



Barrow County Assessment Inventory Project Findings and Recommendations

Timeline

- **October 2015**—US Department of Education encouraged states to examine how the amount of time students spend testing impacts the instructional school year and learning.
- **October 2015**—GaDOE began a project with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) to conduct an inventory of local district assessment requirements and practices.
- **September 2016**—Five districts, including the Barrow County School System (BCSS), began Phase 2 of the project with a facilitator from GPEE. The purpose of this phase is to examine the package of assessments given to students over the course of a school year to help clarify purposes, identify potential redundancies, and evaluate the district's testing program.
- **September 2016**—District Assessment Team met to set the context for the work.
- **October 2016**—School representatives began conducting the inventory.
- **November 2016**—Facilitator met with five focus groups: district leaders, school leaders, ES students, MS/HS students, parents.
- **January 2017**—Assessment Team reconvened to analyze all collected data and draft recommendations.
- **Future**—Team will create a comprehensive communication plan and a professional development plan based on the recommendations.

Key Findings

Definition of Assessment: Tasks designed to measure what students know and are able to do. Assessments are not necessarily tests and are part of the best practice of instructional strategies. Good teachers use assessments in their classroom everyday, be they formal or informal, individual or group, to better target and hone their instruction.

Test: A formal or standardized instrument designed to assess a student skill or mastery of standards. Typically, though not always, given in a group setting.

FINDING 1: The typical Barrow County student spends approximately 1.75% of their instructional year taking district or school required tests. Individual students may spend more time depending on their specific needs and the school they attend, but in general most students spend around 20 hours a year taking tests. The specific amount varies by grade level and in K-12 ranges from a low of 0.62% of instructional time being used for testing for kindergarteners, to a high of 2.43% for ninth graders. The breakdown by grade level, along with a listing of the common assessments given, can be found in table 1.1 below. Note the estimates only include direct time taking assessments, time spent on test review and preparation are not included. Note that so long as the assessment given is standards based such reviews are themselves, if well designed and appropriate, standards based instruction.

Table 1.1: Percentage of instructional time devoted to formal testing and assessment by grade level

Grade	Hours of Testing	Percentage of Total Time	Assessments
PK	2	0.21%	WSO, Speech Screener
K	7	0.62%	GKIDS, Dibels Next, TRC, DRI, IDI
1	14	1.35%	Dibels Next, TRC, DRI, IDI, ELA/Math Common Assessments
2	16	1.49%	Dibels Next, TRC, DRI, IDI, ELA/Math Common Assessments, COGAT
3	20	1.86%	EOG - ELA/Math, Dibels Next, TRC, ELA/Math Common Assessments
4	20	1.86%	EOG - ELA/Math, TRC, ELA/Math Common Assessments
5	23	2.17%	EOG - E, M, SCI, SS, TRC, ELA/Math Common Assessments
6	20	1.89%	EOG - ELA/Math, Mock Writing, Midterms, Finals
7	20	1.89%	EOG - ELA/Math, Mock Writing, Midterms, Finals
8	25	2.34%	EOG - E, M, SCI, SS, Mock Writing, Midterms, Finals
9	26	2.43%	EOC - 9LIT, ALG, PHY, Midterms, Finals, iSteep
10	24	2.29%	EOC - GEO, BIO, Midterms, Finals, PSAT
11	21	1.96%	EOC - AMLIT, USH, Midterms, Finals
12	21	1.74%	EOC - ECO, Midterms, Finals

FINDING 2: Testing expenditures represent about 3% of the non-personnel budget (about 0.35% of total operating budget). The non-personnel (i.e. salary + benefits) budget for BCSS was \$13,308.206 for FY2017. The amount of money devoted to paying for assessments or outside scoring services totaled \$397,181. This represented a tiny fraction of the \$112 million plus general budget. Note that estimates do not include labor and opportunity costs related to teacher and staff time spent on assessments, which constitute a cost as well.

Level	Total Expense
District Paid Expenses	\$325,967
School Specific (Sum)	\$71,214
Total for BCSS	\$397,181

FINDING 3: Focus groups conducted with teachers and parents suggested major concerns with the amount of time students spend on standardized and formal testing. Conversely, students themselves at all levels did not perceive the amount of time they spent on testing as excessive or unnecessary. This represents an important and interesting perceptual difference that is worth consideration in terms of how testing and assessments are talked about and communicated.

Staff Quotes:

- We have a lot of redundancy within our building (MS) among diagnostic assessments. Teachers feel their most valuable assessments are their classroom formative assessments.
- Reading has a lot of tools and teachers feel we are over-assessing there; it's almost like we have too much data. The math is easier to assess and adjust instruction.
- My teachers know that information before giving the common assessment. They can already tell you where students are struggling.

