



ESTABLISHING AN ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Norwalk Public Schools (NPS) is engaging in a self-reflection of their curriculum, assessment, and instructional approach to support students and inform educators. As part of this work, NPS is in the process of redesigning its strategic operating plan with a focus on equitable access to educational opportunities. Dr. Alexandra Estrella, as part of her exploration into school operations, strategies, and approaches to teaching and learning has identified the need to:

- Establish an assessment plan and strategy across the district;
- Leverage assessment information from multiple sources to inform instructional practice and planning;
- Promote assessment literacy among educators; and
- Mitigate over-reliance on the Smarter Balanced Assessment summative assessment for instructional decisions.

While the historical goals named in NPS's [strategic operating plan](#) that address increasing performance expectations, narrowing gaps among student groups, and improving the conditions for learning continue to be relevant, emphasizing the purpose and role of a comprehensive assessment system will serve as a useful tool in clarifying how these goals will be achieved. To this end, partners from the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (the Center) worked closely with NPS to understand and help articulate the intended role of assessment in supporting the district's vision for teaching and learning. At the same time, the Center facilitated several focus groups with educators and school administrators to understand how and what assessments are predominantly used in classrooms and schools, determine their utility in supporting instruction, and identify the highest priority information gaps and needs. In combination, this information provides the foundation for the recommendations represented in this report.

Purpose and Structure of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information and guidance that supports NPS define its strategy related to the design and implementation of balanced systems of assessment that provide stakeholders with useful, coherent information about students' attainment of the state content standards. The following introduction is intended to orient the district with some key context before laying out several foundational concepts, which will be important to consider as readers review the recommendations presented.

Coherence cannot be assumed. Coherence hails from intentional efforts to ensure that student expectations and learning goals are clearly and consistently represented in curriculum, instruction and assessment. Designing an assessment strategy that concurrently supports coherence and privileges educators' autonomy in making instructional and curricular decisions is a complex endeavor. It requires careful consideration of:

- The varied ways in which stakeholders at different levels of the educational system (district, school, classroom, individual/parent) want to use assessment information;

The purpose of this report is to provide information and guidance that supports NPS define its strategy related to the design and implementation of balanced systems of assessment that provide stakeholders with useful, coherent information about students' attainment of the state content standards.

- The intended role of the district in supporting schools and educators design and implement balanced assessment systems; and
- The trade-offs associated with different designs.

More importantly, to support the utility of assessments as a tool for teaching and learning, coherence requires the specification of learning goals that reflect a clear understanding of how student learning is intended to progress within a domain. If operationalized in a manner that clarifies what is expected, learning goals can serve as the common through-line that supports coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment across schools.

This report does not provide a specific solution or strategy, instead it reflects on best practices related to the design and selection of system components to outline options and recommendations for NPS' consideration. Stakeholders prioritize different types of information, so no one assessment solution will meet everyone's needs. However, there are clear, common priorities that NPS can work to address. The recommendations and considerations highlighted in this report reflect different types and degrees of NPS involvement in meeting the information needs of stakeholders. Which option is best depends on the role the district wants to play in defining the expectations for student learning and how they are assessed.

This document is structured in three parts. Part 1 provides the foundation for our recommendations. We discuss the information and documents that were collected and reviewed, as well as highlight key design principles. In Part 2 we discuss feedback and recommendations related to the selection and use of a district common assessment. We summarize stakeholder feedback related to the desired use of scores from district common assessments and discuss the manner in which different priorities necessitate different designs. Finally in Part 3 we consider how the district can move forward based on the feedback received and offer recommendations related to supporting schools and educators implement improved assessment practices.

PART 1: FOUNDATION AND BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations discussed within this report were generated using information collected through document scans, focus groups, district feedback, and best practices related to assessment system design. A brief summary of information considered is provided below. It is followed by a discussion of the foundational best practices reflected in the remaining sections of this report.

Data Collection Methods

The following pieces of evidence were included in our data collection methods:

- 1) **Document scan:** The document scan included a review of strategic planning documents and the current suite of formal assessments required by the district at the time the scan was conducted (spring/summer 2021), which include:
 - a) Smarter Balanced in ELA and Math, grades 3-8;
 - b) aimswebPlus Reading and Math benchmarks and progress monitoring, grades K-8;
 - c) NGSS CT State science test, grades 5,8, and 11;
 - d) College Board PSAT Evidence Based Reading and Writing and Math, grades 8-11;
 - e) CT –SAT, Evidence Based Reading and Writing and Math, grade 11; and
 - f) LAS Links in reading, writing, speaking and listening for MLL in grades K-12
- 2) **District feedback:** To obtain a clearer vision of the district’s vision for teaching and learning and the role of assessment (in general and for different stakeholders) within that vision, NPS district leaders were asked to work together to respond to a series of questions adapted from tools developed by the Center (see Appendix A). The answers to these questions were the focus of subsequent internal discussions between Center and NPS staff.
- 3) **Focus groups:** Focus group discussions were aimed at understanding how and what assessments are currently used and the assessment types, assessment characteristics, data, resources and supports believed to be most beneficial in supporting educators engage in effective instruction.

Focus group participants included two sets of educators: exemplary educators and educators who were representative of typical school personnel, each of which are described below. In addition, focus group participants included two sets of administrators who were able to provide complementary perspectives related to how assessments can and should be used among educators. A list of the focus group participants is provided in Appendix B.

Exemplary Educators. Exemplary educators included those from elementary, middle, and high school who were perceived by NPS personnel to have a strong grasp on how to use assessment data to inform their instructional practice. Participants were interviewed across three, 2-hour meetings. Participants were selected by district leadership based on recommendations from school leaders. The goal of working with these educators was to understand “best practices” in NPS and clarify the outcomes, interactions, and uses the district’s assessment strategy should strive to emulate.

Representative Educators. Representative educators included those across programmatic levels who were perceived as representing the typical educator with respect to understanding how to select and use assessments. Participants were selected by district leadership based on recommendations from school leaders. Elementary, middle, and high school educators were convened separately. The goal of working with these educators was to understand how different types of assessments and assessment information are currently used within the

district, educators' beliefs regarding the utility of available information, and the types of assessments and resources necessary to inform educators' efforts.

Administrators. Administrators included principals and assistant principals from across programmatic levels. Administrators were invited from all schools in the district to participate in a single 1-hour meeting. Separate interviews were conducted for elementary and middle/high school principals.

Foundational Concepts

In order to establish a coherent assessment strategy, it is important to first understand the characteristics of assessment systems. The call for balanced (or rebalancing) assessment systems comes from recognizing that most assessments do not serve the primary purpose of assessment, which is to improve teaching and learning (Marion, et al, 2018). Assessment systems, in order to support the improvement of teaching and learning, must be coherently linked, comprehensively provide multiple sources of evidence, and continuously provide information about student progress over time (NRC, 2001). Furthermore, assessment systems should also be useful and efficient to minimize the burden and maximize the impact to educators and administrators (Chattergoon & Marion, 2016).

In order to establish a coherent assessment strategy, it is important to first understand the characteristics of assessment systems.

Based on our focus group discussions it is clear that a variety of different assessments are being administered across the district beyond those mandated by NPS. These assessments vary greatly with respect to their intended purpose and use, how and when they were developed, and how broadly they are being used. The assessments and resources most frequently referenced in focus group discussions are listed below.

