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An Analysis of Parent Opinions and Changes in Opinions Regarding Standardized Tests, Teacher's Information, and Performance Assessments

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PREFACE

The current intense interest in alternative forms of assessment is based on a number of assumptions that are as yet untested. In particular, the claim that authentic assessments will improve instruction and student learning is supported only by negative evidence from research on the effects of traditional multiple-choice tests. Because it has been shown that student learning is reduced by teaching to tests of low-level skills, it is theorized that teaching to more curricularly defensible tests will improve student learning (Frederiksen & Collins, 1989; Resnick & Resnick, 1992). In our current research for the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) we are examining the actual effects of introducing new forms of assessment at the classroom level.

Derived from theoretical arguments about the anticipated effects of authentic assessments and from the framework of past empirical studies that examined the effects of standardized tests (Shepard, 1991), our study examines a number of interrelated research questions:

1. What logistical constraints must be respected in developing alternative assessments for classroom purposes? What are the features of assessments that can feasibly be integrated with instruction?

2. What changes occur in teachers' knowledge and beliefs about assessment as a result of the project? What changes occur in classroom assessment practices? Are these changes different in writing, reading, and mathematics, or by type of school?

3. What changes occur in teachers' knowledge and beliefs about instruction as a result of the project? What changes occur in instructional practices? Are these changes different in writing, reading, and mathematics, or by type of school?

4. What is the effect of new assessments on student learning? What picture of student learning is suggested by improvements as measured by the new assessments? Are gains in student achievement corroborated by external measures?

5. What is the impact of new assessments on parents' understandings of the curriculum and their children's progress? Are new forms of assessment credible to parents and other "accountability audiences" such as school boards and accountability committees?

This report summarizes current project findings for the parent opinion portion of the study.

Frederiksen, J. R., & Collins, A. (1989). A systems approach to educational testing. *Educational Researcher*, *18*(9), 27-32.

Resnick, L. B., & Resnick, D. P. (1992). Assessing the thinking curriculum: New tools for educational reform. In B. R. Gifford & M. C. O'Connor (Eds.), *Changing assessments: Alternative views of aptitude, achievement and instruction* (pp. 37-75). Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Shepard, L. A. (1991). Will national tests improve student learning? *Phi Delta Kappan*, *73*, 232-238.

An Analysis of Parent Opinions and Changes in Opinions Regarding Standardized Tests, Teacher's Information, and Performance Assessments[1]

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The current debate about the virtues of standardized tests versus performance assessments is often confused because advocates and antagonists fail to specify which measurement feature they are arguing for or against: basic skills content, multiple-choice format, norm-referenced score interpretation, or standardized administration and scoring procedures. Despite the potential for multiple meanings we use the term "standardized test" because this is the name parents and policy makers use for tests like the CTBS and ITBS. For them the term implies external objective tests with bubble-in answers and national norms. We use the term performance assessment as defined by Resnick and Resnick (1992). "A performance assessment is one that uses direct judgments and evaluations of performances rather than indirect indicators of competence" (p. 61). We consider performance assessments to be synonymous with *direct* assessment as described by Frederiksen and Collins (1989) and *authentic* assessment described by Wiggins (1989).

A growing body of research has documented the negative effects of standardized achievement tests on teaching and learning. In some cases efforts to raise test scores have distorted curriculum to such an extent that reading and mathematics have been emphasized to the exclusion of science and social studies. More pervasively, the form of instruction has been reshaped to imitate the format of multiple-choice test questions. As a consequence, students have been taught to recognize right answers rather than to generate their own ideas and solutions to problems. Although standardized achievement tests may have been selected

[1] Sections of this report summarizing initial fall opinion data were presented originally by Shepard and Bliem (1993) at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New data presented in this report include spring quesionnaire and interview results and fall-spring change analyses.

because they provided low-cost, objective scoring and national norms, it is the limitations of test content and multiple-choice test format that have led to these deleterious effects when administered in a high-stakes accountability environment.

In contrast, reformers expect performance assessments to have a nondistorting and positive effect on instruction and learning by aiming at more direct, complete, and integrated measures of desired student outcomes. Then, if teachers attempt to improve performance by providing practice on assessment-like tasks, there should be no discrepancy between these activities and ideal instruction. Unfortunately, the potential benefits of performance assessments remain to date largely theoretical because large-scale implementation efforts are only in the developmental stages. Many technical, educational, and political problems are yet to be resolved including unreliability of scoring, nongeneralizability across tasks, corruptibility in high-stakes contexts, inequities in teacher preparation for new ways of teaching, etc.

In this report, we address one political obstacle to performance assessment—the objection of parents. Although we do not claim, as do some advocates, that performance assessments are automatically valid and equitable, we do believe that challenging academic assessments could be powerful tools for improving classroom instruction. Therefore, it is worrisome if educators are unable to invest in development efforts for fear of a backlash from parents.

Policy makers perceive a demand for standardized testing from both parents and the general public. Standardized test score results are believed to be essential to monitor individual student progress and to hold schools accountable. For example, this demand is evidenced by Gallup Poll results demonstrating the high percentage of respondents favoring the use of standardized national tests by public schools in their community to measure the academic achievement of students (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1992). Because of this perception, legislators, school board members, and professional educators fear that parents will be "up in arms" if performance assessments are adopted to supplant familiar standardized tests. In the early stages of the current research project, for example, sympathetic members of the district accountability committee asked that researchers discontinue the use of the phrase "alternative assessment" because it connoted abandonment of standards and rigor. We adopted the term performance assessment in deference to their wishes.

The purpose of this study was to examine more systematically parent opinions about standardized tests and performance assessments. We were especially interested in focusing parent attention on the content and form of these two types of measures, but we also provided parents with the opportunity to talk about the standardization and norm-referenced features of traditional tests. The research was guided by the following questions.

1. How do parents in this sample respond to marker Gallup Poll questions about the quality of local schools, the quality of information provided to parents, and the desirability of standardized national tests?

2. How do parents evaluate the usefulness of standardized tests compared to less formal types of information such as report cards, talking to the teacher, or seeing samples of their child's work? Do parents differentiate between information they find useful in learning about their child's progress in school versus the information they use to make judgments about the school as a whole?

3. After being shown sample questions and tasks, what preferences do parents express regarding district use of standardized tests and performance assessments in reading and mathematics? Is it true that parents disdain the use of performance assessments as less rigorous or objective? What features of the two types of measures affect parent preferences?

4. How do parents respond when asked to make their judgments about standardized-test questions and performance assessments in the context of classroom instruction?

