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STUDENT ASSESSMENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS NOT STRATEGIC, OFTEN REDUNDANT

***Students Devoting up to 25 Hours per Year to Taking Mandated Tests;
Assessments Required by Congress, U.S. Department of Education,
States and School Districts Add Up in Time***

WASHINGTON, D.C., Oct. 24, 2015 – The average student in America’s big-city public schools will take roughly 112 mandatory standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and high school graduation, a new study shows.

The average of roughly eight standardized tests per year consumes between 20 and 25 hours each school year and frequently produces overlapping results. There were about 401 test titles being used in the nation’s largest urban school systems in the 2014-15 school year and students sat over 6,500 times for tests across the 66 school systems studied, the research found.

[The two-year study](#), believed to be the most comprehensive ever undertaken to ascertain the true extent of mandatory testing in the nation’s schools, was conducted by the [Council of the Great City Schools](#) at the request of its board of directors, which wanted a full picture of the testing practices in its big-city school systems. The Council’s board requested the inventory in 2013 to better inform the public debate and to shape needed reforms.

"The Council's comprehensive review should help all urban school systems examine their testing practices in a way that will lead to considerable improvement," said Felton Williams, the chair-elect of the Council and the school board president in Long Beach, Calif.

"Everyone has some culpability in how much testing there is and how redundant and uncoordinated it is – Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, states, local school systems and even individual schools and teachers," added Michael Casserly, the Council’s executive director. "Everyone must play a role in improving this situation."

The study found that:

- The average amount of time devoted to taking mandated tests during the 2014-15 school year (i.e., tests that were required for every child in a designated grade) was 4.21 days or 2.34 percent of school time for the average 8th grader—the grade with the most mandated testing time.
- The average amount of mandated test time, however, differed by grade and did not include time spent on sample tests, optional tests, and program tests or time to prepare for the tests.
- The time spent on mandatory tests also does not include individual classroom testing or tests designed or acquired at the individual school level.

- Many of the required exams are administered during a two- to three-month period in the second semester and overlap with one another, meaning that testing time feels much longer than the actual percentage, which is spread across the entire school year.
- Students also can spend considerable time taking optional tests, tests associated with a program they are enrolled in, and tests administered to samples of students.
- Students sometimes take end-of-course exams alongside summative tests in the same subjects, contributing to the redundancy in testing of the same students.
- Four out of 10 districts reported having to wait between two and four months before receiving their state test results, meaning the results had limited utility to inform instructional practices.
- The amount of money that school districts spend on testing is considerable but constitutes less than one percent of their overall budgets.
- There is no correlation between mandated testing time and reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In other words, there's no evidence that adding test time improves academic performance.

“There are many reasons educators have found themselves saddled with the unwieldy, incoherent, at times illogical testing system that we have today and it will take considerable effort to recreate something more intelligent,” stated Casserly.

The report notes that over the last several years many of the Council districts examined have taken steps on their own to reduce the number of tests they administer. For example, some districts are reducing the number of assessments in the early grades, eliminating non-core testing or cutting back on district-mandated testing. Duval County, Fla., in Jacksonville, for example, reduced the number of K-12 student assessments from 52 in 2014-15 to 22 in 2015-16. Districts also are using parent feedback to guide changes in assessment policy and how they report student progress.

"As America's urban schools continue to focus on increased academic outcomes for our students, it is important that we have actionable data that can be used to guide instruction and help us focus on reducing learning gaps," said Superintendent Richard Carranza of the San Francisco school district, who chairs the Council board. "This self-initiated study of testing in our member school districts is an important tool that will guide how we move forward to improve our local testing environments.

"I applaud my colleagues and the Council of the Great City Schools for being at the forefront of this important topic for America's public schools," he added.

The Council released preliminary recommendations with the report that call for retaining current annual tests in core subjects but eliminating tests that are either redundant or low quality.

In addition, the Council announced that it will launch a commission of researchers, school leaders, teachers and parents to develop “a more thoughtful approach to assessing the academic needs of our urban schoolchildren.” Casserly indicated that commission chairs would be named in the next two weeks.

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