Illinois
Adult Education Assessment Study

Submitted to:
The Illinois Community College Board
Adult Education and Family Literacy

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Conducted By:
The Center for Adult Learning Leadership
A Member of the Adult Education Service Center Network

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For the purpose of compliance with Section 511 of Public-Law 101-166 (Stevens Amendment) approximately 100% federal funds were used to produce this product.
INTRODUCTION

FY06 data from the Illinois Community College Board reported Illinois adult education programs served 132,266 learners, exceeding its Workforce Investment Act performance targets. Developing performance accountability and using it as a measure of success for programs makes it clear that adult educators must continue to respond to the requirements of current legislation and the ongoing focus of program accountability. Every process in place is intricately connected to the outcomes of the adult education program. Programs must support a comprehensive approach to testing and ongoing assessment that will fulfill mandates while providing the best possible learning experience to meet the adult learner’s goals.

A key area to consider regarding the impact of policy on programs is the first and critical step of assessment. Assessment occurs in various forms, but standardized assessment is the required first step to the process. Whether considering standardized testing or ongoing learner assessments to measure an individual’s progress, assessment is a fundamental part of funding and policy for program accountability and success.

In response to learning more about assessment issues at the state and national level, the Illinois Community College Board requested this study be conducted to gain insight into the latest assessment research and state and national assessment practices. The following information was requested as part of the assessment study conducted by the Center for Adult Learning Leadership:
1. A comprehensive literature review;
2. An examination of other states policies and their responses to federal requirements regarding assessment policy; and
3. An examination of current assessment policies and practices of Illinois adult education programs.

This report is the compilation of the requested information and data collected. Three sections described above and recommendations are included in this document. All of the supporting documents related to the study are on file at the Center for Adult Learning Leadership. This includes copies of state policies, articles, studies, and a sample of standardized tests.
Part 1:  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A thorough review of recent research and literature on adult education assessment practices was conducted to determine what new findings and trends were occurring. An annotated bibliography of key readings is attached to this report.

Not surprisingly, much of the focus of the literature during the past decade has been directly related to the passage of the Workforce Investment Act. This legislation has had great impact on the field of adult education in general, and on assessment issues in particular. It has changed the focus from holding federally funded adult education programs accountable for providing quality services to producing specified learner outcomes. Adult education assessment has become high stakes.

The literature abounds with debate over the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the measures of success that have been assigned to adult education, and to the ability of current standardized assessment tools to accurately measure that success. Research studies have been conducted that echo those concerns. Since standardized tests cannot directly match the content of classroom instruction, there is much discussion about the validity of those instruments for program accountability use.

Nevertheless, accountability through NRS is a reality for federally funded adult education programs. Current literature focuses on how programs can have effective assessment systems that work for learners and programs while adhering to the requirements of NRS. There is clear consensus in the literature on a group of distinct principles of effective assessment.

First, and most importantly, there is agreement that assessment can no longer be a stand-alone piece of a program. Assessment must be integrated and in alignment with all other program components. There must be a direct match between goals, curriculum, standards, what is taught, and what is assessed. If there is not, the assessment is not valid.

When goals are being set, how those goals will be assessed must also be planned. When standards are being set, how those standards are going to be assessed must be planned. As curriculum is being developed, assessments should be developed to check for learning at multiple points throughout the curriculum. Assessment should not be something that is left to develop after everything else is completed.

Assessment should be comprehensive and ongoing. It should occur throughout the learner’s entire contact with the program. Appropriate assessment is not just a pre- and post- test. It begins informally at the first
contact between the learner and intake staff and continues both formally and informally until contact is completed.

Since there is no standardized test that is tightly aligned with classroom content and learner goals, there is a strong trend in the literature to recommend that programs supplement them by developing or adapting alternative assessments that can align directly with what is being taught. Programs are encouraged to use many different measures and many different kinds of measures to obtain the most complete and useful picture of learner needs and progress. As noted in the bibliography, studies and reports have focused on various alternative assessment methods.

The literature abounds with recommendations for a participatory assessment process. Research into factors causing students to persist in adult education has found that engagement is a key factor (Beder, 2005). The learner is a partner in assessment; knows why it is being done, how it will help him or her move forward, and sees it as a helpful learning tool. The use of standardized tests and their results do not necessarily engage the learner especially when pre-tests are given within the first 12 hours of enrollment. This underscores the need for particular attention to the intake process and preparing the adult learner for an active role in an ongoing assessment process.

Research by John Comings concluded that an effective assessment system is critical to the persistence of students and the success of a program. His model of an effective program is described as follows: assessment of each student’s goals as well as skills followed by a presentation to each student of a realistic assessment of skill levels and the time and effort required for achieving his or her goals. Then an individual learning plan is created with the student as a fully informed and active partner in strategizing how to reach the goal. Instruction follows, with ongoing assessment that measures learner’s progress towards their self-defined real life needs and goals, based on their reasons for coming to the program. Research has shown this to be an essential element of best practice. (Comings and Santos, 2006)

When assessment is clearly aligned to other program components for example, placement, program effectiveness, or outcomes, and administered properly, data can be counted on to provide valid information about how close a match there is between what the program is intending to help the student attain and what is happening. Assessment becomes a key tool in gathering information about program improvement. Several national agencies have created research-based guides to using data for program improvement.

In order to follow both principles of effective assessment and NRS requirements, most programs are operating dual assessment systems: one for accountability and one for instruction, raising capacity issues in literature. The standardized pre-and post-test requirements of NRS provide a piece of the
information needed by programs, but not enough information for the comprehensive, learner centered, ongoing assessment aligned with curriculum and other program components described in literature. For that, additional kinds of assessments are needed.

Summary

Current research and literature in adult education reveal strong consensus on the following points:

- Effective assessment is integrated into and aligned with performance and content standards, curriculum development, goal setting, instruction, and program planning. None of these pieces should be developed or conducted without assessment being a part of them.

- Assessment data should be used throughout the program to provide information and feedback regarding what is working and identifying places where change or adjustments might lead to improvement.

- Effective assessment uses multiple kinds of assessments in an ongoing way in order to obtain an accurate picture of learner needs and progress.

- Learners should be active participants in the assessment process. They should receive information about their assessment results tied to their goals and be co-planners in their progress.

- Staff development and resources are needed to ensure assessments are conducted correctly.

- Advocacy with funders is needed to expand the definition of countable learner outcomes, to allow appropriate assessment tools for their measurement when needed, and to ensure that programs have the capacity to fulfill assessment related requirements.

References: See annotated bibliography in Appendix A.
Part 2:  
State Information  

In order to guide an examination of other states’ policies and their responses to federal requirements regarding assessment, five key questions were identified for this part of the study.

1. What are states’ policies on the use of alternative assessments?  
2. What assessments do they use for reporting NRS data?  
3. What guidance do states give local programs in policy on the use of assessment data for program improvement?  
4. What are states’ policies on the number of hours for placement and pre/post testing?  
5. What are best practices?  

Information was obtained through a combination of:  
1. telephone interviews with state adult education directors or their designees  
2. e-mail contact with states  
3. a thorough review of individual state official assessment policies  
4. a search of national e-mail discussions for information on states’ policies and practices.  

Official assessment policies for 46 states were reviewed and are on file. Policies range from states which have merely copied the NRS guidelines, to those which have written one or two page memos to programs, to those which have developed comprehensive resource guides of more than 50 pages. Some policies are embedded within adult education handbooks, like Illinois’; some are stand-alone pieces. States which have produced particularly clear, complete, and user-friendly guides are Georgia, Idaho, and Kansas.  

There are several provider manuals that are clearly based on the principles of effective assessment discussed in literature. Hawaii’s assessment model is standards-based: “To support students, a delivery system is in place to include what is to be taught, how it may be taught, and way or ways to measure if and to what extent learning has taken place”. Kansas and Ohio describe assessment as a continuous process beginning from the moment a new student arrives in the office inquiring about classes until they leave the program. Their guides discuss assessment in the context of integrating it into all other parts of the program. Hawaii, Iowa, Montana and Ohio all clearly address how assessment is to be aligned with standards, goal setting and curriculum.  

