



## What Leaders Think About the Common Core and State Assessments

Virtually all of New York State's school superintendents – 96 percent – report that controversies over state education policies have had a negative impact upon their schools. That is one of the central findings in a survey conducted by the New York State Council of School Superintendents in August and early September, 2015.

By a wide margin, superintendents responding to the Council survey view the Common Core Learning Standards as having a positive impact on education: 79 percent see a positive impact from the English language arts standards; 77 percent report a positive impact from the standards for mathematics. But an even larger majority of superintendents – 81 percent – favors at least some changes to the standards. Only 5 percent endorse complete revision, however.

Most superintendents regard concerns over state testing, teacher evaluations, and linkage of the two as the primary sources of the controversies diverting energy and attention from teaching and learning. So while changes to the standards are needed, that action alone would not resolve parent and public alarm about the direction of education in New York.

By a 70 percent to 20 percent margin, responding superintendents *disagree* that the grades 3 through 8 state assessments provide information useful for evaluating teachers. They are divided over the value of those tests in gauging whether individual students are on a trajectory to meet high school graduation requirements: 46 percent agree; 41 percent disagree.

But in open-ended comments, many superintendents offer thoughtful explanations of how their schools have used state tests to identify gaps in their instructional programs, one of the original purposes of state testing. By 61 to 28 percent, superintendents agree the tests yield information useful for that goal.

### Looking back

State learning standards are not new, nor are state tests.

Standards serve to define what students should know, understand, and be able to do as they progress through school and to leave school with a diploma. They are a foundation upon which curricula, instruction, and assessments are then built. New York's prior English language arts standards were adopted in 1996; the last mathematics standards were approved in 2005.

Similarly, New York has administered grades 3 through 8 state assessments since 2006, due to the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and had 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade assessments before that. It has had Regents Examinations since 1865. Yet deep conflict over testing did not begin until the 2012-13 school year.

### Why? What changed?

First, schools in New York did add tests to comply with state law and federal requirements to build student performance measures into teacher evaluation.

Launching Common Core-aligned grades 3 through 8 assessments in spring 2013 incited more controversy. Reports were common that traditionally

successful students struggled to finish the tests and students with disabilities simply gave up, some in tears. Later, when scores were released, educators questioned whether the tests accurately measured students' proficiency.

The simultaneous start of Common Core-aligned assessments and new teacher evaluations incorporating growth scores tied to those assessments in 2012-13 was doubly damaging. First, it compounded stress for teachers, at once changing both what they were expected to teach and how their teaching would be evaluated. Second, the massive compliance exercise of implementing the new evaluation system diverted superintendents from the leadership work of explaining "the why" behind the new standards to their communities.

Last, with more experience, more weaknesses in the standards themselves have been identified.

### Looking ahead

Lamenting the impact of policy controversies on their schools, one superintendent wrote, "Terrible place to be put as a district: between the state and the parents." Another asked, "Is it too late to get parents back on board?"

Superintendents responding to the Council's survey are not unanimous in their appraisals of the value and impact of state education reforms. But the findings do point to a way forward.

First, state standards and assessments are necessary.

New York's constitution promises, "...a system of free common schools, wherein all the children of this state may be educated." Learning standards help define what all children must be offered by their schools if that promise is to be kept. Our survey indicates most superintendents see the Common Core standards as promising, but not perfect. They support some revisions to the standards, chiefly to address criticisms about developmental appropriateness in some grades, but not a complete overhaul.

But whether one favors adjustments or an overhaul, similar steps must follow. If the Common Core were repealed today, what would teachers teach tomorrow? Changes, great or small, will take time to thoughtfully design and carefully implement.

Traditionally, the state's elementary and middle school assessments were used to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in general instructional programs, particularly their alignment with the expectations defined in state standards. That purpose remains necessary. Ideally, the assessments should also indicate how well individual students are progressing and whether they are on track to meet graduation expectations.

Surveys of parents and students have revealed a willingness to support assessments – if it is clear they can help improve instruction.<sup>1</sup> New York City teacher union president Michael Mulgrew said, "We can't say let's get rid of all tests. That's a diagnostic we need. It's like telling a carpenter we're taking your tape measure away."<sup>2</sup>

Open-ended comments submitted by superintendents reveal consensus on steps toward a better state assessment system. Many of the recommendations are familiar and some are now underway: shorten the tests, get more information back to schools and families faster, assure the involvement of New York educators in test development. A few point to computer-based, adaptive testing as a pivotal reform, essential to shortening the tests, improving their timeliness, and generally strengthening their usefulness in improving instruction. There is wide sentiment that the link between state tests and teacher evaluations must be suspended.

A forthcoming report will examine superintendent perceptions of the state's teacher evaluation requirements.

### Conclusion

Debates over matters of public policy are now so often inflamed and any leader who steps forward with solutions invites criticism. Condemning is easier than consensus building. But if nothing is ever good enough, nothing can change, and nothing will ever improve.

The report that follows summarizes perspectives of the professional school leaders who will be called to make whatever new policies finally emerge work for all the children they are intended to benefit.

## FINDINGS

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### About this report and the surveys

This report is based on two online surveys conducted by the Council through K12 *Insight*, a Signature Partner of the Council.

- Questions on the Common Core, problems affecting schools, uses of the grades 3 through 8 state assessments, and accuracy of Regents Examinations in assessing college and career readiness were included in a survey conducted between August 20 and September 5, 2015. 47.6 percent of superintendents participated.
- Questions “opt-outs” and strengths and weaknesses of the grades 3 through 8 state assessments were included in a survey conducted between April 24 and May 2, 2015. 45.3 percent of superintendents participated.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. Nearly all superintendents report that controversies over state education policies have had a negative impact on their schools.** The Council’s survey asked superintendents to what extent various circumstances are problems for their schools. Leading the responses was “controversies over state policies having a negative impact on schools,” cited by 64% of superintendents as a significant problem, and 32% as somewhat of a problem.
- 2. Most superintendents see a positive impact on education in their schools from the Common Core Learning Standards.** 79% of superintendents responded that the Common Core English language arts (ELA) standards have had a positive impact on education in their schools and 77% responded that the mathematics standards have had a positive impact. In 2014, positive impacts were reported by 85% of superintendents for ELA and by 83 percent for math.
- 3. Most superintendents favor some changes to the Common Core Learning Standards.** Asked to indicate what extent, using a five-point scale, they feel the standards should be revised, 81 percent of superintendents indicated they favor at least some changes. But, in total, the responses indicate a preference for less rather than more change: 19% of superintendents responded “1 (not at all)” and 38% answered “2.” Only 5% responded, “5 (completely revised).”
- 4. Open-ended comments on the Common Core:** Superintendents explain benefits they see from the Common Core but say that the standards are not developmentally appropriate at all grade levels (especially early grade ELA) and that the Common Core has been hurt by linkage with reforms in testing and teacher evaluation.
- 5. Superintendents give mixed marks to the grades 3 through 8 state assessments in English language arts and mathematics.** The Council’s survey asked superintendents whether they agree the assessments provide information useful for various purposes. By 61% to 28%, responding superintendents agree that the tests provide information useful for identifying general strengths and weaknesses in instruction. By 70% to 20% they disagree that information from the tests is useful for evaluating teachers.
- 6. Test refusals – “opt-outs” – from the grades 3 through 8 state assessments were up dramatically from 2014.** 67% of superintendents reported that over 20% of students declined to take the English language arts assessments and 75% reported opt-outs of over 20 percent for the math assessments. In 2014, only 8% of superintendents reported test refusals of more than 20% for either test.
- 7. Superintendents also give mixed grades to the three new Common Core-aligned Regents Examinations (in English, Algebra 1, and Geometry).** Majorities ranging from 57% (Geometry) to 64% (English) responded that they are somewhat or very confident that the tests accurately measure college and career readiness. But significant numbers say they are not at all sure the tests are accurate measures of readiness (ranging from 27% for English to 34% for Algebra 1). A more basic issue is whether a single test and especially one administered in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade (the Regents Algebra Exam) is a valid measure of eventual college readiness.
- 8. Open-ended comments on testing:** Superintendents say statewide assessments have a role in enabling comparisons with similar schools, measuring alignment of instruction with state standards, and evaluating individual student progress toward those standards. But they say that the current grades 3 through 8 state assessments take too much time, both in number of days and daily duration (especially in early grades) and that too little information is returned too late for instructional decision-making. They also say that using the assessments in teacher evaluation is a mistake. Recommendations for changes in the assessment system mirror observations about their strengths and weaknesses.