Table 1. Assessment Types and Examples Referenced during Focus Group Discussions

ASSESSMENT TYPE	EXAMPLES
Teacher/School specific used to inform day-to-day instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exit tickets • Curriculum-aligned lessons & unit-based assessments • Authentic performance based assessments • Tasks and items aligned to the CCSS (identified on web or in text books)
District developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPS common formative assessments • HS math end-of-course assessments
Curriculum embedded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrative Math cool downs • Schoolwide embedded language arts assessments • Curriculum embedded ELP skills assessments
Commercially developed assessments and resources	<p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SBAC Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) • Core Phonics screener & progress monitoring assessments • Fountas & Pinnel • Words Their Way • Exemplars: Performance tasks & standards-based assessment rubrics • Symphony Math Benchmark Assessments • DIBELS <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Wide Writing Rubrics • Hill for Literacy Continuum • NEWSLA

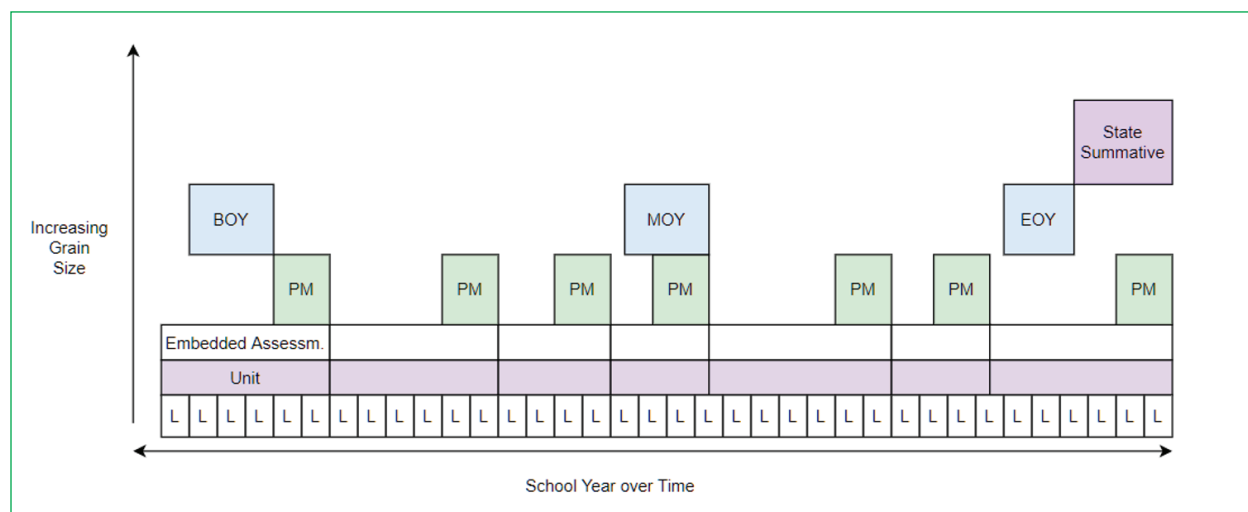
On several occasions, educators and administrators suggested that there was not a clear, coherent strategy directing the specific set of assessments administered within a school or by an educator. New assessments may be developed or pulled from the web to meet an immediate need, while existing assessments continue to be administered out of habit.

A strong assessment strategy is designed in consideration of the information needed by different stakeholders to support decision making. It serves to articulate what assessments belong in the system, the resources needed to support implementation, and the implementation plan to meet overall goals. Central to an assessment strategy are the assessment-specific ideas of alignment, sequencing, and grain size. *Alignment* refers to the degree to which assessment items (individually and as a set) match the expectations of the content standards; however, alignment is more comprehensive than a simple match. Assessments, regardless of their focus at the state, district, or classroom level, should demonstrate alignment to the standards they are designed to assess. Alignment can be conceptualized as a function of the following three key constructs:

- **Match:** The degree to which assessment items connect to standards;
- **Depth:** The degree to which assessment items cover the cognitive complexity of the standards; and
- **Breadth:** The degree to which the set of items on an assessment (e.g., as operationalized in a blueprint or set of test specifications) cover the full range of the standards, consistent with the intended interpretation and use.

Sequencing focuses on the timing of an assessment. For example, a test may be sequenced for administration at fixed points in the school year for all students (i.e. calendar-based timing), directly after students have been sufficiently exposed to certain standards, or when curriculum is intended to be delivered. Finally, grain size refers to the breadth of content targeted by an assessment or set of assessments. *Grain size* is defined in consideration of the intended purpose of each assessment and the set of assessments as a whole. For example, depending on the intended interpretation and use, a single assessment (e.g., state summative assessment) or a series of assessments may be designed to cover the full breadth of the standards (e.g., beginning-, middle-, and end-of-year assessments). Conversely, one or more assessments may be designed to focus on a tight set of standards (e.g., curriculum embedded or progress-monitoring assessments). An example of differences in sequencing and grain size is presented in the figure below.

Figure 1. Example Grain Size and Assessment Frequency



In the figure above, the L refers to lesson plans, the PM refers to progress monitoring assessments, and BOY, MOY, and EOY refer to beginning-, middle-, and end-of-year assessments, respectively. As the grain size of an assessment increases, it will cover a larger set of standards. This provides for more summative inferences about what students know, but will be less responsive to in-the-moment instruction. As this example suggests, the progress monitoring assessments and the beginning, middle, and end-of-year assessments often occur in close proximity or at the same time. Therefore it will be important to understand the degree to which each assessment provides important, high quality, and unique information that justify the time and cost spent. Depending on the nature and frequency of information collected with embedded assessments, it may be determined one type or instance of the PM, BOY, MOY or EOY assessments is not needed.

In addition to the foundational concepts related to assessment systems, it is important to differentiate between the ways in which assessment scores can be interpreted. Depending on the design of the assessment and the ability to compare scores over time, performance can be conceptualized as potentially communicating status, improvement, or growth. These concepts are defined below (see D’Brot, 2017):

- **Status:** The academic performance of a student or collection of students at a single point in time typically relative to some criterion or grade-level expectation.
- **Improvement:** The change in performance over time within grades or across grades, without following the same student or collection of students, typically relative to some criterion or grade-level expectation.
- **Growth:** The academic performance of the same student or same collection of students over two or more points in time. This can be compared to a criterion (e.g., progress toward expectations over time) or a norm (i.e., comparisons relative to other students, classrooms, schools, or other units of aggregation).

While many assessments claim to provide growth-based interpretations, the design of the assessment and the characteristics of the assessment scale determine which interpretations of growth are supported (e.g., progress toward grade level expectations, grade level proficiency, college and career readiness).

Throughout this report, we reference performance as encompassing both status and growth, and both are important to clarifying learning goals for students and educators. Student growth provides a more nuanced indication of how well students are making progress toward defined expectations, but criterion-based status expectations are necessary to establish a clear end-point against which students and educators can work. Both growth and status, however, require assessments that are appropriately aligned to the standards and allow for comparisons in scores over time and across students.

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Grounding Decisions in the District's Vision for Teaching and Learning

In order to make decisions about the types of assessments needed, it is important to first articulate what success looks like and how each stakeholder in the system can help facilitate that success. As part of NPS's assessment strategy development, district leaders examined their goals and priorities for students, educators, and leaders. These are summarized in the table below.

