

After the Tests: How States Share Assessment Data

A Special Report in the series, *Planning for Progress: States Reflect on Year One Implementation of ESSA*

In September and October of 2017, the Center on Education Policy conducted a survey of state deputy superintendents of education or their designees to learn about states' early efforts in implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Most of those survey findings are described in the CEP publication *Planning for Progress: States Reflect on Year One Implementation of ESSA*, available at www.cep-dc.org. This special report highlights state responses to questions in the 2017 CEP survey about policies for providing state test data to teachers, principals, and parents and other test-related issues, which were not covered in the original survey report.

CEP's interest in state policies for sharing state assessment data with educators and parents grew out of our 2016 teacher focus group research, in which many teachers interviewed said they do not always receive state assessment data in a timely fashion or use the data to inform instruction. In addition, other CEP surveys indicate that teachers and school district leaders believe students spend too much time taking tests.

As noted, the main source of the data in this special report is CEP's 2017 state survey, in which 45 states participated.¹ To provide additional context, some sections of this report bring in relevant findings from CEP's earlier nationally representative surveys of district leaders and teachers and focus groups with teachers (CEP, 2017; 2016a; 2016b).

Summary of Key Findings

Providing teachers and principals with state test data

- **Consistent with ESSA requirements, states are providing teachers and principals with student test data, most often through online portals.** Nearly all responding state leaders reported that their states were providing math and English language arts (ELA) assessment results to teachers (42 states) and principals (43). More than half of these states are using online data portals only to make this information available to teachers (23) and principals (25). About one-quarter of the responding states are using online portals and hard copy formats to get assessment results to teachers (14) and principals (13).

¹Not all state respondents answered every question in the survey. In addition, state survey responses have been reported in the aggregate to maintain anonymity of states and participants and encourage frank answers. For more detailed information on methodology and findings, refer to CEP's full state survey report at www.cep-dc.org.

- **Only a limited number of states are getting assessment results to teachers before the school year ends.** Among the 17 states that provide teachers with preliminary assessment results, 9 get results to them in the spring of the school year in which the test was administered, and just 1 state provides teachers with final assessment results in the spring. More states, 13, are providing preliminary results to principals in the spring, but only 1 is getting final results to school leaders before the end of the school year.
- **A few states are planning to administer multiple state assessments throughout the year instead of one test near the end of the year.** Three states are planning to implement the ESSA option of administering multiple state assessments throughout the year, which may enable states to provide teachers and principals with data on students' mastery of state standards at various points during the school year.
- **Most states provide teachers and principals with math and ELA test results for individual students, as well as data summarized at different levels from the classroom to the state.** Survey respondents in 19 states report providing educators with student data at all of the following levels—individual student, classroom, grade, school, district, and state—while most other states provide teachers and principals with some but not all of these levels of data. Of the 32 states that provide individual student results to teachers and principals, a majority give these educators detailed reports about students' performance by subject and by domains within a subject (such as operations in math). Fewer states provide teachers and principals with details about students' performance on constructs (such as addition) within a domain.

Training educators in using test data

- **Less than half of responding states report providing professional development to help teachers and principals analyze and use math and ELA test data.** Specifically, 17 states report providing this type of training to teachers, and 18 are doing so for principals. Eight states currently do not provide such training for either teachers or principals, but are considering doing so in the future.

Parents and state test data

- **All respondents said their state provides parents with student data, and many (29 states) have sought parents' feedback on how the assessment results are communicated.** Ten states provide parents with student performance data by subject, domain, and construct, while 22 provide data by subject level and 19 by domain. Of the 29 states that sought feedback from parents, 28 are specifically engaging with parents to find out if they understand the results; state responses were mixed about whether parents indicated they understood the results.

Testing time

- **A majority of state leaders responding to the CEP survey said their state does not plan to implement certain optional ESSA provisions designed to reduce testing time.** Although many parents, teachers, and others have complained about how much time students spend taking tests, 24 respondents said their state does not plan to set targets for the total amount of time devoted to administering assessments. Further, 28 responding states do not plan to take actions to reduce the timing or frequency of state-mandated tests in subjects other than math and ELA, or to eliminate these tests.

