

Independent Evaluation of Nevada's Statewide Assessment System

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Executive Summary

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) contracted with WestEd to conduct an independent evaluation of Nevada’s statewide assessment system, examining 10 assessments that are administered and required by the state. WestEd focused on collecting data related to the following assessments that comprise Nevada’s state assessment system:

- ACT
- Brigance Early Childhood Screens
- Career and technical education (CTE) assessments
- End-of-course (EOC) assessments
- Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)¹
- Nevada Alternate Assessment (NAA)
- Science (grades 5 and 8 and high school) assessments
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) annual assessment
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) interim assessment
- WIDA assessments

Collectively, these statewide assessments are used to assess student readiness, mastery of state content standards, and to gauge readiness for postsecondary opportunities. Among them, some (e.g., SBAC annual and interim assessments, science assessments, MAP, EOCs, and NAA) were selected by Nevada to determine student progress relative to state content standards. Others (e.g., Brigance Early Childhood Screens and WIDA assessments) have been used for making student placement decisions. Nevada also administers college and career readiness assessments (i.e., ACT and CTE assessments).

The evaluation employed a multi-method approach, analyzing data collected from surveys, interviews, and a document review. The purposes of the evaluation were to identify areas of strength and improvement and to develop resulting recommendations for improving Nevada’s statewide assessment system, including improvements for technical assistance supporting assessment administration.

To conduct the evaluation, WestEd developed and administered two online surveys for district test directors (DTDs) in each of the state’s 19 school districts. All 19 DTDs completed the first survey, and 18 completed the second. Both surveys were designed to understand DTD experiences with administering statewide assessments and using assessment data. The study team also conducted seven follow-up interviews with consenting DTDs and completed an extensive document review, including review of [The Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report \(2016\)](#), a recent report that represented diverse stakeholder input. The overall aim was to examine district staff’s perceptions of Nevada’s assessment system. DTDs were asked to share their perceptions about important aspects of the state’s assessment system, including:

- Usefulness of statewide assessments as defined by the degree to which they meet their intended purposes

¹ Nevada requires MAP administration at grades K–3. Although several Nevada districts implement MAP at higher grade levels, results and recommendations related to MAP in this report are specific to the K–3 MAP assessments.

- Administration compliance and consistency
- Test security
- Accessibility
- Quality of reporting
- Testing time
- Quality and usefulness of resources and training provided by NDE to support assessment administration

Overall, many DTDs perceive NDE’s statewide assessments to be high-quality tools for determining student performance and informing broader curriculum, instruction, and program improvements. Additionally, DTDs indicated that NDE provides necessary and helpful technical assistance and training to support statewide assessment training and assessment use. However, as is to be expected with any complex system, areas for potential improvement exist. Although NDE has supported assessment literacy through training on assessments, more work may be needed to articulate the function of different assessments in a balanced assessment system. In particular, the strengths and limitations of the Smarter Balanced and MAP interim assessments may need more focus in future technical assistance. This section offers suggestions for both NDE and the Nevada legislature to consider as they continue to improve Nevada’s statewide assessment system.²

Key Finding #1: NDE received high marks overall on the training, technical assistance (TA), and resources that it provides to support statewide assessment and data use. Ninety-three percent of DTD survey respondents reported that NDE training and TA to support statewide assessment administration were moderately helpful or very helpful (see Table 10); 87 percent reported that NDE’s training and TA for assessment reporting were helpful (see Table 11); and 73 percent reported that NDE’s training and TA on assessment data use were helpful (see Table 12). Additionally, 94 percent of DTDs reported that resources and materials to prepare schools to administer statewide assessments were either moderately or very helpful. NDE also received high marks overall from DTDs for its effectiveness in communicating the purposes, administration procedures, and district reporting requirements for statewide assessments.

Considerations: These findings suggest that NDE’s staff are highly trained and finely attuned to the needs of Nevada school districts. The positive feedback related to NDE support suggests that gaps in training and TA may be due to lack of sufficient funding. The state legislature should consider working with NDE to collectively determine the extent to which additional resources may be necessary to implement the suggested improvements.

Key Finding #2: Nevada educators expressed a need for more efficient state testing, as well as improved assessment tools and strategies to support instruction. The high-stakes nature of most required annual summative achievement assessments, such as the SBAC and annual science assessments — combined with the considerable time it takes to administer them — may prompt Nevada educators to want more from statewide assessment results than the assessments may be designed to deliver. For example, DTD survey and interview results suggest that district educators

² The extent to which NDE has resources available to support specific recommendations is beyond the scope of this evaluation. The authors urge NDE to work with Nevada’s legislature to prioritize findings, determine appropriate funding levels needed to implement the findings, and consider allocating the necessary funds to support improvements to Nevada’s assessment system.

want assessment data from these summative tests (as currently designed) to be more granular to inform instruction. Findings also indicate that educators want to reduce the amount of time and the number of test items required to administer these tests. These two findings — wanting shorter tests while, at the same time, wanting more granular results that are both reliable and valid — cannot be simultaneously addressed in a single annual statewide achievement test. Furthermore, annual summative achievement tests are most useful for evaluating school performance and student progress, and to inform schoolwide decisions about curriculum, instruction, and programming; these tests are not designed to support ongoing instructional decision-making.

Considerations: These findings suggest the need for (1) a more balanced assessment system within school districts; (2) assessment literacy training for district leaders and staff to understand different types of assessments (i.e., formative, interim, diagnostic, summative) and how they should be used within the context of a balanced assessment system to support instruction and continuous improvement; and (3) stronger communication and coordination between NDE and Nevada school districts to clarify state assessment requirements and to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of NDE from those of local districts. To support these suggestions, NDE should consider how departments might restructure existing resources to focus on improving assessment system balance, data literacy training, and communication strategies. Additionally, the state legislature may consider allocating additional resources for NDE to hire additional staff and build internal capacity to effectively address these needs.

Key Finding #3: District test directors reported mixed perceptions about the usefulness of specific statewide assessments, and confusion related to state testing requirements. Educators reported that, for the high school level, the ACT, WIDA, and CTE assessments were the most useful assessments in terms of addressing the purposes for which they are designed. On the other hand, educators reported finding the EOC assessments to have limited utility for addressing the assessments' intended purposes. Some DTDs suggested that their districts were reluctant to cease administering the EOCs, citing confusion about how these assessments should be used now that they are no longer required for accountability purposes. Additionally, some DTDs noted confusion about the grades at which the MAP assessment was required.

Considerations: While these findings further suggest the need for assessment literacy training, they also point to the need for clearer communication about state testing requirements (i.e., which assessments districts are required to administer at which grade levels) and about the purposes and intended uses of state assessment results. NDE might also consider implementing targeted resources and technical assistance focused on helping districts individually determine whether to continue or eliminate optional state tests across grade levels (e.g., EOCs, SBAC interim assessments, MAP). The extent to which NDE has resources available to develop and execute such support is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Key Finding #4: Results suggest that statewide assessments are implemented with high levels of fidelity, but that improvements are needed to report results more quickly. Nevada educators reported high levels of fidelity in terms of consistent statewide test administration, following test security measures, and making annual high-stakes assessments accessible to all students. Educators reported that the greatest need for improvement is in the timeliness of reporting results (i.e., turning around assessment results more quickly). Specifically, they noted that delayed reporting limits the usefulness of assessment results. Furthermore, educators expressed disappointment that online

testing has not reduced the reporting turnaround time. Survey and interview results also suggest that educators perceive that too much time is spent assessing students, especially for the SBAC annual and interim, EOC, WIDA, science, and NAA assessments.

Considerations: NDE may benefit from a communication strategy that clarifies the necessary steps that the state and its assessment vendor must implement before turning around test results. Additionally, NDE should consider working with its assessment vendor to determine where opportunities exist to turn around assessment results more quickly without compromising data quality.

Key Finding #5: District test directors reported mixed perceptions about the usefulness of the SBAC interim assessments. DTD responses to survey and interview questions suggested that misconceptions exist about the purpose of the SBAC interim assessments and the usefulness of their results for supporting district and school decision-making and instruction. Findings suggest that educators still have many questions about the purpose and benefits of using these assessments, particularly among districts that may already be implementing a different interim assessment (e.g., MAP). Additionally, practitioners may not fully understand the strengths and trade-offs inherent in the SBAC interim assessments, relative to other interim assessment solutions (e.g., the strength of the SBAC assessments' more comprehensive standards coverage and in-depth instructional information, at the cost of less timely, entirely machine-scored results). Evidence from other states suggests that when state departments of education have been given sufficient resources to train and support districts on the proper use of SBAC interim assessments, districts have reported positive results about these assessments, particularly when they are used in combination with the SBAC annual achievement tests.

Considerations: Much more training and communication is needed to clarify the strengths of the SBAC interim assessments and their potential for improving school and classroom decision-making over and above other interim assessments that districts may already be using. To build buy-in, increase fidelity of implementation, and increase scale-up of the SBAC interim assessments across Nevada districts, NDE should consider options for developing and executing a comprehensive and substantive training and communication plan that includes the role that these assessments can play in a balanced assessment system.

Key Finding #6: Although NDE received high marks overall for the support that it provides to districts, DTDs reported occasional gaps in NDE's communication to districts regarding new assessment and accountability requirements, assessment administration guidance, and general assessment support. According to DTD interviews, DTDs who were new to the position occasionally missed out on important information that would have helped them to provide more effective assessment support to schools. Additionally, high percentages of DTDs requested more opportunities for in-person training from NDE, citing opportunities to strengthen relationships with NDE staff and DTD colleagues from other districts.

Considerations: NDE should consider how to leverage existing resources to provide more frequent in-person training sessions with DTDs and district/school staff. Although in-person training is more costly than virtual training sessions, DTDs reported that in-person training sessions would be valuable in terms of facilitating deeper relationships with NDE staff and district colleagues. In-person training would also provide critically important opportunities to build a stronger statewide support network that leverages the experience and expertise of both NDE and district assessment staff.

Evaluation

Overview

In spring 2018, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) contracted with WestEd — a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency — to conduct an evaluation of Nevada’s statewide assessment system, with the final report providing recommendations for improving the system, including related technical assistance for districts. The purposes of the evaluation were to identify areas of strength in Nevada’s statewide assessment system and to develop recommendations for system improvement.

To complete the evaluation, WestEd developed and administered two online surveys for district test directors (DTDs) in each of the state’s 19 school districts, and also conducted seven follow-up interviews with individual DTDs, all with the intention of understanding district perceptions of Nevada’s statewide assessment system and identifying areas for improvement. To augment and provide context for the survey and interview results, the study team also reviewed statewide planning documents (i.e., Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA] state plan and ESSA plan support materials), web-based resources related to state assessment, and technical and administration manuals from vendors involved in developing and implementing Nevada statewide assessments.

Methods

The evaluation employed a multi-method approach. Data from surveys, interviews, and documents enabled the study team to triangulate findings by testing for the consistency of claims across data sources and constructing plausible explanations when inconsistencies or contradictions emerged.

Surveys

Two online surveys were administered to the state’s 19 DTDs. Due to the breadth of assessment issues in the survey, the study team administered two surveys to distribute the burden on DTDs and to promote higher response rates. The first survey was designed to collect data on DTD perceptions of Nevada’s assessments, specifically as related to assessment utility, consistency, security, accessibility, reporting, and testing time. This first survey also included questions on how the state assessment system might be strengthened. The second survey was designed to elicit information about districts’ own assessment administration practices and the state resources that support these practices. This second survey also included questions about how resources for assessment administration might be improved. Both surveys were designed to yield a broad understanding of DTD experiences with Nevada’s assessment system and what supports would be most helpful for DTDs. DTD surveys gathered data about the following assessments that comprise Nevada’s state assessment system:

- ACT
- Brigance Early Childhood Screens
- Career and technical education (CTE) assessments
- End-of-course (EOC) assessments

- Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)³
- Nevada Alternate Assessment (NAA)
- Science (grades 5 and 8 and high school) assessments
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) annual assessment
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) interim assessment
- WIDA assessments

Both surveys were administered using an online platform and electronically delivered to DTDs, using their email addresses, along with WestEd contact information for any respondent questions or concerns. DTDs were given approximately three weeks to complete each survey. During the survey administration period, multiple reminder emails were sent to each DTD, as appropriate, to encourage survey completion. Tables 1–3 present district demographic data from both surveys.

