



Teaching, Testing, and Time:

*Educator Voices on Improving
Assessment in Tennessee*

September 2015

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Introduction

Assessments play an important role in school improvement practices, providing stakeholders with important information about students' academic performance and growth during a school year. Data from assessments allow parents to recognize when students are making progress and when students' academic needs are not being met. Such data allow educators to intervene early with students who are behind and to push higher-achieving students to perform at even higher levels.¹

Educators and policymakers use different types of assessments for different purposes, including summative, formative, and interim assessments. Summative assessments are generally given at a specific point in time such as the end of an instructional unit, the end of a semester, or the end of the school year. These assessments intend to measure student progress or whether a student has met a set of content standards.² A final exam in a biology class is an example of a summative assessment. Summative assessments are typically given statewide or district wide, but also can be given at the school or classroom level. Summative assessments often take a full class period or instructional block to administer, but they are generally given less frequently than interim or formative assessments. In Tennessee, data from statewide summative assessments form an important component of the state's accountability system, impacting important decisions made at the school, district, and state levels.

Formative assessments are an integral part of the instructional process. They provide immediate feedback to teachers and students, indicating if shifts in teaching or learning must occur to improve students' progress toward mastery on standards or skills. These assessments are short in nature and can take anywhere between a few seconds to a small portion of a class period. A reading or math quiz is an example of a formative assessment. Formative assessments can be individualized to meet the needs of different students. Teachers often use formative assessments on a daily basis to gauge students' understanding of content and to get the feedback they need to make adjustments to their instruction.³

Interim assessments, sometimes called benchmark assessments, generally fall between formative and summative assessments. Interim assessments aim to evaluate students' progress toward mastery on a set of specific academic goals or standards and are designed to inform decisions at the classroom, school, or district level. Often, school or district leadership identifies which interim assessments to administer, rather than the teacher. The results of these assessments can serve many purposes,

including predicting a student's performance on an end-of-year assessment, evaluating a program or type of instruction, or identifying gaps in student learning.⁴ In Tennessee, many districts implement interim assessments to predict student performance on Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) assessments. Schools and teachers also use interim assessment results to inform professional learning opportunities for teachers, to identify students in need of intervention, and to adjust classroom instruction to better meet the needs of students.

While state and federal laws require Tennessee's statewide summative assessment to be implemented in every school district,⁵ there has been increased discussion at both the state and national levels about the amount and value of testing. Parents, educators, and policymakers have voiced concerns about reduced instructional time, the quality of assessments, and the culture surrounding assessments in Tennessee. Since TCAP achievement and end of course tests are the only assessments required by the state, conversation about testing in Tennessee arises not only from state-mandated tests but also from tests required by districts or individual schools. These tests are often interim assessments that aim to provide educators with indicators of student progress throughout the school year. While different types of assessments can provide diverse stakeholders with valuable information about student learning, current conversation highlights a need to take a deeper look at assessment practices across the state.

One of the priorities set forth in the [2014-15 State of Education in Tennessee](#) report calls on SCORE to publish a report on the state of assessments in Tennessee, informed by extensive feedback from Tennessee's teachers, principals, and district leaders. While there is increased discussion about assessments, there has been little information about district-to-district variation in the type and amount of interim assessments. This report aims to fill this information gap, providing greater insight into the state of assessment in Tennessee.

In March 2015, the Tennessee Commissioner of Education, Dr. Candice McQueen, announced the formation of an Assessment Practices Task Force to address recent discussion about the issue of over-testing in Tennessee. The task force's goals included:

- To identify and study best practices in student assessment.
- To ensure local school districts and the state are appropriately using assessments to improve student achievement.
- To better inform stakeholders about the state assessment program.

SCORE shared ongoing feedback collected from teachers, principals, and district leaders with the Assessment Practices Task Force, providing the group with critical information to inform their discussions. The Tennessee Department of Education will also release a report, independent from SCORE's report, summarizing the task force's findings and recommendations.

Informed by surveys, interviews, and focus groups with teachers, principals, and district leaders, this report provides an overview of assessment practices in the state, with a focus on summative and interim assessments. More specifically, the report seeks to address the following key questions:

- What are best practices in the selection and implementation of interim and benchmark assessments?
- How do districts in Tennessee use data from interim and benchmark assessments to drive instruction and strategic decisions?
- What challenges do district leaders, principals, and teachers face with assessments?
- What type of interim assessments (vendor, subject area, grade level, etc.) are districts in Tennessee currently implementing and for what purpose?
- How do districts select interim and benchmark assessments? What processes exist at the district level to select and evaluate interim assessments?
- How much time do students spend taking assessments in Tennessee?

The report begins with a brief history of assessments in Tennessee and an overview of the data collected to inform key research questions. The report then provides an overview of findings from surveys and focus groups conducted with teachers, principals, and district leaders related to assessment practices in Tennessee. Primary findings include:

- Teachers, principals, and district leaders continuously pointed to the unique value of assessment in driving key decisions at the classroom, school, and district levels. For example, educators discussed using data from assessments to drive instruction, teacher support practices, and student interventions.
- District leaders and principals consistently identified assessment logistics, such as scheduling assessments and implementing technology-based assessments, as top challenges faced in their roles.
- Teachers consistently identified lost instructional time as a result of both district- and state-level assessments as a top challenge faced in their roles.

The report concludes with a discussion of next steps based on these findings.

History of Assessment in Tennessee

Tennessee's General Assembly passed legislation in 1984 aimed at reforming the state's K-12 education system. This legislation required standardized assessments to be implemented in second through eighth and tenth grades starting in 1988. These assessments made up the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).

Tennessee's Education Improvement Act of 1992 expanded the use and application of TCAP assessments, establishing an accountability system for the state based on student scores on standardized assessments. This legislation required:

- The adoption of the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS).
- The State Board of Education to establish performance goals for schools and districts.
- The creation of the Office of Education Accountability.
- The implementation of high school subject-matter exams.
- Tennessee high school students to take exit exams.
- A strengthening of annual state reporting of school performance.⁶

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) led to an expansion of TCAP.⁷ NCLB, the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, required states to adopt academic standards and implement standardized assessments that measured student progress on those standards. NCLB increased the amount of testing in most states, requiring states to assess students in reading/language arts and math in grades 3-8 and at least once in grades 10-12. NCLB also required states to assess students in science once during grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. In addition, NCLB required states to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward proficiency on academic standards for all students.⁸

In 2007, Tennessee joined the American Diploma Project (ADP). Tennessee adopted the Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP) Standards in 2008 with the goal of better preparing students for college and career. As a result of the adoption of the TDP standards, Tennessee also increased the rigor of the TCAP assessments.

In 2010, Tennessee's State Board of Education replaced the Tennessee Diploma Project Standards with the Common Core State Standards. Tennessee also planned to implement the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, replacing TCAP in the 2014-15 school year. The First to the Top Act, also passed in 2010, specified that student achievement measures from TCAP would inform a significant portion of a teacher's evaluation and would continue to be a central component of school and district accountability.⁹

The Tennessee Department of Education worked to prepare schools and districts to transition to the PARCC assessment in 2014-15, piloting the assessment throughout the state and providing guidance to districts about expectations for online readiness. However, during the 2014 legislative session, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring a request for proposals (RFP) for a new assessment system that would be selected through a competitive bidding process, managed by Tennessee's Procurement Office.¹⁰ In October 2014, the contract was awarded to Measurement Inc. to develop Tennessee's new English language arts and math assessments, which will be called TNReady. TNReady will be implemented for the first time in the 2015-16 school year.¹¹

As Tennessee prepared for the transition to new assessments, the Tennessee Department of Education provided schools the opportunity to pilot assessments that reflected the rigor and content of these new assessments. Figures 1-2 illustrate the required and optional assessments the state offered during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years.

Required Assessments

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>What does it assess?</i>	<i>How is this assessment used?</i>
TCAP Achievement Test	The TCAP Achievement test is required for students in grades 3-8. It is a timed, multiple-choice assessment that measures student skills in math, reading, language arts, science, and social studies. ¹²	The TCAP assessment is used to measure student progress on Tennessee's State Standards. Data from this assessment are used to better understand student needs, to measure teaching effectiveness, to determine reward and priority schools, and to inform school improvement efforts. ¹³
High School End of Course	High school end of course examinations are given in English I, English II, English III, Algebra I, Algebra II, U.S. History, Biology I, and Chemistry. ¹⁴	The results from these assessments account for 25 percent of students' final grades in these subjects. Additionally, data from these assessments are used to measure teaching effectiveness, to determine reward and priority schools, and to inform school improvement efforts. ¹⁵
Social Studies Assessment	The State Board of Education approved new social studies standards in July 2014. These standards were piloted in 2013-14 and were implemented in 2014-15. ¹⁶ For this reason, in January 2014 the State Board approved a plan for transitioning to a new social studies assessment that would align with these new standards. ¹⁷	In the 2014-15 school year, a new social studies assessment was piloted across the state. During this pilot year, scores from the social studies assessments did not factor into teacher evaluation scores. The assessment will be fully implemented in the 2015-16 school year. ¹⁸
Writing Assessment	The online writing assessment was required for students in grades 5, 8, and 11. In the 2014-15 school year, the writing assessment was required for all students in grades 3-11. The writing assessment measures student progress toward key skillsets in writing.	Since writing is an important component of Tennessee's State Standards, this assessment provides an important measure of student progress toward mastery of key skillsets across subjects. Each writing assessment consists of two complex texts that students respond to in two written essays. Additionally, the writing assessment requires students to cite evidence from texts to justify their conclusions. While scores from these assessments do not factor into teacher evaluations or student grades, they provide students and teachers with exposure to the kinds of writing tasks that will be included on new assessments, like TNReady. ¹⁹
ACT	The ACT is required for all students in 11 th grade in Tennessee and measures college readiness.	The ACT is used to assess students' progress toward college and career readiness and is also an important measure of high school effectiveness in Tennessee.
Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²)	In the 2014-15 school year, Tennessee implemented RTI ² in all elementary schools statewide. Implementation of RTI ² will expand to middle and high schools in the 2015-16 school year.	Universal screeners and progress monitoring assessments are a central component of RTI ² . These assessments are used to determine student placement in different tiers of intervention and to measure student progress throughout the school year.