Providing Student Assessment Results to Teachers and Principals

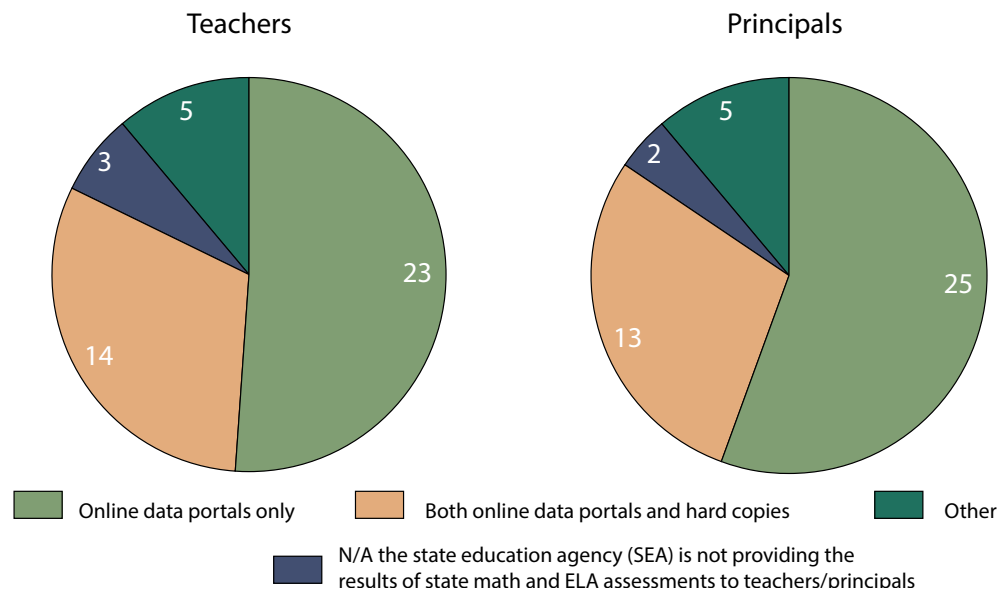
Under ESSA (as under the No Child Left Behind Act), states must administer assessments in math and ELA to students in each of the grades 3-8 and once in grades 9-12. States must also assess student knowledge in science at least once in grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. Results from these assessments, along with other indicators, are used to measure school progress in improving student achievement.

ESSA requires states to provide state assessment results to school leaders, teachers, and parents. For all recipients, the results must be provided “as soon as is practicable after the assessment is given, in an understandable and uniform format.”² CEP’s 2017 survey asked state leaders how they were planning to meet these requirements.

Nearly all respondents said their states are providing math and ELA assessment results to teachers (42 states) and principals (43). Two states reported that they are not providing the results to either teachers or principals, and one state is providing this information to principals but not teachers.

States are using various methods for making test results available to teachers and principals. Over half of the responding states are providing assessment information through online data portals only, while about a quarter are providing access via hardcopy and online portals. Of the states that responded “other,” officials in three states explained that their states give school districts the information and districts then disseminate it to teachers and principals, while two officials said their states have not yet determined how they will provide the data since their assessments systems are in flux.

Figure 1. What method does your state use to provide state math and ELA assessment results to teachers and principals?



Note: No participants selected “Hard copies only.”

Figure reads: State officials in 23 states reported that their state is providing math and ELA assessment results to teachers through online data portals only.

² Part A, §1111(b)(2)(B)(x)

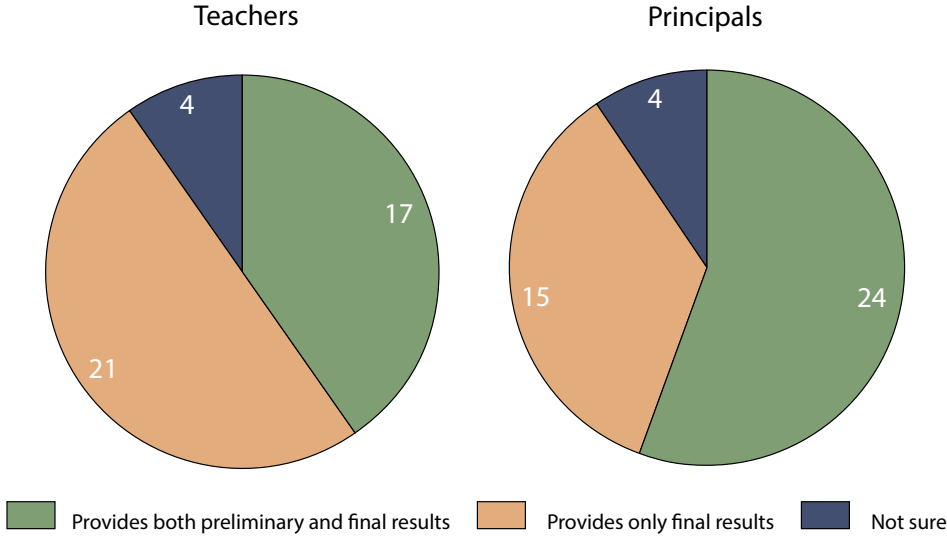
Delivering Preliminary and Final Test Results to Educators

Because state math and ELA assessments are summative—intended to measure what students have learned during an academic year—they are typically given near the end of the school year, and results may not be available until weeks or months later. Several teachers in CEP’s focus groups said that state assessment results are often not informative for making instructional changes because they receive the results late in the school year or after the school year ends. Instead, these teachers reported using their own tests or local assessments to inform decisions about instruction.

To find out how states are approaching the issue of timely assessment results, CEP asked state leaders whether their states provide teachers and principals with preliminary student test results, as well as final results, in math and ELA and when teachers and principals receive either type of results.

Officials in 17 states indicated that their state typically provides both preliminary *and* final student assessment results in math and ELA to teachers (24 states provide these results to principals). Twenty-one officials said their state typically provides only final assessment data to teachers (15 to principals), while 4 state respondents were not sure which results were typically provided to these two groups.

Figure 2. Does your state typically provide preliminary and final student assessment results in math and ELA to teachers and principals?



Note: Three states skipped this question for teachers and two states skipped this question for principals because the states do not provide assessment data to these groups.

Figure reads: Respondents from 17 states said that their SEA typically provides teachers with both preliminary and final student results from state assessments in math and ELA.