Table 1. Schools served by each of Nevada’s 19 districts

	Number of Districts	Percentage of Districts ⁴
1 to 10	11	57.9
11 to 40	5	26.3
More than 40	3	15.8

Table 2. Students served by each of Nevada’s 19 districts

	Number of Districts	Percentage of Districts
Fewer than 1,000 students	5	26.3
1,000 to 5,000 students	6	31.6
More than 5,000 students	8	42.1

Table 3. Types of locations of each of Nevada’s 19 districts

	Number of Districts	Percentage of Districts
Rural	6	31.6
Suburban	8	42.1
Urban	3	15.8
Charter district	2	10.5

The survey analyses present the frequencies for each survey question, as well as thematic analyses of open-ended question responses. Survey response data for all questions is presented in the Findings section of this report, starting on page 9. All 19 DTDs responded to the first survey, and 18 DTDs (about 95 percent)⁵ responded to the second survey.

³ Nevada requires MAP administration at grades K–3. Although several Nevada districts implement MAP at higher grade levels, results and recommendations related to MAP in this report are specific to the K–3 MAP assessments.

⁴ Percentages in tables are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

⁵ Percentages in text are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Interviews

Following survey administration, telephone interviews were conducted with seven of the DTDs, asking them, among other things, to discuss and explain the assessment-related strengths and areas for improvement identified in the surveys. To recruit interview participants, an item had been included in the initial survey asking whether the survey recipient would be willing to participate in an interview. Drawing from the list of willing participants, the study team secured a group of seven DTDs who, together, represented a mix of urban, suburban, and rural school districts and who reflect a range of district experiences with the statewide assessment system. Interview questions focused on DTDs' perceptions about state and local assessments, resources, and guidance provided by NDE to support assessment administration and use. The interviewees were also asked for any suggestions they might have for improving the state's assessment system.

The study team took notes as well as recorded the interviews. Interview notes were inductively analyzed to identify interviewees' perceptions about key strengths and areas for improvement in NDE's assessment and accountability system. Quotes were also pulled from transcripts to illuminate key issues supporting thematic findings.

Document Review

The study team worked closely with NDE's assessment team to clarify questions about state and district assessment contexts and to develop a detailed description of NDE's existing statewide system of assessments. The team also reviewed the following resources:

- *NDE's website and online and print documents*. These resources describe in some detail the full array of assessments, assessment resources, and guidance that NDE provides to Nevada districts.
- [The Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report](#) conducted by the West Comprehensive Center (2016). This report summarizes findings from three focus groups, which were held in urban, suburban, and rural settings. A total of 39 stakeholders participated in the three focus groups. Stakeholders included Nevada teachers, school administrators, students, parents, union representatives, school board members, district leaders, and community members. Findings from the 2016 report were integrated into this report to triangulate findings as the study team compared them against findings from the surveys and interviews.
- *Technical and administration manuals for the Brigrance Early Childhood Screens, CTE assessments, EOC assessments, science assessments, SBAC annual and interim assessments, and WIDA assessments*. These documents were used to evaluate the technical quality of each assessment and to support the federal peer review process.⁶

Findings

Interim and Annual Assessments

The remainder of this report summarizes key evaluation findings and considerations intended to inform multiple aspects of the state's assessment system, including:

⁶ Findings from the technical quality review are included in a separate report to NDE.

- Usefulness of statewide assessments as defined by the degree to which they meet their intended purposes
- Administration compliance and consistency
- Test security
- Accessibility
- Quality of reporting
- Testing time
- Quality and usefulness of resources and training provided by NDE to support assessment administration

Unless otherwise noted — as in the immediately following section, which draws from multiple data sources — all findings are from analysis of survey data.

Usefulness of Assessments for Meeting Their Intended Purposes

This section highlights survey findings about the extent to which NDE’s statewide assessments are perceived by DTDs to effectively address the purposes for which the assessments were designed. For each assessment, DTDs were presented with a list of its intended purposes and asked to rate the degree to which it meets those purposes and is, therefore, considered useful. Each list of intended purposes associated with a given assessment was pulled from the NDE website and vetted by NDE assessment staff.

Usefulness of Interim Assessments (survey findings)

NDE offers two interim assessments: the MAP reading assessment and SBAC interim assessments. Although the MAP and SBAC interim assessments share several purposes, survey results about these assessments should not be compared. Each assessment supports different grade-level bands and addresses different priorities in Nevada. Understanding how each assessment supports specific state priorities is essential in making recommendations for improving assessment in Nevada. This section provides context explaining why the MAP and SBAC interim assessments are not interchangeable, given the unique purposes that each assessment serves; why they should not be compared; and in what ways they are collectively considered important assessment tools for Nevada schools.

The Nevada Board of Education officially adopted the MAP reading assessment to assess students in kindergarten through grade 3 (K–3) as part of the Read by Grade Three program.⁷ The state provides MAP to schools as a tool for monitoring K–3 students’ reading progress statewide and for enabling schools to identify struggling readers who need additional reading support. Specific features of the MAP test support these purposes. For instance, the assessment reports scores on a common scale, so that results can be used to compare students’ reading proficiency over time and at different grade levels (e.g., to determine whether a first-grade student’s reading score compares to the average second- or third-grade student’s), making progress monitoring easier. Also, the version of MAP required in Nevada is an electronically administered multiple-choice test, so classroom and student results can be quickly turned into reports that are available to teachers within 24 hours. This allows teachers to use results for instructional purposes such as grouping students with similar instructional needs, intensifying instruction for students demonstrating slower growth, and accelerating

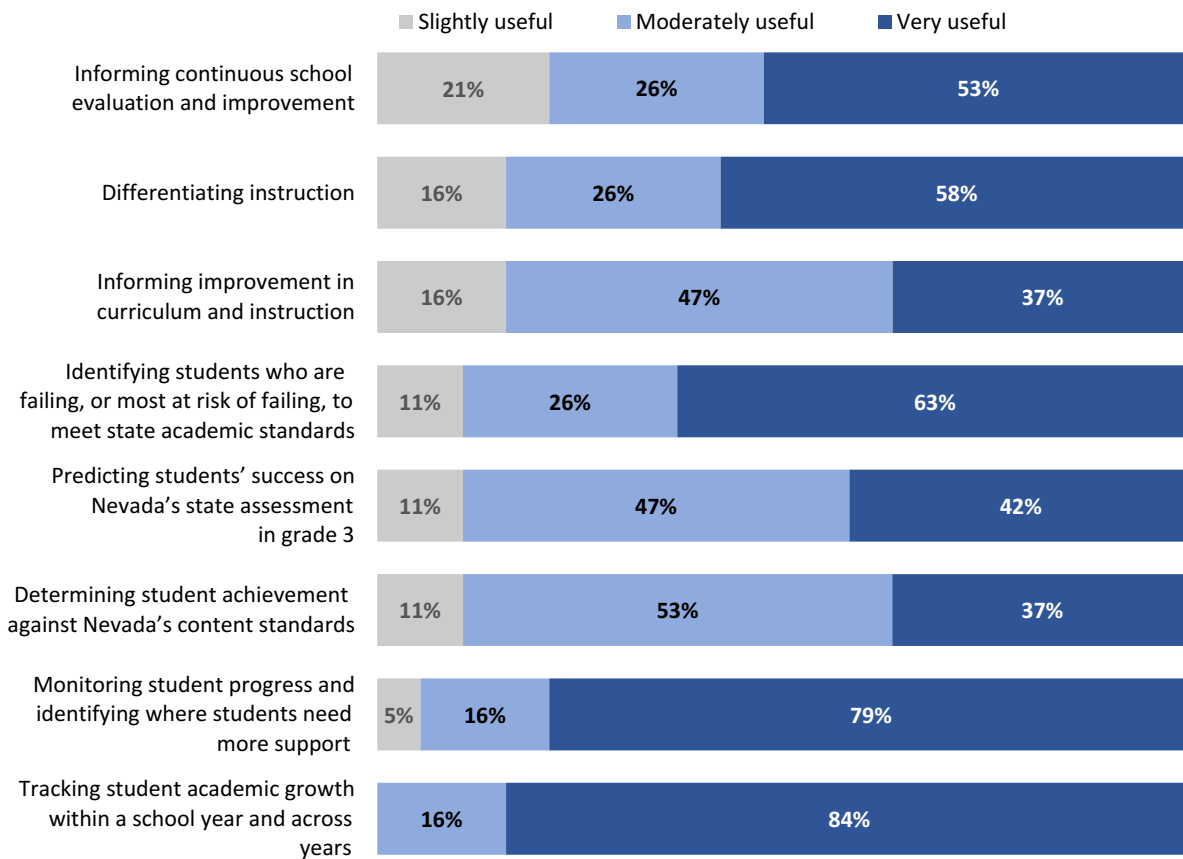
⁷ The Read by Grade Three program is administered to meet requirements of State Bill 391, Nevada’s Read by Grade 3 Act.

instruction for higher-performing students. However, these features come with trade-offs that limit MAP's instructional capabilities. For example, the multiple-choice nature of the assessment limits its ability to assess higher-order standards. Therefore, MAP only addresses a portion of Nevada's reading standards at each grade level. The K–3 assessment also has ceiling effects that may affect the reliability of scores for high-achieving third graders.

NDE offers the SBAC interim assessments on a voluntary basis; districts can choose to administer these assessments to support standards-based instruction in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and to address content gaps associated with the grade 3 MAP assessments. The SBAC assessments include technology-enhanced and performance-based items, which support comprehensive coverage of state content standards and provide more in-depth instructional information for teachers. Item results can facilitate in-depth understandings about what a student knows and can do. The SBAC interim assessments are built using the same assessment design framework as, and thus are closely aligned to, the SBAC summative assessments. However, as with the MAP assessments, the SBAC assessments also have trade-offs. For instance, performance-based items on the SBAC interim assessments must be manually scored, so results on these items are not immediately available to teachers. The results require deeper analysis by teachers and students in order to extract the more in-depth instructional information that these assessments can provide.

Figures 1 and 2 present DTDs' responses regarding the usefulness of the MAP and SBAC interim assessments in meeting each of eight identified purposes. For each intended purpose, DTDs could select from the following choices: not useful, somewhat useful, moderately useful, or very useful. Percentages in the figures reflect respondents' reporting on how useful the MAP and SBAC interim assessments are perceived to be. As shown in Figure 1, between 79 and 100 percent of DTDs reported that the MAP is moderately useful or very useful in meeting its intended purposes.

