

# Standardized Student Testing

Update to 2017 Evaluation Report

February 2018

## Problems Identified

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

## Changes Implemented

- **Administrative Changes Under Development.** In response to our report, MDE is creating an overall evaluation plan for statewide testing. The plan will detail how MDE will systematically gather information about the logistical impacts of testing. Additionally, the plan will include strategies to appropriately target further outreach and training efforts so that educators better understand testing data.
- **State Accountability Plan Created.** MDE developed and submitted the state's plan for meeting its responsibilities under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA's scope is much broader than standardized testing, but elements of the plan address how MDE will use test results as part of the state's educational accountability system.

## Action Needed

- **Eliminate Prescriptive Laws.** The Legislature should delete a provision that requires MDE to report inappropriate projections of college readiness to students and parents. We also recommend removal of a specific statistical formula measuring growth. Lawmakers should reexamine a law requiring state tests to use above-grade and below-grade questions.
- **Provide Clearer Direction.** State laws require MDE and local schools to use standardized test results for multiple purposes that are not always compatible. The Legislature should prioritize which purposes are most important and then hold MDE accountable for delivering tests that address these uses.