

Center for American Progress



Testing Overload in America's Schools

By Melissa Lazarín October 2014

Center for American Progress



Testing Overload in America's Schools

By Melissa Lazarín October 2014

Contents

1 Introduction and summary

6 Methodology

7 Background on testing

13 Efforts to curb unnecessary testing

19 Findings

23 Recommendations

26 Conclusion

28 Endnotes

Introduction and summary

In August, when the Lee County School Board in Southwest Florida voted 3-2 to opt out of the state's mandated tests tied to the Common Core State Standards due to concerns about the overtesting of students,¹ a packed room of opt-out supporters and parents erupted in cheers.

As unpopular as Florida's mandated tests are in many quarters, the state's tests are not the sole culprit. A local newspaper's analysis of the tests given by the Lee County schools found that 52 percent of the assessments that students take are district mandated, while less than half are state required.² In other words, overtesting in Lee County might not be only a state and federal problem but a local problem as well.

The Lee County vote, which was later rescinded due to concerns that the decision could place the district in violation of state law and risk losing funding,³ highlights how the issues of overtesting and the way in which tests results will be used have become more and more controversial in recent months.

New, more rigorous tests that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards—which serve as guideposts for what students in grades K-12 should know in reading and math—will be administered broadly this school year. The prospect of this expanded rollout has spawned growing concern among teachers over how the results will be used to evaluate teacher and school performance. At the same time, the new tests have generated hope among advocates that the low-quality, fill-in-the-bubble tests that states currently use, and the added assessments that districts require to compensate for them, will finally become a thing of the past.

This spring saw a wave of so-called opt-out efforts from Colorado to Illinois where parents sought to keep their children from taking standardized assessments.⁴ In New York, more than 550 principals signed a letter protesting the state's tests.⁵ Some states have decided to stop administering the new Common Core tests, while others have chosen to walk away from using the Common Core standards altogether.⁶

But the bigger question still looms: Are schools overtesting students?

A recent Purple Strategies poll⁷ commissioned by the Center for American Progress found that 49 percent of parents think there is too much standardized testing in schools. But in an apparent contradiction, three out of four parents think that it is important to regularly assess whether their children are on track to meet state academic goals, according to a poll conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.⁸ Support for regular assessment is even higher among Latino and black parents.⁹

It appears that schools and families are at a crossroads when it comes to testing.

High-quality assessments generate rich data and can provide valuable information about student progress to teachers and parents, support accountability, promote high expectations, and encourage equity for students of color and low-income students. But it is important to acknowledge that for some children, testing exacts an emotional toll in the form of anxiety and stress. Therefore, the number of tests and/or the amount of time devoted to tests should be limited to the minimum amount needed to acquire critical information to improve student learning.

Moreover, it must be remembered that tests simply collect information and that they are only as valuable as the quality of the information collected and the way that information is utilized. Tests should not take center stage in the classroom, particularly at the expense of meaningful learning time. Schools should design assessment schedules, as well as overall schooling, in ways that maximize the learning experience and foster the positive development of students.

In undertaking this study, we had two goals: to obtain a better understanding of how much time students spend taking tests and to identify the degree to which the tests are mandated by districts or states. To that end, we focused on 14 districts—urban and suburban—in seven states during the 2013-14 school year. We examined district and state assessment calendars and supplemented that information with correspondence with school district and state central-office staff, along with other publicly available information. We used this information to identify the number and frequency of district and state-required standardized assessments for students by grade spans K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 and to determine the time it took for students to take the assessments. We sought to capture the average standardized testing experience of most K-12 students and therefore only included tests

that either the state or district required of all students. This analysis did not include teacher-developed tests or test-preparation activities; as a consequence, it understates the amount of time and energy devoted to testing in these districts. Because our analysis included only a relatively small sample of districts, it may not reflect the testing experience of students or districts in other communities.

In addition, we interviewed several district and state education officials to better understand why they require certain assessments and the efforts underway to reduce the amount of testing in schools. A number of these efforts are highlighted in this report.

The report finds the following:

- **Despite the perception that federally mandated state testing is the root of the issue, districts require more tests than states.** Students across all grade spans take more district tests than state assessments. Students in K-2 are tested three times as much on district exams as state exams, and high school students are tested twice as much on district exams.
- **Students are tested as frequently as twice per month and an average of once per month.** Our analysis found that students take as many as 20 standardized assessments per year and an average of 10 tests in grades 3-8. The regularity with which testing occurs, especially in these grades, may be causing students, families, and educators to feel burdened by testing.
- **Actual test administration takes up a small fraction of learning time.** Although testing occurs frequently, students across all grade spans—even in grades 3-8, where state standardized tests are mandated by federal law—do not spend a great deal of school time actually taking tests. Students spend, on average, 1.6 percent of instructional time or less taking tests.
- **There is a culture of testing and test preparation in schools that does not put students first.** While the actual time spent taking tests might be low, a culture has arisen in some states and districts that places a premium on testing over learning. It is difficult to systematically document the prevalence of these activities. However, our research indicates that some districts and states may be administering tests that are duplicative or unnecessary; they may also be requiring or encouraging significant amounts of test preparation, such as taking practice tests.

- **District-level testing occurs more frequently and takes up more learning time in urban districts than in suburban districts.** In grades K-2, urban students spend about 52 percent more time on district tests than state tests. In grades 3-5 and 6-8, students in urban districts spend approximately 80 percent and 73 percent more time, respectively, taking district-mandated standardized tests than their suburban peers. But the difference is most profound among high school students. Urban high school students spend 266 percent more time taking district-level exams than their suburban counterparts.
- **Districts are not transparent about testing practices or purposes.** While parents may know when their children are being tested, the purposes of the tests students are taking, whether the state or district is requiring the test, and how much time tests take may not always be clear from the information that districts provide. Chicago Public Schools stood out among all the districts for its transparency regarding district assessments. Most districts examined post some information regarding their district-level assessments on their websites, but the information is often limited in its usefulness for parents and other stakeholders.

Based on our findings and analysis, we make the following recommendations:

- **States should implement the new Common Core-aligned assessments.** Because they are of higher quality, include more open-ended questions, and are more useful for instruction, the new Common Core-aligned state assessments are less likely to lead to teaching to the test. These assessments also offer the promise of reducing the need for districts to layer on additional tests to compensate for low-quality state tests. States should move forward with the implementation of Common Core-aligned assessments.
- **States should issue guidance and provide technical assistance to districts to support fairer and more efficient testing practices that put students first.** States should provide stronger guidance to districts about when and how to use standardized assessments so that they are not requiring duplicative or unnecessary assessments. States should help districts identify ways to streamline their testing schedules so districts do not impose an unfair testing burden on students. States may want to look to New York as an example, where state education officials provided targeted grants and issued individualized guidance and recommendations to each district on how they may reduce the number of tests they employ.

