

LETTING TEACHERS TALK:

RESULTS OF THE TEACHER SURVEY ON STUDENT TESTING

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ON THE FORMATION OF THE STUDENT TESTING TASK FORCE

“We have heard concerns from parents, lawmakers and educators about the amount of testing on the state and district levels and the time spent on test preparation in schools. We believe that through the work of the task force we can come up with reasonable recommendations that will address these concerns, while ensuring accountability among schools and districts to prepare our students for their next step, whether it’s the next grade, the workforce, military, or college,”

Dr. Carey Wright, State Superintendent of Education, Mississippi Department of Education, News Release on formation of the Student Testing Task Force, April 16, 2018

SURVEY METHODS

- The Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) of the Social Science Research Center, MSU was hired to conduct a web-based survey of all public school teachers in the state of Mississippi.
- The Mississippi Department of Education does not have direct email addresses to every teacher in the state. As a result, the survey was conducted through a general email to school and district leaders.
- This process resulted in significant delay in getting the recruitment emails to teachers and likely impacted the response rate.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RESPONSE RATE

- The MDE sent an email on February 13th to the superintendents and principals listserv explaining the purpose of the survey, providing the link to access the survey, and asking them to share the email with their teachers. The deadline to complete the survey was February 22nd.
- A week after the first recruitment email was sent, it was discovered that a significant number of teachers were unable to access survey because some school-level IT systems automatically deactivated the web-based survey link provided in the recruitment emails.
- A publication in the Administrator News section of the EdUpdate promoted the survey to teachers across the state of Mississippi. Teachers began to contact SSRC directly to report that they had not received the email invite with the link to access the survey.
- A review of response rates following the first email invite showed that almost 1/3 of districts had no/zero respondents. A second email was sent and the deadline was extended to March 1st.

TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSE RATE

- Overall Response Rate: 32.3% (10,106/31,252)
- Range of rates: 0% to 89.6%
- 15 school districts with zero responses
- 30 school districts with less than 10% of teachers responding
- Number of teacher respondents by school/district: 1 to 143

CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- **Total sample: 10,106**
 - 3904 teach a tested subject
 - 6202 do not teach a tested subject
- **Grades taught**
 - 31.7% teach pre-K and elementary school (grades 1-5)
 - 23.0% teach middle school (grades 6-8)
 - 29.9% teach high school (grades 9-12)
 - 4.2% teach a non-graded subject
 - 11.2% did not answer the question
- **Years teaching**
 - 5.1% have taught for 1 year or less
 - 16.1% have taught for 2-5 years
 - 20.6 have taught for 6-10 years
 - 36.5 have taught for 11-20 years
 - 21.7% have taught for more than 20 years

TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS

N=3904

- 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8 grade English Language Arts &/or Mathematics
- 5 & 8 grade Science
- Algebra I
- Biology
- U.S. History
- English

THINKING ABOUT STATE-LEVEL TESTING, WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE AMOUNT OF STATE-LEVEL TESTING IS...

- Overall
 - 76.5% too much;
 - 20.8% just right;
 - 0.6% not enough; and
 - 2.1% Don't know.
- Compared with teachers with 1 year of teaching experience or less (65%), teachers with greater teaching experience were more likely to say “too much” (75% - 78%).
- High school teachers were more likely to say “too much” (85%) than middle school (70%) and primary school teachers (71%).
- Tested Subject teachers were less likely (70%) to say “too much” than non-tested subject teachers (80.5%).

THINKING ABOUT DISTRICT-LEVEL TESTING, WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE AMOUNT OF DISTRICT-LEVEL TESTING IS...

- Overall
 - 70.4% too much;
 - 26.4% just right;
 - 1.3% not enough; and
 - 1.9% Don't know.
- Compared with teachers with 1 year of teaching experience or less (54%), teachers with greater teaching experience were more likely to say “too much” (67% - 73.5%).
- High school teachers were less likely to say “too much” (65%) than middle school (73%) and primary school teachers (72%).
- There was no difference between tested subject teachers (70%) and non-tested subject teachers (70%) in “too much”. Instead, they differed in “just right” (26% vs 24%) and “don't know” (1.9% vs 5.3%).

FINDINGS FROM TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS: USE OF ASSESSMENTS

	#	%
Progress-monitoring test or benchmark/interim test	3261	83.5
Diagnostic/pre-test	2339	59.9
As part of student's grade	2111	54.1
Summative/post-test	1874	48.0
Nine weeks test	1438	36.8

FINDINGS FROM TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS: PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENTS

	#	%
Enable teachers to make instructional decisions, such as skill remediation, ability-based grouping, or pace acceleration	3277	83.9
Enable teachers/administrators to predict student achievement on state assessments	3054	78.2
Enable teachers/administrators to determine skill or standard mastery	3043	77.9
Enable administrators to hold teachers accountable	1576	40.4
Motivate students	1030	26.4
Enable administrators to place students into appropriate courses	753	19.3
Enable students to earn a credit or credential	206	5.3
Other	83	2.1

FINDINGS FROM TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS: HELPFULNESS OF ASSESSMENTS

- Overall
 - 9.5% Not at all helpful;
 - 62.3% Somewhat helpful;
 - 26.9 Very helpful;
 - 1.4% Not sure.
- Compared with teachers with 1 year of teaching experience or less (35%), teachers with greater teaching experience were less likely to say “very helpful” (24% - 29.5%).
- High school teachers were less likely to say “very helpful” (18%) than middle school (24%) and primary school teachers (33%).

