

What Do Teachers Really Think About Assessment?

Teach Plus Congressional Briefing

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Remarks by Alexandra Fuentes

ELL Biology Teacher, T.C. Williams High School, Alexandria, VA



I teach high school Biology for English Language Learners at the International Academy within TC Williams High School in Alexandria, VA. This is my 6th year teaching. For the first five years of my career, I taught Biology at a Charter School in Washington, DC and earned highly-effective rating on our evaluation system.

I appreciate this opportunity to share my experience with assessments. In DC, students in biology take a DC CAS assessment toward the end of the year. When I got the data back in October, it was much less helpful. But when I got the data in the summer, I could see students' results broken down by topic, and could then systematically improve my instruction. I changed how I taught mitosis, for example, and saw 43% growth in students' scores. By my third year teaching protein synthesis, 86% of my students scored well on that portion of the exam, which was 53% better than the statewide student proficiency on protein synthesis.

End-of-year assessments like the DC-CAS are only one of the menu of assessments I give. My job is to help students learn, and so I need to know what they do and do not understand on a daily basis, even within a lesson. In addition to state assessments, I am constantly assessing what students know. You cannot separate assessment from teaching.

Teachers by definition are assessing students continually. What makes state-wide, end-of-year tests so important?

State tests help in three unique ways: First, state tests give me data on how my students are doing relative to other students. I need that reality check. Second, state tests hold me accountable for teaching the standards of learning that a state has prioritized. This is especially true when those tests are high stakes for students and tied to graduation. Third, state tests provide data that states and districts can use to develop and refine teacher evaluation systems that recognize and reward excellent teaching, helping to keep the most effective teachers in the classroom.



If annual state-wide tests provide unique and necessary information, then why is there controversy and debate?

From my vantage point, the challenge is assessments can have tremendous influence on the priorities teachers set in the classroom and the way we teach, and that change can either be positive or negative. I have experienced both.

In DC, my experience with the DCCAS exam was positive overall. It was an imperfect test, but I still had the flexibility to innovate in the classroom.

In VA, where students take the SOL exam, I have been shocked at how much the tests have negatively impacted my classroom. For example, my students are supposed to learn minute details, such as the phases of mitosis: anaphase, telephase, etc. Honestly, young people do not need to know the names of those phases just for the sake of knowing those facts. Students need to know about mitosis so that they understand that if you wanted to design a cure for an inherited disease, you cannot inject someone with “healthy DNA.” You would have to inject every single one of their trillions of cells with that DNA because every cell in their body has the same DNA because of mitosis. We don’t want to raise a bunch of young people who are proficient at knowing the facts that we can easily Google. We want young people who can make sense of those facts. But when you create a test with an extensive number of facts, and you tie that test to graduation so that it is high stakes for students, teachers have to make it a priority to teach and continually assess whether students know and can recall those facts.

The way assessments are designed can negatively or positively influence what teachers and schools prioritize. To be sure, it is states (and not the federal government) that are best positioned to improve the design of the assessments they give, and both DC and VA are working to do that.

When you reauthorize ESEA, there’s opportunity to influence the way states look at data and to create space for innovation. The old ESEA required states to test students annually and set annual accountability goals. Teachers need annual tests, but year-to-year changes in scores carry a lot of noise. For example, the year that my charter school changed the school schedule and the grading policy at the same time, my test scores fell 40%. The next year, they bounced back. When we change tests to make them more focused on critical thinking and application, like the assessments aligned to Common Core appear to be, we are likely to see even more noise in year-to-year test scores as teachers change our instruction to align with new and better test demands. When you reauthorize ESEA, you can set up accountability measures focused on student *growth* over a couple years, allowing for more nuanced analysis of data, and still require states to administer tests annually.



Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

My message to you is that assessments are critical and we need to require states to test students annually for three reasons: They provide data teachers need to improve our instruction and data districts need to ensure equity. Well-designed assessments also provide tremendous opportunity for states and districts to develop and refine systems to evaluate, promote, and reward exceptional teachers. Third, well-designed tests can drive teachers to prioritize critical thinking and problem solving in our content areas. All of these outcomes benefit students.

Remarks by Clare Berke

English Teacher, Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, Washington, DC



Good morning. My name is Clare Berke, and I am a high school English teacher in the DC Public Schools. Thank you for listening to my own and my colleagues' experiences today.

