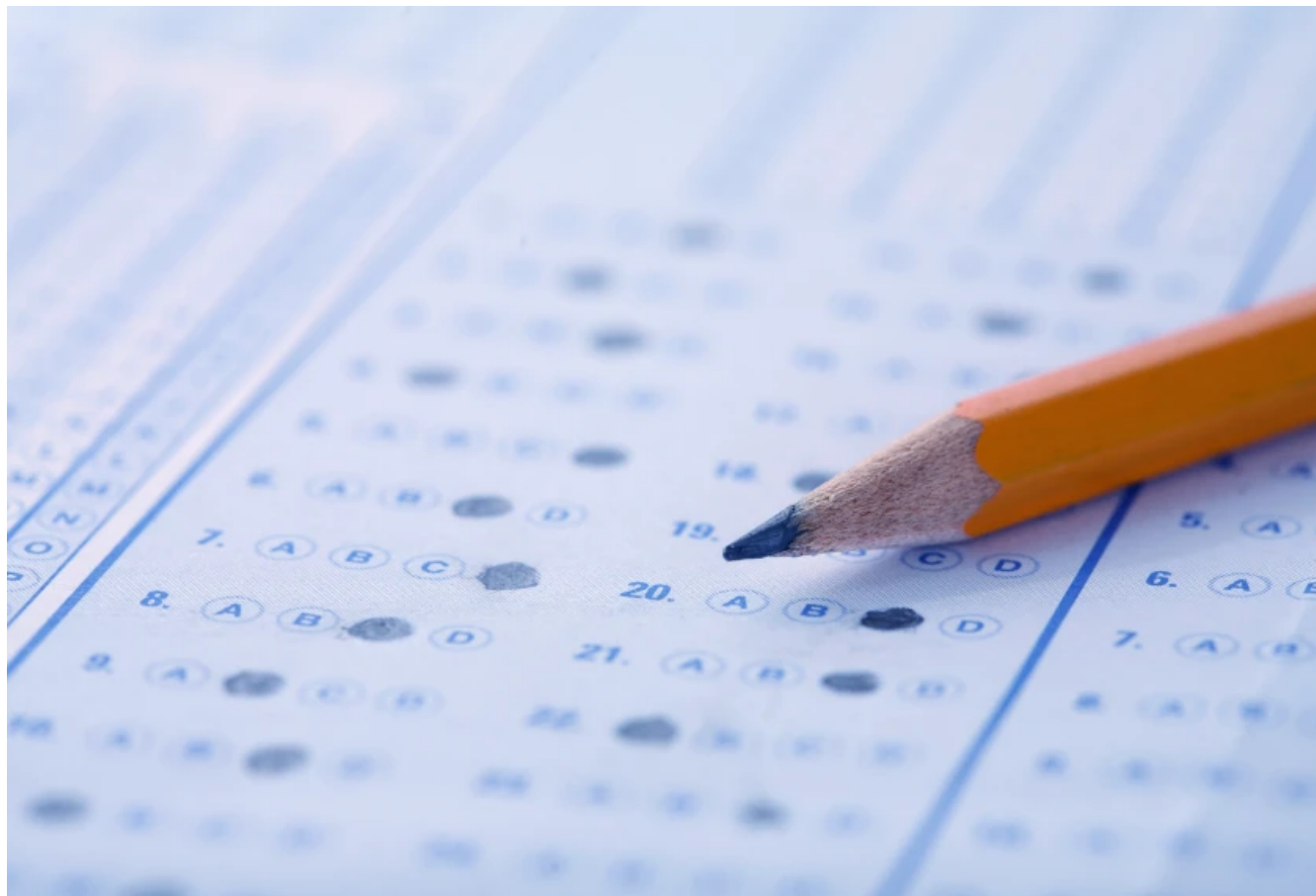


Do State Tests Accurately Measure What Students Need to Know?



By [Alyson Klein](#) — January 30, 2025 ⌚ 2 min read



— E+

Standardized testing—including state assessments for accountability purposes—is an annual reality in K-12 schools.

But more than half of educators—nearly 60 percent—don't believe that state

standardized tests measure what students need to know and be able to do, according to an EdWeek Research Center survey administered last fall.

The survey of 1,135 teachers, principals, and district leaders—conducted from Sept. 26 through Oct. 8 of last year—found a little more than 40 percent believe state tests do reflect what students need to know and be able to do.

States are required by [federal law](#) to test students in reading and math annually in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. Some experts and educators make the case that the results of those tests give schools a barometer of how their students are performing, whether there are areas in need of improvement, and how teachers should address any learning gaps.

But Mollie Wright, a high school English teacher in Texas, is among the educators who think those tests do not measure the critical thinking skills students will need to be ready for college and the workforce.