Parent responses to the question “Do you feel there is too much time spent on testing?”

- Clearly...it's 6 days of nothing.
- I do. I have an anxious kid who doesn't handle the tests and quizzes. I don't think it is communicated how much they are testing.
- My son has been desensitized to missing an item. He just clicks until he gets the right answer and then doesn't connect that to the real test. We have to figure out how to assess those who don't test well.
- Yes...if you studied how much time is lost prepping for the test, taking the test, making up the test.

Student responses to the question “Do you take the right amount of tests?”

- Any less would result in teachers not knowing what they need to fix or how much they've taught you (ES).
- We take the right amount. We take tests every Friday to see if we are improving (ES).
- At the end of every 9 weeks we take tests. They next 9 weeks they work with people who didn't do well (ES).
- The number of tests we (MS) take is a good amount. It helps because the teachers always give us another option. If you need help, the teacher will put you in a guided group. If you know it, you can work with a partner. We can always do retakes.
- I (MS) think you should take a lot of tests so teachers can see where you are in the year. They should use them to place you in the next class.
- It's hard to prepare for all of them. The curriculums don't always overlap. The number of tests isn't as prohibitive as what they cover. The Milestone for AP Biology should be over the AP curriculum. We (HS) learn different things and the curriculums don't always overlap. The AP test is options, so they need a test that shows how everyone did and if the teacher did what she was supposed to do.

FINDING 4: There is a need for a consistent and comprehensive assessment program across all schools and levels in BCSS. Assessment is a key component of any instructional program and an assessment program that is valid, consistent, and thorough, while not excessively stealing from teaching time, is a key component in improving student learning.

FINDING 5: Early reading and literacy assessments are fairly strong and good predictors of later learning. Both teachers and administrators were very comfortable with the DIBELS Next and TRC reading assessments as a measure of student learning, a predictor of later academic success, and tool to improve instruction.

FINDING 6: Gaps exist in math assessments (K-8) and in middle school reading assessments. Specifically, no consistent early or later math assessment tool is consistently used, and schools rely on a hodgepodge of

assessments and teacher created formative tools of varying quality and dubious validity. Reading assessment tools that are widely used and valued exist at elementary school (DIBELS Next and TRC) and high school (iSTEOP). Conversely, no reading assessment of known quality is currently in place at the middle school. Filling these gaps will allow BCSS to develop the comprehensive assessment program recommended in Finding 5.

Level	Reading	ELA	Math	Others
K to 2	DIBELS Next, TRC, IDI	CFA	CFA	GKIDS(K)
3 to 5	TRC	GMA, CFA, Mock Writing or Assesslets	GMA, CFA,	GMA (Sci & SS)
6 to 8		GMA, Mock Writing, Midterms, Finals	GMA, Midterms, Finals	GMA (Sci & SS) Midterms, Finals
9 to 12	iSTEOP,	GMA, iSTEOP, CFA,	GMA, CFA, iSTEOP,	AP, SAT, ACT, PSAT, Compass, EOP, Midterms, Finals, Fitnessgram

Abbreviations

- CFA: Common Formative Assessments*
- EOP: End of Pathway Assessments*
- GMA: Georgia Milestones Assessments*
- IDI: Individual Diagnostic Inventory*
- TRC: Text, Reading, & Comprehension*

FINDING 7: Barrow County School System has a need for greater district investment in professional learning related to proper use of assessment and the use of assessment data to drive instruction. In focus groups and in discussions it became apparent teachers and administrators needed more support and training in how to appropriately develop, implement, and use assessments.

Teacher responses to questions concerning professional learning in assessments.

- The cycle needs to be clearly communicated. The teachers need to see how we use the information from the assessment results to plan our instruction. We (ES) use the pacing guides and the standards and think we have to stick to them no matter what. We need to show how we adjust the written curriculum to meet the needs of our students. Even administrators would benefit from learning more of that so that we can help our teachers.
- Our (ES) teachers feel they aren't allowed to adjust the assessment because it was created the summer before. Teachers have no ownership.
- Not all of our (ES) teachers understand how those were created. We send teacher reps, but they come back and the others don't have ownership. And some of the questions are poorly written.
- We (ES) get ½ day to work on it at the end of the year when everyone's exhausted. That's not an ideal time to work on it.
- At MS they worked on tests for 7 years. You are sending one rep who was pulled from a hat or agreed to go who's not trained. We would like common assessments, but not written by teachers.
- If teachers were trained on writing assessments, we could write better formative assessments. We (ES) would like more valid quarterly assessments.

