



Colorado Assessment Implementation Study

Prepared for
The Colorado Department of Education

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Disclaimer

This study, focused on the implementation of assessments in Colorado, is a direct response to concerns raised by the field. It is neither a study about the Colorado Academic Standards and consortia-developed assessments nor a cost-benefit analysis. This work was originally produced in whole or in part by WestEd with funds from the U.S. Department of Education under cooperative agreement number S283B120016. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Colorado State Assessment System is designed to measure student mastery of the state academic content standards. Revised standards were adopted in December 2009 and August 2010. Since that time several new tests have been introduced. In 2012 the state implemented the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) to reflect changes in the academic content standards and provide better information to educators. As the state assessment system is refined and continues to evolve, intended and unintended outcomes may arise for educators, students, and parents. These outcomes become complicated when viewed in light of early literacy assessments, local district assessment systems, new online assessments, and additional education reform initiatives. To address concerns raised by educators, parents, and other stakeholders, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) decided to gather information about the implications of the entire assessment system. Lacking the resources for such a study, CDE turned to its Regional Comprehensive Center for assistance.

CDE worked with the Regional Comprehensive Center to design a multi-phase study at no cost to CDE or the state. The purpose of the study is to discern and examine issues and concerns associated with implementation of the new state assessment system, and provide feedback that informs policy, practice, and future directions. The first phase of the study captured perceptions and sentiments about current and new state tests, challenges and needs associated with transitioning to the new assessment system, proposed solutions that address key challenges, and ideas for implementing a high-quality assessment system.

Methodology

Conducted in two phases, this report includes findings from phase one, which took place between February and April 2014. The first phase involved a review of documents and district artifacts, survey of district assessment coordinators, and district and role-alike focus groups. The second phase of the study began in May and includes a brief, follow-up survey of district assessment coordinators; follow-up conversations with district focus groups; and a focus group of large, metro-area districts.

Survey

A voluntary survey was sent to 178 district assessment coordinators (DAC) on March 12. DACs were encouraged to consult other district leaders to ensure that responses reflected those of the district as a whole. The survey had three sections. The first section asked for demographic information to assist in the analyses. The second section allowed respondents to provide feedback on general readiness issues related to the new assessment system. The third section requested information on the value and burden of state and other assessments. Each district could submit one completed survey. The survey closed March 28.

Focus Groups

CDE sent invitations to every district during the last week of January 2014. Twenty-three districts responded to the request. The Commissioner’s Superintendent Advisory Council helped to select the following districts from the list of 23 respondents: Archuleta, Buena Vista R-31, Cherry Creek 5, Delta County, La Veta RE-2, Platte Valley RE-7, Strasburg, and Woodland Park Re-2. CDE also identified teachers from across the state to participate in a separate focus group and reached out to various concerned parent groups as well as the Colorado League of Charter Schools to identify participants for two additional role-alike focus groups.

Research Constraints and Limitations

The state assessment system is the primary focus of the study. Study participants also raised accountability issues, such as whether the results of new tests are sufficiently valid and reliable to support school accountability and teacher evaluation decisions. These issues were noted and are discussed in the report. For analyses of the survey data, districts were weighted equally. Since all districts, regardless of location or size, need to perform similar transition activities, each had an equal voice during survey administration and analysis. As a consequence, however, it should be noted that the views of rural districts with small student populations have a proportionally higher impact on the results.

Results

Eighty-seven DACs submitted complete surveys for a 49% response rate. Surveys were submitted by districts in each region with the highest rates for the northeast (23%) and southwest (20%) regions. Districts were predominantly rural (73%) with suburban and urban districts accounting for 16% and 8% respectively of the sample. More than half of the districts are small with 54% serving less than 1,000 students. A majority (78%) of districts participated in assessment field tests (i.e., new English language arts and/or mathematics tests, science and/or social studies tests) and/or the educator effectiveness pilot. Ninety-three individuals participated in focus groups with a majority (nearly 80%) representing rural districts. Twenty percent of focus group participants were parents, and another 20% were teachers. Eleven percent of participants were principals, 11% were either superintendents or assistant superintendents, and an additional 11% represented charter schools.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Analyses revealed the following areas of consensus across survey respondents and focus group participants regarding the state assessment system:

Value Most — Participants value local interim assessments more than statewide summative assessments. State assessment results and the information provided in reports, however, as well as the emphasis on growth are valued. Additionally, participants value the common metric and basis the assessments provide for the state’s accountability system.

Value Least — Participants dislike the high stakes associated with state assessment results. They report that results are delayed and general, and do not inform instructional practice, programming, and student placement decisions (i.e., utility). They also question the timing of statewide summative tests that are administered February through early April rather than at the end of the school year in May.

Challenges — Time is the theme that summarizes the challenges associated with implementation of the new assessment system. Issues related to this theme include the impact on instructional time, frequent schedule disruptions, computer and device access for non-testing students during test windows, and the burden associated with test preparation and administration.

Needs — To facilitate the transition to the new assessment system, participants identified the need for efficient methods to administer tests while minimizing disruptions to instructional time, sufficient numbers and types of devices to meet instructional needs and technical requirements, and enhanced staffing and capacity to support the process.

Solutions — Proposed solutions cluster under the themes of flexibility and results. Flexibility involves options based upon district needs, size, and location as well as local decisionmaking regarding how often as well as whether, when, where, and how students are tested. Study participants also expect timely, high-quality, relevant, and useful feedback about student performance that informs educators, parents, and students.

Unique Survey Results

Respondents (80%) value local interim assessments most followed by early literacy assessments associated with the READ Act (50%). More than half (57%) of urban districts consider their local interim assessments as high burden compared to 37% of rural and 23% of suburban districts. Few respondents (21%) value the social studies and science assessments. School readiness assessments impose the greatest burden (76%) followed by social studies (74%) and science (73%) tests. The least burdensome tests include the Colorado ACT and other district postsecondary readiness assessments. These tests, however, are identified as high burden to half of the urban districts compared to 19% of rural and none of the suburban districts.

Districts generally view current English language arts and mathematics assessments (i.e., TCAP) as low in value with suburban districts valuing these assessments more than urban and rural districts. Two-thirds of rural and suburban districts view all TCAP assessments as high in burden compared to 29% of urban districts. Urban districts (50%) value the science assessments at higher levels than suburban (38% believe the tests inform student progress, 25% say they support school improvement) and rural districts (20%). And although the burden associated with school readiness assessments is high, urban districts (100%) consider it highly valuable in informing student progress compared to 38% of rural and 13% of suburban districts.

Regarding overall readiness to administer state assessments, 28% of districts appear fully prepared and 20% are not yet ready. The two primary issues that influence district readiness are management (62%) and devices (60%). This holds for rural districts with 63% citing management and 57% noting devices. Devices have a greater impact on suburban (71%) and urban (71%) readiness. Suburban districts appear to be the least prepared with 79% citing management and the capacity of their information technology staff. Also, nearly two-thirds of suburban districts reported network infrastructure challenges compared to 49% of rural and 43% of urban districts.

Unique Focus Group Results

In addition to the cross-cutting themes, each role group articulated unique concerns and potential solutions. Students, for example, fear that new exams will be challenging, include unfamiliar content, and be unfair or inadequate measures for some students. They worry about fatigue given the amount of time spent viewing a computer screen during test sessions, and want simpler tests with

one section per subject area. Parents dislike the pressure placed on students, want more transparency about test items and the assessment process, and prefer fewer summative tests. Teachers are familiar with the current system and expressed fears about moving to a new and different system. They also dislike the stress that high-stakes tests place upon students and teachers. Principals value the READ Act because they may select tests from an approved list, and useful, diagnostic information is obtained quickly. Assessment coordinators fear that new tests will not be user-friendly and view social studies exams as problematic due to timing and lack of incentives for high school seniors. Technology directors hope that their districts are well prepared to administer new online assessments and view feasibility (i.e., capacity, complexity, scale, resources, and timeframe) as a major challenge. And superintendents raise accountability issues and concerns about how assessment results will be used. They question the quality of new tests, want fair and accurate measures that reflect student learning, and view communication about the process and results as a challenge.

A solution noted by focus group participants is that of holding schools and districts harmless until all components of the system are functioning effectively and validated. Flexibility is another key theme. Participants, especially those from rural districts, want more local control and differentiated options based upon district needs, size, and location. Funding flexibility to repair and improve school facilities, support teachers, upgrade technology, and meet other deferred needs was also mentioned. Finally, because participants feel overwhelmed and under-resourced, they desire a more gradual pace and seek to slow the roll-out of the new assessment system.

Conclusion

Phase one of this study examined the issues associated with implementation of the state assessment system. While differences were observed among districts located in rural, suburban, and urban areas, several cross-cutting themes and common challenges emerged:

- ❖ Impact on instructional time
- ❖ Moderate levels of readiness (i.e., management, devices, and capacity)
- ❖ Quantity, frequency, and length of assessments
- ❖ Need for timely, relevant, and useful results
- ❖ Burden and utility of assessments at the elementary and secondary levels
- ❖ Recognition of local assessment systems and practices

Based upon the findings four implementation approaches are proposed for consideration:

1. Stay the course and implement the transition plan as scheduled
2. Stay the course with added supports and policy adjustments
3. Purposefully delay parts of the system
4. Strategically eliminate specific assessments

Study findings and potential solutions that address common challenges were discussed among members of the Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Council on May 1, 2014. The council's feedback informed the implementation approaches and helped clarify options for minimizing the assessment burden on districts. Several council members expressed an interest in limiting statewide summative assessments to the federal minimum and making optional any assessments beyond that minimum.

The second phase of the study began in May following online administration of the new science and social studies assessments and field testing of the new online English language arts and mathematics assessments. The objective of the second phase is to understand whether and how the challenges and opportunities may have changed, gather lessons from the state's first online administration, and solicit feedback on strategies for facilitating a smooth transition to the new assessment system. The Colorado Department of Education intends to use the findings, input, and additional feedback to address unintended consequences of the new assessment system and inform adjustments to administrative policies and procedures. Section V, an addendum to the phase one report, contains findings from the second phase of the study.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Colorado State Assessment System is designed to measure student mastery of the state academic content standards. Revised standards were adopted in December 2009 and August 2010. Since that time several new tests have been introduced. In 2012 the state implemented the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) to reflect changes in the academic content standards and provide better information to teachers as they began aligning curricula and instruction with the revised standards. That same year Colorado became a governing member of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), which is developing assessments in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3–8 and high school. The PARCC assessments are scheduled for implementation in 2015. Other new tests added to the system include the ACCESS for ELLs[®] English Language Proficiency assessment implemented during the 2012–2013 school year and general and alternate assessments for science and social studies implemented this spring.

Purpose of Study

As the state assessment system is refined and continues to evolve, some intended and unintended outcomes may arise for educators, students, and parents. These outcomes become more complex when viewed in light of early literacy assessments, local district assessment systems, new online assessments, and other education reform initiatives. To address concerns raised by educators, parents, and other stakeholders, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) decided to gather information about the implications of the entire assessment system. Lacking the resources for such a study, CDE turned to its Regional Comprehensive Center for assistance. CDE worked with the Regional Comprehensive Center to design a multi-phase study at no cost to CDE or the state. The purpose of the study is to discern and examine issues and concerns associated with implementation of the new state assessment system, and provide feedback to CDE that informs policy, practice, and future directions.

Federal Statute

States that accept federal funds for purposes such as supporting the education of children living in poverty, English language learners, and students with disabilities are required to administer statewide assessments to all students. Currently, Colorado receives approximately \$326 million in federal funds for these and related purposes and is therefore required to administer the following assessments:

- ❖ English language arts and mathematics for grades 3 through 8;
- ❖ English language arts and mathematics at least once in high school; and
- ❖ Science at least once in elementary, middle, and high school.

For the aforementioned assessments, states must give the same assessments to all students and at least 95% of the students must participate. There are also some required assessments specific to certain populations of students such as English language learners (ELL).

State Statute

As outlined in the state's revised statutes, Colorado's new statewide assessment system includes the following tests:

- ❖ English language arts for grades 3 through 11;
- ❖ Math for grades 3 through 8 and three times in high school;
- ❖ Science at least once in elementary, middle, and high school;
- ❖ Social studies once in elementary, middle, and high school;
- ❖ ACT in grade 11;
- ❖ WIDA ACCESS for ELLs; and
- ❖ State-mandated, locally-determined assessments for the READ Act and school readiness.

Assessment Overview

Colorado assessments are changing in order to accurately assess student mastery of the new Colorado Academic Standards. As standards become more coherent and rigorous, assessments must adapt to align with them. As a result, the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program is being phased out and replaced by the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS): the state's new English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies assessments.

Colorado is a governing member of a multi-state assessment consortium called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Beginning in 2014–2015, the online PARCC assessments will be administered in grades 3 through 11 for English language arts and grades 3 through 8 and three years of high school for mathematics. Additionally, for the first time this school year, new online state science and social studies assessments were administered. Science assessments are given in grades 5, 8, and 12, while the social studies assessments are administered in grades 4, 7, and 12. The grade 12 high school assessments are scheduled for the fall of 2014.

State Demographic Data

The state of Colorado has 178 school districts, excluding Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), charter schools, and detention centers. Districts are located throughout eight regions: Metro, Pikes Peak, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and West Central, with the greatest concentration in the Northeast region ($n=32$). Overall, no more than 18% of districts are located in any one region. While the Metro region contains only 18 districts, making it the second smallest region in terms of the number of districts, this region serves more than half (55%) of the student population in the state. Conversely, the Northeast has the greatest number of districts yet serves less than 2% of the state's student population. Additionally, more than half (60%) of the districts serve 1,000 students or fewer, 11% serve more than 20,000 students, and the 15 largest districts account for 68% of the state's student population.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study is being conducted in phases to capture information, lessons learned, and options for improvement throughout implementation of the new assessment system. Researchers utilized a statewide district-level online survey and targeted focus groups (at least one per region). Both the focus groups and survey included questions about the components of local and state assessment systems and the impact of current and new assessments.

Design

The first phase of the study took place between February and April 2014. Three approaches were used to gather information: (1) document and artifact review, (2) survey of district assessment coordinators, and (3) focus groups. Phase two began in May, continues until July, and involves similar approaches: (1) follow-up survey of district assessment coordinators; (2) follow-up conversations with the district focus groups; (3) focus group of large, metro-area districts; and (4) a phone interview with online education providers.

Colorado Assessment Implementation Survey

A voluntary survey (See Appendix A) — created by WestEd researchers in collaboration with CDE staff — was sent to 178 district assessment coordinators (DAC) on March 12, 2014. DACs were encouraged to consult other district leaders to ensure that responses reflected those of the district as a whole. The purpose of the survey was to gather perceptions regarding the value and burden of state-required and other assessments (e.g., locally administered interim assessments) as well as views of general readiness issues related to the new assessment system.

Survey responses were reviewed and incomplete surveys eliminated from the sample. Rating questions were reclassified as either low (i.e., low, somewhat low, moderate) or high (i.e., somewhat high and high) to achieve sufficient counts for chi-square analyses. This allowed researchers to better understand how districts in different areas (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) perceive the value and burden of current and new assessments. Additional chi-square analyses were conducted using student population as a frame of reference. Districts were reclassified by student population as follows:

- ❖ Small = 1–250 and 251–1,000 students
- ❖ Medium = 1,001–3,000 and 3,001–10,000 students
- ❖ Large = 10,001–20,000 and more than 20,000 students

Statistically significant differences were not found across responses for small, medium, and large districts, and thus are not reported in the results section.

Focus Groups

To delve deeper into assessment implementation challenges and opportunities, WestEd researchers convened eleven focus groups. CDE sent invitations to every district during the last week of January 2014. Twenty-three districts responded to the request. The Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Council helped to select the following districts from the list of 23 respondents: Archuleta, Buena Vista R-31, Cherry Creek 5, Delta County, La Veta RE-2, Platte Valley RE-7, Strasburg, and Woodland

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Park Re-2. Each district focus group consisted of approximately 7–10 participants, including superintendents, assessment coordinators, curriculum coordinators, technology directors, principals, teachers, parents, and students, all of whom were selected by the districts. CDE also identified teachers from across the state to participate in a separate focus group and reached out to concerned parent groups (e.g., Gifted Education Advisory Council, Padres Unidos, Speak for Cherry Creek, Special Education Advisory Council, Stand for Children, State Council for Educator Effectiveness, and groups opposed to the Common Core State Standards) as well as the Colorado League of Charter Schools to identify participants for two additional role-alike focus groups. (See Appendix B)

Conducted between February 26 and April 2, each focus group convened for approximately two hours. Researchers posed 10 questions organized as follows: current system (value most and least); new system (hopes, fears, challenges); and managing the transition (needs and solutions). Comments and themes were summarized on flip charts or whiteboards during each session. Notes were also typed during the sessions and commenter roles indicated. For each district and role group, participant comments were reviewed, organized into eight categories, coded by theme, and tallied. (See Appendix C)

Research Constraints and Limitations

The state assessment system is the primary focus of the study. Study participants also raised accountability issues, such as whether the results of new tests will be sufficiently valid and reliable to support decisions regarding school accountability and teacher evaluation. These issues were noted and are described in the discussion section of the report. For analyses of the survey data, districts were weighted equally. Since all districts, regardless of location or size, need to perform similar transition activities, each had an equal voice during survey administration and analysis. As a consequence, however, it should be noted that the views of rural districts with small student populations have a proportionally higher impact on the results.