Methods

Parent Sample

Questionnaire parent samples were selected in both the participating and control schools. The sampling design was developed such that mutually exclusive but randomly equivalent stratified samples of parents could be used to measure change in parent opinions over time. One-third of the parents were sent questionnaires in the fall and a new one-third were sent questionnaires at the end of the school year. (In the participating schools only, the interview samples were drawn from the remaining one-third of parents.) In the fall, questionnaire response rates were 70% for the participating schools and 49% for the control

schools resulting in samples of 69 and 36 respectively. In the spring, response rates were 31% and 45% for participating and control schools.

For the first round of interviews, parents of three children per classroom in the participating schools were sampled to be interviewed in conjunction with first-quarter parent conferences. Children were stratified by teacher-judged achievement level (high, middle, and low). Teachers were provided with two alternate names within each stratum to use in cases where parents declined to participate or where scheduling precluded participation. We have no accurate way to estimate what biases were introduced into the sample by refusals or schedule conflicts. However, it was a relatively rare occurrence for teachers to pick the second name on the list because a conference was going to be problematic or because a parent was thought to be unresponsive to school requests. Ironically a greater percentage of parents were willing to commit to the time demands of the interview than returned questionnaires. After the fall interview sample was agreed upon (n = 13 classrooms x 3 = 39), attrition occurred in the sample because of absence from the conferences (n = 5) and technical failures in recording (n = 1), resulting in a final interview sample of 33 parents or parent dyads. Absence from the scheduled parent conferences was related to student achievement level; 3 of the absent parents had children in the low ability group and 2 were from the middle group. Therefore, the final sample was not as balanced as originally intended.

Ideally the secondround of parent interviews would have been conducted at the end of the school year after parents had had sufficient time to become familiar with the assessments being used in their child's classroom. However, the opportunity to interview in conjunction with parent conferences was constrained by each school's unique schedule. The second round of parent interviews was conducted at the end of the second quarter in one school, at the end of the third quarter in another, and at the end of the second trimester in another. Attendance even at agreed-upon conferences was not so good at mid-year as in the fall, possibly because of reduced interest or because of winter snow storms. From an initial sample of 39 only 27 interviews were conducted.

Questionnaire and Interview Instruments

The four-page mailed questionnaire (Appendix P1) had three parts. The first part asked parents to rate the usefulness of report cards, talking to the teacher,

standardized tests, and seeing graded samples of their child's work. The second part provided displays showing typical questions on third-grade standardized achievement tests and typical performance assessment tasks in both reading and math. Parents were asked to rate their degree of approval for each of the four types of measures. Then they were asked to show their preference for one or the other type of measure when used in instruction. The third set of questions was taken from the 1992 Gallup Poll. Parents responded to the questionnaires anonymously.

Interviews, conducted immediately following parent conferences, were guided by a structured but open protocol (Appendix P2). The interview was divided into three parts, two of which closely paralleled the parent questionnaires. In the first and unique part of the interview, parents were asked broad questions aimed at eliciting their conceptions of reading and mathematics knowledge and what they used as indicators to judge their child's progress in each area. Two forms of the interview were printed so that half of the interviews began with reading questions and half began with mathematics. The second set of questions asked parents to rate the usefulness of report cards, talking to the teacher, standardized tests, and seeing graded samples of work. Parents were asked to think aloud and elaborate on their answers while filling out the rating form.

For the last set of interview questions, parents were shown more extended examples of questions from standardized tests and performance assessments in reading and mathematics. The actual sample pages used to exemplify standardized test questions are shown in Figures 1 and 2. The sample performance assessment questions used for mathematics are shown in Figure 3. The sample performance assessment used in reading is not shown. It was a 15 page booklet with a complete story, attractive line drawings, and several open-ended questions with multiple formats, including drawing a picture. Parents were asked about their approval or disapproval of each type of measure and about the advantages or disadvantages they saw with each. A final question asked parents which of the two kinds of tests they would like to see used in classroom instruction.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Extensive field notes were also taken. In two cases where parents declined to be recorded, answers were typed directly into a computer.

Figure 1
Examples of Questions on Standardized Achievement Tests in Reading

Vocabulary

1. under the table
   - ○ below
   - ○ next to
   - ○ away from
   - ○ on top of

2. pleasant smile
   - ○ silly
   - ○ wicked
   - ○ cheerful
   - ○ plain

3. frighten away
   - ○ free
   - ○ scare
   - ○ run
   - ○ finish

4. talked quietly
   - ○ funny
   - ○ a lot
   - ○ quickly
   - ○ softly

Comprehension

Danny began his strange occupation by accident. He was trying to think of a way to make money when his friend Eddie came over. Eddie said his family couldn't leave for their trip until they found someone to take care of their pet snake. The people who took care of their dog hated snakes. Eddie wondered if Danny would take care of the snake. Danny was excited but he was sure that his mother wouldn't let him take the job. But she surprised him by saying that he could.

After that first job, Danny put a sign in the pet shop. It said he would take care of snakes for a fair price. Because snakesitters were hard to find and usually cost a lot, Danny got many jobs. Danny had found an unusual way to make money.

(from Silver Burdett & Ginn's Garden Gates workbook, 1990)

5. A good title for this story would be --
   - ○ The Pet Store
   - ○ A Strange Occupation
   - ○ Going on a Trip
   - ○ Danny's Pet Snake

6. What did Eddie want Danny to do?
   - ○ take care of his dog
   - ○ work in a pet shop
   - ○ go on a trip
   - ○ take care of his snake

7. Why did Danny get many jobs?
   - ○ because snakesitters cost very little
   - ○ because snakes like to go on trips
   - ○ because snakesitters are hard to find
   - ○ because Eddie went on many trips

Figure 2

Examples of Questions on Third-Grade Standardized Achievement Tests in Mathematics

Computation

Add.

1.

$$\begin{array}{r} 3842 \\ +\ 4104 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

- ○ 7946
- ○ 7746
- ○ 7906
- ○ 7942
- ○ None of these

Subtract.

2.

$82 - 3 =$

- ○ 89
- ○ 79
- ○ 81
- ○ 52
- ○ None of these

Multiply.

3.

$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ \times\ 9 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

- ○ 63
- ○ 48
- ○ 54
- ○ 69
- ○ None of these

Divide.

4.