Figure 1. Percentage of district test directors reporting that the MAP interim assessment is slightly, moderately, or very useful for meeting particular purposes (n = 19)⁸

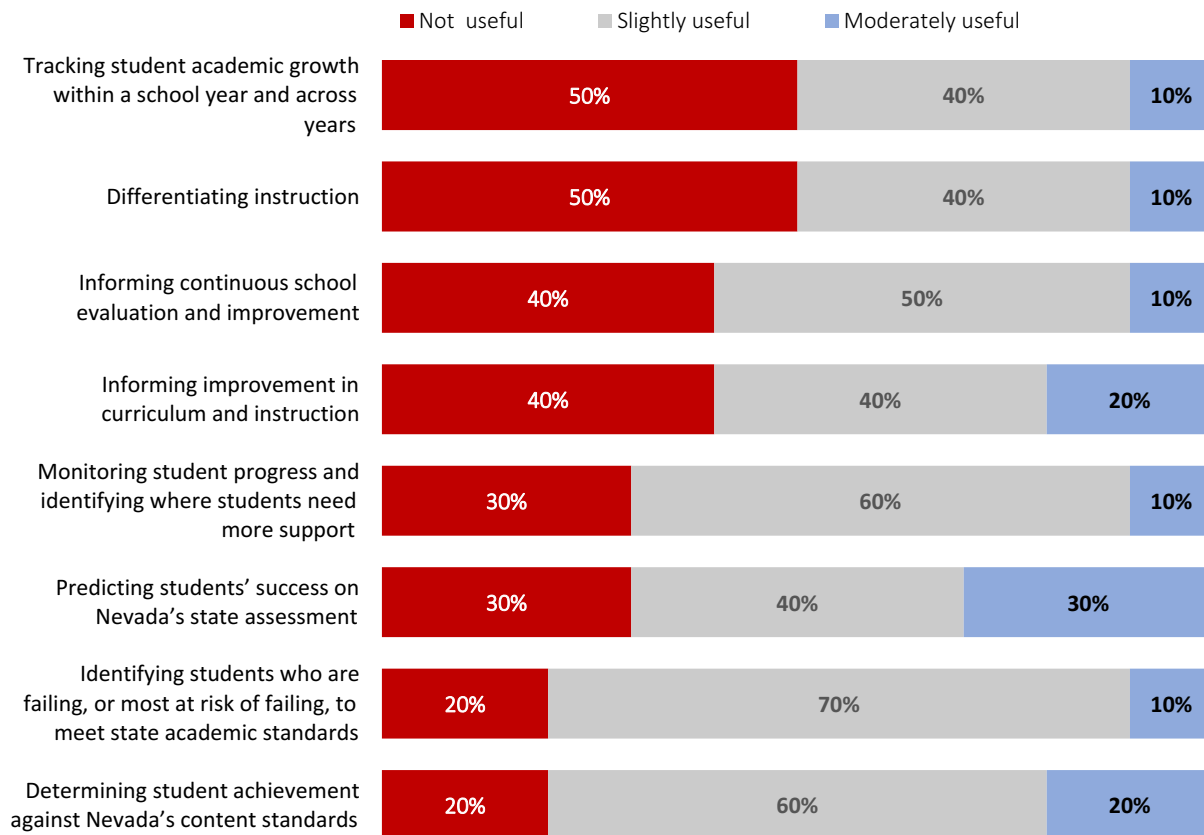


As shown in Figure 2, across all its intended purposes, the SBAC interim assessments were rated as moderately useful by between 10 and 30 percent of the 10 DTDs who administered the assessment in their district.⁹

⁸ Percentages in figures may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

⁹ Use of the SBAC interim assessment is voluntary for districts. Ten of the 19 DTDs reported that their district administered the SBAC interim assessment, and these 10 responded to survey items asking about its usefulness according to the degree to which it meets intended purposes.

Figure 2. Percentages of district test directors reporting that the SBAC interim assessments are moderately, slightly, or not useful for meeting particular purposes (n = 19)

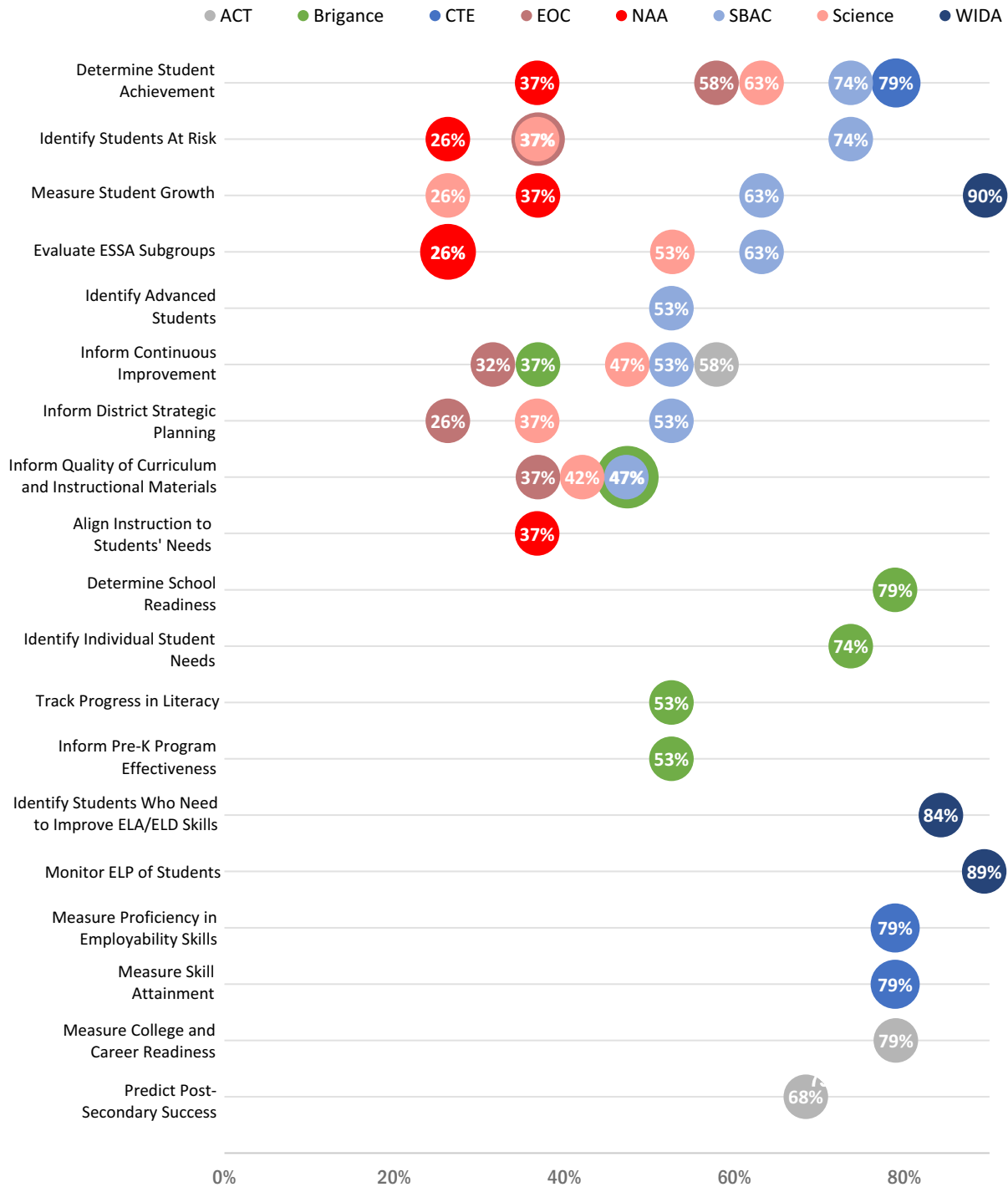


Usefulness of Annual Assessments (survey findings)

NDE offers eight annual assessments, many of which are intended to serve a common set of purposes for different student populations and subgroups (e.g., English language learners). As shown in Figure 3, DTDs (n = 19) reported that among the eight assessments, the WIDA, CTE, and ACT assessments were most useful in meeting their intended purposes, while the NAA, EOC, and science assessments were less useful. More specifically, nearly half or more of DTDs reported that the WIDA, CTE, and ACT assessments were considered useful for meeting their intended purposes. Over half of DTDs reported that the Brigance Early Childhood Screens were useful for meeting all but two intended purposes. Less than half of DTDs reported that the NAA, EOC, and science assessments were considered useful.

DTDs' responses about the usefulness of the SBAC annual assessment and the Brigance Early Childhood Screens varied more widely than did their responses about other annual assessments. For instance, while 47 percent of DTDs reported that the SBAC assessments were useful for informing the quality of curriculum and instructional materials, 74 percent reported that they were useful for determining student achievement and identifying at-risk students. Similarly, a relatively low 37 percent reported that the Brigance Early Childhood Screens were useful for informing continuous improvement, while 79 percent reported that the screens were useful for determining school readiness.

Figure 3. Percentages of district test directors reporting that annual assessments are moderately or very useful for meeting particular purposes (*n* = 19)



Usefulness for Other Purposes (survey findings)

Survey respondents were asked whether they used any of the state’s assessments for purposes not listed in the survey. DTDs used this open-ended question to share other purposes for which they used a particular assessment, as well as areas of concern and suggestions for improvement. In relation to

other statewide assessments, DTDs were most likely to indicate that they used the MAP for other intended purposes, including student placement decisions, assessing additional grade ranges, and identifying gifted and talented education (GATE) students. Table 4 summarizes the other purposes that DTDs indicated that the various assessments serve. For other areas of concern and suggestions for improvement, please see the section of these survey findings titled “Evaluation Summary and Considerations for Improvement” on page 38.

Table 4. Numbers of district test directors reporting additional purposes for assessment data as indicated by DTDs, by purpose and by assessment (n = 19)

	ACT	CTE	EOC	MAP	SBAC Annual	SBAC Interim
Comparing performance to other states					1	
Examining trends			1		1	
Using materials to compare the content and format of district common assessments and teacher formative assessments					1	1
Informing instruction		2	1			
Identifying GATE students				1		
Using alongside true reading assessments to provide a multidimensional view of proficiency and progress				1		
Informing student placement decisions	1			2		
Informing curriculum decisions	1	1				
Using in additional grade ranges				2		
Using for other subject areas				1		

Note: The number in each cell indicates the frequency with which DTDs identified an additional purpose.

To further examine and explain survey findings on the usefulness of Nevada’s statewide interim and annual assessments, the following sections summarize findings from interviews with seven DTDs, as well as findings from the *Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report* conducted by the West Comprehensive Center.

Usefulness of Interim Assessments (interview and document review findings)

The MAP interim assessment was identified by six of seven DTD interviewees as meaningful in terms of providing student performance information relative to MAP's learning continuum. Two DTDs stated that MAP assessment data are valuable due to the student-level analysis provided, which, in turn, is used for instructional decision-making and planning. Another DTD noted how valuable the MAP assessment is for examining students' long-term growth.

According to the survey, only 10 to 30 percent of DTDs reported that SBAC interim assessments were useful. Interview results suggested that this may be due to educators' need for more training on the administration, interpretation, and use of the SBAC results. Use of the SBAC interim assessments may also be impacted by DTD perceptions of assessment utility. For example, one DTD interviewee noted district hesitation to administer the SBAC interim assessments because the feedback provided is not worth the instructional time needed for administration. Another DTD interviewee noted that the SBAC interim assessments only provide raw scores, which have limited usefulness for instructional planning and grouping. Interviews also suggested that overlapping purposes across the MAP and SBAC interim assessments may limit the perceived usefulness of the SBAC assessments, particularly in districts that administer MAP in grades 3 through 8. Both DTDs and school practitioners in these districts are likely to be more familiar with and comfortable using MAP as their interim assessment, compared to SBAC. While an alignment study of SBAC assessments is beyond the scope of this study, it is likely that the SBAC interim assessments demonstrate stronger alignment to the SBAC annual assessment than the MAP assessments do and include items that, compared to MAP or other off-the-shelf interim assessments, better address higher-order standards.

Usefulness of Annual Assessments (interview and document review findings)

DTD interviews and the document review generally supported interview findings. Four of seven interviewed DTDs noted the value of the annual SBAC and ACT assessments for measuring student performance and informing broader improvements in curriculum, instructional strategies, and school programs. However, these same respondents noted that neither assessment provides detailed data that can be used to inform teachers' instructional decisions. One other interviewee noted that end-of-course and end-of-year summative assessments are not useful for instructional planning because they are administered at the end of a course or school year.

According to the *Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report*, focus group participants reported that the ACT was useful for assessing students' college readiness and helping college-bound students identify areas for improvement, although these participants also raised concerns about the utility of the ACT for non-college-bound students. Focus group participants also specifically mentioned the WIDA assessments, indicating that WIDA results were useful for determining student services and placement, as well as for informing training needs for teachers of English language learners.