Figure 1

Optional Assessments

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>What does this assess?</i>	<i>How do we use this assessment?</i>
K-2 Assessment	The K-2 assessment is an optional assessment that districts can use to assess math and reading in the early grades. ²⁰	The K-2 assessment assesses basic skills in math and reading, providing a benchmark of how students are progressing on the foundational skills they need for success in later grades. ²¹
Writing Assessment	The online writing assessment was available for students in grades 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 in the 2013-14 school year.	While the online writing assessment was required for students in grades 5, 8, and 11, it was optional for students in grades 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10. As noted above, this provided teachers and students valuable experience with the type of writing tasks that will be present on new college and career ready assessments. ²²
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) Pilot	The PARCC pilot was optional and was only implemented in a select number of districts and schools across the state in 2014. PARCC assessed student mastery of Tennessee’s State Standards in English Language Arts and Math.	Tennessee planned to implement the PARCC assessment in the 2014-15 school year. For this reason, a representative sample of students, schools, and districts piloted the PARCC assessment in spring 2014. This pilot was meant to provide schools with experience on the new assessment and to inform further improvements to testing items. ²³
Constructed Response Assessment (CRA)	CRAs are math assessments that were offered to students in grades 3-8, Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. CRAs were optional in the 2013-14 school year. This allowed districts that valued the instructional data they received from the CRA to continue implementation, while other districts could opt out of implementation and rededicate that time to instruction.	CRAs were intended to provide teachers and students with assessments that reflect the level of rigor that will be present on new, aligned math assessments. While the results from these assessments did not factor into teacher evaluations or student grades, they provided teachers and students with valuable information about their progress on the new standards. ²⁴

Figure 2

Methods and Study Overview

As outlined above, this project sought to answer these key questions:

- What are best practices in the selection and implementation of interim and benchmark assessments?
- How do districts in Tennessee use data from interim and benchmark assessments to drive instruction and strategic decisions?
- What challenges do district leaders, principals, and teachers face with assessments?
- What type of interim assessments (vendor, subject area, grade level, etc.) are districts in Tennessee currently implementing and for what purpose?
- How do districts select interim and benchmark assessments? What processes exist at the district level to select and evaluate interim assessments?
- How much time do students spend taking assessments in Tennessee?

To inform these questions, SCORE, in collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education and other key partners throughout the state, developed and administered online surveys to teachers, principals, and school district leaders. SCORE also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Teacher Survey

The teacher survey instrument was designed to collect information in four key areas: (1) the amount of time spent on assessments in Tennessee; (2) the amount of time spent preparing for assessments in Tennessee; (3) the usefulness of data from interim and summative assessments; and (4) top challenges faced with assessments. The survey was administered in spring 2015 and all teachers in the state were invited by email to participate. SCORE sent two follow-up emails to all teachers in the state two weeks and four weeks after the survey was initially shared with teachers. A total of 13,057 teachers, or 20.3 percent of those eligible, responded to the survey. Appendix A contains a full version of the survey instrument.

Principal Survey

The principal survey instrument was designed to collect information in six key areas: (1) the amount of time spent on assessment; (2) the amount of time spent preparing for assessment; (3) concerns heard from teachers and parents related to assessment; (4) top challenges faced with assessment; (5) the purposes of assessment in their school; and (6) interim assessments they elect to implement that are not required by the district or state. The survey was administered in spring 2015 and all principals in the state were invited by email to participate in the survey by Directors of the Center of Regional Excellence (CORE). SCORE followed up with CORE Directors several times throughout the survey window to ensure emails were sent to principals in each region and to support CORE Directors with further outreach in regions with low response rates. A total of 286 principals, or 8.5 percent of those eligible, responded to the survey. Appendix B contains a full version of the survey instrument.

District Leader Survey

The district leader survey instrument was designed to collect information in six key areas: (1) the amount of time spent on assessment; (2) the amount of time spent preparing for assessment; (3) concerns heard from educators and parents related to assessment; (4) top challenges faced with assessment; (5) the purposes of assessment in their district; and (6) interim assessments they elect to implement that are not required by the state. The survey was administered in spring 2015 and all district leaders in the state were invited by email to participate in the survey by the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents (TOSS). SCORE provided TOSS with a sample email that included a link to the district survey. SCORE followed up with TOSS multiple times throughout the survey window to ensure emails were sent to all superintendents and to provide additional outreach to districts that had not responded to the survey. A total of 69 superintendents, or 49.3 percent of those eligible, responded to the survey. Appendix C contains a full version of the survey instrument.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were convened to gather information in five key areas: (1) the use of interim assessments in schools and classrooms; (2) time spent on assessments; (3) time spent preparing for assessments; (4) top challenges faced with assessment; (4) purposes of assessment; and (5) the transition to the TNReady assessment. Focus groups were conducted in spring 2015. TOSS supported SCORE's outreach to teachers and principals, asking all superintendents to share invitations with teachers and principals in their district. SCORE also reached out directly to teachers and principals who participated in prior focus groups with SCORE. Finally, the Tennessee Education Association shared invitations with their members across the state. In total, more than 300 educators participated in a total of 40 focus groups across the state. Appendices D and E contain full versions of the focus group protocols.

Interviews

Interviews were designed to collect information in seven key areas: (1) the number of assessments implemented in districts; (2) time spent on district-level assessments; (3) district use of data from assessments; (4) assessment selection processes; (5) concerns heard from parents and educators related to assessment; (6) supports needed to improve assessment practices in districts; and (7) challenges faced with assessments. Interviews were conducted with nine district leadership teams. Districts were selected using a stratified random sample to ensure districts were representative of other districts in the state in terms of student demographic characteristics and achievement. Appendix F contains a complete version of the interview protocol.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that are important to note. First, the response rates for the teacher and principal surveys were relatively low. Because survey responses were anonymous, it is not possible to determine if the teachers and principals who responded to the survey are representative of the general principal and teacher population in the state. Teachers and principals who chose to respond to the survey may be those who feel strongly about the issue of assessment, creating a possible bias in survey results. Second, while our district sample appears to be representative of other districts in the state, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of our results. Third, most surveys and focus groups occurred relatively close to the statewide testing window, resulting in a possible negative bias as responses may be unduly influenced by testing pressure experienced at that time. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the reported findings represent common themes that came up with great frequency throughout analysis of survey data and focus groups and interview transcripts. For this reason, policymakers and district and state leaders should be mindful of these findings when recommending shifts in policy and practice related to assessment in Tennessee.

Findings

In this section, we summarize primary findings from educator surveys, focus groups, and interviews. We present findings in three parts: (1) general findings; (2) findings related to interim assessments; and (3) findings related to the transition to TNReady.

General Findings

Over the past year, the issue of assessment has come to the forefront of the education discussion in Tennessee. Over the past few years, there were significant shifts in assessment practices both at the state and district levels. The delayed implementation of PARCC, the transition to TNReady, and the implementation of RTI² necessitated a rethinking of assessment systems in Tennessee. During focus groups and interviews educators were asked to speak generally about (1) top uses of assessment; (2) challenges faced with assessment; and (3) time spent on assessment. Here, we report on findings in each of these areas.

Top Uses of Assessment

Figures 3-5 summarize the top uses of assessment as indicated by teachers, principals, and district leaders on surveys. A majority of educators acknowledged the benefits and purpose of assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Interestingly, all groups identified diagnosing student skill deficits as one of the top ways they use assessment in their classrooms, schools, or districts. In addition, as summarized in Figures 3 and 4, many district leaders and principals indicated that they not only use assessments to inform teacher support practices or professional learning opportunities but also that they use assessments to predict student performance on future assessments. Top responses among teachers, as displayed in Figure 5, also included to improve instruction, to set goals with students, and to group students.

