Supporting High Quality Assessment Systems

Training Goals

Upon completion of this module school board members will learn:

- The role of school boards in supporting a system of high-quality, aligned, and streamlined student assessments.
- The characteristics of high-quality assessments.
- How school boards can support use of the Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts by district personnel to
  - take stock of student assessments; and
  - determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional and accountability purposes.

Before we start

- While we generally use the term "assessment" in this training, the word "test" is used interchangeably with assessment.
- A glossary of key terms used in this training is provided as a quick reference.
- Reference materials have provided for topics that you may want to explore further.
- The focus for this training is student assessment. This training does not address assessment as it relates to staff (teacher and/or school leader) evaluation. However, the process of taking stock may include assessments used for staff evaluation.

APPROXIMATE TRAINING TIME

Parts 1 & 2 (Previous training)

Part 3: (Focus for this training)
    Approximately 90 minutes

PART 3 – A process for taking stock of the quality of assessments for students: The Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts

Why take a closer look at the student assessment system now?

- Be proactive approach rather than reactive

- Public concerns about assessments (frequency and number of assessments, time, quality, necessity)

Why is an assessment inventory needed?

- The volume of assessment goes well beyond those required by states, and the layers of state, district, and school assessment do not always add up to a cohesive, aligned, informative whole.

- The Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts is designed to assist district leaders in taking stock of their assessments and assessment system.

- Achieve's assessment inventory "took out a lot of layers of testing. We found out that over the years we added on or weren't using assessments for the right purpose." – Jean Ray Korder, Urbana School District 116, Illinois[1]

- "Completing the assessment inventory increased our assessment literacy and changed the conversation about assessments; it helped us develop a common vocabulary and come to agreement on what we mean by terms such as "mastery" and "proficiency," which aligns with our work around teacher evaluation and student-growth metrics." – Kay Dugan, Bensenville School District 2, Illinois[2]

Sample Results from Districts Conducting a Student Assessment Inventory

- Reduction or elimination of assessments. In districts in Illinois and Ohio reductions in testing were significant, particularly for benchmark/interim and K-2 diagnostic assessments for reading.

- Increased engagement with stakeholders. All sites reported benefits from engaging stakeholders in the process and in particular parents.

- Identification of training needs. Several districts identified the need to provide training to teachers and other staff on the purpose, administration, and retrieval and analysis of the data of specific assessments. Assessment literacy training was also identified as a priority and especially how to make informed decisions about creating and/or purchasing assessments and how to appropriately interpret the assessment results.

What is the Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts?

- A tool to **determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional and accountability purposes.**

- The inventory tool **is only one element of a thoughtful longer process** that both engages productively with concerns about testing and leads to real changes in testing practice.

- The inventory is **not a one-time event**. Districts should regularly re-examine their assessments in light of changing district needs and improvements in available assessments.

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[1] Davis, M.R. (March 17, 2016). *Threat and an Opportunity for Testing Companies Educators Want Fewer and Shorter Tests That Generate More Useful K-12 Data*. https://marketbrief.edweek.org/market-intel/a-threat-and-an-opportunity-for-testing-companies

[2] U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Testing Action Plan: State and District Profiles. Retrieved from: http://sites.ed.gov/progress/2016/02/testing-action-plan-state-and-district-profiles-2/

- Taking stock and then taking action requires **significant district commitment!**

- The inventory and related resources are free to use and adapt.

- Where to access the inventory and resources: www.achieve.org/assessmentinventory

- The school board role
  - Support the process
  - Ensure the steps are being completed and keep a spotlight on the work
  - Ask questions
- The district role
  - Conduct the process
  - Inform the school board along the way and at the end
  - Seek funding or policy approval from the school board as appropriate