$8\overline{)16}$

- ○ 2
- ○ 24
- ○ 20
- ○ 8
- ○ None of these

Concepts and Applications

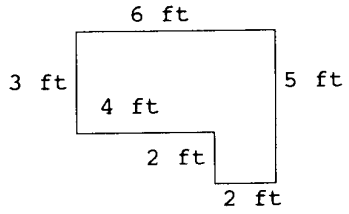
1. What is 763 rounded to the nearest hundred

- ○ 700
- ○ 750
- ○ 760
- ○ 800

2. How much change will you get if you have $6.55 and spend $4.32?

- ○ $2.23
- ○ $2.43
- ○ $3.23
- ○ $10.87

3. What is the perimeter of this shape?



- ○ 20 ft
- ○ 21 ft
- ○ 22 ft
- ○ 23 ft

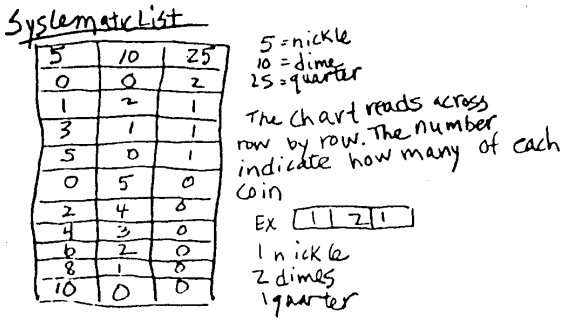
Figure 3

Examples of Third-Grade Performance Assessment Questions

1. Bus Ride -- A friend of yours, who just moved to the United States, must ride the bus to and from school each day. The bus ride costs 50 cents. Your friend must have exact change and must use only nickels, dimes, and quarters. Your friend has a problem because she does not yet understand our money, and she does not know how to count our money.

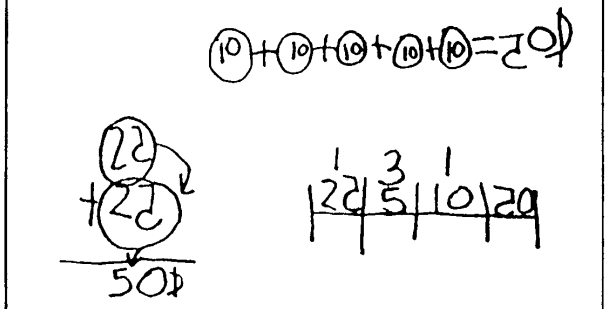
Help your friend find the right coins to give to the bus driver. Draw and write something on a whole sheet of paper that can help her. She needs a sheet of paper that can show which combinations of coins can be used to pay for the 50-cent bus ride.

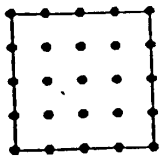
Sample Student Answer 1



5	10	25
0	0	2
1	2	1
3	1	1
5	0	1
0	5	0
2	4	0
4	3	0
6	2	0
8	1	0
10	0	0

Sample Student Answer 2



2. 

For the figure at left, show 1/2 in as many ways as you can. You may draw more figures, if necessary. For each way you find, explain how you know you have 1/2.

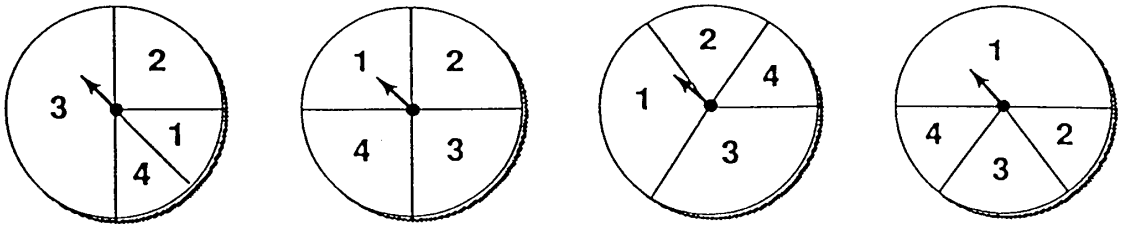
3. Suppose you couldn't remember what 8 x 7 is. How could you figure it out?

4. Our class of 26 students is going to the Denver Art Museum. How many cars do we need if 4 students can go in each car? How many do we need if only 3 students can go in each car?

Note: The first two examples are reproduced with permission from Pandey, T. (1991). A Sampler of Mathematics Assessment. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

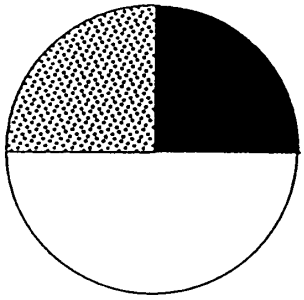
Figure 3 (continued)

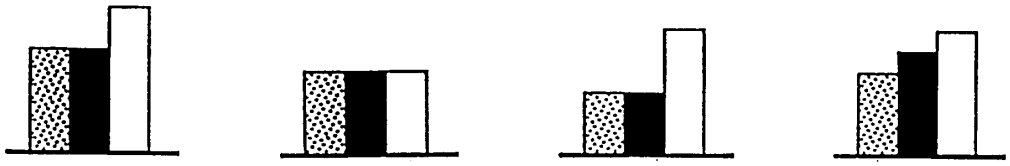
5. Which spinner is most likely to spin a sum greater than seven after two spins? Put a circle around your choice.



Explain your choice.

6. Which one of the bar graphs below shows the same data as the circle graph on the right? Put a circle around your choice.

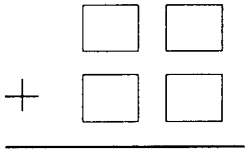




Explain your choice.

7. Adam says that 4 + 52 is 452. Is Adam right or wrong? What would you tell Adam?

8. Put 4 different one-digit numbers in the boxes to make the largest possible answer.



How did you know what to choose?

Findings

The descriptive analysis is based primarily on data collected in the fall because these data were largely unaffected by the assessment development project and therefore are more likely to be generalizable to the opinions of parents in other school districts. Then in a latter section, evidence of change from fall to spring, or more importantly differential change in participating schools, is considered.

Gallup Poll Results

Nationally 71% of the general public as well as 71% of public school parents favor requiring public schools in their community to use standardized national tests (Elam et al., 1992). If the purpose of the present study is to go beyond this superficial endorsement of standardized tests and develop a deeper understanding of parent opinions, then it is important to know how similar parents in the study sample are to the national population of parents.

Table 1 provides a summary of questionnaire results for third-grade parents in the study compared to data from the 1992 Gallup Poll (Elam et al., 1992). A preliminary analysis showed no significant differences between questionnaire responses for control and participating schools, therefore they are combined here as a single sample.

On the most classic Gallup question (#21) concerning national tests, there is a disconcertingly large disparity between third-grade parents in this study and the national sample of public school parents. Only 46% of local third-grade parents favor national tests compared to 71% nationally. Opposition rates are more similar because a very large proportion of parents (25%) in the study sample responded in the don't-know category. On other questions, the gap between the two groups is much narrower suggesting that the third-grade sample can be thought of as only slightly more negatively disposed toward standardized testing than the nation as a whole. On questions 22-27 addressing various uses of standardized national tests, the percentage of third-grade parents endorsing each use was consistently 12% to 14% less than for the national group, with the exception of using test results to improve teaching where the difference was only 7%.

