



Education  
Healthcare  
Public Services

# Real Solutions for Improving Assessment





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#### **Our Mission**

The **AFT** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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# Letter from Randi Weingarten



We know that too many students in our public schools are over-tested and too often endure mandated test prep because of the outsized role of large-scale standardized assessments.

For more than two decades, our public schools have been subject to test-and-punish accountability that discourages educational innovation, demoralizes teachers, narrows instruction and, most importantly, fails to address the needs of children, particularly the most disadvantaged.

Teachers have been forced to abandon what their training and experience tells them is best practice, and the joy of teaching and learning—which should be a driving force in our schools—is lessened or even extinguished.

Assessments should first and foremost be about supporting student learning and providing teachers with data that helps inform their practice. Although there is a growing understanding that we need better assessment systems that build the capacity of educators and schools to improve student knowledge and skills, students still spend way too much time preparing for and taking assessments that fail to authentically represent the skills and abilities we want students to develop.

Although an entire overhaul of the federal law<sup>1,2</sup> is required to empower the transformative changes<sup>3</sup> to accountability and assessment practices we need in states and districts, there are *real solutions* that can be enacted in the short- to mid-term at the classroom, school, district and state levels. These are changes that cannot only lessen the damage of current standardized assessment practices while large-scale change is being advocated for and worked toward at the federal level—they can actually *improve* teaching and learning. The AFT—on our own and with allies, and in the context of Congress’ realities—is working to change federal education law so that what students need to know and be able to do drives the law, not high-stakes testing.

This document highlights the stories of AFT affiliates that are working toward these types of changes; we are sharing them with the hope these examples can help AFT members, leaders and like-minded advocates start to identify ways they can push for improved assessment practices within their sphere of influence.

1 This April 2023 brief from the Learning Policy Institute describes three ways that federal executive action, in the absence of a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act can help states realize their visions for more meaningful assessments:

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/developing-assessment-systems-federal-support-brief>

2 More Teaching Less Testing Act

<https://bowman.house.gov/press-releases?ID=338B9D62-B5AF-4DE9-9468E6061405D154>

3 There have been many papers that have made the case that our current system does not achieve what it purportedly sets out to do, and that there is a better way forward.

[www.nciea.org/blog/school-accountability-is-broken/](http://www.nciea.org/blog/school-accountability-is-broken/)

<https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Educational%20Accountability%203.0.pdf>

As you read about the impressive progress that has been made, you will see some commonalities across the examples:

First, the solutions that make public schools stronger and help children thrive:

- Are grounded in time, tools, trust and training for educators;
- Are done in collaboration with teachers, families, and the community; and
- Can be sustained, integrated and scaled.

Second, that AFT affiliates working toward real solutions in their states and districts have used one or more of these key strategies:

- **Engaging in legislative fights** that stop the introduction of unnecessary new assessments.
- **Pushing for assessment audits** to gain a shared understanding among stakeholders of what tests are being given, to whom, and for what reason.
- **Prioritizing formative assessment practices and assessment literacy**, especially for newer and alternatively certified teachers who may need additional supports.
- **Collaborating to promote experiential learning** to provide students with more engaging and deeper learning opportunities.
- **Engaging members and the community** in ways that are meaningful and aspirational.
- **Creating clear education campaigns** that convey the impact of current policy and practices to parents and legislators.

Throughout this report, you will find references to resources you may find helpful. They address what a better system would look like, how other countries approach assessment, and recommendations for actions the various levels of government should take. There are also several free tools that can help you conduct an audit, review current assessments, incorporate performance assessments and more.

At the AFT biennial convention in 2022, thousands of AFT delegates from local and state unions across the country voted to support the resolution *Equity Through Culturally Responsive, Balanced Assessment Systems*. This document is one result. I am proud that AFT members continue to push for changes to assessment and accountability that will improve teaching and learning. I am also grateful to AFT's Improving Assessment Working Group for articulating our values and living the examples shared here.

*Randi Weingarten*  
AFT President

# Real solutions for improving assessment are grounded in professional knowledge and student experience, and rest on several core values:

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- Centering and supporting students must be at the core of all learning and assessment practices.
- Assessment *for* learning is more important than assessment *of* learning.
- Teaching and assessment are inextricably linked—to be teaching *is* to be assessing, to be constantly checking for student learning.
- Formative assessment processes are the most valuable type of assessment because they enable students and teachers to respond to and support learning in a continuous feedback loop, as it is developing, to ensure that learning goals are met and to make adjustments to instruction as needed. Formative assessment must be integrated into the entire learning process and responsive to each child’s individual learning trajectory.
- Teachers must be confident in their content, pedagogy, and in the science of learning and development. This begins in high-quality teacher preparation. When teachers are not yet prepared (or are unsupported), we have a collective responsibility to assist these teachers and their students.
- Strong, balanced assessment systems reflect a rich vision of student learning as described in disciplinary standards and reflected in high-quality curriculum and ambitious teaching.<sup>4</sup>
- True accountability is shared and is centered on supporting and improving, not testing and punishing.
- The origins<sup>5</sup> of standardized testing were rooted in racist ideology, the negative consequences of which continue to this day.<sup>6</sup> Bias in measurement and sorting, reduced access to a well-rounded curriculum, and learning time lost to test preparation disproportionately impact students of color, economically disadvantaged students, English learners, special education students and those in under-resourced schools.
- All students deserve a high-quality, culturally responsive curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments<sup>7</sup> that reflect and support deep learning.
- All students should feel their strengths have value and that they have an opportunity to be assessed on their strengths.
- Teacher-designed evaluations of student performance have an integral place in any assessment system. Beyond the classroom, teacher voice, experience and judgment are valuable and should routinely inform school, district and state testing and assessment policies.
- Assessment literacy—understanding terminology, differentiating types of assessment from formative assessment practices to grades to standardized tests, and interpreting results—is a collective responsibility that must be supported by school districts and states with time, transparency and family-friendly resources.
- Over-testing contributes to the deprofessionalization of teachers, which in turn contributes to teacher recruitment and retention challenges.

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4 Ambitious Teaching and Equitable Assessment: A Vision for Prioritizing Learning, Not Testing  
[www.aft.org/ae/fall2021/shepard](http://www.aft.org/ae/fall2021/shepard)

5 What you need to know About Standardized Testing

[www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/02/01/need-to-know-about-standardized-testing](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/02/01/need-to-know-about-standardized-testing)

6 Gadfly on the Wall Blog: The Racist Origins of Standardized Testing Still Matter  
<https://nepc.colorado.edu/blog/racist-origins>

7 Advocates’ Guide to Demanding Racially & Culturally Inclusive State Assessments  
<https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Inclusive-Assessments-Final.pdf>

# The Challenges and Consequences of Current Assessment Practices

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Assessment has long been and continues to be a contentious issue, especially when it comes to standardized tests that are linked to high-stakes accountability decisions. However, there is widespread consensus on two major points: measuring student learning matters; and the policy world has yet to get it right.

For those who started school before 2001 and don't work in schools, it is hard to understand the full extent of the effects the No Child Left Behind Act had on state and district policies, and subsequently on changes in schools and teaching practices.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law in 1965, is at its core a civil rights law meant to increase educational opportunity for traditionally underserved groups through targeted federal funding. When ESEA was reauthorized in 2001 under the name No Child Left Behind, it was largely seen as a step toward equal access and full opportunity. NCLB introduced the requirement for states to disaggregate test scores at the school level for subgroups of students—for the first time there was a new kind of evidence to show the adverse impact of unequal opportunities on traditionally underserved populations, particularly students from low-income households and Black and brown students.