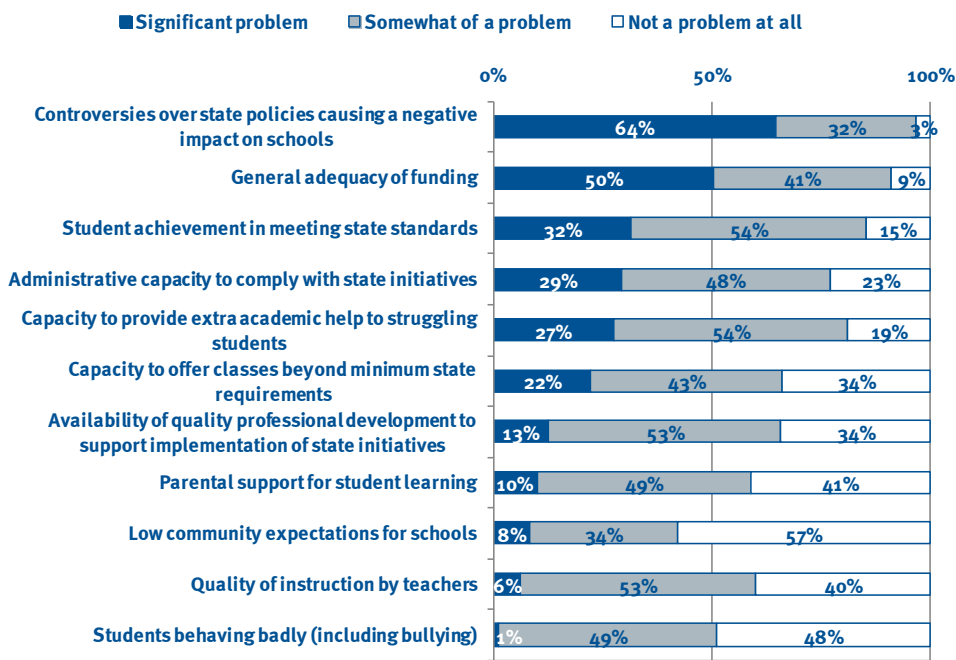
## Nearly all superintendents believe controversies over state education policies have had a negative impact on schools

The Council’s survey asked superintendents to what extent various circumstances have been problems in their districts. Most widely cited was, “Controversies over state policies causing a negative impact on schools.” The perception was nearly universal, with 96 percent of superintendents responding citing negative impact from state education controversies as either a significant problem (64 percent) or somewhat of a problem (32 percent).

A common theme in open-ended comments invited by the survey is that the overall state reform effort has been hurt by flawed implementation and by linkages between state standardized tests and new teacher evaluation requirements. For example, the superintendent of a rural Western New York school system wrote,

Simply, [the Common Core standards are] perhaps the best thing that has happened for the public school students in our state in many years... It is extremely unfortunate that APPR [Annual Professional Performance Review; i.e., teacher/principal evaluations] was implemented concurrently with the standards and that the assessments were tied to teacher evaluation scores before we had a chance to really work with and understand the new CCLS aligned assessments. That decision may have been one of the worst in our state's education history as it has diverted attention and resources from what we could be accomplishing with focused attention on the standards.

To what extent, if any, have the circumstances listed below been problems for your school district or BOCES?



### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

To me, the real issue is not the CCLS, but instead the politics and negative PR by having them associated with APPR [Annual Professional Performance Reviews; i.e., teacher and principal evaluations]. In addition, I believe that the games that have been played with "cut scores" have had a detrimental impact on credibility with parents. -- Mohawk Valley Rural

Standards do not seem to be misaligned, but the APPR connected to the NYS assessments is causing all the fuss. Additionally, parents have a great concern about over testing and are leading the charge to have their children opt-out, which in my opinion is not good for students. -- Central New York Rural



### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Overall, we are supportive of the Common Core Learning Standards and believe that they have had a generally positive impact on teaching and learning in our school district. Our community is somewhat skeptical of them however because of all of the negative hype in the media (mostly connected to testing and APPR [teacher evaluations]). I think that SED must make good on its promise to review them and then to make a significant effort to communicate to stakeholders, particularly parents, what the CCLS are all about. SED needs a communications plan to reset the conversation about the standards if the standards have any hope of being accepted, or embraced. -- Capital Region Suburb

The Common Core Learning Standards have to be understood in the context of standards that preceded them under NCLB. Those standards were a mile wide and an inch deep -the product of the inclusion of far too many concepts for students to learn with any contextual application. CCLS was an attempt to deepen the quality of what students learn by providing deeper contextual application as well as the shifts. Although there may be tweaks to early childhood ELA, I feel it is essential that we do not go backwards. Students can do this. I see it with my own eyes in classrooms. It's the adults in the system that are struggling with the change. -- Western New York Rural

Any real change initiative takes several years of implementation for the real impact to be seen. Please stay the course! The Common Core is truly benefiting our students - especially those who do not have the parental support at home that the more affluent students have. -- Southern Tier Suburb

## Most superintendents see the Common Core having a positive impact

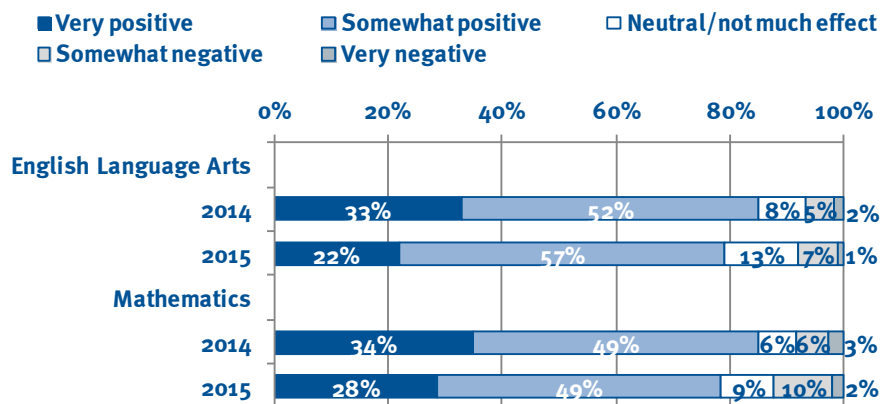
Surveys of Americans and New Yorkers at-large give the Common Core standards mixed grades, at best. For example, a recent Siena University poll asked New Yorkers how they perceive the implementation of the standards has affected the quality of education: 21 percent responded that implementation had improved education, 40 percent said it worsened education, and 21 percent said it had no meaningful effect.<sup>3</sup>

The Common Core is new, but state learning standards are not. New York's constitution promises "...a system of free common schools, wherein all the children of this state may be educated." State standards help define what students must be offered by their schools if that promise is to be met. The previous English language arts standards were adopted in 1996; the prior mathematics standards were approved in 2005.

