Gov. Kasich and the General Assembly\(^1\) directed the superintendent of public instruction to submit a report regarding testing in Ohio schools. This report includes a review of the number of tests administered to students as well as the superintendent's recommendations for decreasing the testing burden to ensure that the amount of testing students undergo is reasonable. In preparing this report, the Ohio Department of Education conducted a study of the time students spend taking tests by grade level. This report describes the current testing landscape in Ohio and recommends how federal, state and local policymakers can ensure that students spend the right amount of classroom time learning, not just testing.

**Types of Testing in Ohio**

Tests that students take each year serve a variety of purposes. Parents, teachers, schools, districts and the state use them to design instruction, understand student knowledge growth, measure teacher effectiveness and capture overall state and district performance. In sum, testing is a fundamental part of effectively educating Ohio's children.

Ohio’s complex testing landscape cannot be understood without first understanding the types of tests and why they are administered. This report discusses four categories of tests: (1) teacher tests; (2) district tests; (3) district tests to meet state requirements; and (4) state tests.

**Teacher tests** are those created by educators for use in their classrooms. Teachers identify this way of assessing their students' knowledge as critical to teaching and learning because they use the results to drive daily instruction and provide parents and students feedback on student progress and performance. These tests are typically shorter than other types of assessments and are directly linked to a classroom lesson like a chapter test, quiz or final exam.

**District tests** are locally selected to fulfill a district goal, not to meet state requirements. Districts administer these to monitor or benchmark student achievement across their school buildings, grade levels or particular classrooms. Common examples of the district tests include the STAR Assessments and NWEA MAP tests.

**District tests for state requirements** are assessments locally selected and administered to meet a state requirement. State initiatives and programs such as teacher evaluation and gifted-student identification require testing. Many of these district tests also can be used to meet a state requirement.

**State tests** are selected by the state and administered to all public school students statewide to meet federal requirements. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, better known as No Child Left Behind, requires each state to annually test students in:

- Reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and once in high school;
- Science in one grade of the elementary grades, middle grades and high school.

Federal requirements account for 72 percent of the time students spend on state tests.

\(^1\)Section 8, Am. Sub. H.B. 487 (effective 9/17/2014)
Child Left Behind, requires each state to test students in reading, mathematics and science. These ways of measuring student performance have historically included the Ohio Achievement Assessments and the Ohio Graduation Tests. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, Ohio transitioned to a new generation of assessments — the new Ohio Achievement Assessments and end-of-course tests. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) created the math and reading tests. Ohio developed its own tests in science and social studies.

Find a complete list of state tests in Appendix 1.

Why Do Students Take Tests?

With the many types of tests given in Ohio schools come many reasons for administering them. Many students take tests at the beginning of the school year to give their teachers a baseline from which to design instruction. They take exams intermittently throughout the year to show their progress in mastering a subject. Students take tests at the end of a course or grade level to show what they have retained and are able to apply long term. All of these reasons are helpful and valid, making testing a key component of the teaching and learning process.

At its core, testing shows evidence of student progress. This provides much needed information to classroom teachers and others so they can monitor and improve student learning.

Educators use the evidence provided by teacher tests to guide their teaching each day. If students are able to demonstrate mastery of the knowledge presented, teachers know that those pupils are ready to move on. If students show lack of understanding, teachers can address areas of concern before proceeding. Results of end-of-year tests also are useful for teachers. Results of these assessments provide teachers perspective on what their students were able to retain and apply long term, allowing for reflection and correction in future school years.

District, state and federal officials also use test results to monitor and improve student learning. Historically, certain populations of students, including minority students, children living in poverty, students with disabilities, and pupils who are not native English speakers, often have not received the same quality of education as their peers across Ohio. To address these equity challenges, Ohio began standardized testing two decades ago — long before No Child Left Behind — to hold all teachers, schools and districts accountable for every student’s learning.

Ohio sets a level of expectations for districts, schools, teachers and students that reflects the state’s educational priorities. The state’s goals for preK-12 education are that:

- All students attend quality schools;
- All students can read at grade level; and
- All students graduate and are college and job ready.