The AFT and other civil rights and education groups are still committed to ensuring that every student and every student group within each school is progressing academically.

However, NCLB's testing policies have also had a lot of other effects that go beyond shining a light on inequity, and those effects have disproportionately and negatively impacted the learning experiences of Black and brown students.

The critiques of state and district standardized tests and how they are used are many, and have been written about extensively. They include:

- The inordinate amount of time that is taken away from teaching and learning that instead goes to test-taking and mandated test-prepping.
- The disruption to other classes and the school when tests are given, which can easily span weeks at a time; this includes classes using substitutes regularly so licensed teachers can proctor the exams, closing media centers and loss of access to computers, and more.
- The massive spending diverted from providing schools needed resources for things like art and music, smaller class sizes and school nurses.
- The increased stress<sup>8</sup> levels during assessment periods.
- The narrowing of curriculum that comes from mandated test preparation, and less time and fewer resources to support a well-rounded and culturally relevant curriculum.
- Use of tests to do things they were never designed to do, such as guide day-to-day instruction, rate teachers and determine school closings.

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8 The Psychological Toll of High-Stakes Testing  
[www.edutopia.org/article/psychological-toll-high-stakes-testing](http://www.edutopia.org/article/psychological-toll-high-stakes-testing)

- In a survey conducted by Hart Research for AFT's Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force, more than 80 percent of teachers and paraprofessionals cited less standardized testing among actions that would improve staff recruitment and retention.<sup>9</sup>
- The use of high-stakes accountability based on test scores has distorted responses to those test scores in ways that undermine rather than enhance teaching and learning in schools.

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9 Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: What America Must Do to Attract and Retain the Educators and School Staff Our Students Need  
[www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/taskforcereport0722.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/taskforcereport0722.pdf)



# There Is a Better Way

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## **Move toward balanced assessment systems that value formative assessment practices.**

So many of the negative effects of standardized tests stem from the accountability systems of which they are a part. Accountability should be designed for enhancing student outcomes by implementing targeted and planned supports that build the capacity of educators and schools to improve student knowledge and skills. Instead, we have accountability systems focused on punishing results, which only snowballs the myopic emphasis on the next cycle of testing. A balanced assessment system situated in a well-designed accountability framework that uses multiple measures of school and student success would use state tests for limited purposes, like identifying schools or districts that may need increased support and improvement (particularly for traditionally underserved students)—because large-scale standardized tests don't provide information that is detailed enough to be able to identify what supports or improvements are needed for individual students, nor do they provide insight on the type of support needed at the classroom or school level.

Well-designed, balanced assessment systems integrate assessment with teaching and learning to ensure a comprehensive understanding of student progress, providing information that can inform teaching and learning, as well as decision-making.

The most valuable assessments are done regularly by skilled educators and grounded in formative assessment practices (e.g., attending to what students say, write, do or make), and using a variety of ways to elicit evidence of learning. Only formative assessment has the primary purpose of directly improving teaching and learning. This requires thoughtful investment and a vision of what teaching and learning should be. Teachers need to learn about formative assessment as an integrated part of teaching and learning in pre-service, be supported with meaningful professional learning opportunities, and be provided ample planning time. And school day structures need to be reimaged to allow teachers time to collaborate on curriculum, instruction and classroom assessment—particularly formative assessment. Teachers need opportunities to learn together and to problem-solve together.

And students need opportunities to demonstrate their abilities to organize information, to solve problems, to frame and conduct investigations, to analyze and synthesize data, and to apply learning to new situations. By using high-quality, relevant and timely formative assessment practices, teachers can modify, refine and individualize instruction to better meet students' needs.

**Teaching and assessment are inextricably linked: To be teaching is to be assessing, to be constantly checking for student learning.** It is assessing how engaged students are at any given moment, assessing how they are processing material, assessing whether they can take concepts and information and use it in new contexts and authentic tasks. This assessment is done by skilled educators and can include noticing what is happening in the classroom, formative assessment, exit quizzes, mid-unit quizzes and end-of-term summative assessments. It happens through project-based learning and looking at a variety of evidence, including essays, oral presentations, demonstrations, and multimedia presentations like a podcast or video or school exhibit.

Educators value assessment, including high-quality common assessments. To get to a balanced system that informs practice, tracks student growth and informs policy decisions, assessments at all levels—from classroom to state—must be able to work together in a comprehensive, coherent and continuous system.

In a new National Academy of Education volume,<sup>10</sup> the authors provide a “reimagined” definition of balanced assessment systems in the first chapter:

Balanced assessment systems and practices are intentionally designed to provide feedback to students and information for teachers to support ambitious and equitable instructional and learning opportunities. This type of assessment system facilitates educator engagement in high-leverage professional practices such as quality formative assessment to support ambitious and equitable teaching. Assessments outside of the classroom, at the district and state level, provide aggregate data to policymakers and education leaders, allowing for the monitoring of educational opportunities and support for high-quality instruction indirectly through the provision of appropriate curricular resources and professional development opportunities.

The chapter goes on to say balanced assessment systems are the “unicorns of educational assessment” because they are rarely seen.

But even incremental changes can help move us in the right direction by:

- **Supporting teachers’** use of research-proven formative assessment practices to provide evidence of student learning to support ongoing instructional decision-making.
- **Engaging students** in ongoing self-assessment opportunities of their own learning, along with peer and teacher feedback and support.
- **Providing parents and caregivers with regular information** about student progress toward learning goals.
- **Using rich common assessments** to support meaningful instructionally-focused conversations across classrooms.
- **Providing school and district leaders with data points** to inform resource allocation and educational interventions, with critical conversations to determine whether removing any data points would meaningfully change decisions.

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10 Reimagining Balanced Assessment Systems  
<https://naeducation.org/new-report-reimagining-balanced-assessment-systems>

# What Can Be Done Now

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## **Conduct an audit to build a common understanding of current assessments.**

Schools and districts should engage in thoughtful examinations of assessments to identify redundancies or mismatches between curriculum and learning visions and assessment realities to help reduce assessment occasions and improve the quality of assessments (e.g., reduce reliance on multiple-choice items only).

It's hard to know what to change without a good, shared understanding of what you've got. A good place to start is often an audit,<sup>11,12</sup> or inventory, of tests being given at the state and district levels. (This can be done at the school or classroom level as well.) An audit collects a large amount of data to be analyzed, but some key pieces include identifying each test being administered, and, for each test:

- Why it is being given;
- When it is given;
- Who takes it;
- How long it takes;
- What it measures;
- What its purpose is (for example, evaluate, predict, diagnose or provide instructionally useful information that educators can use to modify instruction); and
- What information is provided by it, to whom, and when.

Depending on location and context, this might mean working to have the state require each district to do an audit. Or it may be more realistic to start in your district. For example, the Cleveland Teachers Union suggested doing an assessment audit with the purpose of getting rid of any unnecessary district assessments, and the superintendent at the time thought it was a great idea. This started a collaborative labor-management process that had great success in cutting multiple standardized assessments being given in the district. The CTU worked collaboratively with the district, and it quickly became clear there were multiple overlapping assessments. Once the culling was done, more than a third of tests had been cut, going from 14 tests to 9. Teachers in grades 1-12 gained more instructional time from the change. Grade 7 teachers were estimated to have gotten back the most instructional time, at an average of more than 14 hours.