III. RESULTS

Findings from the first phase of the assessment implementation study follow. Information was collected from documents and artifacts, a statewide survey of district assessment coordinators, and focus groups of a representative sample of districts and various stakeholders.

Overall Findings

Analyses revealed the following areas of consensus across survey respondents and focus group participants regarding the state assessment system:

Value Most — Participants value local interim assessments most. They also appreciate the format, elements, and feedback contained in state assessment reports as well as the emphasis on growth. Additionally, the common metric and basis the assessments provide for the state’s accountability system are valued.

Value Least — Participants dislike the high stakes associated with state assessment results. They report that results are delayed and general, and do not inform instructional practice, programming, and student placement decisions (i.e., utility). They also question the timing of statewide summative tests that are administered February through early April rather than at the end of the school year in May.

Challenges — Time is the theme that summarizes the challenges associated with implementation of the new assessment system. Issues related to this theme include the impact on instructional time, expanded testing calendar, frequent schedule disruptions, computer and device access for non-testing students during testing windows, and the burden associated with test preparation and administration.

Needs — To facilitate the transition to the new assessment system, participants identified the need for efficient methods to administer tests while minimizing disruptions to instructional time, sufficient numbers and types of devices to meet instructional needs and technical requirements, and enhanced staffing and capacity to support the process.

Solutions — Proposed solutions clustered under the themes of flexibility and results. Flexibility involves options based upon district needs, size, and location as well as local decisionmaking regarding how often as well as whether, when, where, and how students are tested. Study participants also expect timely, high-quality, relevant, and useful feedback about student performance that informs educators, parents, and students.

Survey Findings

Demographics

Eighty-seven DACs submitted complete surveys for a 49% response rate. Surveys were submitted by districts in each region. Table 1 presents district participation in rural, suburban, and urban areas by region and student population. Overall, about three quarters of the respondents are from rural areas. The Northeast region is well represented in the survey sample. Specifically, 24% of participating districts are from that region. Additionally, districts serving one to 1,000 students are highly represented (54%) in the survey sample. On an area by area basis, at least half of the suburban and urban districts are located in the Metro region. Rural districts are located in every region except for the Metro area.

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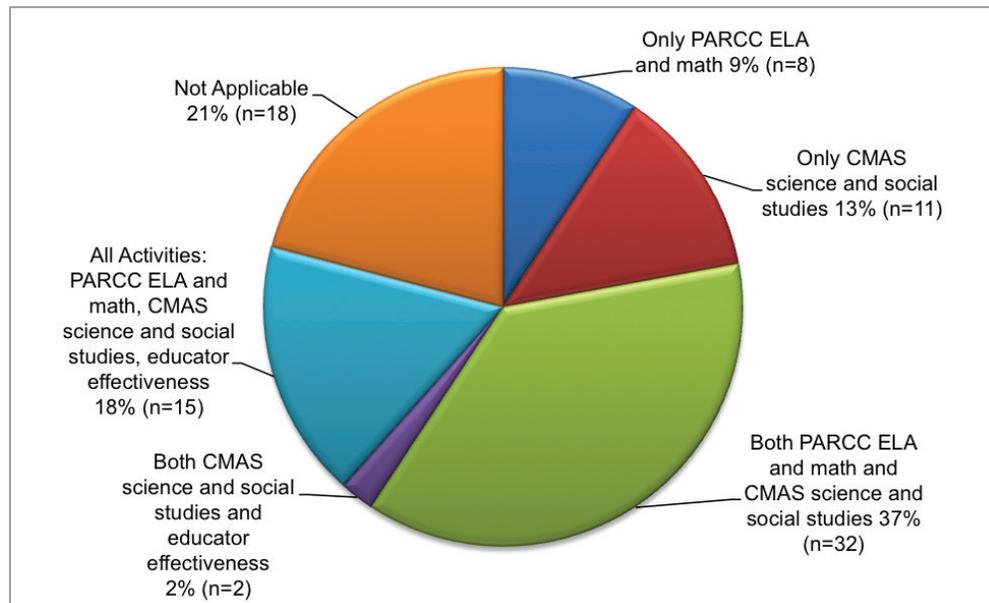
More than two-thirds of rural districts are relatively small, serving between one and 1,000 students. About 71% of suburban and 57% of urban districts serve more than 10,000 students compared to 2% of rural districts.

Table 1. Survey Response Rate in Rural, Suburban, and Urban Areas by Region and Student Population (n=87)

	Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Overall (%)
Overall	76	16	8	100
Region				
Metro	0	50	57	13
Pikes Peak	2	29	29	8
North Central	6	21	0	8
Northeast	31	0	0	24
Northwest	5	0	14	5
Southeast	20	0	0	15
Southwest	26	0	0	20
West Central	11	0	0	8
Student Population				
1–1,000	68	7	14	54
1,001–10,000	31	21	29	29
More than 10,000	2	71	57	17

A majority (78%, n=68) of districts participated in assessment field tests (i.e., new English language arts and/or mathematics tests, science and/or social studies tests) and/or the educator effectiveness pilot. Just 18 districts indicated that they did not participate in any of these activities. More than one third of participating districts reported that they will or have participated in both PARCC English language arts/mathematics and CMAS science/social studies field tests. Additionally, 18% of districts participated in all of the activities: PARCC and CMAS field tests as well as the educator effectiveness pilot.

Figure A. Participation in Field Tests and Educator Effectiveness Pilot



Readiness

Table 2 presents districts' perceptions of factors affecting their readiness to administer online state assessments. The percentages for each area (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) and overall indicate that the factor has a somewhat high or high impact on their readiness. Regarding overall readiness, 28% of districts appear fully prepared. And although not displayed in Table 2, about half of the districts are moderately prepared while 20% are not yet ready. Two issues affect district readiness the most: management (e.g., planning, organizing, scheduling, logistics, administering, controlling) and devices (e.g., hardware and software at schools, device-to-student ratios), which influence 62% and 60% of districts respectively. This holds for rural districts with 63% citing management and 57% noting devices. Devices have a greater impact on suburban (71%) and urban (71%) readiness.

Suburban districts report that the factors most impacting their readiness are management and information technology staff with 79% citing these issues. Also, nearly two-thirds of suburban districts reported network infrastructure concerns compared to 49% of rural and 43% of urban districts. Interestingly, devices have less of an influence on readiness for rural districts (57%) than for suburban (71%) and urban (71%) districts. Management is less of an influence, however, on urban districts' readiness compared to suburban and rural districts. Only 29% of urban districts indicated that their readiness is highly impacted by management compared to 63% of rural and 79% of suburban districts. In addition, few (17%) urban districts reported that training and professional development are issues impacting their readiness compared to half of suburban and rural districts.

Table 2. Perceptions of Factors Affecting Readiness to Administer the State Assessments (n=87)

	Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Overall (%)
Overall readiness	30	14	29	28
Instructional design and preparation <i>(e.g., curricular materials and resources, instructional strategies)</i>	42	57	57	45
Network infrastructure <i>(e.g., Internet access, wired and wireless connectivity)</i>	49	64	43	51
Devices <i>(i.e., hardware and software at schools, device-to-student ratios)</i>	57	71	71	60
Management <i>(e.g., planning, organizing, scheduling, administering, controlling)</i>	63	79	29	62
IT staff and personnel	47	79	57	52
Procurement of necessary funding & resources	44	50	57	46
Training/professional development	48	50	17	46

Notes: The percentages above indicate that the factor has a somewhat high or high impact on their readiness. Bold figures represent large, though not necessarily statistically significant, differences across sectors.

Value and Burden

Table 3 presents participating districts' perceptions of the value and burden of state and local assessments. Respondents (80%) value local interim assessments most followed by early literacy assessments associated with the READ Act (50%). More than half (57%) of urban districts consider their local interim assessments as high burden compared to 37% of rural and 23% of suburban districts. School readiness assessments impose the greatest burden (76%) followed by social studies (74%) and science (73%) tests. The least burdensome tests include the Colorado ACT and other district postsecondary readiness assessments. These tests are identified, however, as high burden to half of the urban districts compared to 19% of rural and none of the suburban districts. District rankings of the value (highest to lowest) and burden (least to most) of assessments are provided in Tables 4 and 5. These tables are shaded green, yellow, orange, and red. Green indicates the tests that are most valued and of least burden, and red indicates the tests that are least valued and of greatest burden. Yellow and orange shading indicates tests that fall between these distinctions.

Districts generally view current English language arts and mathematics assessments (i.e., TCAP) as low value with suburban districts valuing these assessments more than urban and rural districts. Two-thirds of rural and suburban districts view all TCAP assessments as high in burden compared to 29% of urban districts. Few respondents (21%) value the social studies and science assessments. Urban districts (50%) value the science assessments at higher levels than suburban (38% believe the tests inform student progress, 25% say they support school improvement) and rural districts (20%). And although the burden of school readiness assessments is high, urban districts (100%) consider it highly valuable in informing student progress compared to 38% of rural and 13% of suburban districts. The urban sample size for this item, however, only reflects two districts.

Table 3. Perceptions of the Value and Burden of State and Local Assessments

	Value				Assessment (State or Local)	Burden			
	Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Overall (%)		Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Overall (%)
Informs Student Progress	27	43	29	29	TCAP Reading (n=85)	70	79	30	67
Improves School/District	33	36	29	33					
Informs Student Progress	23	43	29	27	TCAP Writing (n=85)	70	79	29	67
Improves School/District	28	29	29	28					
Informs Student Progress	24	43	29	27	TCAP Mathematics (n=83)	66	79	29	64
Improves School/District	32	39	29	33					
Informs Student Progress	20	38	50	23	CMAS Science (n=69)	72	82	80	73
Improves School/District	20	25	50	21					
Informs Student Progress	18	38	33	21	CMAS Social Studies (n=69)	71	82	100	74
Improves School/District	20	25	33	21					
Informs Student Progress	31	57	57	39	ACCESS for ELLs (n=70)	61	57	57	59
Improves School/District	27	39	29	29					
Informs Student Progress	44	43	50	44	Colorado ACT (n=81)	18	14	17	17
Improves School/District	43	43	33	42					
Informs Student Progress	64	64	57	64	Early Literacy Assessments READ Act (n=80)	64	71	57	65
Improves School/District	54	36	43	51					
Informs Student Progress	38	13	100	36	School Readiness Assessment (n=46)	72	88	100	76
Improves School/District	38	13	0	34					
Informs Student Progress	90	77	86	87	Other District Interim Assessments (n=79)	37	23	57	36
Improves School/District	83	62	86	80					
Informs Student Progress	61	29	50	55	Other District Postsecondary Readiness (n=41)	19	0	50	17
Improves School/District	47	29	50	44					

Table 4. Assessments Ranked by Perceived Value

Rank	Assessment	Informs Student Progress	Improves School/District
1	District administered interim	87 %	80 %
2	Early Literacy (READ Act)	64 %	51 %
3	District administered postsecondary readiness	55 %	44 %
4	Colorado ACT	44 %	42 %
5	ACCESS for ELLs	39 %	29 %
6	School Readiness	36 %	34 %
7	TCAP Reading	29 %	33 %
8	TCAP Mathematics	27 %	33 %
9	TCAP Writing	27 %	28 %
10	CMAS Science	23 %	21 %
11	CMAS Social Studies	21 %	21 %

Table 5. Assessments Ranked by Perceived Burden

Rank	Assessment	Burden
1	District administered postsecondary readiness	17 %
1	Colorado ACT	17 %
3	District administered interim	36 %
4	ACCESS for ELLs	59 %
5	TCAP Mathematics	64 %
6	Early Literacy (READ Act)	65 %
7	TCAP Reading	67 %
7	TCAP Writing	67 %
9	CMAS Science	73 %
10	CMAS Social Studies	74 %
11	School Readiness	76 %

Figures B and C are scatter plots comparing the burden (x-axis) to the value (y-axis) of assessments for informing student progress and improving school/district performance. Tests appearing in the upper right-hand quadrant are viewed as high burden and high value. Tests appearing in the upper left-hand quadrant are viewed as low burden and high value. Most of the tests are clustered in the lower right-hand quadrant indicating high burden and low value.

Figure B. Burden versus Value of Assessments for Informing Student Progress

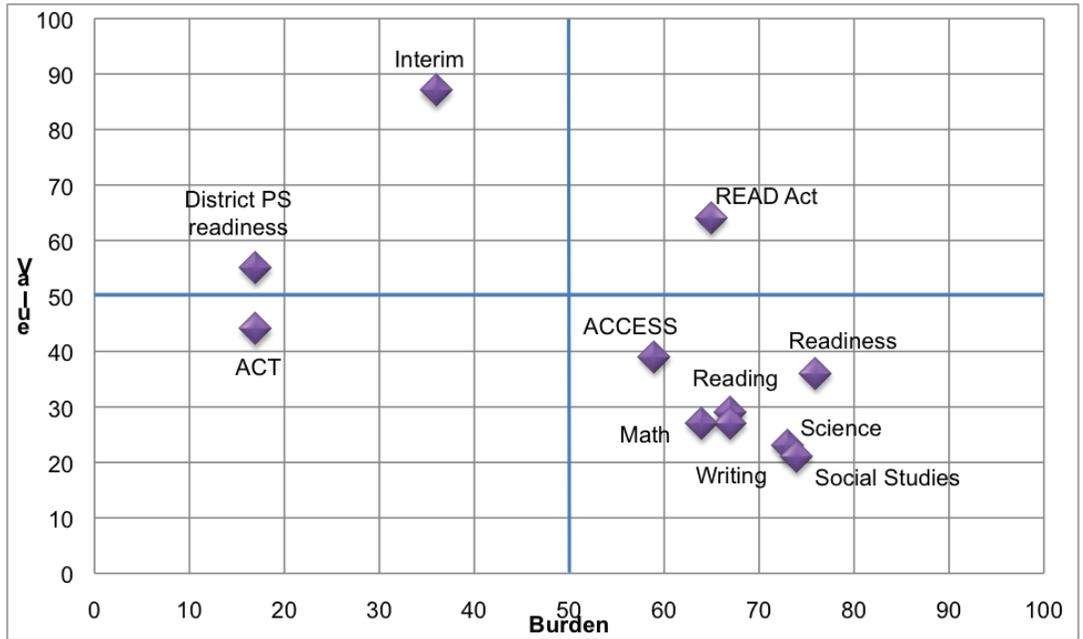
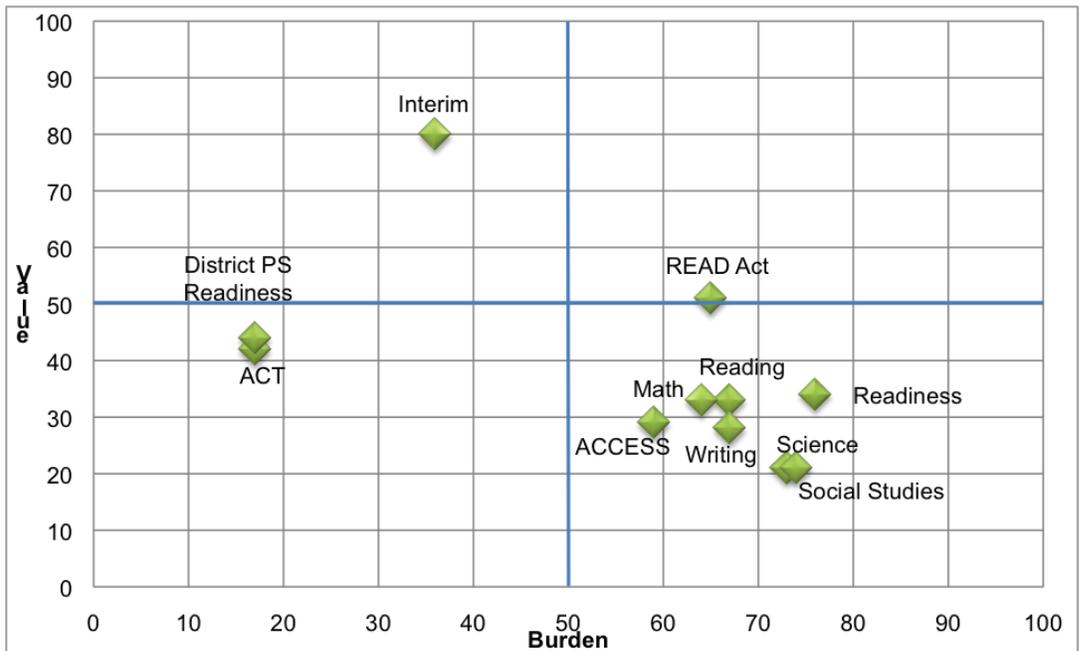


Figure C. Burden versus Value of Assessments for Improving School/District Performance



Elements of a Statewide System

The survey asked districts to rate the importance of particular elements in a state assessment system. As indicated in Table 6, the most important characteristic for rural, suburban, and urban districts alike is timeliness of assessment results (93%). The second and third most desired characteristics are information on student growth from year to year (80%) and length of assessments (74%). On the other hand, only 20% of participating districts reported that assessing social studies annually in grades 4, 7, and 12 is an important element.