Standardized testing has proved critical to measuring student learning and ensuring that all of Ohio’s students receive a high-quality education. This type of testing provides a snapshot of how students are performing based on a standard set of expectations. While it does not yield the most personalized view of student performance, standardized testing allows for a direct comparison across classrooms, schools, and districts and provides the public with much-needed information about how all students are performing. These test results are the foundation of Ohio’s A-F school and district report cards, which
are designed to show parents, taxpayers and school leaders how well students are performing, as well as identify schools and districts that require additional support and intervention.

Results of standardized tests also hold teachers accountable for their contributions to their students’ learning. Studies have repeatedly shown that among school-based influencers of student achievement, teacher quality is important\(^2\). Studies also have found that when a student has an ineffective teacher, his or her achievement suffers dramatically\(^3\). As part of the teacher evaluation system, teachers who are not effective receive training or professional development so that they can better serve their students in the future.

Students who fall behind in school often never catch up. Students who drop out of school and never earn a high school diploma quickly find themselves at a disadvantage and are far more likely to live in poverty. To lessen the risk of students falling behind and graduating without being college and job ready, Ohio uses testing at two critical academic checkpoints: third grade and approaching graduation.

Students who cannot read at grade level by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to eventually drop out of school\(^4\). This is why Ohio has implemented the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. The guarantee uses annual tests to monitor whether a student will be reading at the third-grade level by the time he or she completes third grade, so that the student can learn on pace in higher grades. Students whose reading is not on track by the end of grade 3 receive extra support until they catch up and are ready for the fourth grade.

As another checkpoint to ensure that all students are prepared, testing is part of Ohio’s graduation requirements. Students can use several testing options, such as their performance on end-of-course tests or a college admission test, to show that they are ready for college or a career. Giving a diploma to a student who isn’t ready only hurts the student in the long run. By creating these checkpoints, students, parents, teachers and schools are making sure that every student is prepared to succeed.

No matter the type of test, audience or results yielded, testing is intended to monitor and improve both student learning and teacher, school and district effectiveness. Ideally, a test can consistently and reliably serve the needs of teachers and others. In reality, this is difficult to achieve. Many teachers are concerned that adding accountability to a test designed only for instructional improvement can change teacher and student behavior and reduce instructional benefit. On the other hand, adding accountability to a teacher-designed test created solely for instructional improvement does not allow for accurate comparison of teachers, schools or districts.

It’s difficult to find a test that serves every purpose well. The primary purpose of teacher tests is instructional improvement, while the primary purpose of state and federal testing is accountability. Despite their shared goal of monitoring and improving student learning, the natural tension between the needs of teachers, the state and the federal government can lead to increased testing. The state must strike a balance of testing and instruction time in the classroom.


How Much Student Testing Is There In Ohio?

It’s important to understand several factors when attempting to measure the amount of testing in Ohio.

First, there is no common definition of a “test.” The department’s survey of districts regarding testing time revealed that many school- and district-level tests designed by commercial vendors must be given multiple times throughout the school year, such as monthly or quarterly; or in the fall and spring. There is no common view of whether this is considered one test or multiple tests. Some districts may consider a single administration as a “test” while others define “test” as the multiple administrations given over the course of studying a particular unit or topic.

Also, tests vary considerably in administration time. Fifteen minutes is enough time to complete some standardized tests, while others can take several hours. Two students in different school districts may both take five tests in a year, but the time they spend away from classroom instruction can differ by hours.

A seemingly reasonable way to analyze the amount of testing in Ohio would be to look at days spent testing. Districts have provided the department with many examples of school calendars showing “testing days,” but this can be misleading. Most standardized tests have a “testing window,” or set number of days during which they may test students. Generally speaking, a larger testing window is desirable because it provides more flexibility for teachers and schools to schedule tests when they will least disrupt classroom instruction. A testing window may be four weeks long, but that doesn’t mean a student is taking a test for four weeks.

Understanding these challenges, the goal of this report is to seek a balance of testing time and student learning time. This report, therefore, will analyze testing in Ohio by looking at the actual hours that students spend taking tests.