Before I tell you my views on assessment, I want to tell you a little bit about myself. I have served as a secondary English teacher in the District for six years. I currently teach English I and Advanced Placement Language & Composition at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School. I am a member of the Washington Teachers Union and a fellow with the Leading Educators program. I have developed Common Core State Standards-aligned curriculum for the District, served as a Language Arts lead teacher, and been rated highly effective under the IMPACT evaluation system since SY 2012-13.

I am also, as you may have noticed, nearly nine months pregnant. As I thought about what I wanted to say today, I remembered a student from my first year of teaching who was also pregnant. She was a junior in my Creative Writing course, an elective that had no curriculum, no standards and no assessments. Data on my creative writing students' literacy levels may have existed, but it was not shared with me or other teachers of electives, even though we could have used it to augment the lessons our students were receiving in their core classes.

I remember several awkward parent conversations from my first year of teaching, but one that bothers me still is a parent teacher conference I attended with the mother of the pregnant creative writing student. The mother asked me if her child, about to be a mother herself, had the literacy skills needed to graduate high school and to be successful in a postsecondary program after the baby was born. I shared a sample of the student's narrative writing with her -- two pages of one long paragraph telling about the time she had won a sports competition in middle school. Today, thanks to training I have received as a result of new writing standards and annual writing assessments, I would be able to talk with the student and the parent about improving the sequencing of events, engaging the reader, effectively employing narrative techniques, and thoughtfully reflecting on the chosen experience. But at the time, I did not have a challenging writing assessment to work backwards from, or data from a previous year to know where to begin. I knew that the student's handwriting was neat and her topic clear, and that the mother was waiting for an answer from me. I told her, yes, I thought her daughter would be able to succeed in her senior year and beyond, but I possessed no actual assessment data to indicate this would be true.



This story is one illustration of why I believe that annual literacy assessments are so important for teachers, administrators, students and families. As an AP teacher, I am tasked with preparing my students for an end-of-year writing assessment, and to do so, I have had to learn to better instruct and assess students on the skills of close reading, critical thinking, and writing argument, exposition, and narration. Planning backwards from what I have heard called the most challenging English test a person will ever take has helped me become a better teacher.

I hope that planning backwards from the new Common Core-aligned assessments will also make me and my colleagues stronger literacy teachers. Using the common language of the annual assessment, administrators and teachers should be better able to support one another, teachers and parents should be more successful in communicating about students' skills, and students should be empowered to advocate for their own learning.

In my first year of teaching, when there were no clear standards or assessments, I had only well-wishes to offer my students. But our students, especially the most socially vulnerable, deserve more than our well-wishes. They deserve the best instructional strategies, the most rigorous standards, and the clearest expectations for success. Giving yearly standards-aligned assessments - and supporting teachers, administrators, students and families in digging deep into their results - has and should continue to be a driving force in increasing student achievement.

Thank you for considering my experiences and views on assessment as you move forward with the reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act.

Remarks by Ashley E. Smith

4th Grade Teacher, Lakeland Elementary/Middle School, Baltimore, MD



Hello, my name is Ashley Smith. I am a 5th year teacher in Baltimore City Public Schools. I came to teach after being trained through the Urban Teacher Center, an alternative certification program consisting of a residency year, 4-year commitment, and yearly testing measures of student growth. The growth measurements are used to inform instructional practices of teacher candidates. After finishing my commitment to UTC, I decided to stay in my teaching position at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School and began to pick up

additional leadership roles at the district level and within the UTC program- focusing on training early career teachers.

I'm excited for the opportunity to share with you my views on and experiences with assessment. As a 4th grade teacher, the students I instruct are required to take a state assessment each year. In years past, this assessment was known as the Maryland Schools Assessment, and this year will be the PARCC assessment. The MSA has been useful for me as an educator each year because after looking at the data I can clearly see where I made gains in student achievement the previous year. Additionally, I have had the ability to track student progress over multiple years. This is especially useful when communicating student progress with parents. If a student has struggled or excelled in areas over many years, annual testing data allows both teachers and parents to see the trends.

Having this consistent data has helped me to track my own progress as a teacher over many years in the classroom. Currently, in my school, teachers in grades 3-8 are departmentalized and teach only 1-2 content areas. I recently requested to be assigned to 2nd grade so that I could gain the experience of teaching one class and all subjects throughout the day. This would help me develop as an educator by gaining new experiences. It would also allow me to better help the early career teachers I mentor and coach in their practices. Despite the clear advantages this move would bring me, my request was denied. I was told that because of my history being effective in a tested grade level, my skills would be most useful if I remained in a testing grade.

