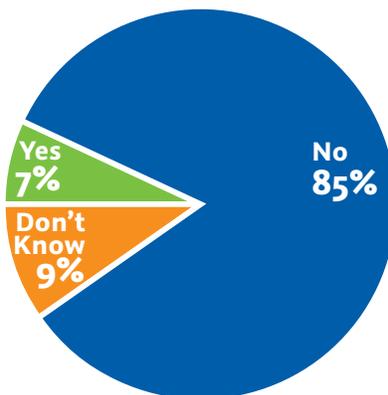
District administrators overwhelmingly believe that teacher preparation programs do not prepare new teachers to integrate assessment into instructional practice. Most teachers (55 percent) report that they never took a course in assessment literacy in their teacher preparation (pre-service) programs; of these, 49 percent believe such a course, or more education on assessment, would have helped them improve their teaching practice. Among the 37 percent of teachers who say they did take an assessment literacy course in their teacher preparation program, 14 percent rate that training as “extremely” effective and 29 percent rate it as “very” effective. More teachers (36 percent), however, rate this pre-service training as only “somewhat” effective.

For their part, district administrators express strong agreement that pre-service programs fall short in preparing teachers to integrate assessment into their instructional practice, as shown in Figure 14.

Most teachers and district administrators think they understand the different types of assessments; the survey results paint a very different picture. District administrators (96 percent) and teachers (89 percent) overwhelmingly believe that they understand the role of assessment in teaching and learning. Compared to other assessment types, district administrators (95 percent) and, to a lesser—but still strong—extent, teachers (82 percent) believe they best understand how to interpret the results from formative assessment practice. District

Figure 14.

District Administrators Pan Assessment Preparation in Pre-Service Programs



Q. In your view, do traditional teacher preparation programs adequately prepare new teachers to integrate assessment into their instructional practice?

Percentages do not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

administrators (93 percent) also are more likely than teachers (81 percent) to say they know how to use formative assessment practice to impact individual student growth.

District administrators express similar high levels of confidence that they understand how to interpret the results from interim and end-of-year state accountability or district assessments. Most teachers agree that they have this understanding as well, albeit not as strongly; 74 percent of teachers say they understand how to interpret interim assessment results and 70 percent say this about end-of-year state accountability or district assessments.

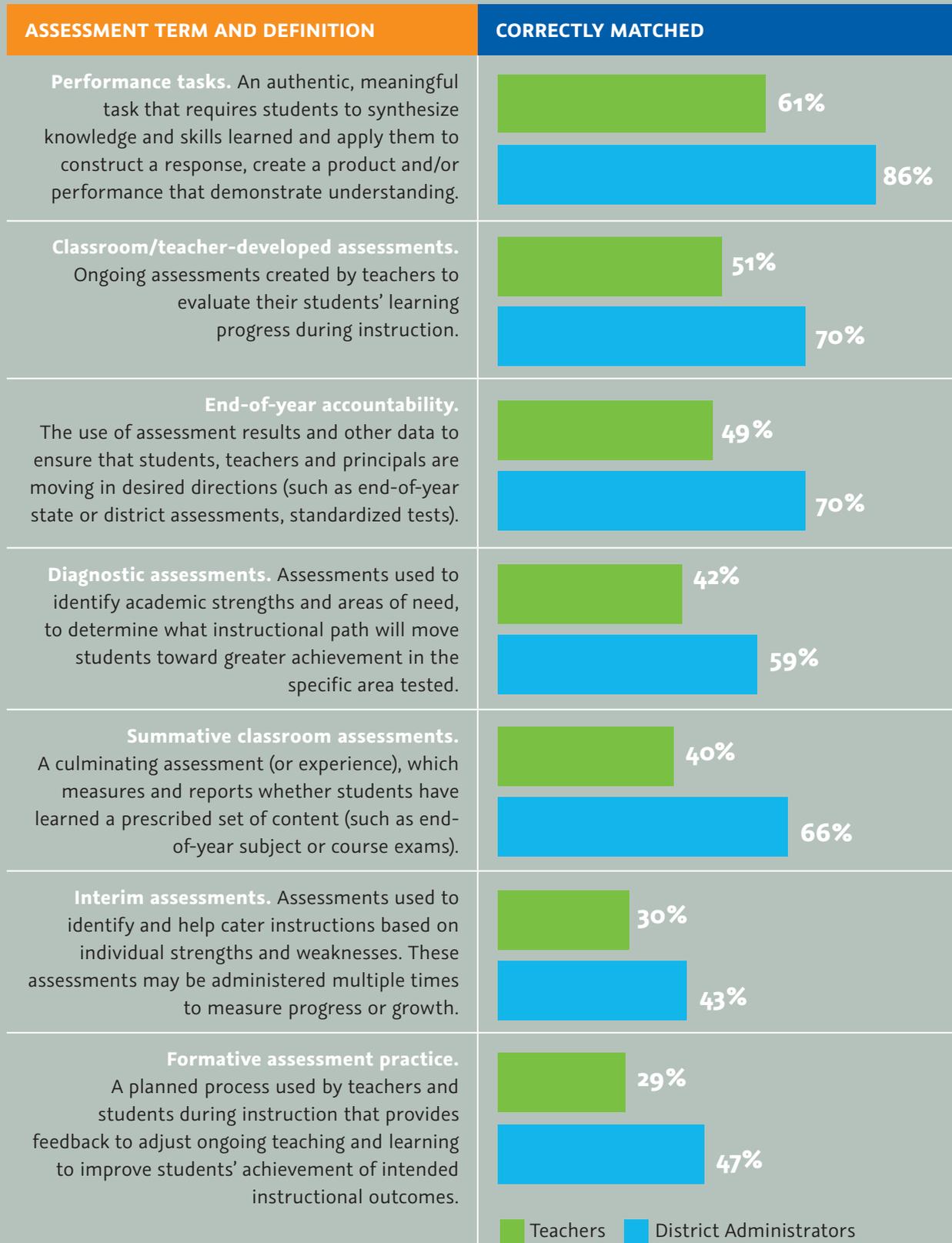
Asked to match seven assessment terms with their definitions, however, district administrators and teachers seem less sure about different assessment types, purposes and uses, as shown in Figure 15. District administrators have a better understanding

