# Broadening Perspectives: Reoccurring Themes About Assessments and Accountability Systems from Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

Jen Edwards and Tia Fletcher, Westat Insight

# Project Overview

- Purpose
  - Understand the diverse views and concerns of stakeholders
  - Inform the vision for next generation of assessments and accountability systems

- Data sources
  - Conversations with students, parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders (sessions with multiple stakeholder types and one session with early childhood educators)
  - 260 participants across 21 interviews and 42 focus groups
  - More than 60 hours of conversation and 1,000 pages of transcripts

# Protocols: High-Level Topics

| Assessments | Accountability Systems |
|---|---|
| Current **use of assessments** | **Who** should be held accountable and how |
| **Validity and reliability** of assessments | Importance of **equity** |
| **Impacts of assessments** on students, schools, districts, and communities | **Definition and determinants** of effectiveness |
| **Re-envisioning assessment** use in the future | Strategies to support **positive student outcomes** |

Note: Certain stakeholder groups have unique lines of questions (e.g., experiences with school transformation; impacts on college admissions).

## Methodology

- Derive topics and coding scheme from protocols
- Code subset of transcripts and identify preliminary themes
- Revise coding scheme and code all transcripts
- Theme: perspective shared by at least 3 participants in a stakeholder group
  - Organize themes into high-level topics within:
    - Assessments: problems and potential solutions
    - Accountability system: problems and potential solutions
- Identify reoccurring themes: themes shared by at least 3 stakeholder groups

# Reoccurring Themes Across Stakeholder Groups: Assessments

# Problems Identified by Stakeholders

**SSTs can be biased**

Students, parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders

**Narrow and / or biased assessments / SST unfairly affect opportunity**

Parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, and researchers

**Assessments / SSTs have psychological impacts on students**

Students, parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, and other stakeholders

**Weak understanding about use of assessment / SST results**

Students, parents, out-of-school-time providers, and policymakers

# Deep Dive Into Bias in Standardized Testing

- Measure knowledge about White culture

- Do not adequately account for learning differences and accommodations for students with disabilities

- Measure test-taking ability (e.g. test preparation and tutoring)

# Deep Dive Into Bias in Standardized Testing

*"[W]hen we think about the strengths that our students bring, that's never captured in that and it's, "Can you answer this question a specific way" and "Do you understand the context of what that question is asking?" Who has more access because of the context that's provided? And so, I don't think, I think they often just will get scores that don't show that... It doesn't connect with a lot of what we know all our students can produce and we see more of it in the classroom than we do on the standardized assessments."*

—Parent

# Potential Solutions Offered by Stakeholders

## Use alternative forms of assessments for academic domains

Students, parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders

## Assess non-academic knowledge and skills

Students, parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, other stakeholders

# Deep Dive Into "Assess Non-academic Knowledge and Skills"

- Value the whole-child: multiple dimensions of children's knowledge and skills

  - Cognitive development

  - Mental health

  - Community engagement

  - Socioemotional learning

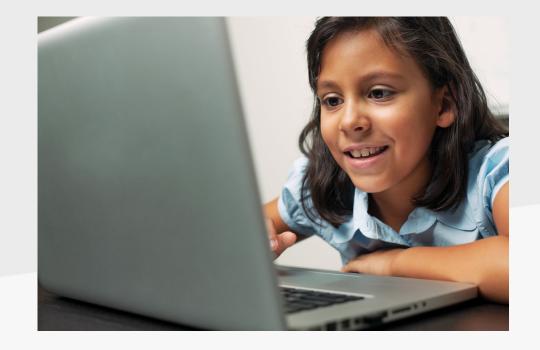# Deep Dive Into "Assess Non-academic Knowledge and Skills"

*"There's definitely a trend focusing [on] measuring social emotional learning, potentially reporting that out as a data indicator for accreditation like they do in Texas. There continues to be focus on that in [location], even beyond social emotional learning, which is creating positive engagement for students every day, self-efficacy—again, I've mentioned the Five C's and so there is also a focus on helping students make their own goals and meeting with students quarterly to look at that. So it's all about individualized learning, student focus, student support, student growth."*

