

EDUCATION WEEK

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Educators, Parents Hold Mixed Views on Testing

By **Catherine Gewertz**

Parents, teachers, and district administrators consider formative and interim tests far more valuable than summative assessments, according to a [survey](#) released Wednesday.

And if state test results arrive more than a month after they were given, parents don't find them very valuable, the survey found.

The study was intended to shed light on those three groups' views of tests as key assessment policy is being shaped at the state and national levels. Federal lawmakers are considering legislation to replace the No Child Left Behind Act, which launched a new era of testing and accountability a decade ago. Many state policymakers are implementing teacher-evaluation systems based in part on students' test scores. And two groups of states are using federal Race to the Top dollars to design new tests for common academic standards.

"What the data show is that parents, teachers, and administrators think that summative tests don't give them the information they consider most valuable, and yet the pendulum has swung so far in that direction that there is a risk to other kinds of tests that actually help children learn," said Matt Chapman, the president and chief executive officer of [Northwest Evaluation Association](#), the Portland, Ore.-based nonprofit research and test-development organization that commissioned the study. "It's an incredibly important time to have that conversation."

The survey, conducted by Grunwald Associates of Bethesda, Md., was given online to a nationally representative sample of about 1,000 K-12 teachers, 1,000 parents of K-12 students, and 200 school district administrators. It probed attitudes about summative tests, which measure what students have learned at the end of the year; interim tests, the periodic tests that measure learning over a shorter time frame; and formative tests, a range of ways of gauging how well students are learning material as it is being taught.

When parents were asked which types of tests were "extremely" or "very" important to them, 85 percent chose formative assessments, 67 percent cited interim tests, and 44 percent chose summative tests.

Researchers asked parents how helpful the different types of tests are for various purposes. On every one of 12 purposes offered, they assigned significantly more value to formative/interim tests than they did to summative tests. Seven in 10 said formative/interim tests were helpful to them in guiding their child's homework, for instance, while 47 percent said the same of summative tests.

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Educator Feedback

Teachers and district administrators, too, gave formative and interim tests higher marks for value than summative assessments.

Nine in 10 administrators said formative or interim tests are very valuable for differentiating instruction and improving learning. Fewer than three in 10 answered similarly for summative tests.

Teachers' feedback was less enthusiastic than that of administrators about the value of formative and interim tests, but still strongly favored them over summative assessments. About two-thirds of teachers consider formative or interim tests very valuable for differentiating instruction, and for determining whether students have a deep understanding of content and whether they should move to the next grade. Three in 10 or fewer ranked summative tests as similarly valuable.

Parents, teachers, and administrators said tests are important to monitor student progress, but they seek broader ways of doing so. More than eight in 10 said tests ought to measure critical thinking and problem-solving. Somewhat smaller—though still substantial—proportions said tests should measure communication, creativity, innovation, and collaboration.

Likewise, there was broad support among all three groups for assessing subjects other than mathematics and English/language arts, which are the two subjects states are required to report under No Child Left Behind. More than 80 percent of each group favors measuring students' performance in science, and 70 percent or more favors doing so in history, geography, and government and civics. Testing in arts, world languages, and economics also drew support from majorities, or large minorities, of all three groups.

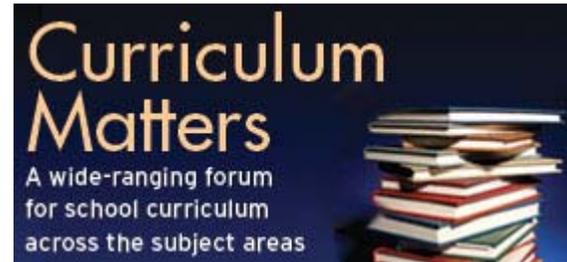
But parents, teachers, and administrators expressed concern about how much time and money are spent on testing. Such concerns were far more pronounced among educators, however, than among parents.

Forty-three percent of parents and 73 percent of educators said too much money is spent on state tests. Fifty-nine percent of educators and 23 percent of parents said students spend too much time getting ready for classroom tests.

Mr. Chapman said he did not see a contradiction in the fact that survey respondents favored tests in more areas, but also are concerned about the time and money spent on tests. "What parents, teachers, and administrators are all saying is that they really want instruction-oriented assessments," he said.

Parents said they find little value in state test results if they have to wait very long to get them. Four in 10, for instance, said such scores "are no longer

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useful or relevant" if more than a month has elapsed since the test.

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