of every assessment term than teachers do.

For the 2012 assessment perceptions study by NWEA and Grunwald Associates LLC (*For Every Child, Multiple Measures*), district administrators and teachers were asked a related question to gauge their understanding of how different assessments are actually used to inform decisions about teaching and learning. Their responses then indicated inconsistencies in their understanding of the best uses of different types of assessments. The takeaway from this study: educators remain confused—and need help—interpreting and using assessment results.

Figure 15.

District Administrators Understand Different Assessments Better Than Teachers Do



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Districts use assessment data to evaluate their school systems from top to bottom.

Assessment data informs many activities for educators throughout the school system, and help monitor achievement gaps and issues of educational equity. Specifically, most district administrators and teachers say that districts use assessment data to measure student achievement, evaluate school performance, evaluate district performance, measure growth in student learning throughout the school year and evaluate teacher/principal performance. Most district administrators, but fewer teachers, also say that districts use assessment data to evaluate program effectiveness and to inform instruction, as shown in Figure 16.

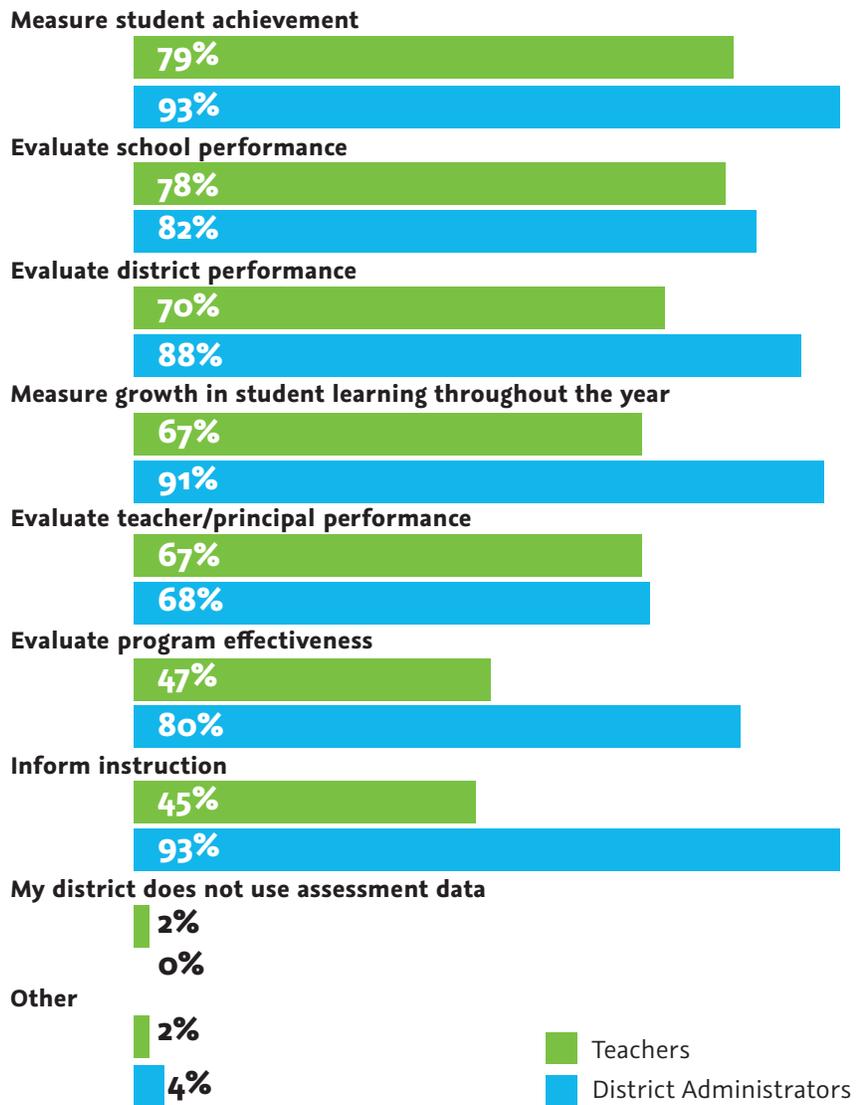
Some educators do not know whether or how states or districts use student growth for teacher and principal evaluations. Most district administrators (66 percent) and teachers (62 percent) say that their state or district is using student growth, as measured by assessments, as part of teacher evaluation. Yet, despite the attention new evaluation systems have received, nearly one-fifth of teachers (19 percent) don't know if this is the case.

