PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER:
Educators on New Assessments

Overview

Colorado educators are using updated assessments to better measure student mastery of the new Colorado Academic Standards. The Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) is replacing the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP). CMAS includes new social studies and science assessments as well as English language arts and mathematics assessments from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Other assessments used statewide include early literacy assessments, the ACT, the Colorado Alternate Assessment (CoAlt), and Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS), in addition to district-, school-, and teacher-created assessments. Together, these assessments inform decision-making to improve instruction and the measures of student learning that districts included in educator evaluations.

About the Findings

In 2014, The Colorado Education Initiative and the Colorado Department of Education surveyed teachers and principals in 26 districts across the state about their experiences with assessments and the data they provide. Unless otherwise noted, the findings presented here reflect the percentage of teachers or principals who agree or strongly agree.[1]

Preliminary results of a recent survey conducted in 26 districts by The Colorado Education Initiative and the Colorado Department of Education suggest that the majority of teachers have access to different types of student learning, performance, and growth data. They use these data in a variety of ways to improve student outcomes. However, the results also indicate that there is room for improvement in developing measures of student learning for teacher evaluations. Districts should consider involving more teachers in selecting measures of student learning used in their evaluations. Those who participate in the selection have dramatically more positive perceptions of these measures and report that they use the data to inform their practice.

Alignment with the Colorado Academic Standards

"I think formative assessments are very helpful. By the time we get TCAP scores, it is too late to make adjustments."
– Elementary teacher

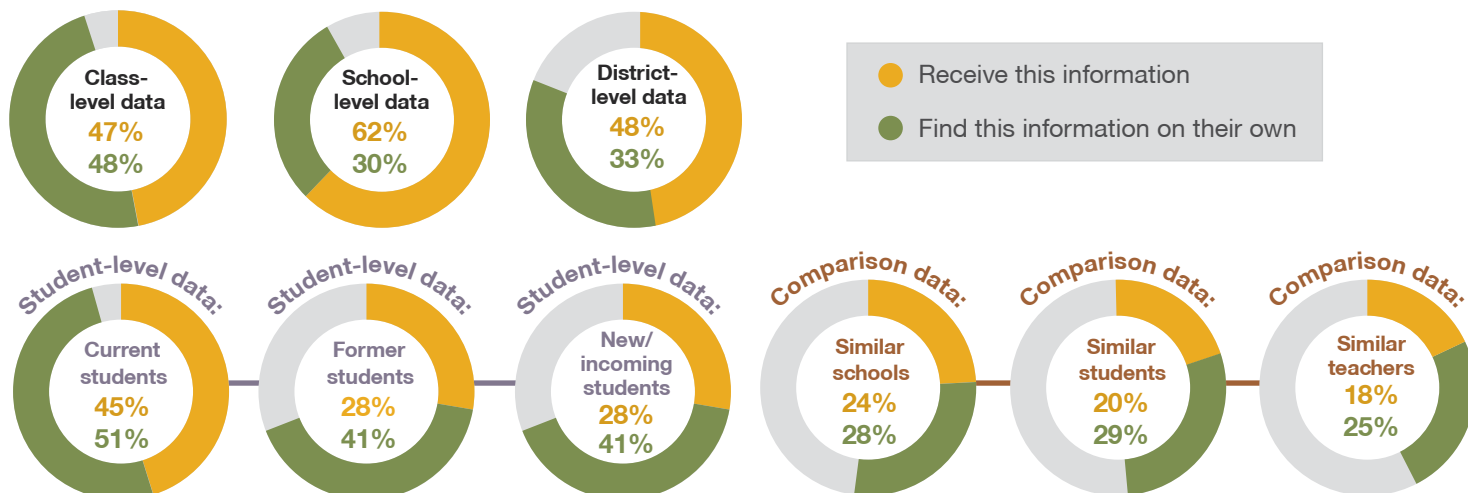Nearly three-quarters of teachers see alignment between the assessments their students take and the Colorado Academic Standards. Interestingly, this percentage is slightly lower than the percentage of teachers reporting that they see alignment in their district's policies on assessments and standards (see Connection with Other Initiatives).

Teacher Access to Data

Overall, most teachers report having access to student data, either by receiving data or finding the data on their own (see Figure 1). These findings are similar to baseline data collected in 2013. The majority of teachers (65 percent) also report that they receive student data in time to inform classroom and instructional decisions. Teachers have the least access to data for making comparisons with similar schools, teachers, and students.

Figure 1. Teacher Access to Student Learning, Performance, and Growth Data

- Class-level data: 47% / 48%
- School-level data: 62% / 30%
- District-level data: 48% / 33%

● Receive this information
● Find this information on their own

- Student-level data: Current students 45% / 51%
- Student-level data: Former students 28% / 41%
- Student-level data: New/incoming students 28% / 41%
- Comparison data: Similar schools 24% / 28%
- Comparison data: Similar students 20% / 29%
- Comparison data: Similar teachers 18% / 25%

[1] Most responses have a four-point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. If responses also include a neutral option, all responses are presented in the accompanying figures.