Even when states provide preliminary results to teachers, only nine states said that teachers are typically given the results in the spring of the school year in which assessment was given. It is worth noting that one state respondent said their state’s final results are typically given to teachers in the spring. In the majority of responding states, teachers typically receive state test scores in the summer of the year in which the test was administered—7 states provide preliminary results in the summer, and 22 provide final results at that time. Fewer states typically provide results in the fall or later.

While more states provide principals with preliminary results than they do teachers, the majority of states typically provide principals with assessment results after the school year concludes.

Figure 3. When does your state typically provide *teachers* with preliminary and final student assessment results in math and ELA?

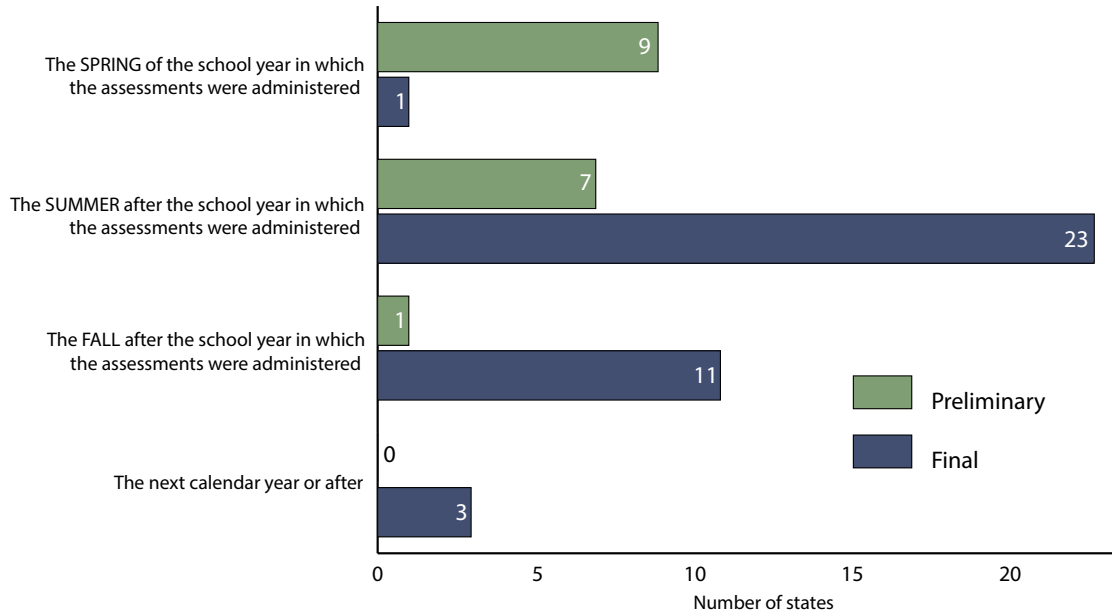
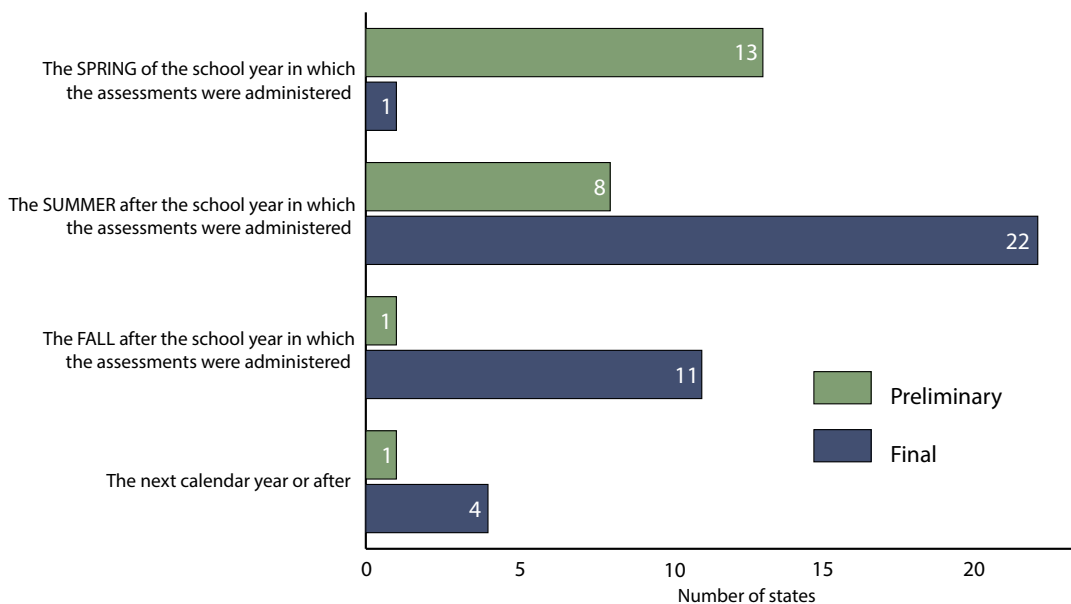


Figure reads: Of the 17 states that typically provide preliminary assessment data to teachers, 9 states provide that information in the spring of the school year in which the assessments were administered, while 7 provide this data in the summer.