Once an inventory has been done, it can be used to guide decision-making.

Attention should be paid to things like whether there are overlapping purposes for assessments, whether there is a clear purpose delineated for each assessment—and whether that purpose is being realized. If a given assessment is meant to guide curricular decisions, is it helpful in doing so? If it is meant to give teachers and schools information on how well students are meeting specific state or district standards, is it doing this effectively? Does it provide information that is specific enough to inform decisions, and is it provided quickly enough so those decisions can be made?

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11 District Assessment Design Toolkit (includes spreadsheet template and implementation protocol)  
[www.nciea.org/library/district-assessment-design-toolkit](http://www.nciea.org/library/district-assessment-design-toolkit)

12 Finding the Right Mix: Adapting Toolkits to Support Assessment System Audits  
[www.nciea.org/blog/finding-the-right-mix](http://www.nciea.org/blog/finding-the-right-mix)

There should be a focus on identifying essential assessments that provide information that is valuable for making decisions—particularly instructional decisions at the classroom, school and district levels—assessments that will identify critical content and skills and have clear impact on student learning.

Once a full accounting of what assessments are being given, at what levels and for what purposes is complete, it is possible to look at what can be eliminated, shortened or otherwise modified. Many districts find that the testing burden is highest at the district, not state, level.

Such assessments should align with standards and reflect what the state and district say students should know and be able to do.

To learn about and access a free toolkit provided by the Center for Assessment to help with the audit process, go to [www.nciea.org/blog/finding-the-right-mix](http://www.nciea.org/blog/finding-the-right-mix).

## Illinois Federation of Teachers: A Comprehensive Campaign of Education, Engagement and Legislative Victories

The Illinois Federation of Teachers is focused on what Illinois students need from their schools: an educationally rich and challenging environment that is supportive and nurturing. Over the past 20 years, the IFT and its affiliates have worked to improve assessment practices in the state, and to challenge harmful practices. This has included issues regarding over-testing of students, overreliance on test prep, and harmful high-stakes accountability systems that led to students—especially Black and brown students—losing access to a well-rounded curriculum that includes the arts, physical education, and career and technical education coursework.

So, in 2021, when the Illinois State Board of Education announced its plan to have three standardized, high-stakes interim tests replace annual end-of-year testing for grades 3-8, the IFT quickly recognized this would cause more problems than the current once-a-year system. The new plan would:

- Cost hundreds of millions more than had already been spent (meaning less money for things like smaller class sizes, nurses, counselors and social workers).
- Divert even more precious time (from the type of instruction that leads to deep student learning) to additional testing and test preparation, including remedial, one-skill-at-a-time instruction, which in turn would risk widening educational disparities.
- Include more tests for the youngest learners in kindergarten, first and second grade, so they would be “ready” for high-stakes tests in third grade.

**IFT knew a successful campaign had to include families and the community, leverage member expertise and experience, and effectively educate decision-makers.**

To this end, the union leaned into strong member engagement activities and came together with a coalition of like-minded advocates from across Illinois, including family and special education organizations and assessment researchers. The IFT knew a key component of a successful campaign would be education—people outside classrooms needed a deeper understanding of the ways in which high-stakes testing in Illinois has been harming kids, negatively affecting teaching, and taking the joy out of learning. It would also have to offer a compelling vision of a better way—a balanced, equitable, and humane assessment system woven into culturally responsive curricula and pedagogy.

Some of this crucial education was done by IFT members via public testimony to the Illinois State Board of Education and to the Illinois General Assembly. Dr. Kelsey Clarkson, a member of the Peoria Federation of

Teachers, painted a picture of some of the logistical consequences of the current testing regime that leads to lost learning opportunities:

*Where I teach, silenced bells during testing means students are tardy to class—leading to lost learning time. Closing the library for testing space means lack of access to books, research materials and computers—leading to lost learning opportunity. And the spotty absences of students pulled for testing means I cannot keep my classes on a consistent pace – again leading to a loss in learning. These inconveniences are my personal experience at the secondary level, and I am sure they pale in comparison to the damage that such testing windows do to learning at younger grade levels.*

AFT Local 604 member Brian Jurinek also testified to the state board of education, calling on Illinois to “abandon its current plans and develop an assessment system that better meets the needs of our students, teachers and administrators.” He also shared how the AFT developed a professional learning course, “Reclaiming Assessment: Using a Balanced Classroom Assessment System to Strengthen Student Learning,” that directly aligns with the recommendations made to the state board by the Center for Assessment, saying “as someone who has enrolled in the course myself and is currently approved by my national union to provide professional learning for this course, I urge you to look through the course. This course is based on research and encourages powerful instructional and assessment practices that benefit all students.”

IFT’s quick mobilization was successful: The state board of education canceled its summer 2021 vote on its planned contract for interim assessments. And in May 2022, after being forced to consider feedback from educators, families and the community, it gave up its plans to shift to a high-stakes, three-test accountability model for grades 3-8.

The IFT has done much work and will continue its efforts to achieve a more balanced system of assessments that advances student learning and engagement:

- IFT continues its work with the coalition, undertaking legislator education and engagement.
- IFT introduced [successful legislation](#) that requires community input before districts purchase new local standardized tests and is amplifying the new law so local unions and communities can organize to address student over-testing.
- IFT supported coalition partner Illinois Families for Public Schools in passage of the [Too Young to Test Act](#), which prohibits the state from adding tests for grades K-2.
- IFT provides support to members of the Illinois State Assessment Review Committee as they provide recommendations to the General Assembly and state superintendent on how state testing contracts impact teaching and learning.
- IFT worked with the coalition to hold a successful national, virtual convening featuring educators and leading researchers Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, Dr. Scott Marion and Dr. Denisha Jones to paint a picture of what a balanced and humane assessment system could be.
- IFT provides professional learning to members through AFT’s “Reclaiming Assessment” as another way to engage members in our union’s campaign to improve Illinois’ assessment model and provide ways educators can improve assessment practices in their own classrooms. In addition, **AFT professional learning course materials on student learning objectives and assessment have been embedded into required principal and teacher evaluator training since 2016, with over 5,000 administrators and teachers being trained.**

## Deepen assessment literacy to build an understanding of various types of assessment practices and their utility.

Testing and assessment language is often inaccessible and jargony. It is not easy to communicate about testing and assessment in ways that make actionable sense to students, families, and the public at large. And beyond the basic understanding of how kids are doing, teachers and instructional leaders should understand the purpose of each assessment being administered (state, district, classroom) and how the assessments and results should be affecting instructional choices and planning.

Assessment literacy is foundational to effective teaching, yet most teachers receive little or no instruction in assessment literacy during their teacher preparation training.

Understanding assessment research and theory, as well as being able to analyze results and other data, helps teachers and schools to work to align school- or classroom-based assessments to their students and what the district and state require students to know and be able to do, as well as incorporate multiple and authentic measures of student learning. It also aids schools and teachers in helping key stakeholders make sense of standardized data alongside grades and other measures.

### AFT Professional Learning Course

The AFT professional learning course called “Reclaiming Assessment: Using a Balanced Classroom Assessment System to Strengthen Student Learning” (referenced above) is a graduate-level course that AFT members deliver in their states, often in collaboration with districts. The course deepens educators’ knowledge about data and assessment, uplifts the value and purpose of educators’ own classroom assessment practices, and builds awareness of the importance of addressing bias in assessment practices and using culturally responsive classroom assessments.