Table 2. Select Elements of the District's Vision for Teaching and Learning

STAKEHOLDERS	KEY FEATURES
<p>Students: What does success look like in terms of skills to be demonstrated?</p>	<p>Students have the ability to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand big ideas and essential understandings • Understand interdisciplinary transfer of knowledge and skills • Demonstrate problem solving, critical thinking and conducting independent or collaborative research • Demonstrate confidence, creativity, and self-direction <p>Additional Skills for Multilingual Learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate self-advocacy • Communicate across a broad range of settings • Effectively work with mainstream peers
<p>Students: How will students acquire this knowledge?</p>	<p>Provide opportunities to think critically and practice desired competencies through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary teaching strategies • Feedback on performance from teachers and peers • Cognitively demanding tasks and project-based learning • Culturally responsive pedagogy • Social emotional learning <p>Additional Opportunities for Multilingual Learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide parents with strategies to support students at home
<p>Teachers: What are teachers' primary roles in facilitating student learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect instruction to essential questions or key learning goals • Use assessment information formatively to provide students with feedback • Provide time for students to give and receive feedback on performance relative to clearly defined expectations (e.g., a rubric) • Communicate effectively with parents around strengths and needs
<p>Principals: What is the principal's role in supporting high quality instruction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate and model clear expectations for teaching and learning • Observe teachers and provide immediate high-leverage feedback • Stay current on best practices, research related to teaching and learning • Closely monitor assessment data for patterns/trends to inform instruction and decision making • Identify and develop action plans for their own person growth • Prioritize and resource time for PL among teachers • Use a common, understood language to provide feedback and support.
<p>District Leaders: What is the role of district leaders in supporting instruction and effective leadership?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe principals and provide immediate high-leverage feedback • Work with teachers/leaders to establish clear expectations for student performance and how to evaluate ; • Clarify the district's vision and priorities and follow through on initiatives • Provide resources and support to help staff improve

Based on the ideas presented in the district's vision for teaching and learning, a key priority is to provide all students with equitable learning opportunities and to provide accelerated learning opportunities for students who are historically underperforming or underserved. This will require the district to implement assessments that enable educators and administrators to monitor how well students are accelerating based on defensible measures of growth. NPS' overall assessment strategy will need to take into account how assessment tools and resources can be prioritized to reflect the values and roles reflected in these descriptions, with a particular emphasis on monitoring the impact of educational opportunities using both status *and* growth.

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PART 2: CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO A COMMON DISTRICT ASSESSMENT

This section considers the district’s vision for teaching and learning in combination with feedback from stakeholders to reflect on different options related to the potential role of a common district-wide interim assessment and highlight the specific assessment characteristics necessary to support that role.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Conversations with stakeholders revealed differences in the perceived value of a common district interim assessment. These differences stemmed from a variety of factors—some specific to the interim assessment currently in place (e.g., ease of access to data; clarity around student expectations and appropriate data interpretation and use). Others related to the type, frequency, and quality of information typically afforded by commercially developed interim assessment products (e.g., alignment, rigor, utility for informing instruction).

In general, school and district leaders saw greater value in the common district assessment than educators. This is not surprising given the way in which these assessments are designed and administered, which result in data that support program evaluation and monitoring goals to a greater extent than goals focused on informing day-to-day classroom instruction. The table below summarizes some of the common, high priority uses of common interim assessment data articulated by different stakeholder groups. Please note that throughout the table, the use of performance data refers to both status and growth information, but each interpretation will require certain assessment characteristics to be met (e.g., large enough grain size, comparability of scores, monitoring of progress over time).

Table 3. Interim Assessment Priorities

STAKEHOLDERS	HIGH PRIORITY USES	INFORMATION TO SUPPORT USE
District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the impact of district-level programmatic decisions on student success • Identify and reward staff successes • Identify disproportionate gaps in achievement outcomes and monitor student progress toward meeting end-of-year outcomes (between and among schools) • Compare results across schools to identify those in greatest need of support based on those that are lower performing and demonstrating little or no growth • Evaluate educators’ attainment of and growth toward SLOs (i.e., using a common measure) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and aggregate performance data¹ (e.g., by school, grade, course, educator, and student group) • Relative performance across schools and educators within the district and relative to national/state norms (where applicable)

¹ Performance data includes measures of status and growth. Measures of growth (whether criterion- or norm-referenced) will provide a more granular ability to monitor progress of student learning, whereas measures of status can articulate defined expectations for students and educators.

Table 3. Interim Assessment Priorities continued

STAKEHOLDERS	HIGH PRIORITY USES	INFORMATION TO SUPPORT USE
School Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform data-driven conversations within professional learning communities that inform teaching practices • Identify areas requiring additional instructional focus or professional development (i.e., for a teacher within a grade or course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and aggregate performance data (by grade, course, educator) • Aggregate performance data by reportable category or standard
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress monitor students for evidence of accelerated learning • Evaluate student attainment of targeted standards • Identify instructional groupings • Inform discussions with parents • Evaluate attainment of teacher-defined student learning objectives (SLOs) • Identify students who need remediation to be on track to proficiency on SBAC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student predicted performance data on state summative assessment • Information about student progress (in general and relative to expected progress) • Information about student performance relative to other students

Based on responses from the focus group sessions, we offer the following considerations to NPS:

- District and school leaders prioritize aggregate data over student level data. While not noted by district and school leaders, it is important to distinguish between status and growth to help educators monitor student progress against standards over time.
- Educators prioritize student-level data as a means of benchmarking achievement and monitoring student progress toward a set of common expectations, but do not rely on it to inform or modify day-to-day instruction.
- The uses articulated in the table above are predicated on stakeholders’ understanding of the manner and degree to which the assessment reflects the expectations a) defined in state standards and b) measured on the state summative assessment. If this information is absent, unclear, or suggests poor alignment, the assessment becomes less of a tool and more of a compliance activity. Resources and activities necessary to support appropriate use of interim assessment results will be discussed in Part 3.

It is important to point out that all stakeholders agreed that having a common interim assessment that provided a common benchmark and basis for comparing results across students, classrooms, and schools was a necessary component of the districts’ assessment system. However, stakeholders varied on the degree to which they believed this assessment would provide the information they needed to best support student learning.

The Role of Interim Assessment in Supporting Teaching and Learning

Off-the-shelf interim assessments products are designed to meet the needs of a broad array of potential customers. While some customization may be available, in most cases the content (e.g. item bank), administration, and reporting elements of the system are fixed. While features vary within and across vendors’ products, the designs tend to fall into three general categories that reflect the manner in which they are administered and the inferences/uses the results are intended to support.

Table 4. Designs and Uses of Interim Assessments.