After this experience, I began to reflect on the importance of assessment. One of the reasons I am seen as such an effective teacher is because I have years worth of annual assessment data that shows consistent student growth. This even goes back to the annual testing from my teacher preparation program. It is incredibly empowering as an educator to be able to know that I can look at data and see that I have been effective in providing my



students the skills they need in order to be successful. However, it is unfortunate that not all teachers, such as those in the lower grades, have this tool to measure their successes.

In addition to being able to see my individual success through annual assessment, the data allows my entire school, district, and state to see how they compare to the nation as a whole. As a teacher of low income and minority students, I have seen the vast disparity between the performance of my students and their affluent peers. Losing this data would cause my district and state to be less successful in combating these gaps, as they would not be so transparent.

In preparing these remarks, I couldn't help but think of a current student Michael, who is a clear victim of the achievement gap. Michael came to my school after spending many years at a low-performing school. After looking at his assessment data, I found that he was extremely behind when compared to his grade level peers. As a result, the teachers and clinicians in the school were able to provide targeted interventions to Michael in reading. After just half a year, Michael has grown more than a year's worth in his reading abilities. In addition to his academic growth, Michael's confidence has skyrocketed. Michael now actively engages in class. He always volunteers to read aloud and is able to contribute to class discussions in meaningful ways. The gap is starting to close for Michael, however if we do away with annual assessment I am not sure this progress will continue in future grades.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my experiences.

Remarks by Micah Miner

Social Studies Teacher and Dept. Chair, Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School, Chicago, IL



Thank you for taking the time to let me share who I am and the importance of assessment. I am a Chicago Public Schools social studies teacher and department chair in an alternative setting for incarcerated students. I am also on the instructional leadership team at my school. I am a Chicago Teachers' Union member, a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellow and a doctoral student in Curriculum Advocacy and Policy. Assessments are essential in my school setting; I will

give some examples of why they are important.

Teaching in the juvenile justice setting poses different challenges. Every day new students are enrolled and others leave. Students stay from a few days to over two years. New students take a computer-adapted assessment during the enrollment process. This gives me information that cannot be found on transcripts such as academic strengths and weaknesses and a student's instructional reading level. Eighteen months ago I had a new student in my class. That assessment helped me select resources for him at his reading level, build instructional groups and pairs with the data, and make other instructional decisions to help him succeed. The assessment results were shared with him. He worked hard, and so did I. He was tested again and he was a part of a group of 23 students who saw an average of 1.5 years increased reading growth. He spent almost a year in my classroom before he turned 18 and changed facilities. He was found not guilty at trial and he returned to a neighborhood high school. I saw him last week and he is now a senior on track to graduate in June and will be going to a Chicago City College and is interested in construction or nursing.

This year the Instructional Leadership team that I am a part of began data talks with students before they took their second progress monitoring assessment. We met with students to share the data from their previous assessment. It included a color visual that used red, yellow and green to represent their scores. Many of the students wanted to "get to the green." Then the students took the assessment and the data was shared with them that same day. Our average growth was 34%; we helped our students understand why assessments are important.

Annual assessment is also very important. It is my job to teach students and help catch them up so that they can have access to postsecondary education options. The annual assessment is taken at the traditional school for those students who transition out of the alternative setting. As a teacher I set my own "high stakes" because if I can get them re-engaged in the classroom this can help them transition. This will reduce their likelihood of



getting caught in the revolving door of the juvenile and adult criminal justice system. Having the same annual assessment is also important because Chicago Public Schools have many types of schools. By having the same annual assessment we can see how well our students are transitioning and see which schools are able to serve our students successfully.

There are some modifications to the ESEA reauthorization that I believe should be instituted to improve teaching and learning. First, I think that a federal cautionary guideline or mandate should be in place to limit annual testing to stop the stress, financial drain and intrusion on the overall teaching and learning process.

Second, the annual test must be aligned for equity and access but must serve multiple purposes. In districts there are many types of schools. In order for this to work the tests must be aligned to college and career standards, which is why I support the Common Core State Standards. This also includes having a way that the federally-mandated and aligned annual test in high school can be considered another avenue besides the ACT or SAT to measure readiness and admittance into post-secondary education.