Perceptions vary by area and reveal notable differences. For example, cross-school comparisons are highly important to 71% of suburban districts compared to 43% of urban and 21% of rural districts ($p < .001$). Additionally, cross-district comparisons are more important to urban (57%) and suburban (64%) districts compared to 14% of rural districts ($p < .001$). Indicators of school readiness are far more important to urban districts (86%) compared to 23% of suburban and 41% of rural districts ($p < .05$).

Table 6. Important Characteristics of a State Assessment System

	Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Overall (%)
Timeliness of results	90	100	100	93
Information on student growth from year to year	77	86	86	80
Length of assessments	73	69	86	74
Actionable information at the program level	62	79	86	68
Actionable information at the student level	61	79	86	67
Aligned local and state assessment system	67	64	71	66
Flexible state assessment window	64	64	71	65
Inclusion of writing	60	64	71	61
Information on student mastery of the Colorado Academic Standards	53	79	71	60
Items beyond selected response	54	64	100	59
Early indicators of college and career readiness	50	64	71	55
Indicators of early literacy development	53	57	57	54
Indicators of school readiness*	41	23	86	43

	Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Overall (%)
Gradual transition from paper to online administration	42	29	43	40
Single state assessment window	35	31	14	32
Cross-school comparisons**	21	71	43	31
Cross-state comparisons	22	36	57	27
Cross-district comparisons**	14	64	57	26
Assessing social studies annually in grades 4, 7, and 12	24	7	14	20
*p<.05; **p<.001				

Respondents also provided feedback on the elements valued most and least about the current system, concerns regarding the new system, and the types of assistance that would increase readiness and facilitate the transition from current to new.

The top three items, selected from a list of 15, that participating districts value most about the current assessment system are that it provides:

- ❖ A common basis for the state's accountability system (n=29);
- ❖ Feedback to educators (n=28); and
- ❖ Comparisons across schools and districts (n=28).

On the other hand, the top three items that participating districts value least about the current assessment system are the following:

- ❖ Inform instructional practice (n=23);
- ❖ Identify teacher development needs (n=22); and
- ❖ Ensure accountability for student performance and progress (n=18).

As the state moves forward with the new assessment system, districts' prominent concerns are:

- ❖ Impact on instructional time (n=63);
- ❖ Quantity of assessments (n=46);
- ❖ Time required for administration (n=40); and
- ❖ Technology requirements (n=35).

To facilitate the transition from the current to the new system, districts need the following types of assistance:

- ❖ Efficient methods to administer assessments that minimize disruptions to instruction time (n=53);
- ❖ Procuring devices that meet instructional needs and assessment consortia requirements (n=46); and
- ❖ Professional development for staff to understand and use assessment results (n=28).

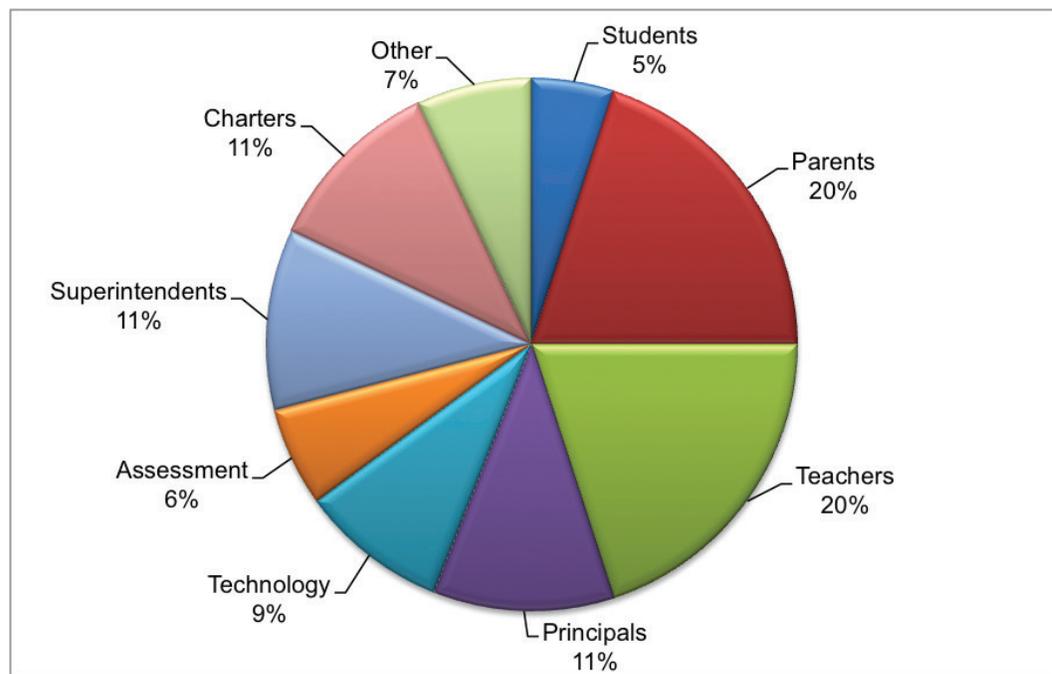
Focus Groups Findings

The focus group sessions provided superintendents, assessment coordinators, technology directors, principals, teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders with an opportunity to share challenges, needs, and proposed solutions for implementing a high-quality assessment system. They also described how an ideal state assessment system might look in the future.

Demographics

Ninety-three individuals participated in focus groups with a majority (nearly 80%) representing rural districts. Twenty percent of focus group participants were parents, and another 20% were teachers. Eleven percent of participants were principals, 11% were either superintendents or assistant superintendents, and another 11% represented charter schools. Participating role groups are depicted in Figure D.

Figure D. Focus Group Participants



Current State Assessment System

Value Most — Participants value the Colorado ACT, especially students, parents, and secondary educators. ACT results are timely, relevant, and meaningful to students and their families. The current TCAP assessments provide a common metric that enables comparisons of schools and districts across the state. Participants also value the reports generated from assessment results and emphasis on student growth. They like the data and graphs depicting students' performance levels, weaknesses, and strengths. And they appreciate the user-friendly format, which allows students, parents, and teachers to view trends over time.

Value Least — Test results are delayed and thus do not inform scheduling, student placements, or instructional decisions. Test administration is perceived as a burden because it diminishes the

amount of time available for instruction and other educational purposes. Participants dislike the weight and number of accountability indicators associated with TCAP assessment results. While the stakes are high for schools and teachers, there are no consequences for students. Few students demonstrate support and buy-in for state summative assessments, and feel limited responsibility to perform well on the assessments.

New State Assessment System

Hopes — Participants hope that new online assessments will be user-friendly, interactive, and relevant, so that students will be engaged and motivated to perform well. They expect results in a timely manner so that educators may use the information to immediately inform instruction and determine necessary interventions. Online administration should reduce the overall amount of time spent testing as well as the costs associated with preparation and administration.

Fears — Students, particularly those at the elementary level, may not be adequately prepared for online assessments. Participants believe that young students lack keyboarding and other technological skills deemed necessary for successful completion of online assessments. This highlights a common fear that the new assessments will measure students' technology skills rather than content knowledge and application.

Challenges — New assessments will be administered more frequently and further reduce instructional time, especially for students who need it the most (e.g., English language learners and students with disabilities). Furthermore, expanded testing windows and increased testing time will limit access to computer labs and devices for non-testing students and teachers who normally use the facilities for their classes. Districts may not have the capacity to efficiently transition to the new system. Devices, network infrastructure (e.g., reliable bandwidth), and other resources are insufficient in some areas. Several sites lack the staff capacity to simultaneously administer assessments and provide instruction to students who are not testing.

Needs — Participants desire comprehensive professional development that prepares staff to administer the assessments effectively, and understand and apply the results. Additional professional development opportunities are essential to help educators better understand and align formative assessments, instructional strategies, and curricula to the Colorado Academic Standards. Participants also indicated the need for sufficient numbers of compatible devices as well as adequate and well maintained network infrastructures. Educators requested resource banks that contain curricular materials, sample items, and model units, to help prepare students for the new online assessments.

Solutions — A solution noted frequently by focus group participants is that of holding schools and districts harmless until all components of the system are functioning effectively and validated. Flexibility is another key theme. Participants, especially those representing rural districts, want more local control and differentiated options based upon district needs, size, and location. They also support local decisionmaking regarding how much as well as when, where, and how students are tested. Funding flexibility to repair and improve school facilities, support teachers, upgrade technology, and meet other deferred needs was also mentioned. Finally, because participants feel overwhelmed and under-resourced, they desire a more gradual pace and seek to slow the roll-out of the new assessment system.

Ideal State Assessment System

When participants were asked if they could have what they want, they listed the following desired elements: a complete and balanced assessment package that includes diagnostic pre-tests, short-cycle assessments, interim and benchmark tests as well as a few, high-quality summative and end-of-course exams for key secondary classes. Differentiated assessment was another common theme. Rather than relying upon a single, point-in-time, one-size-fits-all exam to document student learning, this evaluation process would match tests and assessment methods to student readiness, interests, and preferred means of demonstrating learning. Participants suggested the need for adaptive tests and the ability to provide menus of vetted high-quality choices that align with their students' strengths, learning preferences, and other unique needs. Options for secondary students should align with course work and/or the pathways that students pursue (e.g., ACT, AP, ASVAB, IB, SAT, and industry certifications).

Unique Focus Group Themes

In addition to the cross-cutting themes, each role group articulated unique concerns. Students, for example, fear that new exams will be challenging, include unfamiliar content, and be unfair or inadequate measures for some students. They worry about fatigue given the amount of time spent viewing a computer screen during test sessions, especially for elementary students. They also want simpler tests with one section per subject area, similar to the ACT. Parents dislike the pressure placed on students, want more transparency about test items and the assessment process, and prefer fewer summative tests. Parents also seek opt-out provisions based upon individual student needs and family preferences.

Teachers reported that they are familiar with the current system and expressed fears about moving to a new and different system. They also dislike the stress that high-stakes exams place upon students and teachers. They need curricular materials, seek transparency, and want a voice in issues that affect them. Principals value the READ Act because they may select tests from an approved list, and useful, diagnostic information is obtained quickly following test administration. Principals would like to see fewer summative tests and adjustments at the elementary level (e.g., less testing and age-appropriate tests). They question the feasibility of implementing the new assessment system efficiently and need better curricular materials and test preparation guides for their staffs.

Assessment coordinators fear that new tests will not be user-friendly and view social studies exams as problematic due to timing and lack of incentives for high school seniors. This group seeks adjustments at the secondary level, such as eliminating science and social studies tests for seniors and adopting end-of-course exams. They also appreciate local choices including opt-out provisions. Technology directors hope that their districts are well prepared to administer new assessments and view feasibility (i.e., capacity, complexity, scale, resources, and timeframe) as a major challenge. They need support networks to share experiences and secure assistance; and desire additional resources to procure current and compatible devices, upgrade and maintain network infrastructure, and support additional personnel.

Superintendents raise accountability issues and concerns about how assessment results will be used to judge teachers, schools, and districts. They question the quality (i.e., length, structure, format, level of application) of new online tests. Superintendents want assurance that new tests are fair and accurate measures of student learning. They fear that the new system will be more burdensome

and require additional resources. Superintendents also view communication about the assessment process and results as a major challenge and seek incentives that will motivate students to perform well on state tests.

Finally, representatives from charter schools share the concerns raised by other groups, such as the limited value and utility of current assessments. They also mentioned that the intent of statewide testing conflicts with the values of their students' families, and hope that new English language arts and mathematics tests are developmentally-appropriate rather than requiring the same output for elementary and secondary students. The logistics are a challenge for some charter schools, especially for online schools where students and families must travel to secure testing facilities. Charter school representatives posed several solutions for easing the burden, including fewer and shorter state tests, opt-out provisions for parents, and charter school exemptions from requirements above the federal minimum.

IV. DISCUSSION

Based upon the findings and experience working with other state education agencies across the country, four implementation approaches are proposed for consideration: (1) Stay the course and implement the transition plan as scheduled; (2) Stay the course with added supports and policy adjustments; (3) Purposefully delay parts of the system; and (4) Strategically eliminate specific assessments. The fourth approach was added based upon feedback from the Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Council. The benefits and limitations of each approach are highlighted below.

Implementation Approaches

1. Stay the Course and Implement the Transition Plan as Scheduled

Arguments in Favor:

- ❖ All components of the new state assessment program are required under state and federal statute or regulation and have sufficient educational value to merit their inclusion.
- ❖ The transition implementation plan created urgency to spur reform and incentivizes desired actions.
- ❖ Regardless of any other action taken, the number of testing components will decrease with the sun-setting of the TCAP portion of the system.
- ❖ The Colorado transition implementation plan meets or exceeds the standard achieved by most other states. Delay now might feel better in the short term but result in schools being in the same state of limited readiness at the end of any extension.

Arguments Against:

- ❖ Survey results indicate that full readiness has yet to be achieved.
- ❖ The vision of the revised Colorado Academic Standards requires a range of real reforms (e.g., curricular, instructional, assessment, professional development) that may not be achievable in the time allotted.
- ❖ The increased expectations for the use of technology to support implementation exceed current capacity (software, hardware, connectivity, and staffing).
- ❖ Too much change at once can be counterproductive.
- ❖ A new look at the current assessment system can focus on whether all components are sufficiently valid for their stated purpose, coherent across purposes, and the most efficient means to achieve its important goals.

2. Stay the Course with Added Supports and Policy Adjustments

Arguments in Favor:

- ❖ CDE, districts, and other service providers might identify additional resources and other supports to enhance readiness. For example, professional development activities might be better coordinated across all sectors to increase efficiency and coherence.
- ❖ Regional solutions, particularly in rural districts, may increase the availability of products, services, and human capital to provide differentiated support for the implementation of the various assessments and allow better use of student results for planning and targeted instruction.
- ❖ Interim cut scores could be used to mitigate harm to students and educators without delaying the overall implementation plan.

Arguments Against:

- ❖ Survey and focus group respondents indicated that time, not resources, is the biggest impediment to readiness — adding additional supports will only address part of the stated concerns.
- ❖ Consensus emerged about the value of the various components of the new assessment system. Staying the course, even with the additional supports, does not increase the perceived lack of value of specific components.
- ❖ Local assessments, while not necessarily required, were valued highly by the survey and focus group participants, and thus would not be seen as favorable candidates for easing the perceived overall burden.

3. Purposefully Delay Parts of the System

Arguments in Favor:

- ❖ A delay would allow more time for proper implementation of the valued components as well as support a renewed debate regarding the coherence of all components of the system (state and local).
- ❖ Delayed implementation of selected components of the system has two benefits. First, it respects the feedback of many educators across the state who indicated concerns with the current plan. Second, it allows CDE to remake a case for the value of the system as it currently stands or revise the system based upon additional input and information.
- ❖ As decisions are made about which components to delay, policymakers would need to consider the following items:
 - ▶ assessments required under federal statute (i.e., ESEA)
 - ▶ assessments required under state statutes and regulations
 - ▶ effects of delay of various components on at-risk student populations such as English

learners and students with disabilities

- ▶ community values which may favor content areas such as social studies or value local interim assessments over their state counterparts
- ▶ impact on college and career readiness for students in the delayed content areas

Arguments Against:

- ❖ Most components of the new assessment system are both aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and required by state or federal statute or regulation.
- ❖ Delays of these assessments would require legislative or State Board of Education action or approval from the U.S. Department of Education.
- ❖ Delays would prevent the state from holding schools, educators, and students responsible for achieving Colorado Academic Standards in a timely manner.

4. Strategically Eliminate Specific Assessments

Arguments in Favor:

- ❖ A review of current assessments could focus on whether each one is valid for its stated purpose, and the most effective measure of student learning.
- ❖ Provides time to confirm the findings regarding the value and burden of each assessment.
- ❖ Flexibility and local options based upon district needs and size respects stakeholder feedback and could reduce the impact on instructional time.

Arguments Against:

- ❖ Tests are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and required by state or federal statute or regulation.
- ❖ Elimination would require legislative or State Board of Education action or approval from the U.S. Department of Education.

The implementation approaches are not mutually exclusive. The state could decide to stay the course with some assessments, delay others, phase-in the movement to online assessments, and/or eliminate specific assessments. In addition to exploring these implementation approaches, the state has identified (based on initial findings from this study) several possible short- and long-term options for feedback from districts. These options were shared and initial feedback gathered during the May 1 meeting of the Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Council. The options, outlined below, will be shared and discussed further in phase two of the study.

