



HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER FOCUS GROUP ON ASSESSMENTS

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HOW DO YOU DEFINE ASSESSMENTS?

- Gathering data, no matter how big or small. There are many kinds of assessments- formative, summative. Anything that measures the level of understanding and mastery of material.
- Some teachers have never viewed them as a piece of data, just a measure of understanding.

WHAT DOES “TEST PREP” MEAN TO YOU? IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU PREPARE STUDENTS FOR ASSESSMENTS?

- Assignments, review, and quizzes. It's everything you do up until the test. Hopefully the curriculum is the preparation and the test assesses the curriculum.

DO YOU DO TEST PREP THAT IS DIFFERENT THAN WHAT YOU DO EVERY DAY?

- Some teachers use provided materials from test makers: worksheets, practice quizzes, past state tests. Spent about 3 weeks on those materials and it was awful.
- Preparation for state tests is more intense than county tests. You're allowed to see student performance on county tests, but for state tests, you have no idea whether they are accurate, how to predict performance, etc. Teachers find student performance difficult to predict.
- Test prep is trying to see if students will be able to communicate what they actually know on a test in multiple choice format.
- Especially with the snow days, it was hard enough to cover the material we were supposed to cover, let alone go back and review it.

HOW DO TESTS FIT WITH STANDARD ALIGNMENT?

- Teachers do not know what is on the state tests. They don't have enough feedback on student performance and only get to see sample test questions every once in a while. Some schools recently have been able to see the test from last year, but suspect that it's only because the test is changing.
- Teachers just teach their curriculum and hope that it aligns.
- There is no writing component currently on the state EOCs, which is a major focus of the high school curriculum.

ARE THERE PLACES WE SEE OVERLAP? HOW MUCH VARIABILITY IS THERE BETWEEN SCHOOLS?

- Teachers are overwhelmed with the number of assessments given. Teachers do not know much about the assessments outside of their grade levels.
- 8th graders take EOC and if they are also in physical science, they have to take a state test.
- The high school assessments that make up the biggest time commitments are State EOCs, Local EOCs, mandated common assessments from PLCs, PLAN, ACT, PSAT, Writing assessment, and WIDA.

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- Many schools had computer malfunctions and other technical issues during testing. Even 1:1 schools lost 20% of instructional time for one month during testing. Some schools spent a lot of time practicing administering the technical aspect of exams. Practice exams can double the amount of time lost for assessments.
- Time breakdown for one school: 88 planned instructional days, 11% lost for snow days, 14% lost to testing, 5.6% lost to test prep. Not including snow days, we still lost almost 20% of instructional time for just the major tests.

HOW ARE THE RESULTS USED?

- “Against you.”
- Do not receive individualized data per student and no item analyses. Do not know what the curve is. It does no good for the instructor to know which concepts the students need refreshing. The standards are too broad to know exactly where gaps exist in the material.
- Results weren’t specific enough to help students master content. Both the teacher and student would require more detailed feedback.

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- It is like comparing apples to oranges from one semester to another. Knowing your scores from your past students does not necessarily help you tailor instruction and predict scores for your current students.
- The item analysis provided by some exams allowed teachers to know which questions were missed and by how many students, and they were able to spend extra instructional time on those concepts in the future. Now, the teachers do not know what to expect from the test and do not know how to interpret the results.
- One student did not show up to class for 3 weeks prior to the final exam and then scored a 69%...she should not have come anywhere close to passing that test. The result was achieved due to the extreme curve on some EOC's.

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- Last year, 32% was considered passing for the Spanish exam due to the curve, which results in many students moving forward to the next level with insufficient understanding. Students know how to play the system. They do not participate in half of the coursework and just sit for an hour during the exam to receive a 25% because of the curve. The teacher is not sure if students are understanding or just memorizing the material to perform on the EOC. On the other hand, an A student who has test anxiety can lower their entire course grade. It's a disservice in both directions.
- One student got sick in the middle of the test and had completed 2/3 of the test. She was told she could go home and finish the test the next day, but that was incorrect and the student got a 60% on the exam.

WHAT TYPE OF CONVERSATIONS ARE HAD WITH STUDENTS AND PARENTS?

- Teachers explain at the beginning of the year that the EOC is 25% of the grade and is a huge impact, positive or negative.
- Parents are likely to ask for extra credit for their children, and teachers are reluctant to assign additional work when the initial assignments were never attempted.
- Some teachers say they have never had a positive conversation with parents regarding the percentage of the grade that is made up by test scores. As a whole, they have been negative.

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- Parents are unaware of how extensively students are being tested and teachers are not really either, until they look at the provided list of assessments. At this point, the issue can only get worse as parents become more aware of how many assessments are given.
- Teachers do not know the best way to address parents' concerns about the heavy weight of test scores. Though teachers may agree, they feel that they are a representative of Knox County Schools and do not want to speak against it.
- It's a lot of pressure on students.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF STANDARDIZED TESTING ON SCHOOL CULTURE?

- We are resigned to it, although we hate it. We feel powerless, we do it whether we like it or not. We are employees and we can't control the regulations.
- The impact on instructional time is not just that 20%. Instructors lose planning time, and that affects the quality of the instruction on other days. Teachers lose some students during their class time while they take tests for other subjects, and they do not know what to do during that class time that the other students can afford to miss. Even if the students return to class in a timely manner, they are zapped and not learning to their best ability.
- There is no positive aspect on the school culture in relation to the testing time, use of results.
- Student attitudes toward testing vary. Honors kids are very motivated, mid-level students can coast through the exam without a large effect on their grade, which reflects negatively on the teacher, and low-level kids can not hope to pull up their grade regardless of performance.

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- Teachers are frustrated with the purpose of the exams. They want students to try to learn and understand the material, to use it in their daily lives, not necessarily just use their knowledge to apply to test-taking skills like being able to pick out a trick question on the exam.
- Test security makes teachers feel like they are not trusted. Teachers feel like they are not being listened to.
- Part of the problem of us not being able to see the questions is that we won't be able to point out errors, which could be a reason that we are not allowed to see them—it would mess up their data. Am I spending 50 minutes a week assessing just for the sake of collecting data?
- Sometimes teachers know the difference in a student that knows the material and is just getting caught up on the question format and a student that is just guessing on the test and there is no assessment that can measure that.

MONEY

- Teachers would like to know this information. One piece of testing equipment cost \$100,000 for just one component. Teachers feel that there could be a much better use of the money.
- “Contract with the state of Tennessee is 100 million dollars. That is just the contract with the testing company. Not counting the data people and technology costs.”
- Fact vs. Fiction
- Public Relations / Information Availability

SUMMARY

- Teachers would like to know what is covered on the test to make sure that their curriculum lines up properly
- Think that the EOC's counting 25% is too high
- Would like to be able to use the data, but feel like the data is basically an archive of what happened with a previous class, and not always helpful with future classes
- No assessment is able to replace the teacher's knowledge of the individual student