Top Uses of Assessment: District Leaders

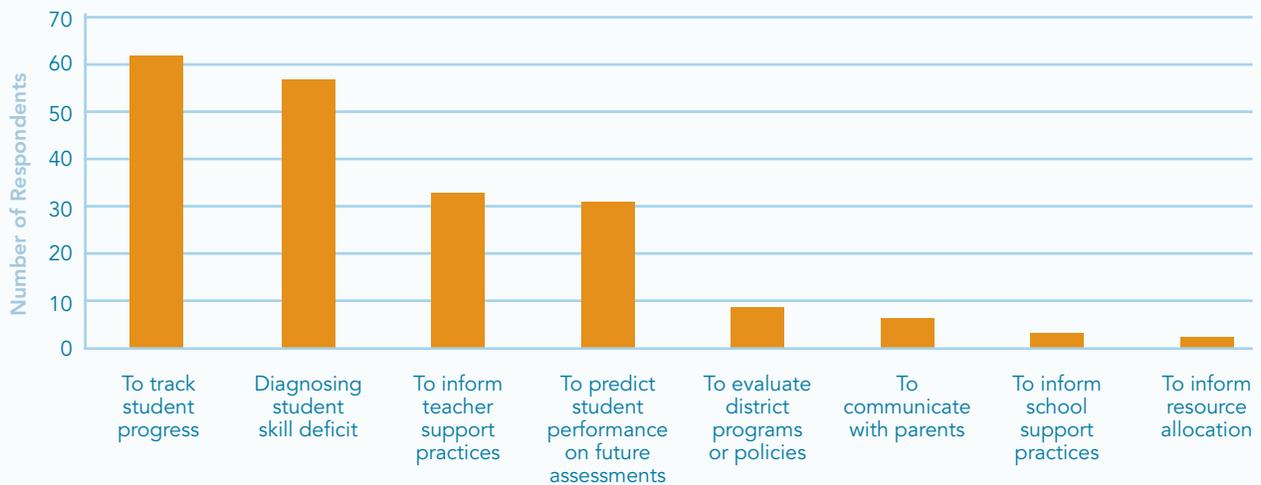


Figure 3

Top Uses of Assessment: Principals

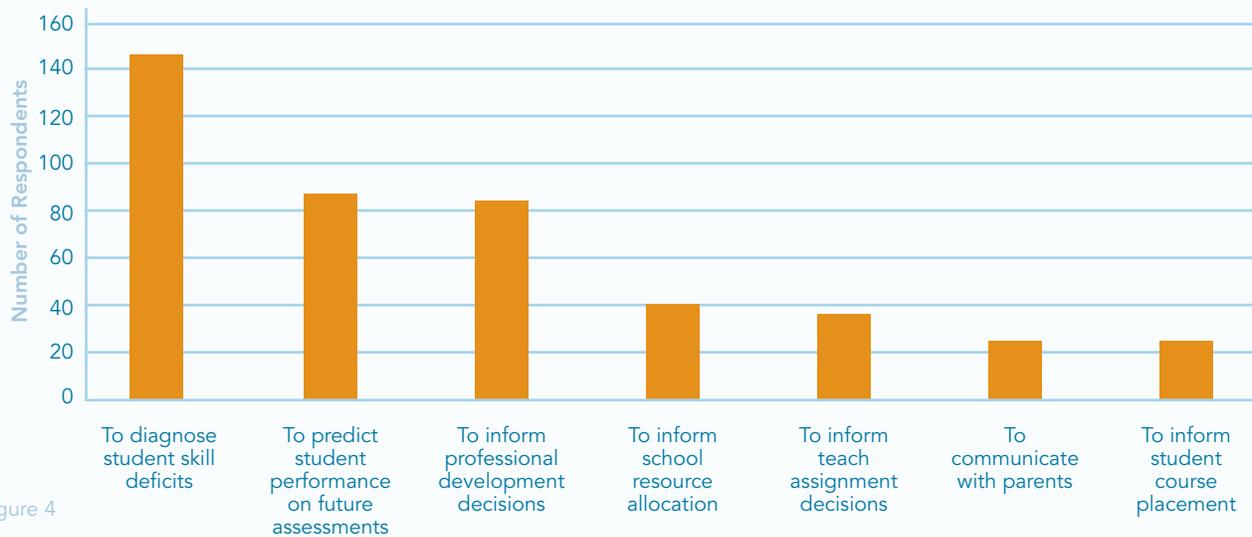


Figure 4

Top Uses of Assessment: Teachers

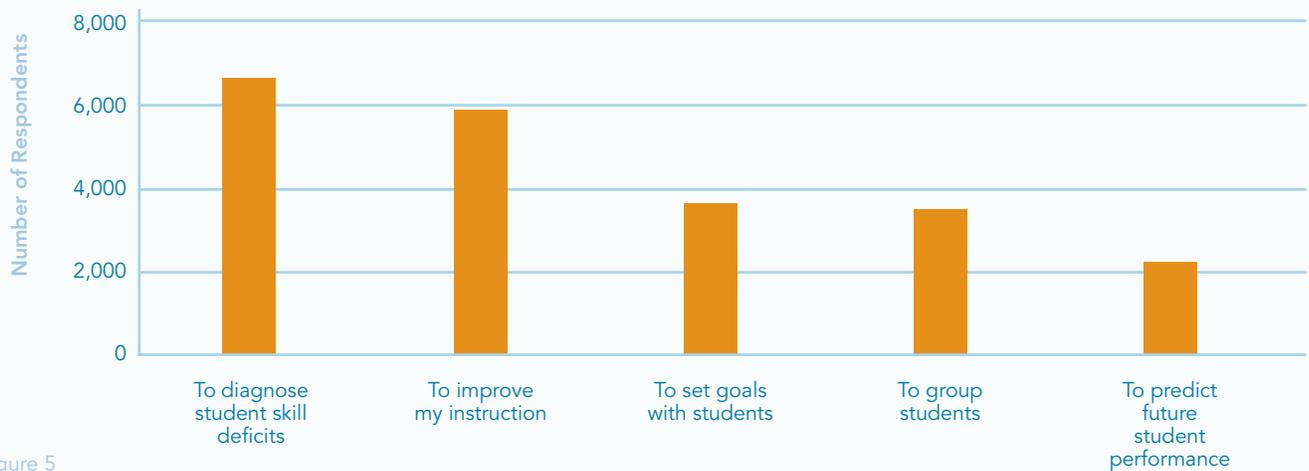


Figure 5

Information shared by educators during focus groups and interviews further attests to the importance of assessments in the teaching and learning process. Teachers discussed using data from assessments to drive instruction, to group students, and to understand individual student needs. For example, a third-grade teacher in one of our focus groups stated:

“Well, they are huge. I spend lots of time looking at where we’re going, how quickly are we going, are we moving kids? Not only are we moving groups of kids, are we moving individual students? We’ve completed our last benchmark and I’m real anxious to get it back. How many of my RTI kids am I moving? [Assessment] just leads and drives us. I believe that it’s a wonderful tool.”

School leaders also regularly identified the importance of assessment results to drive teacher support practices, to diagnose student skill deficits, and to predict student performance on end of year assessments. For example, an elementary school principal in one of our focus groups said:

“When we do our data meetings after each benchmark assessment, we work with teachers on disaggregating their data and looking at instructional strategies of the teachers that were successful. Then the teachers that didn’t quite have success, they actually had to verbalize what it was that may have happened. Was it the way the question was asked? Was it the way I taught it? They really do an analysis and why the students didn’t perform the way they expected them to.”

Challenges Faced with Assessment

Figures 6-8 display findings on the top assessment-related challenges faced by teachers, principals, and districts leaders in their classroom, school, or district, respectively. Results suggest that scheduling assessments and technology availability are top-tier concerns for both district leaders and principals. Another common concern among teachers, principals, and district leaders was student preparedness for technology-based assessments, while teachers most frequently indicated that reduced instructional time was the top challenge they faced with assessment.