Figure 4. When does your state typically provide *principals* with preliminary and final student assessment results in math and ELA?



Note: Not all states answered these questions.

Figure reads: Of the 24 states that typically provide preliminary assessment data to principals, 13 states provide that information in the spring of the school year in which the assessments were administered.

ESSA Option to Administer Multiple State Assessments Instead of One Final Assessment

ESSA includes a new option for administering state assessments that may enable states to provide testing data to teachers and principals earlier in the school year, which might be more useful for instructional purposes. Specifically, states may administer “multiple state-wide interim assessments during the course of the academic year that result in a single summative score that provides valid, reliable, and transparent information on student achievement or growth.”³ States that opt to use multiple assessments (sometimes called “modular” assessments) throughout the school year could test students periodically instead of administering one test near the end of the school year. Teachers could use the student-level data from these assessments to make curricular and instructional changes while they still have the tested students in their classroom.

To find out if states plan to take advantage of this option, CEP asked state leaders if their state plans to switch within the next three years to administering multiple assessments instead of one summative test. As discussed in CEP’s 2017 report based on this same survey, only three state respondents said their state plans to make this change to their math and ELA assessments in the coming years. Thirty-four said their states were not planning these changes, and eight respondents were unsure.

Figure 5. Does your state plan to administer multiple state assessments in math and ELA?

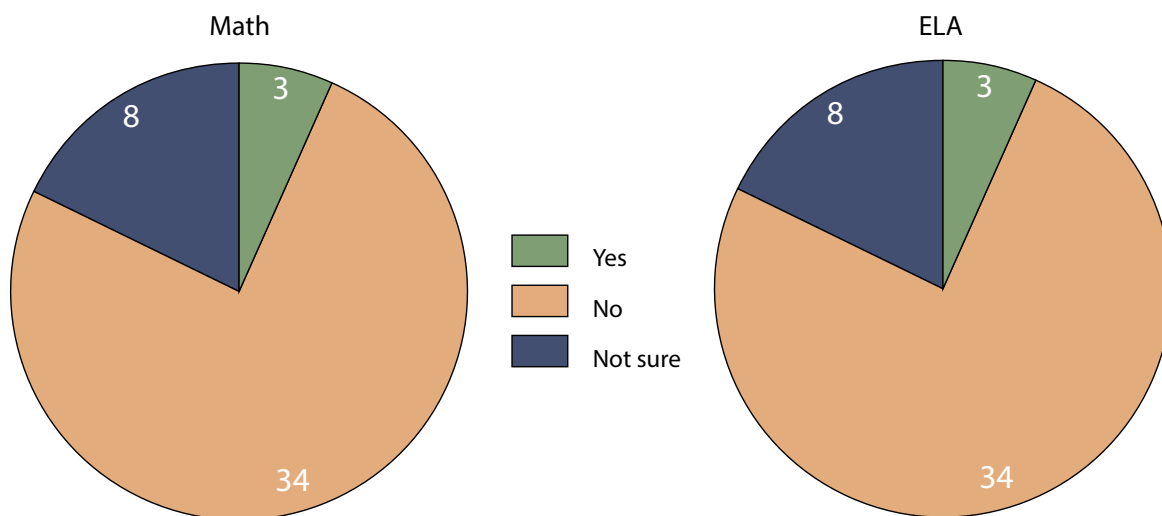


Figure reads: Respondents in three states said that in the next three years their state was planning to switch to administering multiple state math assessments throughout the school year instead of one summative assessment.

³Part A, §1111(b)(2)(B)(viii)(II)

Level of Detail in Assessment Reports for Teachers and Principals

Many teachers in CEP’s focus groups said they found the student assessment data they received to be confusing—to the point that some teachers used (or wished they could use) the assessment reports given to parents because the parent reports were more useful than the teacher reports. One focus group teacher who participated in a state-sponsored professional development activity indicated that she found the state assessment data helpful, but attributed this to her participation in the special training.

CEP’s survey asked state leaders about the level of detail in the assessment information given to teachers and principals. Officials in 19 states said their state provides teachers with test results for individual students, as well as student results summarized at the state, district, school, grade, and classroom levels. Nineteen states also reported providing this full array of results to principals. Of the remaining survey respondents whose states provide assessment results to teachers and principals, 13 said their state gives individual student results, while others provide educators different combinations of results (state, district, school, grade, or classroom).

Table 1. How detailed are the state math and ELA assessment results provided to teachers and principals?

Level of student assessment results	Number of states providing this level of results to teachers	Number of states providing this level of results to principals
ALL LEVELS: State, district, school, grade, classroom, <i>and</i> individual	19	19
Responses from states that provide some but not all levels		
Statewide results	10	13
District-level results	10	12
School-level results	14	17
Results for each grade level in the school	7	12
Results for each classroom in the school	6	7
Individual student results	13	13

Table reads: Of the 42 responding states that provide student assessment data to teachers, 19 give teachers student test results summarized at the state, district, school, grade, and classroom levels, as well as for individual students.

Most state survey respondents said their state provides individual student assessment results to teachers (32 states) and principals (32). These states were asked what types of detailed data they give to educators—specifically, whether the individual student results were broken down by subject (e.g., math), domain within a subject (e.g., operations), and construct within a domain (e.g., addition). Of the states that do provide educators with individual student results, 9 states give teachers results broken out by subject, domain, and construct, and 12 give this same type of detailed information to principals.

