



UNDERSTANDING THE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT GAP:

Eight Important Takeaways for
Principals & Administrators

Executive Summary

A recent Tech & Learning survey of over 500 teachers, principals, and district administrators revealed noteworthy disparities between the realities of teachers' assessment experiences inside their classrooms and the perceptions of principals and district administrators outside the classroom.

While a certain degree of disconnection is to be expected, particularly given the limited interaction and physical distance common between teachers and district administrators, some of the most striking

differences in perception occurred between teachers and principals working together in close proximity.

These gaps in understanding, concerning everything from the type and volume of assessments being administered to the effort and time involved in creating and grading assessments and analyzing the data gathered, can be a challenge, but they offer an opportunity to bring expectations and performance in line with one another.

Key Findings

1. There are significant discrepancies between the type and frequency of assessments teachers are giving and grading and what principals and administrators believe are being administered.
2. This informational disconnect also extends to the volume of required assessments, including state benchmark tests, and reveals a surprising lack of understanding between groups about what exams are actually required.
3. Teachers report spending an average of nearly four hours per week grading student work (although there are significant gaps between those teachers spending the least amount of time and those spending the most). Principals and administrators, however, do not have an accurate understanding of the time involved, either in or out of the classroom.
4. Principals overestimate the use of dedicated scanners to score assessments, which suggests they also overestimate how much grading assistance teachers are currently receiving from such technology.
5. Principals and administrators do not have a clear sense of how much time teachers spend recording grades manually, and they overestimate the abilities of their existing grading systems to transfer grades to digital gradebooks automatically. The process is therefore more cumbersome for teachers than principals and administrators realize.

6. Although a little more than half of all teachers, principals, and district administrators report that teachers have immediate access to student assessment results, there are still nearly fifty percent who do not have access to the instant feedback necessary to make real-time adjustments in a responsive learning environment.
7. Teachers report a lower degree of satisfaction with the student performance data they receive than do administrators and principals, indicating that more timely, specific, or actionable data may still be needed for teachers in the classroom.
8. Almost twice as many teachers as principals and administrators consider the grading process burdensome, with nearly sixty percent remaining uncertain as to whether or not their grading system can even aggregate and share data.

The survey reveals that teachers are clearly overwhelmed by the tasks of grading, scoring, recording, and sharing student performance data. As the need for data-driven differentiated instruction grows, so do the tasks involved with creating and sharing this data.

1. Assessment Type and Frequency

Ongoing assessments are an important tool for understanding student performance, measuring skill acquisition, and ensuring on-track progress. However, the survey results show that principals and administrators not only overestimate the number of daily assessments teachers are administering, but they also overestimate the number of assessments in every category of student work being graded, from homework to benchmark assessments.

FREQUENCY OF STUDENT CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS

FREQUENCY	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
DAILY	21.3%	45.6%	33.3%
WEEKLY	47.4%	50%	38.9%
MONTHLY	15.6%	2.9%	15.3%
SEVERAL TIMES/YER	15.6%	1.5%	12.5%

Vicki Davis, the award-winning educator and thought leader behind the Cool Cat Teacher blog, notes that principals seem to be more likely to be observing teaching than monitoring testing, which may explain the significant disparity between teachers' and principals' answers, even though they work closely together.

FREQUENCY OF STUDENT CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS

STUDENT WORK	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
HOMEWORK	49.5%	72.5%	79.2%
QUIZZES & TESTS	74.5%	94.2%	93.1%
DAILY ASSESSMENTS	56.2%	78.3%	70.8%
WEEKLY ASSESSMENTS	59.1%	81.2%	76.4%
MULTIPLE CHOICE	56.7%	84.1%	81.9%
SHORT ANSWER	55.8%	89.9%	79.2%
OPEN RESPONSE/ ESSAY	53.4%	84.1%	84.75%
COMMON ASSESSMENTS	49.5%	76.7%	79.2%
BENCHMARK ASSESSMENTS	39.4%	68.1%	73.6%

2. Required Assessments

Even though all three groups of educators were compared to each other within their common district, there was a remarkable difference in what each group identified as being required across almost all assessment types. In fact, nearly twice as many administrators reported state benchmark tests compared to teachers. In some instances, the principals' responses were more closely aligned with those of their teachers, while in other instances they were more closely aligned with their administrators.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS REQUIRED BY THE DISTRICT