- **Districts should critically examine their approaches to standardized testing and listen to teachers in the process.** Many district-driven assessments are used to gauge student progress and help teachers improve instruction. Districts should therefore consult with teachers about the assessments that they find useful to their instructional practice when critically evaluating their portfolio of assessments and determining which tests to keep or eliminate.
- **District and school leaders should refrain from test preparation and other practices and activities that may increase test anxiety.** As part of this report, we were not able to objectively measure how much time schools are spending on test-preparation practices. But media reports and common anecdotes of activities—such as administering practice versions of tests, holding school pep rallies that elevate the importance of tests, and inviting all students to wear the same color shirt during test week—have surfaced in recent years.¹⁰ These types of activities can unnecessarily escalate the significance of tests and spur test-related performance anxiety among students. Test preparation should consist of nothing more than high-quality instruction aligned to rigorous academic standards.
- **Districts should improve the transparency of district-level assessments.** Parents and the community should be informed of all district and state tests, including when they are scheduled to occur, their purpose, their administration time, and whether they are required by the state or district. At a minimum, this information should be posted on school districts’ websites.

Used properly, high-quality assessments can be a valuable tool for teachers to determine where students are struggling, for parents to understand their children’s progress and knowledge gaps, and for policymakers and advocates who need assurance that all students are receiving a high-quality education. We simply need to get smarter about when, where and how we use them.

Methodology

In this report, we sought to capture how much testing is occurring in K-12 schools. This effort builds on similar work that has been carried out by the American Federation of Teachers and Teach Plus.¹¹ We selected a pair of urban and suburban districts from seven states:

- **Colorado:** Denver Public Schools and Jefferson County, or JeffCo, Public Schools
- **Florida:** Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Sarasota County Schools
- **Georgia:** Atlanta Public Schools and Cobb County School District
- **Illinois:** Chicago Public Schools and Elmwood Community Schools
- **Kentucky:** Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville and Bullitt County Public Schools
- **Ohio:** Columbus City Schools and South-Western City School District
- **Tennessee:** Shelby County Schools and Knox County Schools

Based on information collected from district and state assessment calendars for the 2013-14 school year, correspondence with school district and state education staff, and other publicly available information, we sought to identify the number and frequency of district- and state-required standardized assessments for students in grades K-12, as well as the time required for students to take the assessments. Where possible, we considered the total test-administration time, including breaks and time for proctoring an assessment.

For the purposes of this report, we sought to capture the average testing experience of most K-12 students. We only considered standardized assessments—tests that are administered and scored in a consistent manner for diagnostic, screening, or achievement purposes. We only included tests that either the state or district required of all students, either in a certain grade or for graduation purposes. For example, we took into account high school end-of-course exams that are required for all students taking a required subject for a standard diploma. But we did not include English language proficiency assessments for English language learners and certain high school

achievement tests—such as the ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate exams—unless state or district policy required these assessments for all students. This report does not include class-based assessments, such as teacher-developed quizzes and tests that are not systematically required for all students for grade promotion or graduation.

There are some important caveats and considerations worth noting. While we relied heavily on publicly available district and state assessment calendars for our data collection, several school districts do not post this information on their websites. A few districts also limit access to this information to parents or school staff behind a secure firewall. We therefore supplemented this data with correspondence with district or state education agency staff when possible and with other publicly available information, including information from test publishers' websites regarding specific assessments. However, it is possible that our analysis has overlooked tests from some school districts or that test-taking time may differ in actuality. Ultimately, we were limited to information that is publicly available and that school districts willingly shared.

It is also important to note that we captured district assessment plans for the 2013-14 school year, just prior to full implementation of the Common Core assessments. We expect and hope that district testing plans will change. Indeed, already this school year, some plans do appear to have been modified.

Finally, while this report attempts to capture the amount of time students spend taking standardized assessments, it does not evaluate how much time is spent on test preparation, nor does it characterize the overall culture of testing in a district. Unfortunately, beyond anecdotal information, it is difficult to systematically evaluate how the culture of testing is affecting the educational experience of most students. This is by no means a minor limitation of this report. We believe this is an important issue, if not the crux of the testing debate itself, and that it merits additional attention.

Background on testing

Federally driven testing

Although tests have long played a role in K-12 schools, the No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, elevated their role by requiring states to annually assess students in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12. It also requires states to test students in science once in grades 3-5, 6-8, and 10-12.¹² In addition, NCLB requires states to annually assess English language proficiency among students who are learning English.¹³

To meet the federal law's requirements, 23 states expanded their assessment programs to test students in grades they had not been previously assessing.¹⁴ In the shift to the Common Core standards, two groups of states—known as the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, or Smarter Balanced for short, and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC—have joined together to develop Common Core-aligned assessments that can be shared across multiple states. These tests are expected to take the place of the assessments that states have instituted to comply with NCLB, though a few states are developing their own tests or are considering alternative assessments such as ACT's Aspire Common Core test.

A number of states successfully piloted the Common Core tests last school year, 2013-14, and will implement them in earnest this academic year. Computer-based, the tests are expected to be of higher quality compared with current state assessments, featuring open-response test items and problems that will encourage and test higher-order thinking skills.¹⁵ Because these tests will be shared across multiple states, they are expected to support greater transparency of student achievement across states.¹⁶

State-driven testing

While NCLB triggered state development of statewide assessments more broadly, it is clear that states have also opted to supplement the federally required tests with other assessments. High school exit and end-of-course exams, statewide diagnostic policies, and efforts to boost college-going participation make up many of these supplemental exams.