THE FOUR STAGES OF THE INVENTORY PROCESS

Reflect and Plan → Conduct the Inventory → Analyze the Inventory → Make Recommendations
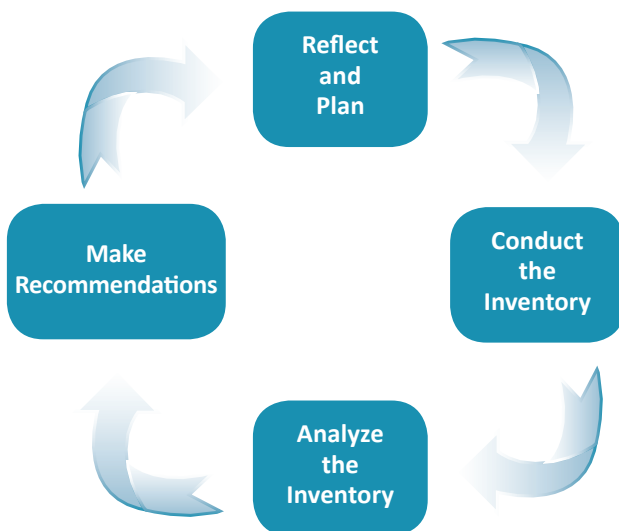
Reflect and Plan

"Reflect and Plan — District context

- What is the district and community context in which the inventory is being considered (e.g., implementation of new state standards and/or assessments, implementation of a new teacher evaluation system, parent or school board concern about testing load, new district or board leadership)?

- What are the objectives of the student assessment inventory?

- What will indicate to the district and the community that the process was a success?

Reflect and Plan — Scope

- What is the scope of the inventory? Which assessments should be included and excluded from the inventory? Based on this scope, what information is needed?

- What groups should be convened or surveyed to help provide answers (e.g., groups of teachers and other assessment users? How will they be convened (e.g., in focus groups by grade level or subject) and/or surveyed?

- Are there other districts with whom it would be useful to collaborate during this process?

Reflect and Plan — Responsibility for the work

- What individual or individuals are responsible for the success of this process?

- Will the district bring in an external party/consultant to assist with the inventory?

- Who will collect the information needed for the inventory table? How will they access this information?

- How will the district communicate to necessary parties that these individuals will be collecting this information?

Reflect and Plan — Stakeholders

- Identifying those stakeholders who are most critical in your district to the assessment inventory process.

- Given that assessment decisions have often been made in silos, it is particularly important that the team crosses offices and responsibilities to ensure an inclusive approach.

- A stakeholder representation table can be helpful for making sure that all stakeholders are represented and the effort is inclusive.

- Consider important subcategories or unique stakeholders such as early-career teachers, veteran teachers, teachers of English language learners, elementary parents, high school parents, middle school parents, parents of students with disabilities, school administrators, district administrators or community advocacy groups.

Example Stakeholder Representation Table					
	Elementary	Middle	High	Students with Disabilities	English Learners
Teachers					
School Administrators					
District Administrators					
Guidance Counselors/ School Test Coordinators					
Parents					
Students					
Community Members					

"Reflect and Plan — District context

A stakeholder representation table can be helpful for

- determining representation on a committee or taskforce

OR

- determining how input from each group will be gathered.

Exercise: Stakeholder Mapping (separate handout)

Reflect and Plan — Action and communication

- Who will be making the recommendations? Who will act on the results of the inventory?

- How will the results of the inventory be communicated to district policymakers (e.g., school board), school leaders, parents, students and the community?

Reflect and Plan — Assessment literacy

Many districts that have completed the assessment inventory process have noted that educators and other stakeholders need additional assessment literacy to:

- provide a baseline understanding of assessment purpose and use (e.g., the difference between summative, interim, and formative assessments);

- make informed decisions about the quality and alignment of the assessments; and

- know how interpret and use assessment results.

Reflect and Plan — Ongoing process

- The inventory cannot be a one-time event. Districts should regularly re-examine their assessments in light of changing district needs and improvements in available assessments.

- It is important to signal internally and to external stakeholders that all assessments will be regularly reviewed.

Recommendations:

- Create a multiyear timeline to regularly review assessments in the district. Reviews can be comprehensive or address specific content areas or grade levels.

- Publicize assessment reviews and opportunities for feedback on the district's assessment program so stakeholders understand the importance of the review and that their feedback is important.

- It is important to engage teachers and school leaders throughout the assessment inventory process. The inventory cannot be seen as something being "done to" or "done for" them.