FINDINGS FROM TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS; CHALLENGES OF DISTRICT-LEVEL TESTING

Please consider the following challenges that district testing may pose for your daily classroom instruction. Please rank these from 1 (the biggest challenge) to 5 (the smallest challenge).	Rank Order	%
Time taken away from daily instruction	1	43.3
Stress for teachers and students	2	31.6
Student motivation and engagement	3	31.4
Technology issues	4	41.5
Adequate resources	5	54.2

FINDINGS FROM TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS AGGREGATED TO DISTRICT-LEVEL

- Teachers were asked to report:
 - the length in minutes for average administration of a typical assessment;
 - how many school days it took to test all of his/her students for one administration of a typical assessment; and
 - how many school days it took to receive the results after all students were tests.
- Data was aggregated to the school/district-level for those schools/districts that had a response rate of 10% or higher.
- There are statistically significant differences between schools/districts. Results are reported in a handout.

FINDINGS FROM TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS: REASONS FOR PROLONGED TEST ADMINISTRATION

	#	%
Technology issues with district broadband/internet	2564	65.7
Technology issues with vendor software	2272	58.2
Technology issues with district hardware	1951	50.0
Students forgetting logins or passwords	1718	44.0
Students forgetting identification	857	21.9
User error/trouble understanding how to use the testing platform	809	20.7
Collecting cellphones	622	15.9
Other	171	4.4

NON-TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS, N=6202

FINDINGS FROM NON-TESTED SUBJECT TEACHERS

- 76% reported that they were provided with district or state assessment results for their students.

What is the primary way you use these results?	%
To make instructional decisions, such as skill remediation, ability-based grouping, or pace acceleration	56.8
To assign grades	0.6
To determine skill or standard mastery	11.8
To place students in appropriate courses	1.9
To collaborate with other teachers for student success	11.1
To motivate students	4.5
Some other use	3.3
I do not use the results that are provided	6.3



QUALITATIVE DATA AND ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

- All teachers were given the opportunity to express any concerns about student testing.
- 2200 teachers or 22% of all survey respondents wrote a response in the text box provided.
- A coding scheme of the themes of teachers' qualitative responses were developed and 4 research associates working in pairs placed each text into one or more of the 15 categories of themes.
- The list of themes and definitions are provided in a handout.

TOP 5 THEMES

- 1. Too Much (Testing)** This category includes comments referring to the amount of testing, the length of testing, and any general complaint how much testing occurs.
- 2. Bad Tests/Bad Data** This category includes comments referring to the quality of the tests, the fit with curriculum/standards, validity of tests, evaluative ability of tests, developmentally inappropriate, and not a good fit for children with disability or in special education programs.
- 3. Kid Stress** This category includes comments referring to students stress/pressure, poor physical or mental health related to testing, and dislike of school due to testing.
- 4. Loss of Instructional Time** This category includes comments referring to not having enough to teach the material due to testing, teachers being unable to fully cover a topic or curriculum due to testing demands, students being pulled out of class to test or receive intensive tutoring for testing, schools stopping other classes due to testing occurring in the school, or teachers or assistant teachers proctoring testing in other classes.
- 5. Teacher Stress** This category includes comments referring to teachers stress/pressure, poor physical or mental health related to testing, and dislike of school or teaching due to testing.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

“As a parent of a child in a Mississippi public school and as a teacher in a Mississippi public school, I feel the amount of testing done causes undue stress on teachers and students. When I see my child stressed out over an upcoming test and hear about other teacher's children crying over the testing, I feel like pulling him out of school and placing him in a private school. As for my kindergarten students, I have to ask myself, why do these babies need to be pushed so hard at 5-6 years old. I feel like I spend all my time ramming information down their throats instead of focusing on developmentally appropriate concepts and skills. Also, I feel that the data gathered from the current tests are invalid for kindergarten. Most of my students are only accustomed to playing games on iPads so they rush through the tests thinking there is some sort of in game prize at the end. They also don't have the motor skills to maneuver/scroll a mouse if placed on a computer. The final question I ask myself is that if all this data is so important and the testing of 5-6 year old's is so important, why is kindergarten not a required grade in the state of Mississippi?”

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

“District-level and State-level testing have been relevant in the teaching profession for the entire 12 years I have been a part of this career path. I have personally seen the level of motivation among students decline rapidly. They no longer feel there is a true purpose for their education, other than to perform well on a test. Education should affect the WHOLE child and their abilities, not just how well they do in certain subjects. I thoroughly understand that testing is a part of life and will be a part of the career these students choose in the future. However, testing elementary and middle school students at an average of 21-26 school days per year is completely unnecessary and does not benefit true education. (The average I refer to includes benchmark and standards mastery testing at the district level, as well as the state testing at the end of the school year).

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

“We place entirely too much stress on testing these days. We are having to rush through skills just to "cover" them for the test. We are also teaching some skills too early for the students. They are not ready to learn some of the skills at the age that we are trying to teach them. We are not able to teach some basic life skills (ex. telling time, counting money) because "those skills are not on the test". As a teacher I feel guilty if I take class time to do a project that the kids will enjoy and also learn a great deal from because it will not be formatted like the tests. We test the kids so much that they do not perform their best when needed. I believe testing and the stress it causes are a big reason that we are seeing teachers leaving education.”

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

“Students are obviously affected a great deal by the extremely high amount of time testing, but teacher morale and motivation also suffers. Teachers are no longer allowed to teach what they are most passionate about; they are required to teach a specific curriculum. When you take away a teacher's passion, the students will also suffer as they no longer see the joy in learning as a result of their teacher no longer exhibiting the joy to teach.”

SUMMARY

- Teachers were very responsive to the opportunity to share their perspectives on student testing.
- There is too much testing at both the state and district levels.
- The biggest (ranked first) challenge of student testing is that it takes time away from daily instruction.
- Stress for teachers and students are also given as issues related to too much testing.
- Significant differences between districts in the time to administer an assessment and complete testing on all students.
- Technology issues were the primary reasons for prolonged test administration.



QUESTIONS?