



INTRODUCTION

Tests play a critical role in improving teaching and learning. They provide measures that allow teachers, parents, and students themselves to monitor student progress, understand specific strengths and weaknesses, and set learning goals. They help teachers identify who needs support, who needs enrichment, and what changes in classroom instruction are needed. They inform teachers' understanding of how effectively they are advancing student learning, and they can provide meaningful learning experiences for students. However, while tests are valuable, each test takes time and resources that could be used for other activities in the school day. Thus, it is essential to ensure that every assessment is used for an important purpose and leads to actions intended to improve student learning.

To address this critical issue, Achieve developed the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts* and Iowa adapted it as the **Iowa Student Assessment Inventory**. It is a tool district leaders can use to take stock of their assessments and assessment strategy and do so from a student perspective. The tool supports a process by which districts evaluate the assessments students are taking; determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes; and work to ensure that every district-mandated test is of high quality, is providing the information needed for specific school and district purposes, and can support structures and routines so that assessment results are actually used and action steps taken that will help students. Districts should consider a number of important issues as they move through the inventory process. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and key questions to assist district and community leaders — superintendents, assessment and curriculum leads, teacher leaders, school board members, and local

advocates — in ensuring that their district's assessment inventory process is meaningful and actionable. This guidance is organized by stages of the assessment inventory process: Reflect and Plan, Conducting and Analyzing the Inventory, and Making Recommendations. An additional section, Communications and Messaging, provides guidance on communicating and transparency throughout the inventory process. Please note that this guidance is suggested and that not all questions may be relevant to a district going through an assessment inventory process.

REFLECT AND PLAN

LOCAL CONTEXT

All school districts have unique local contexts that will directly affect the assessment inventory process. This context — such as concerns around overtesting, a new statewide summative assessment, district or board leadership transition, and other important district initiatives — may have an impact on the direction and timing of an assessment inventory.

Community concerns about overtesting: Teachers, parents, students, and policymakers are concerned about the amount of student testing. The amount of testing across districts varies greatly, and some districts may have more pushback from parents, students, teachers, and the community than others. It is important for districts undertaking an assessment inventory process to understand the level of concern around testing. To that end, Achieve has produced a set of sample focus group and survey questions for [teachers](#), [parents](#), and [students](#) that can illuminate these groups' understanding of and concerns around testing.



Local Context Guidance and Recommendations:

- Communicate at strategic points throughout the inventory process that the district is listening to community concerns about the amount of student testing. See the “Communications and Messaging” section beginning on page 12.
- Identify or understand what groups and individuals are expressing the most concern about the level and amount of student testing and how they can be included in the assessment inventory process.
- Use or adapt the “Taking the Temperature” questions in Achieve’s sample focus group and survey materials for teachers, parents, and students and integrate that feedback into the inventory process.

Key questions to ask about overtesting concerns:

- What is the level of concern about overtesting in the community? Who is expressing concern? How are those individuals or groups expressing their concern to the rest of the community?
- How can the district better understand these concerns through data collection as part of the inventory process?
- How will the district demonstrate, through evidence, that it is listening to these concerns and incorporating feedback into the assessment inventory process?

New statewide summative assessments: The landscape of student assessment is rapidly changing. Iowa will begin the process of transitioning the English language arts/literacy, mathematics and science assessments to assessments that can measure the full range of content in the Iowa Core State

Standards and the state’s college- and career ready (CCR) standards. Districts are required to administer a districtwide government assessment. These state assessment requirements may place new demands on districts, especially around technology for computer-based testing, but also provide opportunities and resources, including more advanced assessment reporting and aligned diagnostic, formative, and/or interim assessments. An assessment transition at the state level provides a window of opportunity for districts to take a step back and examine the full range of assessments students take.

Overtesting Concern Guidance and Recommendations:

- Work with state education agency officials to understand the timeline and impact of new statewide summative assessments on instructional time, staff time (e.g., time to prepare technology and/ or materials for assessment, staff time required for administering and proctoring assessments), and technology requirements.
- Evaluate, to the extent possible, the quality of any new diagnostic or formative assessments aligned to the new statewide summative assessment, the usefulness of these assessments in informing instruction and measuring state standards, and whether these new assessments can partially or fully replace current diagnostic or common formative assessments used in the district.
- Evaluate, to the extent possible, the quality of any new interim assessment aligned to the new statewide summative assessment, the usefulness of this assessment in predicting performance on the statewide summative assessment and measuring state standards, and whether this new assessment can partially or fully replace current interim assessments used in the district.