*“The ‘Reclaiming Assessment’ course has made me realize that assessment—when carried out and analyzed by both teacher and student—is just as important as instruction and an instrumental part of planning.”*

—Brandon Jamirson, Lincoln Middle School, Peoria, Ill.

### RESOURCE: Educational Assessment 101 for K-12 Teachers and Leaders

<https://sites.google.com/view/assessment101/home>

As the Center for Assessment says in the introduction to its assessment literacy professional learning modules: “[A] strong understanding of educational assessment is foundational to high-quality assessment practices in classrooms. An educator becomes assessment literate by mastering basic principles of sound assessment design, implementation, interpretation, and use to meet the diverse needs of all students.” The Center for Assessment’s online modules are free and self-paced, and participants can pick and choose which ones to focus on.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Educational Assessment 101 for K-12 Teachers & Leaders (Center for Assessment)  
<https://sites.google.com/view/assessment101/teacher-learning-modules>

## Engage members and the community to build power.

Parents and parent groups are great partners in efforts to improve assessment. Parents want to know that their children are learning what they need to know and be able to do, and parents also want to know how they can help. They want their kids to have rich, engaging learning experiences and to reduce time spent testing and lessen the stress their kids face from over-testing.

**Holding meetings with families is a great start**—help families and the community understand what is being taught, how and why. Then, explain state and district assessments—what helpful information they can provide, and what types of information cannot be gained from them—and how other methods of assessment given at the classroom level aid in both learning and understanding what has been learned. **A discussion of grading practices**, including new more equitable grading practices, or why some work may not receive a grade, can also be helpful.

**Public demonstrations of student learning**, such as presentations, speeches or other performances, can be effective in engaging families, and a great way for parents to see what their children are doing in school—and can serve as a good introduction to parents about the deeper learning that can happen when instruction is not required to be squarely focused on standardized assessments at the district and state levels.

### Building a Coalition in Houston

Houston's Community Voices for Public Education (CVPE) is a diverse coalition of parents, educators, students and community members who are united in their advocacy for great public schools for all students. What began in 2012 with the commitment of just two teachers and two parents is now a well-organized group of more than 2,500 parents, educators, students and community members.

The coalition, whose first focus was a campaign to reduce the harmful effects of the district's approach to standardized testing, was a powerful draw for teachers and parents who knew something was very wrong with how the public school system was serving their kids, but didn't necessarily know exactly what.

As CVPE co-founder Ruth Kravetz notes, assessments and the high-stakes associated with them "are a unifying issue" for parents, teachers and students who have been active participants in the coalition from the start.

The CVPE had its first win in 2012 when parents, teachers and students met individually with members of the Houston Independent School District's board and persuaded seven of the nine to adopt a resolution that 55 percent of Texas school districts had already approved. The resolution stated, in part, "an over-reliance on standardized, high-stakes testing ... is strangling our public schools and undermining any chance that educators have to transform a traditional system of schooling into a broad range of learning experiences that better prepares our students to live successfully and be competitive on a global stage."<sup>14</sup> While the resolution had no "teeth," it was evidence of the power of collective action and the determination of CVPE members.

Next, CPVE was able to get HISD to change its policy that students at every grade level from 3 to 8 had to pass the state standardized test to be promoted to the next grade. The district dropped the requirement for grades 4-7 to align with the state's requirement. CVPE has also worked with parents to promote their right to opt out of state assessments or STAAR tests in particular cases. As Kravetz notes, "Opting out isn't a goal. Having rich, meaningful instruction for all kids is."

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14 [www.houstoncvpe.org/past\\_issues](http://www.houstoncvpe.org/past_issues)

Since then, the fight has become much bigger than the assessment campaign that launched CVPE in 2012.

After a multi-year effort, which included 2015 and 2017 state laws designed to allow for a takeover, two court blocks, and many manipulated rule changes, the Texas Education Agency finally took over HISD in June 2023, against the wishes of the community.

The details are complex,<sup>15</sup> but the overall story is simple and not dissimilar from fights going on around the country.

Essentially the Republican-led Texas state government changed the rules and weaponized test scores to incentivize public school districts to partner with charter operators. HISD didn't cave, and the TEA responded by punishing schools in under-resourced neighborhoods.

The state would have you believe that Houston public schools were failing, and the takeover was a last-ditch effort to save the city's kids from their schools and teachers. Yet, as CVPE materials make clear, this was far from the case. In fact, at the time of the takeover, HISD was rated in the top half of Texas districts; had a B+ on the state accountability rating; and 94 percent of its 273 campuses were rated A, B, or C, and 35 percent were rated A.<sup>16</sup> The TEA was able to take over the entire district because of a single "failing" school.

Students across the district decided they wanted to join the effort to stop the takeover. They met at lunch to have discussions and talk to their classmates about student advocacy. They traveled to Austin to provide testimony and talk to news outlets. They wrote an op-ed together.

Parents and other community members have stood up and stood alongside educators and students, effectively delaying the takeover, but over time the more powerful state was able to override the will of the people, and quickly institute bad practices that have reversed some of the progress HISD made in the intervening years (the "failing" school that triggered the takeover in 2019 was already a "C" school by the time the takeover was initiated).

What has been highlighted are two very different competing visions for what it is to educate and assess kids. The fight against the takeover is a fight against narrow, scripted curriculum; ubiquitous assessment; and instruction that is focused on coverage of tested items, not actually teaching and learning.

In less than a year into the takeover, there have been drastic changes that have dismayed the community, including daily quizzes in every class for students in many schools. There have been "dismissals of award-winning school principals and teachers to the closure of school libraries and subsequent layoffs of librarians and custodians, a litany of allegations of chaos and fallout..."<sup>17</sup>

The fight continues, with teachers, parents, students, legislators and other community members and organizations working together to save Houston's public schools.

The Houston Federation of Teachers has been a partner of CVPE since its inception, and the leaders of the two organizations have been working closely on the fight against the state's takeover. Each of them sees

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15 The real story behind the state takeover of Houston public schools  
[www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/03/27/real-story-takeover-houston-public-schools](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/03/27/real-story-takeover-houston-public-schools)

16 How Did the Takeover Happen? (Community Voices for Public Education)  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t6vPXfTyWU20CtYb1OHvgncKm3Zk4MIq\\_8xJRKDISAs/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t6vPXfTyWU20CtYb1OHvgncKm3Zk4MIq_8xJRKDISAs/edit)

17 Houston area officials call for end of Texas Education Agency's takeover of Houston ISD  
[www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/education-news/hisd/2024/05/30/489163/houston-area-officials-call-for-end-of-texas-education-agencys-takeover-of-houston-isd/](http://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/education-news/hisd/2024/05/30/489163/houston-area-officials-call-for-end-of-texas-education-agencys-takeover-of-houston-isd/)



the other's organization as critically important. Kravetz says that teachers who join CVPE also join HFT if they aren't already members because "we've seen what's happened when teachers don't have unions to support them." HFT President Jackie Anderson, too, knows the power of diverse coalitions working toward the common good. She says there is no way they could mount a strong fight without parents and without CVPE. Then she says, twice, for good effect, "there's absolutely no way [HFT] could do this alone."

When asked how CPVE became the organization that was able to galvanize so many, co-founder Ruth Kravetz said it was a combination of two things—starting with some of the "most amazing people" she's ever met combined with the power of "information sharing, community building and basic organizing." The most basic thing, she says, is that "if you want people to do something, you have to ask them ... [T]he biggest mistake is people don't ask."