While reviewing the manuals, model materials were identified. A variety of topics are addressed. A complete list of materials can be found in Appendix B. A sample of materials includes:  
- Learning needs screening form
State directors or their designees were interviewed about their state’s assessment policy and practice. The initial focus was on the written assessment policy: did the state have one, where was it, what kinds of things was included in it, what was especially important or interesting about it. Then the state’s policy and experiences with alternative assessments were discussed, followed by questions about what the state was doing with local programs to help them use data for program improvement. Most states admitted they were just beginning to think seriously about this. Their priority had been to get their data system up and running first. The discussion then focused on anything the person thought the state did particularly well in the field of assessment, anything that was particularly challenging, and what advice he or she would give Illinois.

During the time this study was occurring, a discussion was taking place on the National Institute for Literacy Discussion List on the topic of using assessment data for program improvement. Other national adult education groups were also discussing assessment issues on the internet. Recent discussions had been held on identifying the optimal time between pre and post testing, appropriate tests for ESL learners, and alternative assessments. During these discussions, information had been revealed about how different states were responding in policy and practice to different issues. A search was conducted for additional national discussions held during the last three years around this topic. Information about other states’ policies and practices was gleaned from these discussions and also helped inform this report.

Findings

State by state findings to the five guiding questions above are listed in chart form below. Discussion of each finding begins on page 15.
**Alternative assessments**

24 states officially “encourage” or “promote” the use of alternative assessments in policy. Another 7 states give programs permission in policy to continue using them for instructional purposes. Most states do not at this time use results from alternative assessments at the state level since that data is not going on to the federal level. Many states expressed the opinion that NRS was not getting a complete and accurate picture of their state’s effectiveness through reliance on current performance measures. Representative policy statements on alternative assessments are in are listed in the chart that begins on page 19.

**Assessments used for NRS reporting**

No state currently reports alternative assessment results to NRS since current federal policy explicitly allows only standardized tests or performance assessments with standardized measures. In FY07, of the 46 states surveyed, 35 states authorized programs to use the BEST or BEST PLUS; 33 CASAS; 3 CELSA; 2 REEP; 37 TABE; and 9 WorkKeys. Some states who have been using TABE are moving to allowing the use of CASAS only. There are no states that are moving from CASAS to TABE.

**Use of data for program improvement**

In general, states are just beginning to look at how to address this federal mandate. 27 states address it in their official policy, but as can be seen in the chart listing some representative statements beginning on page 19, often this statement is not much more than a philosophical statement of support for the concept. Rarely is there direction given to programs regarding how to actually go about the process of using data for program improvement. Exceptions are states which are heavily involved in serving as Data Detective Models for NRS, and those which already had a standards-based or continuous improvement model in place such as Hawaii and Ohio.

**Placement testing**

Most states defer to the NRS recommendation to conduct placement testing “within the first 12 hours”. Many “pretest at entry”, but the definition of “entry” varies. Some states prohibit the use of the same test for pre-testing and placement testing with the argument that a pre- and a post-test must be given under the same set of conditions in order to be valid; and a placement test is usually given under a very different physical set of conditions than a post-test.

**Pre- Post testing**

Some states specify that all NRS testing must be done in an area designated solely for testing. Most states follow NRS and test publisher guidelines for hours between pre and post testing. Those states with other specifications vary widely: from requiring testing every 40 hours of instruction; to testing on quarterly testing dates; to requiring post testing only at the end of each term of instruction.
Who may administer, score, interpret, and share assessment results with learners

States often specify exactly what staff positions may participate in testing activities. Some prohibit those who regularly interact directly with students, such as teachers and counselors, from doing so. Many states require documentation of mandatory and specific training of everyone who administers and scores standardized tests used for NRS reporting.

Challenges

Challenges identified by states in interviews and e-mail discussion lists mirrored those discussed in literature and those this researcher has heard from administrators throughout Illinois. Recurrent themes were:

- Ensuring staff at all sites follow all standardized test guidelines exactly (especially reading the instructions and adhering to the time limits)
- Obtaining post tests from teachers more frequently than once at the end of each session
- Getting teachers or staff to retest a student if the TABE score is not in the valid range
- That there is little meaning for teachers to standardized test scores, but time to develop alternative assessments
- The difficulty of getting post-test before students have left the program
- Training issues: teacher and staff annual turnover and part-time nature
- Teachers resistance to testing: “too much testing” taking time away from instruction and learning
- Cost of TABE tests if levels are used properly. Temptation just to use level M on everybody.
- Space issues: lack of appropriate or no separate testing space at intake. Noisy, busy, open environment.
- Test results often not being used for anything more than reporting data to the state/NRS.
- The need to obtain standardized test score for NRS as one of the first activities conflicting with the need to make the student feel comfortable and return in an already intimidating situation
- Different sites / different staff treating the assessment experience differently

Best Practice

As themes of common challenges were found, common themes of good practice were also found.
Preparing staff for assessment
• Teachers receive training on why they will be using each specific assessment, what kinds of data it will produce, and how the results can be useful to the teacher, the student and the program
• Staff conducting intake and initial assessment receive training on how to make the experience go smoothly and comfortably for the new student.
• New teachers are required to attend assessment training

Assessment staff support
• Mississippi has a cadre of 4 master trainers and 21 lead teachers to serve as a Train the Trainers group for test administration. In addition, all new teachers receive a training module on assessment during their required attendance at ABE teachers’ academy prior to beginning instruction.
• Maryland programs are expected to hire an assessment specialist whose job it is to organize and oversee the program’s assessment system

Intake Procedures
• Guidance is provided in the Adult Education manual and in assessment training about the needs and sensitivities of new students and how to make intake a positive experience for them (Hawaii, Florida)
• Arkansas uses a “Learning Needs Screening Form” to guide questions at intake that give clues as to whether a student might have special learning needs
• In its Program Handbook, Kansas describes how informal assessment of learner needs happens at initial program contact and throughout the learner’s experience with the program

Goal setting
• Long term goals are broken into intermediate and short term goals
• Learner and staff work together to break short term goals into steps with timelines
• States which address this particularly well are Idaho, Montana, Ohio, Rhode Island

Uniform administration procedures
• Expectations of what should be happening before, during, and after testing are delineated in policy
• FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) are included in provider guides, divided into sections by test and topic, and updated annually
• South Carolina and Maryland are examples of two states which do this particularly well
Test security and confidentiality
• There is a system for tests and answer sheets to be kept in secure, locked files; checked out; and inventoried
• There is a secure process for the destruction of all used and completed answer sheets and other test materials
• Programs are reminded of everyday confidentiality issues such as “Students’ testing and scores are confidential and should not be left on desks or where they have the potential of being seen by others”

Use of assessment results
• Continuous improvement models integrate assessment and instruction together (Hawaii, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee)
• Assessment results are used to inform the program improvement process (Maryland and Pennsylvania)

Lessons on test taking
• Structured lessons are included in the curriculum on what standardized tests are, why we take them, and test-taking strategies (Massachusetts)
• Students are provided with practice on taking standardized tests per publisher guidelines

Summary
States share similar challenges in assessment of adult education students. There are models of good policy and practice from other states that can help Illinois in its own quest for continuous improvement. Some of those models and materials are contained in this report. More information can be obtained by follow-up with specific states.

Identification and consistent training of staff authorized to conduct, score, interpret, and share test results with learners is a critical component of states' policies. Training that is mandatory and consistent in content and delivery throughout the state is essential to ensure valid and reliable assessment results. A detailed, user-friendly assessment policy and implementation guide provides the necessary reference piece of this system.

Several states have modeled how principles of effective assessment (integrated throughout the program, aligned with standards, goals, and curriculum, ongoing, learner-based, varied, and used to inform instruction and guide program improvement) can be implemented in an NRS-compliant environment and in positive and learner-friendly way.
# ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STATEMENTS
Selected Statements in Policy from Other States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>“Programs are <strong>encouraged to use a variety of informal assessments to guide instruction.</strong> The use of teacher-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessments, and learner observations can be used to monitor learning and guide instruction. However, programs may only use TABE and BEST to report learner gains for the NRS.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td><strong>Allowable</strong> for assistance in instructional design and delivery but “<strong>unacceptable for placement and/or progress testing in state and federal reporting</strong>”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>“encourages local adult education agencies to use a variety of informal assessments to assist in guiding instruction. The use of teacher-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessments, and teacher observations <strong>should be encouraged to monitor learning and to guide instruction on a regular, ongoing basis.</strong>”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>“The IOWA DOE <strong>encourages local adult literacy programs to use a variety of informal assessments to assist in informing instruction.</strong> The use of teacher-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessments, learner observations, etc. should be encouraged to monitor learning and to inform instruction on a regular, ongoing basis. However, all NRS educational gains benchmark results must be reported utilizing approved CASAS assessment instruments.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td><strong>(The manual describes each phase of assessment and what informal assessment goes into each phase. For example, encouraging staff to note literacy issues a student may have in reading signage to scheduled rooms, completing intake forms, and the importance of including this as part of the assessment.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>“<strong>programs should continue to use a variety of formal and informal instruments and procedures to collect valid on-going information</strong> regarding student instructional needs and progress.”</td>
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### ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STATEMENTS, cont.