Table 1

A Comparison of National Results With Fall Parent Questionnaire Responses (n=105) on 1992 Gallup Poll Questions

18. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here—A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	A	B	C	D	FAIL	Don't Know
1992 National %	9	31	33	12	5	10
3rd Grade Parent Sample %	13	53	25	2	2	5

19. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally—A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	A	B	C	D	FAIL	Don't Know
1992 National %	2	16	48	18	4	12
Public School Parents National %	2	17	48	18	4	11
3rd Grade Parent Sample %	1	8	50	20	7	15

20. What grade would you give the information you receive from your third grade child's teacher(s) regarding his or her academic progress—A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	A	B	C	D	FAIL	Don't Know
1992 National %	31	30	23	7	6	3
Public School Parents National %	42	29	20	6	2	1
3rd Grade Parent Sample %	32	37	20	6	1	4

21. Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students?

	1992 National %	Public School Parents National %	3rd Grade Parent Sample
Favor	71	71	46
Oppose	20	23	30
Don't Know	9	6	25

In addition to measuring the academic achievement of students, do you think these standardized national tests should be used or should not be used for the following purposes?

		1992 National %			3rd Grade Parent Sample		
		Should	Should Not	Don't Know	Should	Should Not	Don't Know
22.	To rank the local public schools in terms of student achievement	65	26	9	53	37	10
23.	To determine if a student advances to the next grade level of schooling	60	32	8	46	45	9
24.	To determine how much teachers should be paid	38	52	10	26	62	12
25.	To determine the level of funding each local school should receive	36	54	10	22	68	10
26.	To identify areas in which teachers need to improve their teaching skills	79	14	7	72	17	11
27.	To identify areas in which students need extra help	85	9	6	73	19	8

On the more general Gallup questions dealing with quality of schools and quality of information provided by schools about each child's academic progress, the third-grade parents rated their schools higher (66% gave As and Bs compared to 40% for public school parents nationally); they rated the nation's schools lower (9% As and Bs vs. 19% nationally); and they rated the quality of information they receive just the same as did a national sample of elementary parents (69% vs. 71% As and Bs).

Given the above similarities and dissimilarities between national samples of parents and the third-grade sample here, we suggest that the findings in this study—about broad parent preferences and especially about reasons parents give for their preferences—are likely to be generalizable beyond the confines of this particular district. However, it is unlikely that strict quantifications, such as the percent preferring performance assessments over standardized tests, can be generalized either to nonrespondents in the same district or to the nation as a whole. To serve as a check on the local district's relative bias against standardized tests, we replicate some of the key analyses below using only the subsample of parents who favored standardized national tests on the Gallup Poll question.

Parent Opinions About Standardized Tests and Informal Sources of Information: Questionnaire Results

On the questionnaire, parents were asked to evaluate the usefulness of four types of information for two different purposes, learning about their child's academic progress and judging the quality of the school. Data in Table 2 show the percentage responses for the first purpose. Overwhelmingly, parents believe that they learn the most about their child's progress by listening to the teacher; 77% rated this source of information as very useful. A total of 94% rated hearing from the teacher in the top two categories. All three informal sources of information about student progress—report cards, talking to the teacher, and work samples—received strikingly higher usefulness ratings than did standardized tests. However, it should be noted that a biasing factor in this study is that third-grade parents were surveyed in the fall before the first opportunity for their third-grade child to be tested. Therefore, parents were likely to be responding on the basis of experience with older children or a general opinion they held regarding standardized tests. Parents who had little knowledge of standardized tests and whose oldest child was in third grade may not have had sufficient information to judge the usefulness of such tests.

Table 2

FALL Parent Questionnaire Ratings of the Usefulness of Each Type of Information for Learning About Their Child's Progress in School (n=105)

Place a check in the appropriate column to indicate the usefulness of each type of information.	Not at all useful				Very useful	Blank/ Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. Report cards	2%	2%	20%	33%	43%	
2. My child's teacher talking about his/her progress	0	2%	4%	17%	77%	
3. Standardized tests	6%	15%	41%	22%	14%	2%
4. Seeing graded samples of my child's work	0	0	10%	30%	60%	

5. Pick one type of information you think is most helpful in learning about your child and tell what you learn from it and why it is helpful.

Report cards (n=5)

"I think the most important item is report cards because it shows how well they are doing in each subject and then we can determine where help is needed."

Teacher talking (n=44)

"Talking with my child's teacher is most helpful because I learn firsthand what progress is being made in class, where the shortcomings are and how I can best help at home."

Standardized tests (n=0)

Graded samples (n=38)

"This way I can see the actual work, the teacher's response, and evaluate what I understand the child's level of learning to be at."

"When we are able to see our child's work we can see the progress that he makes and can help him in the areas that he needs help."

Other (n=9)

In Table 3 parent ratings are presented for the same four types of information but for the purpose of judging the quality of the school. As expected, more parents considered standardized tests to be useful for this purpose than for learning about the progress of individual children (45% vs. 36%). In addition, 19 respondents (18%) wrote in comments suggesting that it is the comparative information provided by such tests that makes them useful for evaluating the school's performance.

Table 3

FALL Parent Questionnaire Ratings of the Usefulness of Each Type of Information to Evaluate the Quality of Education Provided at Their Child's School (n=105)

Place a check in the appropriate column to indicate the usefulness of each type of information.	Not at all useful				Very useful	Blank/ Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Report cards	18%	11%	35%	17%	16%	3%
7. My child's teacher talking about his/her progress	4%	2%	18%	28%	46%	3%
8. Standardized tests	8%	14%	30%	20%	25%	4%
9. Seeing graded samples of my child's work	1%	4%	20%	27%	46%	3%

10. Pick one type of information you think is most helpful in learning about the quality of education provided at your child's school and tell what you learn from it and why it is helpful.

Report cards (n=0)

Teacher talking (n=26)

"Talking with the teach allows you into the school environment to measure emphasis, attitudes, some insight into treatment of students (i.e., respect, encouragement, etc.)."

"Again I would say talking with the teacher in person. That way I get an understanding of the school policies and programs and what curriculum the school uses."

Standardized tests (n=19)

"Standardized tests show me where [my school] ranks in comparison with district, state and national averages —"

Graded samples (n=18)

"Again, samples of my child's work show me what it is they are doing in the classroom, and will show me where the school's emphasis is at."

Other (n=25)

"Newsletters from school sent home with the student. These discuss what the goals are that have been established, what type of work the students are doing, what teachers expect, etc."

"Being able to be in the classroom, getting to know the teacher, seeing hands-on, spending time and helping at school."

However, much of the data in Table 3 are contrary to the expectation that parents would prefer external and formal measures for school accountability purposes. Indeed the greatest number of parents, 84% and 83% respectively, valued "my child's teacher talking about his/her progress" and "seeing graded samples of my child's work" to help them evaluate how good a job the school was doing. Furthermore, in follow-up comments parents gave justifications that

showed they were mindful of the change in purpose from the first set of questions to the second. Parents said that these informal sources help them learn about the quality of education by giving them first-hand information about the school curriculum, teacher knowledge and expectations, school policies, and classroom climate.