Finally it is important to make sure that the annual testing data is used to allocate resources and re-evaluate practices and programs to help improve learning outcomes. This is not to make teachers exempt from accountability, but rather approach this with the idea of improvement based on capacity-building and innovation. This yields much better results than a punitive approach which leads to a mentality of, "if we fail the school is closed, our community loses a part of itself, students are relocated, and jobs are lost."

I support the annual testing cycle of 3rd-8th grade and once in high school as written in the current NCLB legislation and advocate that this should be in the reauthorization of the ESEA law with some modifications. These modifications include alignment, streamlining for multiple purposes and capacity building. Help us as a nation to give all students the same chance to succeed.

Remarks by Raquel Maya Carson

2nd grade Dual Language Teacher, Powell Elementary School, Washington, DC



Good Morning! Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to become more acquainted with the critical issues surrounding assessment in our schools.

My name is Raquel Maya Carson and I am currently a second grade dual language teacher at Powell Elementary School in Northwest DC. I also serve as a member of my school's Academic Leadership Team and as the Family

Engagement Teacher Lead, bolstering our efforts around home visits and academic parent teacher teams. Prior to entering the classroom three years ago I worked as a communications contractor helping to disseminate critical education research reports from the Institute of Education Sciences, the National Center for Education Statistics and Lumina Foundation for Education. I earned my undergraduate degree in Sociology from The George Washington University and my Master's in Teaching from Johns Hopkins University.

Walking into my classroom, you see right away that my students and I value data. They will proudly walk you over to our reading data wall where we anonymously showcase our reading growth using astronauts and stars. Or boast about our class' most recent celebration (conga line and all) of meeting our goal for progress on an interim assessment.

We value data for a few reasons. First, data has been transformative in ensuring that I am supporting and challenging my students according to their individual needs. Allowing me to create small groups, and differentiate assignments and homework. This ensures that Kevin, my above grade level reader strengthens his writing through a nightly journal but also that Ruben, my newcomer, gets verbal language practice in with his peers.

Second, data has been a key lever in increasing student motivation – both as individuals and as a class. Prior to assessment data and clear standards being such a critical component of our instruction, students struggled with tracking their own progress – often unsure of what their grades or “good job” comments meant. Their assessment data provides clear transparency of what skills they are strong in and which ones need work. They can elaborate on the grade level expectations of proficiency but also how looking at their own data makes them think critically about how to hold themselves accountable. In a recent student conference, Henner, an on-grade level student, and I were graphing their middle of year reading level. Noticing that they had set themselves a goal to grow 2 reading levels, but only grew 1, the student said to me “You know, I didn't actually read two books each night like I said I was going to at the beginning of the year to meet my goal. I am going to



keep my promise this time to make sure I meet my end of year goal so that I can go into third grade a strong reader.”

Third, assessment data has made conversations with families about their children more of an objective two-way conversation. Assessment data translates most naturally into graphs, which makes looking at student progress for my low-literacy families less intimidating. Data is language neutral – parents can clearly see when their student is not meeting, meeting or exceeding expectations. In our most recent academic parent teacher team meeting I even overheard a family explaining to another how to read our class reading data wall.

For me, much of the data we use in our classroom comes mainly from the interim assessments that our students take as part of the district requirement approximately four times a year. These assessments allow me to see how my students are progressing towards proficiency in a particular subject area as well as individual standards.

While I am not in a grade-level that currently administers an annual test according to the policies of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, my instruction has benefited tremendously from the interim assessments that have been created and implemented as a result. Before my 25 kiddos leave me for third grade this year, I can provide their parents and future teachers with a snapshot of what their performance has been this year across the common core standards and what can and should be done over the summer to help support them.

Thank you!

Remarks by Dwight Davis

Assistant Principal, Wheatley Education Campus, Washington, DC



My name is Dwight Davis and I am an Assistant Principal at Wheatley Education Campus in Northeast DC and am an alumni of the Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship. I also spent many years teaching 5th grade ELA/Social Studies and was rated as highly-effective under DC's IMPACT evaluation system. I am a member of the Washington Teachers Union and served as a building representative for two years and on an advisory committee for contract negotiations with the WTU president. Prior to entering the classroom, I earned my Masters of Divinity and Masters of Arts in Education from Princeton Theological Seminary.