Key questions to ask about new statewide summative assessments:

- What is the purpose of the new assessments (i.e., comparisons among test-takers, measure student current learning of selected standards, or evaluate instruction or programs). How does this compare to previous or other current statewide summative assessments?
- How and when will statewide summative assessment results be reported to teachers, parents, and students? What types of information will be included in this assessment reporting that are similar to, or different from, other assessments given in the district?
- Are new diagnostic, common formative, progress monitoring, and/or interim assessments aligned to the summative assessment available? If so, how will that affect the district's current diagnostic, common formative, progress monitoring, and/or interim assessments? How will the information generated from these new assessments be similar to, or different from, the diagnostic, common formative, and interim assessments currently used in the district? What would be gained (or lost) by partially or completely replacing current district assessments with new assessments aligned to statewide summative assessments?

District or board leadership transition: Changes to district or school board leadership can be an opportunity to educate new leaders on a district's vision for assessment through an inventory process. Informing and/or involving new leaders in the inventory process, particularly those who may have concerns about the amount of student testing, may have a positive impact on acting on recommendations.

Transition Guidance and Recommendations:

- Develop district and board statements to build shared understanding and vision of the role of assessments in supporting instruction, support, and accountability.

- Involve new district leaders and board members in setting the goal for the inventory process (e.g., to increase instructional time, to improve the quality of assessments, to reduce the amount of assessment).
- Include new district leaders and board members throughout an inventory process to develop their knowledge of local assessment systems.

Key questions to ask about district and board leadership transition:

- What is the level of knowledge about the district's assessment system the new leader brings to his or her position?
- How can new district or board leaders be effectively informed and/or involved in the assessment inventory process?

Other important district initiatives: While the focus of the assessment inventory is on testing, many district initiatives and department activities can be potentially affected by the results and action that emerge from the inventory process. For example, a district's new teacher evaluation system may include a review of districtwide and statewide assessment results; a district's new science curriculum may require grade level grade level or department teams to review common end-of-year or end-of-quarter assessments; or a district may use professional learning communities as a reform strategy, which may require teachers to work in teams to use data (often drawn from assessments) to inform and improve instruction. This potential impact on other initiatives also highlights the importance of including a wide range of district and school staff on the assessment inventory leadership team and communicating the process widely to stakeholders who may be affected by the results of the inventory process.

Leadership Transition Guidance and Recommendations:

- Review the district’s strategic and/or operating plan to highlight initiatives and programs that incorporate state and local assessments as part of their vision, design, and implementation.
- Include a broad cross-section of district staff to understand how assessments are used and interpreted across the system.
- Ensure that the district’s communication plan addresses all stakeholders with multiple means of communication.

Key questions to ask about other important district initiatives:

- How are staff working with other district initiatives being included in the assessment inventory process?
- What other district initiatives incorporate assessments as part of their design and implementation?
- How would modifying or eliminating an assessment affect key district initiatives?

INVENTORY AS PART OF AN ONGOING, REGULAR PROCESS

Given the concerns around overtesting, it is imperative that districts take the lead on addressing these concerns through a thorough, broad-based inventory process. However, the inventory tool is only one element of a thoughtful, longer process that both engages productively with concerns about testing and leads to real changes in testing time. It is important to signal internally and to external stakeholders that all assessments will be regularly reviewed.

Ongoing Process Guidance and Recommendations:

- Create a multiyear timeline to regularly review assessments in the district. Reviews can be comprehensive or address specific content areas or grade levels.

- Publicize assessment reviews and opportunities for feedback on the district’s assessment program so stakeholders understand the importance of the review and that their feedback is important.

Key questions to ask about including the inventory as part of an ongoing, regular process:

- Will the current assessment inventory be comprehensive or address a narrower set of assessments (e.g., particular grade span or content area)? If the review is not comprehensive, when will areas not covered in the inventory be reviewed?
- How will the district regularly review its assessments over time?