Twenty-five states administered high school exit exams in the 2011-12 school year.¹⁷ Some states are also shifting toward the use of end-of-course exams, or EOC tests.¹⁸ Fifteen states required the class of 2012 to take EOC exams, with nine of these states requiring successful passage of the exams as a prerequisite for graduation.¹⁹

In addition to summative assessments such as these, some states require districts to administer assessments to identify students for programs and services. Ohio, for example, requires its districts to administer a state-approved assessment to screen students for gifted-education programming, and many districts comply by administering a screening test to all students in several grades.²⁰

Partially due to federal initiatives such as the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant, more states are also administering kindergarten-readiness assessments. In 2012, half of all states required an assessment in kindergarten.²¹

A handful of states also require all students in a grade cohort to take college-entrance or preparation exams, such as the PSAT, SAT, and ACT. Twelve states, for example, foot the bill and require their high school juniors to take the ACT.²² Such policies are often instituted for lofty reasons, including fostering a college-going culture and setting high expectations for all students.²³

District-driven testing

Districts, too, have added additional assessments over the past decade. During the 2011-12 academic year, education-technology companies generated \$2.2 billion in revenue from district investments in digital testing and assessments.²⁴ Many districts increased their use of benchmark assessments, or interim assessments, which are largely intended to help teachers improve their instructional practice.²⁵ Some districts also use these tests to regularly track student academic

achievement prior to the state summative exams.²⁶ In a 2005 *Education Week* survey, 7 out of 10 superintendents reported administering district-wide tests on a regular basis, and that number was expected to grow by 10 percent the following year.²⁷ Even during the economic recession, as states faced tight budget constraints, many continued to invest in interim tests.²⁸

Some argue that the Common Core standards are driving the current growth in the testing market.²⁹ As part of this report, we spoke with several district officials about why they administer district-level assessments. Most of the districts we spoke with reported that they would likely be moving in this direction anyway. But some of the shortcomings of states' old tests have also encouraged them to rely on other measures.

At least two districts remarked that while the old state exams serve an important purpose, they are taken at the end of the school year, and school districts do not receive the results right away. "We are still waiting for our results from the spring," said Marco Muñoz, an evaluation specialist with Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky, when interviewed in mid-September.³⁰ Peter Weber, chief of data and strategy for the District of Columbia Public Schools, agreed. The interim tests that many districts administer across their schools provide timely information, which enables them to take action before the end of the year. "It's useful to have more real-time information so that you can know on a given day how a student is doing," said Weber.³¹

The benchmark proficiency exams also give district officials insight into how their students will perform on the state's end-of-the-year tests. "I need to know a little about the ongoing progress of my players before they go into the final game of the season," continued Muñoz.³² Kentucky's Jefferson County has four cycles of proficiency assessments throughout the year.³³

The poor quality of the old state tests also compelled some districts to use additional assessments. Muñoz finds that his district's benchmark tests are of better quality than some of the current state assessments on the books because the district's assessments include a greater number of open-response test items, encouraging students to demonstrate their writing skills. However, he asserted that the new Common Core-aligned assessments will be more performance- and project-based, starting with science and following with other subject areas.

Finally, some districts use additional assessments to assess different skills than the state tests. As Weber described:

The CAS [the District of Columbia’s Comprehensive Assessment System] is pretty good about having a student read a passage and telling us whether the student can interact with the text in a meaningful way. I think this is what the PARCC will do as well. They’re good barometers for college readiness. But for some students, we might need more refined information. For example, we use the DIBELS [Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills] test to help determine whether a student can sound out all the words—phonemic awareness. And we also have a test that evaluates whether they can understand the meaning of the passage.³⁴

Rochester City School District Superintendent Bolgen Vargas agreed. “The state assessments tell you a lot about what the child achieved in a given year, but when you have a school-wide assessment like the NWEA [the Northwest Evaluation Association’s Measures of Academic Progress assessment], you get a sense of where children are at a specific point in time. It tells us what kind of instructional changes we should make.”³⁵

There is some evidence that the new Common Core-aligned assessments may alleviate the need for some district-level testing. For example, the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments are expected to provide more timely results than current state assessments, which is at least one reason why districts have come to rely heavily on interim assessments.³⁶

The new Common Core tests are also widely expected to be of higher quality than current state assessments. They include a greater proportion of open-response questions and problems that will encourage and test higher-order thinking skills.³⁷ Indeed, many students who piloted the new tests last spring found the tests more rigorous and demanding, with less of an emphasis on “regurgitating facts.”³⁸ Therefore, some districts—such as Kentucky’s Jefferson County—may find more value in relying on these assessments in the future.

As some districts indicated, interim tests that are taken prior to the end-of-the-year summative tests can be useful because they provide information about their students throughout the year that can be addressed before gaps widen or become more problematic. While districts may continue to rely on interim tests for this reason, the quality and benefits of some of the district interim tests currently in place

are questionable. Research suggests that “interim assessments are useful but not sufficient to inform instructional improvement” and should be linked to districts’ curricula and state standards, professional learning for teachers in how best to analyze and use test data, and a clear sense of purpose for using the test.³⁹

Smarter Balanced and PARCC—the groups of states developing the Common Core-aligned summative tests—are also developing interim tests and midyear assessments for districts to use at their discretion.⁴⁰ The PARCC and Smarter Balanced summative and interim assessments may offset the need for districts to use some of the interim assessments they currently have in place, given that these tests are aligned to states’ standards and are of high quality.

The role of teacher evaluation in the use of district-level assessments

In recent years, efforts to reform the manner in which educators are evaluated have gained traction. Spurred by federal initiatives such as Race to the Top and flexibility from certain NCLB requirements, or Elementary and Secondary Education Act waivers, states and districts have adopted policies that require educators to be evaluated in part by data on student academic growth. For grades that are tested in reading, math, and science as required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act states must ensure that districts’ teacher-evaluation systems include students’ scores on state assessments as a basis for student academic growth.⁴¹ States must use alternative measures of student learning for subjects and grades that are not tested under federal law. States and districts have the flexibility to choose these alternative measures, which could include performance on end-of-course exams or other “objective performance-based assessments.”⁴²

In response, some states and districts have incorporated additional tests to help measure teacher performance. New York State Education Department officials believe efforts to reform teacher evaluation have unintentionally led to the proliferation of district assessments in their state.⁴³ The state’s guidelines require 20 percent of a teacher’s evaluation to be based on student growth

Key test types

Formative, interim, and summative

The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment offers a useful framework for characterizing the various assessments that schools administer to students.

Summative assessments: These tests are administered once at the end of an academic semester or school year. Offered by states and districts, summative tests help determine student performance relative to a set of content standards. Most federally required statewide assessments fall into this category.

Interim assessments: Often referred to as benchmark assessments, these tests are generally administered school or district wide. While teachers might use these tests to inform their instruction, “a crucial distinction is that these results can be meaningfully aggregated and reported at a broader level”—at the school or district level. Education leaders use these tests for a variety of reasons, including predicting student performance on summative assessments, evaluating a program’s effectiveness, or diagnosing student needs and learning gaps.

Formative assessments: Administered by teachers, formative tests are embedded in classroom instruction and can be as short as five seconds. An example of a formative assessment would be to ask students to explain the main point of a lesson in one to two sentences. These results are primarily useful to teachers, who use them to evaluate students’ grasp of the lesson at hand and modify instruction if necessary.