## Florida Education Association educates families and legislators

One of the biggest disconnects when it comes to standardized testing is that most people outside the school setting don't truly understand the extent to which testing affects teaching and learning, whether a given student is taking a test or not. So, the Florida Education Association set out to help parents and legislators better understand the disruptions to students and their learning. One piece of their education campaign was a compelling infographic that helps visualize the loss and disruption to instructional time students experience.

It includes visuals for information like why a "90-minute" test takes much longer<sup>18</sup> and how the average student had spent more than 27 days taking tests the past year, and additionally experienced disrupted instruction for parts of 58 days. The flier was used with legislators and shared with their education coalition partners to help explain what really happens during state standardized testing and why the test times listed are not the actual time the tests take away from learning. It sparked good discussions about the logistical arrangements and minimizing testing, and they were able to get into statutes a maximum percent of learning time that students would be allowed to test. FEA also got support for testing coordinators in the schools as opposed to shifting much of the testing coordination to guidance counselors.

The most powerful part of the infographic<sup>19</sup> showed the total school disruption that schools experience for days and weeks at a time while tests are being given. It shows a high school wing in which not a single classroom is free from:

- Test-taking;
- A substitute teacher;
- A repeated lesson for students who were out for testing;
- Multiple classes or grades being displaced into a single room; and
- A computer-based class displaced for testing.

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18 The Center for Assessment's Chris Domaleski shares a good analogy in a blog on reducing testing time, "Recognizing the broader ways that testing can impede or interfere with instruction reveals that examination time is just one part of a larger issue. It may be useful to think of total testing time like air travel. For example, recently I traveled from Boston to Chicago. While the actual flight was only about two hours, I had to budget nearly six hours of total 'door-to-door' travel time. That time includes driving to the airport, parking, getting through security, waiting at the gate, and then taking the train downtown upon arrival." [www.nciea.org/blog/educational-assessment-can-we-reduce-testing-time](http://www.nciea.org/blog/educational-assessment-can-we-reduce-testing-time)

19 See the full FEA infographic here: [www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2024/FEA\\_testing\\_Infographic.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2024/FEA_testing_Infographic.pdf)

# FLORIDA'S STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS SUFFER FROM THE STATE'S TESTING MADNESSES

Schools across Florida are dealing with the disruption created by the increasing number of high-stakes standardized tests required by state law. This graphic looks at the loss of and disruption to instructional time students experience in Florida's toxic testing system.

## TOO MANY tests

Seventeen different state-mandated tests are administered to Florida high school students alone — many that are given in multiple sessions over multiple days. In a school with 2,200 students this means more than 26,000 tests. Tests with (\*) will be eliminated by the Governor's executive order.

1. FSA Writing / 9th grade
2. FSA Writing / 10th
3. FSA Writing \* / 11th
4. FSA English Language Arts / 9th
5. FSA English Language Arts / 10th
6. FSA English Language Arts\* / 11th
7. FSA Math (Algebra I) / 9th-12th (mixed)
8. FSA Math (Algebra II) / 10th-12th (mixed)
9. FSA Math (Geometry) / 9th-12th (mixed)
10. Algebra I EOC retake / 9th-12th (mixed)
11. Biology EOC / 9th or 10th (mixed)
12. US History / 11th
13. FSA Writing Practice / 9th-11th (mixed)
14. FSA ELA Practice / 9th-11th (mixed)
15. FSA Math Practice / 9th-12th (mixed)
16. FCAT 2.0 retakes / 11th-12th (mixed)
17. ACT Plan or PSAT / 10th



### Why a "90-minute" test takes more than 90 minutes

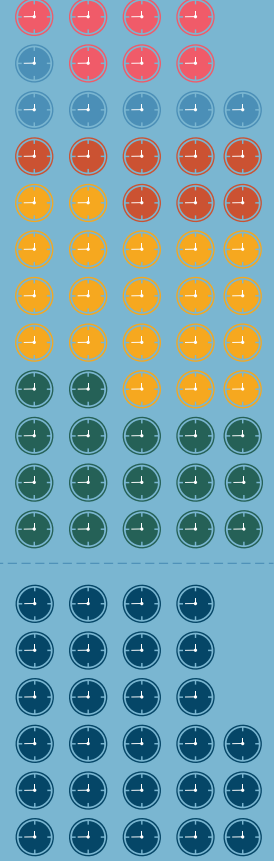
- All tests, regardless of length require pre-test administration: **Up to 30 minutes**
- + passing out reference tables, calculators, pencils, papers
- + reading instructions
- + having students sign security agreements
- + logging into computers
- + waiting for networks to load

- Actual test length: **60-180 minutes** (varies by test)
- + Students are also allowed to request additional time to finish tests

*Note: Tests with multiple pages represent the associated progress monitoring tests given. Commissioner Stewart has recommended making these progress monitoring tests optional. For most schools and students these tests are already optional and the districts have opted to use them.*

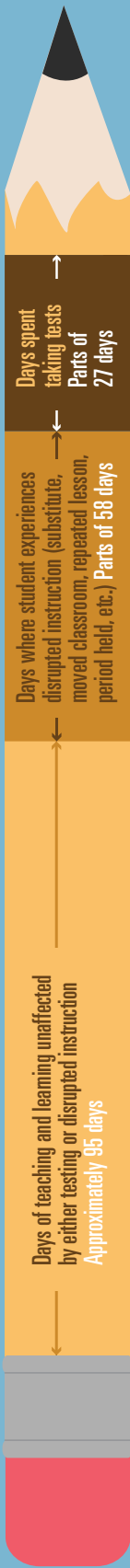
## LEAD TO lost classroom time

In addition to parts of 27 days a year each student loses to directly taking tests, the sheer volume of tests and the complexity of scheduling them leads to an even greater amount — parts of 58 days — of **disrupted instruction** for each student throughout the year.



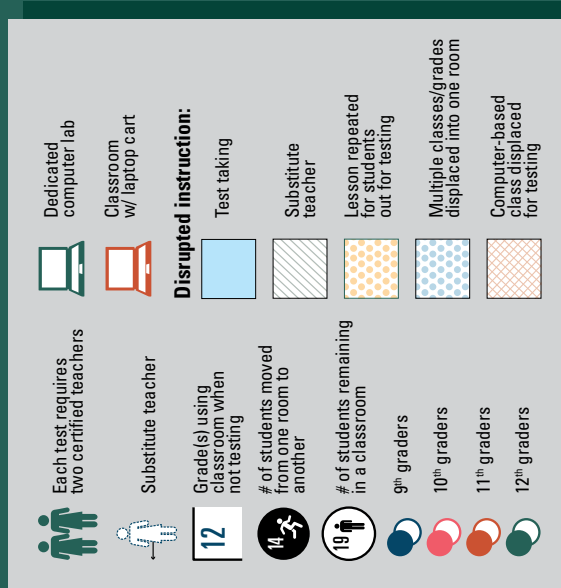
### Significant portion of school day disrupted by:

- Test taking
- Teacher displaced for test admin; substitute teacher
- Lesson repeated for students taken out for testing
- Computer-based class displaced for testing
- Multiple classes displaced, meeting in single classroom, gym, etc.
- Period held for allowed additional testing time