Top Challenges Faced with Assessment: District Leaders

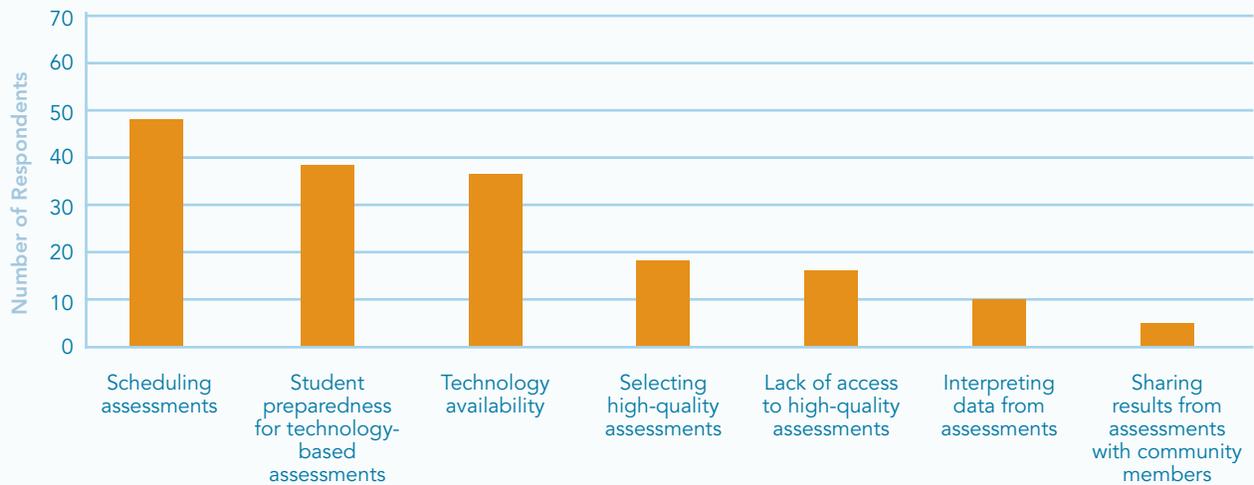


Figure 6

Top Challenges Faced with Assessment: Principals

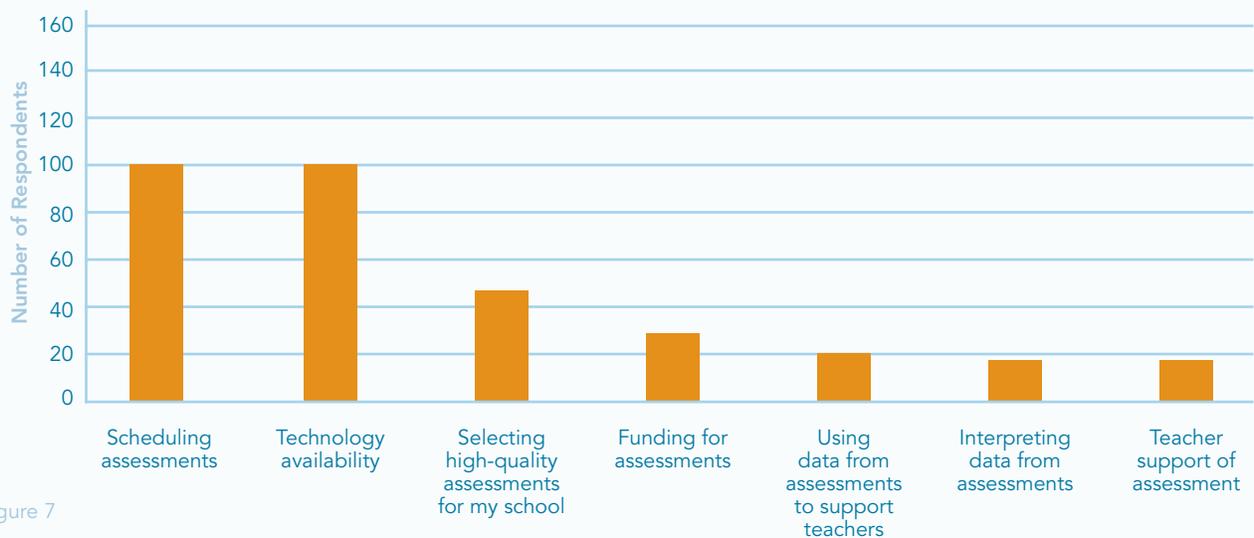


Figure 7

Top Challenges Faced with Assessments: Teachers

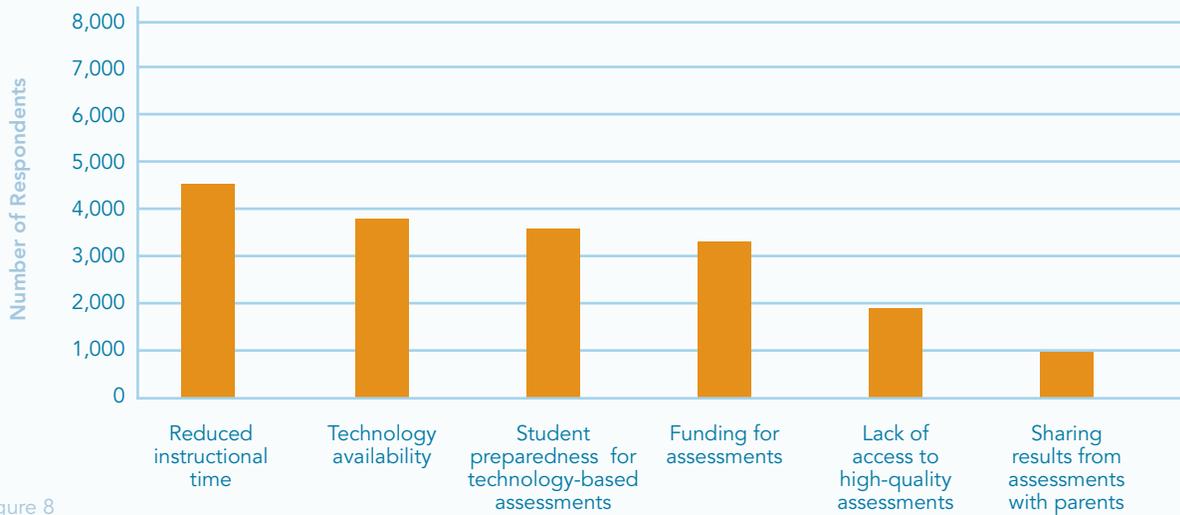


Figure 8

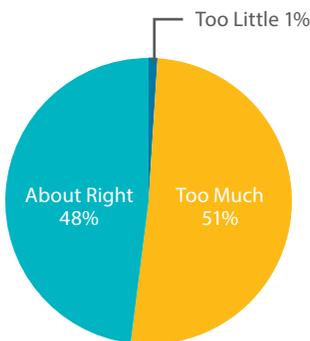
Mirroring these results, logistics related to assessments such as scheduling, technology availability, and student preparedness for technology-based assessments were common concerns discussed in focus groups and interviews. Anecdotes from the pilot social studies assessment and the writing assessment were referenced when focus group participants discussed the challenges their schools faced related to technology. Many participants noted a need for additional devices (i.e., computers or tablets) and improved technological infrastructure in order for online assessments to run smoothly. For example, a principal from a school in a rural part of the state said:

"I'm at a preK-12 school, not very large, but when you're trying to run sixth through eleventh grade through the computer labs for the TCAP writing assessment, we have to shut down the labs for the month of January to practice, then we have to shut it down for the month of February to test. So again, you're talking over two months of schedule interruptions in the computer lab for the test."

Time Spent on Assessment

Figures 9-11 display survey results regarding time spent on assessments, which was also one of the most common themes discussed in educator focus groups and interviews. It is interesting to note that district leaders are split about whether or not too much time is spent on assessment, while a slightly larger percentage of principals feel too much time is spent on assessments. The vast majority of teachers think too much time is spent assessing students.

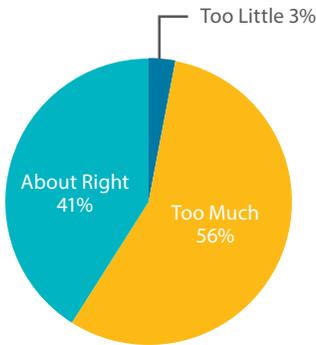
Time Spent on Assessment: District Leaders



*Survey question: Do you think the time spent on assessments in this district is too much, about right, or too little?

Figure 9

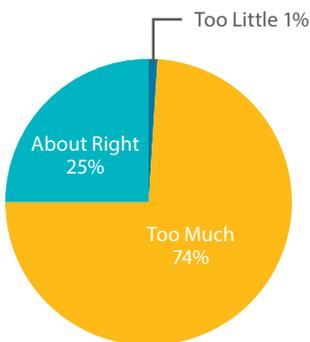
Time Spent on Assessment: Principals



*Survey question: Do you think the time spent on assessments in this school is too much, about right, or too little?

Figure 10

Time Spent on Assessment: Teachers



*Survey question: Do you think the time spent on assessments in this school is too much, about right, or too little?

Figure 11

As noted above, concerns related to the amount of time spent on assessment reflected one of the most common themes that came up in focus groups and interviews. Similar to survey findings, this theme was most prominent in focus groups with teachers. Teachers' concerns centered on reduced instructional time. For example, a middle school teacher in one of our focus groups stated:

"You have to lay out a calendar. We just had a principal's meeting in our district and we looked at our calendar. We highlighted with colors the different tests and whether it's no teaching that day. I thought, what if you give teachers this calendar and say, 'Go find your days to teach.' Those are important."

Interim Assessments

Interim assessments generally occur between summative and formative assessments and aim to evaluate students’ progress on academic goals or standards. While policymakers have a clear picture of assessments mandated at the state level in Tennessee, assessment practices at the district and school level—specifically related to the selection and implementation of interim assessments—are less clear. For this reason, questions asked on surveys as well as in interviews and focus groups aimed to gain a deeper understanding of interim assessment practices in districts and schools.

In this section, we summarize primary findings from educator surveys, focus groups, and interviews related to interim assessments. During focus groups and interviews, educators were asked to speak about (1) the assessments implemented in their schools or districts; (2) interim assessment selection processes; (3) benefits from interim assessments; and (4) challenges faced with interim assessments.

In a holistic analysis of survey, focus group, and interview data, it is important to note that challenges with interim assessments and benefits from interim assessments were both top themes. While teachers, principals, and district leaders see the underlying value of interim assessments, they also see many opportunities for improvement in state and district practices related to interim assessments.

District-Level Assessments

Figures 12 and 13 report survey results regarding the number of district-level interim assessments implemented and the number of times per year each of those assessments is administered. Most districts indicated they implement two or three such assessments each year, and that 60 percent of these assessments are administered three times per year. Survey results also indicate that most of these assessments take less than 50 minutes to administer.