**Selected Statements in Policy from Other States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td><strong>“There will never be one standardized assessment that can measure all</strong> the progress or needs of a learner. In addition to the required, standardized pre and post test for accountability, it is in the <strong>best interests</strong> of learners, teachers, and programs to use a variety of formal and informal Procedures to measure progress and guide instruction, such as: performance samples, informal reading inventory, learner self-evaluation, learning style inventory, learning plans and logs, Official GED practice tests, additional standardized tests, computer generated assessments such as by topic or subject area, textbook tests.**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td><strong>“May use supplemental assessments to obtain additional information essential</strong> to the appropriate placement and/or enrollment of participants in programs….and to obtain a more complete image of the participant and therefore assist him/her in achieving his/her goals.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td><strong>“It is advisable to encourage programs to supplement</strong> assessment for accountability with instruction-based assessment”</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td><strong>“You should use</strong> informal as well as standardized assessment data to track and document educational needs and gains, and to evaluate student progress and the effectiveness of your instruction. Program <strong>staff conduct informal assessment on a daily basis. Informal tools and procedures provide a dynamic tracking tool</strong> for observing and documenting changes in student skill levels. Standardized assessments provide snapshots of learner skill levels at pre-defined instructional intervals. Together, quality standardized and informal assessment data can drive instruction while satisfying the needs of program stakeholders in an environment promoting continuous performance improvement. Informal assessments can include informal reading inventories, curriculum based assessments, program or teacher developed instruments, registration forms completed during the orientation process, and even very informal check-ups such as questioning students after a lesson to see what content has been learned and can be demonstrated. Informal assessments are critical in a well rounded assessment plan by adding depth to the individual’s basic skills profile beyond the grade level equivalency that standardized assessments produce”</td>
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## ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STATEMENTS, cont.
### Statements in Policy from Other States

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>Programs may not use other performance-based or homegrown assessments for reporting to the State. However, programs may continue to use their own placement tests and other assessments that provide additional, useful information to teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Programs are free to perform additional forms of assessment as they see fit in response to the needs of their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>In addition to the required standardized pre and post assessment instruments, a program should continue to use a variety of formal and informal instruments and procedures to collect valid ongoing information regarding student instructional needs and progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Programs are encouraged to continue to use multiple ways to assess progress and achievement and use this information to inform teaching and provide learners with feedback.</td>
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## USE OF LOCAL DATA FOR LOCAL PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

### Statements in policy from other states

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>“Programs are <strong>encouraged to use a variety of informal assessments to guide instruction</strong>. The use of teacher-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessments, and learner observations can be used to monitor learning and guide instruction. However, programs may only use TABE and BEST to report learner gains for the NRS.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>“To support our students in achieving the standards, a delivery system must be in place that includes what is to be taught, how it may be taught and a way or ways to measure if and to what extent learning has taken place. <strong>The interactive nature of the elements allows for a continual process of development and improvement in any of the elements.</strong> Due to the interactive nature of the elements, adjustments in any one can trigger an appropriate response in all of the others.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>“Iowa’s adult literacy program’s continuous improvement model underscores the assessment, instruction and curriculum development process. <strong>Assessment plays a key role in quantifying continuous program improvement efforts.</strong>”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>“<strong>Use of data to promote continuous improvement of local programs</strong> and quality assessment (results include): learners and programs monitor progress towards goals; learners and programs are better equipped to identify other factors that impact progress; programs are accurately informed about learners’ basic skill levels; **programs are better equipped to determine effectiveness of program design, instructors’ proficiency, curricula and materials;…programs have more accurate data on which to make decisions.””</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>“<strong>At the program level, accurate assessment data are critical for decision making in planning, instruction, professional development and program improvement.</strong> Student assessments help instructors pinpoint student needs and choose appropriate curricula and activities. **Aggregate data inform program directors regarding needed improvements and help guide staff professional development.””</td>
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</table>
USE OF LOCAL DATA FOR LOCAL PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT, cont.

Statements in policy from other states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>“Assessment is the <strong>most important step in the instructional process</strong>. It is important for placement of students in instruction, monitoring student progress, tracking student achievement, <strong>improving program practices</strong>, and meeting program accountability requirements.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>“The results must be shared with the learners, so they know the reason they are placed at a certain level and how much progress they have made. For the teacher, the results of testing can be used to guide instruction and curriculum development. The results are critical for <strong>program improvement</strong> and accountability in terms of achieving targeted outcomes, as well as continued financial support of the program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>“<strong>Assessment data are critical to customizing instruction</strong> to meet the individualized needs of each customer. Staff should be well strained in interpreting standardized test results; incorporating informal assessment tools and screening information into the process that provides information on each student’s vocabulary, fluency, decoding and spelling skills; tracking and documenting learner’s educational needs and gains; and upholding the quality and uniformity of assessment practices within programs.”</td>
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Part 3: 
SURVEY OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN 
ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS

I. Survey Procedures

Developing the Survey Instrument

The purpose of the survey was to collect information from adult education program administrators regarding current assessment practices in adult education programs in Illinois. Survey questions focused on the use of standardized assessments as well as informal, locally developed alternative assessments. The survey also included questions regarding the perceptions of administrators about obstacles and barriers to initiating and implementing best practices in assessment. Additionally, program administrators were asked to identify priorities for professional development for adult education teachers and staff in the area of assessment.

Jim Thompson and Linda Reabe at the Center for Adult Learning Leadership (CALL) at Illinois State University worked with David Baker at the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to develop the survey instrument (Appendix C). Numerous reviewers, including ICCB central office staff, state consultants, and adult education program administrators in Illinois, reviewed draft versions of the survey. Their feedback was incorporated into the final survey.

Collecting information

The survey was placed into an on-line, web based survey program (i.e., SurveyMonkey.com). In early April of 2007 David Baker contacted administrators from adult education programs in Illinois (n = 122) through e-mail. He requested that they complete the survey or forward it to someone within their program who would be able to respond to questions about assessment practices. Three weeks later David sent a follow-up reminder to potential respondents. All potential respondents received a web site link to access the survey.

There weren’t any reports of difficulty accessing and/or completing the survey. The first response was received on April 10, 2007 and the final response was received on May 3, 2007. All respondents were anonymous; therefore, there was no effort to track respondents or compare respondents to nonrespondents.

Survey Respondents

Seventy-seven (77) administrators responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 63%. According to Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, and Booth-Kewley (1997), most response rates in the published literature range from 35% to 80%. Although there is no magic number that establishes a good response rate, these authors cited research suggesting a response rate of 50% or better is
adequate, 60% is good, and 70% is very good. Thus, this survey’s response rate of 63% appears to be acceptable for drawing conclusions.

Although respondents were anonymous, they were asked to provide some personal information so that a demographic profile of the respondents could be generated. Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1 and 2 provide a summary of the demographic information. Overall, it appears that an experienced group of adult education administrators representing a variety of programs of different sizes throughout Illinois responded to the survey.

**Table 1: Job Titles of Respondents (n = 75)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word “Director” was included somewhere in the job title of nearly half (47%) of the respondents. *Adult Education Director* and *Director of Adult Education* were the most common job titles. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents had the word “Coordinator” in the title. Usually the description was broad (e.g., *Adult Education Coordinator; Program Coordinator*). But, occasionally it was more specific (e.g., *ABE/GED Coordinator; Recruitment and Enrollment Coordinator*). Dean was mentioned in the job title in nine cases, and the “other” category included an assortment of various titles including *Program Manager, Principal*, and *Facilitator*.

Table 2 shows that the respondents were an experienced group of adult educators. It is noteworthy that over 80% of the respondents reported having 6 or more years of experience in adult education programs. The mean (i.e., average) years of experience was 13.8. The range was from a low of 6 months to a high of 35 years.