CROSS DISTRICT COLLABORATION

Districts may want to partner with other similar districts (e.g., in terms of demographics, location, size, instructional focus), either independently or through an AEA, to share data collection strategies, outcomes of the inventory, and strategies for streamlining the number of assessments. In collaboration with other districts or with the assistance of an AEA, a district might also want to consider taking a deeper dive on issues of alignment to better understand how multiple, related assessments can build (or hinder) understanding of student achievement and needs or how assessments can better support alignment to instruction. Districts can use resources such as the [Student Achievement Partners Assessment Evaluation Tool](#) individually or in partnership with other districts. If these assessments are “off the shelf,” districts may wish to work with other districts that use the same assessments to determine if alignment and quality evaluations have already been conducted and to work with vendors in concert to request improvements.

Cross-district collaboration on the assessment inventory process is currently taking place in several states. In Illinois, three districts—Bensenville, Urbana, and West Aurora— are working together and with the Illinois State Board of Education to share ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and share best practices as they move through the assessment inventory process. In Ohio, the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio regularly convenes four districts to share strategies and communicate to the public as one voice. And in Connecticut, the Capitol Region Education Council is supporting eight districts with differentiated support, depending on particular needs (e.g., teacher surveys, completing the assessment inventory, report writing).

- Are there ways districts and Area Education Agencies can maximize their resources to complete the inventory process? For example, one district leads a cross-district collaboration to review the quality of reading assessments while another leads a cross-district collaboration of mathematics assessments. As another example, districts might collaborate to design a teacher survey that might be deployed to all districts by an AEA.
- Is there an AEA with assessment expertise that would be helpful in an inventory process?

Cross District Collaboration Guidance and Recommendations:

- Partner with other districts that may share similar characteristics (e.g., in terms of assessments, size, demographics, location, or instructional focus) to share ideas and best practices.
- Partner with other districts that are using some of the same assessments to do a “deeper dive” on issues of alignment to standards and/or instruction.
- Explore whether AEAs, non-profit education support organizations, state education agencies, or other third-party entities can convene and support multiple districts conducting an assessment inventory process.
- Document the learning and outcomes from the assessment inventory process and share key insights with stakeholders and other districts using the process.

Key questions to ask about cross-district collaboration:

- Are other nearby districts going through an inventory process? If so, are they currently using similar assessments?

CONDUCTING AND ANALYSING THE INVENTORY

The heart of the assessment inventory process is gathering information to complete the inventory table and then using a student-centered analysis to examine findings and begin to build toward recommendations. The guidance here expands on several important issues that may arise while conducting and analyzing the inventory. First, engaging educators and school leaders throughout the inventory process is critical, from participating in inventory leadership and communications development to including their voices through surveys and focus groups.

Second, understanding the assessments taken by special populations — particularly students with disabilities and English language learners (ELs) — is necessary to have a full picture of a district’s assessment program, especially as these students are often administered additional assessments compared to students in the general population. In the analysis phase particularly, assessment literacy may surface as an area of concern, and the guidance here provides some recommendations on next steps.

In Iowa, the ***Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM)*** is the state assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. The ***English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21)*** is the state assessment for ELs.

Similarly, the inventory analysis may lead to questions about the quality and alignment of testing products and how districts can become smart consumers of those products.

ENGAGING EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS IN THE PROCESS

School districts need to include the voices of educators and school leaders throughout the assessment inventory process. The inventory cannot be seen as something being “done to” or “done for” them. Teachers are the primary administrators, interpreters, and users of assessments, and their front-line perspectives are essential for “taking the temperature” on the assessment environment in the district and building the case for action. Additionally, teachers’ experiences with assessments are important to identify disconnects between purpose and use, understand how assessment results are being used, and developing action steps to make individual assessments and a district’s assessment program as a whole more effective and coherent. Reviewing and making changes to a district assessment program requires an investment of time and the will to make changes to often-ingrained practices.

Clearly communicating to teachers the importance and urgency of this effort, and including educators and school leaders in the assessment inventory leadership team, will help ensure momentum leading to action. Ensuring that teachers understand and support the recommendations that emerge from an inventory process — and if not, revisiting the recommendations — is also a crucial step in ensuring that the process leads to action that benefits students. Districts should consider thoughtful processes for authentic input from teachers. Achieve has produced a set of sample focus group and survey questions for teachers that can be adapted for local context. This resource also includes strategies to ensure that educators’ voices are representative of the entire teaching force and incorporated into the inventory analysis and recommendations.