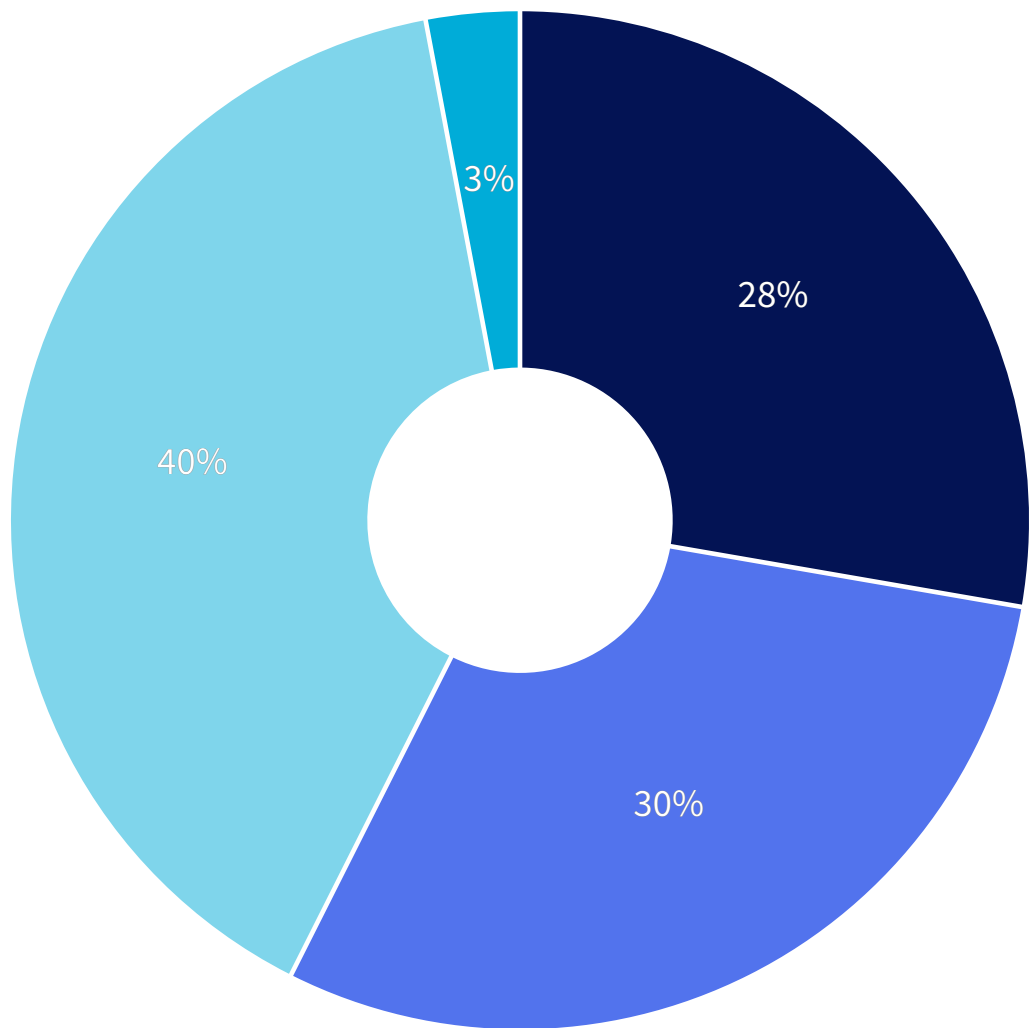
That's partly because students take so many tests and aren't usually told why they are being asked to complete a particular assessment. Many get bored and don't perform their best, she said.

That means tests are more likely to measure students' "motivation and engagement" not their skills, Wright said.

She'd love to see students be given other options to show what they know and can do.

Current standardized tests appropriately measure what students can do

- Completely disagree
- Partly disagree
- Partly agree
- Completely agree



*Results show responses from teachers, principals, and district leaders

DATA SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, October 2024

* A Flourish chart

“For some students, sitting down and [acing] a test is the option that they would want to take. That is the best way for them to show their learning,” Wright said. But for other students, “a portfolio [of classwork] that gives them more time and space to figure it out” would be more appropriate.

She remembers being taught in graduate school that teachers should work with their students to construct the best possible learning experiences for each individual. “Standardized tests are the exact opposite of that” approach, Wright said. “It’s one size fits all, and we all have to do it the exact same way at the exact same time.”

State tests just measure how well students perform under pressure, some educators argue

Adam Clemons, the principal of Piedmont High School in Alabama, sees a similar problem with the relevance of the tests for students.

Though tests can help gauge whether a student might need remediation when they get to college, the format of some tests—which expect students to answer dozens of questions in about an hour—may primarily evaluate “how well you perform under pressure,” Clemons said.

Clemons, who previously taught in nearby Georgia, admires the Peach State’s system of end-of-course exams that assess whether high schoolers mastered the material from a particular class. He finds those kinds of tests “more relevant to the kid” than one that tells students “Here’s some random passages to read, and you got 15 minutes to read it You’re gonna have 30 questions about it.”