Given earlier differences found between the study sample and the national population on Gallup questions, we were concerned that the above, somewhat surprising findings—downplaying the usefulness of standardized tests—might be true only for parents in this sample and not generalize to a broader population of parents. Therefore the present sample was subdivided on the basis of Gallup Poll question 21 into those parents who "Favor" use of standardized national tests and those who "Oppose" (parents answering Don't Know were omitted). Predictably these two groups differed in their ratings of the usefulness of standardized tests on question 3 in Table 2. However, they did not differ at all in their much higher ratings of informal sources of information. For example, on question 2, teacher talking, the mean ratings were 4.65 and 4.74 on the 5-point scale for the Favor and Oppose groups respectively. For question 4, seeing graded samples of work, the means were 4.58 and 4.45. (Neither difference is statistically significant and the slight numeric differences are offsetting.) On the second set of questions dealing with accountability purposes, the two groups again differed significantly in their usefulness ratings for standardized tests (Favor $\overline{X}$ = 3.94; Oppose $\overline{X}$ = 2.80). They did not differ in their ratings on the other three sources of information; both groups gave report cards low marks for this purpose but rated teacher talk (Favor $\overline{X}$ = 4.02; Oppose $\overline{X}$ = 4.10) and work samples (Favor $\overline{X}$ = 4.26; Oppose $\overline{X}$ = 4.00) highly. This means that even the group favorable to standardized testing, which is represented in greater proportion in the national population, only considered standardized tests to be as useful as talking to the teacher for accountability purposes and not as useful as seeing graded work samples. For the purpose of learning about an individual child's progress both groups agree strongly that all three sources of information are more useful than standardized tests.

Parent Opinions About Standardized Tests and Informal Sources of Information: Interview Results

In the interview data, parents reported even more glowing opinions about the usefulness of informal types of information for learning about their child's

academic progress than they had on the questionnaire. In Table 4a and Table 5, quantitative results are presented from the interview questions corresponding to the questionnaire data shown in Table 2. The question about standardized tests was pulled out and treated in a separate table to allow for separate analysis of the qualitative data. Although the parent responses about the usefulness of standardized tests are virtually the same (36% of the questionnaire sample said they were useful vs. 33% in the interview sample), the interview respondents were even more positive about the usefulness of report cards, hearing the child's teacher talk about progress, and graded samples of work than the questionnaire respondents had been. For example, 77% had rated teacher talk as "very useful" on the questionnaire, whereas 91% of the parents interviewed gave the "very useful" rating. Because parents in the interview setting were asked to fill out a rating sheet identical to the question set used on the questionnaire, it is unlikely that the demand characteristics of the interview (having to explain their answers, etc.) account for the more extreme answers in the interview. The more likely explanation is that parents were interviewed immediately following parent conferences. It is also possible that the interview and questionnaire data differ because they are based on different samples; the interview data were collected only in participating schools as compared to the questionnaire data collected from both control and participating school parents. However, there were no significant differences in the questionnaire results between the two types of schools on these

Table 4a

FALL Parent Interview Ratings Regarding the Usefulness of Informal Types of Information for Learning About Their Child's Progress in School (n=33)

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you learn about <u>your child's progress in school</u>? While you're doing that, please tell why you think each type of information is useful or not very useful.

	Not very useful				Very useful	Blank/ Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	
a. report cards	n=0	1 (3%)	6 (18%)	5 (15%)	20 (61%)	1 (3%)
b. talking with the teacher	0	0	0	2 (6%)	30 (91%)	1 (3%)
d. seeing graded samples of my child's work	0	0	0	5 (15%)	27 (82%)	1 (3%)

Table 4b

FALL Parent Interview Responses Regarding the Usefulness of Informal Types of Information for Learning About Their Child's Progress in School (n=33)

Note. Data from the three questions in Table 4a were treated as an aggregate. The following themes emerged from the parent comments. Categories below are not mutually exclusive.

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (73%, n=24) appreciate how these types of information provide feedback about how well their child is doing academically. They cite understanding their child's strengths and weaknesses as well as seeing evidence of his or her progress over time.

"If I didn't have the report card, there would be no way I'd be able to judge that he was actually being able to retain what he's learning. She [the teacher] shows me what I really need to work on with him and with him being there, he sees that he needs to work on this."

"The report cards are very useful. You can [see by the] quarterly report the improvement she's made or if she's not making improvement, you can tell."

"As long as she [the teacher] can see in math that he's improving with each of his tests, that's all she cares about. It's just as important that he is doing the best he can do, and that he's improving."

"I like [graded samples]. I think it's useful because then I know from [the teacher] showing from September to now, I know that she's improving."

Over one-third of the respondents (36%, n=12) comment on the normative aspects of this information. They depend on the teacher to provide the comparative information.

"I think report cards are very useful because their pluses and minuses [system of grading] tell you where they're at in reference to the rest of the class basically."

"[Graded samples] give you more of a clear idea of where the child stands within the class itself."

"Well, [these types of information] let me know that they are doing their level of work. I know that they're at the level that they should be doing. That assures me that they are doing the level that they're supposed to be."

"Well, I think on the report cards, it's very useful because in her reading you know what level she is reading."

With regard to talking to the teacher, respondents value the opportunity for communication with the teacher (18%, n=6).

"If there's questions, just keeping communication with the teacher is important. If you have questions, sometimes things come home that you don't understand and you need to know the answers."

"Talking with the teacher, I think, is most important. We can then ask questions as to the report card..."

Talking with the teacher helps 24% of the parents (n=8) because the teacher spends time with their child.

"They [teachers] see what work they're doing more than we do because we both work. They're with our kids 9 hours a day."

"She's the trained professional, she knows what to look for if something should come up that we should be aware of...To be able to talk with somebody who can see their development and be there all times is very important."

"She deals with my child every day. She knows my daughter and can tell me things about my daughter's learning that she notices. She sees her in a context where she's maybe one-on-one at times, she's in a small group, she's in a large group, and sees my daughter in a wide variety of experiences, where I see her only in a family setting."

"They can see everything that they're doing, and they can see if they're messing around, not getting their assignments, or if they're struggling to understand..."

Table 5

FALL Parent Interview Responses Regarding the Usefulness of Standardized Tests for Learning About Their Child's Progress in School (n=33)

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you learn about <u>your child's progress in school</u>? While you're doing that, please tell why you think each type of information is useful or not very useful.

	Not at all useful				Very useful	Blank/ Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	
c. standardized tests	n=4 (12%)	7 (21%)	9 (27%)	7 (21%)	4 (12%)	2 (6%)

Normative Information n=4 ($\overline{X}$ = 4.7)

"It compares him to everybody else and lets you know how he's doing compared to them. Because if he's just getting As on everything and everybody else is getting As for not doing anything at all, then it doesn't say much for him."