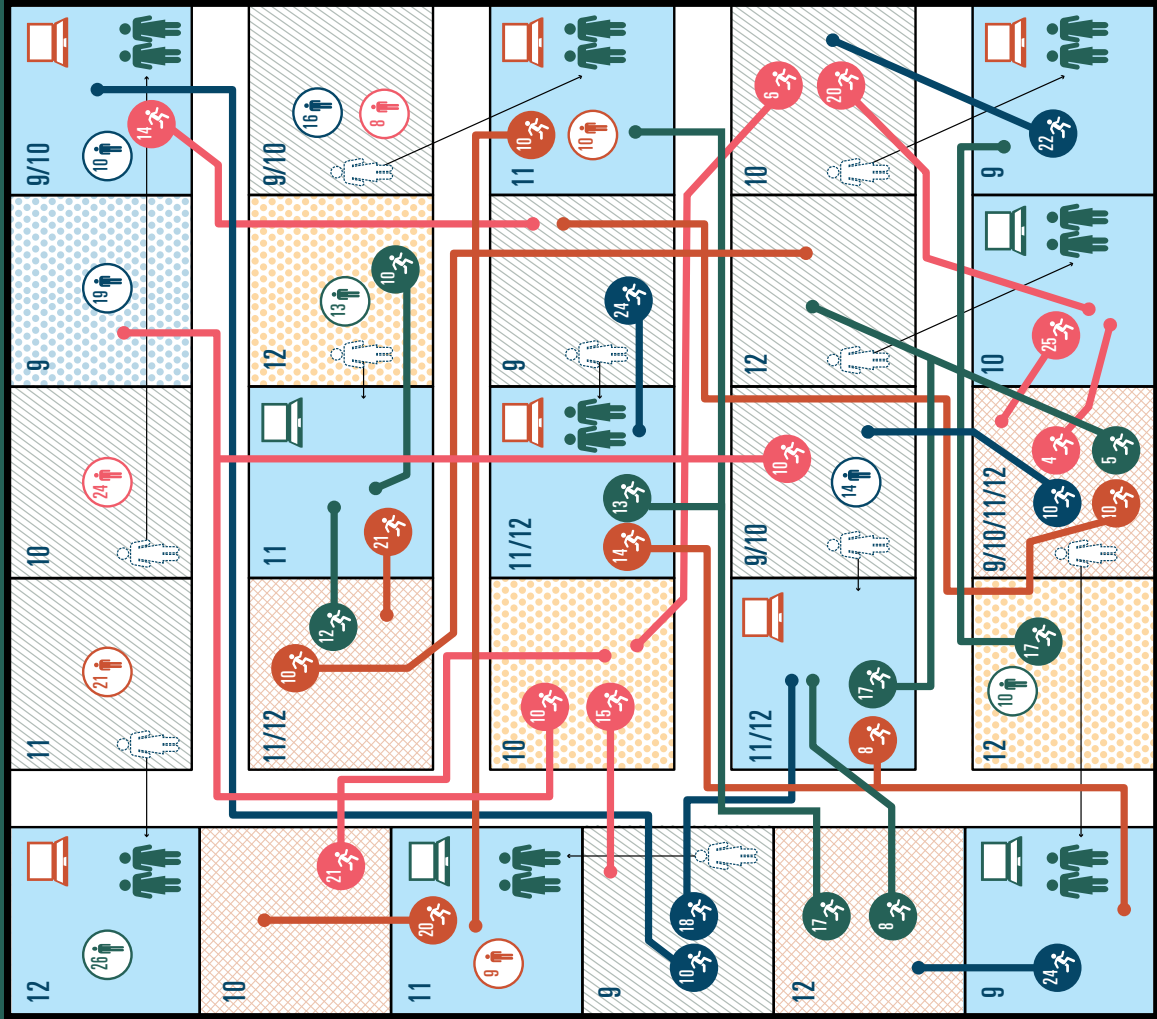


# AND TOTAL SCHOOL **disruption**

Students taking tests are not the only ones affected during the scores of testing (and progress monitoring) periods throughout the year. Most schools experience almost total disruption for days and weeks at a time while tests are given (*see sample high school wing, right*). An influx of substitute teachers (two certified teachers are required for each test), tests that span multiple classes and technology limitations all lead to disrupted instruction for virtually all students in a school.



**NOTE:** The graphic representations and estimates in this infographic are based on the experiences of an average sized high school in St. Lucie County with 2,200 students. The school rated an "A" or "B" each of the last five years — is at capacity and has an above average technology infrastructure (network capacity, total number of computers, etc.). **Schools with less technology face even greater disruption.**



## Use experiential learning to deepen learning, and use authentic measures of student learning.

Assessing student learning is essential—and to do it meaningfully requires using different methods, with an emphasis on authentic assessments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by doing. Contrasted to bubble tests, some examples of broader and more diverse assessments of learning are:

- Capstone projects;
- Exhibitions;
- Speeches;
- Presentations;
- Podcasts, newspapers or fliers;
- Oral exams;
- Oral defense of project, paper, or solution to a problem; and
- Student-led conferences.

There is growing momentum for this kind of teaching and learning, but few places have been able to implement it at a systemwide level. Teachers and students need structures and support to ensure that curriculum, instruction and learning are all aligned toward these more authentic measures of student learning. The infrastructure for performance-based demonstrations of knowledge and skills in public education is perhaps most fully realized in career and technical education programs of study leading to industry-approved credentials. But experiential learning and project-based assessment can be incorporated at all grade levels. That’s why providing all students with opportunities to learn by doing is an essential strategy in the AFT’s ongoing efforts to support real solutions for kids and communities.<sup>20,21</sup>

### RESOURCE: Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment

<https://www.mciea.org/resources>

The Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), which was formed in 2016, is a partnership of eight Massachusetts public school districts and their local teacher unions committed to developing a better way to assess students and schools, in service of increasing achievement for all students. AFT Massachusetts is very pleased with the work of the consortium, as well as the collaborative practices that have been adopted. As the former director of policy for AFT Massachusetts, Daniel Murphy, puts it: “This is good work being spearheaded by teachers and union leaders, along with superintendents and districts”—a recipe for successfully improving student learning outcomes. The consortium’s website is worth visiting for anyone looking to integrate performance assessments into their work. It has:

- **An array of valuable, free tools and resources**, including templates, rubrics, checklists and planning sheets;
- **A performance assessment task bank** with performance assessments for math, English language arts, science, and history/social studies, tagged with grade level and standards covered; and
- A brief that introduces design elements for **anti-racist performance tasks**.

20 Real Solutions for Kids and Communities: Experiential Learning  
[www.aft.org/realsolutions/experiential-learning](http://www.aft.org/realsolutions/experiential-learning)

21 Growth Mindset and Project-Based Learning Lesson Plans  
<https://sharemylesson.com/collections/growth-mindset-project-based-learning>

## Cleveland Emphasizes Experiential Learning in Its Demonstrations of Learning Pilot

In summer 2021, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) used federal COVID-19 relief funds to incorporate project-based learning into their summer programs. It was a success—the students loved the style of learning, and attendance was high. Following that program’s success, district leaders decided they wanted those opportunities to be incorporated into the regular school day. Recognizing the importance of support and input from those who would be leading the learning, a project-based and experiential learning pilot program called Demonstrations of Learning (DOL) was designed collaboratively by the school district and the Cleveland Teachers Union (CTU). As a result, for the 2023-24 school year, teachers in the 12 pilot schools integrated complex tasks that provided authentic opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in joyful and creative environments.

Key to the pilot was the support built in, as well as the freedom to “fail.”