The Council's survey of superintendents finds that strong majorities of New York school district leaders continue to see a positive impact from the Common Core:

- 79 percent of superintendents responding to the survey see the Common Core standards for English language arts (ELA) having a positive effect on the quality of education in their schools, down from 85 percent in 2014.
- For mathematics, 77 percent of responding superintendents see a positive effect, down from 83 percent in 2014.

### How do you see the Common Core Learning Standards affecting the quality of education in your schools?



A superintendent serving a rural Western New York area wrote,

The Common Core Learning Standards have to be understood in the context of standards that preceded them... Those standards were a mile wide and an inch deep – the product of the inclusion of far too many concepts for students to learn with any contextual application. CCLS was an attempt to deepen the quality of what students learn by providing deeper contextual application as well as the shifts. Although there may be tweaks to early childhood ELA, I feel it is essential that we do not go backwards.

One Southern Tier superintendent wrote, “The Common Core is truly benefiting our students, especially those who do not have the parental support at home that the more affluent students have. In our survey, superintendents who said that parental support for education is a “significant problem” were more likely to see the Common Core standards as having a “very positive” impact.

**Superintendents citing parental support for education as a problem more likely to see positive impact from Common Core**

	Significant problem	Somewhat of a problem	Not a problem at all	Total
Impact of Common Core ELA standards "very positive"	34%	19%	22%	22%
Impact of Common Core Math standards "very positive"	31%	32%	24%	28%

We asked superintendents to assess impact of the Common Core, apart from how it has been implemented, assessed, or otherwise used. This is a critical point. Standards define goals for what students should know and be able to do as they progress through school. Curricula help schools and teachers to translate the goals into daily instruction. Standardized tests are a measure of student progress toward those goals. Teacher evaluations attempt to assess the effectiveness of teachers in helping students to attain the goals.

As succeeding sections of this report explain, most superintendents responding to our survey do favor changes to the standards. But most of the controversies over the state’s education policy agenda arise from student assessment and teacher evaluation practices. Changes to the standards would not address the most common criticisms of those initiatives.

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

I believe the Standards are a positive step in improving student learning and learning outcomes in general. The issue has been the pace of the implementation connected to State assessments and APPR [teacher evaluations]. A planned and thoughtful roll out from primary through intermediate, middle school and eventually to high school would have been more effective and less disruptive for our students, staff in implementing the initiative, and better for parent understanding and support. -- Central New York City

As for standards they should always be "living" not static. In my region the CCLS have, in general, been highly supported by administrators and teachers, it is unfortunate that the "common core" has become synonymous with testing and APPR. The standards are valuable and I believe a strategic planned review of standards is always of value, but the goal is to keep them current, not a complete overhaul. -- Finger Lakes Rural

We need time to get the work done. The more experience we get, the more the teachers are adapting (and in some cases, dare I say, enjoying) the new curriculum. Of the challenges, we need to recognize that the curricular changes increased the level of difficulty of the work by 1-2 grade levels. This takes time to adjust. What we lacked was a well-planned implementation, which is the impetus for much of the controversy. -- Capital Region Rural

I do not believe that many of the issues that we face in schools stem from the standards themselves. They need some minor tweaking to address age appropriateness, but I am generally satisfied with the standards. My major issue is with the assessment and accountability piece of the RTTT implementation. -- Long Island Suburb

Our systems aren't designed to reboot every few years, and I don't think we can survive another change in course. We have been building capacity in our workforce with regard to unpacking, aligning and implementing strong standards based instruction for 5 years, and our staff has done an amazing job reflecting on practice and focusing on sustained improvement. The standards are challenging, but I would hope that is what we want for our children. The recent NCES study that maps state standards against NAEP supports that. We shouldn't be ashamed of having high standards. -- Capital Region Suburb

The standards aren't as much a concern as is the misuse of student results to evaluate teachers -- Long Island Suburb

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The standards purport to be back-mapped from a narrow definition of college-readiness. However, that back-mapping, by its very nature, presumes a similar rate of development for all children, something that we know is neither supported by research or experience. This disconnect is most acute in the earliest grades - where child development rates vary most widely, and where students are furthest from the eventual graduation standard. A child who walks at 10 months and one who walks at 12 months would both be considered developmentally normal, even though one's milestone was achieved 20% later in life. One means of acknowledging these developmental differences would be to address the level of rigor in the earliest grades. -- Long Island Suburb

There are portions of the ELA and math standards that are not developmentally appropriate. That needs to be one "lens" at how we look at the standards. Secondly, there MUST be a writing component added to the ELA portion... -- Mohawk Valley Rural

Math seems to flow from grade to grade more easily. It is also clearer when mapped. ELA seems less concrete and more time intensive and has gaps- i.e., grammar, spelling. Teachers are supplementing for this. -- North Country Rural

The CC Math, particularly at the HS level are not age appropriate. Too many college level topics are being brought down to the secondary level inappropriately. -- Long Island Suburb

Some standards in ELA at the primary level are developmentally inappropriate. Math standards at the middle and high school levels need to accommodate acceleration so that students can reach advanced math courses such as calculus. -- Capital Region Suburb

The critical thinking skills embedded in the CCSS that are complete at this point are phenomenal. They enable educators to identify specific skill weaknesses and address them skill by skill, student by student. I would recommend no changes to the standards. -- Southern Tier Rural

I believe that there should be a complete review of the standards, but I don't anticipate a significant revision is necessary - more updated and adjusted than completely revised -- Finger Lakes Rural

## Most superintendents favor some changes to the Common Core

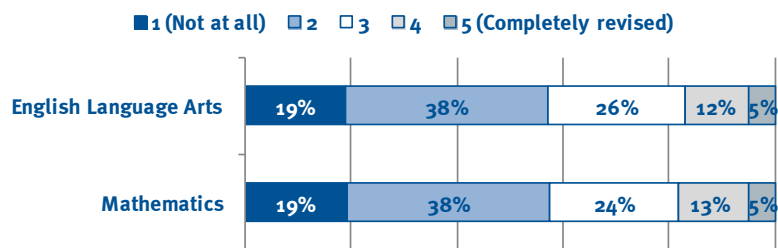
We have described the Common Core Learning Standards as “promising but not perfect.” Strong majorities of superintendents responding to our survey said they want at least some changes to the standards.