How Is Testing Time Measured?

To understand the amount of time students spend taking tests, the Ohio Department of Education surveyed the state’s nearly 1,000 school districts and community schools in November 2014. Nearly 400 districts and schools responded with information on the tests they elect to use and the reasons they use them.

Student learning objective tests. The survey did not request information on tests of student learning objectives, a part of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. These learning objectives are measurable, long-term academic growth targets that a teacher sets at the beginning of the year for all students in the class. Teachers or schools create and administer student learning objective tests to measure each student’s progress on each growth target. Teachers who do not receive student growth data from state tests or vendor tests must use locally created measures of growth for their evaluation, which are most often student learning objective tests. Using data submitted separately by schools for 2013-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Testing Time for the Average Student in a School Year, in Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teacher evaluations, the department created a chart of the amount of time, per grade, for student learning objective testing in the 2015-2016 school year. The model is based on the amount of time the average student in each grade spent taking student learning objective tests.

State tests. To measure the time spent on state-developed and administered tests, the department used its already scheduled testing times for the 2015-2016 school year.

Teacher tests. The time spent on teacher tests is not included in this analysis for two reasons. First, the length and frequency of these tests vary significantly between teachers and between schools. It, therefore, would be difficult to make conclusions or recommendations based on the analysis. Second, small tests, such as quizzes or chapter tests, are a foundational part of teaching and learning. Since these tests are critical for instructional improvement, this report does not recommend specific policies to limit or reduce these tests. Still, teachers and administrators should consider the frequency and value of these tests as they assess opportunities for reducing testing at the local level.

**How Much Time Does The Average Student Spend Testing?**

The average student in the average school will spend approximately 19.8 hours on testing in a school year, starting in the 2015-2016 school year. This average varies by grade level. Kindergarten students spend the least amount of time on testing (11.3 hours on average), while grade 10 students spend the most (28.4 hours on average).

In most grades, the testing time is driven by state requirements, either through state tests or district tests given to meet a state requirement. The amount of time for student learning objective tests alone, whose results are used for teacher evaluation, averages 5.1 hours in each grade. However, federal requirements drive the majority of testing time in the middle grades.

These findings are consistent with other research on testing times in Ohio. Find a full breakdown of testing time by grade level, test type and requirement source in Appendix 2.

**Full Impact of Testing**

There is growing public concern over the amount of time students spend taking tests. However, survey data reveals that testing time represents a fairly limited portion of a student’s academic experience. According to recent analysis, testing constitutes only 1-3 percent of a typical student’s time in school, depending on the grade level. Still, the time a student spends taking tests does not reveal the full impact those tests have on a classroom, school or school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Average Time (Hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Tests</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Tests for State Requirements</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Tests</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Test Types</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Most schools and teachers spend a significant amount of time preparing for standardized tests, especially state tests. Preparation may include time spent taking practice tests, taking local tests to prepare for state tests, teaching test-taking skills and reviewing content for the tests.

Teachers and administrators cite the increased accountability tied to test results as their key motivation for increasing preparation time. They want to ensure that their students are comfortable with the content and possess the test-taking skills they need to succeed. Increased teacher and school accountability tied to testing in recent years has likely resulted in schools increasing the amount of time they spend on test preparation.

The department also surveyed Ohio’s school districts and community schools on practice time, but the survey results offered only a glimpse into actual time dedicated to practicing for tests. The majority of respondents indicated they spend at least 15 hours a year practicing for tests, which is roughly 1.4 percent of the average school year. As stated earlier, the average time a student spends taking actual district or state tests is approximately 19.8 hours.

Beside the time spent preparing for tests, actual test administration can make it challenging for teachers to manage classroom instruction. Some tests are administered to all students at the same time, while others require one-to-one interaction with students. Tests administered online may require a computer lab or devices that normally are used for teaching. It’s difficult to measure these types of disruptions because each school and teacher approaches testing differently. With planning, schools and teachers can minimize these disruptions. Yet factors like these can increase the impact of student testing perceived by stakeholders.