"How they do compared to other children is very important so that you have an idea that they are progressing like they should."

Helpful Academically n=4 ($\overline{X}$ = 4.2)

"I think they are very useful. Not to me but to the teachers. I think they probably should have these so the teachers can inform the parents as to where they're at. Informs me as to what she needs help on."

Other Positive Attributes n=3 ($\overline{X}$ = 4.0)

Children as Individuals n=6 ($\overline{X}$ = 3.0)

"Some children just do not respond well to certain standardized tests. I think that children are different types of learners and standardized testing sometimes does not always catch that, the full breadth of a child's learning abilities."

"A standardized test really doesn't center around what the problems are with the individual child, but are used as a measurement of how much this child knows."

Invalid Results n=6 ($\overline{X}$ = 2.7)

"I think it's got a lot to do with how well a child takes tests, what their particular morning was like, or whether they had a good night sleep. I think there's so many variables that can influence their score on the standardized testing."

Parents' Own Experiences n=2 ($\overline{X}$ = 1.5)

"I don't like them. And I probably have to say because when I was a kid they made me nervous. I do better without the test. And when they go to give you that big test, it's overwhelming and you know you're being graded on whether you're stupid or smart."

Don't Know n=2 ($\overline{X}$ = 2.5)

Child hasn't taken test or Parents have never seen results n=3 ($\overline{X}$ = 2.0)

Other negative attributes n=2 ($\overline{X}$ = 1.0)

Unfamiliar with standardized tests n=1 (parents left question blank)

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questions. Another possibility is that willingness to participate created different samples for the questionnaire and interview studies; but ironically, the more extreme, positive responses came from the more inclusive sample.

Transcript analyses of parent comments explaining their ratings are summarized in Table 4b and Table 5. In Table 5, parent comments about why standardized tests are useful or not useful are related predictably to their ratings (means are shown in parentheses). Parents who rated standardized tests highly commented on the usefulness of normative comparisons and the ability of tests to identify academic strengths and weaknesses. Parents who gave lower ratings to standardized tests tended to comment on the vagaries of test performance on any given day or their own negative experiences taking standardized tests.

Parents had a great deal to say about why they valued informal sources of information, especially talking to the teacher, to learn about their child's progress. Note that all three informal types of information, even report cards, which got the lowest rating, were rated as more useful than standardized tests. Parents want to know in some detail how their child is doing. They want to know strengths and weaknesses and what they can work on at home. To interpret the meaning of where their child is, they seek comparative information, that is, how their child is doing in relation to grade-level expectations or compared to the rest of the class.

Perhaps the most interesting finding, however, is that parents, by and large, trust their child's teacher to provide them with this type of information. "She's the trained professional, she knows what to look for . . ." "She deals with my child every day. She knows my daughter and can tell me things about her learning." We considered the very high approval ratings given to teacher information to be striking because usually the public endorsement for standardized national tests is taken to mean that parents require external verification of progress and cannot rely on teacher judgment.

When the purpose shifts from learning about my child's progress to evaluating the school, the interview results parallel the questionnaire findings but again with more extremely positive ratings for informal sources of information from the interviewed parents. Quantitative ratings are shown in Tables 6a and 7. Just as with the questionnaire data, the usefulness of standardized tests increased when the purpose was to judge the school rather than an individual child's progress. On the questionnaire the increase in positive ratings was from 36% to 45%; for the interview sample the increase was from 33% to 45%. Again on the question about standardized tests, there was a close correspondence between the responses from the questionnaire and interview samples. In explaining their ratings, approximately one-third of the parents interviewed said something about

Table 6a

FALL Parent Interview Ratings Regarding the Usefulness of Informal Types of Information for Learning About the Quality of Education Provided at the School (n=33)

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you learn about the quality of education provided at this school? While you're doing that, please tell why you think each type of information is useful or not very useful.

	Not very useful				Very useful	Blank/ Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	
a. report cards	n=4 (12%)	6 (18%)	9 (27%)	4 (12%)	8 (24%)	2 (6%)
b. talking with the teacher	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	4 (12%)	2 (6%)	23 (70%)	1 (3%)
d. seeing graded samples of my child's work	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	3 (9%)	8 (24%)	18 (55%)	1 (3%)

the value of standardized tests for making comparisons. "That is one of the reasons I like the standardized tests, because to me if you have a national standard test for third graders, it shows you where your kid is against national standards which doesn't necessarily say anything about your kid but it might point out there is a problem here . . ."

When rating informal sources of information the results from the interviews can be seen as a more extreme version of the pattern found in the questionnaire data (as occurred for the first set of questions on children's progress). Even for the purpose of evaluating the school, parents find talking to the teacher and seeing graded samples of work to be more useful than standardized tests. In Table 6b categories of parent responses are presented with illustrative quotations. In support of their positive ratings, parents explained that talking with the teacher allowed them to see what expectations were being set, the quality of the curriculum, and how caring the teacher is with students. Specifically parents said that seeing the actual work that students brought home let them judge whether what was being taught was worthwhile.

"I can see what kind of work the teacher is handing out. The teacher is the one that's in there quarter-backing the classroom. You know, if she's handing out pretty basic stuff to the kids to work on, then that's pretty boring, you know, 'get-me-through-the-school-day' type of activities as far as I'm concerned. But if she's handing out stuff that will keep their interest and get their initiative going as

Table 6b

FALL Parent Interview Responses Regarding the Usefulness of Informal Types of Information for Learning About the Quality of Education Provided by the School (n=33)

Note. Data from the three questions in Table 6a were treated as an aggregate. The following themes emerged from the parent comments. Categories below are not mutually exclusive.

Talking with the teacher helps identify her expectations and goals (n=4)

"Talking with them gives you a better feel of the goals that they have in mind for the kids, the criteria, teacher criteria, the goals for different grade levels. Usually when we talk about their progress it's in relationship to those kind of things which is an indication to me of the quality of the education here."

Talking with the teacher is telling about her personality and style with students (n=7)

"I think if there's a lot of kids that are having problems, that maybe it reflects the teacher. You know, so to me, that's where I would say how it affects the school."

"I think that's very useful, very significant to tell you that the teachers are really caring, or that they're really good with the students."

"Talking with the teacher tells me a great deal about the quality of education because she is able to tell me about herself, you know, her strengths, her weaknesses, and things like that."

Seeing graded samples (and to a lesser extent, talking with teacher) allows an evaluation of the curriculum (n=15)

"That [graded samples] lets me know whether my child's learning and I think the paperwork that they get lets me know what they're doing."

"I think [graded samples are] very useful. I like to know what kind of things because not everything that they teach, you think is useful."

"I just think if it's a really good cross section of what they do, the samples, then it would be a pretty good indication of the quality. If it's just random cases of their work, or ones that they just save because they like and they put them in the portfolio, or something, then I don't think it's a real good indication."