**Table 2: Years of Work Experience in Adult Education (n = 75)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience in Adult Education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year or less</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 or more years</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is shown in Figure 1 (next page), there was good representation from each geographical region of the state. In fact, there was roughly equal representation from each region.
The final piece of demographic information collected concerned program size. Respondents were asked, “How many students does your adult education program serve annually?” Although this question seemed straightforward when the survey was designed, additional comments provided by several respondents suggested that it might have been interpreted in different ways. For instance, several respondents made a point to communicate that they were not counting duplicate students. Others indicated enrollment by semesters, which would, by definition, include duplicate students if the enrollment across the semesters were summed to arrive at an annual count. Several respondents indicated a range of students. To address these ambiguities, the following decisions were made: (a) when programs provided an annual enrollment it was assumed that they were not counting duplicate students; (b) when programs provided semester by semester enrollment, the semester with highest enrollment was used to represent the annual enrollment; (c) when programs provided a range of enrollment figures, the midpoint was used (e.g., 850 was used when a program reported an annual enrollment of 800 to 900).

Figure 2 on the next page shows the diversity in program size represented by the respondents in this survey. Although the largest number of respondents worked in programs serving 501-1000 students, a significant percentage of respondents worked in each of the program sizes represented in the chart.
II. Use of Commercially Developed Standardized Tests

The first set of questions focused on the purposes for using commercially developed standardized tests. Figure 3 shows the extent to which standardized test are used for the following six purposes:

- To place learners in appropriate instructional levels;
- To measure the ongoing progress that learners are making in the program (i.e., to demonstrate learner gains);
- To identify learner strengths and weaknesses;
- To qualify learners for academic and vocational programs;
- To determine program effectiveness;
- To collect pre- and post-test data.

These findings show that adult education programs use standardized tests regularly for each of these purposes. The vast majority of adult education programs frequently use standardized tests to collect pre- and post-test data, measure learner progress, and place learners in appropriate instructional levels. Standardized tests are used less frequently, but still quite often, to identify learner strengths and weaknesses, determine instructional effectiveness, and to make decisions regarding learner qualifications for academic and vocational programs.
Table 3 shows the number of respondents indicating whether or not their programs use four specific standardized tests (i.e., BEST, BEST PLUS, CELSA, TABE) for the six purposes listed previously. Additionally, respondents had the opportunity to identify other types of standardized tests their programs used. The findings reveal that adult education programs are using a variety of different tests for a variety of purposes. But, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is the most frequently used test and the BEST PLUS is used the least among the four assessments that were identified on the survey. The *Official GED Practice Tests* published by Steck Vaughn was the most popular assessment tool in the “other” category, with 10 programs indicating that they use it. Four programs reported using the Slosston Oral Reading Test (SORT or SORT-R).
Table 3: Number of adult education programs (n=77) using standardized tests (BEST, BEST PLUS, CELSA, TABE) for six specific purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>BEST</th>
<th>BEST Plus</th>
<th>CELSA</th>
<th>TABE</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To place learners in appropriate instructional levels</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To measure the ongoing progress that learners are making in the program (i.e., to demonstrate learner gains)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify learner strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To qualify learners for academic and vocational programs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To determine instructional effectiveness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To collect pre- and post-test data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Programs could identify more than one test per purpose. Thus, if a program used both the BEST and the TABE for placement, they would identify both tests.

The next set of questions focused on the extent to which test administration procedures, as published in test manuals, are followed. As Table 4 shows, 92% of the programs reported that they follow the procedures “always” or “often”. However, 42% reported that they deviated from the published guidelines at least some of the time.

Table 4: Extent to which standardized testing procedures are aligned with guidelines presented in test manuals in Illinois adult education programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent to which testing administration procedures are followed</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always; the test administration guidelines found in the manuals are strictly followed whenever the test is administered.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often; intermittently there is a need to deviate from test administration guidelines provided in the manuals, but these cases are exceptions from the norm.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About half the time; in approximately 50% of the test administrations the guidelines presented in the test manuals are followed, and in the other 50% the guidelines are modified.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom; most test administrations involve some deviation from the test administration guidelines found in the test manuals.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never; the test administration guidelines found in the test manuals are never strictly followed (i.e., there is always some deviation).</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Programs reporting deviations from assessment administration procedures published in the testing manuals were asked to describe the most typical or common deviations. Eleven (11) of the 30 respondents indicated that compliance with the Americans with Disability Act was the most common reason for deviating from the official guidelines. For example, one respondent wrote, “Self-identified individuals with special needs may receive testing accommodations. They first work with the ADA Coordinator, who works with the testing center to arrange for appropriate accommodations.” Another common rationale was the need for additional clarification or elaboration of instructions because of a lack of English proficiency. As one respondent explained, “On occasion, the limited English proficiency of a student requires additional elaboration on behalf of the instructor for first time test takers. This is necessary to get new students accustomed to the process and to ensure that they understand the process.” A final theme was the need to adjust to environmental distractions inherent to test settings in certain adult education programs. As one respondent explained, “There may not be absolute quiet in the testing room; timing guidelines may not be followed exactly because of students entering and leaving.”

III. Use of Locally Developed Alternative Assessments

The next set of questions focused on the use of locally developed, alternative assessments. Tables 5-9 show the extent to which respondents reported their programs use 24 types of alternative assessments for five of the six purposes of assessment described earlier (note that collecting pre- and post-test data was not included because regulations require pre- and post-test measures to be collected through standardized assessments). The following five tables show that no single type of locally developed alternative assessment is widely used for any specific assessment purpose. However, some assessments are more commonly utilized than others. In particular, Writing samples, Writing prompts, Quizzes, Informal teacher interviews, Teacher observation, and Learner/instructor conferences appear to be the alternative assessment practices that are most frequently employed.
Table 5: Frequency which locally developed, alternative assessments are used for placing students (both new students and continuing students) in appropriate instructional levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Half</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews that include teacher questioning and dialogue</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer questioning and observation</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning logs</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual self-evaluation</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group self-evaluation</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading samples including picture cued description stories</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing samples</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing prompts</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy inventories</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student journals</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent written products (e.g., major assignments such as major end of term paper)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner/instructor conferences to determine information gaps and student interests</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video clips of performance on instructional tasks</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final summative evaluation (e.g., final exam) given to group</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role plays or simulations</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations and presentations</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance assessment tasks (specific tasks that students need to demonstrate)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting activities</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Largest number for each assessment is highlighted in **bold**.
Table 6: Frequency which locally developed, alternative assessments are used to measure the ongoing progress of learners in adult education programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Half</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews that include teacher questioning and dialogue</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer questioning and observation</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning logs</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual self-evaluation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group self-evaluation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading samples including picture cued description stories</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing samples</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing prompts</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy inventories</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student journals</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent written products (e.g., major assignments such as major end of term paper)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner/instructor conferences to determine information gaps and student interests</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video clips of performance on instructional tasks</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final summative evaluation (e.g., final exam) given to group</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role plays or simulations</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations and presentations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance assessment tasks (specific tasks that students need to demonstrate)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting activities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Largest number for each assessment is highlighted in **bold**.
Table 7: Frequency which locally developed, alternative assessments are used to identify learner strengths and weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Half</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews that include teacher questioning and dialogue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer questioning and observation</td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning logs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual self-evaluation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group self-evaluation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading samples including picture cued description stories</td>
<td>14</td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing samples</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing prompts</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy inventories</td>
<td>15</td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student journals</td>
<td>21</td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent written products (e.g., major assignments such as major end of term paper)</td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner/instructor conferences to determine information gaps and student interests</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video clips of performance on instructional tasks</td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final summative evaluation (e.g., final exam) given to group</td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role plays or simulations</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations and presentations</td>
<td>19</td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance assessment tasks (specific tasks that students need to demonstrate)</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Largest number for each assessment is highlighted in **bold**.
Table 8: Frequency which locally developed, alternative assessments are used to qualify learners for academic and vocational programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Description</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Half</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews that include teacher questioning and dialogue</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer questioning and observation</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student learning logs</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group self-evaluation</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Reading samples including picture cued description stories</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Writing samples</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Language and literacy inventories</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Student journals</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Permanent written products (e.g., major assignments such as major end of term paper)</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learner/instructor conferences to determine information gaps and student interests</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video clips of performance on instructional tasks</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final summative evaluation (e.g., final exam) given to group</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role plays or simulations</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrations and presentations</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance assessment tasks (specific tasks that students need to demonstrate)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal setting activities</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Largest number for each assessment is highlighted in **bold**.
Table 9: Frequency which locally developed, alternative assessments are used to determine instructional effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Half</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews that include teacher questioning and dialogue</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer questioning and observation</td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning logs</td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual self-evaluation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group self-evaluation</td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading samples including picture cued description stories</td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing samples</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing prompts</td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language and literacy inventories</td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student journals</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent written products (e.g., major assignments such as major end of term paper)</td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner/instructor conferences to determine information gaps and student interests</td>
<td>14</td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video clips of performance on instructional tasks</td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final summative evaluation (e.g., final exam) given to group</td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Goal setting activities</td>
<td>17</td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A few adult education programs reported using alternative assessments that were not described in the survey. For instance, one program used a “monthly oral individual speaking/listening test based on program competency based curriculum as well as a modified NYS test for initial placement.” Two programs mentioned designing tests that were customized to their curriculum as a means of measuring student learning. Another program described a 10-minute written test that includes providing accurate personal information on a form, writing a check to a landlord, addressing an envelope, and writing a note about a problem in one’s apartment.