We asked,

*“Using a 1 to 5 scale (with 1 indicating the standards should not be changed at all and 5 indicating they should be completely revised), to what extent, if at all, do you believe the standards should be revised?”*

For both ELA and math, 19 percent of superintendents answered “1 (not all)” – 81 percent of responding superintendents favor at least some change to the standards. In total, however, the responses tilt toward favoring less rather than more change: for both sets of standards, 57 percent of superintendents responding answered one or two and only 5 percent endorsed complete revision.

**To what extent should the Common Core Learning Standards be revised?**



In open-ended comments, superintendents commonly question whether all the standards are developmentally appropriate, especially for children in the early grades. Some also question the pacing of expected learning across grade levels.

The standards are intended to reflect what students should know and be able to do upon completing high school if they are to succeed in college or the workplace. The standards then “backward map” to plot the trajectory students should match grade-by-grade to reach the ultimate goal of college and career readiness.

One Long Island superintendent observed, “... back-mapping, by its very nature, presumes a similar rate of



development for all children, something that we know is neither supported by research or experience. This disconnect is most acute in the earliest grades, where child development rates vary most widely.”

Learning standards can be viewed as the foundation of the state’s education system. As explained in the preceding section, standards help define the meaning of the state constitution’s promise of a sound basic education for all children. Inevitably, any change in the system’s foundation necessitates further changes in the structures built upon it, including curricula, assessments, teacher practices, professional development efforts, and so on.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has appointed a task force to review the Common Core Learning Standards and associated curricula, guidance, and assessments. Legislation signed by the Governor in June had already mandated the Education Commissioner to complete a review of the standards by next June, and to establish a content review committee to assure the soundness of the state’s grades three through eight assessments in ELA and math.

As we noted in the introduction, whether one favors adjusting the standards or replacing them, the steps that follow would be similar – if the Common Core were repealed on Friday, what would teachers teach on Monday? Changes, no matter how big or small, will take time to thoughtfully design and carefully implement. The beginning steps would necessarily resemble those that the State Education Department has embarked on – seeking reactions to the current standards from educators, parents, and others.

Implementation of the Common Core has been widely criticized, including by many superintendents responding to Council surveys. But changes to the standards and their attached structures would then need to be implemented. So one question for policymakers and educators is whether the anticipated gains from any adjustments would justify the effort and disruption that putting them into place would require. Another would be how to avoid the mistakes which accompanied initial implementation.

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

Simply, [the Common Core standards are] perhaps the best thing that has happened for the public school students in our state in many years. Unfortunately, with the controversy around the assessments I do not hear much discussion of the collaboration and cooperation that the standards have fostered among school districts... In addition, as difficult as the shifts have been at times, even the most hardened educators cannot deny what the students accomplish when teachers dedicate themselves to learning the standards and providing curriculum, instruction and assessment aligned to the standards. It is EXTREMELY unfortunate that APPR was implemented concurrently with the standards and that the assessments were tied to teacher evaluation scores before we had a chance to really work with and understand the new CCLS aligned assessments. That decision may have been one of the worst in our state’s education history as it has diverted attention and resources from what we could be accomplishing with focused attention on the standards. -- Western New York Rural

The standards coupled with the new assessments are truly the issue. Parents are not upset about the standards and recognize the need to always do better, however, the more rigorous assessments resulting in the severe drop in scores has frightened and enraged parents. -- Long Island Suburb

The change needed regards communicating the value of the standards to the public and creating more effective assessment instruments that help school districts determine student growth and achievement. SED has completely dropped the ball on communication and rather than help they have hurt the effort to implement standards. -- Western New York Suburb

Standards do not seem to be misaligned, but the APPR connected to the NYS assessments is causing all the fuss. Additionally, parents have a great concern about over testing and are leading the charge to have their children opt-out, which in my opinion is not good for students. -- Central New York Rural

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

Testing (even the current) should be used primarily to assess alignment of curriculum and instruction. Are we teaching what we say standards say we should be teaching? Are there gaps? What do the item analyses tell us about the curriculum and what do they tell us about the instruction overall? The state assessments are one shot high stakes snapshot in time of a student that cover far too much in too long of a sitting over too many days at the end of the most interrupted calendar portion of the year... We need quality assessments. We need to benchmark progress. But the results tell us little given all the external issues of politics, length of test, readiness of test prior to curriculum implementation, any connection to VAM [teacher evaluation], and the hype! -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

The issue I have with the shift to common core is not with the standards, but rather with how the state assesses the standards. We ask teachers to differentiate instruction, yet we assess learning towards the standards using a one-size fits all paper and pencil assessment. The state needs to consider adaptive assessments [computer-based that measure all children where they are at in their learning. Adaptive assessments would also change the conversation from pass/fail to growth. -- Long Island Suburb

**Superintendents give mixed reviews to the grades 3 through 8 state assessments**

In open-ended comments submitted to the survey, superintendents cite state assessments and their linkage to teacher evaluations as driving the controversies now creating such discord over education.

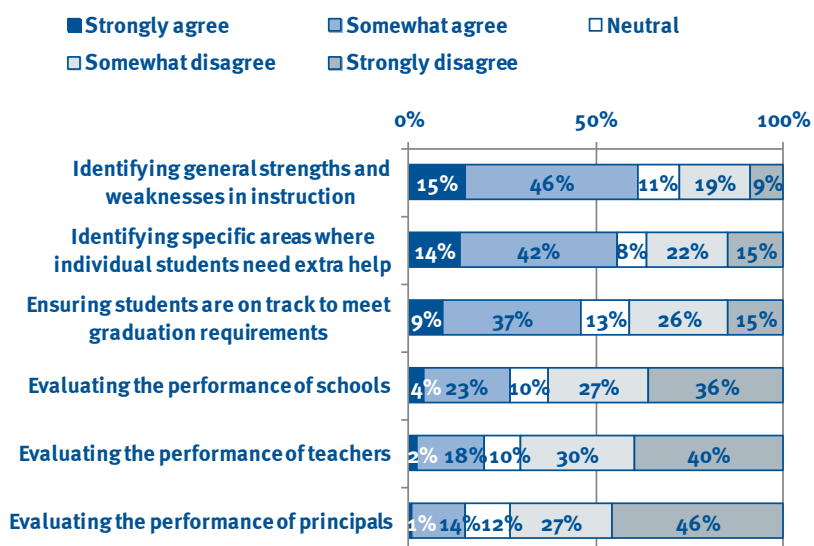
Historically, state assessments served the purpose of helping schools identify how closely their instruction aligned with state standards and how well the achievement of individual students matched the expectations defined by standards. With the 2002 federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), state assessments gained force as a tool for holding schools accountable for student performance. More recently, the assessments have become a factor teacher and principal evaluations, particularly after the advent of the federal Race to the Top initiative and requirements for receipt of waivers from NCLB mandates.

We asked,

*“To what extent do you agree or disagree that the state’s current grades 3-8 assessments in ELA and Math can provide useful information for the following purposes?”*

By 61 to 28 percent, a majority of responding superintendents agree that the state tests provide useful information for identifying general strengths and weaknesses in instruction.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the state's current grades 3-8 assessments in ELA and Math can provide information useful for the following purposes?**



Superintendents were more divided over whether the tests provide information useful in identifying specific areas where individual students need extra help, with 56 percent agreeing and 37 percent disagreeing.

Ideally, the state assessments should give educators and families an indication of whether individual students are on track to meet graduation requirements. Responding superintendents were especially divided on this aspect of the grades 3-8 assessments, with 47 percent agreeing that the tests provide useful information for that purpose, and 41 percent disagreeing.