Source: Marianne Perie, Scott Marion, and Brian Gong, “A Framework for Considering Interim Assessments” (Dover, NH: National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, 2007), available at http://www.ncea.org/publications/ConsideringInterimAssess_MAP07.pdf.

on the state test, 20 percent on student growth on “local assessments or a set of predetermined learning objectives,” and 60 percent on class observations.⁴⁴ Many districts, as a result, have instituted pre- and post-tests for the sole purpose of calculating a local measure of student academic growth.

But implementing more robust teacher-evaluation systems does not necessitate additional testing. The following section highlights how state and district officials in New York have modified their response to the call for more meaningful evaluation systems with minimal additional testing.

Efforts to curb unnecessary testing

In response to concerns of overtesting, several states and districts have announced initiatives or changed their testing policies. Below, we highlight federal actions from the U.S. Department of Education; state-level efforts in New York, Virginia, and Texas; the district-wide effort in the Rochester City School District; and other notable efforts across the country.

U.S. Department of Education

“I believe testing issues today are sucking the oxygen out of the room in a lot of schools,” Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently blogged.⁴⁵ Acknowledging that the initiatives of the Obama administration bear some of the responsibility, Secretary Duncan announced in August 2014 that states could delay when student test scores count toward a teacher’s evaluation by one year.⁴⁶ Approximately 16 states are likely to take advantage of the opportunity, which is intended to relieve some of the overtesting fatigue and anxiety that educators and parents are feeling as a result of federal requirements to require test scores in teacher evaluations.⁴⁷

This is not the first time that the Department of Education has tried to ease testing burdens for states. In June 2013, prior to the school year in which states would be piloting versions of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers Common Core tests, the department offered states an opportunity to avoid “double-testing” by allowing them to forgo administering their state assessments to students who would be piloting the Common Core exams.⁴⁸ At least 15 states applied for the flexibility.⁴⁹

Secretary Duncan has indicated that the Department of Education will launch additional efforts in fall 2014 to reduce the testing burden.⁵⁰

New York

With a few exceptions, most of New York state's required assessments are in place to comply with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's requirement for annual state tests. The challenge facing the state, therefore, is keeping district-level assessments to a minimum. To take on this challenge, New York has launched the most ambitious statewide effort to reduce unnecessary district-level assessments. Using Race to the Top funds, New York established a Teaching is the Core competitive grant for districts as an incentive to reduce local standardized testing.⁵¹ Districts that review and re-evaluate the purpose of their local assessments are eligible for funding that can be used to support efforts to reduce testing and improve the quality of assessments. In August of this year, the New York State Education Department announced 31 grant awards totaling \$9.2 million.⁵² Twenty-five district consortia representing 257 districts and four large school districts—Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, and Yonkers—were among the awardees.⁵³

In addition, the state has also focused on ways to reduce district-wide testing that may have been triggered by new policies reforming teacher evaluation. This past February, the New York State Board of Regents announced regulatory changes related to teacher evaluation, testing, and Common Core implementation, based on concerns raised by the public.⁵⁴ Specifically, the Board of Regents voted to reject district teacher-evaluation designs that incorporated standardized tests in grades K-2. It also established a 1 percent cap on locally selected standardized testing and a 2 percent cap on test preparation.⁵⁵

Directed by the Board of Regents and New York State Education Commissioner John King, the state education department in July sent a letter to every school district in the state that included an individualized “testing transparency report” that identified district-selected tests that could be eliminated or replaced with other measures. According to one district's letter:

*In lieu of pre-tests [districts] can use past performance trends, historical data and/or prior-year test results to establish targets for determining student learning growth. Additionally, locally-adopted standardized tests can be replaced with state assessments, school-wide growth measures, or performance-based assessments. ... [Y]ou can engage in collaborative conversations with your local stakeholders about ways in which you might choose to use data and/or evidence more effectively and efficiently to ensure that all local tests help inform instruction and improve student learning, rather than needlessly add to the number of assessments administered within your district.*⁵⁶

Each district's letter is posted on the state department's website.⁵⁷ According to state educational officials, the guidance has encouraged more than 40 districts to modify their plans as a result.⁵⁸

Rochester City School District

Rochester is an example of one district that has taken steps to eliminate locally selected tests. According to Superintendent Vargas, the Rochester City School District has dramatically reduced its number of district-level tests.⁵⁹ The district recently eliminated pre- and post-tests in multiple subjects and grades that were being used for teacher-evaluation purposes. "The increased testing is self-inflicted. The number of state assessments has not changed,"⁶⁰ said Vargas. Exasperated by the amount of testing they were doing, Vargas looked to see how other districts were handling the issue.

The Webster Central School District and its former superintendent, Adele Bovard, faced a similar dilemma. Bovard explained that in order to meet the state requirement to evaluate teachers on a local measure of student growth, "we wanted to create local assessments that were germane to each grade level. ... But the unintended consequences were that we had to create pre- and post-tests. Once you also take into account administering and scoring the pre- and post-tests, it just isn't worth it. It takes too much time."⁶¹

Then the district noticed that the state's teacher-evaluation guidance allowed districts to use historical data. "You can use a lot from the New York state tests," Bovard pointed out. She recently joined the Rochester district as deputy superintendent for administration.

Based on Webster's experience, Vargas eliminated Rochester's pre- and post- tests for multiple subjects and grades and instead decided to rely on data from the state assessments, even for teachers of nontested subjects. The 20 percent local measure of a teacher's evaluation is a school-wide goal based on data from the state assessments.⁶² For elementary schools, the local measure is based on the state's grade 3-8 exams in English language arts and math. In secondary schools, the local measure is based on the New York State Regents Exams in each content area.⁶³

Virginia

Following a trend in several states, the Commonwealth of Virginia is re-evaluating its suite of mandated assessments. In spring 2014, lawmakers passed a bill eliminating five of Virginia's Standards of Learning tests: the grade 3 social studies and science tests; the grade 5 writing test; and two U.S. history assessments.⁶⁴ Virginia school districts must, however, administer an alternative assessment in place of the eliminated state assessments. According to Jennie O'Holleran, deputy secretary of education in the office of Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D), "It's not the intention to make more work for school divisions."⁶⁵ The law and the state board of education's current guidelines regarding the alternative assessments clarify that districts can use performance assessments and portfolios, a combination of multiple assessments, and integrated assessments that cover multiple subjects.⁶⁶

Virginia's new law also calls for a so-called Standards of Learning Innovation Committee to examine ways to improve the state's assessment program.⁶⁷ Made up of a variety of stakeholders, including parents, educators, and district superintendents, the committee is expected to release preliminary recommendations this fall.⁶⁸