"I can see what kind of work the teacher is handing out. The teacher is the one that's in there quarterbacking the classroom. You know, if she's handing out pretty basic stuff to the kids to work on, then that's pretty boring, you know, 'get-me-through-the-school-day' type of activities as far as I'm concerned. But if she's handing out stuff that will keep their interest and get their initiative going as far as keeping them active in school, and wanting to learn, that pretty much sets the tone for the school year and gives me an indication of what kind of quality teachers there are, and what kind of quality programs are here at this school."

Report Cards are not useful because they're about the child (n=3)

"That's a 2 because that doesn't tell anything about the school, that tells about the student."

Report Cards are not useful because of subjective grading (n=4)

"[They] wouldn't be very useful in telling the quality of education because you're not really sure what they are being graded on until it has been explained to you or you have see other things."

"...because everybody grades differently."

Report Cards are not useful—Other reasons (n=10)

far as keeping them active in school, and wanting to learn, that pretty much sets the tone for the school year and gives me an indication of what kind of quality teachers there are, and what kind of quality programs are here at this school." The only consistently negative comments regarding informal measures pertained to report cards. About half of the sample said that report cards were not very

Table 7

FALL Parent Interview Responses Regarding the Usefulness of Standardized Tests for Learning About the Quality of Education Provided by the School (n=33)

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you learn about the quality of education provided at this school? While you're doing that, please tell why you think each type of information is useful or not very useful.

	Not at all useful				Very useful	Blank/ Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	
c. standardized tests	6 (18%)	2 (6%)	8 (24%)	7 (21%)	8 (24%)	2 (6%)

Normative Information n=12 ($\overline{X}$ = 4.2)

"The standardized test would probably be very useful because they compare with other students in other schools."

"That is one of the reasons I like the standardized tests, because to me if you have a national standard test for third graders, it shows you where your kid is against national standards which doesn't necessarily say anything about your kid but it might point out there is a problem here..."

"The standardized testing, I guess, if it's compared to other school districts, it would have to be somewhat useful in understanding the quality of education."

"The standardized tests—there are so many things that fall into each district, I don't know how I feel about those. Yes, I think it would. Because of course the parents are going to want their child to go to the better schools."

Curriculum Information n=4 ($\overline{X}$ = 4.0)

"It shows you what the kids are doing, what he does know, what he can remember, what he's learning in the class. It gives you an idea about what they're presenting to the kids."

"I would feel that that would be very useful with the school. That they're following certain guidelines."

Other n=9 ($\overline{X}$ = 2.9)

"As parents, we just go by what we have here. We don't make a comparison as far as what's going on elsewhere. We just kind of take it for granted what's here."

One parent replied that the standardized tests aren't useful because her child has learning disabilities and has a hard time reading the test.

Child hasn't taken test or Parents haven't seen results n=3 ($\overline{X}$ = 2.3)

Test not important n=2 ($\overline{X}$ = 2.0)

"I just don't feel it's as important."

Test provides no information n=2 ($\overline{X}$ = 1.0)

"I don't think that shows any effect on the school even."

"That doesn't tell me anything about the quality of education here at this particular school. It just tells me that these are tests that pretty much had to be given out during the end quarter of the semester."

Unfamiliar with standardized tests n=1 (parents left question blank)

useful for judging the school because "they don't tell about the school" or because grading criteria are ambiguous or noncomparable across schools.

Parent Reactions to Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments: Questionnaire Results

On the questionnaire (Appendix P1), parents were provided with displays showing typical multiple-choice questions that appear on traditional standardized achievement tests and a sample of more open-ended questions used in performance assessments.[2] Separate displays were shown for both reading and math. Only a few examples of each type were given in the questionnaire but the interview examples, shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3, were more extensive.

Parents were asked to rate their approval or disapproval of each type of measure. Respondents were not forced to choose one type of measure over the other. In fact, as can be seen from the data in Table 8, many parents liked both. (As a consequence, oblique factor analyses showed no correlation between the "standardized testing" factor and the "performance assessment" factor.) Although the majority of parents approved of both types of measures, performance assessments had higher approval ratings than did standardized tests, especially in the strongly approve category. For example, in mathematics 18% strongly approved of standardized tests whereas 31% strongly approved of the use of performance assessments.

To try to get at the issue of the influence of assessment formats on instruction, parents were also presented with the following choices:

> Currently in the nation there is some concern that standardized tests have had an undue influence on what gets taught in school, because of too much 'teaching to the test.' IF it is true that tests influence instruction, indicate below whether you prefer for children to be taught mathematics and reading using questions like Box A or Box B:

Box A contained the sample standardized test questions for each subject and Box B contained the performance assessment problems.

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[2] If we had it to do over again, we would redesign the questionnaire to include more complete examples. This comment is based on insights gained from the very positive experience of conducting parent interviews using more complete samples of performance assessments. Extended examples could be in a separate booklet from the questionnaire instrument itself so as not to discourage respondents by the length of the questionnaire.

Table 8

FALL Parent Questionnaire Approval Ratings of Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments (n=105)

Suppose the school district were trying to decide whether to use standardized tests, performance assessments, or both standardized tests and performance assessments in all its elementary schools. Indicate below the degree of your approval or disapproval of each type of test or assessment.

Do you approve or disapprove of:	Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve
12. using standardized tests with questions like those in **Box A** to measure your child's achievement in math?	2%	10%	24%	46%	18%
13. using performance assessments with questions like those in **Box B** to measure your child's achievement in math?	6%	5%	20%	38%	31%

Do you approve or disapprove of:	Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve
14. using standardized tests with questions like those in **Box A** to measure your child's achievement in reading?	2%	11%	22%	47%	18%
15. using performance assessments with questions like those in **Box B** to measure your child's achievement in reading?	2%	7%	15%	47%	30%

Currently in the nation there is some concern that standardized tests have had an undue influence on what gets taught in school, because of too much "teaching to the test." IF it is true that tests influence instruction, indicate below whether you would prefer for children to be taught mathematics and reading using questions like Box A or Box B:

	Strongly Prefer Instruction like Box A	Prefer Instruction like Box A	Neutral	Prefer Instruction like Box B	Strongly Prefer Instruction like Box B	Blank/ Missing
16. For math instruction	15%	16%	21%	27%	17%	4%
17. For reading instruction	9%	12%	17%	37%	21%	4%

As shown in Table 8, more parents preferred the use of questions like those on performance assessments for instructional purposes than preferred the use of standardized-test type questions. Although the preference for more open-ended

questions is quite large in reading (58% favored performance assessments compared to 21% liking standardized tests), the difference was narrower for instruction in math (44% favored performance assessments over 31% for standardized tests). The tendency for a subgroup of parents to differentiate their choices by subject area is consistent with a pattern found later in the interview data and can clearly be connected in more extended interview responses to their conception of mathematics as a one-right-answer subject area. A different, small subgroup of parents resisted choosing between the two types and added comments in the margin emphasizing that a combination of both should be used.

