Tennessee Task Force on Student Testing and Assessment

Superintendent Conference
September 2015

Assessment Task Force Members

• Nancy Ash	Lebanon Special Schools Assistant Director of Schools
• Mary Reel	Milan Special Schools Director of Schools
• Wanda Shelton	Lincoln County Director of Schools
• Beth Unfried	Clarksville-Montgomery Director of Elementary ED
• Mike Winstead	Maryville City Schools Director of Schools

Assessment Task Force Members

Harry Brooks	House Administration & Planning Ed Committee Chair
John Forgety	House Instruction & Programs Committee Chair
Dolores Gresham	Senate Education Committee Chair
Sara Heyburn	State Board of Education Executive Director
Candice McQueen	Tennessee Commissioner of Education
Debbie Shedden	Hawkins County School Board Member, TSBA President
Virginia Babb	Knox County Parent-Teacher Association Member
Jasmine Carlisle	11th Grade Student, Mt. Juliet High
Philip Eller	Cedar Grove Elementary Teacher
Bill Harlin	Nolensville High Principal
Valerie Love	Dobyns-Bennett High Teacher
Rebecca McBride	Brighton High School Teacher
Sharon McNary	Richland Elementary Principal

Ex-Officio Members

Process

- Heard feedback during roundtables of 10,000 Teacher Tour
- Reviewed survey results (SCORE and TDOE)
- Assembled task force
- Identified three primary areas of feedback
  - Summative assessment
  - Formative assessment
  - Testing logistics
- Reviewed presentations and data on areas of concerns
- Discussed possible solutions
- Drafted principles in three primary areas
- Built out recommendations based on principles
- Developed final report on testing and assessment

Task Force Purpose and Goals

- Purpose
  - To study and identify best practices in testing at the school level and how those assessments align with required state tests.

- Goals
  1. Identify and study best practices in student assessment
  2. Ensure local school districts and the state are appropriately using assessments to improve student achievement
  3. Better inform stakeholders about the state assessment program

Task Force Objectives

- Conduct an environmental scan of assessment usage and practices across the state
- Establish principles addressing purposes and goals of state assessments relative to locally chosen/designed assessments
- Define appropriate practices that best support decision-making at the state, district, school, and teacher level
- Gain insight on ways to best communicate about TNReady to all stakeholder groups

Recommendations

Culture of Transparency

Recommendation 1

- The department and districts should continue to focus on **improving communication** around testing and accountability to create clarity, transparency, and trust.
  - Next Steps:
    - Communicate TNReady to media and general public audiences
    - Collaborate on communication, training, etc. with all education stakeholders and partners
    - Create proactive and clear communications to educators
    - Post additional information about TVAAS and quick scores on the department website
    - Require districts to share test results/reports directly with students as well as parents

Recommendation 2

- Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, the department should annually release as many **summative test items** as possible without compromising test security and development. These should include operational, non-linking test items.
  - Next Steps:
    - Determine cost
    - Work with appropriate stakeholders on budgetary impact
    - Create plan for public release

Recommendation 3

- The department should annually release **standardized test blueprints**, test specifications, and the methodology for calculating all score reports.
  - Next Steps:
    - Have already released these items for 2015-16 school year
    - Prepare clear timelines for release in future years
    - Staff appropriately

Recommendation 4

- The department and individual districts should build upon current reporting requirements related to mandated assessments and clearly communicate to the public the **purpose** of large-scale formative or summative assessment usage. If either the department or an individual district administers a large-scale assessment, teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders need to know "why," with such information easily accessible to the public through district and school websites as well as other sources.

  - Next Steps:
    - Already posted information on state annual tests on the department's website (also created educator and parent guidebooks on TNReady)
    - Present principles/recommendations of assessment task force to directors at Superintendent's Study Council Conference during September 2015
    - Determine method to ensure compliance

Recommendation 5

- The department should communicate with educators through regular channels including regional assessment meetings, about **successful practices for test preparation** for annual tests as well as practices that should be avoided. Communication should center on the idea that the best test preparation is focusing on great teaching and engaged student learning every day.

  - Next Steps:
    - Already scheduled regional assessment meetings for educators during September
    - Already scheduled additional regional TNReady information lunch and learn meetings for educators, parents, legislators, and community members during Sept. and Oct.
    - Create additional messages, guidance documents, and communication tools for district superintendents and educators about principles of assessment

Test Reduction

Recommendation 6

- The department should **eliminate** the kindergarten and first-grade annual standardized test option when SAT-10 is discontinued at the end of the 2015-16 school year. The department should create a new second-grade assessment aligned to Tennessee state standards as an alternative to the second-grade SAT-10 and provide this **option** to districts.

  - Next Steps:
    - Communicate elimination of kindergarten and first-grade annual standardized assessment option
    - Draft Request for Proposals to begin process for second-grade assessment

Recommendation 7

- The department should address the issue of over-testing and possible test redundancy by **eliminating** the mandatory EXPLORE (8th grade) and PLAN (10th grade) tests, and **not adopt** ACT's new alternative ASPIRE. The department should continue to require ACT for all 11th grade students except for the rare circumstances in which an IEP precludes a student from taking the ACT.