Short-Term Options:

- ❖ Phase-in online assessments by allowing all math assessments to be administered by paper/pencil, thereby reducing by nearly half the amount of online testing in the first year, and by allowing those districts that have limited capacity to make a gradual transition to online assessments
- ❖ Reduce the number of high school assessments to the federal minimum:

- ▶ Make the 9th and 10th grade PARCC assessments optional for districts
- ▶ Use the culminating PARCC assessments (most students would take them in grade 11)
- ❖ Shorten the length of science assessments and only report overall scores
- ❖ Shorten the length of social studies assessments and only report overall scores
- ❖ Use a sampling approach to social studies that does not require every school to be tested every year
- ❖ Propose adjustments to the PARCC assessments:
 - ▶ shorten the number and length of sessions
 - ▶ collapse the performance-based assessments and end-of-year windows

Long-Term Options:

- ❖ Consider making school readiness assessments optional due to the perceived high burden and low value, with the noted exception of urban districts
- ❖ Initiate discussions with stakeholders to design a next generation assessment system that provides timely, relevant, and useful information that supports learning
- ❖ Explore the possibility of moving toward more authentic and instructionally-embedded assessments that focus group and survey participants valued

Study findings, implementation approaches, and potential options are being discussed among members of the Commissioner’s Superintendent Advisory Council. The council’s feedback informed the approaches and helped clarify options for minimizing the assessment burden on districts. Several council members expressed an interest in limiting statewide summative assessments to the federal minimum and making optional any assessments above that minimum. (See Appendix D)

The second phase of the study began in May following online administration of the new science and social studies assessments and field testing of the new online English language arts and mathematics assessments. Objectives for this second phase include the following: (1) understand whether and how the challenges and opportunities may have changed, (2) gather lessons from the state’s first online administration, and (3) solicit feedback on options for facilitating a smooth transition to the state’s new assessment system. The Colorado Department of Education will use the findings, input, and additional feedback to address unintended consequences of the new assessment system and inform potential adjustments to administrative policies and procedures.

Future Directions

Some of the anxiety and frustration expressed by study participants derives from how the state intends to use CMAS results for accountability purposes. Even though the study was designed to examine issues associated with implementation of the new state assessment system, some of the accountability concerns expressed by focus group participants are noted here. Besides the assessment issues identified, Colorado educators and other stakeholders raised concerns about whether the results of new tests will be sufficiently valid and reliable to support decisions about school and educator effectiveness. Focus group participants question whether new assessments are well aligned with curricula and instruction and accurately reflect student learning. And while they recognize and value the concept of growth in addition to status, some disagree with the methods used

to determine performance levels and calculate growth. Several participants also mentioned that sample sizes are too small to reflect real growth or differences among student groups, especially in small and rural districts.

Study participants stated that the current accountability system relies upon results from the same students for multiple indicators, and is punitive in nature including more sticks than carrots. They expressed the desire for a learner-centered assessment system founded upon high-quality instruction with results from key tests used as one of many measures within a balanced accountability system. Perhaps a strategy during this transition period could be facilitating an open, transparent discussion among stakeholders so that they clearly understand how much weight these new online assessments should bear in the accountability system. Such dialogues are important because the new online exams are high stakes. Results will be used to evaluate teacher performance, label schools, and judge programs.

Furthermore, the state could continue to consider the elements of an ideal statewide assessment system as well as some of the other solutions noted by focus group participants. For example, the state could simplify and adjust the timing of other major reform initiatives, specifically educator effectiveness, to ensure the stability and validity of the new assessment system prior to including results as accountability indicators. The state could initiate a conversation about sampling and how that might significantly reduce test burden while still providing state-level accountability data and serving as a proxy for growth. Finally, study participants proposed several creative solutions and incentives that are worthy of further exploration.

V. Addendum: Phase TWO Results

Introduction

The first phase of the Colorado Assessment Implementation Study took place between February and April. Three approaches were used to gather information: (1) document and artifact review, (2) survey of district assessment coordinators, and (3) focus groups. Study findings were shared and discussed among stakeholders during three meetings held in May. Members of the Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Council reviewed preliminary results on May 1. The council's feedback informed the implementation approaches described in the discussion section of the report and helped clarify potential options for minimizing the assessment burden on districts. Phase one findings were then shared with the Colorado State Board of Education on May 14. A public presentation was also held in Denver on May 21.

The second phase of the study began in May following online administration of the new science and social studies assessments and field testing of the PARCC-developed English language arts and mathematics assessments. Similar approaches were used to gather information during this phase of the study: (1) follow-up survey of district assessment coordinators; (2) follow-up conversations with eight, district focus groups; (3) focus group of large, metro-area district superintendents; and (4) a phone interview with online education providers.

Objectives for the second phase of the study included the following:

- ❖ Understand whether and how the challenges and opportunities may have changed since the first phase of data collection,
- ❖ Gather lessons from the state's first online administration, and
- ❖ Solicit feedback on strategies for facilitating a smooth transition to the new assessment system.

The Colorado Department of Education is using the findings, input, and additional feedback to address unintended implications of the new assessment system and inform adjustments to administrative policies and procedures. This addendum to the phase one report contains findings from the second phase of the study.

Survey Findings

On May 23 a voluntary, follow-up survey (Appendix E) was sent to 178 district assessment coordinators (DAC). To complete the survey assessment coordinators were encouraged to consult other district leaders so that responses reflected those of the district as a whole. Each district could submit one survey. The survey closed June 9. Eighty-seven DACs submitted complete surveys for a 49% response rate. Urban districts were better represented during this round of data collection with

12 (14%) districts responding compared to seven (8%) districts during phase one. The number of rural and suburban districts each decreased by three in phase two compared to phase one with 63 (72%) districts located in rural areas and 11 (13%) located in suburban areas. One district did not respond to the demographic question.

Common implementation challenges, identified during the first phase of the study, were explored further during phase two. Key challenges include the following:

- ❖ Impact of testing on instructional time;
- ❖ Concerns regarding overall readiness related to management, devices, and capacity;
- ❖ Concerns related to the quantity, frequency, and length of assessments;
- ❖ A desire for results to be available more quickly and used to inform instruction;
- ❖ Specific concerns regarding the testing burden in high school; and
- ❖ Student readiness to take online assessments in grades three and four.

Furthermore, districts shared a range of possible short- and long-term options or solutions to these challenges. The phase two survey requested district feedback on proposed short-term options. It should be noted that while some options are within CDE's ability to implement, others require federal and/or state statutory changes. Thus survey questions focused on options that meet federal assessment requirements.

Technology Readiness

Several solutions were proposed to address technology readiness with regard to number of devices, district capacity, and technology infrastructure. Districts were asked to select the top three solutions that would best meet their needs. Table 7 lists the options according to the total (see column five) number of districts selecting the option as a top three solution. The number of districts selecting each solution as its first, second, or third choice is also indicated, as well as the number of districts indicating that the option is not applicable (N/A).

Table 7. Solutions to Address Technology Readiness

Solutions	1st	2nd	3rd	Total	N/A
Emergency funds for device purchases	37	23	9	69	4
Gradual phase-in of online assessments, allowing for paper/pencil as needed.	26	16	15	57	13
Increased broadband access and consistency	17	19	10	46	15
More specific guidance regarding third party software and local configurations that may impact testing	8	10	25	43	17
Onsite technology consultations and assistance	7	17	15	39	14
More robust infrastructure trial simulation files	3	12	15	30	16
Guidance on how to optimize proctor caching	3	5	9	17	20

Districts indicated that the best solution (i.e., highest first and total numbers) would be emergency funds for device purchases (green) and the least preferred solution (i.e., lowest first, second, third, and total numbers) is guidance on how to optimize proctor caching (red). The two solutions receiving the highest totals (i.e., first, second, and third selections) were emergency funds and then gradual phase-in of online assessments. Districts selected emergency funds followed by increased broadband access and consistency as the second best solutions (column three). More specific guidance regarding third party software and local configurations that may impact testing was selected most as the third best solution (column four).

Ratings varied slightly by district type. Rural districts prefer emergency funds, gradual phase-in of online assessments, and then more specific guidance regarding third party software and local configurations that may impact testing. Suburban districts prefer gradual phase-in and emergency funds, followed by more specific guidance. And urban districts prefer emergency funds, onsite technology consultations and assistance, and more robust infrastructure trial simulation files.

When provided with the same list of solutions, 22% of districts again indicated that the least preferred option was guidance on how to optimize proctor caching. This option was followed closely by gradual phase-in of online assessments, with 20% of districts selecting this as their least preferred option. This solution may need to be optional as some districts clearly like the idea whereas one out of five districts do not prefer this solution.

Impact on Instructional Technology

Districts were asked to specify their level of support for the following solution to reduce the number of online assessments in the 2014–2015 school year:

- ❖ Solution: Transition to online assessments for PARCC by administering the English language arts assessments online and the mathematics assessments via paper and pencil, with district flexibility to administer all tests online if desired. This solution would significantly reduce the number of online assessments to be administered in the 2014–2015 school year.
- ❖ Tradeoff: This solution would eliminate the embedded supports and accommodations of the online assessments, potentially requiring more adult delivered accommodations.

Districts are divided almost evenly on this proposed solution with 38% indicating support (10% strongly support and 28% support) and 37% indicating no support (15% strongly do not support and 22% do not support). Twenty-five percent (n=22) of districts were neutral.

Quantity of Assessments

Districts were next asked to indicate their level of support for the following four solutions that address the quantity of assessments while noting the tradeoffs associated with each solution:

1. Solution: Require only the federally-mandated minimum assessments for math, English language arts, and science:
 - ▶ Assess grades 3–8 annually in math and English language arts;
 - ▶ Implement culminating exams in math and English language arts once in high school (grades 10–12); and
 - ▶ Assess science once in elementary, middle, and high school.

Other state-required tests would become optional for districts.

Tradeoff: This solution would impact high school growth data at the student, school and district level; impact high school accountability and the definition of adequate growth; and eliminate early indicators of college and career readiness provided through the state system.

2. Solution: Use a sampling approach for social studies (e.g., assess one-third of schools each year) while allowing those schools that want annual social studies assessments to request it. Tradeoff: This solution impacts the ability for teachers and administrators to monitor annual achievement in social studies at each school. This solution may also signal a decreased valuing of social studies.
3. Solution: Eliminate the social studies assessment. Tradeoff: This solution eliminates the ability to determine and monitor student achievement in this content area as a state, and may also signal decreased valuing of social studies.
4. Solution: Eliminate the school readiness assessment. Tradeoff: This solution would eliminate the ability to establish a school readiness baseline at kindergarten in all developmental domains. This could also limit a school’s ability to create comprehensive readiness plans for students.

Results are summarized in Table 8 with the solution receiving the most support shaded green and the solution receiving the least support shaded red.

Table 8. Solutions to Reduce the Quantity of Assessments

Solutions	Level of Support				
	Strongly do not Support	Do not Support	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support
(1) Adopt the federal minimum	2%	14%	10%	31%	43%
(2) Social studies sampling	13%	19%	14%	30%	24%
(3) Eliminate social studies	7%	21%	11%	31%	31%
(4) Eliminate school readiness	5%	18%	13%	20%	45%

A majority of respondents support all four solutions. The first solution received the greatest support. Seventy-four percent (n=64) of districts support adopting the minimum federal requirements and making other statewide assessments optional. Sixty-six percent of urban districts support this solution making it their top choice among the four solutions. It was the second most preferred option for rural and suburban districts. Solution two received the least support. Fifty-four percent (n=47) of districts support the use of a sampling approach in social studies. Solutions three and four received about the same amount of support with 62% (n=52) of districts supporting the elimination of social studies assessments and 65% (n=54) supporting the elimination of school readiness assessments. Solution four is the most preferred option for rural and suburban districts, and the second most supported option among urban districts.

Length of Assessments

The fifth survey question examined concerns regarding the length of assessments. Districts were asked to indicate their level of support for two solutions addressing this concern while once again considering the tradeoffs associated with each solution:

1. Solution: Shorten the number and/or length of English language arts and math sessions.
Tradeoff: Implementation of this solution could impact the level of detail in subscore reporting.
2. Solution: Shorten the number and/or length of social studies sessions.
Tradeoff: Implementation of this solution would impact the ability to report subscore data on such areas as geography, history, and economics as students would only receive a high-level score for social studies.

Results indicate strong support for both solutions with 81% (n=70) supporting solution one and 76% (n=66) supporting solution two. The level of support for each solution is elucidated further in Table 9.

Table 9. Solutions to Address the Length of Assessments

Solutions	Level of Support				
	Strongly do not Support	Do not Support	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support
(1) Shorten ELA and math sessions	1%	7%	10%	38%	43%
(2) Shorten social studies sessions	0%	10%	14%	30%	46%

Elementary Student Readiness

During the first phase of data collection, districts shared concerns about the readiness of young students to take online assessments as well as the impact on instructional time for elementary students. The phase two survey asked districts to indicate their level of support for the following option:

- ❖ Solution: Administer paper and pencil tests in third grade so that students have more time to develop typing and keyboarding skills.
- ❖ Tradeoff: This solution impacts students' ability to experience the online tests which have more interactive and engaging features. Additionally, the paper and pencil option may not match current instructional approaches, which are increasingly technology-based.

Districts are divided almost evenly on this proposed solution with 42% indicating support (18% strongly support and 24% support) and 39% indicating no support (11% strongly do not support and 28% do not support). Eighteen percent (n=16) of districts were neutral. Results did not vary by district type.

Districts also indicated that their top two concerns regarding implementation of the new assessments in elementary schools are (1) the quantity of assessments and (2) the impact on instructional time due to rotating students through computer labs with 58 districts (67%) and 57 districts (66%) respectively identifying these issues. These concerns are the same for rural, suburban, and urban districts. Limited technology expertise to support administration of the new assessments was a concern for only two districts. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Implementation Issues at the Elementary Level

Rank	Issues	n	%
1	Too many assessments (local and state)	58	67
2	Impact on instructional time due to rotating students through computer labs	57	66
3	Student technology readiness	21	24
4	Duplication of assessment requirements	15	17
5	Limited devices	13	15
6	Other (e.g., too much testing and less time for instruction, expand the timeframe, duplication of testing for English learners)	7	8
7	Not applicable	3	3
8	Limited technology expertise to support assessment administration	2	2

Secondary Assessments

During the first phase of data collection, districts shared concerns about the number and timing of assessments in high school. The phase two survey asked districts to specify their level of support for the following two options to address this concern:

1. Solution: Use only the ACT, which may require augmentation, in high school and eliminate the other assessments.

Tradeoffs: The ACT is not fully aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards. This solution would eliminate high school growth data and impact the definition of adequate growth. This solution would also eliminate direct writing as part of the high school English language arts assessment.

2. Solution: Assess science and social studies in different years at the high school level.

Tradeoff: The earlier the assessment is given, the greater the impact the test has on the district's scope and sequence.

Districts are divided on the ACT solution with 46% indicating support and 40% indicating no support. Fourteen percent (n=12) of districts took a neutral position on this solution. A majority of districts, especially suburban, support the second solution with 41% (n=36) in support and 23% (n=20) indicating strong support for assessing science and social studies in different years. The level of support for each solution is provided in Table 11.

Table 11. Solutions to Address Assessment Concerns at the Secondary Level

Solutions	Level of Support				
	Strongly do not Support	Do not Support	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support
(1) Use the ACT	11%	29%	14%	18%	28%
(2) Assess in different years	3%	10%	22%	41%	23%

District concerns regarding implementation of the new assessments at the secondary level are identical to those for elementary schools: (1) the quantity of assessments and (2) the impact on instructional time due to rotating students through computer labs with 70 districts (80%) and 56 districts (64%) respectively identifying these issues. Student technology readiness and limited technology expertise to support administration of the new assessments are not concerns at this level. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12. Implementation Issues at the Secondary Level

Rank	Issues	n	%
1	Too many assessments (local and state)	70	80
2	Impact on instructional time due to rotating students through computer labs	56	64
3	Duplication of assessment requirements	21	24
4	Limited devices	12	14
5	Other (e.g., need for course- rather than grade-specific tests, grade level designations, participation rates, less time for instruction, expand the timeframe)	10	11
6	Not applicable	5	6
7	Limited technology expertise to support assessment administration	2	2
8	Student technology readiness	0	0

Student motivation was another secondary challenge described by districts during the first phase of data collection. Science and social studies assessments are currently administered in the fall of 12th grade to address concerns related to the 11th grade testing burden and the desire for districts to have maximum control over the scope and sequence of their social studies and science curricula. Districts shared strategies that could address motivation challenges at this level. The phase two survey asked districts to indicate which ideas are the most appealing. Results are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. Solutions to Address Student Motivation at the Secondary Level

Rank	Strategy	n	%
1	Request scholarship funds for students achieving an advanced score on culminating high school assessments	49	56
2	Allow the assessments to satisfy graduation requirements	43	49
2	Allow the assessments to qualify a student for an endorsed diploma	43	49
4	Move the assessments to the fall of 11 th grade	18	21
5	Move the assessments to the spring of 11 th grade	17	20

A majority of districts (56%) like the idea of requesting scholarship funds for students achieving an advanced score on culminating high school assessments. About half of the districts appreciate allowing assessments to satisfy graduation requirements and qualify a student for an endorsed diploma. Solutions regarding moving the assessments to the fall or spring of 11th grade received the least support. Results are consistent for rural, suburban, and urban districts. The endorsed diploma option is more appealing to suburban and urban districts, while rural districts prefer scholarship funds for their students.