DESIGNS	ADMINISTRATION	COMMON USES	EXAMPLES
Fixed: A single assessment that measures the entire domain	Administered to all students at defined points throughout school year	Monitor and communicate school/ class/student progress or growth in domain; program evaluation; inform instructional groupings; identify students that need support to be on-track; screening for intervention	SBAC Comprehensive; I-Ready Diagnostic, NWEA Map; Renaissance Star
Block: Multiple assessments, each measuring a chunk of the domain	Administered to all students in class as appropriate or necessary given a teacher's defined scope and sequence	Monitor progress, growth, and/or screening for intervention within defined domains; identify skills requiring remediation within a defined category or subset of a domain (e.g., fractions, writing, proportional reasoning)	SBAC Interim Assessment Blocks
Modular: Multiple assessments, each measuring a very small chunk of the domain	Administered to one or more students in a class on an as needed basis	Determine student mastery of specific skills or standards; identify students' misconceptions as a means of determining next steps for instruction; evaluate a specific pre-requisite skill prior to a new unit of instruction.	SBAC Focused Interim Assessment Blocks; I-Ready Standards Mastery

Note: Adapted from Dadey, 2019 RILS Presentation

In addition to the designs described above, many vendors are beginning to offer item banks for educators to use in developing on-demand assessments. Again, any commercially developed assessment will need to be evaluated for alignment and how expectations are operationalized in comparison to standard match, depth, and breadth.

As suggested in Table 2 and reiterated in focus group discussions, a commercial interim assessment will only go so far in supporting the NPS' vision for teaching and learning which prioritizes cognitively demanding, culturally relevant tasks, and authentic demonstrations of student learning. In addition, based on conversations with the district, there is no intent to mandate a common curriculum that defines how, when, and what educators must teach and assess in order to meet the expectations of the standards. Given that, and consistent with feedback collected from educators and administrators, there is a clear need for district-provided resources and training that support the development of high quality classroom assessments and formative assessment strategies. These assessments and strategies can inform instruction and provide coherent information about students' progress toward meeting the expectations of the standards. A district interim assessment should reflect and support that coherence, but it cannot and should not drive coherence without a corresponding set of resources, a plan for implementation, and intent to monitor the use of assessment.

A district interim assessment should reflect and support coherence, but it cannot and should not drive coherence without a corresponding set of resources, a plan for implementation, and intent to monitor the use of assessment.

NPS must consider these factors in combination with the limitations previously discussed when articulating an appropriate role for the common district assessment and, consequently, the features necessary to support that role. To inform these discussions we provide specific recommendations below.

Recommendations

Based on the roles, priorities, and desired assessment features articulated in conversations with stakeholders, the following recommendations are presented *from an investment perspective*:

- If a commercial assessment is selected as the district's common assessment, it will be important to provide information to educators and administrators regarding the primary purpose of the assessment, what it is intended to measure, and the specific interpretations and uses it is/is not designed to support.
- Consider investing resources in a common district assessment that provides a measure of progress against grade-level standards, but do so with only as much frequency as necessary to monitor growth over time for a broad set of students in an effort to understand equitable educational opportunity.
- Ensure that the deployment of any common district assessment includes sufficient training about its alignment, grain size, and intended sequencing against curriculum implementation—consistent with its design and intended use.
- The assessment selected should support the district's ability to identify gaps in achievement and disparities in growth among student groups, which means that assessments must be accessible to all students and administered under conditions that support desired comparisons within and across schools.
- The assessment selected should also support the district's ability to monitor progress over time (i.e., individual student growth), which means that assessments and their scores must be sufficiently comparable to report growth meaningfully in the aggregate and across time.
- Conduct a crosswalk between the summative blueprint and the district common assessment blueprints to ensure match, depth, and breadth are comparable and interpretable.
- Articulate how the assessment reflects the district's understanding of how students gain knowledge within a content domain, as represented in other district-developed, endorsed, or adopted resources and tools (e.g. curriculum maps, learning goals, performance expectations).

While the process of assessment selection and deployment is critical, the district will also have to consider the specific assessment characteristics necessary to serve the multiple needs identified by educators, administrators, and district staff. Some of these characteristics (e.g., frequency of administration, granularity) will depend on NPS' decision related to the highest priority use of results; however, the following assessment characteristics are desired by educators across NPS for any assessment, regardless of use.

If a commercial assessment is selected as the district's common assessment, it will be important to provide information to educators and administrators regarding the primary purpose of the assessment, what it is intended to measure, and the specific interpretations and uses it is/is not designed to support.

For any assessment, the district will need to ensure the following:

- The assessment blueprint and items are aligned to the standards, using the more complete definition of alignment as presented in the Foundational Concepts Chapter of this report.
- The assessment is accompanied by documentation that clearly specifies the purpose of the assessment.
- Any information necessary to ensure reported scores are used and interpreted correctly are outlined in reporting specifications and made clear to educators and administrators. These reporting specifications should be well documented, provided to educators, and reinforced through training.
- The “footprint” of the assessment (i.e., its impact on decision making and required administration time) matches the intended use. For example, as information needs increase (e.g., the amount of diagnostic information vs. more frequent monitoring of progress toward end-of-grade level expectations using student growth), the number of assessments or the length of each assessment is likely to increase.
- The target sampling domain matches the intended interpretations and uses of results. For example, if the primary goal is to understand the degree to which students are
 - Meeting the **full range of grade-level expectations**, the complete set of grade-level content will need to be covered in a blueprint, which functions like a mini-summative assessment. These interpretations are most appropriate for evaluative decisions.
 - Performing at a level that is consistent with, above, or below grade level **within a content domain (e.g. Math, ELA, Reading)** a computer adaptive assessment that utilizes a vertical scale and supports the administration of items that go above and below grade level will be necessary. Such interpretations are useful for monitoring status, improvement, and growth within and across years and informing differentiated support and remediation.
 - Meeting the expectations defined by a **sub-set of related content standards like a reportable category, unit, or lesson plan**, the assessment will need to specify that sub-set of related grade-level content standards clearly. These interpretations can support evaluation, progress monitoring, and potentially differentiation of instruction.
 - Meeting the expectations defined by a **specific skill or content standard** within a grade, the assessment will need to specify which skills, standards, or learning objectives are covered. Note, the smaller grain size will require more assessments to gauge student progress against standards. These interpretations are most appropriate for monitoring progress, diagnosing specific strengths or needs, or identifying challenging instructional or pedagogical content.

Educators and administrators across NPS identified two specific yet competing goals for assessments. These goals included using assessments to (1) inform student-level instructional decisions at the classroom level and (2) supporting comparisons across classrooms, schools, or student groups within the district. These two goals require different assessment designs and therefore competing assessment characteristics. The following recommendations present two alternative assessment characteristics depending on NPS’ decision regarding which use of results from the common district assessment should be prioritized:

- If intended to support instructional decisions, the district will need to ensure that
 - The grain size assessed is small enough to support improvements in student evidence of learning in reaction to classroom adjustments.
 - Administration times are short enough to avoid excessive interruptions to instruction.
 - Assessment administration requirements are flexible enough that educators can easily administer assessments in an on-demand fashion, as they will need to closely connect to the enacted curriculum.
 - Educators understand the decreased comparability of student scores across classrooms because performance changes should be responsive to instructional decisions made by classroom educators.
 - The assessments are coherent with the model of student learning reflected in other district-developed, endorsed, or adopted resources and tools (e.g., district developed assessments, curriculum materials, and learning goals).
- If intended to support comparisons across classrooms, schools, or student groups within the district,
 - The grain size is large enough to cover a sufficient breadth of the standards so that comparisons are defensible. The broader the coverage of standards, the more likely educators will be able to interpret student growth against end-of-grade-level expectations.
 - Administration times are long enough to ensure students have an opportunity to cover the content necessary to support broader comparisons.
 - Assessment administration is well-coordinated across classrooms or schools, especially if used to compare student growth across schools.
 - Educators understand how scores can be compared despite idiosyncrasies in administration conditions.