Measures of Student Learning Used in Teacher Evaluations

After the first year of implementing measures of student learning (MSLs) in teacher evaluations, slightly more teachers (43 percent) think the measures individually attributed to them provide an accurate representation of what their students know and can do than those that are collectively attributed (39 percent), as shown in Figure 2.[2] Slightly fewer teachers (37 percent) agree that the assessments factored into teacher evaluations have undergone a formal review process. Despite the relatively low percentages of teachers responding positively about measures of student learning used in evaluations, it is important to note that a large percentage of teachers also respond in the neutral category for each of these questions, possibly indicating some uncertainty about their use and implementation at this early stage. Furthermore, 63 percent of teachers were engaged in selecting measures of student learning used in their evaluations; as depicted in Figure 2, these teachers are significantly more positive about those measures than their peers who were not engaged.[3]

Use of Data

The analyses also suggest that educators use student data in meaningful ways to inform their practice: Over 90 percent of teachers use student data to inform instruction and provide differentiated support to students (see Table 1). Similarly, more than 95 percent of principals use student data to inform school goals and policies and to identify professional supports for teachers.
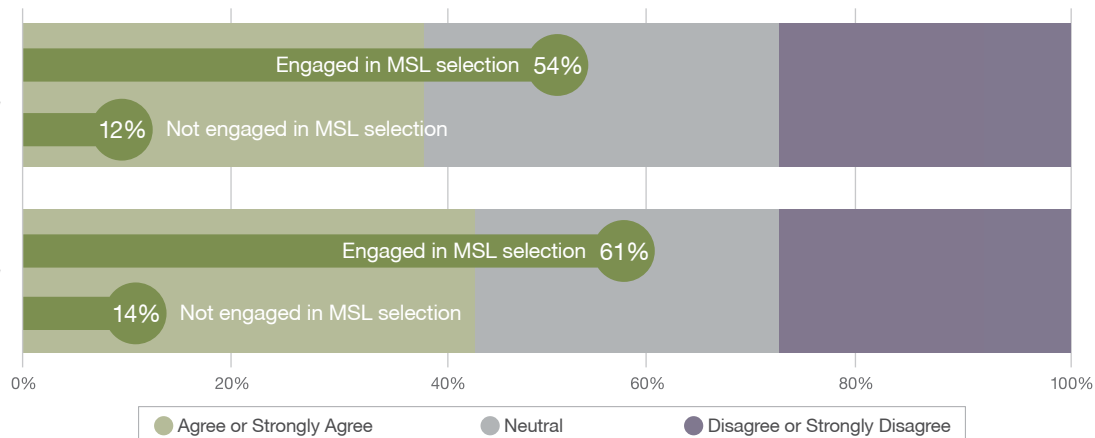
Table 1. Teacher Use of Data

Survey item *I use student data…*	Teachers who agree
…to inform my instruction.	94%
…to provide differentiated support to my students.	93%
…in my professional learning community.	82%

Figure 2. Teacher Perceptions of Measures of Student Learning Used in Teacher Evaluations

My _____ MSLs provide an accurate representation of what students know and can do.

collectively attributed
- Engaged in MSL selection 54%
- 12% Not engaged in MSL selection

individually attributed
- Engaged in MSL selection 61%
- 14% Not engaged in MSL selection

Legend: ● Agree or Strongly Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree or Strongly Disagree

Additionally, teachers who were engaged in selecting measures of student learning are also more likely to use the data than their peers (see Figure 3). Slightly more than half of all teachers report that they have collaborative conversations about data on student learning from their evaluations, use the data to inform instruction, and use it to provide differentiated support to students, while over two-thirds of engaged teachers report that they use the data in those ways.
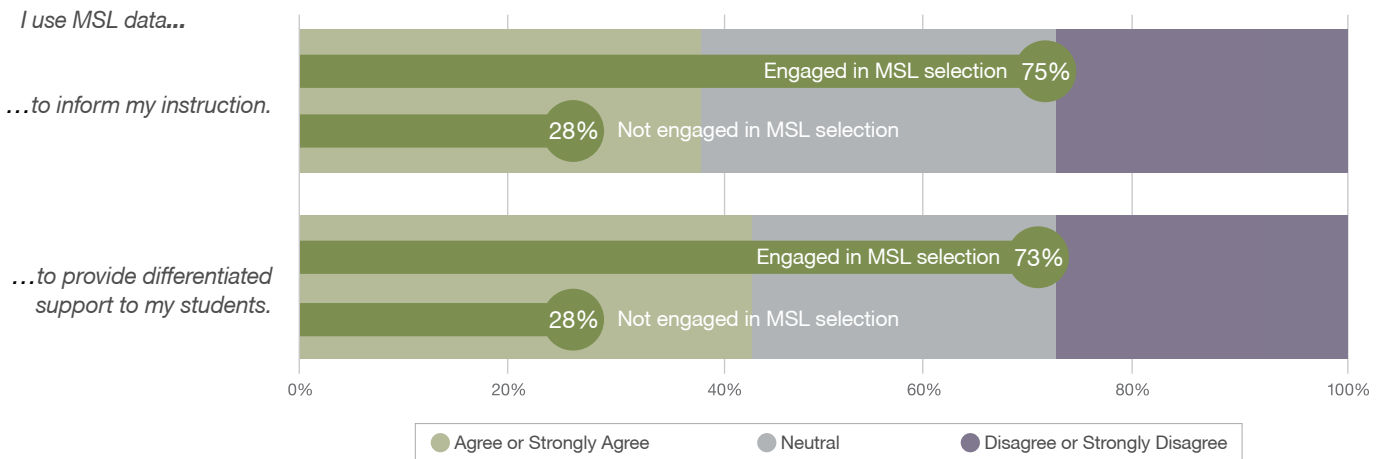
> *"In my work with teachers, I definitely see how the new evaluation system, looking at data and using it to inform instruction, and the work the district is doing with creating and ensuring a guaranteed, viable curriculum that aligns with the standards, all work together to improve instruction, student achievement, and growth."*
> – Instructional coach