Other Ideas and Comments

Several themes emerged when districts were asked about other ideas and suggestions for improving the state's assessment system. The predominant theme is time. Respondents (n=9) feel that too much time is spent testing, which subsequently reduces the amount of time available for instruction as well as co- and extra-curricular activities. They suggest adopting the minimum federal requirements: English language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8 and at least once in high school, and science at least once in elementary, middle, and high school. Another suggestion is to implement one-hour assessments in English language arts and math.

Secondary issues (n=8) emerged as well with districts suggesting eliminating high school assessments altogether, implementing the new ACT suite, and moving to exit exams that must be passed in order for students to graduate. The quantity of assessments was another theme. Respondents (n=7) suggest reducing the number of required tests and combining English language arts and social studies assessments. Participants also suggest that tests required for federal and state accountability should be conducted every other or every third year instead of annually.

Respondents (n=6) continue to question the purpose and utility of state assessments. They seek assessments that yield timely, meaningful data and inform instruction; assist their school improvement efforts; are well-aligned with curricula and instructional strategies; and relevant to students. Local flexibility and choice was another theme with districts (n=5) wanting to use assessments other than those required by the state.

Continuing the Conversation

The final survey question asked districts how they would like to stay informed of ongoing conversations about the future of the state's assessment system. A majority of districts indicated that they prefer two methods: (1) DAC listserv and (2) monthly assessment e-newsletter with 58 districts (67%) and 46 districts (53%) respectively selecting these options. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14. Preferred Communication Mechanisms

Rank	Method	n	%
1	District Assessment Coordinator listserv	58	67
2	Monthly assessment e-newsletter	46	53
3	Assessment website	34	16
4	Superintendent messages from the Commissioner	27	13
5	Webinar information sessions	25	12
6	Quarterly updates	18	9

Focus Group Feedback

Follow-up conference calls were conducted between May 5 and 15 with representatives from the eight, mixed-role district focus groups that participated in the first phase of the study. The purpose of these calls was two-fold: (1) determine whether perceptions had changed following the online administration and field tests, and (2) discuss possible solutions for reducing the assessment burden and facilitating a smooth transition to the new statewide assessment system. In addition to the eight follow-up conference calls, focus groups were conducted to capture the perceptions and experiences of two groups that were underrepresented during the first phase of data collection. A face-to-face meeting took place on May 21 with metro-area superintendents and a conference call was conducted with multi-district online education providers on May 28.

All ten groups were asked to provide feedback about the opportunities, issues, and strategies associated with the administration of online science and social studies assessments; consider short-term options that would be most beneficial to districts; discuss immediate next steps; and share any additional concerns about the state's assessment system (Appendix F). Summaries of these conversations follow with overarching themes described first and then other group-specific (i.e., phase one districts, metro-area superintendents, and online providers) issues noted.

Online Administration Opportunities and Challenges

All groups noted that student engagement was high when asked what went better than expected with regard to the online administration. Participants reported that students were excited, involved, and more motivated to take the online tests. Students liked the online format and do not want to revert to paper exams. Students also enjoyed the up-to-date and current content, interactive features, tools, graphics, layout, and ability to maneuver among screens.

Management was a second theme mentioned by all ten groups. For the most part it appears that preparations for and the actual administration of tests were smooth and efficient processes. Online schools were able to complete the assessments in a few days by using multiple facilities and flexible scheduling. District groups reported that Chromebooks worked well, it was easy for students to initiate the tests, and students could also restart or log back on if they were kicked out of tests. Most students were able to take tests in classrooms, limited technical difficulties were encountered, and the materials were simpler given the elimination of test booklets. Other opportunities mentioned by the district groups include the ease and efficiency of handling accommodations and the exceptional customer service and support provided by Pearson.

Issues remain, however, and four continue to challenge districts as they transition to online assessments:

- ❖ Sufficient numbers and types of devices;
- ❖ Scheduling disruptions and the resulting impact on instructional time;
- ❖ Staff capacity; and
- ❖ Student fatigue, motivation, and stress.

Participants mentioned the need for adequate numbers of computers and other compatible devices that meet requirements and are sufficiently durable for both testing and classroom use. The groups describe the assessment process as a “complete disruption” that shuts down operations and brings everything to a halt during what has become a “non-stop, second semester testing window.”

Instructional time is lost and affected negatively as technology staffs are constantly troubleshooting during testing windows and unavailable to assist other teachers and students with class/course needs; facilities are secured and/or occupied preventing specials rotations and access for non-testing students; and the amount of time available for more meaningful and relevant assessment that immediately informs instruction is limited. The assessment process demands the allocation of significant material and human resources requiring “all hands on deck.” During testing windows teachers and other staff members assume multiple roles and additional responsibilities yet often lack the expertise and training necessary to perform these roles well.

In addition to devices and disruptions, all groups mentioned that fatigue sets in and students check out after a few days of testing. Some districts suggested that testing over two days was better than extending the time to three days, and there were mixed reviews regarding administering all three sections of a test during one day. Participants reported that some students began clicking randomly through the tests so they could finish, especially during the social studies exams. The district groups reported that elementary students seemed more anxious than secondary students and that the test format and navigation arrows were confusing to some students. High school students seemed surprised by the unfamiliar content of some questions as well as the number of essay questions.

Some unique challenges were described as well. For example, the primary challenge mentioned by online providers is the cost and inconvenience for students, families, and teachers who must travel to secure testing sites. Online providers describe the assessment process as an annual, one-to-two week, “life-changing event” as families adjust schedules, travel far from home, and stay in hotels so that their children may be tested. The logistics of moving staff to students and students to test sites are complex and cumbersome. Additional challenges mentioned by the district focus groups include accommodations (e.g., oral presentation/voice software was difficult to understand and assignments had to be made multiple times); Java updates; confusion regarding the log off and submit buttons; various technical glitches (e.g., browser compatibility, delays in loading questions, screens freezing, simulations not working, and tests restarting); and troubleshooting difficulties (e.g., nebulous manuals and instructions, access to the helpline, duplicate student files).

District representatives did offer some strategies for addressing these issues. Regarding the duration of tests and resulting student fatigue, they suggested testing no more than two sessions at a time and limiting testing to two days. Java updates were addressed by moving updates to an internal folder and then testing after updates were completed to avoid pop-ups. Management was facilitated by color-coding usernames and passwords internally to prevent confusion especially among students with similar names, running TestNav prior to administration to prevent issues, using Firefox rather than Explorer, and disabling anti-virus software to avoid crashes. Furthermore, extensive planning, preparation, and field testing enabled districts to identify and fix issues ahead of time, work out any additional kinks, secure adequate network capacity, assign technology staff to every test site, and ensure a smooth and well organized process.

Unique Challenges by Level

During the first phase of the study, participants identified several concerns that were specific to either elementary or secondary students. These concerns were explored further during the second phase of data collection. Focus group participants identified three central challenges at the elementary level: (1) computer, keyboarding, and typing skills; (2) session length; and (3) developmental appropriateness. Almost every participant noted a technology divide within and across districts with implications for student performance on the new online assessments. Participants reported

that some students did not understand how to navigate certain parts of the tests or respond to some of the questions. A few districts noted that they are addressing the typing skills issue by offering keyboarding courses beginning at the kindergarten level. Focus group participants also believe that a 90-minute session is too long for elementary students to sit for tests, and that some of the social studies test items are not developmentally appropriate as the phrasing and format appears too difficult for fourth grade students.

The most frequently mentioned issue at the secondary level was the lack of student motivation and buy-in, especially among high school seniors, when there is no incentive to perform well or accountability attached to results. District representatives noted that the ACT matters to students and that the other tests will have little value unless tied to graduation requirements. Additional secondary concerns include the content and timing of exams and an even greater negative impact on instructional time as students miss class due to testing, athletic competitions, and other extracurricular activities. Focus group participants question the focus and emphasis (e.g., civics, history, economics, geography) of the seventh and twelfth grade social studies exams. They believe that science and social studies assessments should be aligned to the courses that students are taking rather than determined by grade level. This issue more directly concerns online providers as students move at their own pace and matriculate at different rates. The timing of assessments is a major challenge when students don't take and finish classes at the same time. Flexibility is requested at the secondary level regarding the number and length of tests given high school schedules and the number of periods available for testing.

Options and Solutions

Common themes and challenges emerged during the first phase of the study. The Colorado Department of Education subsequently identified potential short-term options that address key challenges. Participants in the second round of data collection were asked to consider several proposed solutions for improving the state assessment system and then select the option that would provide the most relief for their district. Participant feedback about the challenges and associated options is summarized in Table 15.

Table 15. Focus Group Feedback on Potential Short-Term Options

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Technology Readiness	<p>Phase in online assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer all math assessments on paper for the first year Paper option for districts with high barriers to online assessment 	<p>No support — Most districts do not want to revert to paper for several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are prepared and possess the required technology. They don't have to manage all of the test booklets. Online assessments are inevitable, can be more rigorous, and are not comparable to paper formats. They want to receive student results quickly. <p>Limited support — A few districts like the paper option, especially for math, and appreciate the flexibility as they do not have the personnel to troubleshoot technical issues.</p>
Access to Devices	<p>Request emergency funds this budget cycle dedicated to device purchases</p>	<p>Strong support — Most districts would like CDE to request emergency funds for one-to-one solutions and devices that work well (e.g., Chromebooks) across multiple platforms. In addition to devices, districts cite the need for space to house the equipment.</p> <p>Limited support — Online providers want funds for test administration and some districts already purchased sufficient devices and want flexibility to use funds for other items such as bandwidth, infrastructure, and maintenance.</p>
Length of the Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push PARCC to shorten the ELA and math tests Shorten the number and length of science and social studies sessions Push PARCC to collapse the performance-based and end-of-year assessment windows 	<p>Strong support — Most districts want the number and length of tests to be shorter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shorten PARCC and CMAS tests One test per subject; ACT approach One or two sessions per subject; consider two, 45-minute sessions or a single, 80-minute session Eliminate the reading tests and use social studies and science tests for ELA purposes <p>Undecided — Some districts want one testing window while others are unsure about collapsing the PARCC windows as the end of the year is a busy time for schools. Some districts want a wider testing window to provide schools with more flexibility.</p>

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Number of Assessments	Use a sampling approach for social studies by assessing one third of the schools each year	<p>No support — Several districts believe that sampling would eliminate buy-in and render these tests meaningless. They like the idea of testing social studies once per level but want the tests to be more manageable.</p> <p>Undecided — Other districts are unsure about sampling and believe parents will question why only some children are being tested.</p> <p>Limited support — A few districts think this is a good option that would reduce the burden on small districts and at the high school level as testing seniors in the fall is not ideal.</p>
	Decrease the high school burden by making the culminating PARCC exam for English language arts and math required and the 9 th and 10 th grade ELA and math tests optional	<p>Undecided — Districts did not endorse this option but did provide other suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use end-of-course, competency-based assessments at the secondary level • Option to use ACT ASPIRE • 10th grade end-of-year PARCC tests and the 11th grade ACT • Follow-up assessments for students who are not proficient
	Make the school readiness assessment optional	<p>Strong support — Most districts fully support this option as it would reduce the burden on teachers. One superintendent struggled with making the assessment optional and preferred that it either be required or eliminated.</p>
	Move to the federal minimum and make everything else optional	<p>Strong support — Most districts believe that this option makes good sense, would increase local flexibility, and defuse some of anger and frustration regarding the amount of testing.</p>
Recognition of Local Assessments	<p>In addition to a request to reconsider process, identify ways in which local assessments may be recognized in addition to state assessments in the accountability process.</p> <p>(Note: Federal law requires the same assessments to be administered for federal accountability purposes.)</p>	<p>Support varies by district type with rural and small, metro-area districts valuing local assessments more than large urban districts. Districts that have invested time and resources developing local assessments like this option, whereas others would need support to do so. Several districts want to use other measures and local tests (e.g., MAP) to demonstrate student growth and inform instruction in a timely manner. A few districts mentioned linking this option to accreditation with high performing districts able to use their local assessments.</p>

Student Buy-in and Motivation

Participants were asked to share their ideas for increasing student buy-in and motivation to perform well on state assessments. Most participants mentioned that any kind of testing requires providing students with incentives and, if possible, second chances. Suggestions ranged from linking scores to driving privileges to tax breaks for parents when students earn proficient scores. A desire surfaced to have scores that matter. For example, students will buy-in when certain CMAS scores are required for entry-level jobs, college admission, reduced tuition rates, grants, and scholarship purposes. Graduation is a motivating factor for high school students and demonstrated competency on one or more assessments could be considered. Other participants believe that motivation will increase significantly when the CMAS results are used to determine interventions, additional supports, and course placements for the following academic year.

Options that Address the Greatest Needs

When asked which of the previously discussed options would provide districts with the most relief, focus group participants resoundingly requested that the state reduce the amount of testing time for all grade levels. Suggestions for accomplishing the reduction include fewer and shorter tests, no more than 60 minutes per test, one session per subject/content area, and integrating literacy into other content area tests so that separate English language arts tests are no longer necessary. Additionally, one district requested that the writing assessment provide at least three prompts from which students could select one. And another district seeks assistance in integrating CMAS results into student learning management systems.

While online providers also prioritize a decrease in the number and length of assessments, they identified two solutions particular to their clientele: facilities and individualization. Teachers and students must use facilities that do not belong to a district or school. Setting up and packing devices in testing areas every day for three weeks straight is inconvenient and costly. According to this group, the state ought to consider establishing multiple testing sites in each region for students to use when they are ready to take exams. These test sites could also be used by other students for make-up exams and online coursework. Online providers also raised the need for individualized assessments that are appropriate given students' levels and aligned with individual learning plans. Regardless of the options pursued, all districts want more flexibility to do what works best for their students and staffs.

Sampling

During phase one of the study, the idea of sampling emerged as participants described a desired future assessment system unconstrained by federal requirements. A sampling method could significantly reduce test burden while still providing accountability data. Student growth data, however, would no longer be available on an annual basis. Since Colorado educators value growth indicators, this would involve a tradeoff. Focus group participants were divided equally on the issue of sampling. About one third of the participants support sampling, especially for tests used for accountability purposes and to meet federal requirements. This group suggests that growth can be measured more accurately with local assessments. Small districts also support sampling if it eases the testing burden. They don't want every student tested every year either.

Another third was neutral and strongly reiterated that they just want the burden reduced. Some participants stated that they would be "okay with sampling if it is the only way that the assessment window and tests are shortened." Other participants like the idea of tracking growth but only if

assessments are shorter. Some would appreciate “any action that reduces the load of testing on educators.” And participants from one district said that they are “unsure about sampling but want an option where schools and districts are tested based upon their accreditation rating.”

Finally, about one third of the focus group participants do not support sampling. They see no purpose or benefit and wonder about the logistics of sampling. They believe that sampling will be highly political, meaningless to schools, and eliminate growth and student buy-in. Urban districts rely upon and appreciate annual testing of all students in English language arts and mathematics and would not support sampling in these content areas. Statewide assessments provide a consistent method and tool for collecting similar data on all of their students.

Desired Next Steps

CDE is using the data from this study to take immediate actions to address assessment burden concerns. The department is also looking to make policy changes. Two themes surfaced when participants were asked what else they want to see from the department in terms of next steps: less testing and funding. Overwhelming participants request that the number and length of assessments be reduced immediately. Districts would also like money and local control in determining assessments and addressing student needs. Emergency money is needed for devices and facilities. The state could also provide funding for test administration or establish sites for testing across the state. Other desired next steps include the opportunity for accountability measures beyond tests, flexibility based upon the area where districts are located, materials (e.g., test manuals and practice tests) to better guide and prepare schools for assessments, a sustainability plan for technology, and immediate results. Districts also want an assurance that if they follow all required preparatory steps, they may then anticipate a smooth administration. Some districts were dismayed by the amount of technical difficulties encountered.

Regarding continued conversations about the future of the state’s assessment system, district representatives want to be involved “in any and every way.” Focus group participants said that they enjoy being part of the conversation addressing the assessment dilemma and want to stay involved. Districts also want to know that decisions are being made thoughtfully and efficiently.

Additional Concerns: Accountability

Focus group participants and superintendents in particular continue to express frustration regarding how the state intends to use CMAS results for accountability purposes. Besides the assessment issues identified, district representatives raise concerns about whether the results of new tests will be sufficiently valid and reliable to support decisions about school and educator effectiveness. And while they recognize the need for accountability, they dislike the current performance frameworks and associated indicators which rely heavily upon statewide assessment results.

Participants want the state to defend the number and purpose of every test, design a better way to dip-in and check student achievement for accountability purposes, and provide districts with greater flexibility to select meaningful achievement and performance measures and indicators. Participants also suggested that the state should set the standard, provide support, and then allow districts to decide how best to accomplish goals and meet standards. In summary, district representatives want the state to align accountability with testing for an accurate and honest view of student learning. Additional concerns beyond the accountability implications are organized by topic in Table 16.