Texas

With a long history of using standardized tests that predates the No Child Left Behind Act, Texas eliminated 10 of its end-of-course exams, bringing the total down to five.⁶⁹ Effective the 2013-14 school year, exams for algebra II, geometry, chemistry, physics, English III, world geography, and world history are no longer offered.⁷⁰ The state's remaining end-of-course exams include algebra I, biology, English I, English II, and U.S. history.⁷¹

The law reducing the number of tests also requires schools to limit test preparation. Every school board must adopt and enforce a policy that restricts schools from removing a student "from a regularly scheduled class for remedial tutoring or test preparation if, as a result of the removal, the student would miss more than 10 percent of the school days on which the class is offered."⁷²

District of Columbia Public Schools

The District of Columbia Public Schools, or DCPS, is strategically reviewing its assessment system. In January 2014, DCPS Chancellor Kaya Henderson announced the creation of the Assessment Task Force. In a letter to parents, Henderson wrote:

*Currently, DCPS students take several assessments throughout the year, including the DC CAS, Paced Interim assessments (PIA), additional literacy and math assessments, as well as a number of diagnostic exams. The task force will review these assessments to ensure that we are only using the assessments that serve students, teachers, and parents best, and eliminate all others.*⁷³

While strongly committed to data-driven decision making, “we felt as though we weren’t always giving assessments for the right reason,” said DCPS’ Weber.⁷⁴ The task force, made up of more than 20 members, includes teachers, principals, instructional coaches, and central-office staff. “We have also made sure that the task force has spent a lot of time reaching out to parents so we can hear their perspective on the assessments that students are taking,” Weber added.⁷⁵ Currently, the task force is reviewing the district’s assessments and determining which ones are most valuable; it is preparing to make recommendations on whether to eliminate any tests. The findings of the task force will be released to the public later this year, according to Henderson’s letter.⁷⁶

Achieve’s Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts

Achieve, a nonprofit organization that has supported states in the development and implementation of the Common Core standards, released a state and district test-inventory tool in June 2014.⁷⁷ The Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts is designed with the student in mind and can be used “to make decisions about what amount of testing is appropriate and to be more transparent with parents about the testing in schools.”⁷⁸ The tool walks districts through a four-stage process and helps them identify and document test features and qualities that should be considered when keeping or eliminating an assessment. For example, the tool helps districts identify whether the test is useful to teachers or district administrators, whether the test is being used as intended, the testing window and frequency, and the cost of the test and how it is being financed.⁷⁹ The tool was piloted in eight Connecticut school districts in early 2014 and is now available to all districts and states.⁸⁰

The Common Core standards and tests, together with new teacher-evaluation reforms, have inspired a handful of districts and states to strategically review their assessment systems. The actions of these districts and states serve as promising early exemplars for other school and state leaders.

Findings

CAP examined the available data on standardized tests by the following grade spans: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Below are our major findings based on available information for the 2013-14 school year.

Despite the perception that federally mandated state testing is the root of the issue, districts require more tests than states.

State tests alone are not to blame for testing fatigue. District-level tests play a role too. Students across all grade spans take more district-required exams than state tests. Students in K-2 are tested three times as much on district exams as state exams, and high school students are tested twice as much on district exams. But even students in grades that must be assessed per No Child Left Behind took between 1.6 and 1.7 times more district-level exams than state exams.

Most of the district-level tests in use were interim benchmark exams that are taken two to four times throughout the year. Other district-wide exams included diagnostic tests and end-of-course exams for students taking certain required courses.

Students are tested as frequently as twice per month and an average of once per month.

Testing can occur very frequently for some students. Students in grades in which federal law requires annual testing—grades 3-8—take the most tests. This means about 10 tests, on average, throughout the year. But in the Jefferson County school district in Kentucky, which includes Louisville, students in grades 6-8 were tested approximately 20 times throughout the year. Sixteen of these tests were district-level assessments. In the Sarasota County, Florida, school district, middle school students were tested 14 times on state and district tests throughout the year. These interruptions in instruction may likely be contributing to public sentiment regarding students being overtested.

Students in grades K-2 and 9-12, who do not take or are less frequently tested using federally required state exams, take the fewest number of tests—approximately six tests in a year.

Actual test administration takes up a small fraction of learning time.

Students spend, on average, 1.6 percent or less of instructional time taking tests. This corresponds to findings from other similar examinations of testing time.⁸¹

On average, students in grades 3-5 and 6-8 spend 15 and 16 hours, respectively, on district and state exams. In contrast to the average total hours of instructional time, the amount of time spent on test-taking is comparatively small.⁸² These students did spend more time on state tests than district tests—nearly three more hours, on average.

Students in grades K-2 and 9-12, who take the fewest number of tests—approximately six tests in a year—spent the least amount of time taking tests in the year at approximately four and nine hours, respectively. The fact that these students do not take or are less frequently tested using federally required state exams is a contributing factor.

There is a culture of testing and test preparation in schools that does not put students first.

Based on our analysis, test-taking time does not appear in itself to be problematic. But the culture of testing, particularly in urban districts, may play a more prominent role in the schooling experience. The frequency at which testing interrupts the school calendar in some districts and the fact that the testing burden seems to disproportionately affect urban schools are important aspects of today's testing culture that warrant additional consideration. Our research also finds that some districts and states may be administering tests that are duplicative or unnecessary, including the use of practice tests.

More difficult to capture but an integral part of the testing conundrum nonetheless is how much time schools spend on test-preparation activities, training teachers on how to administer assessments, and analysis of test results. District-level staff in the Rochester City School District, for example, acknowledged that the time it took to administer and analyze pre- and post-tests, which they were using for teacher-evaluation purposes, was a motivating reason to consider alternatives strategies and eliminate some district-wide tests.

District-level testing occurs more frequently and takes up more learning time in urban districts than in suburban districts.

We examined how district-level testing compared across urban and suburban districts and found some substantial differences. Urban high school students, in particular, spend more time taking district-level exams than suburban high school students. Urban high school students take three times as many district-level tests and spend up to 266 percent more time taking them compared with suburban high school students.

A few districts, such as the suburban South-Western City School District in Ohio, do not have any required assessments for high school students. At the other end of the spectrum, high school students in the urban district of Jefferson County, Kentucky, are tested approximately, on average, 13 times throughout the year, and high school students in Denver Public Schools spend an average of nearly 17 hours taking district-level tests.

In grades 3-5 and 6-8, urban-district students spend approximately 80 percent and 73 percent more time, respectively, taking district-level exams than their suburban peers. In grades K-2, urban students spend about 52 percent more time on district tests.