- Teachers are the primary administrators, interpreters, and users of assessments. Their front-line perspectives are essential for "taking the temperature" on the assessment environment in the district and building the case for action.

- Teachers' experiences with assessments are important to identify disconnects between assessment purpose and use, understand how assessment results are being used, and developing action steps to make individual assessments and district's assessment program as a whole more effective and coherent.

- Achieve has produced a set of sample focus group and survey questions for teachers that can be adapted for local context. This resource also includes strategies to ensure that educators' voices are representative of the entire teaching force and incorporated into the inventory analysis and recommendations.

- Ensuring that teachers understand and support the recommendations that emerge from an inventory process — and if not, revisiting the recommendations — is also a crucial step in ensuring that the process leads to action that benefits students.

- Students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) are often tested much more frequently than the general student population.

- Involving district and school staff with strong knowledge of assessments used with these populations in the inventory process is highly recommended.

- While students with learning disabilities and speech-language disabilities represent a large portion of students with disabilities, there are a number of other categories of disability including students with intellectual disabilities, autism, blindness and other visual impairments, and deafness and other hearing impairments, to name just a few. Assessment approaches for these categories of students vary and reflect a need for differentiation in these approaches.

- Title I and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act both contain assessment requirements, which have separate assessment and accountability provisions, for ELLs.

- The ELL expertise in the district should be engaged in all phases of the inventory process and not just in portions that concern ELL student identification, the monitoring and exiting process, or the assessment of students' English language development.

Conduct the Inventory

Conduct the Inventory — Inventory Table

There are three types of questions being asked in the table:

- Basic information questions

- Use/purpose questions

- Operational questions

Some information to complete the table will not be directly available from test specifications and will require communicating with users of the assessment, especially with respect to issues of assessment use. A short survey or set of focus groups is strongly recommended to better understand how assessments are being used by multiple audiences.

	Name of Individual(s) completing the table Date			
	Optional Category: English Language Arts (e.g., grade level, subject)			
BASIC INFORMATION QUESTIONS	**Name of assessment**	(Example) PLACE ELA			
	Entity requiring assessment *state – SEA or other agency; district; or school*	District			
	Grade(s) tested	5-8			
	Course(s) or subjects tested	ELA			
	Which students are eligible or required to take assessment?	All students in these grades who are also required to take regular state assessment			
	Type of assessment *summative; interim/bench-mark; formative; diagnostic*	Benchmark			
	To which content standards is the assessment aligned? *(source of alignment verification)*	Common Core State Standards *(Independent review by Dr. Anne Jones using Student Achievement Partners Assessment Eval. Tool)*			
USE/PURPOSE QUESTIONS	**Intended purpose(s) of the assessment**	Measure student knowledge of ELA standards in reading comprehension			
	Intended use(s)[1] of the assessment	Predict ELA performance on state assessment and inform instructional practice			
	Users of the assessment	District assessment staff and teachers			
	Do users of the assessment use it for its intended use(s)?	Yes *(district)* No *(educators)*			
	To what degree do users of the assessment find it useful or not useful? *1 – not useful* *2 – somewhat useful* *3 – useful* *4 – very useful* **Explain why.**	*2 – district staff find it accurately predicts performance on state assessment, but that the results are not useful for educators to inform instruction*			

[1]*Federal and/or state accountability, district accountability, predictive, diagnostic, instructional uses (e.g., grouping), high school graduation, student promotion/retention, factor into course grades, college admissions, teacher evaluation, Advanced Placement credit, International Baccalaureate, English language proficiency, international comparisons, other uses.*

OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS

Type of administration	Paper booklet/scantron			
Item type(s)	Selected response			
Test administration time	150 minutes (includes 15 minutes of instructions read aloud by teacher)			
Testing window	10/1–10/15 and 3/1–3/15			
Test frequency	Given twice a year, in October and March			
Time between test administration and results to users	24 hours for raw data to district; 3 weeks for analysis			
Vendor	Tests4Schools			
Contract expiration date	4/1/2015			
Entity that holds contract	District			
Annual cost *(total and per student)*	$38,000 total, $19.00 per student (grades 5-8)			
Funding source(s)	Local funds			

- Stakeholder feedback is critical to inform the inventory process and promote transparency.