Summary

The primary concern of districts remains the amount of testing and resulting impact on instructional time. District representatives suggest several solutions to address this issue, such as moving to the federal minimum and implementing simple, low burden assessments when the primary purpose is state and/or federal accountability. Additional solutions include providing funding for devices, facilities, and infrastructure upgrades and maintenance. Districts support several proposed solutions to reduce the number and length of assessments. By far the most mentioned solution is to adopt fewer, shorter tests at all levels. Districts also want to continue the transition to online assessments by working out the technological issues and glitches. Districts should revert to paper assessments only for student specific and/or emergency purposes. Finally, different approaches and options are desired by rural, suburban, and urban districts to best meet the needs of their student populations. For example, rural districts want greater flexibility to use local assessments and determine when, where, and how students are tested. Large, urban districts, however, appreciate the state-provided tests and resulting reports and information.

Table 16: Additional Comments Shared by Individual Focus Group Members

Topic	Comments
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptive tests – Adopt a computer-adaptive test with fewer items that is shorter in length and similar to the Smarter Balanced test. End-of-course – Secondary exams should be course based not grade level. Local option – Use locally developed tests (e.g., 3-week, pre- and post-tests; 9-week benchmark exams) and/or purchased tests such as Acuity (math, reading, writing) and Schoolnet student assessment tools. Single, end-of-year test – Design one assessment that is aligned with CMAS and PARCC to be given to students at the end of the year. System – Want an assessment system that has formative and summative tests; don't want to switch between local and state tests to get results.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital expenditures – provide to districts rather than to CDE; need people at CDE with the expertise to help districts but CDE can't provide services and supports well. What is the appropriate level of support given state resources? May need a better model, perhaps regional service centers. Shift funding – put dollars where they matter most, early childhood, pre-K
Educator Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weight – minimize state tests as part of evaluation; option to select useful indicators; don't dictate percentages SB 191 connection – no value add; no new information; capricious and arbitrary measures of effectiveness; needs to be fixed

Topic	Comments
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on kids – begin with the child in mind; we have lost sight of what matters most; tests need to help kids in meaningful ways; too many conflicting purposes • Achievement gaps – the primary issue; need good data that speak to this; state data does not trickle down; need value added data at the student level • Love of learning – less intrinsic motivation; testing gets in the way; doesn't nurture a lifelong love of learning
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item review – Who reviews test questions (e.g., 4th and 7th grade social studies)? Does CDE review the questions developed by Pearson? • Need more transparency regarding the review and validation process to ensure appropriate rigor.
Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moratorium – “Stop reforming. We never have a chance to implement, evaluate, reflect and adjust. No more changes.” • CDE's role – initiate a conversation about CDE's role; be either a regulator or an assistance provider. Select one role and do it well. CDE should take a more forceful hand with the legislature.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide preliminary CMAS data to districts as soon as possible; please share early information even if only anecdotal. • Timely – lots of information available; good for understanding urban gaps; valuable; need more formative data to share with next year's teachers
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State assistance – It doesn't feel like the state is doing anything for the district but is asking the district what it can do for the state. • Student accounts – Is it possible to roll students' accounts and information from the PARCC system into the CMAS system and vice versa? This will save the district a lot of time. • User guides – The numerous handbooks and manuals (6-7) are confusing.

Notes: Each bullet is a comment or quote shared by one focus group respondent. The aim of this chart is to provide readers with a sense of the range of ideas and suggestions offered by participants.

V. APPENDICES

A. Colorado Assessment Implementation Survey

Preparing for a new statewide assessment system presents a range of benefits and challenges for administrators, teachers, and students. To better understand these benefits and challenges, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is working with WestEd — a nonprofit, public research and development agency — to conduct focus groups and surveys of stakeholders as the new system rolls out. WestEd will synthesize the findings and provide a range of options to inform CDE’s planning, support, and next steps. All responses will be kept confidential.

This survey is being sent to every district assessment coordinator (DAC) in the state. DACs are encouraged to consult with other leaders in the district when completing the survey to ensure that the responses reflect those of the district as a whole. Each district should submit one completed survey.

This brief survey has three sections. Section I asks for demographic information to assist in the analysis of results. Section II asks for feedback on general readiness issues related to the new assessment system. Section III allows you to provide information on the value of state and other assessments. The survey should take 15 minutes to complete.

Questions regarding the survey should be directed to: Sheila Arredondo, sarredo@wested.org.

Section I. Demographic Information

1. In which region of the state is your district located? Metro

- Pikes Peak
- North Central
- Northeast
- Northwest
- Southeast
- Southwest
- West Central

2. In what area is your district located?

- Urban (i.e., located within a major city)
- Suburban (i.e., located within a residential region surrounding a major city)
- Rural (i.e., located within a small town or agricultural area)

3. How many students does your district serve?

- 1-250
- 251-1,000
- 1,001-3,000
- 3,001-10,000
- 10,001-20,000
- More than 20,000

4. Has or will your district participate in any of the following pilot activities:

- CMAS Science and/or Social Studies field tests
- PARCC ELA and/or mathematics field tests
- Educator Effectiveness pilot

Section II. Factors Affecting Readiness to Administer State Assessments

5. Please indicate the extent to which the following factors influence your district’s readiness to administer required state assessments.

	Low	Somewhat Low	Moderate	Somewhat High	High	N/A
Instructional design and preparation <i>(e.g., curricular materials and resources, instructional strategies)</i>						
Network infrastructure <i>(e.g., Internet access, wired and wireless connectivity)</i>						
Devices <i>(i.e., hardware and software at schools, device-to-student ratios)</i>						
Management <i>(e.g., planning, organizing, scheduling, logistics, administering, controlling)</i>						
IT staff and personnel trained to support the process						
Procuring necessary funding and resources for modern learning environments						
Training/professional development						
Other (please specify):						

6. Please rate your district’s overall readiness to administer all required state assessments.

Low	Somewhat Low	Moderate	Somewhat High	High

7. What assistance would most increase your district’s level of readiness to administer the new online assessments? Please select up to three responses.

- Administration, scheduling, and logistics support
- Alignment of curricula, instruction, and assessments to Colorado Academic Standards

- Communication strategies
- Efficient methods to administer assessments while minimizing disruption to instructional time
- Procuring devices that meet instructional needs and assessment consortia requirements
- Technology specifications for the assessments
- Technology support personnel
- Training/professional development to prepare staff to administer assessments
- Training/professional development for staff to understand and use assessment results
- Other (please specify): _____

Section III. Value of State and Local Assessments

8. Please rate the value/benefit and burden (i.e., time and cost) of administering each assessment listed below.

Please use a scale where 1 is low and 5 is high.

		Value in Informing Student Progress	Value to School or District Improvement	Burden	Not Applicable
1	TCAP Reading and Writing				
2	TCAP Mathematics				
3	CMAS Science				
4	CMAS Social Studies				
5	ACCESS for ELLs				
6	Colorado ACT				
7	Early Literacy Assessments (READ Act)				
8	School Readiness Assessment (if implemented)				
9	Other district administered interim assessments (e.g., MAP, Scantron Achievement Series, STAR)				

		Value in Informing Student Progress	Value to School or District Improvement	Burden	Not Applicable
10	Other district administered postsecondary readiness assessments (e.g., EXPLORE, PLAN, PSAT, Accuplacer)				
11	Other program specific assessments (e.g., AP and IB)				

9. What does your district value most about the current state assessment system?

Please select up to three responses.

- Sets clear expectations for students
- Measures and monitors student progress toward mastery of content standards
- Documents student mastery of content standards
- Supports student placement decisions
- Ensures accountability for student performance and progress
- Provides feedback to students and families
- Provides feedback to educators
- Provides feedback to community members
- Provides common basis for state’s accountability system
- Provides comparisons across schools and across districts
- Informs instructional practice
- Informs program improvement
- Documents program/school performance
- Identifies teacher development needs
- Identifies program design and delivery issues
- Other (please specify):

10. What does your district *value least* about the current state assessment system?

Please select up to three responses.

- Sets clear expectations for students
- Measures and monitors student progress toward mastery of content standards
- Documents student mastery of content standards
- Supports student placement decisions
- Ensures accountability for student performance and progress
- Provides feedback to students and families
- Provides feedback to educators
- Provides feedback to community members
- Provides common basis for state's accountability system
- Provides comparisons across schools and across districts
- Informs instructional practice
- Informs program improvement
- Documents program/school performance
- Identifies teacher development needs
- Identifies program design and delivery issues
- Other (please specify):

11. What are your *top concerns* regarding the new state assessment system?

Please select up to four responses.

- Quality of assessments
- Quantity of assessments
- Relevance of assessments to students and teachers
- Technology requirements
- Student readiness to take online assessments
- Time required for administration
- Time required for students to complete the assessments
- Impact on instructional time
- Impact on use of technology for instruction
- Timeliness of results
- Type and quality of training and preparation available to educators
- Utility of results
- Security of the assessments
- Duplication with local assessment systems
- Duplication with other state assessments
- No concerns
- Other (please specify):

12. Please indicate the importance of each element listed below in a state assessment system?

	Low	Somewhat Low	Moderate	Somewhat High	High	N/A
Actionable information at the student level						
Actionable information at the program level						
Aligned local and state assessment system						
Assessing social studies annually in grades 4, 7, and 12						
Cross-school comparisons						
Cross-district comparisons						
Cross-state comparisons						
Indicators of school readiness						
Indicators of early literacy development						
Early indicators of college and career readiness for middle and high school students						
Gradual transition from paper to online administration						
Length of assessments						
Inclusion of writing						
Information on student mastery of the Colorado Academic Standards						
Information on student growth from year to year						
Items beyond selected response (e.g., constructed responses and performance-based tasks)						
Single state assessment window						
Flexible state assessment window based upon student readiness and course progression						
Timeliness of results						
Other (please specify):						

13. What 3–5 essential elements would your ideal state assessment system include? In other words, if you could have exactly what you want, what would that be?

Please limit your response to 100 words or less.

14. Is there any other issue not covered in this survey that you would like to share about the state assessment system? Please limit your response to 50 words or less.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

B. Focus Group Protocol & Questions

I. Welcome and Introductions

- ❖ Welcome and thank participants
- ❖ Researchers introduce themselves
- ❖ Researchers explain that they were asked by CDE to gather data and provide an neutral, third-party summary to inform CDE’s and the state’s understanding of the needs and challenges facing districts as they implement the new assessment system. This study is neither a cost/benefit analysis nor a study of the Colorado Academic Standards. The focus is solely on assessment implementation issues.
- ❖ Researchers explain that while participating districts will be identified in the report, no information will be shared that could be individually identified.
- ❖ Participants introduce themselves.
- ❖ Researchers request participants to complete and submit a consent form.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the focus group is to better understand the challenges, needs, and proposed solutions for implementing a quality assessment system. CDE will use the information to inform possible changes in practices, procedures, and legislative/regulatory policy if needed.

To ensure a shared understanding of state testing, let’s review what is in place now and what is changing [see one-page summary]:

- ❖ TCAP — currently includes reading, writing, math, and science
- ❖ CMAS — moving to the Colorado Measures of Academic Success in English language arts and math (PARCC-developed) as well as science and social studies
- ❖ English language proficiency assessments known as WIDA Access for ELLs
- ❖ ACT given to high school juniors
- ❖ State-mandated, locally-determined assessments for the READ Act and school readiness

Refer participants to three-page “Fact Sheet” for additional information about the changes.

We will be asking you to be specific about which assessments in this system you are referring to as well as the specific grade levels. The primary focus will be to understand the impact of the state’s movement to new online assessments in English language arts, math, science, and social studies. We also want to understand how this transition is impacted by other state-mandated assessments and general reform initiatives underway.

This is a multi-phase study. We plan to conduct similar focus groups and/or interviews after the administration of the online science and social studies assessments this spring. This will help us to determine what has changed after districts administer online assessments and what new information/suggestions they might have.

III. Questions

Researchers ask questions, facilitate the conversation, encourage equal air time, and take notes.

Current State Assessment System

1. What do you value most about the current state assessment system and want to retain as the state moves to new online assessments in English language arts, math, science, and social studies?
2. What do you value least and want to change about the current state assessment system?

New State Assessment System

3. What are your greatest hopes as districts implement new online assessments?
4. What are your greatest fears as districts move forward?
5. What are the top challenges that schools and districts face in implementing the state's new assessment system?
6. Moving to specifics, let's discuss some areas that may or may not have been mentioned:
 - a. Administration (e.g., scheduling, staffing, space, and logistics)
 - b. Increased expectations for students
 - c. Impact on specific populations and at-risk students
 - d. Impact on specific grade levels and subject areas
 - e. Impact on local assessment systems and uses
 - f. Impact on technology use
 - g. Impact on instructional time
 - h. Duplication of testing
 - i. Technology readiness of students and districts/schools

Managing the Transition

7. What assistance and support do schools and districts need to manage the transition to online assessments?
8. What other ideas/proposed solutions do you have for addressing the challenges mentioned?
9. What 3–5 essential elements would your ideal state assessment system include? In other words, if you could have exactly what you want, what would that be?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us as we gather data and prepare a summary for CDE? [If time permits, probe further about the district's assessment system and efforts to align curricula, assessment, and instruction with standards.]

IV. Conclusion

Thank participants for their time. Inform them that information will be gathered from eight district focus groups, three role-alike focus groups, and a district survey. The aim is to develop a summary of the information by the end of April. Phase two of the work is scheduled to begin in May after administration of the science and social studies assessments. CDE will share the findings from phase one. District participation in phase two is appreciated.

V. Researcher Notes

The focus group researchers need to know the following information prior to the meetings:

- ❖ Districts that are part of the READ Act early literacy assessment tool program
- ❖ Assessments the district is using for the READ Act
- ❖ Districts that are part of the school readiness work
- ❖ Districts that participated in spring/fall field testing
- ❖ Districts participating in PARCC field testing

Handouts

- ❖ Assessment Implementation Study: An Overview
- ❖ Assessment Fact Sheet
- ❖ Assessment Summary Chart

C. Focus Group Summary Tables

	I. Current System		II. New System	
Districts	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Archuleta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability Comparisons ELA/math improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disrupts learning Does not inform instruction Delayed results Timing – not year end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant, timely feedback Less time consuming Whole child focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost Stakes Validity
Buena Vista	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Common metric Program improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes Administrative burden Duration Growth model No student buy-in Utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local assessment options Timely results Valid information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burnout Duration Impact on instruction
Charters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparisons Growth Reports READ Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Relevance Burden Delayed results Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age appropriate Adequate resources Better information Less time – fewer, shorter tests; immediate feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on instruction Data mining; security Burden Validity Impact on unique groups
Cherry Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Common metric Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> READ Act – too many choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevance Timely results Informs instruction Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credibility Equity Network infrastructure Student motivation Teacher evaluation
Delta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Common metric Improvement Growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevance Stakes Student buy-in and motivation Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth Relevant and meaningful Timely results Utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate accommodations Devices Impact on instruction Validity

Districts	I. Current System		II. New System	
	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
La Veta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Growth ▪ Status ▪ Snap shot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparisons ▪ Delayed results ▪ Utility ▪ Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adaptive ▪ Aligned with content delivery ▪ Timely, useful results ▪ User-friendly, interactive, relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Configurations and requirements ▪ Quality ▪ Stress ▪ Students' tech skills
Platte Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data and graphs ▪ Growth ▪ Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disrupts instruction ▪ Cumbersome ▪ Organization ▪ Stakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ready, prepared ▪ Student motivation ▪ Less burden ▪ Rewards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Digital divide, equity ▪ Impact on unique groups ▪ Miscommunication ▪ Capacity ▪ Validity
Strasburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common metric ▪ Familiar ▪ Growth ▪ READ Act choices ▪ Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulations ▪ Delayed results ▪ Student motivation ▪ Timing – not year end ▪ Impact on unique groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Growth ▪ Pilots inform policy ▪ Quality ▪ Validity – actual performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curricula narrows ▪ Difficulty ▪ Impact on instruction ▪ Quantity – more areas ▪ Stress ▪ Student motivation ▪ Teacher evaluation

	I. Current System		II. New System	
Districts	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Woodland Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Reports Comparisons READ Act Utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CoAlt burden Frequency Stakes Stress Timing Utility Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement Interaction Options Timely results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More accountability Increased burden Students' tech skills System failure
Combined Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Common metric Comparisons Growth Improvement READ Act Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burden Delayed results Relevance Stakes Student motivation Timing Utility Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth Less time Options Timely results User-friendly, interactive, relevant Validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity Impact on instruction Impact on unique groups Stress Student motivation Students' tech skills Teacher evaluation Validity

Districts	III. Transition		IV. Future	
	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System
Archuleta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices Students' tech skills Accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility Resources Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities Flexibility Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21st century skills Balanced accountability Sampling Whole child focus
Buena Vista	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bandwidth Facilities Impact on instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development Resources Item bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short assessments End-of-course Flexibility for districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced accountability Differentiated assessment Multiple indicators Local control
Charters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost Logistics Staffing Students' tech skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Teacher training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement Fewer tests Resources Sampling Waivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility, choice Differentiated, options Formative and interim Transparency Trust
Cherry Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on instruction Capacity Communication Cost Logistics Stress Timing/window 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Flexibility Autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shorter, fewer, single subject sessions Rollout, thoughtful phasing Waivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptive Comprehensive system Formative emphasis, MAP model Relevant, timely feedback Flexibility