Districts are not transparent about testing practices or purposes.

Chicago Public Schools stood out among all the districts we studied for its transparency regarding district assessments. The district publicly posts its assessment calendar on its website, and it identifies which tests are state or district required. In addition to the testing administration dates, the Chicago district's assessment calendar also includes the estimated time duration for each test, descriptions of the assessments, and which subgroups of students are assessed.

Most districts post their assessment calendars on their websites, but those calendars lack information that might be useful for parents and other stakeholders. For example, we found only one district—Knox County—in addition to Chicago Public Schools that includes information regarding test administration time.

One district—Denver Public Schools—informed us that additional information about the tests it provides is available to parents behind a secure firewall. This could be the case with others.

While parents likely know when their children take a test, we believe that many parents might not fully understand the purpose of all the tests or when the tests are state or district required. Opt-out efforts and opposition to standardized tests have largely focused on statewide assessments. But as is the case with Lee County, Florida, state assessments alone are not to blame in many cases. This type of information can further support parent knowledge and information regarding testing.

Recommendations

Based on our analysis and findings, we propose the following recommendations.

States should implement the new Common Core-aligned assessments.

Featuring open-response test items and problems that will encourage and test higher-order thinking skills, the Common Core tests are expected to be of higher quality than current state assessments. They therefore may offer states and districts the opportunity to reduce the need to layer on additional tests to compensate for poor-quality state assessments. States and districts are also more likely to experience a faster turnaround in receiving test results than is currently the case—something that appeared to drive a few of the districts explored in this report to rely on district-wide tests.

Finally, the Common Core tests have the added benefit of being shared across multiple states. As a result, they can support greater transparency of student achievement across states.

States should issue guidance and provide technical assistance to districts to support fairer and more efficient testing practices that put students first.

As this report highlights, several districts and states have launched efforts to address the issue of overtesting. Virginia and Texas have passed laws rolling back some of their statewide assessments, for example. But states can play a bigger role in influencing test practices at the district level too. New York is a good example.

New York undertook the tremendous effort of reviewing each district's assessment portfolio and provided them with specific and individualized recommendations for eliminating some of their locally selected assessments. The state also publicly posted each district's letter on its website. And the state has identified a handful of districts as exemplars of best practices to help inform other districts.

We believe that this is a useful exercise for all states to consider, particularly at this pivotal juncture when the new Common Core assessments are being implemented. State guidance should also touch on the role of teacher-evaluation systems to help districts as they seek out test instruments and methods to measure student academic growth.

Districts should critically examine their approaches to standardized testing and listen to teachers in the process.

A handful of districts have launched efforts to inventory their assessment portfolios. Some, including the District of Columbia Public Schools, have formed task forces charged with reviewing the purpose of each assessment currently in use and making recommendations for eliminating duplicative tests. It's too soon to determine whether all these efforts will lead to reduced tests for students.

But at least one district highlighted here—the Rochester City School District—has successfully reduced the number of district-level tests it was using. While the New York State Education Department has played a pivotal role in catalyzing and supporting districts in their efforts to roll back local tests, districts across the country can take similar action on their own. Achieve's Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts is designed to help districts in this process. Districts should take advantage of this tool.

Moreover, districts should ensure that teachers and parents are an integral part of their process to review and audit tests. Many district-level tests are in place with the primary purpose of providing teachers feedback and information about students, and teachers are primarily responsible for administering most tests. Therefore, teacher input on each of the tests in use is essential. Likewise, parents offer an important perspective on how various tests and test-preparation methods are affecting their children at home. Districts should make a concerted effort to collect parent feedback. Furthermore, a district's process for auditing its tests, along with the results of testing inventory, should be widely disseminated to parents and the public.

District and school leaders should refrain from test preparation and other practices and activities that may increase test anxiety.

Although this report does not examine test-preparation practices and the broader testing culture, these issues are unarguably at the heart of the testing opposition. Teaching to the test and so-called drill-and-kill test preparation have become common concerns in the era of NCLB tests. More rigorous and designed to illicit and measure higher-order problem-solving skills and knowledge, the Common Core standards and the aligned tests have the potential to mitigate some of these practices.

But districts and schools must be leaders in this effort as well. Test preparation and teaching to the test should consist of nothing more than high-quality instruction. As one district described, student assessments need to become a more intrinsic part of the school year—not an all-important event that schools build toward at the end of the year.

Districts should improve the transparency of district-level assessments.

Most districts we explored reported that the degree of assessment literacy among parents and stakeholders varied. States, districts, and schools have a responsibility to be more transparent regarding their testing practices.

Parents should be informed of all district and state tests, including when they are scheduled to occur, their purpose, whether they are required by states, districts, or schools, and administration time. At a minimum, this information should be posted on school districts' websites. This type of basic information can help parents and families understand the value of certain assessments.

As we have already noted, districts and schools should take care in how information regarding tests is shared with parents and students. School leaders who disseminate this information to parents and families should use the opportunity to address common concerns regarding tests, such as the role of tests in any high-stakes decisions and the school's philosophy and strategy for preparing students. In this case, the manner in which the district shares information about the tests is as critical as the message itself.

Conclusion

The testing debate, which has heated up recently, is not a new one. The widespread rollout of the Common Core State Standards, compounded with the expanded role that tests will play in newly developed educator-evaluation systems, have reignited a nationwide—and much-needed—conversation on testing.

However, it is important to put the testing conversation in perspective. While federal law requires annual state-mandated testing in certain grades, states and districts have played a role as well. In fact, many of the tests in use in schools today have been well in the control of state and district leaders.

Tackling the challenge of overtesting and the culture of testing, which is the real issue at hand, is more difficult to resolve. It requires all federal, state, and local leaders to take a pragmatic review of how tests are being used. Moreover, we believe that the Common Core standards and tests can be part of the solution. Because Common Core-aligned tests are intended to be more representative measures of student knowledge and skills, the hope is that states and districts will, in time, find it less necessary to pursue and develop additional tests—or, at the very least, that they will be more thoughtful about how additional tests can be used to inform instruction while not overburdening students and schools.

Used properly, tests are invaluable tools for teachers who want to augment their practice to reach struggling students, for parents who want to understand how their children are doing in reading and math, and for equity advocates who need assurance that all students are receiving a high-quality education. We simply need to get smarter about how and when we use them.