Table 2. What types of individual student test results does your state provide to teachers and principals?

Type of detail of individual student results	Number of states providing this type of detail to teachers	Number of states providing this type of detail to principals
All Types: By subject, domain, <i>and</i> construct	9	12
Responses from states that provide some but not all types of detailed individual results		
By subject	18	16
By domains within a subject	13	13
By constructs within a domain	2	1
Other	2	1

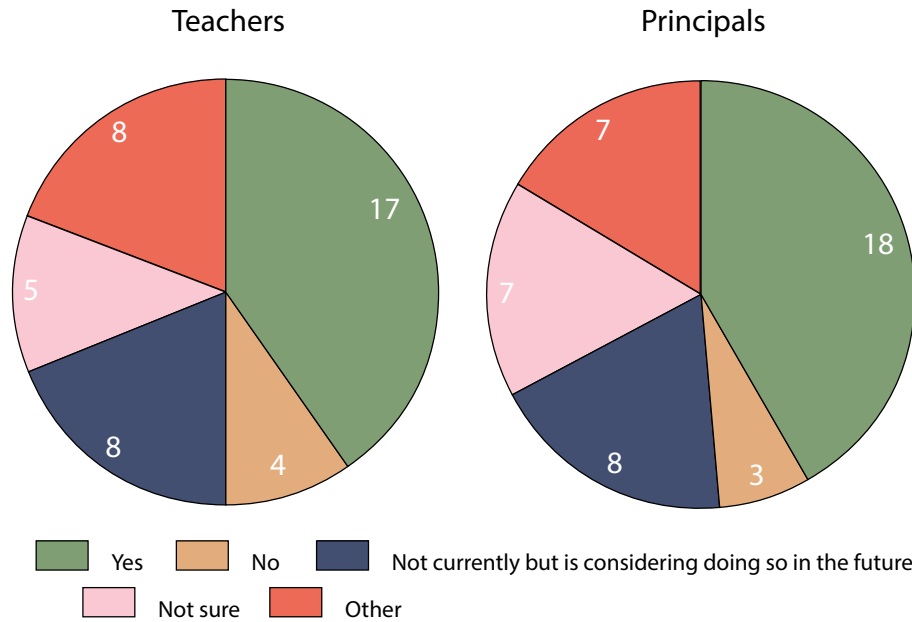
Table reads: Of the 32 states that are providing teachers with individual student-level assessment results, 9 provide information by subject, domains within a subject, and constructs within a domain.

Training Teachers and Principals to Use and Analyze State Assessment Data

CEP’s previous studies indicated that teachers do not always have sufficient professional development or other resources to use state assessment results effectively to improve instruction. In CEP’s 2016 national teacher survey, teachers who had received student assessment results from their state’s previous-year test reported using a variety of resources to understand the results. However, the top two responses were self-initiated efforts to understand test data: “working with other teachers in my school” (83% of teachers in both math and ELA) and engaging in “self-study” (73% math, 78% ELA). Relatively small percentages of teachers reported participating in state-sponsored professional development to understand state test data (17% math, 18% ELA).

Our 2017 state survey asked state leaders if their state was currently providing professional development opportunities to help teachers and principals analyze and use math and ELA assessment data. Seventeen states are providing teachers with this type of training, while 18 states are doing so for principals. Eight states currently do not provide such training for either teachers or principals, but are considering doing so in the future.

Figure 6. Does your state provide teachers and principals with training on how to analyze and use math and ELA assessment data?



Note: Three states skipped this question for teachers and two states skipped this question for principals because they do not provide assessment data to these stakeholder groups.

Figure reads: Of the 42 states that provide assessment data to teachers, 17 are providing training on how to analyze and use the student data.

Types of Assessment Results Provided to Parents

All state survey respondents said their state provides individual student assessment results to parents. Ten of these states provide parents with individual student results broken out by subject, domain, and construct, while the rest provide some, but not all, of these types of data.

Table 3. What types of individual student test results does your state provide to parents?

Type of detail of individual student results	Number of states providing this type detail to parents
All TYPES: By subject, domain, <i>and</i> construct	10
Responses from states that provide some but not all types of detailed individual results	
By subject	22
By domains within a subject	19
By constructs within a domain	2
Other	6

Table reads: Of the 45 states that are providing parents with individual student-level assessment results, 10 provide information by subject, domains within a subject, and constructs within a domain.

Parental Feedback on Assessment Reports

Because ESSA requires states to provide parents with student assessment results in a format that is uniform and understandable, CEP asked state leaders whether their state had sought feedback from parents on how the state communicated their children’s test results and whether parents understood the results.

Officials in 29 states said their state has sought feedback from parents on the way in which children’s assessment results are communicated to parents. However, state responses were mixed about whether parents indicated they understood the test results. Officials in 11 states said parents understood the test results, and 1 said they did not. The remainder indicated they were unsure what feedback was received from parents or selected “other.” Of the 10 state leaders who responded “other,” 6 said that the feedback was mixed.

Figure 7. Has your state sought feedback from parents about the way in which their children’s assessment results are communicated to parents and, if so, did parents understand the results?