—Policymaker

# Stakeholder Group Spotlight: Researchers

- Implement antiracist assessment practices
  - Develop assessments that validate student experiences
  - Conduct psychometric analyses to remove problematic test items
  - Increase diversity among test creators and scorers

- Remove high stakes from assessments

*"But a lot of those things like, to have an A-through-F grade or to have a teacher evaluation or to have a high stakes like gifted and talented programs screaming, like that's a local decision. And so it's sort of blame the federal law and the federal requirement for that, like you're targeting the wrong person. Your state, your district can change that right now. They don't need ESEA to change."*

—Researcher

Reoccurring Themes Across Stakeholder Groups: Accountability Systems

# Problems Identified by Stakeholders

**There is an overreliance on assessment / SST results**

Parents, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, and policymakers

**Inadequate measures negatively affect teachers**

Students, parents, teachers, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders

**Resources are not directed to where they are most needed**

Parents, out-of-school-time providers, other stakeholders

**Communities are harmed by negative feedback loops**

Parents, researchers, other stakeholders

# Deep Dive Into Inadequate Measures Negatively Affect Teachers

- Misalignment of assessments / SSTs and classroom curriculum

- Teachers are pressured to raise assessment / SST scores

- Teachers cannot be creative and teach other topics or address other student needs

- Teachers face increased pressure are leaving the profession

## Deep Dive Into Inadequate Measures Negatively Affect Teachers

*"There has been one personally that I know of—one, two, three, four teachers in my building who... actually five, wait, no, that's six, sorry, six who are leaving—early retirement. [They] have the same years as an educator as me, and we call it retirement, too. This got to be too much, all the testing, all the accountability of paperwork for child study teams, the whole list, standardized testing."*

—Teacher

# Potential Solutions Offered by Stakeholders

Promote equity by valuing student subgroup performance

Students, parents, civil rights activists, researchers

Expand measures of school effectiveness

Students, parents, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, researchers, other stakeholders

Expand accountability systems' focus

Parents, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, researchers, other stakeholders

Allocate resources to those who need it most

Parents, out-of-school-time providers, civil rights activists, policymakers, researchers, other stakeholders

# Deep Dive Into Expand Measures of School Effectiveness

- Include racial/ethnic representation among school staff

- Include diversity of curriculum and/or extracurricular offerings

- Include student, parent, and/or staff engagement

- Include attendance, suspension, high school graduation rates, faculty retention, school leadership, and school climate

# Deep Dive Into Expand Measures of School Effectiveness

*"By using leading indicators like attendance and then looking at growth and maybe other measures, like faculty retention…. If the school is a fun place to be, teachers tend to stay there and want to work in an environment that is actually energizing, and they feel like they're making a difference."*

—Policymaker

# Stakeholder Group Spotlight: Policymakers

- Tailor accountability measures to account for the specific areas of growth and progress of individual schools and student populations

- More effective resource management

*"If we can use that funding that is being spent into state assessments and increase the salary schedules, maybe we can attract more people to the profession for those smaller class sizes."*

—Policymaker

*"I think we often end up throwing money at things because we don't really understand what the need is and how it can really be resolved, and that means getting more at the local level, having more intense conversations with the people who really understand what the problems are."*

—Policymaker

Discussion and Questions

# Summary of Reoccurring Themes

| Assessment Problems Identified by Stakeholders | Potential Solutions Offered by Stakeholders | Accountability System Problems Identified by Stakeholders | Potential Solutions Offered by Stakeholders |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assessments / SSTs can be biased | Use better assessments / SSTs for academic domains | There is an overreliance on assessment / SST results | Promote equity by valuing student subgroup performance |
| Narrow and / or biased assessments / SSTs unfairly affect opportunity | Assess non-academic knowledge and skills | Inadequate measures negatively affects teachers | Expand measures of school effectiveness |
| Assessments / SSTs increase student stress and anxiety | | Resources are not directed to where they are most needed | Expand accountability systems' focus |
| Weak understanding about use of assessment / SST results | | Communities are harmed by negative feedback loops | Allocate resources to those who need it most |

Thank you!