About the author

Melissa Lazarín is Senior Policy Advisor and the former Managing Director of Education Policy at the Center for American Progress. She focuses principally on standards-based reform, accountability, and school-improvement efforts, including expanded learning time and education issues related to English language learners and Latinos. Prior to joining CAP, she was director of education policy at First Focus and associate director for education policy at the National Council of La Raza.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express her gratitude for the tremendous research assistance of CAP Research Assistant Chelsea Straus. She, with the assistance of a team of interns, collected much of the data on districts' testing schedules, managed correspondence with many of the school districts, and helped inform the data analysis and editing process. Carmel Martin, Catherine Brown, and Ulrich Boser also provided invaluable feedback. The author also thanks the generous assistance of the school districts that answered numerous questions regarding their testing practices and policies, especially Denver Public Schools, Atlanta Public Schools, Sarasota County Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, and the South-Western City School District in Ohio.

Endnotes

- 1 Emily Atteberry, "Lee County makes history, opts out of state-mandated tests," *The News-Press*, September 5, 2014, available at <http://www.news-press.com/story/news/education/2014/08/27/lee-county-makes-history-opts-out-of-standardized-testing/14714541/>.
- 2 Emily Atteberry, "Opt-out fallout: Lee schools crammed with exams," *The News-Press*, September 8, 2014, available at <http://www.news-press.com/story/news/education/2014/09/07/opt-fallout-lee-schools-crammed-exams/15218495/>.
- 3 Scott Travis, "Palm Beach schools won't opt out of testing," *Sun Sentinel*, September 10, 2014, available at http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2014-09-10/news/fl-palm-testing-opt-out-20140910_1_palm-beach-school-board-state-testing-high-stakes-testing.
- 4 Karla Scoon Reid, "Testing Skeptics Aim to Build Support for Opt-Out Strategy," *Education Week*, March 11, 2014, available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/03/12/24boycotts_ep.h33.html.
- 5 New York Principals, "Letter to Parents about Testing," available at <http://www.newyorkprincipals.org/letter-to-parents-about-testing> (last accessed September 2014).
- 6 Tonette Salazar and Kathy Christie, "States and the (not so) new standards – where are they now?" (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2014), available at <http://www.ecs.org/html/NF2014/NF2014agendapresentations/Common-Core-memo.pdf>.
- 7 Letter from Margie Omero to Center for American Progress, September 26, 2014, available at <http://www.purplestrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/CAP-Common-Core-Memo-09.26.14-FINAL.pdf>.
- 8 Trevor Tompson, Jennifer Benz, and Jennifer Agiesta, "Parents' Attitudes on the Quality of Education in the United States" (Chicago, IL: Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2013), available at http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Parent%20Attitudes/AP_NORC_Parents%20Attitudes%20on%20the%20Quality%20of%20Education%20in%20the%20US_FINAL_2.pdf.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See, for example, John Robinson, "Test Pep Rallies: Good Practice or Waste of Time?," *The 21st Century Principal*, April 16, 2011, available at <http://the21st-centuryprincipal.blogspot.com.br/2011/04/test-pep-rallies-good-practice-or-waste.html>.
- 11 See Howard Nelson, "Testing More, Teaching Less" (Washington: American Federation of Teachers, 2013); Mark Teoh and others, "The Student and the Stopwatch" (Boston, MA: Teach Plus, 2014), available at http://www.teachplus.org/uploads/Documents/1391446664_The%20Student%20and%20the%20Stopwatch.pdf.
- 12 *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110, 107th Cong., 1st sess. (January 8, 2002), sec. 1111.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Lynn Olson, "State Test Programs Mushroom as NCLB Mandate Kicks In," *Education Week*, November 30, 2005, available at <http://www.edweek.org/media/13testing.pdf>.
- 15 See Center for American Progress, "Better, Fewer, and Fairer Tests: The Promise of the Common Core Assessments" (2013), available at <http://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/CCSS-Testing-2-25.pdf>.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Shelby McIntosh, "State High School Exit Exams: A Policy in Transition" (Washington: Center on Education Policy, 2012), available at <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=408>.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ohio Department of Education, "Rules, Regulations and Policies for Gifted Education," available at <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Gifted-Education/Rules-Regulations-and-Policies-for-Gifted-Educatio> (last accessed September 2014); see also, for example, Columbus City Schools, "Gifted Identification Process," available at <http://www.ccsok.us/IDProcess.aspx> (last accessed October 2014).
- 21 Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, "Fast Fact: Information and Resources on Developing State Policy on Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)" (2014), available at http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/KEA_Fast_Fact_Feb_2014.pdf.
- 22 Tamar Lewin, "Testing, Testing: More Students Are Taking Both the ACT and SAT," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/04/education/edlife/more-students-are-taking-both-the-act-and-sat.html>.
- 23 See, for example, J.B. Schramm and Shirley Sagawa, "High Schools as Launch Pads: How College-Going Culture Improves Graduation Rates in Low-Income High Schools" (Washington: College Summit, 2008), available at <http://www.collegesummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/WhitePaperfull2008.pdf>.
- 24 Michele Molnar, "Assessment Investments Fuel Instructional Support Market," *Education Week*, June 9, 2014, available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/06/11/35ii-instruction-support.h33.html>.
- 25 Lynn Olson, "Benchmark Assessments Offer Regular Checkups on Student Achievement," *Education Week*, November 29, 2005, available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/11/30/13benchmark.h25.html?qs=benchmark+assessments>.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Stephen Sawchuk, "Testing Faces Ups and Downs Amid Recession," *Education Week*, May 12, 2009, available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/05/13/31assess_ep.h28.html?qs=benchmark+assessments.
- 29 Sean Cavanagh, "Demand for Testing Products, Services on the Rise," *Education Week*, October 1, 2013, available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/10/02/06testing_ep.h33.html?tkn=PSVFKHcN8KakBJQr1YgOnoG3PmkTwt2wVDR%2F&cmp=E NL-CCO-NEWS1.