By decisive margins, responding superintendents expressed skepticism about using the grades 3 through 8 assessments to evaluate educators. By 70 percent to 20 percent, superintendents disagree that the tests provide information useful for evaluating teachers. There was even more skepticism toward the assessments' utility in evaluating principals: 15 percent agreeing the tests offer useful information for that purpose and 73 percent disagreeing.

The Council also conducted a survey immediately after conclusion of the spring 2015 grades 3 through 8 assessments which invited superintendents to share their thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of those assessments and how to improve them. Their responses are summarized in a later section.

One over-arching theme of superintendent comments is that the tests are being used for too many purposes and that too many testing decisions have been driven by needs of the teacher evaluation system, rather than what would best support instruction.

A related theme is a there is not nearly enough transparency in the assessment system. A Long Island superintendent wrote, "The determination of what is college readiness is not transparent, the determination of the cut scores is not transparent, the way the state curves the scale score to the raw score is not transparent, the way the standards are measured through the tests is not transparent, the number of questions released is not transparent, and obviously the way the growth measure works its way through the black box is not transparent."

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Terrible place to be put as a district: between the state and the parents – Capital Region

Our parents expressed that the tests are unfair in evaluating teachers, does not provided valuable feedback, and deeply concerned about the secrecy of the tests. In regards to ELA, we consistently get complaints that the tests are well above the readability level of the students, which leads to frustration and anxiety. -- Mohawk Valley Rural

Our District jumped from a 4.7% refusal rate in 2014 to above 40% this year. Parents were clearly influenced by the efforts of NYSUT and its local affiliates. -- Long Island Suburb

The refusals were organized by a group of well informed, active, and media savvy parents. They are generally the same parents who are active in fund raising, budget approval activism, and strong advocates for school funding with local legislators. -- Central New York Suburb

I think that in Grades 6-8, it became a fiasco. Students were coming in on second day of Math with notes on napkins that stated, "My child does not want to take the test, so I am opting them out." I think the character messages we are sending to our children are very misguided. -- Central New York Rural

It strikes me that this is a movement that is growing exponentially each year, and SED, the Governor and the Legislature continue to fail to address it. Not only do people feel the assessments do not accurately measure the skills/ progress of their children, they also are beginning to feel that their child's teachers are being unfairly targeted by an ill advised testing structure and political infighting. The newest legislation simply compounds past mistakes. This is a grass roots movement that is growing. SED, and state government must address it in a reasoned, collaborative manner. It is not going away. -- Long Island Suburb

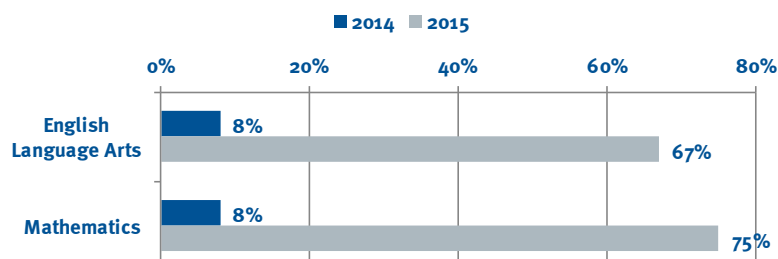
The momentum of the parents to refuse was much more intense this year. Also, there was WAY more anxiety among the students this year. We had to talk to teachers about actively trying to lower student anxiety. Parents and teachers whipped students into a frenzy about the notion that if they do badly on the assessments, their teachers could get fired. The large number of refusals combined with the anxiety and building culture issues that come out with this much negativity make the results suspect and the process indefensible. -- Finger Lakes Rural

Where does opting out end...Are students and parents going to opt-out of Regents testing and be allowed to graduate? -- Southern Tier Rural

## The “opt-out” movement expanded dramatically over the past year.

In separate surveys, the Council has inquired about the “opt-out” or test refusal movement. In a 2014 survey, 8 percent of responding superintendents reported that more than 20 percent of students had refused a grade 3 through 8 state assessment in English language arts or mathematics. In 2015, the shares reporting more than 20 percent opt-outs rose to 67 percent for ELA and 75 percent for math.

Percentage of superintendents statewide reporting more than 20% of students did not take grades 3-8 state assessments



Maintaining participation in state assessments by at least 95 percent of eligible students is one criterion for satisfying federal “adequate yearly progress” requirements and avoiding designation as a school needing improvement. For tests given this past spring, 90 percent of responding superintendents reported that their districts had less than 95 percent participation in ELA and 94 percent were short for math.

In open-ended comments, superintendents gave varying perceptions of the impetus for opt-outs. Some described the opt-out movement as sparked and organized by concerned and sophisticated parents; others cited teachers or the statewide teacher union as the driving force. Some cited specific concerns about the tests or their elevation as a measure of the performance of schools and teachers. Others said that opting-out became a fad among students. Several were frustrated that the Education Department had not taken a firmer stand in guidance against accommodating test refusals. Some felt high profile state-level controversies added to local tensions and opting-out became a form of protest against state policy.

Last, some superintendents worry about the messages being sent to students. A Finger Lakes (Rochester area) superintendent wrote, “It [opting-out] has also created an environment of insubordination ... Students now believe they can refuse other important expectations within our school.”

## Superintendents also give mixed grades to High School Regents Examinations

For all the controversy over the grades 3 through 8 assessments, they are only benchmark assessments, intended to yield information to help schools and families determine how a student is performing in relation to grade level expectations as prescribed by state standards. Almost no districts used the assessments as a determining factor in grade promotion decisions and the practice was prohibited by a law enacted in 2014. Schools are required to use the results in determining student needs for academic remediation.

On the other hand, high school Regents Examinations do carry substantial consequences for students. Passage of exams in five subjects is required to receive the diploma signifying high school graduation. Success on eight exams is required to earn a Regents diploma with advanced designation.

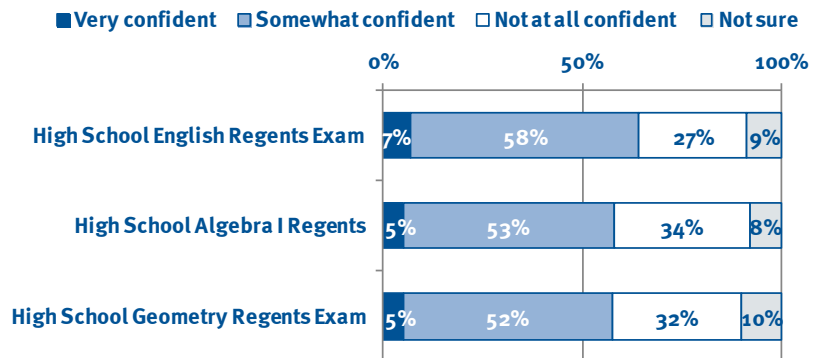
The state has begun a transition to Common Core expectations in the English and mathematics Regents Exams. Again, meeting Common Core standards is intended to signify whether a student is ready to succeed in college or a career. We asked,

*How confident are you that the state’s Common Core-aligned Regents Exams accurately measure whether students are acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to be college and career ready by the time they graduate from high school?*

The reviews were mixed. Majorities of responding superintendents profess that they are either very or somewhat confident in the three exams’ accuracy, ranging from 65 percent for English to 57 percent for Geometry. But significant numbers did respond, “not at all confident,” ranging from 27 percent for English, to 34 percent for Algebra 1.