Number of District-Level Interim Assessments

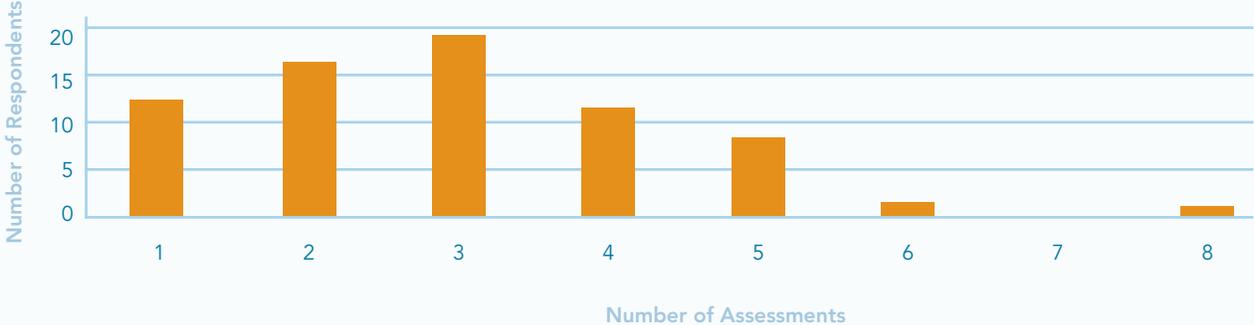


Figure 12

*Survey Question: How many assessments does your district implement? This number should only include assessments your district office selects. Please do not include state mandated assessments, school selected assessments, or teacher created assessments.

Number of times per year district assessment administered

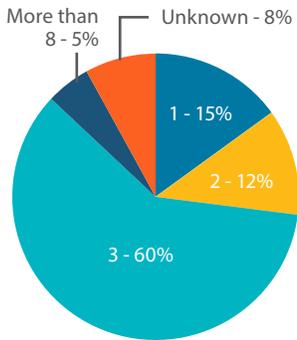


Figure 13

Similar to the figures above, Figures 14 and 15 display survey results regarding the number of school-level interim assessments implemented and the number of times per year each of those assessments is administered. The largest number of principal respondents indicated they do not implement any assessments that are unique to their school. Of the assessments implemented at the school level, most principal respondents indicated these assessments are administered three times per year. Survey results also indicated these assessments generally take less than 50 minutes or between 51 and 100 minutes to administer.

Number of School-Level Interim Assessments

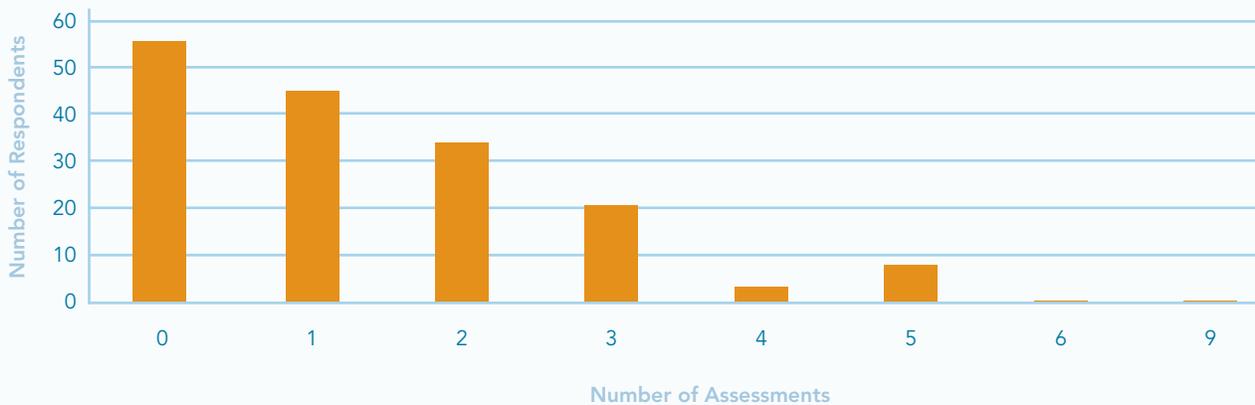


Figure 14

* Survey question: How many assessments do you implement that are unique to your school? Only include assessments that you select as a principal to implement at your school across classrooms or grade levels. Please do not include state mandated assessments, district mandated assessments, or teacher created assessments.

Number of times per year school-level assessment administered

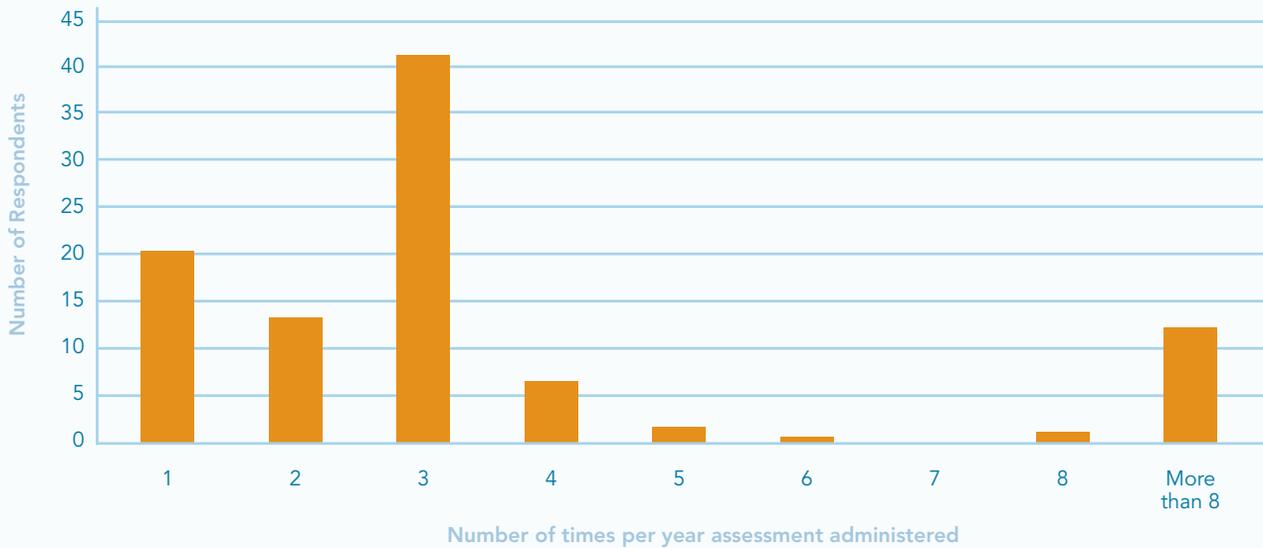


Figure 15

Principal Survey: How many times per year is this assessment given?

Interim Assessment Selection Processes

During interviews with district leaders, we asked a series of questions about interim assessment selection processes. District leader responses revealed common practices as well as common challenges faced in the selection of high-quality interim assessments.

Teacher participation in the selection of interim assessments was a common practice across districts. In some cases, teachers serve on leadership teams that evaluate vendor-created assessments. In other cases, teachers collaborate across schools to create common formative assessments for their grade level. For example, a district leader from one of our interviews stated:

"We have weekly team meetings where we look at new assessments that are coming out, we look at samples, and we sit down around the table and just kind of hash it out. We discuss what we feel is the best product to meet our needs. So our teachers are very, very involved in our decision-making process. It's not me making the decision or [other district leaders] making the decision. We sit down with a team of teachers and we listen to their feedback. Before we went with Discovery Education, we got a free pilot. So we did a test run of it. The teachers worked with it. They used it and determined if they liked it or didn't like it. So, it is very much a team process."

District leaders also described the different criteria or qualities they consider when selecting interim assessments. Many of these qualities were mentioned in most or all interviews with district leaders, creating a common picture of what district leaders view to be a high-quality interim assessment. Some common qualities or criteria discussed included cost, quality of assessment reports, ease of administration, and correlation to the end of year assessment.

Benefits from Interim Assessments

Results from surveys, focus groups, and interviews indicate teachers, principals, and district leaders found great value in the data gleaned from interim assessments. Many teachers, principals, and district leaders discussed using data from interim

assessments in similar ways in their classrooms and schools. These assessments are used as tools in the teaching and learning process, guiding teachers' instruction, indicating when concepts need to be retaught, and helping all stakeholders in a school to look at how best to meet individual student needs. A high school teacher in one of our focus groups stated:

"I believe in the years that I've been in education, we moved in the right direction with having interim assessments drive instruction. I think before teachers would say, 'Here are the standards. I'm going to teach this. If you get it, you get it. If don't, you don't.' But my job isn't just to teach these standards, really, our job is to teach these students each standard and see mastery. And I feel like that the interim assessment helps us to see mastery."

District leaders and principals often discussed using data from interim assessments to inform professional learning opportunities for teachers, to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention or instructional strategy, to inform teacher placement decisions, and to identify schools in need of additional support. A district leader in one of our interviews said:

"We make every decision based on that data. That's just the nature of the current superintendent. I move people. We move people from, say, a kindergarten classroom to a fourth-grade classroom because we see where those students are excelling in that room. So teacher placement decisions are made based on that data. The time that each child spends in intervention or enrichment is based on that data. I think the good thing about that is we really individualize instruction."

Another district leader stated:

"It also drives our professional learning, in conjunction with several other pieces of data related to TEAM and teacher evaluation. We also do quarterly lunch and learns and gather data from teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators about what they need in terms of professional learning. So testing data is used to tell us a bit of a story and to help us to determine what resources we need to put in place."

