



Standardized Student Testing

Update to 2017 Evaluation Report

January 2019

Problems Identified

- **Logistical Challenges in Schools.** Due to limited computers, staffing, space, or other resources, required student testing lasted for weeks at many schools. Testing tied up resources and staff time, affecting learning even for students not testing. Students using special education or English language services were particularly affected by teachers' testing responsibilities.
- **Limited Understanding of Test Data.** Surveys we conducted showed that many teachers and principals felt unprepared to interpret test scores. Nearly one-third of responding teachers felt unprepared to interpret overall scores from the state's required math, reading, and science tests. Almost half of teachers and principals who work with English learners felt unprepared to interpret scores from the specialized tests administered to those students.
- **Overly Prescriptive Laws.** The Legislature has required the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to design questions, administer tests, and calculate and report scores in specific ways. It also requires MDE and schools to use the scores for multiple different purposes. Some of these requirements have created unintended consequences.

Changes Implemented

- **Administrative Changes Made.** MDE created an action plan to respond to recommendations in our report. The plan detailed strategies to increase outreach and training efforts so that educators better understand testing data. MDE has also streamlined some processes to reduce local administrative tasks.

Action Needed

- **Measure and Assess Logistical Impacts.** The department should systematically gather information about how standardized testing affects staffing, instruction, costs, student time, and the availability of technology. Among other reasons, gathering baseline data will make it possible to evaluate how future testing policy changes affect local schools.
- **Eliminate Prescriptive Laws.** The Legislature should delete provisions that (1) require MDE to report inappropriate projections of college readiness to students and parents, and (2) mandate use of a specific statistical formula measuring growth. The Legislature should also remove a requirement that tests use above-grade and below-grade questions; MDE has concluded they cannot be used in the calculation of federally mandated test scores.
- **Provide Clearer Direction.** State laws require MDE and local schools to use standardized test results for multiple purposes that are not always compatible. The Legislature should prioritize which purposes are most important and then hold MDE accountable for delivering tests that address these uses.