Engaging Educators and School Leaders Guidance and Recommendations

- Include educators and school leaders as part of the assessment inventory leadership team and ensure coverage of multiple grade spans, content areas, experience, and specialized roles (e.g., special education and ELL teachers).
- Communicate to educators and school leaders that their feedback on the district’s assessment program is being heard, considered, and incorporated into analysis and recommendations.
- Reach out to teachers with diverse perspectives — for example, from different grade spans, content areas, and specialized roles (e.g., ELL specialists, special education specialists, content specialists, instructional coaches, counselors) — who will add important insight to the assessments students take in those areas. District leaders should also strive to ensure that focus groups and surveys are demographically representative of the local teaching force, taking into consideration, for example, race/ethnicity, gender, and years of classroom experience.

Key questions to ask about engaging educators and school leaders in the inventory process:

- How should educators and school leaders be involved in the leadership of the assessment inventory process?
- How should educators and school leaders be convened or surveyed to help provide feedback and information about assessments?

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Many districts are undergoing significant demographic changes, particularly increases in ELL students and students with disabilities. Research has found that these student populations are often tested much more frequently than the general student population. Involving district and school staff with strong knowledge of assessments used with these populations in the inventory process is highly recommended.

Students with disabilities: Districts may hear concerns about assessments specifically used for students with disabilities. It is important to understand the assessments that are required for these students and to know what questions to ask when considering how to ensure that a comprehensive and coherent assessment system exists for all students in a district. The nearly 6 million children and youth with disabilities who receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are a heterogeneous group. They include primarily students with learning disabilities and speech-language disabilities but also students with intellectual disabilities, autism, blindness and other visual impairments, and deafness and other hearing impairments, to name just a few of the categories of disability. Assessment approaches for these students vary and reflect a need for differentiation in these approaches. For an extended discussion of assessments for students with disabilities and additional guidance and recommendations, please see on the Achieve website *Special Education Assessment Systems: Considerations for the Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts*. That guidance and recommendations are summarized briefly below.

Students with Disabilities Guidance and Recommendations:

- Include special education personnel in discussions about a comprehensive assessment system.
- Include special education assessments in the district assessment inventory.
- Identify assessments used to meet special education purposes that are duplicative or are similar to other assessments used for other diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes.
- Ensure that assessments taken by students for special education purposes in a comprehensive assessment system are of high quality and considered useful by those who implement them and use the results to take action.

- Assessment literacy efforts should include both general educators and special educators, and professional development should include information about students with disabilities and the assessments they take.
- Ensure that parents are informed of the intent and purposes of assessments in educational and postschool planning.

English language learners: Roughly one in 10 students in the U.S. public school system is classified as ELL. Exact estimates vary because there is no common definition of an EL; definitions vary by state and in the case of some states, by local district policy. There is agreement that the number of ELs continues to grow, and that growth is most notable in some regions of the country that have not historically had significant proportions of ELs, such as the southeast and the midwest. In Iowa the EL population continues to grow approximately 10% annually. Title I and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) both contain assessment requirements, which have separate assessment and accountability provisions, for ELs. Their assessment scores are included as part of the accountability system after they have attended a U.S. school for a certain number of years (three years for reading/language arts, one year for mathematics). Under Title III, districts are required to annually assess ELs on state English language proficiency (ELP) assessments aligned to the state ELP standards. Students must be assessed annually in each of the four domain areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, regardless of whether they have scored “proficient” in any given domain area (i.e., banking of proficiency for any given domain is not allowed). For an extended discussion of assessments for ELs and additional guidance and recommendations, please see *Special Education Assessment Systems: Considerations for the Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts*. That guidance and recommendations are summarized briefly below.