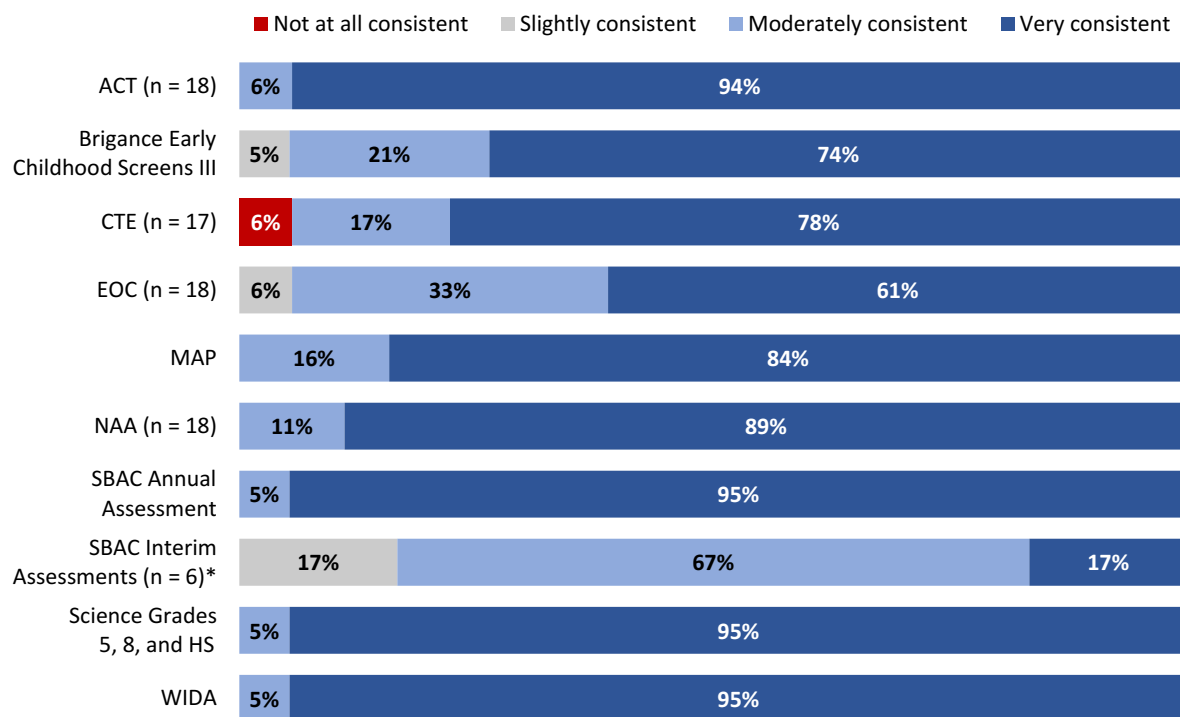
The report also indicated that participants raised concerns about the purpose of the EOC assessments and how these assessments fit into the state assessment system. Participants indicated that the EOCs represented a duplication of classroom assessments and reported not being sure what distinct purpose they serve. District and school leaders also raised concerns about the lack of clarity regarding when EOCs should be administered and re-administered.

Four of the seven DTD interview participants indicated that the EOCs have limited utility because results are provided at the end of the year and, therefore, do not provide enough detail to inform teachers' instruction. One DTD noted that, as of the 2017–2018 academic year, the EOCs are not used at the state level for making high-stakes decisions, and that, because accountability was a primary purpose of these assessments, their usefulness now is no longer clear. Another DTD requested that NDE provide information that districts can share with stakeholders about why changes have been made to the EOC assessments. One DTD also noted that there has been insufficient guidance from NDE on how to interpret and apply EOC data to instructional decisions.

Administration Compliance and Consistency

The survey asked DTDs to report on the consistency of assessment administration by considering how well an assessment administration adheres to a set of protocols, across schools and classrooms in their district. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of district test directors ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated in the figure) reported that, with the exception of the SBAC interim assessment, assessment administration procedures in their district are very consistent.

Figure 4. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the extent to which assessment administration procedures are consistently implemented within the district ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated)



*For this figure and the following figures, WestEd included survey responses about the SBAC interim assessments only from the six (6) DTDs who consistently indicated, across all relevant survey items, that they administered SBAC interim assessments in their districts.

Nevada DTDs were also asked to respond to questions about how well their district staff understand statewide assessment administration procedures. Questions asked them to identify the extent to

which district staff correctly follow assessment administration procedures, as well as the extent to which NDE provides access to resources that support understanding of those procedures.

Table 5. District test directors reporting on the extent to which NDE provides resources (e.g., technical support staff, materials) to support statewide assessment administration (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all	0	0
To little extent	1	5.9
To moderate extent	7	41.2
To great extent	9	52.9

As shown in Table 5, 16 of 17 responding DTDs (94 percent) reported that NDE provides access to resources that support statewide assessment administration, with most respondents indicating that this is true to a great extent.

Table 6. District test directors reporting on the extent to which district staff understand all required procedures for correctly administering statewide assessments (n = 16)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all	0	0
To little extent	0	0
To moderate extent	7	43.8
To great extent	9	56.3

As shown in Table 6, all DTD respondents reported that district staff understand, to an either moderate or great extent, the required procedures for statewide assessment administration.

Table 7. District test directors reporting on the extent to which district staff follow all required procedures associated with correctly administering statewide assessments (n = 17)

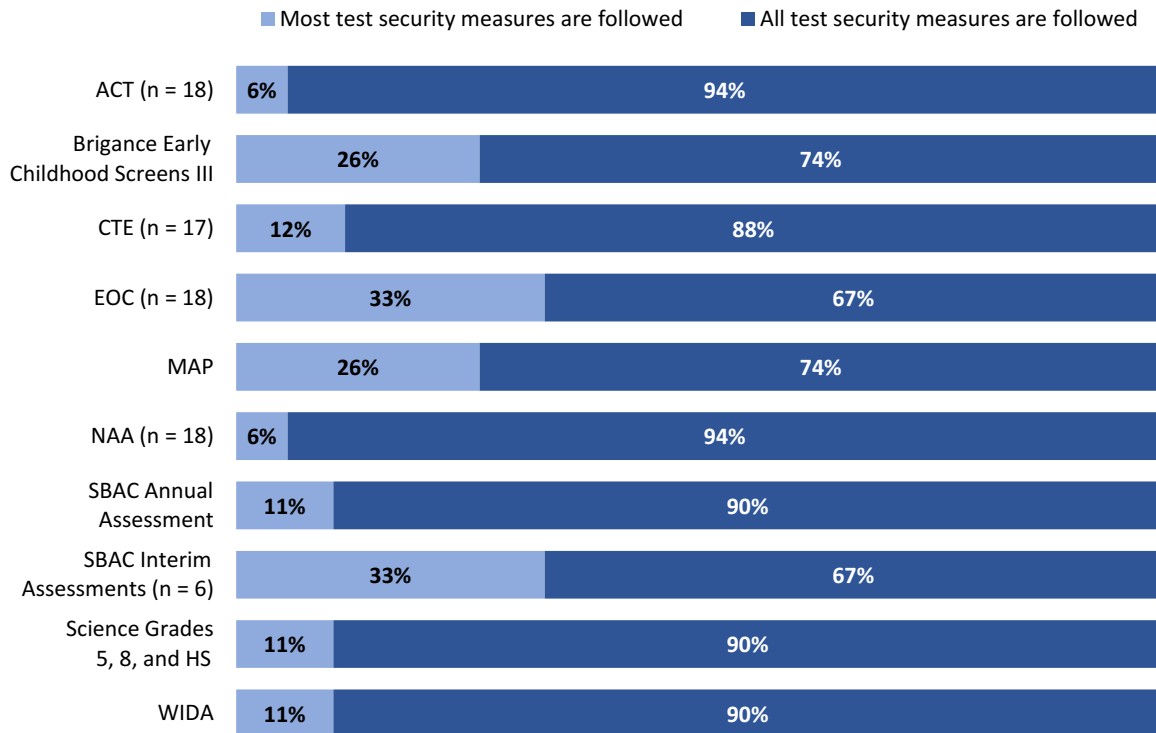
	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all	0	0
To little extent	0	0
To moderate extent	4	23.5
To great extent	13	76.5

As shown in Table 7, all responding DTDs reported that district staff correctly follow all required procedures for statewide assessment administration.

Test Security

Tests are secure when policies and protocols are followed to ensure the integrity of assessment implementation. As shown in Figure 5, the majority of DTDs ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated in the figure) reported that all test security measures are followed for all assessments administered in their district.

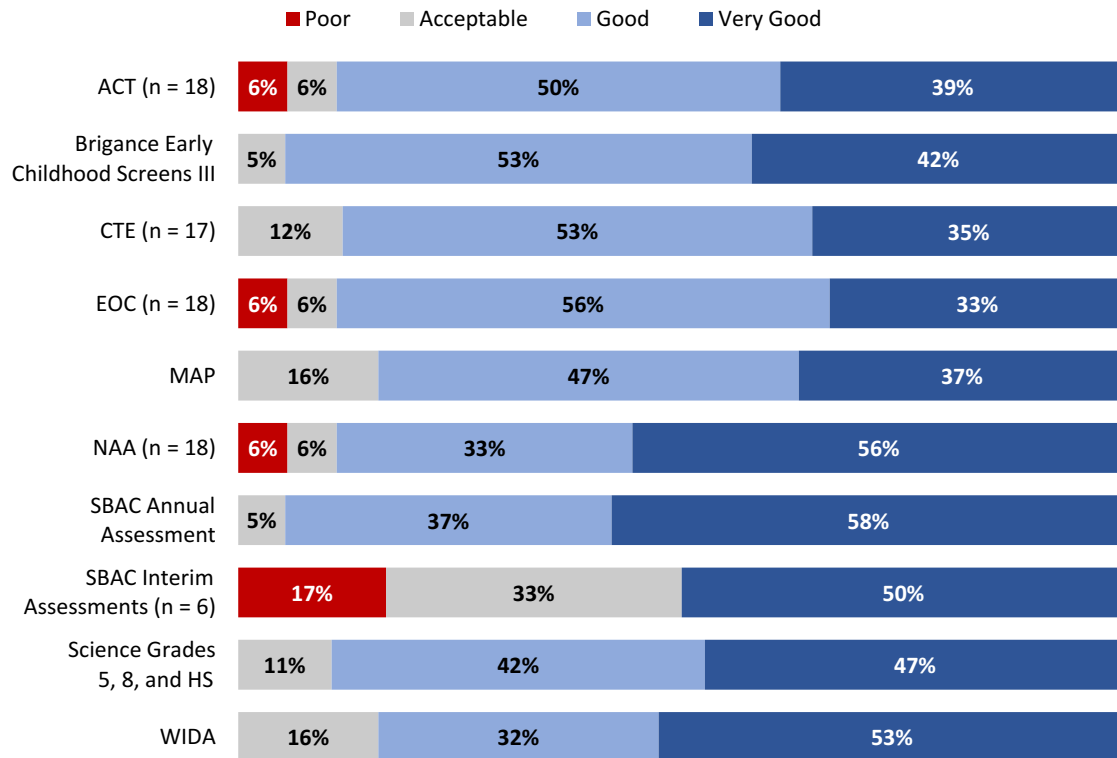
Figure 5. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the extent to which test security measures are followed in Nevada districts (n = 19 unless otherwise indicated)



Accessibility

An assessment is accessible when students with disabilities receive accommodations specified in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. Figure 6 shows the DTDs' rating of each assessment's accessibility for students with disabilities. As shown in Figure 6, more than 80 percent of DTDs ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated in the figure) reported that, with the exception of the SBAC interim assessments, assessment accessibility is good or very good for students with disabilities in their district.