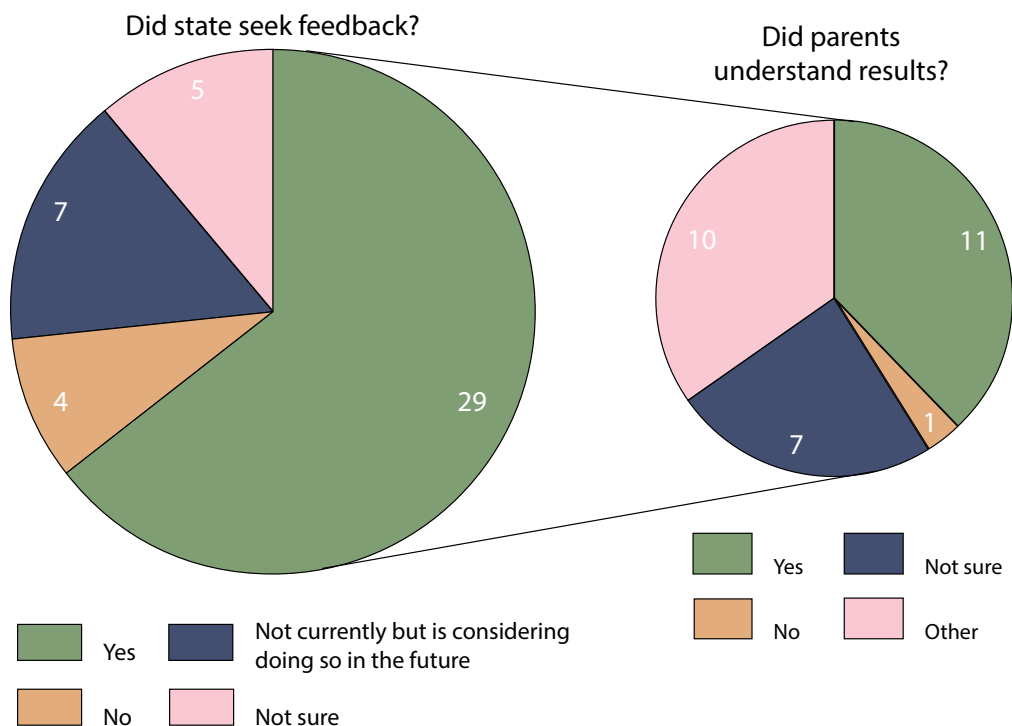


Figure reads: Respondents in 29 states said that their SEA sought feedback from parents on the way their child’s assessment results were communicated. Of those 29 respondents, 11 said parents indicated they understood the results.

State Efforts to Reduce Testing Time

A frequent complaint among some parents is that children spend too much time taking tests. Some parents have responded by “opting out” their children from state and local assessments. Previous nationally representative surveys by CEP indicate that the majority of district leaders and a large majority of teachers agree that students are tested too much when considering state and district tests—a sentiment echoed by teachers in focus groups.

In light of these concerns about testing time, our 2017 survey asked state leaders whether their state planned to pursue the option in ESSA for states to set targets by grade span for the aggregate amount of time devoted to test administration. Most respondents (24) said their state would not set targets, 5 said their state will set targets, and 15 were unsure about their state’s plans.

Figure 8. Does your state plan to set targets, by grade spans, for the aggregate amount of time devoted to administering assessments?

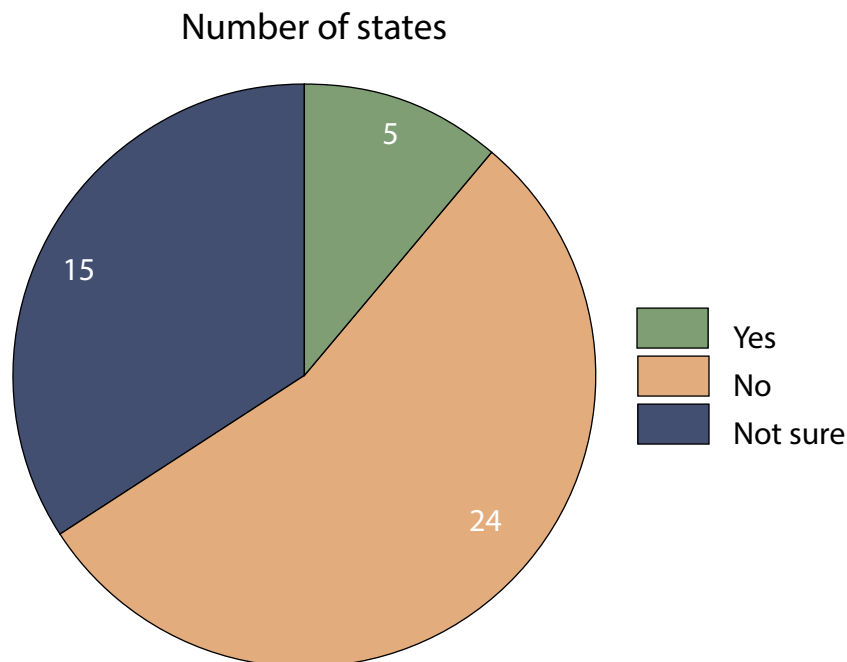


Figure reads: Of the 44 state leaders responding to this question, 5 said that their state plans to set targets for the aggregate amount of time devoted to the administration of assessments by grade span.