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[2] Each teacher is required to have at least one measure of student learning that is individually attributed (results are attributed to an individual educator) and another that is collectively attributed (student results on the measure are attributed to more than one teacher).

[3] In Figures 2 and 3, the responses of all teachers in the survey are depicted by the bars. The green lines on top of the bars represent comparisons between teachers who were engaged in their MSL selection and those who were not.
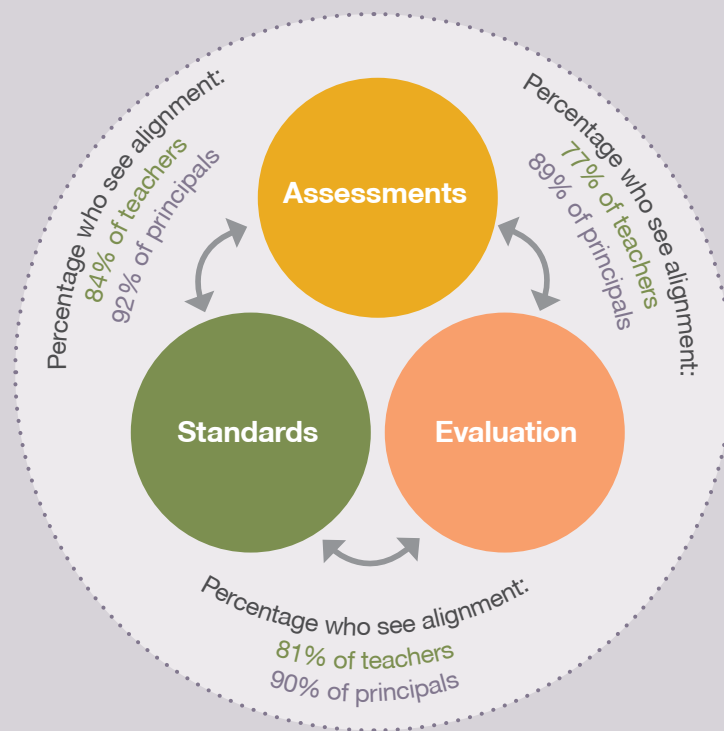
Figure 3. Teacher Use of Measures of Student Learning Data

I use MSL data...

...to inform my instruction.
- Engaged in MSL selection 75%
- Not engaged in MSL selection 28%

...to provide differentiated support to my students.
- Engaged in MSL selection 73%
- Not engaged in MSL selection 28%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

● Agree or Strongly Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree or Strongly Disagree

Connection with Other Initiatives

It is also important to highlight the connections between assessments and the evaluation system and standards. The findings suggest that districts that integrate their work in these three areas are also able to build more responsive systems for their educators and students. To better understand this dynamic, both teachers and principals were asked about their overall perceptions of the interconnectedness of assessments, standards, and evaluation systems in their districts. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of teachers and principals believe their district policies are aligned with assessments, standards, and evaluation systems, with the strongest perceived alignment between the new standards and assessments. A majority of teachers and principals also report that they are optimistic about the ability of these initiatives to positively impact instruction, student outcomes, and the quality of professional support for teachers (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Educator Perceptions of Alignment in District Policies Regarding Assessments, Standards, and Evaluation

Percentage who see alignment:
84% of teachers
92% of principals

Percentage who see alignment:
77% of teachers
89% of principals

Assessments

Standards

Evaluation

Percentage who see alignment:
81% of teachers
90% of principals

Figure 5. Educator Optimism about Initiatives

Percentage who are optimistic about the ability of assessments, standards, and evaluations to improve:

The instruction in their classroom.
67% of teachers
87% of principals[4]

Student outcomes.
63% of teachers
82% of principals

The quality of the professional support they receive.
58% of teachers
76% of principals[4]

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[4] The principal versions of these two items are slightly different: "instruction in their school" rather than classroom and "professional support they can provide teachers in their school" rather than what they receive.