FINDING 8: There is a need for increased accountability for teachers and leaders in implementing the assessment program with fidelity. Due to the lack of consistency across levels and schools and the often ad-hoc and improvised nature of the assessment program it was found that the fidelity of assessment and data usage was in many cases unknown, and at worse counterproductive and invalid. A greater need for oversight and monitoring from school and district level leaders was prescribed, which is made easier by more consistent and valid instruments being administered as consistent with other findings and recommendations.

District Leaders Focus Group

What are you as a district staff supposed to do with the results?

- The expectations for schools are clear, but we don't have a way at the district to oversee that process. We can't see if it's happening or if it's effective.
- We've made clear our expectations of what schools should be doing with the data, but it's difficult for us to oversee from the district level that the expectations are being met.
- We've told the schools that we are not looking at the common assessment data at the teacher level.

How are you going to determine consistency if you're not going to look at the data?

- The capacity doesn't exist to look at the data. We must put teeth behind the accountability. We can't be shocked when we see Milestones results. There has to be some touchpoint during the year to know how things are going.
- I'm not sure the principals are consistently looking at the data.
- The expectation is that the teachers are looking at the data and using it to inform instruction.
- The principals don't have time due to their many obligations. The instructional coaches are doing that at some schools.

FINDING 9: BCSS needs to increase opportunities to communicate & collaborate with parents on the assessments their children take, the purposes & uses of those assessments, & how they can use those results to help students at home (particularly at middle & high school). Parents expressed frustration with inconsistent communication home from some schools and often struggled to know how to use assessment data to help their children, or even what some scores mean and why some tests are even used.

Parent Focus Group Responses

- The Infinite Campus calendar should tell you when there's an assignment. The results are supposed to be entered. I had a time period of three weeks when nothing was entered. You have to go in and check.
- According to the MS, it's the parents' responsibility to go look. No one tells us.
- That's the same at the HS.
- Why does that change from ES? Communication should not stop after ES.
- My MS communicates more than the ES ever did.
- I'm seeing that in 5th grade too. They feel it's your child's turn to take responsibility. I am far from a helicopter parent, but there is something to be said for setting them up for success.
- I don't know if the test results get used or what is done with them. I only know what I hear on the news. I don't give the test any value.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Eliminate ELA Common Assessments

RATIONALE: ELA common assessments are perceived by teachers and administrators as of dubious quality due to their creation by teachers who have not been properly trained in test writing and development. Their validity and psychometric quality are unknown. At the elementary level these tests are frequently redundant in assessing standards and skills already assessed by DIBELS Next or TRC, and thus rob students and teachers of valuable instructional time. If these assessments were replaced by a comprehensive and streamlined assessment system K-8 then instructional time would be preserved and valuable data still available to adjust instruction.

Recommendation 2: Eliminate the use of DIBELS Next at third grade

RATIONALE: Data gathered from the 3rd grade DIBELS assessment can be found within the TRC assessment results already administered at that grade. Data revealed there is redundancy and that eliminating the DIBELS administration will free up instructional time while not losing relevant student reading data.

Recommendation 3: Create consistency across elementary and middle schools on practice (mock) writing assessments in terms of rubrics used, testing windows, and training.

RATIONALE: Practice writing assessments constitute a valuable component of a literacy assessment program and have ramifications for learning across the grade spectrum. Schools generally like and trust their current practice writing assessments, but the variation in methods and windows makes it difficult to assess students who transfer within the district and make it difficult to critically evaluate which practice writing assessments are most effective at preparing students for high stakes testing and later writing performance. By creating consistency in major components of these assessments, while allowing schools to individualize components they need that are specific to themselves, the system can better accommodate transfers and evaluate effectiveness while allowing schools to problem solve for their populations.

Recommendation 4: Find an adopt a universal math screener for grades K-8.

RATIONALE: Unlike ELA and reading there does not exist a valid and consistent assessment of math skills across any grade band in Barrow County Schools. From early numeracy to later math reasoning math performance is assessed via common assessments of varying quality and consistency. As math, particularly at the high school level, is a major point of weakness and emphasis for BCSS the adoption of a quality math universal screener K-8 would greatly assist in determining that students have core mathematics competencies that make them ready for future high school instruction as well as success at their current grade levels.

Recommendation 5: Eliminate elementary math common assessments. This recommendation is contingent on successfully completing recommendation 4. In the event that is not accomplished the district should reinvest in improving these assessments.

