



**For Immediate Release**

Friday, March 16, 2018

[www.sde.idaho.gov](http://www.sde.idaho.gov)

**Media Contacts**

Kristin Rodine

Media relations specialist

208-332-6807

[krodine@sde.idaho.gov](mailto:krodine@sde.idaho.gov)

## **Idahoans weigh in on state's standardized testing via survey, focus groups**

(BOISE) – Parents, teachers and administrators from throughout the state are helping the Idaho Assessment Task Force complete its process of studying the state's standardized testing system and suggesting ways to improve it.

At this month's daylong task force meeting, members reviewed a survey of nearly 3,000 Idahoans, plus results from eight stakeholder focus groups held in January.

"The objective is to make the state's assessment program as effective as possible, and for that we need to understand the needs and concerns of parents, educators and others," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra, who established the task force last summer. "This task force, the survey and focus groups are all part of the State Department of Education's overriding goal – supporting schools and students to achieve."

The 25-member task force started meeting in September and includes educators and others from large and small districts across Idaho. It will hold its final meeting in mid-April before making recommendations to Superintendent Ybarra. Findings will be presented to the State Board of Education in June.

"This will help shape budget priorities and focus the training we provide to our schools and districts," said Karlynn Laraway, SDE director of assessment and accountability. "And it will help us tailor our communications more effectively to stakeholders."

Boise School District Superintendent Don Coberly said participating in the task force has been an educational experience.

"I have learned a great deal during the task force meetings," Coberly said. "I've been impressed by the presenters' expertise and am more knowledgeable about national trends in assessment. State Department of Education personnel have welcomed input and comments from participants."

"This in-depth look at assessment covers all standardized testing in Idaho but is particularly timely as the SDE works to develop a science test to pair with the state's newly updated and approved science standards. The new test is expected to debut in the 2020 school year."

At the March task force meeting, consultants from Assessment Solutions Group (ASG) presented survey and focus group results. Of nearly 3,000 survey respondents statewide, about 37 percent were parents and 35 percent were teachers, with smaller percentages of administrators, board members and other community members.

The survey shows that stakeholders, overall, think Idaho’s assessment system is working reasonably well, but those closest to the student and classroom – parents and teachers – judged the tests as less useful than did those higher up the education ladder, Barry Topol of ASG told task force members.

“Parents and teachers were remarkably well aligned,” giving very similar responses, Topol said. Principals had higher opinions of testing than did teachers, and superintendents’ opinions were, in general, higher yet, he said. Among other findings:

- A majority of respondents (around 60 percent) favored a mix of types of items on standardized tests, even if that mix made the process more costly or time-consuming.
- A greater majority (76 percent) said current assessments take too much time.
- More than half of respondents (58 percent) said students aren’t motivated to do their best on standardized tests.
- Survey results showed strong interest in greater use of formative assessment, which assesses student progress during the learning process, helping teachers and students adjust strategies.

Asked to select the three areas of improvement most needed in Idaho’s assessment system, respondents’ top suggestions were: guide daily instruction using ongoing, formative assessment; monitor student growth to determine progress or change over several years; and review and improve the school or district’s instructional program.

A smaller number of education stakeholders went into greater depth in examining what is working well in the assessment system and how the system could be improved. In late January, ASG gathered about 70 people into eight focus groups -- parents, teachers, school board members, principals, district superintendents, legislators, and representatives of the SDE and the State Board of Education. As in the survey results, parents and teachers tended to have more negative comments about the assessment system than administrators and other stakeholders, John Olson of ASG said.

Key themes of the focus group feedback include the need for greater understanding of the assessment process, a more balanced approach that includes formative assessment and performance assessment, and strengthened professional development and communication about assessment. Greater communication with parents also is needed to help them understand key concepts, what the results mean and how they are used, group members said.

###

**Attached:** ASG’s presentation on statewide survey results