The frequency of this theme indicates strong agreement among teachers, principals, and district leaders on the value of interim assessments to the teaching and learning process. This finding increases the importance of ensuring teachers and schools have access to high-quality interim assessments that provide them with accurate measures of student learning.

Challenges with Interim Assessments

Challenges with interim assessments were a common theme throughout surveys, focus groups, and interviews. While educators indicated they find great value in the information gleaned from interim assessments, they also acknowledged several common challenges faced with interim assessments. Figures 16 and 17 summarize findings from teacher surveys related to time spent on interim assessments. Most teachers that responded to the survey feel their students spend too much time taking interim assessments and do not feel the time spent taking interim assessments is worth the time and effort.

Teacher Survey: My students spend too much time taking benchmark assessments.

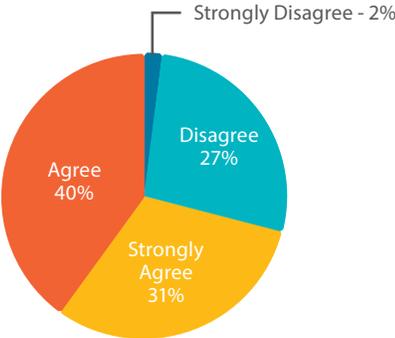


Figure 16

Teacher Survey: Overall, the benefits to my students from benchmark assessments are worth the time and effort.

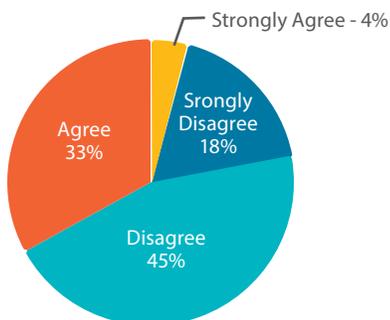


Figure 17

During focus groups and interviews, teachers, principals, and district leaders discussed common challenges faced with interim assessments. Teachers, principals, and district leaders often discussed time spent on assessments, logistical challenges related to scheduling and technology, funding, and lack of access to high-quality interim assessments.

As Tennessee transitions to technology-based assessments for its statewide summative assessments, many districts have tried to adopt technology-based interim assessments. In focus groups, many teachers and principals indicated that while technology-based assessments have benefits, they also create logistical challenges in implementation. Many teachers and principals discussed challenges related to glitches with technology, scheduling time in computer labs, and student preparedness for technology-based assessments.

Many teachers and principals also discussed limitations in the quality of district- or school-level interim assessments. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary uses of interim assessments in many districts is to predict student performance on statewide summative assessments. Many teachers and principals indicated that while many vendors claim interim assessments accurately predict student performance on TCAP assessments, this was often not the case. An elementary school teacher stated:

"I was told that Discovery Education Assessments didn't really align to TCAP. A lot of our kids scored advanced and proficient on Discovery Education all year, and then they got to TCAP and were below basic and basic."

Many teachers also indicated district- or school-level interim assessments were limited in terms of the information they provided teachers. Teachers noted these interim assessments lack the specificity needed to guide their instruction and meet students' needs. An elementary school teacher in one of our focus groups said:

"At the elementary level, we have an interim assessment three times a year on the computer that I think is good, fair, and targeted in the right place, but it doesn't tell me anything I don't already know. 'Look, AJ got more questions right than Sarah.' I knew that was going to happen. I would love to see an assessment that tells me, 'Sarah doesn't understand phonics as well as she understands word shapes,' or something that would actually help me be a better teacher."

A high school teacher in one of our focus groups explained the same challenge, stating:

"Even assuming that there's a gap in your teaching somewhere, the categories we get from these local assessments are so broad. They don't really tell you what to do better. Your social studies might come back low in governance and civics. Did I not teach the three branches of government? Or do they not understand the meaning of democracy? The titles were too broad. The data was too blunt, not sharp enough to tell me what was really going on."

Transition to TNReady

Tennessee is at a critical crossroads in its efforts to prepare students for success in college and career. The state took an important step in 2010 when it adopted new standards in English language arts and math. Research indicates that Tennessee's current standards are as strong as or stronger than standards previously implemented in other states.²⁵ These standards focus on fewer topics in greater depth, have greater coherence, and require more critical thinking skills and conceptual understanding than previous standards. For these reasons, the standards are a vast improvement from Tennessee's earlier standards, which were ranked among the lowest in the country.²⁶ Furthermore, they are designed to align with expectations for postsecondary and career success.

Research has found that in order for Tennessee's State Standards to transform instruction and improve student learning, they must be supported by high-quality, aligned assessments.²⁷ When standards and assessments are misaligned, teachers make instructional choices based on what is assessed rather than what the academic standards require. Tennessee now faces the responsibility of implementing an assessment that aligns with the rigor and quality of the standards Tennessee adopted in English language arts and mathematics. To fully realize the potential these standards have for improved student learning in Tennessee, it is imperative for the state to implement an assessment that aligns with the depth, breadth, and rigor of Tennessee's State Standards in English language arts and math.

In December 2014, Tennessee's Central Procurement Office concluded an RFP process for a new assessment, awarding the contract to Measurement Inc. Over the past several months, Measurement Inc. collaborated with the Tennessee Department of Education and local educators to develop Tennessee's new assessments in English language arts and math. This new assessment, called TNReady, will be implemented for the first time in the 2015-16 school year.

In this section, we summarize primary findings from educator surveys, focus groups, and interviews related to the transition to the new TNReady assessment. During focus groups and interviews educators were asked to speak about: (1) the transition to TNReady generally; (2) technological readiness for the TNReady assessment; (3) additional resources needed to ensure a successful transition to the TNReady assessment; and (4) communications and supports provided thus far on the new TNReady assessment.

Educator Readiness

Throughout focus groups and interviews, many teachers, principals, and district leaders responded positively to questions about the transition to the TNReady assessment. Many educators discussed challenges faced over the past few years in implementing the TCAP assessments, which were not fully aligned with Tennessee's State Standards in English language arts and math. Educators also often discussed the benefits of the new TNReady assessment, which includes extended response items, asks students to explain their thinking in writing, and allows students to interact with the assessment in new ways. A district leader in one of our district interviews said:

"Now as we flash forward to 2016, there is some relief that the summative assessment is going to be more properly aligned to how students are being taught, the way they are being challenged to think and solve problems. So, the change to TNReady is something many people are looking forward to"

Similarly, a principal in one of our focus groups stated:

"I love to see that finally the state test will be more aligned to the increased standards that we have. It's been really challenging straddling the fence between TCAP and our standards. So I'm really looking forward to TNReady and so are my teachers. It's safe to say that for most of the teachers in our district, they're looking forward to having a test that aligns to how they are teaching."

Technological Readiness

One of the top challenges district leaders, principals, and teachers discussed related to TNReady was transitioning to a technology-based assessment. Many district leaders discussed challenges related to technological infrastructure and the number of technological devices available in schools. Some district leaders noted that even in cases where large investments were made in technology upgrades over the past several years, challenges were still faced during online assessments. A middle-school teacher in one of our focus groups stated:

“At our school, our fifth-graders have to take the writing assessment, which is now a typing assessment on a computer. We have one laptop cart that has 30 computers on it for the entire school. When we have to take a writing assessment, we have to rotate kids through the laptop cart to take it. Then, we couldn’t have practiced enough with our students because we don’t have a formal keyboarding teacher, a class, or a computer lab. We don’t have anything like that where they can practice keyboarding skills.”

In addition to infrastructure and devices, many teachers, principals, and district leaders discussed concerns about student readiness for technology-based assessments, particularly in the early grades. Many educators said they were worried the new assessment may not be an accurate measure of students’ understanding of Tennessee’s State Standards, but rather a measure of their ability to successfully navigate a technology-based assessment. An elementary school teacher in one of our focus groups said:

“In that same bag, you’re tying up your labs, so therefore, the students can’t practice their keyboarding and things because your labs are being used for testing. So if they don’t have them at home and they can’t use them at school, then how are they supposed to learn to take the test?”

Resources Needed to Ensure a Successful Transition

Teachers, principals, and district leaders also discussed the resources their schools and districts need to ensure a successful transition to TNReady. Many teachers and principals discussed a need for additional information about TNReady. Related needs included information about test items, testing format, and logistical details related to implementation of the new assessment. While some of this information was shared with principals and teachers in the spring and early summer, teachers and principals indicated a desire to receive this information prior to the end of the school year. District leaders, principals, and teachers noted that it would be helpful to have large banks of sample items that could be used to create interim assessments for districts and schools. A middle school teacher stated:

“I want sample questions out there and I want enough of them out there that we can pull five or six items for each different standard. Or maybe even have ten that I could choose from. That’s the biggest thing because this is brand new for our students. It’s brand new for our teachers. They don’t truly know what they’re getting into.”

District leaders and principals discussed a need for additional guidance on the logistics and implementation of TNReady. Many principals and district leaders noted that it would be helpful to have access to sample assessment schedules from similar districts, to have opportunities to test run TNReady before the actual assessment takes place, and to receive guidance from the state on interim assessments. Many district leaders voiced concern about interim assessments, noting that the assessments they used in the past likely will not align with TNReady. One district leader said:

“We need any support. It’s been so all over the place the past few years that making a quality decision has really had to be based on your best blind guess. Lots of money is spent sometimes going in the wrong direction. So yes, we need more help and we need the help earlier on. Like right now, I do not know if my students need more training in the use of technology to be successful on TNReady or if they need more help with the writing and keyboarding. I mean, I don’t know where my kids are going to be weak because I don’t have enough preliminary data to be able to make those decisions. And I don’t think there’s any formative assessment today that can help me know that. So yes, we need more help and we need the help sooner.”