RATIONALE: If a high quality universal screener is adopted then CFAs would become redundant and are generally of less validity than a high quality screener. Eliminating them frees up valuable instruction time and reduces burdens on teachers and students. Conversely, so long as a math screener is not identified the CFAs represent an important source of data to drive instruction. If a screener cannot be found to replace them then the system should invest in professional learning and support to ensure math CFAs are as valid and consistent as possible.

Recommendation 6: Restructure middle school final examinations in Georgia Milestones End of Grade assessed courses to allow and encourage teachers to use performance based assessments.

RATIONALE: In grade levels where the EOG is administered the finals, which are currently multiple choice assessments covering the same standards as the EOG, are deeply redundant and take away valuable instruction time. By changing the finals in these classes to performance based the redundancy is reduced and potentially more engaging and valuable assessments introduced; all while still meeting the regulations present in the Barrow County board rules.

Recommendation 7: Identify a comprehensive universal screener and assessment for reading at the middle school level.

RATIONALE: Data indicated there is complete lack of data regarding reading levels at the middle schools; data is needed so as to track student literacy longitudinally as well as to ensure students are not falling behind prior to enrolling at high school.

Recommendation 8: Remove the midterm examination requirement for all high school courses.

RATIONALE: On a block schedule the grade is assessed frequently through formative and summative assessments for each unit and is the mid-term is a superfluous assessment. It was primarily created for yearlong schedules and takes too much time out of instructional time. Removing the requirement for a midterm frees up time for further instruction, support, or diagnostic testing on the part of the teacher.

Recommendation 9: Provide professional learning on the use of MobyMax as an intervention and practice tool in order to reduce inappropriate usage as an assessment and encourage appropriate usage.

RATIONALE: MobyMax is very cost-effective and has benefit as a practice tool and intervention. The evidence suggest it is not a valid or consistent assessment tool. The lack of other effective assessments, coupled with no real professional learning related to MobyMax, has led to its inappropriate usage as a screening tool. Key individuals who have found success using MobyMax appropriately should be leveraged to create appropriate professional learning to ensure MobyMax is used in the manner in which it is intended and best suited.

Recommendation 10: Explore how PSAT data is used and determine if we can better use results to make decisions for student scheduling, advanced content, and future testing.

RATIONALE: Data examined over the previous years suggest BCSS students do not perform as well on college aptitude assessments (SAT & ACT) and frequently require more remediation in college than do other graduates. Conversely, some school staff suggested they did not view the PSAT as a valid assessment and could not identify many usages of the data. As the PSAT screening is entirely state subsidized and highly correlated with later SAT and ACT scores it is critical that professional learning and work be focused on leveraging PSAT data to help improve the outcomes post-secondary.

The PSAT can be used to identify students in need of test preparation courses and advanced content. The universal nature (all tenth graders) makes it a highly equitable test. Some concerns were raised about the time cost and whether testing on a Saturday may be preferable. Also it was reported that many students did not wish to take the SAT/ACT prep classes even when PSAT suggested they need to. While these are relevant concerns that should be considered, it is critical that any changes to the PSAT administration window be evaluated to ensure it will not disproportionality impact low income students or other vulnerable populations. Further, given the importance of SAT and ACT scores to gaining admission in selective colleges and access to greater scholarship funds it is also recommended that high schools consider ways to engage and incentive students that need college entrance examination support to seek it out and value it.

Recommendation 11: Provide targeted professional learning on assessment development, implementation, and usage.

RATIONALE: Professional learning and structure for data teams is needed at all levels. Such PL should be targeted to the teacher level (train the trainer models have had limited success. Resources for standardized test questions and training on how to access and utilize them should be provided, as well as how to analyze and adjust instruction based on formative data. This type of training has been conducted sporadically, but with an influx of new teachers and some reluctant buy in, it needs to be a continual focus. Currently, it is inconsistent between classes, subject areas and schools, with some questions/assessments being poorly written.

Recommendation 12: Explore ways to increase the opportunities for screening students for potential gifted eligibility.

RATIONALE: Currently, the only mass screening conducted for gifted eligibility is the COGAT at 2nd grade. Previously, the ITBS was administered at grades 3/5/8 but was discontinued due to funding and the outdated norms associated with paper based testing. With only one universal norm-referenced test the gifted process is highly driven by teacher and parent referral. This creates a high probability of inefficiency in identification and potential bias and inequity in identification. Further, the BCSS gifted enrollment rate of 8.9% of all students is notably lower than Georgia as a whole (11.4%). A more comprehensive method for identifying gifted students is badly needed.



District Assessment Inventory Team

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