  - Next Steps:
    - Communicate elimination of 8th and 10th grade ACT tests
    - Identify or create career inventory (currently a part of 8th grade EXPLORE test) to be used with 8th grade students
    - Continue to ensure that state standards align to ACT and create TNReady alignment based on postsecondary readiness standards
    - Map 2015-16 Explore and Plan test results to 2015-16 TNReady results
    - Communicate TNReady benchmarks at 8th and 10th grades to ensure readiness to meet benchmarks on ACT at 11th grade

Recommendation 8

- Districts should carefully select and design formative assessments that lead to defined student outcomes. Districts should **reduce** the number of formative assessments that do not guide decision making and next steps in instruction. Districts should utilize the principles of formative assessment as presented in the assessment task force report.
  - Next Steps:
    - Communicate expectations of assessment principles to directors at Superintendent's Study Council Conference in September 2015
    - Assist in training districts on effective formative assessments
    - Ensure understanding of and compliance with recommendation four

Recommendation 9

- The department should form a **parent advisory group** to specifically give feedback on concerns related to over-testing and test preparation practices as well as feedback on information desired for annual student test reports.

  - Next Steps:
    - Start collecting nominations for parent advisory group
    - Plan first meeting in October
    - Share report options with various parent focus groups as well as parent advisory group

Postsecondary Alignment and Readiness

Recommendation 10

- The department should partner with leadership from **higher education**—UT, TBR, and TICUA—to validate TNReady assessment as a tool for determining remedial placement, as well as helping to validate TNReady as a measure of progress toward postsecondary and career readiness.

  - Next Steps:
    - Already met with UT, TBR, and TICUA leadership to review TNReady focus and design
    - Identify UT, TBR, and TICUA math and English and language arts faculty for TNReady item review and validation during fall 2015
    - Include Tennessee higher education faculty in all standards setting processes and decisions during 2016
    - Partner with Tennessee higher education administration and faculty to set TNReady scores for admission into postsecondary programs by December 2016 for new students entering postsecondary during the 2017-18 school year

Recommendation 11

- The department should expand ACT or SAT **retake** opportunities for all students.
  - Next Steps:
    - Identify funding to facilitate ACT or SAT test retakes
    - Assist districts in providing additional support to students who do not meet ACT or SAT subject test benchmarks prior to retake
    - Encourage districts to utilize current ACT or SAT tools, training, and support
    - Partner with State Board to determine appropriate interventions for a student who does not meet necessary benchmarks for postsecondary success

Recommendation 12

- The department should ensure annual tests provide **clear reports** for educators, students, and parents that point to alignment to postsecondary readiness.
  - Next Steps:
    - Already created sample reports for feedback
    - Already shared samples with assessment task force for feedback
    - Share with additional groups, including parent advisory group noted in recommendation nine

Recommendation 13

- The department should convene a testing scheduling and logistics advisory group that is representative of district personnel across the state to **address logistical challenges**. This team should focus on test scheduling that minimizes disruptions and provide ongoing guidance and support (in the form of sample schedules and process guides) particularly during the first year of TNReady.
  - Next Steps:
    - Already convened Testing Scheduling and Logistics Advisory Group
    - Already shared initial test schedule samples with assessment task force
    - Share test schedule samples and guidance with districts
    - Provide districts with ongoing technical assistance
    - Analyze results for continued improvement

Other

Recommendation 14

- The department should create **additional portfolio accountability options** for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects, specifically for first grade, from which districts can choose.
  - Next Steps:
    - Already started first grade portfolio process
    - Begin pilot in spring 2016
    - Examine pilot results in preparation for statewide roll-out during 2016-17

Recommendation 15

- The department must ensure future and new teachers have explicit knowledge about assessment for learning. Tennessee **teacher preparation programs** should include a specific curriculum or module on assessment with specifics to Tennessee. All new teachers, whether in tested subjects or not, also need specific training with embedded professional learning around this area of the TEAM rubric.

  - Next Steps:
    - Create advisory group, including higher education faculty, district administrators, and educators, to determine contents of TN-specific assessment for learning module
    - Determine policy and process changes with State Board
    - Pilot assessment for learning module with various teacher preparation programs during fall 2016

Recommendation 16

- The department should work directly with districts to increase awareness of the realities of **test anxiety** while providing specific guidance in how to help educators avoid passing on stress or test anxiety to students. School counselors must be available to assist in this work during test administration.
  - Next Steps:
    - Communicate expectations of assessment principles to directors at Superintendent's Study Council Conference in September
    - Provide administrators and school counselors with additional information and training on how to proactively create positive testing environments and how to work with students experiencing test anxiety

Further Analysis

Further Analysis

There were several areas identified by the task force that require more information in order to better understand the topic or issue. Areas for further research and analysis that the department should explore are outlined below:

1. The department should look more closely at grading policies and practices with districts in an effort to determine whether greater consistency and clarity needs to be addressed.

Further Analysis

2. The department should explore the usage and understanding of screening versus testing in grades K-2 in an effort to bring clarity of purpose and practice.

Further Analysis

3. The department should review the possibility of purchasing more item banks for district-created and aligned formative assessments.

Further Analysis

4. The department should consider conducting trainings on how to create common assessments and how these trainings can be used as learning opportunities for teachers.

Further Analysis

5. The department should continue to analyze the concern regarding over-testing and determine strategies to ensure that schools and districts have local assessments that are aligned to standards, yet not duplicative of state standardized assessments.

Questions?