For both of these assessment uses, the reporting infrastructure will be critical to consider, especially if the assessments are administered in an electronic format. Assessments closer to the classroom may need to prioritize ease of use, flexibility, and autonomy at the teacher level so that assessments are administered in conjunction with curriculum as delivered. They will likely also require more district-provided support to inform appropriate implementation and use (e.g., curriculum aligned assessment maps). On the other hand, assessments that are intended to support broader comparisons or evaluations of a larger set of the standards may require more stringent technical designs and administration conditions (e.g., security and standardization). In this case, the district will need to determine whether the prioritized comparison is at the student-, classroom-, or school-levels within the district. If district level comparisons are necessary, a flexible interim assessment design that provides educators with non-needed instructional data will not fully meet the district's needs. The uses associated with each comparison group are presented in the table below. These should be considered by NPS to further prioritize assessment selection or design.

Assessments that are intended to support broader comparisons or evaluations of a larger set of the standards may require more stringent technical designs and administration conditions (e.g., security and standardization).

Table 5. Goals and Uses Associated with Different Comparison Levels.

INTENDED LEVEL OF COMPARISON	INTENDED GOAL	HOW DATA CAN BE USED
Classroom	Compare and aggregate the performance of students within a class	Evaluate needs for differentiated instruction within a classroom on the assessed content
School	<p>Compare the performance of students within a school</p> <p>Aggregate and compare the performance of classrooms within a school</p>	<p>Inform programmatic decisions at a school level (e.g., needs for professional development, required curricular supports, etc.)</p> <p>Inform decisions related to the need for differentiated instruction for students across classrooms within a school</p>
District	<p>Compare the performance of students within the district</p> <p>Aggregate and compare the performance schools within a district</p>	Inform programmatic decisions at a district level and support district monitoring of performance at the school level

PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE USE OF ASSESSMENTS AND RESOURCES

The preceding sections presented a series of considerations around the foundational concepts for assessment systems and strategy, along with specific assessment characteristics that align with the uses that educators and administrators identified as high-priority. Regardless of the use prioritized, the thoughtful selection of an assessment will fall short of its goals if it is not implemented with sufficient understanding of its design and its intended interpretation and use.

While the primary area of investigation for focus groups was around assessment use and information gaps, it became clear that educators and administrators had suggestions for the district to consider related to the development of assessment-related resources, curriculum-focused resources, and structures to implement those resources. Recommendations extending from these suggestions are provided in the sections that follow.

Recommendations Specific to Assessment-Related Resources

While the preceding section focused on assessment characteristics, educators and administrators also provided recommended resources to support the implementation of a potential district common assessment. These recommendations included the following:

- Develop sample items, exemplars, and additional detail about test expectations (e.g., test blueprints, scoring procedures and weighting) that help teachers understand what student knowledge, skills, and abilities are expected to look like in action.
- Develop interpretive guides and resources that inform instruction when compared to student performance on the assessment and responses to individual items or tasks (e.g., sample work, rubrics).
- Develop resources that help educators discuss the expectations of the assessment with students and families to help families understand how they can be most helpful in supporting student learning.
- Establish professional development resources and opportunities related to administering the assessment and navigating the reporting system.
- Provide ongoing support to educators and schools that inform the analysis, interpretation, and use of results appropriately.
- Provide clear information about how/if the assessment mirrors the pace and focus represented in common curriculum materials.

Recommendations Specific to Curriculum

Many of the assessment, and consequently curricular, recommendations stemmed from challenges associated with the interpretation and use of existing district assessments. As educators described how assessment results were and were not used, they clarified that a common curriculum (or at least a curriculum guide and associated assessment map) could help organize assessment selection and administration at the school and classroom levels. Based on educator and administrator feedback, the district should consider supporting the following actions:

Many of the assessment, and consequently curricular, recommendations stemmed from challenges associated with the interpretation and use of existing district assessments.

- Develop curriculum-focused resources to help educators understand the difference between standards and curriculum and the role curriculum plays in helping educators engage with the standards. This may require a scan of existing resources to determine their alignment to the standards.
- Develop common, standards-based grade/course rubrics that inform instruction and grading throughout the school year with exemplars or demonstrations of student work that represent performance at different levels or proficiency (assuming a rubric that supports scoring/grading).
- Conduct a gap analysis to identify what standards are covered by existing curriculum materials to establish a potential development plan for curriculum and curricular resources.
- Generate pacing guides focused on common thematic units that support students who transition among schools to help them maintain progress on the same topic.
- Create a unit at a glance associated with a universal set of “I can” statements, resources, and standards that would be taught within a school year.
- Develop curriculum maps and a calendar of events that inform assessment selection and administration in alignment with curriculum deployment, along with universal criteria for success.
- Establish documentation and resources that help schools identify and employ assessment, curriculum, and instruction a manner that provides coherent, timely information about student’s attainment of/progress toward prioritized learning goals.

Recommendations Specific to Structures to Support Implementation

In addition to establishing a set of resources that support assessment and curriculum implementation, educators and administrators had specific suggestions the district could consider supporting teacher and principal use of assessment results. These include the following:

- Establish a process or committee of advising educators who can help identify exemplar and annotated student work to highlight the range of performance on standards (e.g., “can-do” or “I can” statements, examples of student work at each performance level or different levels of content mastery, and rubrics against content that provides example knowledge, skills, and abilities for teachers to evaluate student growth over time).
- Establish a formalized calendar to organize what district required assessments happen at what points using key personnel at the district and schools who can serve as advisory personnel for implementation.
- Formalize structures that support communication across schools (vertically and horizontally) to understand and clarify expectations for entry and exit.
- Work with schools across the district to develop sample responses aligned with curriculum units to help teachers identify example knowledge, skills, and abilities that reflect grade-level expectations.
- Establish a district-defined common (or example) curriculum and set of associated set of curriculum embedded assessments that provide the data needed by different stakeholders (note, this would supplement a common district assessment as it serves a different purpose).
- Deliver professional development that serves to improve assessment literacy, with a focus on the appropriate use and interpretation of assessment data (e.g., how can assessment data be used to monitor student growth over time? How do educators act on different types of data/information to support instruction?).
- Provide resources tools/that inform the identification and evaluation of assessments relative to their intended use.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations and considerations highlighted in this report are intended to help NPS define an assessment strategy that aligns with the district's strategic priorities and vision for teaching and learning while, at the same time, provide stakeholders with the information and resources needed to implement that vision in practice. Because stakeholders at different levels of the educational system have different priorities and information needs, a key first step for NPS will be to identify the role it wants to play in facilitating the design of a balanced assessment system. Specifically, the degree to which it intends to dictate or structure how, when, and what is taught and assessed throughout the school year. This has implications for both the design and selection of the district common assessment as well as the range of resources and supports necessary to help educators select and implement a coherent set of assessment tools and practices.

In Part 1 of this document we provide a brief summary of NPS' existing assessments, materials, and practices that are currently in place. Additionally, we provide a series of foundational concepts that ground the recommendations in this report. In Part 2 of this document we summarize the high priority uses of interim assessment data articulated by different stakeholders. While educators and administrators agreed that a common district wide interim assessment that "benchmarks" student performance and allows for results to be compared within and across schools was important, educators indicated that the current interim assessment (i.e., AimsWeb+) did not provide the type of information needed to inform instruction or ensure students were meeting the expectations of the standards. This was due in large part to alignment issues (i.e., match, depth and breadth), but also the type and frequency of information provided, which was not detailed enough to inform decisions about appropriate next steps.