Our previous surveys further explored the issue of testing time by asking district leaders and teachers which types of tests—including state-mandated, district-mandated, and teacher-created—they felt should be reduced in terms of administration time or frequency, or eliminated altogether. The majority of district leaders (63%) and teachers (60%) wanted to reduce the length of time students sat for state-mandated tests or the frequency of those tests. A greater percentage of district leaders (56%) than of teachers (13%) wanted to keep district-mandated tests. And over 80% of district leaders and teachers wanted to keep teacher-created tests and quizzes. Some focus group teachers wanted to get rid of summative assessments, which are often state-mandated, because they did not provide useful information for making curricular or instructional changes. These teachers said that district assessments were generally more helpful than state-mandated tests.

As discussed in CEP’s previous 2017 report based on this survey, several of the 45 state officials who responded to the survey said their state was planning to reduce the length of time students sat for state-mandated tests in math (15 states) and ELA (17 states).

Figure 9. Does your SEA plan to reduce the length of time students sit for state-mandated math and ELA tests?

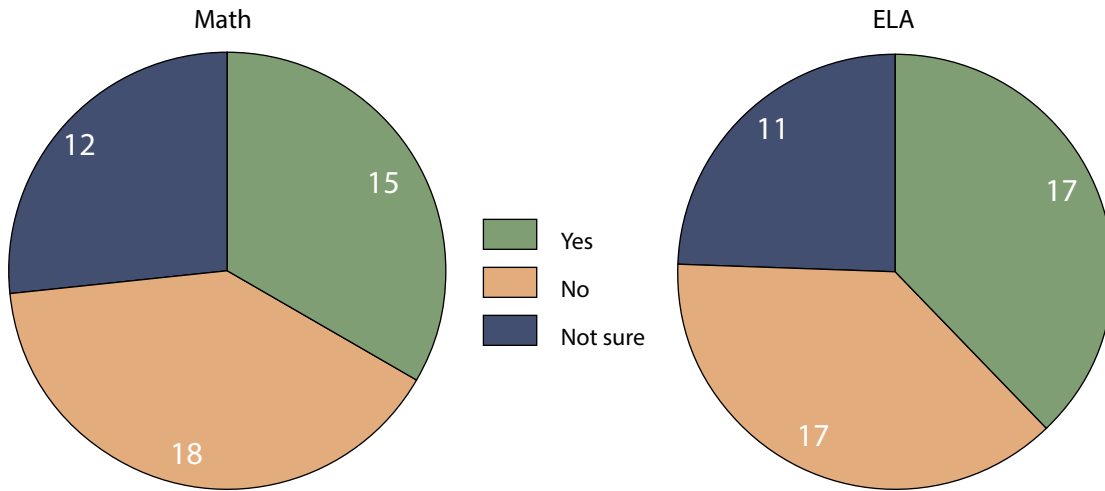
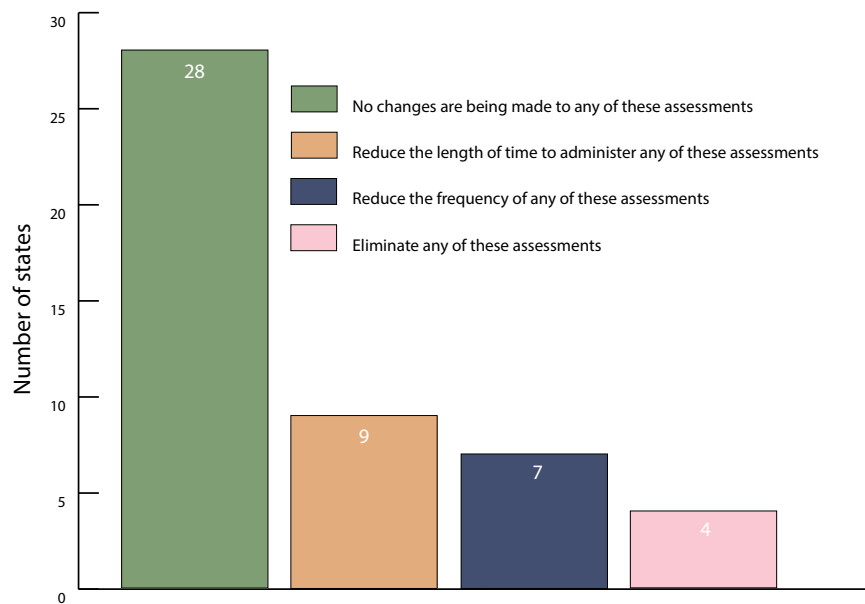


Figure reads: SEA officials in 15 states said their state plans to reduce the length of the mandated math assessment.

We also asked state leaders if they were taking any steps to reduce the frequency or length of time that students sit for mandated assessments in subjects other than math and ELA assessments.

As shown in the figure below, leaders in 28 states said they were not planning to reduce testing in other subjects. Of the 16 states that do plan to take action, 7 reported they will reduce the frequency, 9 will reduce the length, and 4 will eliminate some mandated state exams.