	III. Transition		IV. Future	
Districts	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System
Delta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices Management Social studies Students' tech skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding Resources Professional development Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower stakes Hold harmless End-of-course Fewer tests, simplify Drop secondary CMAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competency-based Differentiated, adaptive Formative and interim Professional development Support teachers Transparency
La Veta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources Impact on instruction Duration Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bandwidth for rural districts Curricular and test preparation materials Funding and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility, rural options Individualize, adjust timing Rollout, slow the pace, gradual staging Don't test seniors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiate for districts, rural options Individualized learning Focus on high-quality instruction One online system Immediate and useful feedback for educators Sampling Trust teachers
Platte Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on instruction Student motivation Capacity Feasibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials Practice sessions Professional development Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive system End-of-course Incentives Timely results Don't test seniors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valid accountability framework Efficiency Flexibility Differentiation Informed decisionmaking Interim assessments

		III. Transition		IV. Future	
Districts	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System	
Strasburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost Devices Facilities Impact on instruction Shift in purpose Seniors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricular materials Resources Devices Network infrastructure Bandwidth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold harmless Student consequences End-of-course Shorter, fewer tests and sections Immediate feedback Rollout, one thing at a time Timing/flexible window 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate accommodations Fewer standards Fewer, high quality tests Flexibility, options Individualize 	
Woodland Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for priorities Seniors Session creep Capacity Student motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practices Curricular materials Exemplars Professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent, clear communication Interim/benchmark tests Flexible funding Criterion-based growth Local control Balanced stakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared accountability Elementary limits Invest in high-quality instruction Student-centered Incentives 	
Combined Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity Cost Devices Impact on instruction Students' tech skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricular materials Flexibility Funding Professional development Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't test seniors End-of-course Flexibility Rollout, thoughtful phasing Shorter, fewer tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced/shared accountability Differentiation Flexibility Formative and interim 	

Groups	I. Current System		II. New System	
	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT (4) Growth/progress (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student motivation (4) Relevance (3) Validity (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online (4) – user-friendly, interactive, engaging Validity (2) – measures what students know and can do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging content (5) Students’ tech skills (4) – readiness
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT (4) Comparisons (4) Accountability (3) Results (3) – longitudinal data, quality indicators Utility (3) – feedback to evaluate student progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress (5) Stakes (4) – too much emphasis on one test Student motivation (3) – no accountability or buy-in (secondary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodations (2) – appropriate, paper/pencil option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost (4) – devices, infrastructure, upgrades Duration (4) Impact on instruction (4)

Groups	I. Current System		II. New System	
	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reports (4) – data, graphs ▪ Familiarity (3) – current system and growth model ▪ Growth (3) ▪ Improvement (3) ▪ Common metric (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Results (5) – delayed, insufficient feedback ▪ Utility (5) – too general, does not inform ▪ Burden (4) – preparation, scheduling ▪ Impact on instruction (4) – disrupts learning time, narrows curricula ▪ Stakes (4) – too high ▪ Timing (4) – too early ▪ Student motivation (3) – no buy-in or ownership ▪ Transparency (3) ▪ Validity (3) – one shot, N size, growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Results (7) – relevant, timely, user-friendly ▪ Validity (4) – growth ▪ Efficiency (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact on students (12) – fatigue, stress, unique groups ▪ Impact on teachers (9) – evaluation, recruitment, retention, punitive ▪ Impact on instruction (8) – disruptive, less time, narrows curricula ▪ Students’ tech skills (4) – elementary keyboarding ▪ Validity (4) – content versus keyboarding, growth, one size for all
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ READ Act (5) – choice, diagnostic, useful ▪ Accountability (3) ▪ Reports (3) – user-friendly, strengths, weaknesses ▪ Growth concept (2) ▪ Improvement (2) – needs, programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Burden (7) – preparation, administration, CoAlt, staffing, cost ▪ Utility (4) – summative snapshot, does not inform instruction or placements ▪ Accommodations (4) – inadequate/unfair for special education students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age appropriate (3) ▪ Growth (3) – valid, useful ▪ Results (3) – timely, relevant ▪ Flexibility (2) ▪ Utility (2) – use earlier in the year ▪ Validity (2) – better aligned, actual performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of instruction (8) – less time, disruptive, access for non-testers ▪ Digital divide (6) – device fear, access, skills, readiness ▪ Curricula (3) – too much to teach

Groups	I. Current System		II. New System	
	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Technology Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Constructed responses Growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results (3) – delayed, does not inform decisions Stakes (2) – too high, heavily weighted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepared (4) – all goes well Results (2) – timely Appropriate accommodations Choice – writing prompts Efficient – less time Engaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on instruction (3) – access to labs Burden (2) – more time Quality/authenticity Staff capacity
Assessment Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utility (4) – gaps, improvement, performance indicator, interventions ACT (3) – relevant Common metric (2) Growth (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utility (4) – does not inform instruction, not valued by postsecondary Validity (4) – N size, inappropriate measure for severe-needs students, does not reflect instruction Burden (2) – administrative CoAlt (2) – burden, results not useful Delayed results (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High quality (4) – aligned with standards, relevant, user-friendly, valid Duration – shorter tests Lower burden – reduces time teachers spend preparing materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not user-friendly (5) Duration (3) – too long Accommodations (2) – insufficient Devices (2) – insufficient numbers, access for others Stakes (2) – too high

Groups	I. Current System		II. New System	
	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Superintendents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results (6) – disaggregated feedback, snap shot, monitors mastery and progress, trends Common metric (5) – comparisons Growth (5) Accountability (4) – disaggregated data, progress Improvement (3) – math, ELA, gaps ACT (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validity (6) – N size, limited performance range, inappropriate for some students, proficiency cut points Quality (5) – organization, format, redundancy, not adaptive, no application Results (5) – delayed, complicated, don't inform instruction Stakes (4) – too much emphasis on one test, tied to teacher evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High quality (7) – adaptive, engaging, flexible, interactive, relevant, better format Results (5) – timely, relevant, useful Comprehensive system (3) – formative, summative, end-of-course Aligned with content delivery/courses (2) Validity (2) – reflects student learning, measures the right thing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burdensome (6) – more time, increased costs Accountability (5) – more for schools and teachers; none for students Validity (4) – growth, teacher evaluation, keyboarding versus content knowledge Student motivation (3) – secondary students Management (2) – planning, scheduling Students' tech skills (2) – elementary readiness Timing (2) – not year end

Groups	I. Current System		II. New System	
	Value Most	Value Least	Hopes	Fears
Combined Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT (13) – meaningful, relevant, timely results TCAP report elements – charts, graph, cut points, disaggregated data, performance levels, trajectories, trends (10) Focus on growth (9) Common metric and Comparisons (8) Informs improvement (7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High stakes (17) – too much emphasis on a single data point Utility (16) – too general, does not guide instruction Validity (14) – cut scores, growth, knowledge, N size, not aligned with curricula Delayed results (10) Student motivation (10) – no buy-in, consequences, or accountability Timing (9) – too early; ¼ through the year Administrative burden (8) – preparing testing materials, documentation Disrupts learning and instructional time (8) Duration (7) – too many hours spent testing Relevance (7) – no value, not meaningful or informative CoAlt (6) – burdensome set up, documentation, misuse, penalties, utility Writing (5) – not reflective of teaching, poor prompt, not relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediate, high-quality feedback (15) Interactive, engaging, user-friendly (12) Utility (8) – informs instruction and decisions Validity (5) – accurately reflects student learning Aligned (4) – with content delivery, courses, curricula Relevant, meaningful (4) Duration (3) – less time consuming Growth (3) – valid, useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students’ tech skills (14) – elementary readiness Duration and frequency (13) – too long, more time, extended window Impact on instruction (10) – schedule disruptions, access for non-testers Misunderstanding of results (10) – explaining low scores Student motivation (7) Validity (7) – testing technology skills not content knowledge, accurate growth Burnout (7) – student stress, fatigue Network infrastructure (7) – capacity, technical difficulties Devices (6) – inadequate and insufficient Equity (6) – digital divide, access

III. Transition		IV. Future		
Groups	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on instruction (5) Devices (3) – numbers and access for non-testers Screen time (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices (4) – access to computers and labs for non-testers Technology skills (4) – time to practice and prepare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Format (6) – one section/ subject, choices, web-based Frequency (3) – fewer summative, more interim Results (2) – relevant and immediate Timing (2) – test when ready 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated (3) – adaptive, tailored, individualized; test choices
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices (4) – numbers, age/ size appropriate Capacity (2) – insufficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development Resource Bank – vetted items teachers can select Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive system (6) – diagnostic, formative, interim; few summative Accommodations (5) – appropriate, individualized, paper/pencil option Teacher evaluation (4) – decrease weight of scores, student voice, growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated (4) – adaptive, individualized, multiple measures Flexibility (3) – opt out Transparency (3) – view examples, information to inform instruction Trust (3) – allow teachers to prepare students

III. Transition		IV. Future		
Groups	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital divide (5) – impact on disadvantaged Capacity (4) – facilities, infrastructure, staff Devices (4) – availability, access for non-testers Resources (3) – limited, hard choices Accommodations (2) – appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricular materials (6) – scope and sequence, model units, resource banks Teacher tools (4) – format, question types, practice tests, navigation, troubleshooting Professional development time (3) Technology (3) – bandwidth, devices, student information portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualize (6) – accommodations, end-of-course, test when ready Duration (4) – short, quick, fewer sections Resources (4) – best practices, item bank, funding Sampling (4) Student accountability (4) – consequences, grades, promotion, placement Hold harmless (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data/results (9) – frequent, timely, relevant, useful Balanced accountability (7) – multiple indicators Individualized (7) – age and level appropriate, differentiated Respect (5) – empower and trust teachers Local decisions (4) Shared decisionmaking (4)
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feasibility (9) – bandwidth, scale, management, staffing Students’ tech skills (4) – elementary readiness Impact on instruction (3) – shut down for a month Resources (3) – taxing building resources Devices (2) – numbers, access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricular materials (6) – textbooks, model units, exemplars Professional development (5) – best practices, support, coaching Test preparation (4) – users guides, practice sessions, remediation Management strategies (3) – efficient processes and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility/options (8) – drop secondary CMAS; provide menu; test when ready Results (6) – timely, learner-centered, inform instruction Elementary rethink (5) – type, frequency, format Hold harmless (4) – reduce the stakes End-of-course exams (3) Interim assessments (3) Rollout (2) – one at a time Transparency (2) – teachers take the test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced accountability system (5) – multiple elements, indicators, and measures; compare similar groups Comprehensive system (5) – integrated; early diagnostic, more formative, interim, summative; college and career readiness, ACT approach

III. Transition		IV. Future		
Groups	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System
Technology Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices (6) Feasibility (6) – capacity, complexity, resources, scale, timeframe Impact on instruction (3) Management (3) – preparation, scheduling Network infrastructure (3) – bandwidth, maintenance, future planning Students’ tech skills (3) Time (3) – many sessions, extended window Facilities (2) – space, compliant labs Student motivation (2) – engaging seniors, ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices – compatible, comparable Network infrastructure – maintenance, consistent platform/labs Support networks – share experiences; know where to find help and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources (5) – current devices, infrastructure, personnel Rollout (3) – slow the pace, one subject/year Facilities (2) – mobile labs Stakes (2) – balance the stakes, hold harmless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data (5) – accurate, high quality, informative Formative (3) – shorter, more frequent tests Multiple indicators (3) – growth, equitable comparisons Accountability (2) – balanced stakes Parent accountability (2) Portal (2) – one online system
Assessment Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social studies (3) – timing, incentives for seniors Facilities (2) – space, capacity Resources (2) – limited, no money to buy new devices Timing (2) – not aligned with instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development (2) – standards, model units, technology Curricular materials (3) Test prep materials (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary (5) – drop CMAS, don’t test seniors, junior year tests, end-of-course exams Rollout (4) – prep time, thoughtful phasing, support Comprehensive system (3) – pre-tests, short-cycle, interim, and summative Results (2) – timely Timing (2) – performance-based in March, summative in May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced accountability (5) – multiple indicators Flexibility/waivers (5) – local choices, opt-out, teacher evaluation Differentiated and relevant tests (4) – district and student options End-of-course exams (4) Hold harmless (3) – optional until 2018 Support (3) – coaching

III. Transition		IV. Future		
Groups	Challenges	Needs	Ideal System	
Superintendents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity (8) – sufficient proctors, staff, infrastructure Impact on instruction (6) – disruptive, less time Communication (4) – explaining changes, lower scores Resources (4) – costly, hard choices, cuts Student motivation (3) – buy-in, relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricular materials (5) – exemplars, model units Resources and support (4) – pilot supports Professional development (3) – instructional practices Communication and transparency (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility (5) – for small and rural districts, reporting, frequency/number of tests, funding uses Student incentives (4) High quality (3) – fewer standards and tests Individualize (3) – adaptive, student-level mastery, match test to performance Devices (2) End-of-course exams (2) Local control (2) – less federal and state involvement Rollout (2) – slow down, assessments then evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced, holistic, integrated system (5) – assess 21st century skills, interdisciplinary, project-based, formative, interim, summative assessments Incentives and rewards (5) – for students, parents, teachers, sites Secondary (5) – end-of-course exams, capstones, summative options, don't test seniors Elementary (3) – less testing Feedback (3) – immediate, useful; data pipeline Flexibility (3) – based on student needs, district size, location, and resources High-quality instruction (3) – basis of system Multiple measures (3) – less reliance on a single data point Sampling and spans (3) – NAEP approach Support (3) – tailored and tiered district supports Coaching and mentoring (2) – observe and monitor strategy implementation Whole child (2) – social, emotional, physical too

III. Transition		IV. Future		
Groups	Challenges	Needs	Solutions	Ideal System
Combined Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on instruction (16) – lab access, preparation time, frequent disruptions, test frequency and duration Devices (11) – insufficient numbers, access for non-testers, age/size appropriate keyboards Student motivation (10) – buy-in, relevance, engagement Staffing (11) – sufficient proctors, teachers for non-testing students, analysts Management (10) – intensive preparation, scheduling, timing, extended window Resources (9) – limited, taxing building resources, daunting task, hard choices Students’ tech skills (9) – inadequate, especially elementary Accommodations (7) – appropriate for young children, special education Feasibility (6) – complexity, scale Funding (6) – bandwidth, technology, substitutes Facilities/space (5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development (10) – coaches, standards, assessment, curricula, instruction, technology Funding/resources (10) – technology, materials, supplies Resource banks (7) – scope and sequence, curricular materials, model units, sample items and exams Test preparation materials & practice sessions (6) – troubleshooting guides Transparency (4) Devices (2) – compatible, comparable Flexibility (2) – rural options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced, complete, integrated assessment system (16) – fall pre-tests, short-cycle assessments, mid-year interim or benchmark tests, year-end summative and/or end-of-course exams Hold harmless (14) – decrease weight, balance the stakes Flexibility (11) – more local control End-of-course exams (9) – no secondary CMAS Rollout (8) – slow the pace, stage logically Shorter, single-subject testing sessions (6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared/balanced accountability (14) Differentiated assessment (14) – individualized, choice, secondary options Feedback (11) – timely and relevant Trust and empower teachers (11) High-quality instruction (8) – data-driven, learner-centered Multiple indicators (8) Support (8) Data (7) – accurate and useful Interim assessments (6) Local decisionmaking (6) Professional development (6) College and career indicators and milestones (5) Criterion-based growth (5) Limited/minimal elementary testing (5) Relevant, high-quality tests (5) Sampling (5) Span versus level (5) Transparency (5)

D. Feedback from Commissioner’s Superintendent Advisory Council

Notes from Small Group Discussions

May 1, 2014

1. What are your reactions to the scenarios that WestEd shared?
 - ❖ Scenarios look to be accurate.
 - ❖ Overall findings generally capture our scenario.
 - ❖ Stay the course
 - ❖ Stay the course — it is critical that major adjustments are not made
 - ❖ Supports and flexibility that do not impact the intent (i.e., increase in student achievement) are appreciated when districts require assistance.
 - ❖ The study affirms our sense of human resource drain to manage the shift and to maintain the necessary components of testing.
 - ❖ Consider fourth scenario of strategic elimination of certain tests

2. Based on the Phase I findings, there are a range of short- and long-term options that could be considered to address the issues raised. Possible short-term options (those that would not require changes in federal ESEA statutes) are outlined below. Please provide your feedback on the options.