Figure 6. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the accessibility of statewide assessments for students with disabilities (n = 19 unless otherwise indicated)



Quality of Reporting

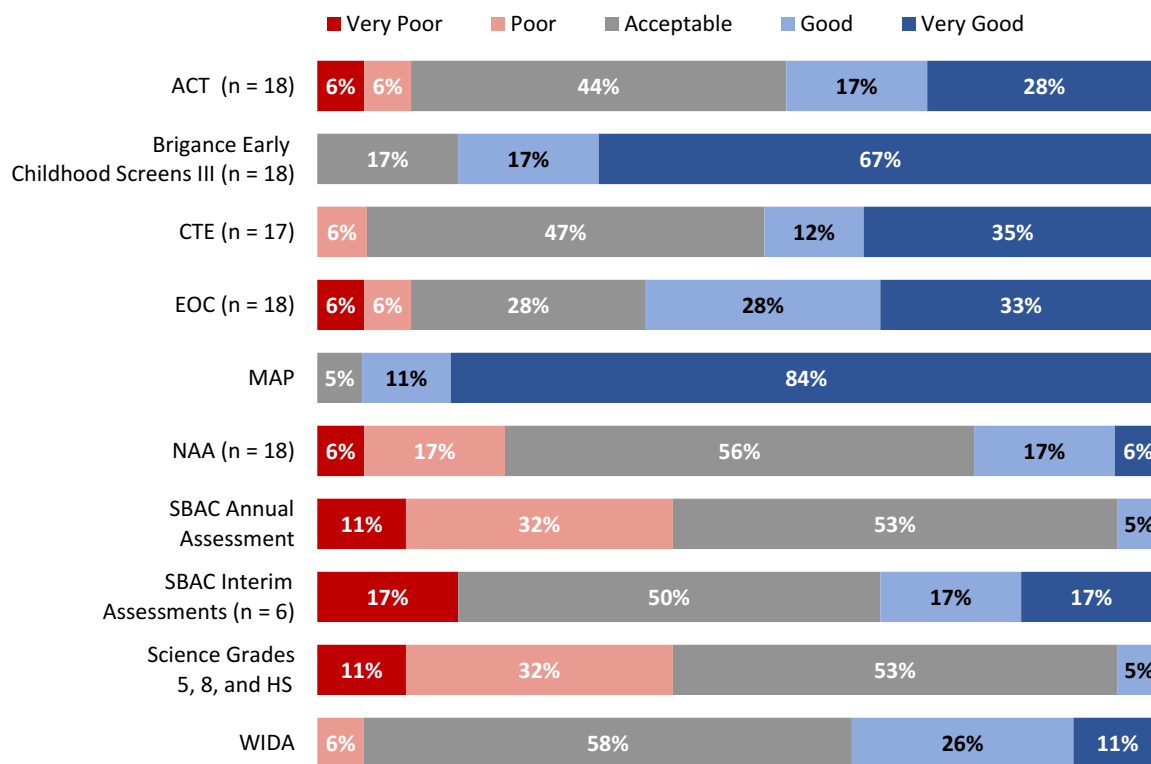
Several survey questions sought feedback on the timeliness, clarity, and disaggregation of reported results. Respondents were asked to keep in mind the following definitions when providing feedback:

- **Timeliness of results:** Assessment results are provided to schools within a time frame that allows them to make meaningful decisions to inform improvement.
- **Clarity of results:** Assessment results are reported in ways that schools can easily understand and interpret.
- **Disaggregation of reported results for relevant student groups:** Assessment results are disaggregated for any student group needed for schools to effectively evaluate school performance.

Timeliness of Results (survey findings)

Figure 7 shows the timeliness of reports by assessment. As shown in Figure 7, although the majority of DTDs (n = 19 unless otherwise indicated in the figure) reported that the timeliness of reports is at least acceptable across the assessments, majorities considered timeliness very good for only two NDE assessments: MAP (84 percent) and Brigance (67 percent). Sizable minorities of DTDs reported that the timeliness of reports is poor or very poor for NAA (23 percent), science (43 percent), and SBAC annual assessments (43 percent).

Figure 7. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the timeliness of reports produced from statewide assessments ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated)



Timeliness of Results (interview and document review findings)

Three of seven DTD interview participants requested that assessment reports be provided to districts in a more rapid manner. These interviewees indicated that assessment reports are not typically received until the end of July or the beginning of August, which makes it difficult for districts to interpret, analyze, and use assessment data to inform instructional planning. These DTDs would like to have assessment reports returned sooner. DTDs identified ACT, EOC, and MAP assessment reports as reports that are provided in a timely manner.

Concerns about the timeliness of reports were also raised in the *Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report*, in which stakeholders noted that delays in receiving assessment reports prevented use of assessment data for instructional planning. During focus group discussions, some participants explained that this frustration stemmed, in part, from results not being returned in a shorter time period, contrary to their belief that the use of online assessments would facilitate timely results.

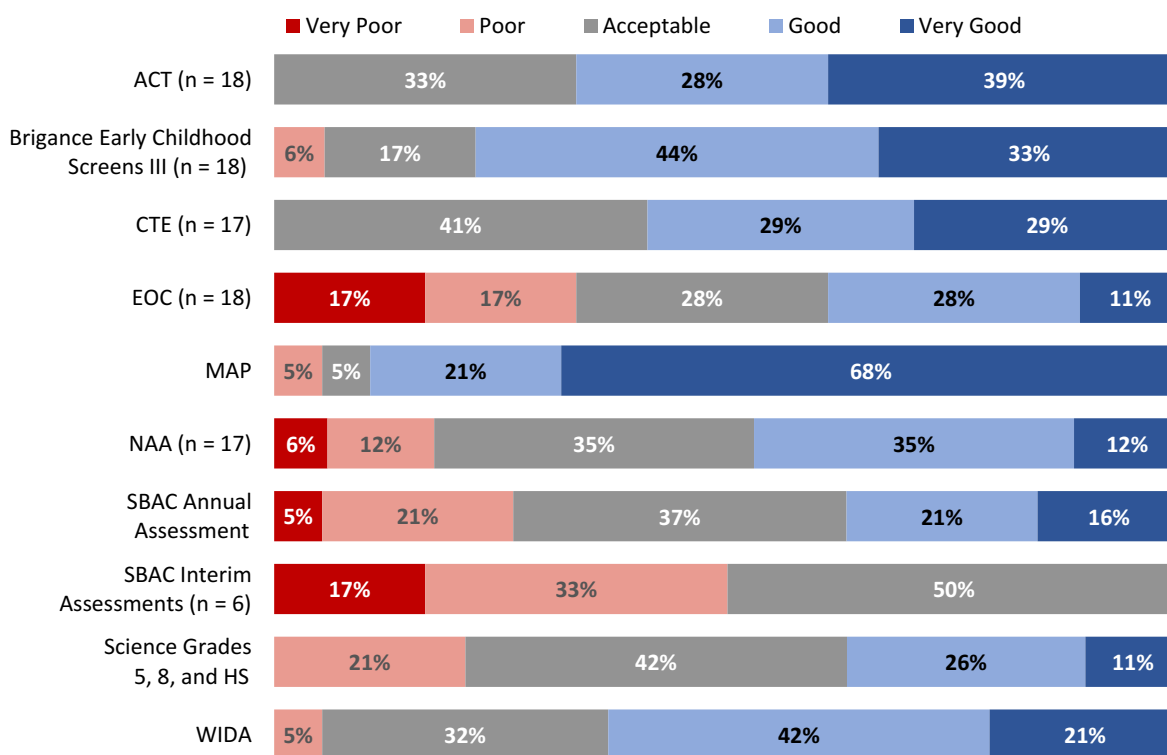
Clarity of Results (survey findings)

As shown in Figure 8, the majority of DTDs ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated in the figure) reported that the clarity of results is at least acceptable. However, a majority of DTDs rated clarity as very good for only one assessment: MAP (68 percent). Eighty-nine percent of DTDs reported that the clarity of MAP assessment results is good or very good, meaning that these reports are easy to interpret. Over half of

DTDs reported that clarity of results using the Brigance, WIDA, CTE, and ACT assessment reports is good or very good. However, more than 20 percent of DTDs reported that the clarity of results is poor or very poor for the following assessments:

- Science (21 percent)
- SBAC annual assessment (26 percent)
- EOC (34 percent)
- SBAC interim (50 percent; $n = 6$)

Figure 8. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the clarity of assessment results ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated)



Clarity of Results (interview findings)

Granularity of summative assessment results to inform instruction. Two DTD interviewees requested assessment reports that provide student- and item-level analyses, as well as student performance related to specific standards. These DTDs indicated that this information would be valuable for use in teachers’ professional learning communities and would support teachers’ use of assessment data for instructional planning. One DTD acknowledged the challenge that NDE may have in providing this type of granular data to teachers, as these more granular results require much longer tests and possibly longer wait times before receiving results.

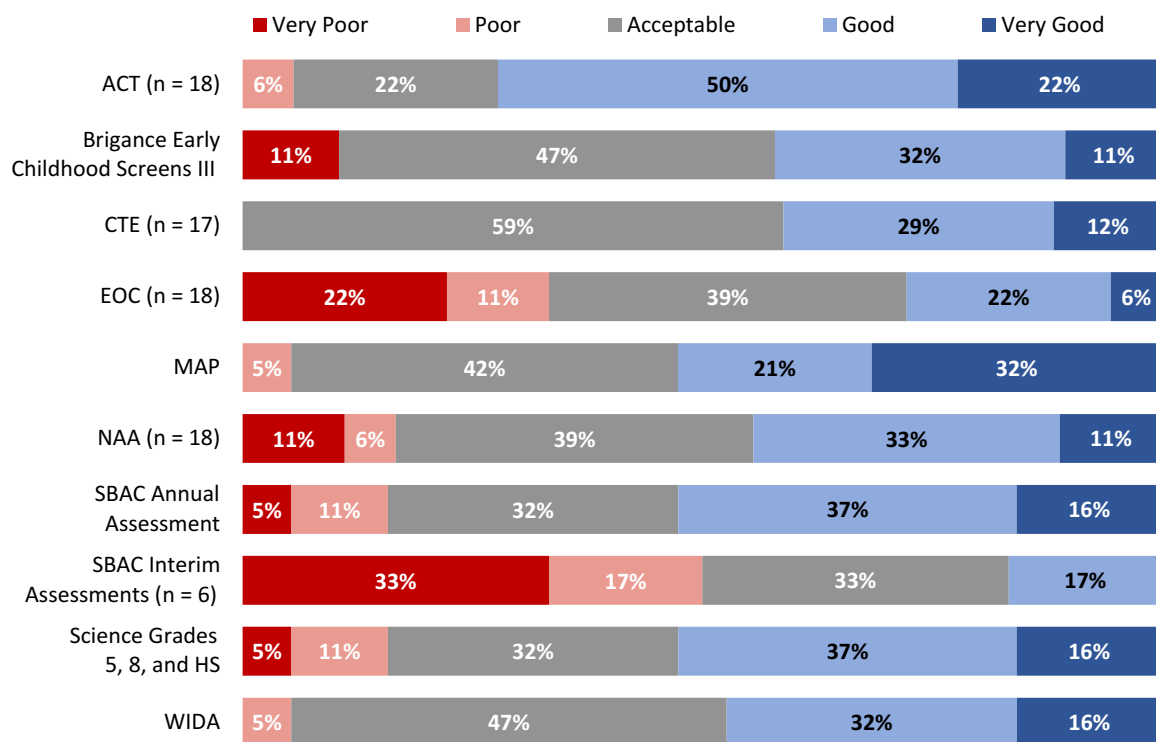
Clarity of results for educators and parents. Additionally, although two DTDs indicated that the current statewide assessment reports are accessible and informative for educators and parents, two other DTDs perceived them to be complex and difficult for educators and parents to understand. One of these DTDs suggested that assessment reports use more accessible language for parent and guardian

understanding. Another DTD said the district spends a lot of time explaining the reports, and acknowledged that, due to the inherent limitations of reporting, creating more intuitively understandable reports can be difficult.

Disaggregation of Reported Results for Relevant Student Groups

Figure 9 shows DTDs’ perceptions of the quality of the disaggregation of reported results for relevant student groups, by assessment. As shown in Figure 9, well over half of DTDs ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated in the figure) indicated that the reporting of assessment results for relevant subgroups of students was good or very good for the ACT (72 percent), Science (53 percent), SBAC annual (53 percent), and MAP (53 percent) assessments. Conversely, 33 percent of DTDs reported that disaggregation of results for the EOC assessments was poor or very poor, and 50 percent of DTDs ($n = 6$) reported that disaggregation of results for the SBAC interim assessments was poor or very poor.