In open-ended comments, several superintendents criticized the June 2015 Algebra I Regents. A Western New York superintendent explained, “SED rescaled the Common

**How confident are you that the state’s Common Core-aligned Regents Exams accurately measure whether students are acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to be college and career ready by the time they graduate from high school?**



### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Unlike the 3-8 tests, the Regents exams end up on a student’s transcript. The new CC Regents assessments are incredibly language dense and are more of an endurance feat - over 95% of our students needed the entire 3 hour block just to complete them. The new Math Regents in Algebra included topics that were Algebra II and pre-calc topics. Both exams contain a significant amount of linguistic and visual distractors. The new Algebra Regents content has now caused concerns in schools where children take that course in grade 8. The new "aspirational index" is ridiculous... The Aspirational Index does NOT include the idea that children (in my district) will take THREE or FOUR more years of Math - after Algebra I. The "index" was NOT adjusted for the new CC exams. IF this is NOT adjusted - the new Aspirational Index will doom many students in NYS - it also makes 75 and 80 the new "passing rates" - VERY confusing to the public and the anti public school lobby will take the "sound bite" that addresses their agenda and use it. The State (executive branch and NYSED) use the assessments as a "gotcha" and as a punitive tool. That distracts from creating an honest and fair accountability system. If people do not like tenure - then change those laws, if they believe that public education is too expensive then address pension reform, Triborough and the unfunded mandates. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

The sense of frustration by the new CCS Regents Exams is what the 3-8 testing has felt over the years. The changes are difficult when it has the potential of effecting college selections. -- Long Island Suburb



### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The high school English Regents exam is likely a better exit indicator than either of the math tests, but a minimal score on the test likely doesn't really indicate college readiness. The demands of a college curriculum vary much more widely than the state's narrow definition of college readiness. -- Long Island Suburb

We have to stop curving the cut scores. Everyone should know prior to the test how many points are needed to pass. I can't trust the tests if I can't understand or explain to my parents why 36 points is failing this year but was passing last year. The proposal to change 65% for passing math and ELA Regents is going to explode. Find another way to demonstrate the mythical college career ready. -- Capital Region Rural

Core Algebra exam this year and it is now exceedingly difficult to earn a mastery score (85 or higher), much more so than the first two years the exam was administered. Something is wrong with a system that radically changes the scaling of the exam in the third year of administration.” There were also criticisms of the complexity of Regents Exam scoring – that having the number of correct answer points required for a passing score of 65 float from year to year fuels public skepticism over the state’s testing system.

As explained above, attainment of Common Core standards is intended to indicate that graduating students will be able to succeed in college (without remedial classes) or at a job. The Education Department is now phasing in Common Core expectations for the English Regents Exam and the three mathematics Regents Exams. As currently planned, students in the class of 2022 (entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2018-19) will be required to meet Common Core expectations to pass Regents Examinations.

A fundamental issue is whether a single test can truly measure eventual college and career readiness, particularly one administered three or even four years before graduation – students take the Algebra Regents Exam in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, some take it in 8<sup>th</sup>. To the extent students struggle to pass that exam, they may be precluded from completing a succession of math classes which may be more valuable preparation for success beyond school.

## Testing: the good, the bad, and how to make it better

Much of our current controversy relates to the state grades 3 through 8 assessments. Immediately following the spring 2015 administration of those assessments, the Council invited superintendents to share their views of the strengths and weaknesses of those tests and their recommendations for a better system.

The leader of a suburban district in the Mohawk Valley defined the benefits an ideal state assessment system would yield:

- measuring student progress against a set of clearly defined expectations;
- measuring student progress against similar children;
- measuring student progress of the same children from year to year;
- measuring the impact a teacher has on student learning;
- marking progress towards a distant goal [e.g., high school graduation requirements];
- identifying student deficiencies and student strengths;
- identifying curriculum concerns and instructional gaps.

### ***Strengths of the current assessments***

Some superintendents are finding value from the current grades 3 through 8 state assessments. As we reported earlier, 61 percent of superintendents agreed that the tests provide information useful for identifying general strengths and weaknesses in instruction (28 percent disagreed).

A Western New York superintendent wrote,

We are finding the assessments very useful in helping us to evaluate our curriculum and instructional practices. We have been able to target specific areas for improvement and adjustment by looking at the group results by standard, not focusing as much on individual student results... We also are involved in regional scoring [of tests] with a number of districts in our BOCES... This has become a very effective professional development opportunity for our teachers involved in the scoring. The feedback they bring back to the buildings is also valuable for the rest of our staff...

### **IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

[Purposes of an assessment system] Measuring student progress against a set of clearly defined expectations; measuring student progress against similar children; measuring student progress of the same children from year to year; measuring the impact a teacher has on student learning; marking progress towards a distant goal; identifying student deficiencies and student strengths; identifying curriculum concerns and instructional gaps;... Are there superintendents that do not understand the role of assessment in instruction? -- Mohawk Valley Suburb

I would ask what is the purpose of an assessment system? We need a system to monitor the academic progress of children - I would hope that's a position all parties would agree to. It informs parents and teachers about student academic progress, helps identify curricular gaps and informs instruction. If these are the reasons for a formal assessment system, the current system falls short in all areas. -- Capital Region Suburb

They do provide us information about the extent to which are students are meeting the demands of the common core. The results of the assessments help us make decision about the deployment of resources for children, programs, and buildings. -- Capital Region Suburb

Most important is the continuity of the tests to prepare for Common Core Regents and then Common Core SAT. We do derive important data points about children from the state assessments. -- Long Island Suburb

We do use our assessment data. Through comprehensive planning teams, data teams, and inquiry teams we have worked thoroughly with our data and made curricular, assessment, and structural changes to our program. The assessments have driven our instruction. We have made significant changes to our instructional (and assessment) programs. The substance and value of our professional conversations have improved. We now have a standards based elementary report card. The assessments have shown us where we were weak, and have served to improve our efforts. -- Western New York Rural

The strength is that it's a very sophisticated test that has great potential. Another is that the tests do seem to reflect the academic challenge of the Common Core well. Another is that the tests are not easy to "teach to." -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Standardized assessments, when actually aligned with the standards (I have no problem with the CCLS) are our only way to get a real sense of how our students are progressing compared with the state, the region and with other demographically similar school districts. I'm totally in favor of some level of standardized testing that allows us to both gauge student progress, identify areas of strength in our academic program as well as areas of weakness. Standardized testing also allows us to reach out to other schools who are outperforming us and help us figure out what we can do better... -- Finger Lakes Rural

The tests provide excellent perspective on our program delivery and on student achievement. I fully support my children taking the tests -- Long Island Suburb

The benefit of an assessment system is that it does help to get teachers on board in terms of teaching a consistent curriculum across grade levels. -- North Country Rural

Our Grades 3-8 Assessments have always been designed as more program evaluations than individual student diagnostic tools. As a once a year assessment, they can't possibly give educators the learning information needed for substantive change. They can, do, and always have provided an important external benchmark for schools as a whole to check performance against other like schools. -- Finger Lakes Rural

Too much testing for accountability purposes has led to too little time for meaningful assessments designed to help teachers focus their instruction on the real needs of their students. The results of testing for accountability are too late to help teachers address the needs of their students. -- Capital Region Suburb

First, all of the items need to be released from the Grade 3-8 assessments. That is the only way the assessments can have highly effective uses instructionally. Second, the state has to get the scaling and standard setting metrics correct... Also, NYS teachers need to be involved in creating items for the grade 3-8 assessments... Parents and teachers have lost confidence in the grade 3-8 state assessments and it is an enormous leadership challenge to win that confidence back. Some of it has to do with making logical changes to the tests and releasing all the questions. Some of it has to do with creating a valid and reliable "growth statistic". Most of it has to do with generating support for the standards and assessments, and SED needs to take the lead... -- Western New York Suburb

A Capital Region superintendent wrote, "They [the assessments] do provide us information about the extent to which are students are meeting the demands of the Common Core. The results of the assessments help us make decision about the deployment of resources for children, programs, and buildings."