Most district administrators (68 percent) say their state or district is using student growth measures as part of principal evaluations. Fewer teachers (47 percent) report that this is happening—and 36 percent of teachers say they don't know. District administrators and teachers from the largest school districts—

Figure 16.

Ways in Which Educators Say Districts Use Assessment Data

Q. To the best of your knowledge, please indicate which of the following ways your district is using assessment data.



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

those with more than 25,000 students—are the most likely of all educators to say that student growth is part of their teacher evaluations.

District administrators express much stronger agreement than teachers do—with double-digit differences in their perceptions—that states or districts are using teacher evaluations for specific purposes, including:

- To determine educators’ impact on student growth or learning objectives
- To gain insight on where educators can improve their practices
- To provide effective support to educators

The disparity in the perceptions of district administrators is particularly evident when it comes to support for teachers; 72 percent of district administrations, but only 43 percent of teachers, believe their states or districts put teacher evaluations to use for this purpose, as shown in Figure 17.

Similar double-digit gaps between district administrators and teachers show up about the same purposes for principal evaluations.

Figure 17.

Gaps in Educator Perceptions of How Districts Use Teacher Evaluations

Q For what purpose is your state/district using teacher evaluations?

To determine educators’ impact on student growth or student learning objectives (SLOs)



To gain insight on where educators can improve their practices



To provide effective support to educators



Teachers
District Administrators

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

CONCLUSION



This national survey of 1,200 educators and 1,000 students meaningfully informs the dialogue about recalibrating the nation's approach to student assessment. The insight from these key stakeholders indicates that the emphasis on high-stakes testing is distracting teachers, district administrators and students from a focus on learning. The student voice, in particular, provides a strong call to action. The survey findings make clear that students want relevant tests that are focused on supporting their learning and aspirations. At a minimum, we hope that this work encourages educators and policymakers to regard students as key partners in this conversation.

This study also adds new data showing that our middle and high school students become less engaged with their education over time—a finding that is sadly played out in the nation's graduation rates. Holding assessment to a high standard of relevancy, and engaging students in the dialogue around assessment, are important

steps toward empowering middle and high school students to take ownership of their own learning paths.

Finally, the results show that collaboration is a necessity. Educators deserve to be supported in their continuing education through formal collaborative learning time with other teachers. These structured opportunities help teachers better understand assessment and use student data to enhance teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Assessment is a natural part of the teaching and learning cycle. The survey results demonstrate that district administrators, teachers and students all believe that tests can be an important part of learning. With more time to focus on what really matters in the classroom—higher standards and deeper learning practices—teachers and all students will make significant progress in their achievement, and our policymakers will explore new and less disruptive accountability methods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the survey data, five recommendations emerge that will place the focus where it belongs—on student learning.