Figure 9. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the extent to which assessments disaggregate results for all relevant subgroups ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated)



Testing Time

Figure 10 shows the reported reasonableness of time that students spend on each assessment. As shown in Figure 10, for the following six assessments, at least 50 percent of DTDs ($n = 19$ unless otherwise indicated in the figure) reported that students spend a reasonable amount of time taking the assessment:

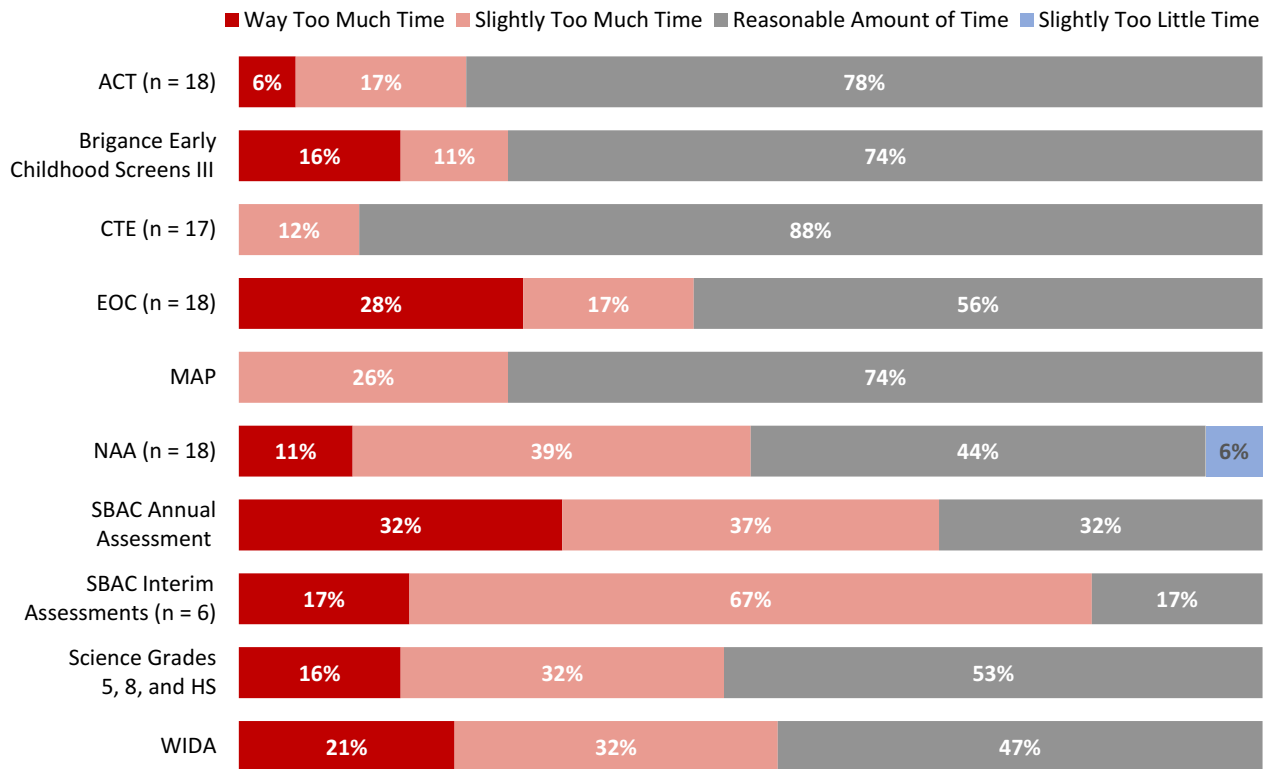
- CTE (88 percent)
- ACT (78 percent)
- Brigance (74 percent)

- MAP (74 percent)
- EOC (56 percent)
- Science (53 percent)

However, for the following four assessments, at least half of DTDs reported that students spend too much time taking the assessment:

- NAA (50 percent)
- WIDA (53 percent)
- SBAC annual (69 percent)
- SBAC interim (84 percent)

Figure 10. Percentages of district test directors reporting on the reasonableness of time students spend on each assessment (*n* = 19 unless otherwise indicated)



NDE Training and Technical Assistance

Participating DTDs shared their perspectives on the resources, training, and technical assistance that NDE provides to support statewide assessment administration, reporting, and use. As shown in Table 8, 15 of 18 DTDs reported receiving training or technical assistance on statewide assessments.

Table 8. District test directors reporting that NDE provided training or technical assistance for administering statewide assessments (n = 18)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Yes	15	83.3
No	3	16.7

Note: Only DTDs who responded “Yes” to this question were asked about how helpful they found NDE training or technical assistance on statewide assessments (see Table 9).

Table 9 shows that, of the 83 percent of responding DTDs who received training directly from NDE:

- 100 percent received assistance for administering the SBAC annual assessment;
- 80 percent received assistance for administering science assessments;
- 67 percent received assistance for administering EOC assessments;
- 60 percent received assistance for administering WIDA assessments; and
- 53 percent received assistance for administering the NAA.

Table 9. Assessments for which district test directors received NDE training or technical assistance (n = 15)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
SBAC annual assessment	15	100
Science (grades 5, 8, and high school) assessments	12	80.0
EOC assessments	10	66.7
WIDA assessments	9	60.0
NAA	8	53.3
ACT	5	33.3
MAP	5	33.3
SBAC interim assessments	5	33.3
Brigance Early Childhood Screens	3	20.0
CTE assessments	3	20.0
Other	0	0

Training on Assessment Administration (survey findings)

Table 10 shows that 93 percent of DTD respondents found NDE training or technical assistance to be moderately helpful or very helpful for preparing schools to administer statewide assessments.

Table 10. District test directors reporting on the helpfulness of NDE training and technical assistance in preparing district schools to administer statewide assessments (n = 15)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	0	0
Slightly helpful	1	6.7
Moderately helpful	6	40.0
Very helpful	8	53.3

Training on Assessment Administration (interview findings)

NDE and its assessment vendor, Data Recognition Corporation (DRC), provide training for districts to clarify the purpose and administration procedures for annual assessments. Three of the seven interviewed DTDs reported that these sessions could be improved by being held more often, by including more in-depth information on the expectations for assessment administration, and by providing opportunities for DTDs to ask questions. One DTD also requested more frequent calls with NDE and with all DTDs, not only to provide opportunities to ask questions, but also to ensure that all districts receive consistent, updated, and in-depth assessment information.

Two DTDs cited timing as an important factor in receiving effective support from NDE. These DTDs noted that NDE’s assessment guidance often comes too close to the start of a testing window, making it difficult for districts to understand and absorb this information and then disseminate it to their schools. Both DTDs requested that information and supports come from NDE much sooner, in order to facilitate sharing with district and school staff and to allow districts to plan appropriately.

Training on NDE Data Reporting Procedures

Table 11 shows that 87 percent of responding DTDs found NDE support for guiding data reporting procedures to be either moderately helpful or very helpful, with the majority of respondents indicating that NDE support was very helpful.

Table 11. District test directors reporting on the helpfulness of NDE training and technical assistance to support state assessment reporting procedures (n = 15)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	0	0
Slightly helpful	2	13.3
Moderately helpful	5	33.3
Very helpful	8	53.3

Training on Use of Assessment Results

Table 12 shows that nearly 75 percent of responding DTDs found NDE training or technical assistance to be moderately helpful or very helpful for preparing districts to use assessment data.

Table 12. District test directors reporting on the helpfulness of NDE training and technical assistance in preparing district schools to use assessment data (n = 15)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	1	6.7
Slightly helpful	3	20.0
Moderately helpful	5	33.3
Very helpful	6	40.0

The survey also asked DTD respondents to report on the extent to which NDE provided helpful and responsive feedback when districts contacted NDE with questions. Table 13 shows that 17 of 18

responding DTDs (94 percent) reported contacting NDE directly for assistance to support assessment administration, reporting, or data use.

Table 13. District test directors reporting that they contacted NDE for assistance with assessment administration, reporting, or data use (n = 18)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Yes	17	94.4
No	1	5.6

Note: Only DTDs who responded “Yes” to this question were asked about how helpful they found NDE support regarding assessment administration, reporting, or data use (see Table 14).

Helpfulness of NDE Responses to District Requests

Of the 17 DTDs who indicated having contacted NDE for support regarding assessment administration, reporting, or data use, 88 percent found NDE to be a moderately helpful or very helpful source.

Table 14. District test directors reporting on NDE’s helpfulness in providing needed information (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	0	0
Slightly helpful	2	11.8
Moderately helpful	3	17.7
Very helpful	12	70.6

Responsiveness of NDE to District Questions

According to Table 15, 78 percent of DTD respondents reported that NDE was either moderately responsive or very responsive to their questions about assessment issues.

Table 15. District test directors reporting on NDE responsiveness to questions related to administering statewide assessments (n = 18)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all responsive	0	0
Slightly responsive	4	22.2
Moderately responsive	5	27.8
Very responsive	9	50.0

Web-Based Assessment Resources

Helpfulness of NDE Web-Based Resources

As Table 16 shows, 82 percent of DTD respondents reported accessing the NDE website to obtain resources for proper statewide assessment administration. Table 17 shows that, among respondents who had used the NDE website, 86 percent reported that the website was moderately helpful or very helpful as a support for statewide assessment administration.

Table 16. District test directors reporting that they accessed NDE’s website for assessment resources (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Yes	14	82.4
No	3	17.7

Note: Only DTDs who responded “Yes” to this question were asked about the NDE website and its content (see Table 17).

Table 17. District test directors reporting on the helpfulness of the NDE website for supporting statewide assessment administration (n = 14)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	1	7.1
Slightly helpful	1	7.1
Moderately helpful	10	71.4
Very helpful	2	14.3

Helpfulness of Other NDE Resources

As shown in Table 18, 16 of 17 DTD respondents (94 percent) reported that existing NDE resources for supporting statewide assessment administration were either moderately helpful or very helpful. As shown in Table 19, 11 of 17 responding DTDs (65 percent) reported that NDE resources to support the use of statewide assessment results were moderately helpful or very helpful.

Table 18. District test directors reporting on the helpfulness of NDE resources and materials for preparing schools to administer statewide assessments (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	0	0
Slightly helpful	1	5.9
Moderately helpful	9	52.9
Very helpful	7	41.2

Table 19. District test directors reporting on the helpfulness of NDE resources and materials for preparing schools to use statewide assessment results (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all helpful	1	5.9
Slightly helpful	5	29.4
Moderately helpful	8	47.1
Very helpful	3	17.7

Communication

Overall, DTDs reported that NDE and its assessment vendors effectively communicate assessment purposes and procedures for administering statewide assessments and reporting requirements to NDE.

General Communication (survey results)

As shown in Table 20, 15 of 16 responding DTDs (94 percent) reported that communication regarding the stated purposes of statewide assessments is moderately effective or very effective.

Table 20. District test directors reporting on the effectiveness of NDE communication about the stated purposes of each assessment (n = 16)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all effective	1	6.3
Slightly effective	0	0
Moderately effective	9	56.3
Very effective	6	37.5

In terms of NDE and assessment vendor communication about proper assessment administration procedures, 15 of 17 responding DTDs (88 percent) reported that this communication is either moderately effective or very effective, as shown in Table 21.

Table 21. District test directors reporting on the effectiveness of NDE communication about the procedures that schools and staff must follow to correctly administer assessments (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all effective	0	0
Slightly effective	2	11.8
Moderately effective	8	47.1
Very effective	7	41.2

Similarly, as shown in Table 22, 15 of 17 DTD respondents (88 percent) reported that communication to inform how districts should report assessment information to NDE is moderately effective or very effective.

Table 22. District test directors reporting on the effectiveness of NDE communication about the procedures schools and staff must follow to report all required information to NDE (n = 17)

	Number of DTDs	Percentage of DTDs
Not at all effective	1	5.9
Slightly effective	1	5.9
Moderately effective	7	41.2
Very effective	8	47.1

Communication Related to the Nevada School Performance Framework (interview results)

The Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) is a stakeholder-developed roadmap for rating Nevada schools based on multiple measures of student and school performance. Schools receive a one-to five-star rating based on scores derived from an index that comprises student achievement, growth, reductions in subgroup achievement gaps, and other indicators (e.g., average daily attendance, college

and career readiness measures, and high school graduation rates). During interviews, several DTDs mentioned specific strengths and areas for improvement regarding transparency and communication of the NSPF and, more specifically, how school ratings are calculated and reported.