State Support and Communication

Although teachers, principals, and district leaders discussed challenges faced in the transition to the TNReady assessment, they also shared positive feedback on the communications and support they have received thus far on the TNReady assessment. Most principals and district leaders felt there was greater transparency in communications on the TNReady assessment compared to the information provided during previous assessment transitions. A district leader from one of our district interviews said:

“Well, the state has done an exceptional job with offering training for school and district leaders through the spring and summer leadership courses. They put information about the trainings out in director’s updates and TNCore updates, so they’ve really tried to advocate for leaders at varying levels to participate in the training. The training focused on TNReady. I mean there’s lots of support for the assessment. For those that participated, from what I understand, this particular spring leadership course is the highest-rated training they’ve had. So that was very exciting to see leaders really felt that this was a meaningful, supportive training on TNReady.”

When focus groups were held, most teachers had not attended any professional development on the TNReady assessment but planned to attend sessions in the summer. Depending on their district and school, teachers received different levels of communication about the TNReady assessment from their principals or district leaders.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to provide an overview of assessment practices in Tennessee that was grounded in the experiences and perspectives of Tennessee educators and was focused on summative and interim assessments. The findings demonstrate not only the multi-faceted challenges schools and districts face with assessment across the state, but also the importance of assessment in schools and districts. More specifically:

- Teachers, principals, and district leaders continuously pointed to the unique value of assessment in driving key decisions at the classroom, school, and district levels. For example, educators discussed using data from assessments to drive instruction, teacher support practices, and student interventions. For this reason, it is essential to ensure educators have access to high-quality assessments that help them better understand the unique needs of their students.
- District leaders and principals consistently identified assessment logistics, such as scheduling assessments and implementing technology-based assessments, as top challenges faced in their roles. Over the next year, district leaders and principals should receive guidance and support in these key areas, specifically on the implementation of the new, technology-based, TNReady assessment.
- Teachers consistently identified lost instructional time as a result of both district and state-level assessments as a top challenge faced in their roles. Education partners across the state should work together to create balanced assessment systems that retain or adopt high-quality assessments, eliminate redundancies in assessment practices, and protect educators’ instructional time.

Many teachers, principals, and district leaders feel students in Tennessee spend too much time taking assessments. The issue of over-testing has arisen not only as a result of statewide summative assessments, but also as a result of district- and school-level interim assessments. As Tennessee transitions to a new statewide summative assessment, it is important to consider the need for fewer, better assessments at the state, district, and school levels.

SCORE encourages continued focus on the issue of assessment during the coming academic year. Specifically, SCORE will take on the following bodies of work over the next year:

- SCORE will use results from this report to inform priorities outlined in the 2015-16 State of Education in Tennessee report, creating specific recommendations that address key challenges identified by district leaders, principals, and teachers related to assessment.

- In an effort to continue to inform this important policy area, SCORE will revisit the issue of assessment again in 2016, collecting feedback from teachers, principals, and district leaders on topics related to assessment, including the implementation of the TNReady assessment, the implementation of RTI² related assessments, and interim assessment practices at the district- and school-levels. This process will continue to guide SCORE's policy efforts on the topic of assessment.

Ultimately, we believe that high-quality assessments are needed to accelerate students' development of the skills and competencies the current workforce demands, guide the instruction of teachers, and inform the decisions of principals and district leaders.²⁸ In order to ensure students in Tennessee are progressing toward college and career readiness, high-quality summative, interim, and formative assessments must be in place.²⁹

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Appendix A: Teacher Survey Instrument



Over the next few months, SCORE in collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Education Association, and Professional Educators of Tennessee is taking a closer look into assessment practices in districts and schools across the state. An essential part of this work is gathering information from teachers, principals, and district leaders about what assessments are being implemented in their communities and how data from these assessments are being used. The following survey will help provide a better understanding of what assessments are being implemented across the state, how much time is spent on these assessments, and how these assessments are used to drive student learning. We appreciate you taking the time to share this valuable information with us and look forward to sharing our findings.

1. In which district do you teach? *

2. In which school do you teach? *

3. What grade(s) do you teach? *

- Pre-K
- K
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12

4. What subject(s) do you teach? *

- Math
- English Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Science
- Other *

(untitled)

5. Think about the number of district and state mandated assessments your students take during the school year. Do you think students in this school are not given enough assessments, are given about the right number of assessments, or are given too many assessments throughout the school year? *

- Not enough assessments
- About the right number of assessments
- Too many assessments

6. Do you think the time spent on assessment in this school is too little, about right, or too much? *

- Too little About right Too much

7. About how much time do students in your class spend taking district and state assessments during the school year? *

- None
- 1-3 hours
- 4-7 hours
- 8-14 hours
- 15-25 hours
- More than 25 hours

8. How much time do you spend preparing students in your class for state or district assessments during the school day? Test preparation could include practice tests, instruction on test-taking strategies, or review for tests that you use specifically to prepare students for district or state assessments. *

- 0-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26-30 hours
- More than 30 hours

9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning benchmark and other district-required assessments. *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I spend too much instructional time helping students prepare for benchmark assessments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My students spend too much time taking benchmark assessments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, the benefits to my students from benchmark assessments are worth the investment of time and effort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Benchmark assessment results are available to me in a timely manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand how to use results from benchmark assessments to improve my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The results of benchmark assessments help me to determine my students' readiness for the TCAP examination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The results of benchmark assessments help me to determine if my students are gaining the skills and knowledge to meet Tennessee's State Standards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would use a benchmark assessment designed to gauge student readiness for taking TCAP tests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand how to use results from other district-required assessments to improve my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The results of other district-required assessments help me to determine if my students are gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to meet Tennessee's State Standards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Please describe your concerns about assessment, if any.

11. Please describe concerns you have heard about assessment from other teachers, if any.

12. What level of concern have you heard about the time spent on assessments from parents?

*

- No concern Some concern A lot of concern

13. Please describe concerns you have heard about assessment from parents, if any.

14. What are some examples of district assessments that you have found helpful in improving your instruction? (Please note if you have not found any assessment helpful.)

15. In general, what aspects of these district assessments make them helpful?

- Strong alignment to standards
- Rapid turnaround of results
- Easily understood student-level reports
- Other *

16. What are some examples of district assessments that you have found helpful for diagnosing student needs? (Please note if you have not found any assessment helpful.)

17. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them helpful?

- Accurate identification of student skill deficits
- Rapid turnaround of results
- Easily understood student-level reports
- Other *

18. What are some examples of district assessments that you have found helpful for predicting student performance on statewide standardized assessments (e.g. TCAP or EOC)? (Please note if you have not found any assessment helpful.)

19. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them helpful?

- Strong alignment to standards
- Rapid turnaround of results
- Easily understood student-level reports
- Other *

(untitled)

20. What are some examples of district assessments that you have not found helpful for improving your instruction? (Please note if you have found all assessments helpful.)

21. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them not helpful?

- Weak alignment to standards
- Slow turnaround of results
- Inadequate student-level reports
- Other *

22. What are some examples of district assessments that you have not found helpful for diagnosing student needs? (Please note if you have found all assessments helpful.)

23. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them not helpful?

- Inaccurate identification of student skill deficits
- Slow turnaround of results
- Inadequate student-level reports
- Other *

24. What are some examples of district assessments that you have found not helpful for predicting student performance? (Please note if you have found all assessments helpful.)

25. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them not helpful?

- Weak alignment to standards
- Slow turnaround of results
- Inadequate student-level reports
- Other

(untitled)

VALIDATION Max. answers = 3 (if answered)

26. What are the top three ways you use assessments in your classroom? *

- To improve my instruction
- To diagnose student skill deficits
- To predict student performance on future assessments
- To group students based on their performance
- To set goals with students
- Other *
- Other *
- Other *

VALIDATION Max. answers = 3 (if answered)

27. What are the top three challenges you face with assessments as a teacher? *

- Scheduling assessments
- Technology availability
- Student preparedness for technology-based assessments
- Using data from assessments to improve my instruction
- Using data from assessments to diagnose student needs
- Using data from assessments to predict student performance
- Sharing results from assessments with parents
- Lack of access to high-quality assessments
- Reduced instructional time
- Other *
- Other *
- Other *

28. Which local assessments, if any, would you suggest your school or district continue to use as it does today?

29. Which assessments, if any, would you suggest your school or district think about eliminating from the assessment program?

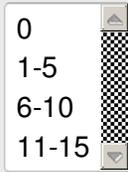
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Over the next few months, SCORE in collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Education Association, and Professional Educators of Tennessee is taking a closer look into assessment practices in districts and schools across the state. An essential part of this work is gathering information from district leaders, school leaders, and teachers about what assessments are being implemented in their communities and how data from these assessments are being used. The following survey will help provide a better understanding of what assessments are being implemented across the state, how much time is spent on these assessments, and how these assessments are used to drive student learning. We appreciate you taking the time to share this valuable information with us and look forward to sharing our findings.

LOGIC Show/hide trigger exists.