1 **District administrators, educators and policymakers need to engage students in policy development processes, especially when making testing mandates at the state, district and classroom levels.**

Students are remarkably savvy about tests. They recognize that testing plays a valid role in education; they care about their performance and try hard on tests. They value assessments that are relevant to them, provide timely, meaningful feedback and help them learn. Many students—and their families—are in the dark about new state assessments as well as other new and different kinds of assessments. They want to be informed and engaged.

Recommendation: Educators can help close gaps between student perceptions and knowledge and educator practices by using formative assessment, timely feedback to students and joint goal setting. Educators and district administrators should formally solicit student input as they implement education policies and assessment mandates.

2 **Realign assessment priorities in support of teaching and learning.**

Remarkable alignment exists among the views of students, teachers and district administrators regarding the effective use of assessment; yet all say they are spending too much of their time responding to initiatives that focus elsewhere. Formative assessment also emerges as having the most positive impact on learning, yet it's least understood and not widely practiced.

Recommendation: Federal, state and district dollars should be reallocated to focus assessment initiatives on informing teaching and learning. Alternate and less costly methodologies for obtaining accountability data should be explored.

3 **Establish formal learning opportunities on assessment literacy for every teacher, principal and building administrator. Assessment literacy, in teacher preparation and professional development, is a significant area of need, especially since teachers' communications are most important to students and parents regarding testing.**

Among educators, students and parents, there are substantial gaps in the understanding of different types and purposes of assessment, as well as in the value and usefulness of assessments. This lack of understanding may be fueling contentious dialogue that is making headlines. At the same time, states and districts are using assessment data to scrutinize every aspect of education. New educators entering the profession are ill equipped to use assessment data to inform their practice. Students and parents need help navigating the different types of assessment and the purposes they serve. Armed with that knowledge, they can advocate effectively for high-quality assessment that supports student learning.

Recommendation: First, a common vocabulary should be developed for the different types of assessment. Teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives should focus on assessment literacy, using that common vocabulary, to increase knowledge of the subject and its terms, communicate better with students, parents and other educators and use assessment data more effectively to drive student learning.

4 Improve student learning by making educator collaboration a priority in every school and district.

Teachers and district administrators who collaborate with their peers to interpret and use assessment results are more confident in their ability to use these results effectively to support teaching and learning. Increased educator collaboration around assessment in professional learning communities and communities of practice will support more confidence in the use of assessment data. Widening the circle of collaboration by informing and engaging with students in the use of assessment results that impact their learning would support raising student achievement.

Recommendation: Educators and administrators need to structure frequent time and training in professional learning communities to develop shared understandings of assessment results and informed decisions about instruction, resourcing and intervention. Fostering this collaboration will increase both teacher job satisfaction and impact on student learning.

5 Prioritize technology readiness in every district, focusing on infrastructure and addressing glitches.

For the first time ever, most states are shifting state tests from paper delivery to online delivery. Educators and students believe that online assessments could make test taking more engaging. While assessment developers are working hard to make the new tests easy to use, states and districts are struggling with infrastructure, as well as teacher and, in some communities, student readiness.

Recommendation: Increase technology investment in every district, so every student in the United States is ready and able to engage and benefit from new online assessment and learning. Fund training designed specifically to provide ongoing support for administrators, teachers and students to build confidence and comfort in their use of online assessment.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study is based on the responses to three 20-minute surveys conducted online. The surveys used nationally representative U.S. samples of:

- 1,042 students in grades 4–12
- 1,004 K–12 classroom teachers
- 200 district administrators

Respondents from both public and private schools were included.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

Prior to the online surveys, four focus groups with students were conducted to understand:

- Student perceptions of learning and testing, particularly state accountability tests
- Student knowledge of educational terms and the language used to describe learning and testing

The four focus groups, conducted in Portland, Oregon, included students in:

1. Grades 4 and 5
2. Grades 6, 7 and 8
3. Grades 9 and 10
4. Grades 11 and 12

All focus groups included a mix of students of different ages, genders, household incomes and ethnicities, and a mix of urban, rural and suburban students who attend public, private and charter schools.

The student focus groups were used to develop the student survey questionnaire using language that students would understand. The quoted student voices highlighted in this report were captured from group discussions.

STUDENT, TEACHER AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY SAMPLES AND RECRUITMENT

Students in grades 4 through 12 were recruited through their parents from a large, nationally representative online panel. Parents were asked to give their permission for their child to participate in the survey. Parents provided their household income ranges and information about their child's school type, metro status and region.

Students were given the option of completing the 20-minute survey in one sitting, or to take a break, come back to the survey later and pick up where they left off.

Parents also were given the option to help their children read the survey questions and response choices, if necessary. However, both parents and students were reminded that students were to answer the questions honestly and on their own.