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Technology readiness	<p>Phase in online assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Administer all math assessments on paper for the first year ▪ Make available paper for districts with high barriers to online assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Let those who are ready take it online ▪ No benefit: best aspect of online is that we get data in a timely manner ▪ Concerns: difficult for students to go back to paper/pencil; if results come back sooner once the roll out is completed, then this will slow down everyone if some use paper/pencil and others are online ▪ Why only for math? ▪ A possible way to get back to a short but intensive window ▪ Paper/pencil does shorten the test window. ▪ Paper as an option for those without barriers but strong values against taking away the instructional time ▪ Paper options a good alternative for any test to prevent technology issues from becoming a challenge

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Access to devices	Push for emergency funds this budget cycle dedicated to device purchases (large investment in devices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Similar to buying a lot of technology in a bond issue ▪ Devices result in corresponding need for human resources (support) ▪ One time investment in technology would be helpful ▪ Could be a win-win and may not only placate but also actually assist districts in tangible ways that also would enhance instruction and overall student access to what ought to be typical resources available to every child in our schools. ▪ Might manage some of the political fray ▪ Would more funding for technology be taken from somewhere else?
Length of the PARCC assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Push PARCC to collapse the performance based assessment and end-of-year assessment windows ▪ Push PARCC to shorten the test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strongly oppose the collapse: it will become the same type of assessment again ▪ Collapse assessment ▪ Shortened is not better ▪ Shorter tests ▪ Drop from three to two sections per test ▪ If they could be shortened and still remain valid then by all means that should be pushed.
Length of science and social studies assessments	Could shorten the number and length of sessions (note: would eliminate the ability to get subscore data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better than doing nothing ▪ These are critical areas that warrant tracking of student mastery ▪ Shorten maybe if we can still target critical skills and standards ▪ Eliminate these tests; no problem if subscore data unavailable ▪ Are these necessary or just preferred?

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Too many assessments	Move to a sampling approach for social studies by assessing one-third of the schools each year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hesitant to advocate change from current course: highly neglected area ▪ Interesting thought: however, we do not use the current science test to inform instruction so going that route with social studies will not give us very useful data. ▪ This would help ▪ Better than doing nothing ▪ Sampling approach or eliminate ▪ Suggests that these assessments are not necessary. At the expense of instructional and learning time, if the assessments are not essential, then I do not test.
	Decrease the high school burden by making the culminating 11 th grade PARCC exams for English language arts and math required and the 9 th and 10 th grade exams optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good idea ▪ Eliminate tests: administer reading and math only in grades 3–8 ▪ Good start ▪ Agree: perhaps investigate a federal consideration of bringing 9th grade into the high school mix ▪ This makes the most sense, especially if we have a reliable interim measure used locally such as NWEA. ▪ ACT only; augment if needed ▪ Disagree: would not dispose of any
	Make the school readiness assessment optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agree: may not need mandate; currently do this when needed ▪ Good idea ▪ Important when a question exists as to a student’s readiness ▪ Not needed; easy fix; change to 212 ▪ Undecided: still waiting to see whether this area has benefit or not.
Recognition of local assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Best handled through accountability changes and request to reconsider process ▪ A support the state could provide is helping districts determine what assessments are best aligned to the new standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local assessments and their clear tie to evidence outcomes should be considered ▪ Do people like local assessments because they are familiar or because they drive improvements in achievement? ▪ Worth considering ▪ Substantiating a local assessment’s use and value could be of benefit in many ways.

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Other ideas	Delay science and social studies until all issues with PARCC tests are resolved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good idea: use PARCC ELA and math, get settled, and then choose to take the other two exams So much data from PARCC to focus on that science and social studies will not get much attention for awhile
	Move to the federal minimum as soon as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The increasing number of state summative assessments is reducing the good information available from local assessments, which are being put on the shelf due to the overload.

3. What input do you have for Phase II of the study? What additional data should be gathered? What questions should be asked, of whom? Where should WestEd probe deeper?

- ❖ **Fewer Tests** — Start by asking (1) what should be eliminated first? (2) how can we meet the needs of our students with fewer mandated, one-size-fits-all assessments? (3) what would districts do if they had fewer state tests? You may be surprised where the good information is coming from.
- ❖ **Impact on Instruction** — I’d substantiate anecdotal information as far as how schools and districts adjusted and the learning environment impact the changes have caused. For example, in our school we have open computer labs and it means that students in the classrooms adjacent to the open labs are not allowed to use the restroom during testing. Testing created lunch schedule issues, etc. I think the broader recognition of the impact on learning is poignant. At the same time, we don’t want to throw the baby out with the bath water. There are some good potential benefits once all the problems are worked out.
- ❖ **Local Assessments** — We are planning to drop our NWEA winter assessment because it is simply too much testing and time to learn is decreased significantly with the disruption to the learning environment and scheduling for required assessments. Eliminating state tests will not reduce the amount of information collected on students. In fact, we will keep and use assessments that give information quickly.
- ❖ **Technical Issues** — Our district experienced significant technological issues during the social studies and science assessments. Although we were 100% ready to go, felt we had everything in place, and have enough devices. These tech issues now will make me question the validity of some of the assessments. Pearson will have to really ensure that all of the bugs are worked out or there will be no confidence in the assessments.
- ❖ **Technology Staff** — We had a false sense early on that maybe it was just going to be this year that we felt the urgency and the demand for additional technology staff, but we no longer feel that way. We are facing the reality that we will need a half- to full-time person to help coordinate all year long every year.
- ❖ **Testing Windows & School Calendars** — Interestingly, as we have struggled to devise a calendar for next year, the assessment windows have caused substantial concern. We did not feel comfortable limiting our testing windows, due to this year’s experience with the online testing and the various things that cropped up (such as Java updates creating new challenges). For example, our “Spring” Break seemed to only fit at the beginning of March

which is about a month earlier. In addition, we delayed our school end date because we didn't want to end school with testing potentially being the last week of school. We put monthly calendars on the wall as visuals in planning our calendar and the colored indicators for test windows easily display that the last quarter of the year is extremely disrupted. That becomes a major issue for all because the "normal" of school is significantly altered.

Appendix E

Colorado Assessment Implementation Survey: Phase Two

The transition to a new statewide assessment system presents a range of benefits and challenges for educators and students. To better understand these issues, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is working with WestEd to conduct stakeholder focus groups and surveys. Findings from the first phase of the study were synthesized and potential options identified. The results are being explored further through focus groups and this voluntary, follow-up survey, which is being sent to every district assessment coordinator (DAC) in the state. Please consult other district stakeholders when completing the survey to ensure that the responses reflect those of the district as a whole. Each district should submit one completed survey. All survey responses are confidential. This brief survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Questions regarding the survey should be directed to Pamela Shand at pshand@wested.org.

The survey closes Monday, June 9, 2014 at 5:00 PM Mountain Daylight Time.

-
1. In what area is your district is located?
 - Rural (i.e., located within a small town or agricultural area)
 - Suburban (i.e., located within a residential region surrounding a major city)
 - Urban (i.e., located within a major city)

Phase I Findings and Focus of this Survey

During the first phase of the study, we identified several key challenges that districts are facing as they implement new assessments. These include:

- Impact of testing on instructional time;
- Concerns with regard to overall readiness related to management, devices, and capacity;
- Concerns related to the quantity, frequency, and duration of assessments;
- A desire for results to be available more quickly and to be used to inform instruction; and
- Specific concerns regarding the testing burden in high school.

In addition, we heard districts share a range of ideas for possible short-term and longer-term options or solutions. We'd like your feedback on the proposed short-

term options. Please note that while some of these options are within CDE’s ability to implement, others would require statutory changes. The focus is on options that still meet federal assessment requirements.

2. Technology Readiness

- a. Several solutions were proposed to address technology readiness with regard to number of devices, district capacity, and technology infrastructure. Please rate the solutions below that would best meet your needs by selecting “Best” for your first choice, “2nd Best” for the next choice, and “3rd Best” for your final choice.

	Best Option	2 nd Best	3 rd Best	N/A
Gradual phase-in of online assessments, allowing for paper/pencil where needed.				
Emergency funds for device purchases				
Onsite technology consultations and assistance				
More robust infrastructure trial simulation files				
Increased broadband access and consistency				
Guidance on how to optimize proctor caching				
More specific guidance regarding third party software and local configurations that may impact testing				

- b. Given the same list of solutions, please indicate the least preferred option for your district. Select only one option.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Gradual phase-in of online assessments, allowing for paper/pencil where needed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emergency funds for device purchases
<input type="checkbox"/>	Onsite technology consultations and assistance
<input type="checkbox"/>	More robust infrastructure trial simulation files
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increased broadband access and consistency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Guidance on how to optimize proctor caching
<input type="checkbox"/>	More specific guidance regarding third party software and local configurations that may impact testing

3. Impact of Online Assessments on Instructional Technology

Please indicate your level of support for the solution described below to reduce the number of online assessments in the 2014–2015 school year.

SOLUTION: Transition to online assessments for PARCC by administering the English language arts assessments online and the math assessments via paper/pencil, with districts that wish to continue with all online administration doing so.

This would significantly reduce the number of online assessments that would be administered in the 2014–2015 school year.

TRADEOFF: Eliminates the embedded supports and accommodations of the online assessments, potentially requiring more adult delivered accommodations.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

4. Quantity of Assessments

Please indicate your level of support for the following possible solutions (4a–4d) to address the quantity of assessments. Note that each solution has tradeoffs.

- a. **SOLUTION:** Require only the federally-mandated minimum assessments for math, English language arts, and science: Grades 3–8 math and English language arts; Culminating exams in math and English language arts once in high school (grades 10–12); Science once in elementary, middle, and high school. Make other state-required tests optional for districts.

TRADEOFF: Impacts growth data at high school at the student, school and district level; impacts high school accountability and definition of adequate growth; and eliminates early indicators of college and career readiness provided through the state system.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

- b. **SOLUTION:** Use a sampling approach for social studies (e.g., assess one-third of schools each year) while allowing those schools that want annual social studies assessments to request it.

TRADEOFF: Impacts ability for teachers and school and district leaders to monitor annual achievement in social studies at each school. This may signal decreased valuing of social studies.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

- c. **SOLUTION:** Eliminate the social studies assessment.

TRADEOFF: Eliminates the ability to determine and monitor student achievement in this content area as a state. This may signal decreased valuing of social studies.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

d. SOLUTION: Eliminate the school readiness assessment.

TRADEOFF: Eliminates the ability to establish a school readiness base-line at kindergarten in all developmental domains. This could also limit a school’s ability to create comprehensive readiness plans for students.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

5. Length of Assessments

Please indicate your level of support for the following possible solutions to address the length of the assessments. Note that each solution has tradeoffs.

a. SOLUTION: Shorten the number and/or length of English language arts and math sessions.

TRADEOFF: Could impact the level of detail in subscore reporting.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

b. SOLUTION: Shorten the number and/or length of social studies sessions.

TRADEOFF: Would impact the ability to report subscore data on such areas as geography, history, and economics. Students would receive a high-level score for social studies.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

6. Elementary Student Readiness

Some concerns were shared about the readiness of young students to take the online assessments as well as the impact on instructional time for elementary students. Please indicate your level of support for the option described below.

a. SOLUTION: Administer paper/pencil tests in grade 3 so that students have more time to develop typing/keyboarding skills.

TRADEOFF: Impacts students’ ability to experience the online test which has more interactive and engaging features. May not match instruction, which is increasingly technology-based.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

b. Please indicate the top two issues/concerns for your district’s elementary schools in implementing the new assessments:

- Duplication of assessment requirements
- Impact on instructional time due to rotating students through computer labs
- Limited devices
- Limited technology expertise to support administration of the assessments
- Student technology readiness
- Too many assessments (local and state)
- Not applicable
- Other (please specify):

7. Secondary Assessments

Some concerns were shared about the number and timing of assessments in high school. Please indicate your level of support for options 7a and 7b.

a. SOLUTION: Use only the ACT (may require augmentation) in high school and eliminate the other assessments.

TRADEOFF: The ACT is not fully aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards. Eliminates growth data at high school and impacts the definition of adequate growth. Eliminates direct writing as part of the high school English language arts assessment.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

b. SOLUTION: Assess science and social studies in different years at the high school level.

TRADEOFF: The earlier the assessment, the greater the impact the test has on the district’s scope and sequence.

Strongly do not support	Do not support	Neutral	Support	Strongly support
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Some strategies to address motivation challenges associated with the high school science and social studies assessments. The high school

assessments are currently administered in the fall of 12th grade to address concerns related to the 11th grade testing burden and the desire for districts to have maximum control over the scope and sequence of their social studies and science curricula. Please indicate which ideas are most appealing to you. You may select multiple options.

- Request scholarship funds for students achieving an advanced score on culminating high school assessments
 - Allow the assessments to satisfy graduation requirements
 - Allow the assessments to qualify a student for an endorsed diploma
 - Move to the spring of 11th grade
 - Move to the fall of 11th grade
- c. Please indicate the top two issues/concerns for your district's secondary schools in implementing the new assessments:
- Duplication of assessment requirements
 - Impact on instructional time due to rotating students through computer labs
 - Limited devices
 - Limited technology expertise to support administration of the assessments
 - Student technology readiness
 - Too many assessments (local and state)
 - Not applicable
 - Other (please specify):
8. What other ideas or comments would you like to share with us for improving the state's assessment system?
9. How would representatives from your district like to be involved in continued conversations about the future of the state's assessment system?
- Assessment website
 - District Assessment Coordinator listserv
 - Monthly assessment e-newsletter
 - Quarterly updates
 - Superintendent messages from the Commissioner
 - Webinar information sessions

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Appendix F

Focus Group Protocol and Questions: Phase Two

I. Introductions & Overview

- ❖ Welcome and thank participants
- ❖ Roll call to confirm participants' names

II. Purpose

Follow-up conference calls are being conducted to determine what has changed after administration of online science and social studies assessments, and discuss possible solutions for reducing burden and facilitating a smooth transition to the new assessment system. CDE will use the information to inform changes in practices, procedures, and legislative/regulatory policy if needed.

III. Questions

Researchers ask questions, seek understanding, encourage equal air time, and take notes.

Feedback from Online Administration

1. Opportunities

- What went better than expected with regard to the online administration?
- What worked well for your district that should be expanded or shared with others?
- What did students think of the tests?
Issues
- Did the district encounter any difficulties during administration of the online science and social studies assessments or PARCC field tests? If so, how were they resolved?
- Did the experience with online assessments change any of your ideas/concerns that you shared at the last focus group? If so, how?

2. Strategies

- What were the key lessons learned from the online assessments this spring?
- What strategies did you use to minimize disruptions (instructional time issue)?
- What strategies would you use if given more resources and time?

Options to Consider

Several key themes and findings emerged from Phase I (first column). The next

series of questions will delve deeper into these themes to understand which short-term options would be most beneficial to districts. We need to work within the federal minimum requirements which include: the same assessment for all students across the state in grades 3–8 and once in high school for reading and math; and once per level in science. We still want to have conversations long term about where to push as a state and nation.

We’d like your feedback on proposed solutions for improving the state assessment system. Which of the following ideas would work best for your district?

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Technology readiness	<p>Phase in online assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer all math assessments on paper for first year Paper option for districts with high barriers to online assessment 	
Access to devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request emergency funds this budget cycle dedicated to device purchases (large investment in devices) 	
Length of the CMAS assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push PARCC to shorten the ELA and math tests Shorten the number and length of science and social studies sessions (would eliminate subscore data) Push PARCC to collapse the performance based assessment and end of year assessment windows 	
Too many assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a sampling approach for social studies by assessing one-third of the schools in social studies each year 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the high school burden by making the culminating PARCC exam for English language arts and math required and the 9th and 10th grade ELA and math tests optional 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the school readiness assessment optional 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move to the federal minimum and make everything else optional 	

Challenge	Options	Feedback
Recognition of local assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Request to reconsider process ▪ Identify ways in which local assessments may be recognized in addition to state assessments in the accountability process 	
Student buy-in and motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High stakes at key milestones: 3rd grade reading, algebra, 11th grade PARCC, and 11th grade ACT ▪ What ideas do they have? Students don't have a stake in their interim assessments – why do they see a difference? Is it because school/teacher accountability for the summative tests? 	

3. Which of the options discussed today would provide your district with the most relief and/or support? In other words, which option best addresses your greatest need?
4. Unique Challenges by Level
 - What concerns and issues are unique at the elementary level?
 - What concerns and issues are unique at the secondary level?

Future System & Next Steps

5. Sampling — As we discuss the desired future assessment system (one unconstrained by federal requirements), the idea of sampling has been raised. Sampling significantly reduces test burden and can still provide accountability data; however, student growth data is no longer available. Colorado values growth. How do you view this tradeoff and what value do you place on student growth data?
6. Immediate next steps — CDE is using the data from this study to take immediate actions to address assessment burden concerns. The department is also looking to make policy changes. What else would you like to see from the department in terms of next steps and how would you like to be involved in continued conversations about the future of the state’s assessment system?
7. What else would you like to share with me?

IV. Conclusion

Thank participants for their time. Inform participants that data from Phase I of the study will be shared with the State Board of Education on May 14. Findings from this second round will be summarized as an addendum to the Phase I report, and will be available in July.



Colorado Assessment Implementation Study

Prepared for
The Colorado Department of Education