- 30 Marco Muñoz, phone interview with author, September 11, 2014.
- 31 ³² Peter Weber, phone interview with author, September 12, 2014.
- 32 Muñoz, phone interview with author.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Weber, phone interview with author.
- 35 Bolgen Vargas, phone interview with author, September 11, 2014.
- 36 See, for example, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, "Frequently Asked Questions," available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/> (last accessed October 2014).
- 37 See Center for American Progress, "Better, Fewer, and Fairer Tests."
- 38 Catherine Gewertz, "Early Reports Suggest Few Field-Testing Snags," *Education Week*, May 5, 2014, available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/05/06/30fieldtest_ep.h33.html.
- 39 Margaret E. Goertz, Leslie Nabors Oláh, and Matthew Riggan, "Can Interim Assessments be Used for Instructional Change?" (Philadelphia, PA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2009), available at http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre_pdfs/rb_51_role%20policy%20brief_final%20web.pdf.
- 40 See Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, "Smarter Balanced Assessments," available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/> (last accessed October 2014); Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, "Assessment System: 3-8," available at <http://www.parcconline.org/3-8> (last accessed October 2014).
- 41 U.S. Department of Education, *ESEA Flexibility* (2012), pp. 3, 7.
- 42 Ibid., p. 7.
- 43 Ken Wagner and Julia Rafal-Baer, phone interview with author, August 22, 2014.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Arne Duncan, "A Back-to-School Conversation with Teachers and School Leaders," *Homeroom*, August 21, 2014, available at <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2014/08/a-back-to-school-conversation-with-teachers-and-school-leaders>.
- 46 Letter from Deborah S. Delisle to Chief State School Officer, August 21, 2014, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/secretary-letters/cssoltr8212014.html>.
- 47 Forty-three states requested and were approved for flexibility from certain No Child Left Behind requirements. Eligibility for the federal waiver required states and their districts to implement a teacher-evaluation system that, among other things, must include a measure of student growth based on state assessments. According to the *Education Week* Politics K-12 blog, waiver states that plan to seek a delay in including student test data in their evaluation systems include Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Utah. See Alyson Klein, "Which NCLB Waiver States May Delay Using Test Scores in Teacher Evaluations?," *Politics K-12*, September 16, 2014, available at http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2014/09/which_nclb_waiver_states_may_d.html.
- 48 Letter from Arne Duncan to Chief State School Officers, June 18, 2013, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/130618.html>.
- 49 Catherine Gewertz, "Fifteen States Seek Double-Testing Waiver From U.S. Education Department," *Curriculum Matters*, December 3, 2013, available at http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2013/12/fifteen_states_seek_double-tes.html.
- 50 Duncan, "A Back-to-School Conversation with Teachers and School Leaders."
- 51 New York State Education Department, "Race to the Top: Teaching is the Core," available at <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/rfp/sa-17/> (last accessed September 2014).
- 52 New York State Education Department, "State Education Department Awards 'Teaching Is The Core' Grants," Press release, August 12, 2014, available at http://www.nysed.gov/press/RELEASES%5C2014%20RELEASES%5CTITC%20Awards%20release_Final_August2014.docx.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 See Memorandum from Anthony Lofrumento to the members of the New York State Board of Regents, "Summary of the February 2014 Meeting," March 11, 2014; memorandum from Ken Wagner and John D'Agati to the New York State Board of Regents P-12 Education Committee and Higher Education Committee, "Proposed Amendments to Subpart 30-2 of the Rules of the Board of Regents Relating to a Prohibition Against Traditional Standardized Testing for Students in Grades K-2, Removal of K-2 Tests for Students in Grades K-2, Removal of K-2 Tests from the List of Approved Student Assessments, Change in the Definition of Core Subjects for the State Growth or Other Comparable Measures Subcomponent and a Limitation on Instructional Time Spent on Taking Local Assessments for Purposes of Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPR)," February 10, 2014, available at <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2014/February2014/214p12hea1.pdf>.
- 55 Memorandum from John L. D'Agati and Ken Wagner to New York State Board of Regents Higher Education Committee and P-12 Education Committee, "Proposed Amendment to Subpart 30-2 and Section 8.4 of the Rules of the Board of Regents to Implement Chapter 56 of the Laws of 2014 Relating to the Definition of Traditional Standardized Assessments, the Department's Expedited Review Process for Material Changes to Eliminate Unnecessary Tests and Establishing Caps on Testing Time for State Tests (1%), Other Standardized Tests (1%) and for Test Preparation Time under Standardized Testing Conditions (2%) Based on the Minimum Required Annual Instructional Hours for Such Grade," April 28, 2014, available at <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2014/April2014/413p12a1revised.pdf>.
- 56 Letter from Julia Rafal-Baer to Pamela Brown, June 15, 2014, available at http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/test/teachers-leaders/teach-more-test-less/docs/BUFFALO-CITY-SD_15June14.pdf.
- 57 New York State Education Department, "Teach More, Test Less: Testing Transparency Reports," available at <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/test/teachers-leaders/teach-more-test-less/home.html> (last accessed September 2014).
- 58 Julia Rafal-Baer, phone interview with author, August 22, 2014.
- 59 Vargas, phone interview with author.
- 60 Ibid.

- 61 Adele Bovard, phone interview with author, September 11, 2014.
- 62 Personal communication from Adele Bovard, deputy superintendent for administration, Rochester City School District, September 23, 2014.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Virginia Department of Education, "2014-2015 Virginia Assessment Program Changes" (2014), available at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/va_assessment_program_changes.pdf.
- 65 Jennie O'Holleran, phone interview with author, September 8, 2014.
- 66 Virginia Department of Education, "Proposed Amendments to the Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2014-2015: Developed in Response to 2014 Acts of Assembly" (2014), available at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2014/09_sep/proposed_revisions_to_local_assessment_guidelines.pdf.
- 67 Office of Virginia Secretary of Education Anne Holton, "SOL Innovation Committee," available at <https://education.virginia.gov/initiatives/sol-innovation/> (last accessed September 2014).
- 68 O'Holleran, phone interview with author.
- 69 Jonathan Tilove, "Gov. Perry signs sweeping education bill," *Austin American-Statesman*, June 10, 2013, available at <http://www.statesman.com/news/news/state-regional/gov-perry-signs-hb-5-rolling-back-number-of-high-s/nYG6Y/>.
- 70 Texas Association of School Boards, "Summary of House Bill 5" (2013).
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 H.B. No. 5, 83rd Legis. Reg. sess. (Texas Legislature, 2013).
- 73 Letter from Kaya Henderson to District of Columbia Public Schools families, January 23, 2014.
- 74 Weber, phone interview with author.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Letter from Henderson to DCPS families.
- 77 Achieve, "Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts" (2014), available at <http://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveStudentAssessmentInventory.pdf>.
- 78 Achieve, "Achieve Announces Launch of Student Assessment Inventory Tool," Press release, June 5, 2014, available at <http://www.achieve.org/launch-student-assessment-inventory-tool>.
- 79 Achieve, "Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts."
- 80 Achieve, "Achieve Announces Launch of Student Assessment Inventory Tool."
- 81 Teoh and others, "The Student and the Stopwatch."
- 82 We based our calculations on the average total hours of instructional time by grade span on data collected from the Education Commission of the States. See Marga Mikulecky, "Number of Instructional Days/Hours in the School Year" (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2013), available at <http://www.ecs.org/clearing-house/01/06/68/10668.pdf>.

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