I would like to share my thoughts on assessment. However before I do I want to ask you all a couple of questions. How many of you have set a goal within the last year? If you don't mind me asking, in what area did you set these goals? Great! Now, what is the first thing you did after setting your goal? You assessed correct? At the beginning of the year I set a nutritional goal for myself. The first thing I had to do was take an inventory of what I had been eating and then I had to measure myself. The bottom line: assessment is good. It is at the heart of what we do. As a teacher for 10 years before this new age of testing, I've seen the difference that a focus on testing makes. As a result of testing, I'm more aware of where students start and end. I more aware of where I child needs to go and how best to facilitate such growth. During parent teacher conferences I can talk to parents about where students have deficits and how we can work together to strengthen weaknesses. Using the data from assessments I can talk to parents in a different way about how we can personalize the learning experience for their child.

Before assessment became so important I don't think I was a good teacher. Now, I know I am a great teacher. I was underprepared before I entered the classroom and I had to learn more about how to teach reading because my evaluation was tied to it – it forced me to learn more. Before, I was given some books and told to teach reading. I didn't know that there were “reading levels” and that there were guidelines that helped me measure and inform our efforts. Frankly, part of this was a function of the educational system as a whole. The system didn't require or demand that I focus on the data. With the enactment of NCLB came a new set of demands. In hindsight I can't believe this wasn't a requirement before now. If I'm not growing students, why teach?

With a focus on data, not just testing, I became more aware of my students strengths and weaknesses. I became more aware of where my students should be at a particular point in



their educational development. With a focus on the data I understood the urgency with which I must work to ensure that each of my students' needed to grow and develop. To this end, I also began to realize that I really needed to challenge my higher performing students who seemed to ace everything I threw at them. You see, this focus on the data isn't just about the students who struggle; it's also about the students who are ready to move beyond the confines of prescribed reading levels. If we're not growing students, why teach? Now I'm an Assistant Principal and data from testing helps me do my job well. As an AP, I am equipped with the data I need to have important conversations with teachers. For example, I can say this child is two grades below grade level – what are we going to do about it? I can also say, "Hey this child is reading two years above grade level are we in need of a special reading club or group for students like this one?"

As an administrator I use data from assessments to invest students in their learning. I show them their data and say here's where you are – and here's how we're going to get where you want/ need to be. The assessment data helps me engage a child and his or her family. It's cliché but true that kids don't care what you know until they know how much you care. Sharing their assessment data with them in this way helps me show them how much I care. This is true for me as I parent as well. During parent teacher conferences, I am often told that everything is fine with my child. With test data I can check and be sure that's the case.

I would like to leave you with this. When I was younger I would help my uncle and grandfather around the house. My Grandfather was old school and had these old heavy wrenches. I loved using them, we would often move around the house and find tune different things. We would tighten something in the bathroom or loosen something in the kitchen to fix it. My grandfather had a different tool for everything. That being said he occasionally used the wrench to drive in a nail or two. I see assessment similarly. It is a tool. The data from assessment allows teachers to fine tune their teaching practice. I want to be clear, I get that in some places people are not using assessment in the best way. Over the years some people have used the wrench as a hammer, does that mean that we just throw out the wrench? Assessments serves a purpose it is an invaluable tool that allows teachers, administrators, and school districts fine tune.

Thank you for your consideration of my views as you move forward with the ESEA reauthorization.

Remarks by Alice Johnson Cain

Vice President for Federal and State Policy, Teach Plus



Good morning! My name is Alice Johnson Cain and I'm the Vice President for Federal and State Policy at Teach Plus. It's good to see some familiar faces from when I worked on the House side as George Miller's K-12 advisor. Many years before that, I worked here in Dirksen on the HELP Committee staff of Senator Paul Simon where I helped with the 1994 ESEA reauthorization. I appreciate your making time to be here today.

Teach Plus is a teacher leadership organization founded on the premise that teachers must play a leading role in changes in schools -- as well as changes in policy -- if we want to build a better education system for children.

- We run a highly-selective leadership program, our Teaching Policy Fellows program, in six cities around the country to train hundreds of teachers a year in policy and advocacy. The teachers here with me today have studied policy in that program.
- We run two additional leadership programs that support highly-effective teachers in leading their peers in instructional change, including a teacher-designed turnaround model where teams of highly-effective teachers work together to turn around high-poverty, low-performing schools.
- We also engage large numbers of teachers—at least 20,000 over the past six years—in teacher-led events, webinars, surveys, and other activities.