Since different interim assessment designs afford different uses (see Table 4), NPS will need to consider which uses should be the highest priority for the district's common assessment, and the implications associated with that decision. For example, an assessment that provides educators with detailed information based on a fine grain size to inform instruction will not lend itself to a standardized administration (i.e., all students testing within the same window) nor fully support the comparison of results across classrooms and schools in the absence of a district-wide guidance for curricular pacing. Similarly, a benchmark district assessment can help educators understand how their students are achieving and growing relative to others in the district (as well as potentially the nation) at fixed points in time, but this information has limited utility in the absence of information that clarifies how the assessment aligns to state content standards and the district's interpretation of those standards. It will be important to determine how commercial or locally developed assessments actually align to the state standards using the more comprehensive definition of alignment presented earlier, as well as understanding how expectations are operationalized in practice.

Different decisions represent different theories of action with respect to the role of interim assessment in supporting the district's vision for teaching and learning. Before moving forward the district should take time to broadly articulate this theory of action to ensure that the inputs and conditions necessary to support it are well understood. Specifically, NPS should answer the following questions:

It will be important to determine how commercial or locally developed assessments actually align to the state standards using the more comprehensive definition of alignment presented earlier, as well as understanding how expectations are operationalized in practice.

- What is the district’s highest priority use of data from a common interim assessment?
- What information is necessary to support that use (i.e., types of scores and interpretations)?
- What are the key features of an assessment that provides this type of information (e.g., from a content and administration perspective)?
- What information will we need a vendor to provide in order to ensure the assessment can be used as intended?
- What conditions must the district put in place in order for the information from the assessment to be used as intended?
- What information and evidence can be collected to ensure the assessment is adding value to stakeholders in the manner intended?

The district’s responses to these questions, in addition to the recommendations provided in Part 2 of this document should go a long way in defining this aspect of the district’s strategy.

Part 3 of this document summarizes recommendations to support the interpretation and use of results from the district common assessment based on discussions with stakeholders. These recommendations reflect not only on the need for information about the purpose, design, and content of the assessment, but also the link between the assessment and district’s expectations for teaching and learning as represented by the content standards. While we do not expect all of the recommendations reflected in Part 3 to be part of the district’s assessment strategy, the desire for greater clarity and consistency was a common theme. A high priority for educators and administrators alike was resources that clarify and operationalize the expectations underlying the content standards so that they are understood, taught, and evaluated in a consistent manner across classrooms and schools. This call is reflected in the recommendations specific to curriculum as well as those outlining structures to support implementation.

Focus group respondents commented that common rubrics, curriculum guides, assessment maps, and other resources could support greater consistency and coherence within and across schools. Furthermore, these resources could help improve communication among teachers in service to student learning and help ensure transient students did not fall between the cracks (i.e., due to differences in how/when grade level expectations were being addressed across schools in the district).

Additionally, NPS should identify the structures/supports necessary to inform its vision for teaching and learning while articulating its theory of action related to how and why providing those supports will help the district achieve its goals. Questions to consider include the following:

- What resources does the district need to develop to help ensure schools and educators use the district common assessment as intended?
- Given the recommendations provided by educators/administrators, what conditions need to hold in order for the district to better meet the needs of all students?
- What resources should the district generate (in coordination with educators) to help ensure that those conditions hold?
- What policies or procedures can the district implement to support the interactions and practices necessary to bring about the desired conditions?

We look forward to working with the district as it addresses these questions in service to defining a strategic plan that facilitates the use of assessment information in service to the districts vision for teaching and learning.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

Focus Group Questions for Exemplary Educators: Focus Group 1 of 3

Focus Group Interviews: Good afternoon! Welcome to the first of our two focus group interviews. As you saw in your invite letter, you have been asked to participate in these focus groups to share your perspective, expertise, and experiences around the use of assessments in your classrooms. Please keep in mind, we are trying to understand where NPS is today, how you use what you have, and whether you find value in it. Our next conversation will focus on where NPS should go. In other words, what do you think you need, what would be most valuable, and how should folks use it.

My name is Juan and this is Erika. <insert brief introduction about our experience here.>

Before we begin, we wanted to describe the purpose of the project. As a brief reminder, NPS has contracted with the Center for Assessment (that's us!) to help support the district in establishing a coherent assessment strategy. What that means is that our job is to act as a mirror to the district to help define the vision, goals, and needs of the schools and students in Norwalk, organize the available resources, and identify gaps as we establish a coherent assessment and reporting strategy to support effective teaching and learning.

You were recruited as participants for these focus groups because of your expertise using assessment information as part of your overall teaching and learning approach. We are interested in your candid thoughts related to the assessment information that is available, what might be missing, and how assessment information is best used to support student learning. Again, today's conversation is about the state of assessment information available to the district today.

We ask that everyone share their thoughts and to honor each other's perspectives without bias or judgment. We will be recording today's session solely for us to focus on the conversation and so we don't focus on taking notes. Your responses will not be attributed to any one individual and we will be anonymizing your feedback. We are looking forward to learning from you and bringing your perspective back to NPS.

With your permission, we'd like to begin.

1. We understand that the state provides Smarter Balanced and the district has most recently purchased aimsweb+ for schools. What other types of assessments are available to you or do you use on a regular basis?
 - a. Probe: Be sure to identify whether the following are available
 - i. OTS interim beyond aimsweb,
 - ii. district developed, or
 - iii. school developed/provided
 - iv. curriculum embedded
 - v. educator selected or developed
 - b. Thoughts: SBAC IABs, Illustrative math (cool downs), Running records, reading inventories, Fountas and Pinnel, Words their way,
 - c. Illustrative Math is being piloted. Others are piloting Math in practice. Others are using the old packing guides.
 - d. What are the decision points? Moving more toward IM most likely – but tough this year. Math in Practice have liked it but didn't have a lot of resources. Doesn't lend itself to remote learning.

2. Thinking about the range of assessments that we just discussed. How do you use the information from these different assessment types and how valuable are they to you in supporting your own teaching?
 - a. State summative tests (SBAC, CT State Science tests; PSAT, SAT)
 - i. *Probe: How do you use information from Smarter Balanced assessments? Do you use growth information from these tests? if so, how?*
 - b. Off-the-shelf or commercial tests that are made available by the district or purchased (e.g., aimsweb, NWEA)
 - i. *Probe: How frequently do you administer these assessments?*
 - ii. *Probe: How do you use the information from these assessments? What role do they play? How do you talk about growth or progress based on these assessments?*
 - iii. *Probe: What is the most important or useful thing about these tests (i.e., what information do they provide that you could not live without)*
 - iv. *Probe: What is the biggest drawback?*
 - c. Your own or school-developed (or provided) tests
 - i. *Probe: If available, who develops these tests?*
 - ii. *Probe: Are these common across schools? Grade-levels? Common in any other way?*
 - iii. *Probe: How are the results of these assessments used? How do you talk about or use growth with these assessments?*
 - iv. *Probe: What is the most important or useful thing about these tests (i.e., what information do they provide that you could not live without)*
 - d. Informal assessments (e.g., bell ringers, exit tickets, lesson plan check-ins)
 - i. *Probe: Is there any commonality to these tests within grades? School-wide?*
3. How appropriate are each of the assessments for students with disabilities? What about for students who are English learners?
 - a. *Probe: Students come with a variety of experiences to the classroom. How relevant are these assessments to their own cultural experiences and background?*
 - b. *Probe: Do you think that assessments reflect students' unique experiences, cultures, and upbringing? Why or why not?*
4. Think about the assessment information we've been discussing. Does this information serve to effectively supplement your instructional decisions?
 - a. *Probe: If yes, what information and how do you use it?*
 - b. *Probe: What makes this information useful to supplement your instructional decisions?*
 - c. *Probe: Which type of information is least useful to supplementing instructional decisions? Why?*
 - d. *Probe: How do existing assessment results connect to your curriculum? If not, what makes the results difficult to connect to curriculum?*
5. Is there anything else that you think we need to understand before we finish today?