- Remember to use the Stakeholder Representation Table developed during the planning phase! The inventory table will also help identify stakeholder representation that is needed for the process.

Conduct the Inventory – Talking to Teachers

Example questions to ask teachers in a focus group or on a survey.

- What are some examples of district assessments that have been helpful/not helpful to your work, such as informing instructional practice, diagnosing student needs or predicting a student's later performance? How have they been helpful/not helpful?

- How have teachers been trained on the use of assessments?

- How useful are score reports for teachers? Do teachers share score reports with parents and students?

- What local assessments, if any, would you suggest the district continue to administer as it does today? Why?

- What local assessments, if any, would you suggest the district consider eliminating from the assessment program? Why?

Analyze the Inventory

Analyze the Inventory

In analyzing the inventory, it is critical to keep these things in mind.

- Develop a **student-level perspective** by looking across all assessments students take at a particular grade level or grade band, and then by particular student needs and characteristics.

- **Build toward recommendations** while reengaging with key stakeholders to review potential options and decision points.

- Identify assessments that the district will **continue** to administer, ensuring a shared understanding of their intended purpose(s) and actual use(s), and determining if any changes are necessary (e.g. to improve test quality, alignment or utility).

- Identify the assessments that may be **eliminated or where significant changes are necessary.**

Some contexts for deciding to keep, modify, or eliminate assessments

- Quality of an assessment (validity, reliability, alignment to standards)
- Frequency with which an assessment is administered
- Redundancy or overlap across assessments
- Higher assessment burden at select grades
- Maintaining trend information
- Underutilization of an assessment
- Cost
- Purpose and Use — Are there assessments that are not being used for their intended uses?

- Reporting — How clear and useful are score reports for teachers, parents, students, and the public?

Cost benefit

- Assessment cost
  What is the total and per student cost of the assessment?

- Administrative cost
  What administrative time is required to manage, administer, and implement the assessment?
  Personnel (e.g., district, principal, teachers, proctors)
  Resources (e.g., paper, technology)

- Opportunity cost
  What benefit, value, or resources must be forgone in order to implement an assessment?

    Examples

    Personnel needed to administer one assessment vs. another

    Technology used for assessment that is not available for instruction

- Analysis cost
  How much time and whose time is required to analyze the assessment results?

Make Recommendations

Make Recommendations

Based on the inventory analysis, what recommendations will the district make to provide an assessment system that is:

- High quality,
- Coherent and comprehensive, and
- Meeting the needs for instructional, diagnostic, accountability, and program evaluation purposes with the minimum amount of testing

Exercise: Assessment Scenarios (separate handout)

COMMUNICATION AND MESSAGING

Commit to transparency

- Communications and messaging should be woven throughout each phase of the assessment inventory process, not just at the end.

- A robust communications and messaging strategy to signal to key stakeholders — teachers, parents, students, school board members, community leaders, and media — that their concerns are being taken seriously and to ensure that the final decisions are not a surprise.

- A lack of familiarity with assessments can leave audiences confused. To counter this confusion, districts must develop clear and consistent messaging that explains assessments effectively to audiences unfamiliar with education issues.

- Publicly report the results of the assessment inventory, recommendations, and actions taken.

Develop the general message framework

- Determine the central message. What are the goals for releasing the results?

For example, "Address concerns about overtesting by reviewing all tests and making decisions about which ones are most valuable to teachers, parents, and students."

- Identify three key high-level messages to deliver in support of the central message (e.g., tests help teachers make decisions about how best to help students) and develop supporting talking points, as appropriate, for each of the three high-level messages.

- Building on the three key message, what additional messages do you want to communicate to specific audiences. (start with the allies and opposition groups).

- Prioritize the identified audiences as HIGH, MEDIUM, or LOW based on their importance to achieving the district's goals.

- Create an audience profile for each relevant group, determining if they (1) support the effort already, (2) are inclined to support it, (3) have no opinion or knowledge (likely a high number early in the process), (4) are inclined to oppose it, or (5) are opposed.