NDE improved transparent communication for the NSPF. Four DTDs reported that, compared to previous communications regarding Nevada’s school accountability system, NDE has done a better job of providing communication and training for the NSPF, including clear explanation of the criteria used in determining school ratings. All of these DTDs expressed that NDE has been transparent about the NSPF and its implementation, although one DTD noted that NSPF implementation was a “long and painful process.” Another DTD noted that updates to the NSPF have made it difficult for districts to develop a deep understanding of the system and its school ratings. However, one DTD cited the NSPF manual as a strong resource, and also identified workshop tools and NDE staff as valuable ongoing resources for NSPF understanding.

Additional communication is needed around the criteria used in the NSPF. Two DTDs questioned how the high school ratings are calculated. One questioned the use of the ACT as a proficiency measure for high school ratings, noting that the ACT is a measure of college readiness but not of standards-based proficiency; the other questioned why the high school criteria are not as rigorous as those used for elementary and middle schools. Another DTD was concerned about the inclusion of student test participation as a measure, since schools with students who opt out of state testing may receive a score of zero for that measure, adversely impacting the overall rating. Another DTD was concerned about the chronic absenteeism measure and the lack of clarity about how this measure is calculated in different schooling contexts.

Educator Improvement Suggestions (surveys, interviews, document reviews)

In the surveys and interviews, DTDs were asked to provide their perspectives on their assessment needs, and on how Nevada’s assessment system might be strengthened and improved. Both surveys included questions designed to collect open-ended responses about DTDs’ perceptions of the system and of NDE resources that are shared to support understanding of this system. In these responses, DTDs expressed their needs and challenges related to the existing assessment system and made specific suggestions for improving the statewide assessment system. This section provides a summary of DTD responses and illustrative quotes from surveys, interviews, and the *Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report*.

Table 23 lists suggestions, by assessment, from an open-ended survey item that asked for DTDs suggested improvements to NDE’s statewide assessment system. The narrative text that follows Table 24 summarizes findings from DTD responses to open-ended survey items, interviews, and results from the 2016 *Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report*.

Table 23. District test directors’ open-ended suggestions for improvement, by assessment (n = 19)

	ACT	Brigance	EOC	SBAC Annual	SBAC Interim	Science
Providing results in a timelier manner				1		1
Replacing with common assessments to better inform student progress and instruction			1			1
Providing additional support and guidance to districts on administration and reporting			3			
Providing results at a more granular level				1		
Administering more frequently to better inform curriculum and instruction						1
Improving consistency across assessment years			1			
Replacing with better and more efficient screening tools		1				
Improving the reported results so that they can be used to inform instruction					2	
Simplifying and improving the administration process to meet teachers’ needs in monitoring student learning					1	
Using the assessment to inform school improvement	1					
Using the assessment to identify students’ college and career readiness needs before their senior year	1					

Note: The number in each cell indicates the number of DTDs indicating a particular improvement.

More frequent and instructionally useful assessments

Three of seven interviewed DTDs indicated the need for more frequent and instructionally useful assessments and more timely assessment results. Respondent comments included:

“Until the assessment platform has the ability to provide timely and specific line-item analysis with formative and summative feedback to students with strengths and areas for growth, it is not always helpful information.”

“Many of the tests . . . provide scores that cannot be used to drive instruction. They only offer vague levels of achievement. If the interim assessment was more manageable (easier for teachers and students to use), the assessment would be well worth the time necessary to take [it].”

“Summative assessments are not useful to current-year teachers to impact instruction. They can be a reflective tool, but for the amount of time and effort, there are better options for helping teachers inform instruction and for engaging students in taking an active part in their learning.”

“We have a need for formative assessments that are user friendly, [that] embed with existing curriculum or classroom activities, and that can be used to guide student learning. All of the existing assessments are summative, with results coming well after the assessment. The only exception is MAP, whose results correlate with the Smarter assessments but do not necessarily [assess higher-level problem-solving standards].”

Shorter statewide summative assessments

In the *Nevada State and District Assessment Focus Group Results Summative Report*, stakeholders suggested that NDE shorten the amount of time allotted for administering each assessment. One focus group participant described the challenge this way:

“Overall, our students lost 1–2 percent of instruction on state-mandated assessments. This is a reasonable amount of time overall. With that stated, the length of the SBAC annual is a bit too lengthy, as it takes schools approximately two months to get all students assessed. Some students are tested for two hours or more on one part of the test, which is a tremendous amount of time for a nine-year-old child.”

Assessments that can be dually used for benchmarking and summative reporting

Two of the seven interviewed DTDs suggested that NDE consider implementing one interim assessment that can be administered multiple times during the school year while also being used as a summative proficiency measure (also called a “through-course” assessment). Their comments included:

“We really shouldn’t have two assessments that measure the same thing [in reference to the similarities between the Smarter Balanced and MAP assessments]. So I think there are two different purposes, but if that could be rolled into one assessment, that would be super great. [It could be] given more frequently throughout the year so that kids don’t just have one opportunity to demonstrate proficiency, that they could become proficient at a later time and be given multiple opportunities to get there.”

“If [NDE] really want[s] to get into . . . improving instructional practice and student support, I’d move down the lines of formative interim assessments rather than terminal assessments. Provide assessments that can be given, you know, throughout the year to inform instruction. The teachers can actually use [them], in the moment, to adjust course or reflect upon how they’re doing in November or February, rather than in June when you can’t do anything about it.”

More consistent and timely training and resources for assessment administration

Across surveys and interviews, DTDs made suggestions for improving the content and delivery of NDE resources and supports. DTDs requested improvements in NDE guidance on assessment administration, especially for test security measures. They indicated that training and clear guidance from NDE are occasionally not timely. Some also noted that, in the past, NDE guidance has been changed after training has already been provided for the summative assessments, causing confusion and increasing the likelihood of inconsistencies among districts. DTDs also reported that insufficient training and guidance contributed to inequitable testing situations and lost opportunities to compare results across districts.

Assessment training earlier in the school year

Across surveys and interviews, 12 of the 19 DTDs requested that training and guidance be provided in a timely manner to ensure that district staff receive correct assessment administration information prior to the testing window. In the survey, five DTD respondents (26 percent) requested that resources and information on assessment administration be distributed before the testing period begins. Interview and survey comments included:

“Training and guidance from NDE is not timely.”

“This year, documents were available (manuals, accommodations forms) for many of the major assessments prior to testing. This wasn’t always the case. As a district, we are consistent and hold regular training for all levels of employees throughout the year. However, sometimes the information from the state is lacking. We are consistent as a district internally; however, other districts may not do things the same way as we do. We often must make decisions without clear direction from the NDE.”

“Clear direction is not provided by the state in a timely manner. The test security training is not available prior to the WIDA administration (which is a requirement to administer the assessment).”

“Timely information is critical. Information is often provided too late and impacts scheduling and planning.”

“Training should provide information at the beginning of the school year (or earlier) — it is August 10th right now, school starts shortly, and there is no information other than a draft assessment calendar.”

“Information must be received well in advance of any test administration so there is ample time to review and respond to questions.”

“Timely test security training well before the testing season begins.”

“Timely training with accurate support guidance provided is critical.”

“Resources are not posted in a timely manner.”

“[Statewide assessments] need to be more frequent. And it can’t be a couple of weeks before the testing window opens; it’s far too late. Schools are engaging with scheduling and testing calendars, and one example is [that] test security training has still not been provided by NDE. However, a testing window is going to open in less than two weeks. Schools are required to have been trained and it’s, you know, it’s really difficult to try to get that out via certain communication strains that we have.”

Assessment results delivered in a timely manner

Three of seven DTD interviewees reported that because assessment results are not provided in a timely manner, they are not helpful for decision-making, whether for adjusting curriculum, materials, and instruction or for making decisions about professional learning for teachers. The two assessments for which the timeliness of reported results was not identified as a problem were the Brigance and MAP assessments; for these assessments, at least 84 percent of DTDs reported the timeliness of reporting results to be good or very good (see Figure 7). In an open-ended response, one DTD also indicated that

the district's CTE assessment provides an immediate score, which is "useful in immediate change of instruction." These responses are similar to those of the 2016 focus group respondents, who suggested that the state assessment system could be improved with timelier assessment reports and data. Respondent comments included:

"Until the assessment platform has the ability to provide timely and specific line-item analysis with formative and summative feedback to students with strengths and areas for growth, it is not always helpful information."

"Data must be made available to assist with decision-making when providing teacher professional learning for the in-service days at the start of the year. This is not provided in a timely manner to obtain these learning opportunities. Parent communication is also delayed, as the results are not available until the next year."

"I think we can always work on timeliness. It seems odd that we . . . do not receive our reports until the end of July or August, when the students have completed the assessment in May, and we don't get results until the end of July or August, when it's all online. Seems like that's quite a timespan."

Consistent guidance to districts

Four of the seven interviewed DTDs requested that NDE ensure that any guidance or resources it provides are clear and consistent in communicating correct procedures. Their comments included:

"All staff attend the training for test security. Our district still manages to have test irregularities based on their own interpretations for the training they attended."

"We follow our district test security procedures [that] align with the state, when available. Some of the . . . assessments, such as MAP, have not had well-developed security protocols provided by the state. The same goes for EOCs. It is difficult to hold teachers accountable when guidance from the NDE is not clear."

"If [training from NDE were] more consistent, it would be a lot easier to manage . . . [I]n my district I do assessment. So I have access to certain information and training about the MAP assessment. But then my Read by Three folks, they'll go off to a Read by Three training and sometimes they'll [receive] information that contradicts the information I have."

"Guidance is often changed after training has been provided for the summatives, requiring revisions to already distributed guidance [and] causing confusion."

More frequent in-person training opportunities

Although in-person training is more costly than virtual training sessions, DTDs reported finding it valuable in terms of facilitating deeper relationships with NDE staff and district colleagues. Additionally, in-person trainings may facilitate dialogue and professional sharing among district leadership who might be less likely to participate in virtual meetings.

Five of 19 DTDs suggested implementing in-person NDE trainings of some sort:

"[Conduct] live training instead of web meetings."

“NDE could make district visits during testing windows and training opportunities.”

“I liked the district training we had once a year with the NDE. Just bringing test directors and district personnel together with NDE folks would be incredibly helpful to build relationships and answer questions.”

“I’d like to see, at least once a year, having a state meeting where we see each other in person and expectations are outlined.”

“I think that what has been helpful in the past is when [NDE staff] get district folks together to kind of talk about how these results should be used. So more face-to-face meetings where district folks are involved.”

Targeted and personalized support for new district test directors

DTDs suggested that NDE provide more personalized support to districts, particularly as new DTDs step into their roles. For example, two DTD interviewees requested that NDE provide more information for new staff members, ensuring that new staff receive all needed information. A third DTD interviewee indicated that information was occasionally not communicated to DTDs who are new to the role. Their comments included:

“[In my first year as a DTD,] often the information was presented as if I should have already known what it meant. It cause[d] a lot of time after the meeting to follow up. There may need to be levels of support and additional time spent with districts that have people in new roles.”

“Getting a response from folks via email completely depends on who I attempt to contact. I requested a list of who to contact regarding which tests, and the person I emailed quickly typed up a list for me and sent it. What I’m wondering is why isn’t that list available, or why wasn’t it offered to me when I emailed the department?”

“So I think when new folks come on . . . there needs to be some sort of onboarding with brand-new people into their roles, about roles [and] expectations.”

Assessment results that are more granular to inform curriculum and instructional resource decisions

DTDs expressed a need for more granular summative assessment results that can be used to inform curriculum and instructional decisions. For the three assessments with the identified purpose of informing the quality of curriculum and instructional materials, 47 percent or fewer of surveyed DTDs reported the assessments to be useful or very useful in meeting that purpose (see Figure 3). The following comments elaborate on this issue:

“Many of the [state-required] tests provide scores that cannot be used to drive instruction. They only offer vague levels of achievement.”

“The Smarter Balanced [assessment] just gives us a pretty overall, kind of a 30,000-foot-level, view, so as far as classroom instruction, I don’t know if it has changed the actual classroom instruction.”