Closing: Thank you for your time and thoughtfulness. We will be sending you a follow up email with a write-up of NPS's vision for teaching and learning. We look forward to connecting with you for our next focus group, next week!

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us with any questions you might have.

Focus Group Questions for Exemplary Educators: Focus Group 2 of 3

Welcome back, everyone! We're happy to see you again and are looking forward to our conversation today. We learned a tremendous amount about the ways in which you use assessment information, how it informs your own classroom assessment and instructional practices, and where there may be some challenges with respect to how/where assessment, curriculum, and instruction intersect.

Today, we will be focusing on your vision related to the role of assessment for teaching and learning and the role NPS should play in that vision. What supports do you need? What resources can NPS provide to help improve your work at the school or in the classroom?

Like last time, we asked everyone to share their thoughts and to honor each other's' perspectives without bias or judgment. We will be recording today's session solely for us to focus on the conversation and not worry about taking notes. Your responses will not be attributed to any one individual and we will be anonymizing your feedback. We are looking forward to learning from you and bringing your perspective back to NPS.

With your permission, we'd like to begin. If you would rather not be recorded, thank you for joining us and please send us any ideas via email.

Let's begin.

1. During our previous conversation, you described some of the benefits and challenges with your current common assessments, or universal screeners like aimsWeb and MAP. With regard to a common assessment that can help you universally screen students, please describe how you would like to use these assessments?
 - a. Probe: What kind of information does it provide?
 - b. Probe: What kinds of characteristics does it have (e.g. Length, frequency, content areas)?
 - c. Probe: How big of a chunk of standards should it cover? The whole year? A semester?
2. Other than screening, how else would you like to use these common assessments? What additional features would help you use the results in this manner?
3. What kind of resources should the district provide to support educators in using the data from these assessments appropriately (i.e., not extend or overuse)?
 - a. Probe: In what ways should other educators be using these data?
 - b. Probe: What kind of resources would be most helpful?
 - c. Probe: What kind of resources would educators be most likely to read/review?
 - d. Probe: What trainings would be helpful, based on what you wish you would have seen this year?
4. During our previous conversation, you described some of the characteristics of common assessments that are used for progress monitoring. Please describe the characteristics of an ideal assessment that can help you progress monitor students whether purchased or developed.
 - a. Probe: What kind of information would they provide in order to help inform your instruction?
 - b. Probe: How granular should these be? (how frequent; how long)Probe: to what extent is comparability of results across students and schools important given the way you want to use the results?

c. *Probe: How are these any better than good teaching and formative assessment practices?*

d. *Probe: If you could pick this or something like a universal screener (i.e., summative interim assessment), what's more important and why?*

5. What kind of resources would be helpful to support educators in using these data appropriately?

a. *Probe: consider things like common rubrics, common scope and sequence, common evidence statements of knowledge, skills, and abilities.*

6. What would help educators understand how to best use the results from progress monitoring assessments for this specific use (informing instructional intervention) so you don't over extend misunderstandings (e.g., lack of reliability in results if not tied to instructional pacing)?

7. Outside of these common, formal assessments what can/should the district do to facilitate improved assessment practices at the school and classroom level?

Focus Group Questions for Exemplary Educators: Focus Group 3 of 3

Welcome back, everyone! We're happy to see you again for our final focus group. The last two focus groups addressed current benefits and challenges with assessments available to you and what more informative assessments might look like. We learned about how you use assessment information, how it intersects with your own classroom assessment, and where there may be some challenges with respect to how/where assessment, curriculum, and instruction intersect.

Today, we will be focusing on what the district can do to support you in both using assessments and in your classroom practice. We will revisit supports, resources, and processes that might be beneficial.

Like last time, we asked everyone to share their thoughts and to honor each other's' perspectives without bias or judgment. We will be recording today's session solely for us to focus on the conversation and not worry about taking notes. Your responses will not be attributed to any one individual and we will be anonymizing your feedback. We are looking forward to learning from you and bringing your perspective back to NPS.

With your permission, we'd like to begin. If you would rather not be recorded, thank you for joining us and please send us any ideas via email.

Let's begin.

1. We have heard about many different types of assessments being used by teachers throughout the district, and how those might look different for early, middle, and high grade spans. What background information do you need to know about an assessment in order to best use it in your work?
2. Let's say that the district were to purchase a new assessment for all schools. Please describe the characteristics of an ideal assessment.
 - a. Probe: What should be the primary intended purpose or use of that "common" assessment
 - b. Probe: How big of a scope of the standards should it cover? All of them? Should it line up with curriculum you've delivered recently?
 - c. Probe: Should it be delivered online or on paper?
 - d. Probe: Should it include open-ended responses or performance tasks? Even if you had to hand-score it?
 - e. Probe: Who should determine when the assessment is administered? District? School admin? Teacher?
 - f. Probe: How frequently do you want to administer it?
3. Let's say that the district were to purchase a new assessment for all schools. Please describe what the ideal training around a new assessment roll out would like?
 - a. What information about the assessment must you need to know?
 - b. Who should attend the training?
 - c. How should the training be delivered?
4. In the last two focus group sessions, we have spent some time discussing the need for common resources for teachers around curriculum and assessments. Common resources might be training materials, documents, or templates, for example. What would good

resources look like that could help a teacher better use assessments? Does this look different for formal, common assessments (e.g., benchmarks and progress monitoring assessments) and informal, teacher developed/selected assessments?

- a. What would help teachers engage in better assessment practices in their own classrooms?
- b. What kind of resources would help teachers engage in better collaborative discussions around assessment data?
- c. What kind of resources would promote common understanding of the knowledge and skills are expected of students at each grade level?

5. Let's assume that high quality resources around using assessments, collaborating around assessment data, and understanding student expectations at grade level are available. How could the district help teachers access and use these resources?

- a. What does training actually look like?
- b. Who should attend the training?

6. Beyond common, formal assessments, what else should the district do, specifically, to facilitate improved assessment practices at the school and classroom level?

Focus Group Questions for Representative Educators

Focus Group Interviews: Good afternoon! Welcome to our focus group for NPS teachers. As you saw in your invite letter, you have been asked to participate in these focus groups to share your perspective, expertise, and experiences around the use of assessments in your classrooms. Please keep in mind, we are trying to understand where NPS is today, how you use what you have, and whether you find value in it. We will be hosting several focus groups with teachers and administrators across NPS over the next couple of weeks.