In conclusion, the most commonly employed alternative assessments for each “assessment purpose” are summarized below:

- **To place learners in appropriate instructional levels** – Writing samples, Teacher observation, Writing prompts, and Informal teacher interviews;
- **To measure the ongoing progress that learners are making in the program (i.e., to demonstrate learner gains)** – Writing samples, Writing prompts, Quizzes, Goal setting activities, Informal teacher interviews, Teacher observation;
- **To identify learner strengths and weaknesses** - Informal teacher interviews, Teacher observations, Writing samples, Writing prompts, Quizzes, Learner/instructor conferences;
- **To qualify learners for academic and vocational programs** – None; no locally developed alternative assessment was identified by a significant number of respondents as being used any more often than “occasionally”;
- **To determine program effectiveness** - Informal teacher interviews, teacher observations, Writing samples, Learner/instructor conferences, Program evaluation.

### IV. Perceptions of the Relative Usefulness of Standardized Assessments

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of the relative usefulness of different standardized assessments in relation to specific purposes. The question was “Regardless of how (insert name of assessment tool) is currently being used in your program, what are you perceptions of its relative usefulness for the following purposes:

- To place learners in appropriate instructional levels
- To measure the ongoing progress that learners are making in the program (i.e., to demonstrate learner gains)
- To identify learner strengths and weaknesses
- To qualify learners for academic and vocational programs
- To determine program effectiveness
- To collect pre- and post-test data

Figures 4–9 show that overall, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), is perceived to be the assessment tool providing the most useful information. Across all six assessment the TABE was listed as “very useful” by more respondents than
any other assessment instrument. The CELSA, BEST, and BEST Plus had relatively similar profiles as a whole, however respondents indicated that each of these tests had relative advantages over the others in certain areas. For example, the BEST was rated more favorably than the CELSA in regard to identifying learner strengths and weaknesses, but the CELSA was consider superior to the BEST in terms of its usefulness in identifying learners to qualify for academic and vocational programs.

It appears that respondents had much more confidence in the usefulness of the four standardized tests for purpose of collecting pre- and post-test data than for the other five purposes. The majority of respondents rated all four tests as “very useful” for collecting pre- and post-test data, and only a very small percentage indicated that these tests were not useful for this purpose. In contrast, although the TABE received the most support as an assessment to qualify learners for academic and vocational programs, only 20% of respondents considered it to be a “very useful” test for this purpose. There was a significant number of respondents that rated all four tests as “not useful” in terms of providing information to inform decision making regarding which learners should qualify for academic and vocational programs.

**Figure 4: Number and percentage of respondents indicating the relative usefulness of 4 standardized assessments for the purpose of placing learners in appropriate instructional levels**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents indicating the relative usefulness of BEST, BEST Plus, TABE, and CELSA for placing learners in appropriate instructional levels. The chart indicates that a higher percentage of respondents found BEST and TABE to be very useful compared to BEST Plus and CELSA.](image-url)
Figure 5: Number and percentage of respondents indicating the relative usefulness of 4 standardized assessments for the purpose of measuring the ongoing progress that learners are making in the program (i.e., to demonstrate learner gains).

Figure 6: Number and percentage of respondents indicating the relative usefulness of 4 standardized assessments for the purpose of identifying learner strengths and weaknesses.
Figure 7: Number and percentage of respondents indicating the relative usefulness of 4 standardized assessments for the purpose of qualifying learners for academic and vocational programs.

Figure 8: Number and percentage of respondents indicating the relative usefulness of 4 standardized assessments for the purpose of determining instructional effectiveness.
Several respondents indicated that a variety of standardized assessment instruments and state licensure exams were being used in a modified fashion to provide additional information. Included among these instruments were the Slosson Oral Reading Test, GED Practice Tests, BEST Screener, Illinois Department of Public Health exams related to Nurse Assistant and Food Service Sanitation, Stand Out, ACT/PSAE, SLEP, and COMPASS.

V. Obstacles and Barriers to Implementing Best Practices in Assessment

Several potential obstacles/barriers to initiating and implementing best practices in assessment were presented for consideration. Respondents were asked to indicate the relative significance of each obstacle/barrier. The results are shown in Table 9.

Adult education administrators clearly believed that the most significant obstacle/barrier was related to difficulty collecting post-test standardized assessment information due to the reality that a high percentage of adult education students fail to remain enrolled in their courses long enough to take the post-test. There are a significant number of students in adult education programs who have far more transitory lives compared to those of the general population. Therefore, there is an inherent tension between the goals of (a) striving to serve individuals at the margins of society who have limited access to other educational opportunities and (b) striving...
to obtain post-test information on a high percentage of students to demonstrate program accountability.

*Limited funding to purchase standardized assessments that are needed by adult education programs and limited time for local adult educators to develop informal/alternative assessments and/or become familiar with the uses and applications of various assessment options* were identified as relatively significant obstacles/barriers. These two barriers may be linked. In a follow-up item on the survey which requested respondents identify additional factors that may serve as obstacles/barriers, one respondent commented “To clarify - limited time for instructors to spend on developing knowledge/best practices in the area of assessment equals limited funding - not just limited funding to purchase standardized assessments.” Another respondent wrote “Instructional staff is part-time and they do not have time to develop informal assessment tests. I prefer their time is spent preparing and implementing quality instructional programs, and student support staff administer post tests and through those results, and GED testing, we assess learning gains.”

Two other obstacles/barriers received some validation from the respondents. *A lack of motivation on the part of adult education teachers to learn how to use alternate assessments and a lack of knowledge about the potential of alternative assessments to benefit students among adult education teachers and/or administrators* were listed as either a “minor” or “legitimate” consideration by approximately two-thirds of the respondents. In providing comments to the follow-up question about these barriers, several respondents noted that there is a lack of training/professional development on alternative assessment, and the high turnover of instructors only exacerbates the problem. One respondent commented, “Instructors are already over-burdened with open enrollment, large classes, requirements from local institution, and some students attending class infrequently. Instructors are so busy fulfilling the requirements for the grant that most lack time and energy to develop and use alternative assessments on a regular basis with their students.”

The final two potential barriers, *a lack of administrative support at the local level to assure that standardized assessment information is collected with fidelity and a lack of administrative support at the local level to encourage teachers to develop and use informal/alternate assessments in their classrooms*, were not considered to be genuine problems by the vast majority of respondents. Although it is important to remember that the respondents to the survey were program administrators and therefore may have a skewed view of these two items, they clearly did not believe that there was a lack of administrative support for teachers to implement best practices in assessing students.