ASSESSMENT TYPE	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
DAILY QUIZZES	8.1%	9%	15.9%
END-OF-CHAPTER TESTS	34.3%	40.3%	34.8%
MID-TERM EXAMS	27.8%	22.4%	40.6%
SEMESTER EXAMS	45.9%	32.8%	59.4%
STATE BENCHMARK TESTS	46.4%	64.2%	84.1%
END-OF-GRADE TESTS	23%	31.3%	34.8%
OTHER	25.8%	35.8%	34.8%

3. Time Spent Grading

Davis was struck particularly by the wide disparity that the survey revealed between teachers at the low and high ends of the spectrum. Approximately 20 percent of teachers reported spending less than two hours a week on grading, while approximately 20 percent reported spending five or more hours. Davis suggests that a variety of factors can impact the amount of time teachers spend grading, including class size, grade level, question type, and access to paraprofessional or technological support (e.g., higher grade levels typically assess more complex content, open-ended questions are more time-consuming than multiple-choice, grading assistance can significantly reduce the workload, etc.)

Teachers reported spending an average of 3.77 hours per week grading student work, and while principals and district administrators certainly understand that teachers invest considerable time grading, neither principals nor administrators have an accurate perception either of the total amount of time teachers spend or of the time they invest in these tasks outside the classroom.

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT PER WEEK GRADING STUDENT WORK

HOURS	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
LESS THAN 1 HR.	8.3%	2.9%	1.4%
1-2 HRS.	15.3%	7.4%	5.6%
2-3 HRS.	20.4%	33.8%	29.6%
3-4 HRS.	16.7%	27.9%	32.4%
4-5 HRS.	12%	16.2%	9.9%
5-6 HRS.	7.9%	7.4%	9.9%
6-7 HRS.	6.5%	0%	5.6%
7-8 HRS.	5.1%	2.9%	1.4%
MORE THAN 8 HRS.	7.9%	1.5%	4.2%

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT PER WEEK GRADING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

HOURS	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
LESS THAN 1 HR.	18.3%	7.5%	1.4%
1-2 HRS.	22.5%	32.8%	29.6%
2-3 HRS.	19.2%	34.3%	32.4%
3-4 HRS.	16%	13.4%	22.5%
4-5 HRS.	5.6%	4.5%	5.6%
5-6 HRS.	7%	6%	5.6%
6-7 HRS.	3.3%	0%	0%
7-8 HRS.	2.3%	0%	0%
MORE THAN 8 HRS.	5.6%	1.5%	2.8%

4. Assessment Scoring Technology Usage

According to Davis, this information likely reflects a basic lack of understanding of the potential for technology-based grading support as well as of some of the technology types available.

The accessibility and functionality of grading solutions can make an enormous difference for teachers, but there is a distinct disconnect between teachers, principals, and administrators regarding what kind of technology is actually being used to scan and score assessments. Particularly notable is the difference between teachers and principals concerning the use of dedicated scanners, multifunction printers, and document and web cameras.

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT PER WEEK GRADING STUDENT WORK

TYPE OF DEVICE	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
DEDICATED SCANNER	25.6%	37.2%	33.3%
MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER	34.1%	25.6%	19.6%
MOBILE DEVICE	31%	32.6%	35.3%
DOCUMENT CAMERA	16.3%	27.9%	37.3%
WEB CAMERA	11.6%	0%	13.7%
OTHER	22.5%	23.3%	17.6%

5. Grade Transfer

Since principals and administrators rarely observe this component of the assessment process, Davis was not surprised to see such a disconnect here. However, it is important for principals and administrators to be aware, both of the time required as well as of the technology support available, in order to improve the efficiency of the back end of the assessment process.

When it comes to the amount of time teachers spend recording grades manually, principals and administrators miss the mark—in both directions—but they consistently overestimate the capability of their grading system to transfer grades automatically into electronic gradebooks.

TIME SPENT ENTERING GRADES MANUALLY INTO GRADEBOOKS

HOURS	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
LESS THAN 1 HR.	38.8%	33.8%	22.5%
1-2 HRS.	32.9%	44.1%	52.1%
2-3 HRS.	15.7%	14.7%	11.3%

ABILITY OF GRADING SYSTEM TO TRANSFER GRADES AUTOMATICALLY TO ELECTRONIC GRADEBOOKS

AUTO-TRANSFERS	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
YES	31.3%	38.2%	40.8%
NO	62.1%	54.4%	53.5%
UNSURE	6.5%	7.4%	5.6%

6. Access to Assessment Results

The time delay between giving assessments and accessing the results, Davis notes, indicates that formative teaching still is not taking hold as much as we would like to see. When nearly half of teachers aren't receiving feedback for days or weeks (or more), it is unlikely they are going back to re-teach content or adjust instruction.