My name is Juan and this is Erika. <insert brief introduction about our experience here.>

Before we begin, we wanted to describe the purpose of the project. As a brief reminder, NPS has contracted with the Center for Assessment (that's us!) to help support the district in establishing a coherent assessment strategy. What that means is that our job is to act as a mirror to the district to help define the vision, goals, and needs of the schools and students in Norwalk, organize the available resources, and identify gaps as we establish a coherent assessment and reporting strategy to support effective teaching and learning.

You were recruited as participants for these focus groups because the district wants to understand how you are using the assessments that are available to you and whether you find value in how they inform your overall teaching and learning approach. We are interested in your candid thoughts related to the assessment information that is available, what might be missing, and how assessment information is best used to support student learning. Again, today's conversation is about the state of assessment information available to the district today.

We ask that everyone share their thoughts and to honor each other's perspectives without bias or judgment. We will be recording today's session solely for us to focus on the conversation and so we don't focus on taking notes. Your responses will not be attributed to any one individual and we will be anonymizing your feedback. We are looking forward to learning from you and bringing your perspective back to NPS.

With your permission, we'd like to begin.

1. We understand that the state provides Smarter Balanced and the district has most recently purchased aimsweb+ for schools. What other types of assessments do you typically use on a regular basis?
 - a. *Probe: Be sure to identify whether the following are available*
 - i. *OTS interim beyond aimsweb,*
 - ii. *district developed, or*
 - iii. *school developed/provided*
 - iv. *curriculum embedded*
 - v. *educator selected or developed*
2. Thinking about the assessments that you typically use, how valuable are they to you in supporting your own teaching and why?
 - a. State summative tests (SBAC, CT State Science tests; PSAT, SAT)
 - i. *Probe: How do you use information from Smarter Balanced assessments? Do you use growth information from these tests? if so, how?*
 - b. Off-the-shelf or commercial tests that are made available by the district or purchased (e.g., aimsweb, NWEA)

- i. *Probe: How frequently do you administer these assessments?*
 - ii. *Probe: How do you use the information from these assessments? What role do they play? How do you talk about growth or progress based on these assessments?*
 - iii. *Probe: What is the most important or useful thing about these tests (i.e., what information do they provide that you could not live without)*
 - iv. *Probe: What is the biggest drawback?*
 - c. Your own or school-developed (or provided) tests
 - i. *Probe: If available, who develops these tests?*
 - ii. *Probe: Are these common across schools? Grade-levels? Common in any other way?*
 - iii. *Probe: How are the results of these assessments used? How do you talk about or use growth with these assessments?*
 - iv. *Probe: What is the most important or useful thing about these tests (i.e., what information do they provide that you could not live without)*
 - d. Informal assessments (e.g., bell ringers, exit tickets, lesson plan check-ins)
 - i. *Probe: Is there any commonality to these tests within grades? School-wide?*
- 3. Think about the assessment information we've been discussing. Does this information serve to effectively supplement your instructional decisions? What about collaborative planning with teachers?
 - a. *Probe: If yes, what information and how do you use it?*
 - b. *Probe: What makes this information useful to supplement your instructional decisions?*
 - c. *Probe: Which type of information is least useful to supplementing instructional decisions? Why?*
 - d. *Probe: How do existing assessment results connect to your curriculum? If not, what makes the results difficult to connect to curriculum?*
- 4. If there would be a resource, process, or training you could ask the district to provide you with in order to support your teaching and learning, what would it be and why?

Closing: Thank you for your time and thoughtfulness. We appreciate your insight. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us with any questions you might have.

Focus Group Questions for Administrators

Focus Group Interviews: Good afternoon! Welcome to our focus group for NPS administrators. As you saw in your invite letter, you have been asked to participate in these focus groups to share your perspective, expertise, and experiences around the use of assessments in your schools. Please keep in mind, we are trying to understand where NPS is today, how your teachers use what they have, whether you believe they value them, and whether you find value in them schoolwide. We will be hosting several focus groups with teachers and administrators across NPS over the remainder of this week.

My name is Juan and this is Erika. <insert brief introduction about our experience here.>

Before we begin, we wanted to describe the purpose of the project. As a brief reminder, NPS has contracted with the Center for Assessment (that's us!) to help support the district in establishing a coherent assessment strategy. What that means is that our job is to act as a mirror to the district to help define the vision, goals, and needs of the schools and students in Norwalk, organize the available resources, and identify gaps as we establish a coherent assessment and reporting strategy to support effective teaching and learning.

You were recruited as participants for these focus groups because the district wants to understand how you view the use of assessments that are available to your teachers and whether you find value in how they inform your teaching and learning for your schools. We are interested in your candid thoughts related to the assessment information that is available, what might be missing, and what assessment information might be best to support the instruction of your teachers. Again, today's conversation is about the state of assessment information available to the district today.

We ask that everyone share their thoughts and to honor each other's perspectives without bias or judgment. We will be recording today's session solely for us to focus on the conversation and so we don't focus on taking notes. Your responses will not be attributed to any one individual and we will be anonymizing your feedback. We are looking forward to learning from you and bringing your perspective back to NPS.

With your permission, we'd like to begin.

1. We understand that the state provides Smarter Balanced and the district has most recently purchased aimsweb+ for schools. Based on your experiences, what other types of assessments do your educators (e.g., teachers, coaches) typically use on a regular basis?
 - a. *Probe: Be sure to identify whether the following are available*
 - i. *OTS interim beyond aimsweb,*
 - ii. *district developed, or*
 - iii. *school developed/provided*
 - iv. *curriculum embedded*
 - v. *educator selected or developed*
2. Thinking about the assessments that your teachers typically use, how valuable are they in supporting their instruction and why?
 - a. State summative tests (SBAC, CT State Science tests; PSAT, SAT)
 - i. *Probe: How do you use information from Smarter Balanced assessments? Do you use growth information from these tests? if so, how?*
 - b. Off-the-shelf or commercial tests that are made available by the district or purchased (e.g., aimsweb, NWEA)

- i. *Probe: How frequently do you administer these assessments?*
 - ii. *Probe: How do you use the information from these assessments? What role do they play? How do you talk about growth or progress based on these assessments?*
 - iii. *Probe: What is the most important or useful thing about these tests (i.e., what information do they provide that you could not live without)*
 - iv. *Probe: What is the biggest drawback?*
 - c. Your own or school-developed (or provided) tests
 - i. *Probe: If available, who develops these tests?*
 - ii. *Probe: Are these common across schools? Grade-levels? Common in any other way?*
 - iii. *Probe: How are the results of these assessments used? How do you talk about or use growth with these assessments?*
 - iv. *Probe: What is the most important or useful thing about these tests (i.e., what information do they provide that you could not live without)*
 - d. Informal assessments (e.g., bell ringers, exit tickets, lesson plan check-ins)
 - i. *Probe: Is there any commonality to these tests within grades? School-wide?*
- 3. Thinking about the assessment information available to you, what assessments or assessment information do you find the most valuable in supporting your work schoolwide? And how do you use that information?
 - a. *Probe: How do you use it?*
 - b. *Probe: What makes this information useful?*
 - c. *Probe: Which type of information is least useful?*
- 4. What is the most effective strategy that you think administrators should be doing with assessment data? What can the district do to support you and others to do that?
- 5. If there would be a resource, process, or training you could ask the district to provide you with in order to support your teachers, what would it be and why?

Closing: Thank you for your time and thoughtfulness. We appreciate your insight. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us with any questions you might have.

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