As has been mentioned, there was a follow-up question on the survey that asked respondents to “Please list any additional obstacles or barriers to initiating
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle/Barrier</th>
<th>Not a true obstacle/barrier and is of no concern (score 1)</th>
<th>A minor obstacle/barrier that may occur in isolated situations, but only of limited concern (score 2)</th>
<th>A legitimate obstacle/barrier that will require considerable time, attention, and/or resources to properly address (score 3)</th>
<th>A major obstacle/barrier that will require a tremendous effort to fully address (score 4)</th>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lack of administrative support at the local level to assure that standardized assessment information is collected with fidelity. (n=65)</td>
<td>68.2% (45)</td>
<td>24.2% (16)</td>
<td>7.6% (5)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of administrative support at the local level to encourage teachers to develop and use informal/alternate assessments in their classrooms. (n=66)</td>
<td>51.5% (34)</td>
<td>33.3% (22)</td>
<td>13.6% (9)</td>
<td>1.5% (1)</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of motivation on the part of adult education teachers to learn how to use alternative assessments. (n=66)</td>
<td>27.3% (18)</td>
<td>48.5% (32)</td>
<td>18.2% (12)</td>
<td>6.1% (4)</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of knowledge about the potential of alternative assessments to benefit students among adult education teachers and/or administrators. (n=65)</td>
<td>21.2% (14)</td>
<td>37.9% (25)</td>
<td>30.3% (20)</td>
<td>10.6% (7)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obstacle/Barrier</td>
<td>Not a true obstacle/barrier and is of no concern (score 1)</td>
<td>A minor obstacle/barrier that may occur in isolated situations, but only of limited concern (score 2)</td>
<td>A legitimate obstacle/barrier that will require considerable time, attention, and/or resources to properly address (score 3)</td>
<td>A major obstacle/barrier that will require a tremendous effort to fully address (score 4)</td>
<td>Mean Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited funding to purchase standardized assessments that are needed by adult education programs</td>
<td>13.6% (9)</td>
<td>42.4% (28)</td>
<td>33.3% (22)</td>
<td>10.6% (7)</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited time for local adult educators to develop informal/alternate assessments and/or become familiar with the uses and applications of various assessment options (n=66)</td>
<td>10.8% (7)</td>
<td>30.8% (20)</td>
<td>44.6% (29)</td>
<td>13.8% (9)</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty collecting post-test standardized assessment information because a high percentage of students fail to remain enrolled in their courses long enough to take the post-test. (n=65)</td>
<td>3.1% (2)</td>
<td>13.8% (9)</td>
<td>49.2% (32)</td>
<td>33.8% (22)</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and implementing best practices in assessment in adult education program.” In addition to the comments that were summarized in the preceding paragraphs, one additional theme emerged. Namely, respondents perceived that the system did not reward alternative assessments in the same way that collecting standardized assessment data was rewarded. As one respondent put it “It would be helpful for the funding entity to provide some form of incentive/encouragement to focus on alternative assessment measures. Currently, the focus is solely placed on standardized pre/post gains and testing rates.”

VI. Perspectives on time between pre- and post-tests

Respondents were asked to provide 3 perspectives on the amount of time between pre- and post-testing:
1. What is the minimum amount of time needed to show a gain score?
2. What is the ideal amount of time that would maximize the number of students for whom a pre- and post-test could be collected?
3. How many hours of instruction are needed for adult education programs to collect pre-and post-test data on the greatest number of students enrolled in the program?

It is evident that these three questions overlap, as each question is attempting to find the best time period between pre- and post-testing in order to (a) maximize the participation of students, but at the same time (b) provide a realistic opportunity for students to demonstrate growth and learning. Table 10 shows the findings.

Table 10: Perspectives from adult education administrators on time needed between pre- and post-test to demonstrate “gain scores”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum Hours to Show Gain</th>
<th>Ideal Hours to Maximize Student Participation</th>
<th>Hours Needed by Greatest Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language (ESL)</td>
<td>20 - 250</td>
<td>62.91</td>
<td>12 – 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Basic Education (ABE)</td>
<td>25 - 260</td>
<td>58.76</td>
<td>12 – 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Secondary Education (ASE)</td>
<td>15 - 240</td>
<td>53.36</td>
<td>20 – 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Development (GED)</td>
<td>15 - 240</td>
<td>52.40</td>
<td>12 – 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational (VOC)</td>
<td>15 - 240</td>
<td>53.68</td>
<td>12 – 320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the three questions were intended to provide nuanced perspectives, the redundancy among the questions may have confused respondents as several indicated that they did not understand the distinctions. Many respondents elected to enter a range of hours, and in such cases the mid-point was used for data analysis. Several others simply indicated that there was no way to answer the questions because the answer varies from learner to learner and from program to program. As one respondent pointed out, there are different answers for the Certified Nurses Aid Program, the Business Program, and the Food Sanitation Program, although all three programs are included within vocational (VOC) category.

Because respondents may have found these questions to be confusing, results must be interpreted with caution. All findings must be considered as preliminary, and further investigation is certainly warranted. However, it is clear from this survey that there is great divergence of opinion among adult education administrators regarding the amount of instructional time that is necessary between pre- and post-tests in order to realistically have the opportunity to demonstrate learner outcomes (i.e., gain scores). As can be seen in Table 10, the ranges are especially wide (e.g., 12 and 320 hours). Even when the most extreme scores are removed (i.e., take out the highest 10% and take out the lowest 10% of scores), there is still significant diversity of opinion regarding the amount of instructional time that the majority of learners need in order to demonstrate gain scores. For each program there were several respondents who suggested between 75 and 90 hours was needed, an equal number of others who recommended between 20 and 30 hours, and relatively equal numbers of respondents at every point in between.

It is interesting to note that although the ranges were very broad, the means were relatively consistent across the five programs and the three questions. Based on mean scores from this survey it could be concluded that that between 35 and 60 hours of instruction are needed to balance the competing priorities of (a) collecting pre- and post-tests on as many students as possible and (b) providing students and adult education programs with a reasonable opportunity to document learner gains.

VII. Sharing Assessment Information with Students

Although assessment information provides a basis for documenting program accountability and instructional effectiveness, it can be argued that the most important potential consumer of assessment data is the student. On an individual level, assessment data can help students understand what they know and what they still need to learn, and can enable them to track their own progress. The importance of adult learners critically reflecting on their progress and taking responsibility for their own learning cannot be overstated.
Therefore, there were two survey questions that addressed sharing assessment information with students. The first question asked to what extent was there a process in place for students to become aware of the results and implications of their own assessment information. Administrators were asked to respond to a 5-point Likert type of scale that included the following descriptors: 0 - to no extent, 1 - to a small extent, 2 - to a moderate extent, 3 - to a great extent, and 4 - to a very great extent. Figure 10 shows that most program administrators believed that this was present to a “moderate” or “great” extent.

**Figure 10: To what extent do you have a process in place for students in your program(s) to become aware of the results and implications of their own assessment information?**

![Bar Chart](image)

The follow-up question asked respondents to describe how staff communicated the purpose and value of various assessment findings to students. It was clear from the responses that programs use a variety of formal and informal means to communicate assessment information to students. Some programs appear to rely solely on less formal, face-to-face conferences that include students and instructors and/or testing staff. Several respondents commented that the quality of these conferences depended on skills of staff members. Some adult educators are more gifted than others in their ability to use assessment information to motivate students and reinforce students who are making progress toward their goals.

Some programs are taking a programmatic approach to sharing assessment information in the sense that the importance of assessment information is highlighted during orientation sessions and in student handbooks, and is the focal point of student conferences. These programs have guidelines that require a certain number of scheduled meetings to review assessment
information, instead of leaving the frequency of meetings to the discretion of teachers and/or students.

Finally, some programs share with students the connection between program funding and test scores as means to encourage participating in post-tests. According to one respondent, “Sometimes I think teachers may mention that the more points we get the better it is for the agency, but they don't go into detail about funding, they just mention it for extra motivation.”

VIII. Professional Development Needs of Adult Educators

Respondents were provided with a list of 29 assessment related topics for professional development and were asked to assign one of the following ratings to each topic: (a) Limited or no need for training; (b) Moderate (i.e., some) need for training; (c) Significant (i.e., great) need for training. The results are displayed in Table 11.

As Table 11 shows, ratings were quantified by scoring 1 point each time a respondent rated a topic as “limited or no need”, 2 points whenever the rating was “moderate need”, and 3 points when the rating was “significant need”. The points for each topic were summed and divided by the number of respondents who recorded a rating to arrive at the “Mean Rating”. Based on this method, Alternative Assessment (All types) was the topic identified to be most needed by adult educators followed by Standardized Assessment (All types). The fact that more specific types of alternative and standardized assessments were rated lower may suggest that administrators see their staffs as needing broader, more foundational (i.e., big picture) information instead of particular/detailed information about a specific test or assessment technique. However, all of the standardized assessments were rated relatively high, so the “big picture” information need may be more pronounced for alternative assessments.

In addition to information about the four standardized tests, Goal setting activities, Communicating assessment information to students, Language and literacy inventories, and Performance assessment tasks were areas ranked in the top ten in terms of need for professional development.