We believe that bringing the voice of teachers into the conversation on assessment is imperative. The previous generation of testing, spurred by NCLB, consulted teachers too little, leading to a gap between state accountability systems and tests teachers find meaningful in improving how they serve kids.

We will present new data today from teachers that shows the next-generation assessments piloted and administered over the past year are much closer to the type of tests teachers find useful in preparing their students for future success.

To kick-things off, I will:

1. Give a quick overview of testing since NCLB as context;
2. Share our organization's work over the past 4 years to engage over 10,000 teachers in providing feedback on how to improve assessment;



3. Share data from our most recent events, Testing the Test, with 1,000 teachers on next-generation assessments;
4. Share our four-point agenda for testing.

Then we will hear from an amazing group of teachers from around the country for their thoughts on assessment. Finally, we will open the floor to your questions.

NCLB

Our visionary founder and CEO, Celine Coggins, was supposed to be here today to give this talk but got stuck in Boston with the snow. She likes to begin all conversations with teachers on testing with a story from her own experience teaching in the mid-90's. It's important to remember what schools were like. Teachers set their own standards, had great latitude over the content they taught, and pushed their students at a pace that felt right for them. It may have been great for teachers to have that level of academic freedom; but it wasn't great for kids.

Celine tells the story of doing a baking soda volcano with her sixth grade science class only to learn that most kids in the class had done the same thing in multiple prior grades. Without standards for what kids were supposed to know and be able to do at each grade level, kids learned some core concepts 10 times over and other core concepts not at all.

Without the basic accountability of standard assessments, whatever any teacher did in terms of pace and rigor was good enough -- even though we know teachers routinely set lower expectations for students who need high standards the most -- socioeconomically disadvantaged students and students of color.

Enter NCLB. Most teachers are well acquainted with the downside of NCLB and how it was implemented.

1. Its annual testing requirement for grades 3-8 resulted in some states using tests that were not well-aligned to what teachers were expected to teach and tests that did not get teachers data back in time to help their struggling students.
2. It judged student progress in terms of absolutes -- "Is a student at grade level?" -- rather than growth -- "Did a student, who started out behind grade level, make a year's worth of progress?" This bar made it more likely that disadvantaged students would show up as "not proficient" and that the schools they attended would not get credit for progress.
3. Some states chose to "game" NCLB's ambitious proficiency goals by setting low pass scores for kids.



The current movement around common standards and next-generation assessments in some ways the pendulum swing back -- and positively in the eyes of most teachers -- to address these problems that resulted from NCLB.

It is important to note that NCLB did move our field forward in some profoundly important ways:

- It moved us away from annual volcanoes and toward an ability to ensure all schools were fulfilling their basic obligation to help kids learn.
- Perhaps more importantly, it required test data to be disaggregated by student income-level and ethnicity. This means decent overall student performance in a school could no longer mask the problem when children from low-income families or minorities were not performing as well as their peers.
- It established meaningful accountability systems – imperfect as they are – based on this disaggregated data.
- It focused on getting great, well-qualified teachers into every classroom and took initial steps to address the persistent problem of low-income and minority students being taught by the least experienced teachers.

These four things together -- annual testing, disaggregated data, meaningful accountability systems, and of course effective teaching for all students -- are the most powerful tools we have for closing the achievement gap. They force us to confront the fact that most schools do not serve black, brown and poor students as well as others and to target resources to the schools and students that need help.

The power of these NCLB reforms in closing the achievement gap is not theoretical. A new study from Third Way shows that overall student progress -- in both ELA and math across multiple grade levels -- grew at roughly DOUBLE the previous pace since NCLB was introduced.

More importantly, the improvement of African-American and Hispanic students outpaced white students leading to real and measurable narrowing of achievement gaps that have existed for decades. For example, Third Way found that:

- The average 9 year old went from glacial reading gains (+0.1 point/year pre-NCLB) to steady gains in the decade since (already up 9 points).
- African American 9 year olds jumped an astounding 20 points in reading (twice the improvement of white students), and Hispanic 9 year olds gained a 15 points.



- Two-thirds of African American 4th graders were below basic level in math in 2000; now that's down to one-third. Among Latinos, those numbers went from three-fifths to only a quarter.

Now I want to transition to some of the work Teach Plus has done to help bring teacher voice into the conversation about improving testing.