Figure 10. Does your state education agency plan to take the following action to reduce state-mandated testing in subjects other than math and ELA?



Note: One state intentionally did not respond to this question.

Figure reads: SEA officials in nine states said their state plans to reduce the length of any state-mandated tests, such as end-of-course exams and/or assessments, in subjects other than math and ELA.

When we analyzed state responses to all survey questions about planned reductions in testing for all subjects, two additional findings emerged:

- Twenty-five states plan to take one or more steps to reduce testing, either by eliminating assessments, reducing the frequency or length of exams, or setting targets for the amount of time that students sit for tests.
- One state plans to reduce the frequency and length of some state-mandated tests and eliminate others.

Conclusion

The survey responses from state leaders show that states are providing teachers, principals, and parents with student test data, consistent with ESSA requirements, but often the data come too late to inform instructional strategies for the group of tested students. Many states are also providing training to teachers and principals on how to understand and use the data. Some have also reached out to parents for feedback on how the results are reported to them. Additionally, half (25) of the states are taking one or more steps to reduce state testing.

While the survey was able to address many issues about state assessments, some questions remain unanswered, including the impact of state efforts to reduce testing time, or what are states doing to improve teachers' and principals' access to and understanding of student test data. Our findings point to areas for additional research, as well as policy options for states to consider.

State testing time. Given the concerns of parents, teachers, and district leaders about the amount of time that students spend taking tests, additional research about those states that have taken steps to reduce testing time would be very useful for other states that want to do the same. It would also be important to better understand how these actions have impacted classroom instruction and student achievement. Finally, if assessment changes were made in response to the concerns of district leaders, teachers, and parents, it would be helpful to determine whether or not these stakeholders perceive the state's efforts as sufficient or would prefer more drastic changes.

Options for administering multiple assessments. Our survey indicates that most states are still committed to maintaining the structure of one summative assessment and prefer to tinker at the edges rather than make widespread changes. Only three states responding to our survey indicated that they will pursue the option under ESSA of administering multiple state assessments throughout the year. The few states that are pursuing this option should be studied to determine whether that approach changes the total amount of time required to administer state tests, and whether the multiple state assessments are providing teachers and principals with information throughout the school year about students' mastery of state standards, and thereby possibly eliminating the need for other exams. Research on these topics would help other states understand the advantages and challenges of "staggering" their assessments.

Computer adaptive testing. One avenue states could pursue when updating their assessments is to adopt computer adaptive tests. Computer adaptive tests, which tailor assessment questions to a student’s ability level, are now permitted for accountability purposes under ESSA.⁴ This approach may enable shorter assessments that can more precisely identify a student’s ability level and, like computer-based assessments, produce and disseminate results immediately. Several states, including those participating in the Smarter Balanced consortium, have already integrated computer adaptive testing into accountability systems, while others, including Nebraska and Utah, intend to do so in the near future. Computer adaptive assessments in these states should be monitored closely to help inform states that consider this option in the future.

Professional development opportunities in assessment use. A majority of our survey respondents said their state is providing teachers (23 states) and principals (25) with student assessment data through online portals only, and many states are providing these educators with a variety of information on student performance. Yet, our state survey responses suggest that not all states are offering professional development opportunities to help teachers and principals understand and effectively use increasingly complex test data. While these comprehensive, online systems may provide teachers and principals with a wealth of information to draw from in developing curriculum and instructional strategies, they also may be difficult to navigate and have limited usefulness without proper training. In light of the widespread concerns about the amount of time students spend taking tests, states have a responsibility to ensure that the data produced by their tests is more than just a factor in school accountability systems. They should ensure that their test data is informative to educators, and that educators have the necessary training to interpret and use it.

⁴Using computer adaptive testing for accountability purposes was previously prohibited under No Child Left Behind. States may use computer adaptive testing under ESSA (Part A, §111(b)(2)(J)), but they are required to measure and report results against grade-level standards.

References

Center on Education Policy. (2016a). *Listen to us: Teacher views and voices*. Washington, DC: Author.

Center on Education Policy. (2016b). *Listening to and learning from teachers: A summary of focus groups on the Common Core and assessments*. Washington, DC: Author.

Center on Education Policy. (2017). *District leadership in the new era of assessment*. Washington, DC: Author.

Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Matthew Frizzell, CEP's senior research associate; Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's deputy director; and Nancy Kober, CEP's editorial consultant. Matthew Braun, CEP's research assistant, and Mr. Frizzell administered the survey and tabulated the survey data. Matthew Frizzell also designed the report with assistance from Nancy Kober. Maria Ferguson, CEP's executive director, provided advice throughout the development and writing of the report.

We are tremendously grateful to the state leaders who took time from their busy schedules to participate in our survey. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the Center.


Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995, the Center on Education Policy at The George Washington University is a national, independent source for research and information about public education. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent special interests. Instead, we try to help citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

© 2018 Center on Education Policy. All rights reserved.

Center on Education Policy
The George Washington University
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
2100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, #310
Washington, DC 20052

Phone: (202) 994-9050
Fax: (202) 994-8859
E-mail: cep-dc@cep-dc.org

www.cep-dc.org

 CenterOnEducationPolicy

 @CEPDC

 Center on Education Policy