IX. Examples of Promising Practices from Illinois

The final question on the survey asked respondents to identify examples of exemplary assessment practices in adult education in Illinois that could be replicated by other programs. Several excellent examples were identified, and the Center for Adult Learning Leadership will be contacting these programs to highlight their practices in the coming year and providing programs the opportunity to share innovative ideas with one another.
Table 11: Professional development needs of adult educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Topic</th>
<th>Limited or No Need (score 1)</th>
<th>Moderate Need (Score 2)</th>
<th>Significant Need (Score 3)</th>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Assessments (All types)</td>
<td>5.4% (3)</td>
<td>57.1% (32)</td>
<td>37.5% (21)</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Assessments (All types)</td>
<td>15.3% (9)</td>
<td>55.9% (33)</td>
<td>28.8% (17)</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABE</td>
<td>20.4% (11)</td>
<td>50.0% (27)</td>
<td>29.6% (16)</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST PLUS</td>
<td>29.4% (15)</td>
<td>35.3% (18)</td>
<td>35.3% (18)</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting activities</td>
<td>21.1% (12)</td>
<td>61.4% (35)</td>
<td>17.5% (10)</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating assessment information to students</td>
<td>23.6% (13)</td>
<td>56.4% (31)</td>
<td>20.0% (11)</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy inventories</td>
<td>21.8% (12)</td>
<td>61.8% (34)</td>
<td>16.4% (9)</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELSA</td>
<td>30.6% (15)</td>
<td>51.0% (25)</td>
<td>18.4% (9)</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance assessment tasks (specific tasks that students need to demonstrate)</td>
<td>32.1% (18)</td>
<td>48.2% (27)</td>
<td>19.6% (11)</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST</td>
<td>27.3% (15)</td>
<td>58.2% (32)</td>
<td>14.5% (8)</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews that include teacher questioning and dialogue</td>
<td>30.4% (17)</td>
<td>55.4% (31)</td>
<td>14.3% (8)</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing samples</td>
<td>30.4% (17)</td>
<td>55.4% (31)</td>
<td>14.3% (8)</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner/instructor conferences to determine information gaps and student interests</td>
<td>35.2% (19)</td>
<td>48.1% (26)</td>
<td>16.7% (9)</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>37.0% (20)</td>
<td>46.3% (25)</td>
<td>16.7% (9)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation</td>
<td>30.4% (17)</td>
<td>60.7% (34)</td>
<td>8.9% (5)</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual self-evaluation</td>
<td>30.9% (17)</td>
<td>60.0% (33)</td>
<td>9.1% (5)</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning logs</td>
<td>37.0% (20)</td>
<td>50.0% (27)</td>
<td>13.0% (7)</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>37.0% (20)</td>
<td>53.7% (29)</td>
<td>9.3% (5)</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer questioning and observation</td>
<td>42.6% (23)</td>
<td>48.1% (26)</td>
<td>9.3% (5)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group self-evaluation</td>
<td>44.4% (24)</td>
<td>44.4% (24)</td>
<td>11.1% (6)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading samples including picture cued description stories</td>
<td>40.7% (22)</td>
<td>51.9% (28)</td>
<td>7.4% (4)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>43.4% (23)</td>
<td>49.1% (26)</td>
<td>7.5% (4)</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing prompts</td>
<td>40.7% (22)</td>
<td>55.6% (30)</td>
<td>3.7% (2)</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student journals</td>
<td>49.1% (27)</td>
<td>45.5% (25)</td>
<td>5.5% (3)</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations and presentations</td>
<td>50.0% (26)</td>
<td>44.2% (23)</td>
<td>5.8% (3)</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video clips of performance on instructional tasks</td>
<td>54.5% (30)</td>
<td>36.4% (20)</td>
<td>9.1% (5)</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role plays or simulations</td>
<td>57.4% (31)</td>
<td>35.2% (19)</td>
<td>7.4% (4)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final summative evaluation (e.g., final exam) given to group</td>
<td>63.0% (34)</td>
<td>29.6% (16)</td>
<td>7.4% (4)</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>63.0% (34)</td>
<td>31.5% (17)</td>
<td>5.6% (3)</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent written products (e.g., major assignments such as major end of term paper)</td>
<td>63.0% (34)</td>
<td>31.5% (17)</td>
<td>5.6% (3)</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers in the parentheses are number of respondents for the item. References
RECOMMENDATIONS

The information gleaned from this study provided the foundation for the following recommendations regarding policy, practice and research. Ongoing examination of assessment practices at the state and local level will continue to enhance program performance as accountability measures remain a focus.

Policy:

Written Policy:

- Communicate the expectation that assessment should not be a stand-alone piece of a program, but embedded and integrated throughout a program by stating this explicitly in the Adult Education Handbook.

- Require that content standards being created and/or piloted have assessments identified/developed concurrently with curriculum, based on goals and standards.

- Embed assessment into course planning by requiring that the type and scope of assessments to be used be added to all curriculum guides/syllabi submitted to ICCB for approval.

Test Administration:

- Strengthen test administrator training policy to ensure that staff who are administering tests to students are consistently following policy and guidelines.

- Institute a required training and certification system to make certain test administrators are strictly adhering to all publisher guidelines including time limits of standardized test and the use of appropriate testing forms and levels of tests for students.

- Review the training provided to programs by the Service Center Network to ensure timeliness, consistency, and effectiveness of training in transmitting information about state assessment policies and publishers’ standardized testing requirements.

- Require use of the Locator prior to administration of the TABE pretest.

Funding

- Provide funding specifically allocated for assessment to programs that is in addition to their general funding so that they do not have to
choose between spending money on assessment or spending money on instruction. Costs could be based on a formula related to numbers served during the previous year or other base numbers recommended by Advisory Group or special study group.

- Provide incentives for programs who consistently use alternative assessments that include an accompanying method of collecting data to guide and support instruction and report results.

- Provide incentives for programs that experiment with using alternative assessments that include an accompanying method of collecting data to guide and support instruction and report results.

Advocacy

- Advocate at the national level for more appropriate measures of progress. This would include collecting longitudinal data at the state level to determine if level gains would be better revealed over a longer time span than one year. If found to be true, use the data to advocate for longer timelines.

- As programs use alternative assessments, request their assistance to determine a way to measure progress and produce data that could be used in support of broader measures of progress.

- Examining both length of time needed for measurable learning gain and methods of using and reporting alternative assessment as a collaborative effort with other states would be most effective and could help provide useful data to NRS in support of a longer reporting period and broader measures of progress.

Practice

- Encourage programs to closely examine and evaluate their intake procedures to ensure adult learners are properly informed in preparation for assessment procedures and fully supported throughout the process.

- Provide direction for programs on how to promote job-embedded professional development on the value, development, and use of alternative assessments to inform or guide instruction in the classroom and the tie to program improvement. This would be done through the Service Center Network.
• Provide information to all programs on the importance of using assessment data for program improvement. Highlight Illinois programs with promising practices using data for program improvement. Continually focus on the message through professional development opportunities offered by the Service Center Network, online HorizonWimba discussions, resources on the Excellence Website, and Service Center Network websites.

Research:

• Form a study group to review current ICCB policies and program practices to identify ways to increase the number of valid pre-/post test scores and level gains. The study group could include ICCB staff and a representative group of program providers who would examine such issues as intake procedures, TABE Locator policy, number of hours between pre and post testing, Placement test / pre-test policy and testing procedures.

• Identify pilot project(s) to test identified strategies/procedures from study group(s) described above. Determine what data will be useful to determine impact, how the data will be collected and reported to further guide policy and/or practice.