Again, the Common Core standards are intended to define what students need to know and be able to do grade-by-grade if they are to be ready to succeed in college or a career upon high school graduation. As we reported above, responding superintendents were divided on the degree to which the grades 3 through 8 assessments yield information useful for ensuring students are on track to meet graduation requirements (46 percent agree, 41 percent disagree).

Nonetheless, a Long Island superintendent wrote, "Most important is the continuity of the tests to prepare for Common Core Regents and then the Common Core SAT. We do derive important data points about children from the state assessments."

This observation is why some educators express particular concern about opting-out of state assessments by students in the upper grades (i.e., 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades). They, their schools, and their families lose one indicator of how their academic progress measures up against high school commencement expectations. Also, the state assessments do provide an experience with a structured, timed test resembling what students will encounter with Regents and college entrance exams.

### ***Weaknesses of the current tests***

A Capital Region superintendent said,

"I would ask, what is the purpose of an assessment system? We need a system to monitor the academic progress of children - I would hope that's a position all parties would agree to. It informs parents and teachers about student academic progress, helps identify curricular gaps and informs instruction."

He added, however, "If these are the reasons for a formal assessment system, the current system falls short in all areas."

Commonly cited criticisms of the grades 3 through ELA and math assessments include:

- The tests are too long, both in number of days and in duration each day (three days each, over two weeks, 60 to 90 minutes each day, including for early grade students, and potentially longer for students with disabilities).
- Conversely, too many students have difficulty completing the assessments, especially for ELA – the tests do not allow enough time for students to apply the “close reading” strategy called for by the Common Core.
- Some of the tests are not developmentally appropriate, especially early grade ELA assessments. A Long Island superintendent wrote, “The tests are too long. It is the length of the test that drains the students. The Regents is only 3 hours for high school students in one day but for elementary it is three days. The content on the ELA is not developmentally appropriate. Lexile [reading] levels are too rigorous. Stories are too dense and beyond a level of interest.”
- There should have been a slower, more careful phase-in on the Common Core-aligned tests, to enable students and teachers to first gain comfort with the standards.
- In some multiple choice questions, there are vague distinctions among possible right answer choices.
- Not enough data is released from the assessments, especially for the purpose of identifying strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Not enough questions are released for the tests to be optimally useful in identifying general program strengths or weaknesses.
- Data has not been returned to districts quickly enough to be optimally useful for program planning and student scheduling.
- Some superintendents argue for moving the assessments from late April/early May to the June Regents Exam period, to allow them to cover more of the school year and cause less disruption within the year.
- Testing every student, every year in math and ELA between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8th grades is unnecessary and excessive. Again, this is a federal mandate unlikely to change.
- The tests are serving multiple purposes – individual student assessment, program evaluation, and teacher and school accountability – and cannot serve all of them well.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The math questions seem to be excessively wordy and sometimes confusing/misleading in what students are actually supposed to do. -- Mohawk Valley Rural

Results need to be more detailed and student specific. Results need to be more immediate. Performance should not be tied to teachers. -- Western New York Suburb

...it has been common practice to ask 4th grade students to take ELA assessments that last 90 minutes three days in a row. Many students do not have the stamina to sit through a 90 minute assessment. They quickly go through the test, just to get it over with. A student with an IEP may be given extended time, and thus sit with an exam for 180 minutes, 3 days in a row. To make matters worse, many of the passages on the 4th grade exams have a lexile level on an 8th grade level. Many educators and parents do not consider these tests to be respectful to students. -- Capital Region Rural

Our biggest concern is making sure that the state assessments are developmentally appropriate, especially when it comes to the reading passages. The length of the tests also come into play when we know that attention for 3-8 grade students can wane after only 20 minutes. I understand that a valid test will take longer than 20 minutes but 90 minute assessments over the course of 6 days for math and ELA cannot possibly give the most valid result. Perhaps we are not measuring learning as much as we are measuring perseverance, attention and focus. -- Western New York Rural

They have to be used to measure what they were intended to measure: student performance. Mixing in teacher performance turned low stakes tests to high stakes. Students have to flip between pages to answer questions on reading passages--not good design. Having numbers in the margins is a distraction to weak young readers. -- Long Island Suburb

The weaknesses, which may ultimately destroy its potential are: they are too long, the lack of a complete item analysis for use by schools, the fact that they are linked to teacher evaluation, without evidence of validity for this purpose, they were implemented too soon after the Common Core was introduced,-they were implemented after a rushed introduction of the Common Core. - Politicians who do not actually understand the tests, or testing in general, are using them as a policy tool. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In my opinion, tying the assessments to teacher evaluations was the trigger for the intense scrutiny of these assessments. I truly do believe if these assessments were not tied to a teacher's APPR, the public outcry would be minimal. I do think it is important for districts to review the process that students are making in annual assessments and if a teacher has a record of students not making process during their experience of being in his/her classroom to address it. But making this a statewide initiative for teachers in grade 3-8 opened up a huge can of worms which has caused a number a terrible consequences for school. Student enrollment in college prep programs for the teaching and administrative professions is way down. I predict that districts are going to have a very difficult time with a teacher and principal shortage in the near future. -- North Country Rural

Parents and teachers have lost confidence in the grade 3-8 state assessments and it is an enormous leadership challenge to win that confidence back. Some of it has to do with making logical changes to the test and releasing all the questions. Some of it has to do with creating a valid and reliable "growth statistic". Most of it has to do with generating support for the standards and assessments, and SED needs to take the lead. The accountability system can be based on fear and punishment. Until that changes, we won't get the parents and teachers to support the tests and the opt-outs will get worse. -- Western New York Suburb

SED needs to do a massive, high quality, community outreach effort to educate school communities about the purpose and goals of the test, back off on the link to evaluation, and release more questions... -- Capital Region Suburb

I would recommend an assessment system that does no more than what an assessment system should do; measure student achievement as part of the school improvement process. The assessment system should not be one that is showcased in the media as if weapons of mass destruction have been identified in school buildings across the state. -- Mid-Hudson Valley Rural

If all assessment items are released the following two things may happen: 1. educators and public will develop confidence in the data; 2. educators will use the data effectively to track students progress toward meeting graduation requirements, identify areas where students need additional instruction, and identify strengths and weaknesses in instruction -- Capital Region Rural

– It is a mistake to use the assessments a factor in teacher evaluations – rushed implementation of both Common Core-aligned assessments and new teacher evaluations fueled much of the present controversy. Also, some superintendents see the growth scores derived from the tests as unreliable measures of teacher effectiveness. A Long Island superintendent wrote, “I was remaining open to the possibility but have now witnessed ‘unfair’ and/or ‘inaccurate’ teacher scores - some of our skilled ‘master teachers’ have experienced an erratic swing in their scores - even though they bring their ‘A’ game to our schools each and every day. How demoralizing.”