Student Sample Composition

Grade

Elementary	25%
Middle	26%
High	49%

Gender

Male	50%
Female	50%

Parents' Household Income

Less than \$25,000	10%
\$25,000 to \$49,000	24%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	22%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	19%
\$100,000 to \$149,000	16%
\$150,000 or more	9%

Ethnicity

White	70%
African-American	14%
Hispanic	13%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7%
Multiethnic, multicultural	4%
Other ethnic background	4%
American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut	2%

School Type

Public	87%
Private	9%
Charter	4%

Region

South	38%
Midwest	22%
Northeast	21%
West	19%

Metro Status

Suburban	56%
Urban	27%
Rural	18%

Respondents' State Participation in Assessment Consortia

Partnership for Assessment of College Readiness and Careers (PARCC)	50%
Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)	35%

Teacher Sample Composition

Classroom teachers were recruited from a large, nationally representative online panel. Loose quotas were set for teachers to ensure that they represent the national teacher composition in terms of grades taught, years of experience, district sizes, geographic region and gender.

Grade

Elementary	56%
Middle	19%
High	26%

Gender

Female	78%
Male	22%

Teaching Experience

Less than five years	14%
Five to 10 years	32%
11 to 15 years	20%
16 to 20 years	13%
More than 20 years	24%

School Type

Public	85%
Private	10%
Charter	5%

District Size

Less than 1,000 to 4,999 students	42%
5,000 to 9,999 students	18%
10,000 to 24,999 students	17%
25,000 to 100,000 students	14%
100,000 or more students	9%

Region

South	36%
Midwest	24%
Northeast	22%
West	18%

Metro Status

Suburban	50%
Urban	30%
Rural	20%

Respondents' State Participation in Assessment Consortia

PARCC	44%
SBAC	39%

District Administrator Sample Composition

District administrators were recruited online from a commercial education database. We sent administrators an email invitation to the survey, screened them and, if they qualified, invited them to complete the full online survey.

To qualify, district administrators were required to be at least somewhat involved in academic testing in their district and tell us that assessments are relevant to their job.

Gender

Female	51%
Male	49%

School Type

Public	97%
Private	3%
Charter	0%

District Size

Less than 1,000 to 4,999 students	69%
5,000 to 9,999 students	11%
10,000 to 24,999 students	13%
25,000 to 100,000 students	8%
100,000 or more students	1%

Region

South	36%
Midwest	35%
Northeast	18%
West	12%

Metro Status

Rural	52%
Suburban	33%
Urban	15%

Respondents' State Participation in Assessment Consortia

PARCC	46%
SBAC	37%

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To understand perceptions of, satisfaction with and needs regarding assessment, we covered related topics with similar, but targeted questions for students, teachers and district administrators. All respondents were recruited and completed their surveys online, and were incentivized for their participation.

Data from the three target groups were analyzed independently. When possible, results were compared across groups to identify similarities and differences. Analysis also investigated possible subgroup differences (e.g., student's grade level, gender, ethnicity, household income).

All differences reported between groups of students, teachers and district administrators are statistically significant at the 95 percent level of confidence ($p < 0.05$), unless otherwise indicated. Comparisons between teachers and district administrators, as well as between teachers and students, are noted, where applicable. Additionally, comparisons with the teachers' and district administrators' data from 2011 are included, where relevant.

ABOUT NWEA

NWEA is a global not-for-profit educational services organization headquartered in Portland, Oregon. We partner with educational organizations worldwide to provide computer-based assessment suites, professional development and research services. We are passionate about our mission: Partnering to help all kids learn.

Our Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) adaptive assessments leverage over 30 years of research into student growth and yield unparalleled data that informs decision making at every level, from classroom to boardroom. We continue to expand curriculum, instruction and assessment offerings all in a unified system. Our professional development offerings help educators use data to transform outcomes. The Kingsbury Center at NWEA, our research arm, uses our Growth Research Database to drive original research with universities, foundations and policymakers.

www.nwea.org

ABOUT GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES LLC

Grunwald Associates is a full-service research and consulting firm whose work has informed the debate on a range of national policy issues. Grunwald offers an in-depth understanding of education and innovation, combined with mastery of state-of-the-art research methodologies.

The firm specializes in challenging public and proprietary assignments for nonprofit, corporate and government clients. Services include sophisticated quantitative and qualitative research, including pricing simulation and product configuration, social media and community development, and messaging and strategic counsel.

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Make Assessment Matter: Students and Educators Want Tests that Support Learning is available to download at www.nwea.org/makeassessmentmatter



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