• Gather promising practices from Illinois programs in the area of assessment. Examine what programs are doing in various areas of assessment and share the methods/strategies/procedures statewide. Topics highlighted should include managing the assessment process, preparing staff and students, integrating assessment throughout the program, effectively monitoring staff administering tests, and using assessment data for program improvement.
STATES’ FINDINGS:
SELECTED MATERIALS ON FILE

Accommodations

Arkansas
- “Learning Needs Screening Form”
  Questions to ask at intake to give clues as to whether a student might have special learning needs

Idaho
- List of accommodations for which documentation is not needed

New Jersey
- Accommodations for which proof of disability is needed and those for which it is not

South Carolina
- Sample Modifications for Students With Disabilities
  Lists examples of flexible scheduling, setting, timing, presentation, and responding

Tennessee
- Accommodations section
  Lists applicable federal law and website
  Lists publisher recommendations and website

Acronyms and Definitions

Georgia
- Federal and State Acronyms and Definitions
  5 page, complete definitions of commonly needed terms

Idaho
- One page of frequently used acronyms

Maryland
- Glossary
  4 page list of commonly needed definitions
Assessment Systems Checklists

Kansas
• Testing Checklist

Maryland
• Checklist for assessment administration standards
  Areas of test security, selection, training, preparation, administration, outcomes
• Instructions are to develop an action plan and timeline for any standard not checked off

South Carolina
• “NRS Implementation Checklist for Quality Control”
• Self-assessment checklist for programs to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in implementation of NRS requirements

Computer Literacy

Oregon
• “Guidelines for Measuring Technology Gain”
  Defines entry and exit level skills

South Carolina
• Computer Skills Assessment Correlation Chart
  Correlates Computer skills to educational functioning level
• Computer Skills Assessment Checklist
  Assessment of pre and post computer skills

Continuous Improvement Systems

Iowa
• “Flowchart …to learner goal/program outcome”
• “Iowa’s NRS Benchmark Continuous Improvement Model”

Maryland
• “Data Quality Plan Tips”, 2 pages from adult ed. handbook
• “Data Quality Plan: Example of Evidence Elements” includes standards for assessment

Ohio
• “Connecting Policy and Practice: A Guide to the Revised ABLE Portfolio System”: A guide for programs
• Standards-based collection of student work used to plan and prepare collaborative teaching, learning, assessment, and reflective experiences.
Pennsylvania
- Discussion questions for program improvement team to determine how well the program is doing with indicators
- Leads directly to program improvement

Correlations with EFLs

New Hampshire
- Chart

West Virginia
- Charts by test

Data Detective Materials

Maryland
- Power Point presentations on state implementation
- State workbook for Program Directors
  Fall administrators meeting activity

South Dakota
- Power Point presentations on state implementation
- State workbook for Program Directors
  Fall administrators meeting activity

Tennessee
- Power Point presentations on state implementation

Forms

Arkansas
- “Pre-test/Post-test Form” and “Student Separation Form”
  Good forms to emphasize the need to track this data

- “Post-test Exception Form”
  For documentation of reason for administering a post test prior to the 60 hour minimum between pre and post test

Tennessee
- “Teacher referral form for testing” from teacher to test administrator
  Waiver of Instructional hour minimum for retesting for documentation of reason to schedule TABE or BEST prior to completion of 60 instruction hours
Post Testing Hours Exception Checklist-for documentation of reason for administering a post test prior to the 60 hour minimum between pre and post test

**Goal Setting**

Idaho
- Goal setting chart
  Breaks long term goals into intermediate and short term goals and steps with timelines

Montana
- Goal Setting section
  Written policy fully integrates assessment policy into goal setting

Ohio
- “Goal Setting and ILP Development”
  Rationale for goal setting, types of goals, implications for the student and for the program
- “Goal Setting: A Collaborative Process”
  Includes a chart showing the collaborative steps in setting, monitoring, and recording progress towards goals

Rhode Island
- “Policy and guidance letter”
  Reports results of a study of persistence of students who used goal setting versus those who did not
  Details goal setting components and processes
  Also lists intake and orientation standards

**Guiding Principles**

Hawaii
  “To support students, a delivery system is in place to include what is to be taught, how it may be taught, and a way or ways to measure if and to what extent learning has taken place”

Idaho
- “Responsibilities of Those Who Administer Assessments”
  Lists 11 responsibilities to ensure that those who prepare students for and give assessments provide them with an opportunity for a fair and accurate assessment of their skills and knowledge
Kansas
- “Phases of Assessment”, Section 1.2
  "Assessing the progress and skills of learners is a continuous process, starting from the moment they arrive in the office or classroom and continuing until they leave the program.”
  How assessment fits into each phase of the student’s experience is discussed: orientation, initial assessment, placement, instruction, post-testing

Ohio
- Guidance to staff regarding the ongoing nature and usefulness of assessment
  Description of portfolio system
Intake and Testing Procedures

Maryland
- “General Assessment Guidance”: Test security guidance
  FAQ: Sample pages

Massachusetts
- Suggested guidelines for intake and class placement
  Provides four acceptable scenarios with different sequences
  Discusses the advantages of each

Missouri
- “Good Testing Procedures”
  Detailed instructions of what should happen during pre-testing

South Carolina
- “Standardized Testing Procedures”
  What should happen before, during and after testing:
    Securing of testing materials
    Preparing students for testing
    What to do during the testing process
    What to do after testing

Job Description

Maryland
- Intake/Assessment Specialist job description
  Resource person for all instructional staff
  Responsible for appropriate intake and assessment of learners
  Includes purpose, required knowledge, duties, qualifications, employment terms

Lesson for Students: Taking Standardized Tests

Massachusetts
- Complete lesson plan (10 pages) with objectives, materials list, activities and teacher notes
  Topics covered include: What are standardized test?; Purposes, pros and cons of standardized tests; Why do we take tests?; Test-taking strategies
Managed Enrollment

Maryland
- Detailed description of what managed enrollment is and how programs can implement it
  Examples of different formats are provided in chart form

Staff Training

Georgia
- “Training for Administering Assessments”
  Includes a list of minimum content of training

Massachusetts
- requirements

Oregon
- “Training for Administering Assessments”
  Describes a cadre of state trainers system; apprenticeship process.
  Requires annual recertification

South Carolina
- Lists required content of training

Tennessee
- Detailed list of training requirements per standardized test
  Lists include separate lists for Best Plus and Best Oral and Best literacy.
  Also list for TABE

Standardized Test Information

Georgia
- “TABE and BEST Frequently Asked Questions”
  Questions and answers about administering; accommodations; correlations and uses of scores; purchasing, etc.

Massachusetts
- Guidelines for TABE valid/invalid scores
  When programs should retest a student due to inaccurate score
  Includes information in chart form

Michigan
- Guidelines for TABE valid/invalid scores
  When programs should retest a student due to inaccurate score
New York
• Guidelines for TABE valid/invalid scores
  When programs should retest a student due to inaccurate score
  Includes information in chart form used by several states

South Carolina
• Information to staff about each standardized test

• NRS Assessment Tools Comparison
  Chart comparing BEST, TABE, CASAS, WorkKeys, GED OPT tests
  Provides basic description, use, advantages and limitations of each

West Virginia
• Entry and Exit Federal Functioning Level Correlations to Grade Level,
  Scale Scores, and SPLs

Test Security

Georgia
• Lists 12 distinct policies regarding the security of test materials, questions,
  answers, and violations

Idaho
• Guarding test content and actual test materials

Maryland
• Locked cabinet and checkout requirements
ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

The following states’ written policies provide additional quality text, models, and materials in the following areas. These states would be good sources for additional information in the future.

Accommodations
- Arkansas
- Idaho
- New Jersey
- South Carolina
- Tennessee

Alignment of standards, goal setting, curriculum, assessment
- Hawaii
- Iowa
- Ohio
- Montana

Assessment Manuals: Comprehensive, user-friendly manuals for program use
- Georgia
- Kansas
- South Carolina
- West Virginia

Assessment throughout a program
- Hawaii
- Maryland
- Kansas
- Ohio

Bringing the student In: learner-centered intake and assessment
- Hawaii
- Florida

CASAS information
- California
- Connecticut

Checklists
- NRS Implementation checklist (South Carolina)
- Assessment Administration Standards Checklist (Maryland)
Continuous improvement models
- Hawaii
- Iowa
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Ohio
- Tennessee

Conversion of Test Scores to EFL
- New Hampshire
- West Virginia

Detailed testing procedure guidance
- South Carolina
- Maryland
- Mississippi

FAQs and Q and A Formats
- Georgia
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- South Carolina
- West Virginia

Goal setting emphasis
- Idaho
- Montana
- Ohio
- Rhode Island

Job description of assessment specialist
- Maryland

Lessons for learners on understanding standardized tests
- Massachusetts

Managed Enrollment
- Maryland

Performance Standards: FAQ
- Massachusetts

Portfolio system
- Ohio
Professional development content
  • Florida

Readability levels of published series
  • Missouri

Standards-Based Education
  • Hawaii

Test guidelines
  • Georgia
  • Massachusetts
  • West Virginia

Training of those giving tests
  • Georgia
  • Mississippi

Security Policies
  • Georgia
  • Maryland

Using data for program improvement
  • Maryland
  • Pennsylvania

Valid TABE Scores
  • Massachusetts
  • New York