1. How many assessments do you implement that are **unique to your school**? Only include assessments that you select as a principal to implement at your school across classrooms or grade levels. Please **do not** include state mandated assessments, district mandated assessments, or teacher created assessments. *



For each assessment implemented in your school, list the name of the assessment in the left hand column. In the columns to the right, please answer specific questions about each of these assessments. **You will need to scroll to the right to answer every question. You do not need to include state-mandated assessments or teacher created assessments in your response.**

LOGIC Hidden unless: Question "How many assessments do you implement that are **unique to your school**? Only include assessments that you select as a principal to implement at your school across classrooms or grade levels. Please **do not** include state mandated assessments, district mandated assessments, or teacher created assessments." #1 is one of the following answers ("1-5", "6-10", "11-15")

2.

Assessments 1-5

Name of assessment	Grades tested													English Language Arts	I		
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12				

Page description:

5. Of the assessments implemented in your school or district, which three do you find **most helpful** to you as a principal? *

6. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them helpful? *

- Strong alignment to standards
- Strong alignment to curriculum
- Rapid turnaround of results
- Easily understood student-level reports
- Other *

7. Which assessments, if any, have you found **least helpful** to you as a principal?

8. In general, what aspects of these assessments make them least helpful?

- Weak alignment to standards
- Weak alignment to curriculum
- Slow or delayed turnaround of results
- Difficult to understand or inadequate student-level reports
- Other *

(untitled)

9. Do you think students in this school are not given enough assessments, are given about the right number of assessments, or are given too many assessments throughout the school year? *

- Not enough assessments
- About the right number of assessments
- Too many assessments

10. Do you think the time spent on assessment in this school is too little, about right, or too much? *

- Too little
- About right
- Too much

11. What concerns, if any, have you heard from your teachers about assessments?

12. What concerns, if any, have you heard about assessments from parents and community members?

VALIDATION Max. answers = 3 (if answered)

13. What are the top three ways you use assessments as a principal? *

- To inform professional development decisions
- To inform hiring, firing, and retention decisions
- To diagnose student skill deficits
- To inform school resource allocation
- To predict student performance on future assessments
- To inform teacher assignment decisions
- To communicate with parents
- To inform student course placement
- To inform teacher pay decisions
- Other *
- Other *
- Other *

VALIDATION Max. answers = 3 (if answered)

14. What are the top three challenges you face with assessments as a principal? *

- Scheduling assessments
- Technology availability
- Student preparedness for technology-based assessments
- Selecting high-quality assessments for my school
- Interpreting data from assessments
- Funding for assessments
- Sharing results from assessments with parents
- Using data from assessments to support teachers
- Accessibility of student results to teachers
- Teacher support of assessment
- Other *
- Other *
- Other *

Contact Information

Page description:

15. Contact Information

First Name

Last Name

Role/Title *

District Name *

School Name *

Email Address

Page description:



Over the next few months, SCORE in collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Education Association, and Professional Educators of Tennessee are taking a closer look into assessment practices in districts and schools across the state. An essential part of this work is gathering information from district leaders, school leaders, and teachers about what assessments are being implemented in their communities and how data from these assessments are being used. The following survey will help provide a better understanding of what assessments are being implemented across the state, how much time is spent on these assessments, and how these assessments are used to drive student learning. We appreciate you taking the time to share this valuable information with us and look forward to sharing our findings.

1. How many assessments does your district use? This number should only include assessments your district office selects. Please do not include state mandated assessments, school selected assessments, or teacher created assessments. *

1-5
 6-10
 11-15
 16-20
 21-25
 26-30
 31-35
 36-40
 41-45
 46-50
 51-55
 56-60

For each assessment implemented in your district, list the name of the assessment in the left hand column. In the columns to the right, please answer specific questions about each of these assessments. **You will need to scroll to the right to answer every question. You do not need to include state-mandated assessments in your response.**

2.

Assessments 1-5

Name of assessment	Grades tested													English Language Arts		
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			

14. Do you think students in this district are given too many assessments, not enough assessments, or about the right number of assessments throughout the school year? *

- Not enough assessments
- About the right number of assessments
- Too many assessments

15. Do you think the time spent on assessment in this district is too much, too little, or about right? *

- Too little
- About right
- Too much

16. What level of concern do you have about the time spent on assessments in your district? *

- No concern
- Some concern
- A lot of concern

17. What concerns, if any, do you have about assessments in your district?

18. What level of concern have you heard about the time spent on assessments from teachers in your district? *

- No concern
- Some concern
- A lot of concern

19. What concerns, if any, have you heard about assessments from teachers in this district?

20. What level of concern have you heard about the time spent on assessments from parents? *

- No concern
- Some concern
- A lot of concern

21. What concerns, if any, have you heard about assessments from parents?

22. What are the top three ways you use assessments in your district? *

- To inform teacher support practices
- To inform school support practices
- To inform resource allocation
- To track student progress
- To communicate with parents
- To evaluate district programs or policies
- To predict student performance on future assessments
- Diagnosing student skill deficit
- Other (required)
- Other (required)
- Other (required)

23. What are the top three challenges you face with assessments as a district? *

- Scheduling assessments
- Technology availability
- Student preparedness for technology-based assessments
- Lack of access to high-quality assessments
- Selecting high-quality assessments
- Interpreting data from assessments
- Sharing results from assessments with community members
- Other (required) *
- Other (required) *
- Other (required) *

Contact Information

Page description:

24. Contact Information

First Name

Last Name

Role/Title

District Name

Email Address

Appendix D: Teacher Focus Group Protocol

1. Describe the use of formative assessments in your school and district. Are these assessments useful to you? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. How do you use formative assessments in your classroom?
3. How would you describe the amount of time spent on assessments at your school? How would you describe the amount of time spent preparing for assessments at your school?
4. What are the top challenges and benefits you face with assessment in your classroom or school?
5. Are there any gaps you see in the assessments you have access to?
6. How would you describe a high-quality assessment?
7. Do you feel that Tennessee's current state assessments are reflective of student learning? What changes would you make to our current assessment?
8. Describe how you feel about Tennessee's transition to the TNReady assessment.
 - How has your principal and/or district communicated with you about the changes to Tennessee's assessment?
 - What support do you need to ensure a successful transition to TNReady?
9. Describe your school and district's readiness for the TNReady assessment from a technological standpoint.

Appendix E: Principal Focus Group Protocol

1. Describe the use of formative assessments in your school and district. Are these assessments useful to you? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Do you implement any formative or benchmark assessments that are unique to your school? If so, how do you use these assessments? What process do you go through to select these assessments?
3. How would you describe the amount of time spent on assessments at your school? How would you describe the amount of time spent preparing for assessments at your school?
4. What are the top challenges and benefits you face with assessments in your school?
5. What are you hearing about assessments from your teachers? What about parents and community members?
6. Are there any gaps you see in the assessments you have access to?
7. How would you describe a high-quality assessment?
8. Do you feel that Tennessee's current state assessments are reflective of student learning? What changes would you make to our current assessment?
9. Describe how you feel about Tennessee's transition to the TNReady assessment.
 - How has your district communicated with you about the changes to Tennessee's assessment?
 - What support do you need to ensure a successful transition to TNReady?
 - How are educators in your school feeling about the TNReady assessment?
10. Describe your school and district's readiness for the TNReady assessment from a technological standpoint.
11. Describe your thoughts on student readiness for the TNReady assessment from a technological standpoint.

Appendix F: District Interview Protocol

1. How many interim or benchmark assessments are administered in your district? About how many days does it take to administer these assessments? How many years have you used these assessments?
2. How much time do students in your district spend on assessments?
 - Do you think this is too much time?
 - Do you think they should spend more time on assessments?
3. How do you use assessments in your district? In what ways do you use data from assessments to drive decisions in your district?
4. How do you select benchmark or formative assessments to implement in your district? Do you have any processes in place that you use to select assessments? If so, could you walk us through that process? (ask for artifacts)
 - How do you evaluate the quality of assessments?
 - How do you measure the usefulness of these assessments to different stakeholders (teachers, principals, students, parents, etc.)?
 - Do you think your district needs any additional support in the selection of assessments? If so, could you describe what support you need and who you think should provide that support to your district?
 - Have there been any policies or programs that have influenced the adoption of additional assessments at the district level?
5. What district or state mandated assessments are helpful to you in your work? What about these assessments makes them helpful?
6. Are there any district or state mandated assessments that are not helpful to your work? What about these assessments makes them not helpful?
7. What are you hearing about assessment from principals?
8. What are you hearing about assessments from teachers?
9. What are you hearing about assessment from parents and community members?
10. Are there areas for improvement you see in the assessments you have access to in your district? If so, what supports do you need to fill in those gaps?
11. What are the top challenges you face with assessments?
12. How has assessment changed in your district over the past few years? What do you think drove these changes?
13. Do you have any materials or artifacts that you could share with us related to assessment practices in your district?
14. Describe how you feel about Tennessee's transition to the TNReady assessment.
 - How has the state communicated with you about the changes to Tennessee's assessment?
 - What support do you need to ensure a successful transition to TNReady
 - How are educators in your district feeling about the TNReady assessment?
15. Describe your district's readiness for the TNReady assessment from a technological standpoint.
16. Describe your thoughts on student readiness for the TNReady assessment from a technological standpoint.