EL Guidance and Recommendations

- The EL expertise in the district should be engaged in all phases of the inventory process and not just in portions that concern ELL student identification, the monitoring and exiting process, or the assessment of students' English language development. ELLs are the collaborative responsibility of all school staff, and attention to their progress should not occur as a specialized event.
- All content assessments should be evaluated on the basis of alignment to a state's CCR standards for all students, and for ELs, with respect to the quality of accommodations (including assessment through the native language) made available, differentiated by individual student needs.
- All ELP assessments should be evaluated with respect to alignment to a state's ELP standards, if the standards are judged to correspond to the state's CCR standards, as measured through the English Language Proficiency Development (ELPD) Framework.
- The student assessment inventory process should examine the EL student reclassification process and determine which assessments are part of district (rather than state) policy and whether the district-controlled assessments are appropriate. If not, the committee should decide whether to replace district assessments with standards-aligned assessments or remove the assessment if it is not required by the state.
- The student assessment inventory process should examine processes that address EL students with disabilities and look at the assessments used for these students. Assessments that differentiate and do not confound regular language acquisition processes with language-related disabilities should be retained and enhanced, but assessment approaches that do not incorporate students' native languages should be considered for elimination.

- Assessment literacy efforts should include the participation of both general educators and EL educators and specialists, and professional development should include information about ELLs and the assessments they take.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS AROUND ASSESSMENT LITERACY

Once a district has collected information about its assessments, concerns around "assessment literacy" often arise. Many districts going through the assessment inventory process have noted that district and school staff need additional assessment literacy to understand how to interpret and use assessment results and how to make informed decisions about the quality and alignment of the assessments used in the district. It may be valuable for districts using the assessment inventory process to deliver professional development on assessment literacy prior to, or immediately following, the process to ensure a baseline understanding among educators and other stakeholders of assessment purpose and use. Several states and regional service centers provide online or in-person professional development on assessment literacy to help district leaders and teachers become smarter about the assessments they are administering and using. For example, both the [Illinois State Board of Education](#) and [Kansas State Department of Education](#) have developed online assessment literacy training modules for school leaders and educator.

Assessment Literacy Guidance and Recommendations:

- Consider providing assessment literacy professional development prior to the inventory process to build common understanding of assessment types (e.g., formative, benchmark, summative), assessment terms, or specific assessments used in the district.
- Include questions on assessment purpose and use in surveys and focus groups of teachers.
- Contact state education agencies and AEAs that may have professional development resources and services to support assessment literacy development.

Key questions to ask about assessment literacy:

- What is the current level of assessment literacy among district and school staff?
- What existing resources can the district access and use prior to and following the assessment inventory to increase assessment literacy among district and school staff and the broader community?
- How can the district guarantee that school and district staff hired after the inventory process will have the same assessment literacy as existing staff?

BECOMING SMART CONSUMERS OF TESTING PRODUCTS

The inventory analysis will likely raise questions about the quality and alignment of assessments, both locally developed and vendor purchased. For example, many vendor testing products make claims about alignment to the CCSS or other state standards, but often there is no independent verification of those claims. As of yet, there is no Consumer Reports-type guide to commercial testing products to address those issues, but some important steps are being taken to provide unbiased, objective information to districts. For example, the Oregon Department of Education provides [a set of online resources](#) for districts to evaluate the quality of assessments, whether they are purchased from outside vendors or developed internally. The Council of Chief State School Officers' [high-quality assessment principles](#) and [criteria for procuring and evaluating high-quality assessments](#), while primarily aimed at state education agencies, are also helpful guides to selecting and evaluating assessments.

Smart Consumers of Testing Products Guidance and Recommendations:

- Ask vendors for information on their assessment products' alignment and quality. Ask if they can provide independent evaluations of those products against high quality criteria.
- Use objective and unbiased resources to evaluate and compare vendor products.
- Consider collaborating with other districts or a regional service center to evaluate the quality of

district-developed and vendor- purchased assessments.

Key questions to ask to become smart consumers of testing products:

- What is the district's capacity to evaluate vendor testing products and internally developed district assessments?
- For vendor testing products, is there independent verification of alignment to state standards?
- How was or is the quality of each assessment determined?

MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

ADVANCING THE INVENTORY ANALYSIS TO RECOMMENDATIONS

After a district has collected information on its assessments and received input from key stakeholders across the community, that information will need to be analyzed and shaped into a set of actionable recommendations to keep, modify, or eliminate assessments. It is important that districts develop a student-level perspective by looking first across all assessments students take at a particular grade level or grade band and then at particular student needs and characteristics. The next step is identifying assessments that the district will continue to administer, ensuring a shared understanding of their intended purpose(s) and actual use(s) and determining if any changes are necessary (e.g., to improve test quality, alignment, or utility), as well as identifying the assessments that may be eliminated or need significant changes. Finally, it is critical that as districts build toward recommendations, they re-engage key stakeholders to review potential options and decision points.

Analysis Guidance and Recommendations

- Develop a student-level perspective on the assessments students are taking. One way of doing this is to look at all of the assessments that a student takes while he or she is in a particular grade level or grade band (e.g., grades K–5).
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for all assessments that includes:
 - Monetary cost — total and per student for the assessment;

- Administrative cost — managing, administering, and implementing the assessment, which includes both personnel (e.g., district, principal, teachers, proctors) and resources (e.g., paper, technology);
- Opportunity cost — the benefit, value, or resources that must be foregone to implement an assessment (e.g., personnel needed to administer one assessment vs. another, technology used for an assessment that is not available for instruction); and
- Analysis cost — the amount of time required to analyze assessment results.
- Identify the assessments that will continue to be administered and clarify if any of these assessments need to be changed to ensure that they are high quality and effective for their intended uses. Following this step, districts can identify the assessments that seem to be on the table for elimination or significant changes.
- Conduct a more detailed analysis to help districts start building toward recommendations. As districts reach this last step, it will be crucial to re-engage teachers, parents, students, or others who deeply informed the inventory process to review potential options and decision points. Doing so will help ensure sound recommendations and a solid base of support for them.
- Are there assessments that are not being used for their intended uses?
- Are there assessments that users do not find useful? Of these, what might be the causes for lack of usefulness?
- Are there assessments that users do not find useful? Why do users not find these assessments useful?
- For assessments that are identified as ones that need to continue to be administered, are there certain assessments that need to be changed to improve the quality, alignment, reporting, or other aspects of the assessment?
- For assessments that are identified as not being used for their intended uses, not useful, or redundant, analyze the potential options and considerations:
 - Stop administering the assessment.
 - Are there any current contracts or other operational issues that need to be considered?
 - If an assessment of this kind is needed to comply with a law or policy, or has critical instructional uses, would the district need to replace the assessment with another assessment? If so, what criteria would the district use to select an assessment that better serves its needs?
 - Continue administering the assessment but make significant changes in design, content, and/or implementation. **n** What design, content, and/or administration changes are needed?
 - If the assessment was developed within the district, who will need to be involved in the redesign or restructuring process?
 - If the assessment is off the shelf, will the vendor be amenable to working with the district for changes? Can the district work with other districts?

Key questions to ask around advancing the inventory analysis into recommendations:

- What assessments are essential for students to continue taking because of clear requirements in law or policy? And what is the law/policy?
- What assessments have real benefits for students, teachers, parents, and the system as a whole?
- What assessments provide clear feedback and actionable data?
- What assessments are high quality and aligned to the state’s standards?
- Of the assessments identified, what might strengthen the use of assessment results for their intended uses?

- Continue administering the assessment as is or with minor changes.
 - If the process has identified problems with this assessment, why will the district recommend continuing as is? What mitigating factors are involved?
- What evidence will teachers, parents, and district leaders need to see to be assured that this process has explored all options?
- Who has the authority to act on the recommendations? What is the timeline for making decisions about assessments, and where are appropriate points to take action (e.g., contract renewal, school board meetings, and district strategic planning)?

COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING

TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Communications and messaging should be woven throughout each phase of the assessment inventory process, not just at the end. As described earlier, using surveys and focus groups with multiple audiences are a necessary and important part of “taking the temperature” on testing in the district and community. However, districts will need a more robust communications and messaging strategy to signal to key stakeholders — teachers, parents, students, school board members, community leaders, and media — that their concerns are being taken seriously and to ensure that the final decisions are not a surprise. Additionally, a lack of familiarity with assessments can leave audiences confused. To counter this confusion, districts must develop clear and consistent messaging that explains assessments effectively to audiences unfamiliar with education issues.