While there was much closer alignment between teachers, principals, and administrators on the length of time it takes for teachers to receive assessment results, nearly half of educators are still not able to access the kind of instant feedback that could make a difference in a responsive learning environment.

TIMELY ACCESS TO ASSESSMENT RESULTS

FREQUENCY	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
IMMEDIATELY	53.5%	58.2%	54.9%
WITHIN A FEW DAYS	37.6%	31.3%	40%
WITHIN A FEW WEEKS	2.8%	3%	12.9%
IT TAKES MONTHS	0.9%	0%	1.4%
OTHER	5.6%	7.5%	8.6%

7. Assessment Data Quality

It is not uncommon for teachers, principals, and administrators to have differing opinions of the data they receive, Davis acknowledges. Obviously, their respective needs are not the same. But this also means there is a great deal of room for improvement in the areas of data analysis, usability, and turnaround time.

Administrators and principals report a higher degree of satisfaction with the performance data they receive from the district than do the teachers who need it most. The primary reason identified is that it takes too long to analyze the data. Although once the data is processed, however, it appears it is often not necessarily helpful for classroom application.

SATISFACTION WITH PERFORMANCE DATA RECEIVED FROM THE DISTRICT

SATISFACTION	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
VERY SATISFIED	13.3%	16.2%	12.7%
SATISFIED	34.1%	48.5%	47.9%
SOMEWHAT SATISFIED	40.3%	32.4%	36.6%
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	12.3%	2.9%	2.8%

CRITICISM OF PERFORMANCE DATA RECEIVED FROM THE DISTRICT

CRITICISM	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
TOO MUCH INFORMATION	15.2%	22.5%	18.9%
TAKES TOO LONG TO ANALYZE	35.9%	30%	37.8%
NOT ENOUGH USABLE DATA	32.4%	32.5%	32.4%
TOO MUCH TIME BETWEEN ASSESSMENTS AND RECEIPT OF DATA	33.8%	35%	27%
OTHER	22.1%	27.5%	24.3%

8.

Grading Process Workload

Davis points out that test creation has become a more time-consuming grading-related task as question banks written by publishers have become more easily accessible to parents and students online. As a result, teachers have had to dedicate more time up front to writing their own original assessment questions. In order for teachers not to increase their workload considerably, this time has to be made up somehow on the back end (e.g., fewer assessments, more efficient grading processes, etc.).

District administrators have a significantly higher opinion of year-over-year improvement in the classroom assessment scoring process than do principals and teachers, and almost twice as many teachers consider the process burdensome as compared to principals and administrators. The survey results show that teachers are spending more than three times longer than principals realize they are, writing their own assessment questions. Twice as many principals are under the impression that teachers are pulling questions from question banks than actually seems to be the case. Additionally, while roughly forty percent of educators agree about their grading system's ability to aggregate and share data, the disparity between the "No" and "Unsure" categories indicates that almost sixty percent appear to be unclear.

CURRENT CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING PROCESS EFFICIENCY

EFFICIENCY LEVEL	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
BETTER THAN LAST YEAR	20.9%	19.1%	32.4%
SAME AS LAST YEAR	57.2%	66.2%	54.9%
BURDENSOME/TAKES TOO MUCH TIME	21.9%	14.7%	12.7%

SOURCE OF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

QUESTION SOURCE	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
TEACHERS WRITE THEM	27.8%	8.7%	11.8%
PULLED FROM QUESTION BANK	3.7%	8.7%	5.9%
COMBINATION OF BOTH	32.4%	82.6%	73.5%

ABILITY OF GRADING SYSTEM TO EASILY AGGREGATE AND SHARE STUDENT DATA

AGGREGATES/SHARES	TEACHERS REPORT	PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS	DISTRICT ADMINS' PERCEPTIONS
YES	41.9%	37.3%	39.4%
NO	27.6%	41.8%	38%
UNSURE	30.4%	20.9%	22.5%

Conclusion

A distinct disconnect exists between teachers, principals, and administrators that is resulting in both misperceptions and missed opportunities. While principals and administrators underestimate the amount of time teachers spend creating and grading assessments, they also overestimate the abilities of their current grading systems to automatically score, record, analyze, and share student performance data. Yet despite these overly optimistic views, more than sixty percent of educators still express dissatisfaction with their current grading system.

Given increasing expectations for performance and accountability, it would seem that the onerous processes around assessment creation, grading, and data aggregation and sharing are key areas for improving both efficiency and communication between educators at all levels. The more these tasks can be automated, the more teaching can be customized.

About the Author

Annie Galvin Teich is a K-12 market specialist and writes about the impact of technology on education.



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