- Each school had a designated DOL “champion,” in the school who would work to support teachers in planning and executing these authentic tasks.
- Educators had access to a computer program that made it simple to take a project shell and customize and flesh it out for their students and the standards they needed to target.
- There was also a district staff person assigned to work with and support the champions.
- There was a policy of “safe practice.” This meant that there was an understanding that while principals and teachers should expect support and coaching, there would be no evaluations (unless educator-requested) during the week of a scheduled Demonstration of Learning. The pilot was built on the idea that if innovation is to flourish, people need to know that the iterative process is valued and there wouldn’t be repercussions for trying something that didn’t go as planned.
- Teachers also had optional PD available before the school year or on Saturdays during the year, paid at the in-service workshop rate.

Each task was to align to CMSD’s Vision for Learning and Teaching by focusing on complex tasks that are worthy of productive struggle and allow for authentic opportunities to demonstrate learning, and students would be expected to articulate their ideas and present, explain or defend their product design.

Examples of these projects span a wide spectrum to meet both student interests and state standards—from elementary students creating fire escape plans based on measurement concepts, to high school students analyzing policies to address homelessness. One eighth-grade class analyzed different grading systems used by teachers in the building—their demonstration of learning even led their teacher to change their practice!

Students demonstrated their learning to parents, community members, teachers and fellow students, whether it was a speech, a slide presentation, a podcast or some other medium. Educators were asked to complete one project but, according to Jillian Ahrens, Ohio Master Teacher and CTU vice president, “many decided to complete more as it ignited engagement and the joy of learning with their classes.”

In summer 2023, the mayor of Cleveland appointed a new chief executive officer to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Unfortunately, the new CMSD leadership will not continue the program after the memorandum of understanding expires at the end of the 2023-24 school year. Although this program was short-lived, Cleveland teachers and students in the pilot have demonstrated the transformative potential of project-based learning and demonstrations of that learning. Many teachers who were introduced to this learning and assessment modality are committed to having it remain part of their practice, even though the program is no longer active. The loss of the program highlights the power of meaningful labor-management

collaboration and offers yet another example of how difficult it is to make progress at a systems level. However, despite temporary setbacks, CTU and its members—like educators and their unions across the country—continue to work toward student-centered learning opportunities where the students can authentically demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

To view more resources and information on the Demonstrations of Learning program, go to [www.clevelandmetroschools.org/cms/lib/OH01915844/Centricity/Domain/160/2023/MOU\\_SY23-24\\_DoL\\_Final.pdf](http://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/cms/lib/OH01915844/Centricity/Domain/160/2023/MOU_SY23-24_DoL_Final.pdf).

## New York increasing and scaling up access to deeper learning

As in other states, the No Child Left Behind Act sent New York down a testing path that overemphasized standardized assessments in a way that made it challenging for schools and districts to support teachers in meaningfully incorporating project-based learning and performance-based assessments. However, in recent years, decision-makers have increasingly recognized the problematic nature of the approach, and New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) is optimistic about the state's early steps toward increasing student access to powerful experiential learning practices.

Most students in New York state graduate by meeting credit requirements and passing five Regents exams in specific subject areas. The state graduation requirements allow for four Regents exams and one pathway exam (e.g., in the arts or CTE), but most students end up taking five Regents. According to NYSUT, many of its high school teachers view the tests favorably on the whole—so they aren't pushing for changes to the high school tests, although they are for the poorly regarded grade 3-8 tests. But they continue to advocate for additional ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

To that end, in 2019, the New York Board of Regents announced the creation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures, which was charged with developing alternative graduation pathways in New York that would maintain rigorous graduation standards. Recognizing the opportunities for change on the horizon, NYSUT convened its own task force of more than 65 educators, school-related professionals and higher education faculty; in 2023, NYSUT released "More Teaching, Less Testing," a report that offers a "reimagining of the current system of student assessments in the state of New York." One of the focuses of the report is the importance of providing those multiple pathways for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. As NYSUT President Melinda Person said:

*We know that the modern workforce relies on skills like communication, collaboration, and ability to work as part of a team—skills not necessarily measured by a standardized test. When it's time to graduate, students should have multiple options to show they are ready. Expanding our graduation requirements to allow for career and technical education programs, capstone portfolios, or project-based pathways is how we prepare our children for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.<sup>22</sup>*

Providing additional pathways isn't just about the tests or graduation requirements themselves—it is about promoting deeper learning experiences that are engaging and enjoyable to students, and that promote critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving and other skills they will need, no matter what they choose to do after graduation.

Both NYSUT and the commission released their reports within a week of each other and reinforced the same message: New York students and educators want more performance-based assessments.

22 NYSUT releases report on state testing, graduation requirements (NYSUT press release, 2023)  
[www.nysut.org/news/2023/november/media-release-testing](http://www.nysut.org/news/2023/november/media-release-testing)

New York state has many examples of schools that have fully integrated performance-based assessments. However, they are just a small fraction of all the state's schools: This type of teaching is challenging and more time-intensive, and there has never been the direct or systematic support needed for more schools to move toward this modality of teaching and learning.

New York has a plan to change that. As part of its move toward providing additional graduation pathways, the state is piloting a way for students to have the types of learning experiences and performance assessments that could one day be such a pathway.

In 2021, the New York State Education Department announced the Performance-Based Learning and Assessment Networks (PLAN) pilot program to explore the conditions and supports necessary for implementing performance-based learning and assessment statewide, including using performance-based assessments like the consortium, described below, as a model. PLAN ultimately seeks to develop support systems, policies and resources to facilitate the adoption of performance-based learning across all schools in New York.<sup>23</sup> What is different about this initiative is the level of support that will be provided to schools, as well as a network where schools that have been doing this type of teaching and learning will mentor pilot schools.

The implementation phase of the pilot begins in fall 2024. NYSUT representatives remain actively engaged with the state department of education in the effort. And, in November 2024, the education department will put a full timeline and plan for implementing the new graduation requirements statewide, providing for multiple ways to reach a high school degree, including career and technical education, early college high school programs, service, and exams including and beyond the Regents.

The New York Performance Standards Consortium has long been a shining example of what performance assessment and project-based learning can look like when fully supported. The consortium's 38 high schools are mostly in New York City and represent the same diversity as in the city's schools. Since the early 1990s, the consortium's survival and growth have required activism and advocacy from educator coalitions, teachers and their unions, students and families, beginning with an initial waiver allowing the use of performance assessments in 1995.<sup>24</sup>

For decades, the consortium has pursued an alternative approach to high-stakes testing in its high schools, yet it says it is still the only network of schools in the country that has put into practice an authentic assessment option other than standardized testing. Teachers have a large amount of autonomy, and the schools have cultivated a collaborative environment where deeper learning, experiential learning and student choice are centered. This approach is effective: Teacher retention rates are much higher than in non-consortium schools, and graduates of consortium schools exhibit higher rates of college attendance and persistence, despite facing significant economic challenges.<sup>25</sup>

In consortium schools, the focus is not on standardized tests; it is on the learning students demonstrate every day.