Transparency and Communications Guidance and Recommendations:

- Define the specific goals the district is trying to achieve and over what timeframe. Being clear on what actions the district wants to influence — and who has the authority to take those actions — will set the stage for a breakthrough effort.
 - Identify key partners and supporters who will help the district reach its goals.
- Identify opposition or obstacles that may prevent the district from reaching its goals.
- Develop a general message framework.
 - Determine the central message (e.g., address concerns about overtesting by reviewing all tests and making decisions about which ones are most valuable to teachers, parents, and students).
 - Identify three key high-level messages to deliver in support of the central message (e.g., tests help teachers make decisions about how best to help students) and develop supporting talking points, as appropriate, for each of the three high-level messages.
 - Identify the audiences relevant to achieving the district’s goals (start with the partners and opposition groups identified earlier).
 - Prioritize the identified audiences as HIGH, MEDIUM, or LOW based on their importance to achieving the district’s goals.
 - Create an audience profile for each relevant group, determining if they (1) support the effort already, (2) are inclined to support it, (3) have no opinion or knowledge (likely a high number early in the process), (4) are inclined to oppose it, or (5) are opposed.
 - Map messages for each audience. Using the audience profiles developed above, customize the messages and talking points as appropriate for each audience, starting with the HIGHS that are 1s or 2s.
 - Develop a communications and messaging plan that is aligned with the overall assessment inventory process.
- Plan specific outreach activities. Starting with the friendliest, most familiar audiences and building outward is recommended. This approach is the most effective long-term communications approach, but it does require adequate time and resources. Key steps include:
 - Identify the primary channels (e.g., email, website, press release, public forum, social media, etc.) available to communicate the district’s message to the audiences mapped above.

- Determine which channels will have the most influence with the district’s audiences.
 - Questions to ask:
 - Who influences these audiences?
Examples: other parents, teachers unions, students, advocates, etc.
 - Where do audience members go to get information they rely on?
Examples: newspapers, television, websites, social media, newsletters, etc.
 - What resources/voices do they trust? Examples: news stories, websites, union materials, newsletters, etc.
 - Develop shareable content and materials based on the channels above.
 - Examples: newsletter articles, tweets, district or other websites, Facebook posts, blog posts, media outreach, etc.
 - Identify, recruit, and equip third-party spokespersons.
 - Examples: teachers who were part of the inventory process, parents and students who were part of focus groups on testing, etc.
 - Identify and secure communications opportunities for members of the campaign and for third party spokespersons to engage in the channels identified above. Examples: media interviews, speaking opportunities, guest blogs, columns/ articles, etc.
 - Measure progress to gauge how well the process is going — and what changes should be made. No campaign ever plays out as predicted, so the adjustments made along the way can make the difference between winning and losing. To keep efforts on track, the district should:
 - Meet periodically with key leaders (monthly to start) to evaluate the effectiveness of communications efforts to date (lessons learned sessions);
 - Apply lessons to adjust messaging, media, and audience focus as needed; and > Share the district’s experiences with other districts, the state education agency, local media, etc.
 - Commit to transparency by publicly reporting the results of the assessment inventory, recommendations, and actions taken.
- Key questions to ask around transparency and communications:**
- Who will be the spokesperson(s) for results of the assessment inventory?
 - What are the district’s goals and anticipated outcomes around conducting the assessment inventory? Around releasing the results of the inventory process?
 - Who are the target audiences/groups the district wants to engage around its efforts to inventory testing in the district? Who does the district need to have involved to make progress on changing what tests are given and the perception of testing in the district?
 - What are the three key messages the district wants to convey to all stakeholders (e.g., we reviewed all tests given in the district, we give too many/too few, we have a plan to improve), and what are the additional messages, building on the key three, that the district may want to use with specific audiences?
 - What communications channels does the district plan to use to deliver the message (e.g., media outlets, PTOs, PSAs, social networks, etc.)? What other activities are worth investing in to reach key audiences (e.g., roundtables, forums, or press conferences)? What types of advocacy materials should the district create (e.g., executive summaries of results, fact sheets, etc.)? Where will the district post the results?
 - Within the communications and outreach plans, what are the various phases of work to ensure a smooth roll out of messages, materials, and targeted outreach, aligned with major milestones in the process?