- Map messages for each audience. Using the audience profiles developed above, customize the messages and talking points as appropriate for each audience, starting with the HIGHs that are 1s or 2s.

- Develop a communications and messaging plan that is aligned with the overall assessment inventory process.

Identify key leaders

- Identify an individual or two to take the lead in developing and implementing the assessment inventory process.

- Identify who will be the spokesperson(s) for results of the assessment inventory?

Measure progress

- Measuring progress is essential to gauge how well the process is going and what changes should be made.

- No campaign ever plays out as predicted, so the adjustments made along the way can make the difference between winning and losing.

- To keep efforts on track:
  - Meet periodically with key leaders (monthly to start) to evaluate the effectiveness of communications efforts to date (lessons learned sessions);
  - Apply lessons to adjust messaging, media, and audience focus as needed; and
  - Share the district's experiences with other districts, the state education agency, local media, etc.

Assessment Inventory and Related Resources

For more information and resources:
www.achieve.org/assessmentinventory

Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts
http://www.achieve.org/assessmentinventory

Student Assessment Inventory overview
http://www.achieve.org/publications/student-assessment-inventory-overview

Sample teacher, parent, and student focus group and survey materials
http://www.achieve.org/publications/listening-teachers-sample-focus-group-and-survey-materials

http://www.achieve.org/publications/listening-parents-sample-focus-group-and-survey-materials

Student Achievement Partners assessment evaluation tools
http://www.achieve.org/publications/listening-students-sample-focus-group-and-survey-materials

Support in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

SEC. 1202. STATE OPTION TO CONDUCT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AUDIT

Audit State assessment systems and ensure that local educational agencies audit local assessments (not less than $1,500,000 per State)

- purpose for which the assessment was designed and the purpose for which the assessment is used and legal authority for the administration of the assessment;

- how teachers, principals, other school leaders, and administrators use assessment data to improve and differentiate instruction

- the timing of release of assessment data

- the extent to which assessment data is presented in an accessible and understandable format for all stakeholders

- opportunities, resources, and training to review assessment results and make effective use of assessment data

- distribution of technological resources and personnel necessary to administer assessments

- the amount of time teachers spend on assessment preparation and administration

- the assessments that administrators, teachers, principals, other school leaders, parents, and students, if appropriate, do and do not find useful

- other information as appropriate

Leveraging ESSA Funds to Support Fewer Assessments – Education Secretary's letter to Chief State School Officers on Feb. 2, 2016

- States and districts may be able to use current Federal formula grant funds to conduct assessment audits in order to take stock of the full range of assessments currently being administered to students and to improve the use of the results from high-quality assessments so that educators and families can better understand student learning needs and help them make progress.

- A State might use State assessment funds available under section 6111 of the ESEA to conduct an audit, in collaboration with educators, of its statewide assessment system or to assist its districts in conducting audits of local systems.

- A district might use ESEA Title II-1A funds, consistent with the results of its local needs assessment, to conduct assessment audits designed to improve the quality of instruction and to help schools recruit and retain highly qualified teachers by reducing unnecessary or low-quality testing, thereby making their schools more attractive places to work.

- A State or district might use Title II-A funds to support educators working together to analyze assessment data to improve teaching and learning. For example, working in professional learning communities, groups of teachers and school leaders might work together to examine the purpose of assessments, learn how to interpret the results of assessments in order to better understand student strengths and weaknesses, and then discuss how to use the data to improve classroom instruction and student outcomes.

NEXT STEPS AND REMAINING QUESTIONS

- Beginning with the end in mind, when would you like to have a revised assessment system in place based on the results of the assessment inventory?

- Working backwards from that point, when would recommendations or policy changes have to be made?

- Continue working backwards to identify key milestones required to complete the inventory process. Some of these key milestones might include completion of basic assessment information, completion of user feedback (e.g., from surveys, interviews, focus groups, forums, etc.), analysis of the inventory information and feedback, and recommendations.

- What will be your immediate next step?

- Are there any questions that have not been addressed?