Additionally, 21 percent of DTD survey respondents raised similar concerns in the open-ended survey item, requesting more granular data that can be used for instructional decision-making and planning. One interviewed DTD specifically addressed the possibility of receiving line-item analysis that could be

used to provide instructional feedback, while other DTDs requested assessment data that are provided at the classroom and individual-student levels:

“Until the assessment platform has the ability to provide timely and specific line-item analysis with formative and summative feedback to students with strengths and areas for growth, it is not always helpful information.”

“It would be beneficial if the reports provided this type of information down to the classroom and student level.”

“With the interim assessments, if we could get student-level reporting, that would be really helpful. That’s a missing piece, that’s a gap, that I think would help our schools use those as a formative tool to help engage in conversations with students, as well as parents and colleagues.”

“I don’t know if Smarter actually attends to it, but the more granular the information, the more likely it would impact classroom instruction. And I think that would be broad-based for all the assessments.”

Consider providing training that supports district- and school-level interpretation and use of assessment results

In the open-ended survey responses, 16 percent of DTDs requested guidance on interpreting assessment results so that they can be useful for their intended purposes, particularly for the SBAC, ACT, and EOC assessments:

“The usefulness of the Smarter assessment data is minimal — the clarity of results in the Claims is minimal.”

“Continue to need information about how the ELA score is determined for the ACT.”

“We need direction on how to correlate EOC scores with grades.”

Across surveys and interviews, 9 of the 19 surveyed DTDs requested that NDE provide further training and resources to accurately interpret and use reports from statewide assessments, noting that training could help districts better understand what the data reveal about student learning and how data should be used for supporting student growth and improvement initiatives:

“Better guidance for the community on the limitation of the results and what they should be used to evaluate.”

“Give a breakdown of where our deficiencies lie. We cannot fix what we do not understand.”

“Training on how to read the data, appropriate use of data, and supports for growth and improvement.”

“We have not been well supported regarding data use. NDE could conduct an in-person meeting to discuss district interpretation and use of data.”

“I haven’t reviewed the website for information regarding interpreting data, but my history with data in our district doesn’t lead me to believe the information on the website is helpful.”

“Now that state tests are consistent, we need more support for understanding and leveraging the results.”

“It’s really getting into, so what does [assessment data] mean? What, where do I go with this individual student, how do I group like students together to inform my instruction?”

“To my knowledge, I can’t think of any actual data training we’ve had . . . but as far as training on reading reports and what implications those reports have on instruction, I don’t recall ever being a part of anything of that nature . . . I think that yes, we would like to be able to experience some training and some deep dives into the reports, so that when parents call or schools question us on what these reports mean and what does it mean for the parent or for the child, we would know what the state would like us to say about the state reports.”

Consider improvements in assessment accommodations

Two of seven interviewed DTDs suggested that greater consideration be given to the accommodations provided, to ensure that all students can participate in statewide testing:

“With the advent of online assessments, vendors need to be more responsive and offer embedded accommodations in the system, ensuring students have the supports to have an equitable assessment. This is not currently the case.”

“NWEA provides guidance to other states that students in grad[e] 2 should take either the primary MAP or the 2–5 MAP, based on previous test scores. In Nevada, we are told that all students should take the 2–5 test no matter what. This is a problem because it does not provide useful data for students that should be taking the primary test (a large percentage of students — many who have IEPs or will in the future).”

Provide clearer communication related to the administration and use of assessment results

Across surveys and interviews, 3 of the 19 DTDs suggested the need for clearer communications about procedures for administering and using results from statewide assessments. Communications should present consistent information about the correct protocols for assessment administration. Focus group participants also suggested that NDE provide clear information about the intended purpose and use of each assessment:

“Clear direction on how to administer, close out, and then read the data the assessments yield.”

“The offices of Standards and Instruction and ADAM form a unified message regarding the alignment of NVACS and assessments. Consistent procedures throughout assessment windows. Solicit and respond to district’s ideas for improving the system.”

“We had a clear miscommunication regarding entering data of students who did not test because they left the district prior to testing. This caused significant work for us after the fact.”

Consider allocating resources to ensure that NDE's assessment-related website information is always up-to-date

DTDs were asked to provide feedback on the NDE website as a resource for assessment administration information. Across surveys and interviews, 4 of the 19 DTDs suggested that the website be improved by maintaining the most current information:

"Information on the website is often outdated, difficult to find."

"Make sure it is up to date."

"Keep it updated."

"How about actually getting the 'coming soon' sections completed before school starts in August? It's pretty difficult to get information to administrators and testing coordinators that isn't available."

Evaluation Summary and Considerations for Improvement

Overall, many DTDs perceive NDE's statewide assessments to be high-quality tools for determining student performance and informing broader curriculum, instruction, and program improvements. Additionally, DTDs indicated that NDE provides necessary and helpful technical assistance and training to support statewide assessment training and assessment use. However, as is to be expected with any complex system, areas for potential improvement exist. Although NDE has supported assessment literacy through technical assistance on assessments, additional work may be needed to articulate the functions of different assessments in a balanced assessment system. In particular, additional technical assistance may be needed to inform the strengths and limitations of the Smarter Balanced and MAP interim assessments. This section offers suggestions for both NDE and the Nevada legislature to consider as they continue to improve Nevada's statewide assessment system.¹⁰

Feedback from DTDs revealed various explanations for these findings.

Key Finding #1: NDE received high marks overall on the training, technical assistance (TA), and resources that it provides to support statewide assessment and data use. Ninety-three percent of DTD survey respondents reported that NDE training and TA to support statewide assessment administration were moderately helpful or very helpful (see Table 10); 87 percent reported that NDE's training and TA for assessment reporting were helpful (see Table 11); and 73 percent reported that NDE's training and TA on assessment data use were helpful (see Table 12). Additionally, 94 percent of DTDs reported that resources and materials to prepare schools to administer statewide assessments were either moderately or very helpful. NDE also received high marks overall from DTDs for its effectiveness in communicating the purposes, administration procedures, and district reporting requirements for statewide assessments.

¹⁰ The extent to which NDE has resources available to support specific recommendations is beyond the scope of this evaluation. The authors urge NDE to work with Nevada's legislature to prioritize findings, determine appropriate funding levels needed to implement the findings, and consider allocating the necessary funds to support improvements to Nevada's assessment system.

Considerations: These findings suggest that NDE’s staff are highly trained and finely attuned to the needs of Nevada school districts. The positive feedback related to NDE support suggests that gaps in training and TA may be due to lack of sufficient funding. The state legislature should consider working with NDE to collectively determine the extent to which additional resources may be necessary to implement the suggested improvements.

Key Finding #2: Nevada educators expressed a need for more efficient state testing, as well as improved assessment tools and strategies to support instruction. The high-stakes nature of most required annual summative achievement assessments, such as the SBAC and annual science assessments — combined with the considerable time it takes to administer them — may prompt Nevada educators to want more from statewide assessment results than the assessments may be designed to deliver. For example, DTD survey and interview results suggest that district educators want assessment data from these summative tests (as currently designed) to be more granular to inform instruction. Findings also indicate that educators want to reduce the amount of time and the number of test items required to administer these tests. These two findings — wanting shorter tests while, at the same time, wanting more granular results that are both reliable and valid — cannot be simultaneously addressed in a single annual statewide achievement test. Furthermore, annual summative achievement tests are most useful for evaluating school performance and student progress, and to inform schoolwide decisions about curriculum, instruction, and programming; these tests are not designed to support ongoing instructional decision-making.

Considerations: These findings suggest the need for (1) a more balanced assessment system within school districts; (2) assessment literacy training for district leaders and staff to understand different types of assessments (i.e., formative, interim, diagnostic, summative) and how they should be used within the context of a balanced assessment system to support instruction and continuous improvement; and (3) stronger communication and coordination between NDE and Nevada school districts to clarify state assessment requirements and to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of NDE from those of local districts. To support these suggestions, NDE should consider how departments might restructure existing resources to focus on improving assessment system balance, data literacy training, and communication strategies. Additionally, the state legislature may consider allocating additional resources for NDE to hire additional staff and build internal capacity to effectively address these needs.

Key Finding #3: District test directors reported mixed perceptions about the usefulness of specific statewide assessments, and confusion related to state testing requirements. Educators reported that, for the high school level, the ACT, WIDA, and CTE assessments were the most useful assessments in terms of addressing the purposes for which they are designed. On the other hand, educators reported finding the EOC assessments to have limited utility for addressing the assessments’ intended purposes. Some DTDs suggested that their districts were reluctant to cease administering the EOCs, citing confusion about how these assessments should be used now that they are no longer required for accountability purposes. Additionally, some DTDs noted confusion about the grades at which the MAP assessment was required.

Considerations: While these findings further suggest the need for assessment literacy training, they also point to the need for clearer communication about state testing requirements (i.e., which assessments districts are required to administer at which grade levels) and about the purposes and intended uses of

state assessment results. NDE might also consider implementing targeted resources and technical assistance focused on helping districts individually determine whether to continue or eliminate optional state tests across grade levels (e.g., EOCs, SBAC interim assessments, MAP). The extent to which NDE has resources available to develop and execute such support is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Key Finding #4: Results suggest that statewide assessments are implemented with high levels of fidelity, but that improvements are needed to report results more quickly. Nevada educators reported high levels of fidelity in terms of consistent statewide test administration, following test security measures, and making annual high-stakes assessments accessible to all students. Educators reported that the greatest need for improvement is in the timeliness of reporting results (i.e., turning around assessment results more quickly). Specifically, they noted that delayed reporting limits the usefulness of assessment results. Furthermore, educators expressed disappointment that online testing has not reduced the reporting turnaround time. Survey and interview results also suggest that educators perceive that too much time is spent assessing students, especially for the SBAC annual and interim, EOC, WIDA, science, and NAA assessments.

Considerations: NDE may benefit from a communication strategy that clarifies the necessary steps that the state and its assessment vendor must implement before turning around test results. Additionally, NDE should consider working with its assessment vendor to determine where opportunities exist to turn around assessment results more quickly without compromising data quality.

Key Finding #5: District test directors reported mixed perceptions about the usefulness of the SBAC interim assessments. DTD responses to survey and interview questions suggested that misconceptions exist about the purpose of the SBAC interim assessments and the usefulness of their results for supporting district and school decision-making and instruction. Findings suggest that educators still have many questions about the purpose and benefits of using these assessments, particularly among districts that may already be implementing a different interim assessment (e.g., MAP). Additionally, practitioners may not fully understand the strengths and trade-offs inherent in the SBAC interim assessments, relative to the strengths and trade-offs of other interim assessment solutions (e.g., the strength of the SBAC assessments' more comprehensive standards coverage and in-depth instructional information, at the cost of less timely, entirely machine-scored results; see pp. 10–11 for more information). Evidence from other states suggests that when state departments of education have been given sufficient resources to train and support districts on the proper use of SBAC interim assessments, districts have reported positive results about these assessments, particularly when they are used in combination with the SBAC annual achievement tests.

Considerations: Much more training and communication is needed to clarify the strengths of the SBAC interim assessments and their potential for improving school and classroom decision-making over and above other interim assessments that districts may already be using. To build buy-in, increase fidelity of implementation, and increase scale-up of the SBAC interim assessments across Nevada districts, NDE should consider options for developing and executing a comprehensive and substantive training and communication plan that includes the role that these assessments can play in a balanced assessment system.

Key Finding #6: Although NDE received high marks overall for the support that it provides to districts, DTDs reported occasional gaps in NDE's communication to districts regarding new assessment and accountability requirements, assessment administration guidance, and general assessment support.

According to DTD interviews, DTDs who were new to the position occasionally missed out on important information that would have helped them to provide more effective assessment support to schools. Additionally, high percentages of DTDs requested more opportunities for in-person training from NDE, citing opportunities to strengthen relationships with NDE staff and DTD colleagues from other districts.

Considerations: NDE should consider how to leverage existing resources to provide more frequent in-person training sessions with DTDs and district/school staff. Although in-person training is more costly than virtual training sessions, DTDs reported that in-person training sessions would be valuable in terms of facilitating deeper relationships with NDE staff and district colleagues. In-person training would also provide critically important opportunities to build a stronger statewide support network that leverages the experience and expertise of both NDE and district assessment staff.