23 Performance-Based Learning and Assessment Networks Program Description  
[www.nysed.gov/plan-pilot/program-description](http://www.nysed.gov/plan-pilot/program-description)

24 History of the Consortium  
[www.performanceassessment.org/history-22](http://www.performanceassessment.org/history-22)

25 Assessing College Readiness Through Authentic Student Work  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/assessing-college-readiness-authentic-student-work-report>

In 2015, in response to the barriers consortium students were facing in gaining admission into the City University of New York, CUNY and the New York Performance Standards Consortium collaborated on an initiative to integrate performance-based assessments into the college admissions process. This pilot program allowed consortium students to be admitted based on the quality of their high school work rather than solely on standardized test scores. The pilot has showed promising outcomes, with increases in college enrollment, especially among Black and Hispanic students. Additional preliminary evidence suggests that students who gained admission through the pilot program achieve higher first-semester college GPAs and continue their college education at higher rates compared with their peers.<sup>26</sup> By providing a more comprehensive view of what students know and can do, these assessments have reformed the admissions process to promote meaningful teaching and learning experiences for all students. And in so doing, it furthers the knowledge that the learning experiences at consortium schools are preparing students well.

## AFT Member Calls for Changes to District Practices to Make Time for Experiential Learning

The AFT Teacher Leaders Program, which began in 2011 as a response to the lack of teacher voices in education policy discussions, prepares educators to facilitate discussion of the issues that affect the education profession—both locally and nationally. Each year, selected AFT local unions have cohorts of teachers who go through the program, which includes as a component that each participant develops an action research project.

Allan Dyen-Shapiro, who was a part of the 2023-24 cohort of the Teachers Association of Lee County, in Florida, decided to focus on what he had heard anecdotally—that high school biology teachers had reduced labs, considered a cornerstone of biology education, in order to dedicate that time on preparation for the state’s tests.

As Dyen-Shapiro describes in his project report, Florida requires an end-of-course exam in biology, but each district can make decisions on how teachers must prepare for or incorporate the state exam into instructional practices. He describes how his district has handled it:

*In Lee County, biology teachers are expected to administer nine progress-monitoring multiple-choice tests (“Exemplars”) and 3 quarterly “Comprehensive Checks” prior to EOC administration (Lee County School District, 2024). As students who are absent must make up these tests during class time, these assessments will interfere with instruction for at least twice this number of days. ... In order to keep up with this examination schedule, topics are mapped to the school calendar. As little as two days are devoted to entire units. This rigidity of scheduling augurs against integrative activities in which students learn and correlate material from diverse topics.*

He goes on to describe anecdotal evidence he gathered through conversations with colleagues:

*[D]istrict mandates led to Biology 1 courses focused around facts and vocabulary, rather than depth of knowledge, with proven strategies for student engagement and learning neglected. In particular, very little time has been devoted to labs (and very little of that has been inquiry-based); extended projects like science fair and problem-based learning have not been pursued; and multiple-choice assessment has been favored over writing assignments.*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



He designed a survey and received responses from 74 percent of Biology 1 teachers at the schools allowed to participate (one principal prohibited administration of the survey to the school's teachers). What did he find? Hard numbers supporting his previously only anecdotal evidence—that so much time is spent on drilling vocabulary, facts and practice questions that “little time remains for activities proven to enhance student engagement with and learning of material.”

All but one of the survey questions were quantitative, asking how many class periods teachers spent on a variety of classroom activities. However, there was one open-ended question; and as part of his analysis to that question, he wrote:

*The overwhelming consensus emerging from these responses was that the district's insistence on a test-preparation focus for Biology 1 hurts student learning by making implementation of best practices near-impossible. Given additional time and freedom from micromanagement, nearly all teachers indicated that more emphasis would be placed on lab work, especially inquiry labs. Hands-on activities of other sorts and field experience were also mentioned frequently. Numerous teachers felt their students should be doing projects, including literature-based research into current topics of interest. Teachers also mentioned that they would spend more time teaching topics they felt important or interesting to the students if they were freed from a strict schedule. Several teachers indicated a desire to innovate in teaching methods. Problem-based learning, science fair preparation, current events in science, remediation of basic skills, and game/simulation-based learning were all also mentioned.*

The increase in inquiry labs would be a big improvement. His survey found that 74 percent of on-level classes would have done no inquiry labs in the school year it was administered.

He ends his paper with recommendations grounded in his literature review and based on the survey findings. They were simple and would cost the district nothing: Get rid of the many progress-monitoring biology tests throughout the year, as well as the prescriptive scope-and-sequence document that leaves no room for teachers to adjust their instruction based on the needs of their students.

He writes, “Freed from testing exigencies, district-level staff could more productively focus on supporting laboratory experiences and other proven strategies via training of teachers in equipment use, inquiry lab design, and scientific writing as needed. They could also facilitate sharing of strategy and lab methodology between teachers at different district high schools.”

The Teachers Association of Lee County is sending the paper to district administrators, site-based principals, and the local school board, hoping it will spark meaningful conversation—and change.

# Fighting Forward from Here

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Communities band together about not only what to fight against, but also what to fight for. The AFT, along with our many partners and allies in this work, fight for students to be thriving; academically well-rounded; and prepared for further education, careers and life. We do this by fighting *for* a system that supports students learning equitably, engages them deeply, and measures what they know and can do fairly and meaningfully. Actions like those described here move us toward that vision. We have seen too many negative examples of the testing tail wagging the learning dog. And we know it can be different. While we will continue to fight for changes at the federal level that drive much of states' policy decisions, we will also support our members and allies to act, where they are with what they have, in ways worthy of the students we serve and the educators we represent. The topics addressed in this report will continue to receive attention through the AFT's programming, policy and professional learning as well as through webinars and resources available on AFT.org and AFT's Share My Lesson.

*If you are an AFT leader and want help connecting with the people involved in any of the examples above, please reach out to Educational Issues staff directly or email [edlssues@aft.org](mailto:edlssues@aft.org).*

# Free Assessment-Related Tools and Resources to Learn More

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## TOOLS, PROTOCOLS and CRITERIA GUIDES

### Assessment Literacy

- Educational Assessment 101 for K-12 Teachers & Leaders  
<https://sites.google.com/view/assessment101/home>

### Selecting and Reviewing Assessments

- Choosing the Right Tests: The District Assessment Procurement Protocol  
[www.nciea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/District\\_Assessment\\_Procurement\\_Protocol\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nciea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/District_Assessment_Procurement_Protocol_FINAL.pdf)
- EdReports assessment criteria and implementation guides  
<https://edreports.org/process/review-tools>

### Assessment Inventory/Audit

- District Assessment Design Toolkit  
[www.nciea.org/library/district-assessment-design-toolkit](http://www.nciea.org/library/district-assessment-design-toolkit)
- Finding the Right Mix: Adapting Toolkits to Support Assessment System Audits  
[www.nciea.org/blog/finding-the-right-mix](http://www.nciea.org/blog/finding-the-right-mix)

### Performance Assessment and Project-Based Learning

- Quality Criteria for Systems of Performance Assessment for School, District, and Network Leaders  
[https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/3904/download?inline&file=RCA\\_Quality\\_Criteria\\_Systems\\_Performance\\_Assessment.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/3904/download?inline&file=RCA_Quality_Criteria_Systems_Performance_Assessment.pdf)
- The Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment website contains an array of tools and resources, including templates, rubrics, checklists and planning sheets. It also contains a performance assessment task bank and a brief that introduces design elements for anti-racist performance tasks.  
[www.mciea.org](http://www.mciea.org)
- Share My Lesson Collection of Resources on Project-Based Learning  
<https://sharemylesson.com/collections/growth-mindset-project-based-learning>

## FURTHER READING

### Federal Recommendations

- Developing Assessment Systems That Support Teaching and Learning: Recommendations for Federal Support  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/developing-assessment-systems-federal-support-report>

- The Path Forward for School Accountability: Practical Ways to Improve School Accountability Systems Now  
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