As reported above, when we asked superintendents about the extent to which the Common Core English language arts and mathematics standards should be revised, the results were nearly identical for the two subjects. But in open-ended comments about the corresponding grades 3-8 state assessments, superintendents offered more negative comments about the assessments for ELA and more positive comments about those for math. For example, a Western New York superintendent wrote, “This year I have heard that ‘the math tests are fair’, and ‘the ELA tests were ridiculous.’ This may, in part, be an indicator that we have done a better job of aligning our mathematics curriculum and instruction with the CCLS.”

### ***Thoughts for a better assessment system***

Thoughts offered by superintendents on how to improve the elementary and middle level assessment system flow from the positive and negative comments cited above. Both the comments above and recommendations below reflect a representative sample of the opinions offered by superintendents, but they do not represent formally adopted positions of the Council, except where noted.

Again, there is a consensus that statewide standardized testing has a place, as a tool for comparing performance with other schools (particularly with those sharing similar demographics), for evaluating alignment of instruction with state standards, and for assessing whether students are on track to satisfy ultimate requirements for high school graduation. Ideally, the assessments should also help identify gaps in learning for individual students.



An overarching theme in the suggestions for improving the assessments is to assure they are useful for the purpose of improving student success and that this objective is undermined by using them for too many purposes, including teacher evaluations.

A Capital Region superintendent wrote, “Too much testing for accountability purposes has led to too little time for meaningful assessments designed to help teachers focus their instruction on the real needs of their students. The results of testing for accountability are too late to help teachers address the needs of their students.”

Here are the suggestions that emerge from the superintendent comments:

- Shorten the tests – both the number of days and the duration each day, particularly in the earliest grades.
- Do not test every student, every year in grades 3 through 8. The Council has recommended testing all students once at each grade level, for example, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, high school. Another option could be to test all students in each subject every other year, staggering the assessments so that students would be tested in ELA one year and math the other. Some superintendents do favor retaining annual testing. In any event, it is a federal mandate and not likely to change.
- Release substantially all test questions and return results to schools and families promptly to facilitate timely analysis, program planning, and student scheduling.
- Consider moving the grades 3-8 state assessments from late April/early May to the June Regents Exam period.
- End the use of the state assessments as a factor in teacher evaluations.
- Maximize involvement of New York State teachers and administrators in the development of the assessments.
- Be more transparent in defining “cut scores” – the scores used to indicate proficiency or passing.
- Allow appropriate time for planning and implementing any significant transition in assessments

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

They do not need to be three days in length. How about a 1-2 hour bench mark type assessment that will give districts a snapshot of where we are in meeting the common core--despite the controversy, those standardized tests are an important part of the overall picture of how our district is doing. Now, with 1/5 of our students not taking the test, the results are skewed and are essentially invalid, which will affect our long term strategic planning processes. Adjustments MUST be made so the tests are shorter, yet still provide districts with enough data to draw conclusions. -- Finger Lakes Rural

The State's assessment system needs to focus on program development. Standardized assessments are not a valid or reliable means of assessing teacher effectiveness. Consider alternate year testing or alternate grade level testing to reduce the significant number of hours. For example, consider ELA testing in odd number grades and math testing in even number grades. Develop an assessment system that is transparent. Involve New York State teachers and administrators in the development of the system and the assessments. Provide districts and the public with access to copies of the assessments after the administration of the test. Provide districts with information so that an item analysis can be performed on every test item for every student, not just 50 % of the test items. Develop a plan for regaining the trust of the public and the professionals. Develop an effective communication plan. Begin with informing the profession and the public of the "why" this is needed, then develop the "what" can be expected and "how" this will be done, with a feedback loop throughout the process. The State assessment system needs a new beginning...-- Central New York Suburb

A minimum 18-month implementation period, which includes two summers, is necessary to successfully plan and implement the initiative from an educational standpoint and to budget appropriately for the necessary resources (time, personnel, and materials) from a fiscal perspective. This was not done with ELA and mathematics resulting in widespread discontent and frustration among all stakeholders, public outcry, parental revolt, and possibly invalid student achievement results on the state assessments which are tied to teacher performance measures. -- Mid-Hudson Valley Rural

Whatever is decided, take the time to get it right! Get stakeholder input and LISTEN to them! -- Western New York Rural

A few superintendents expressly recommend moving to computer-based adaptive assessments, noting that shift could address many of the criticisms of existing assessments.

Current computer-based testing systems provide for prompt return of results to schools and families – the next day in some cases. They also allow for shorter tests – fewer questions are needed to distinguish between performance levels for students because the difficulty of questions adjusts based on whether students respond correctly as they proceed. In 2013 testimony to the Senate Education Committee, we observed,

“Computer-based testing offers the promise of better assessments, more refined diagnostic data, and eventually lower recurring costs. Accordingly, movement to computer-based testing should not be seen as a ‘yes or no’ question, but one of ‘when and how.’”

Rockville Centre Superintendent William Johnson explained his district’s experience with online testing: “We do it because it makes sense. Our parents don’t opt out. The results are provided back to our teachers and then again to our parents and families within a few days.”<sup>4</sup>

But the Council has also cautioned that transition to this new mode of assessment must be done with more care than has characterized most recent state reform initiatives.

The State Education Department has taken steps to address assessment criticisms. A new vendor has been chosen to develop the next iteration of the assessments and greater involvement of New York State educators is promised. Data from the 2015 assessments were made available to schools in early July, more than month earlier than the year before. Plans for transition to computer-based testing have been published. Finally, the Legislature and Governor appropriated an additional \$8.4 million to support the Department’s testing operations; this will permit release of substantially all test questions and elimination of stand-alone field testing of multiple choice questions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Make Assessment Matter*. Northwest Evaluation Association, Apr. 2014. Web. 02 Nov. 2015. Also, *Student Testing in America’s Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis*. Council of Great City Schools, October 2015.

<sup>2</sup> “Mulgrew: It’s helpful to have a foe in City Hall, but better to have an ally.” Chalkbeat New York, October 21, 2015. Web. 5 Nov. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> “Half of voters view Cuomo favorably.” Siena Research Institute, 26 October 2015. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.

Also, the 47th annual Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup survey of the public’s attitudes toward the public schools, found 54 percent of respondents opposed having teachers in their community use the Common Core standards guide what they teach. *The 47 Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*. Phi Delta Kappan, Sept. 2015.

Supplying more background in its phrasing of the question, Education Next did find more support for the standards, 49 percent supporting the standards and 35 percent opposed. “The 2015 EdNext Poll on School Reform: Public Thinking on Testing, Opt Out, Common Core, Unions, and More.” Education Next, 17 Aug. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> “State pushing online testing for 2016-17 school year.” Politico New York, Sept. 24, 2015. Web. 16 Nov. 2015