Several years ago, we started hearing the same refrain from teachers in all corners of the country. In every group of teachers I met with, one would say they had an amazing assessment system that allowed them to track student progress, set goals with families and see real growth over the course of the year. The other teachers visibly turned green with envy and said they wished passionately for such a system but had only a very weak state test.

We wanted to know more about the differences between state tests so, following the advice of our Boston teachers, we launched Assessment Advisor, a YELP-like tool, that allowed teachers to rate the assessments they give. We inventoried over 300 state assessments and off-the-shelf tests and learned that there are many tests that teachers love and many they don't like at all. After about 8,000 teachers weighed in, our analysis showed that what teachers most want in tests are the following five things:

1. Aligned to their curriculum
2. Pick up the growth of students way above and below grade level
3. Ask complex questions
4. Give them back data quickly
5. Point them to the resources they need to improve

We often heard that it wasn't the quality but the quantity of tests that was problematic. So we did a study, *The Student and the Stopwatch*, a copy of which is in your packets, with a number of districts across the country and several hundred teachers that measured the amount of time spent on state- and district-mandated tests. We found that the average 3rd or 7th grader spends 1.7% of their school year on these types of tests, which is important context in current debates about whether we are "over-testing" kids.

Finally, this past Fall, we engaged teachers in a new and timely question about testing. We wanted to know whether the next-generation assessments that are being debated for adoption by many states were better in the eyes of teachers than their predecessors. Or not.

We worked with over 1,000 teachers in five cities in a very intensive way. They came to us for a full Saturday in which they rolled up their sleeves for forums on "Testing the Test"



where they compared actual PARCC test items, to the common core state standards and to a set of principles for what good assessment should look like. After spending the day with colleagues cross-walking these different documents, we polled them on their thoughts and the data was astounding. We will release this data formally later this month, but I want to give you a preview now.

- When asked to rate the quality of the PARCC against their previous state tests, 79% of teachers say it is better and only 5% think it is worse.
- When asked how well it is aligned to the standards (recall that this has been a common complaint of teachers) only 6% thought it was only slightly or not well aligned.
- When asked if the tests were aligned to what kids need to be college and career ready—77% said it was extremely, very or somewhat well aligned.
- Sixty-nine percent of teachers think PARCC does extremely or very well in measuring critical thinking skills. Only 5% thought it did not do well.
- Finally, when asked if the tests were appropriately rigorous for the grade level, most thought it was—80% were in some level of agreement.

Given that these tests will be coming online at scale this year, there is good reason for optimism. Our field is making clear progress on narrowing the once large gap between the tests needed for accountability and the tests teachers need to improve instruction for students.

Based on all of this information we have gathered, I want to conclude with the agenda Teach Plus has developed on improving assessment. We work with teachers who have a wide variety of perspectives, but all of them want to know how the students in their class are doing. They all worry that if we don't have a coherent, streamlined annual assessment system, they will continue to be victims of a poorly aligned patchwork of tests—maybe PARCC at grades 3, 6 and 9, a separate type of test in the other grades and yet another set of formative assessments to chart progress.

We all know testing is not going away. We need to create the conditions that push districts and states toward the following goals: Streamlined, aligned, annual, and statewide.

1. Streamlined—we need to get rid of the many bad and redundant tests that teachers are forced to give. New York state, at the urging of Teach Plus and others, is requiring all districts to audit the tests they give and reduce time on testing. Streamlining is something we hear from teachers about in every part of the country.
2. Aligned—It was surprising to us to hear 4 years ago that so many teachers were giving tests that were not aligned to the curriculum they were expected to teach. They are telling us—at least on the PARCC assessments—that there is that



alignment there—and that is so necessary for a fair and credible accountability system.

3. Annual—while not all teachers would advocate for annual testing, we believe that annual, disaggregated data is a pivotal tool in closing the achievement gap. It is important to note that disaggregated data without the data, which would be the result of grade-span testing for most years of a child’s schooling, would be a tremendous loss for teachers who use this data as a tool to inform their work.
4. Statewide—if we want to raise the bar for students who are currently held to low expectations, it is essential for them, and for closing the achievement gap, that we can compare how students across a state are doing and, ideally, how students from across different states are doing.

Thank you for listening. I’m happy to take questions at the end. Next, I’d like to turn things over to our teachers, starting with Alex Fuentes, who teaches biology in Virginia. Alex?