Once again we wished to examine whether the lowered enthusiasm for standardized tests in this sample compared to the nation could explain the more positive response to performance assessments. Therefore, responses to the above questionnaire items were considered separately for the subgroups that "Favor" and "Oppose" standardized national tests on the Gallup Poll. Not surprisingly, the group that favors standardized tests gave higher approval ratings to standardized test questions than did the Oppose group (Math: $\overline{X}$ = 4.10, 2.97 respectively; Reading: $\overline{X}$ = 4.13, 2.87 respectively). However, as suggested above by zero correlations between the two factors, approval of standardized tests does not imply disapproval of performance assessments. Parents who favor standardized national tests rated performance assessments just as highly as did parents who oppose standardized national tests (Math: $\overline{X}$ = 3.92, 3.61 respectively; Reading: $\overline{X}$ = 3.90, 3.87 respectively). Yet, when forced to choose between the two types of questions for use in classroom instruction, there were significant differences between the two groups. Parents who favor standardized tests rated the two types of measures about equally in the context of math instruction ($\overline{X}$ = 2.72) whereas parents who oppose standardize national tests expressed a stronger preference for the use of performance assessments in mathematics instruction ($\overline{X}$ = 3.80). In reading, the pattern was similar ($\overline{X}$ = 3.17, 3.93 respectively). Thus population shifts in the proportion endorsing standardized testing do affect the degree of approval of performance assessments in some contexts, but these analyses suggest that even if 100% of the national population answered yes to the need for standardized national tests, that answer would signify approximately equal approval of performance assessments, not disapproval of them.

Parent Reactions to Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments: Interview Results

It was the impression of the interviewers that almost all parents were intrigued by the opportunity as part of the interview to have a close look at both standardized test questions and performance assessments for third graders. Despite being presented with these examples near the end of the interview, most parents took time to look through the materials carefully. Many worked through the sample problems and asked questions about how they were administered typically or whether this was third-grade work. As can be seen from sample transcript data in Table 9, parents often pointed to the two different types of questions or used specific problems as examples when explaining their preferences for standardized tests or performance assessments.

Because the purpose of the interview was to understand the reasoning behind parent preferences, qualitative analysis was used to develop categories representing different positions. Entire transcript segments from this portion of the interview were read and distilled so that shortened segments could be used that still contained the central arguments and key ideas from the longer transcripts. Each representative segment was given a shortened label; similar segments were sorted into categories resulting in the final categorization scheme shown in Table 9. The data in Table 9 are all from fall interviews. A similar analysis was completed for spring interviews. The same categories emerged in the spring data with one minor exception. In the category Prefers Performance Assessment (Likes Both) in the spring, there was a subgroup of parents who said specifically that both kinds of measures should be used *in mathematics* to ensure that all important skills and concepts were covered. Although the character of the categories did not change from fall to spring, the relative frequency of responses did shift. These changes are discussed in the section on changes in parent opinions.

In addition to the overall preference categorization scheme, a separate coding system was developed for key ideas because it was discovered that many features of the two types of tests, cited repeatedly by parents in their discussions, did not always predict parents' final recommendations or preferences about which type of measure should be used. For example, regardless of whether they strongly preferred standardized tests or strongly preferred performance assessments, parents tended to comment that standardized tests were easier. Some parents,

Table 9

Parent Interview Evaluations of Standardized Test Questions and Performance Assessments: Categories of Response With Sample Excerpts

Note: Parents were shown samples of standardized test questions and performance assessments. They were asked whether they approved or disapproved of each type. Then they were asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each. Half of the interviews presented the math comparison first, and half presented the reading comparison first. The last question asked parents what type of questions they would prefer to see used in classroom instruction.

The standardized test prompt and performance assessment prompt are abbreviated ST and PA below. Parent ratings of strongly approve are shown as ++, strongly disapprove as --, and so on. The question about instruction is shown by the word (Instruction) in parentheses.

Strongly Prefers Standardized Tests (n=2)

1
(STreading++) Well, I think it's really clear cut what is expected of these kids. It's easy for them to understand, it's easy for them to answer it.

(PAreading-) Well, the disadvantages of it are that there are too many right or wrong answers. I think that is kind of hard for kids that age to comprehend all this. Maybe the advantages of it would be they are more able to use their imagination.

(Pamath-) For one thing, if the child might understand how to do something like this but they don't know how to explain it. They have trouble with words....

Just that a test like this might be useful again to get an idea how they are at comprehending different things but it wouldn't really be fair to grade their learning on this.

(Instruction) Oh. Standardized. Because I feel that that is easier to teach and easier for the kids to learn and easier to grade them on it.

(ST: Easy, Obj)

(PA: Imagin, Diag, Hard, Unfair, Subj)

Prefers Standardized Tests (Likes Both) (n=1)

2
(STreading++) When I take tests, I like to take this kind.

(PAreading+) Well, maybe advantage-wise, it would make 'em pay closer attention.

(STmath++) I think, when you're taking a test, that you're nervous anyway, and if you have the right answer somewhere in there [laughs], you're gonna do better....

Well, this could be the other side of that coin. Sometimes the disadvantage is knowing that the right answer is there somewhere.

(PA+) ...Yeah, I don't really like that "explain your choice." I think that they're doing pretty good to pick out the right one without explaining why they did it.

(Instruction) ...If they're being taught this way and they're doing, you know, they seem to be doing well, in this kind of test [PA], then I have no problems with that. If they're being taught to do it.

(ST: Y/N, Support)

(PA: Align, Think)

Table 9 (continued)

Standardized Tests Math/Performance Assessments Reading (n=4)

3
(STmath+) I would rather the standard achievement. It's more clear what they want from the child than the performance one. It's more clear and more understandable.

(PAreading+) On this one [reading] I would have to choose the performance, yeah. Because it gives the child a little more chance to express his own personal views and this one [ST] there's just the choices.

(Instruction) I'd say the performance assessments [in reading] 'cause it still does give him a chance to still tell their part. [In math?] I would have to say I prefer the standardized 'cause that's not like an option, there's only one answer, you know.

(ST: Y/N)

(PA: Imag)

4
(PAreading++) Strongly approve. I like that because they have to think. It's not as cut and dried. Here [standardized] you just "a", "b", "c", or "d"...and this one [performance] is more...There's a little more leeway, individuality.

(PA math-) 'Cause if you're measuring math, I mean I expect things like this on the reading, but on a lot of these there's a lot of...If you have a kid who's a math whiz and can't read a lick, they're gonna flunk something like this. Basically, they wouldn't understand what they have to do if they cannot read. Here [standardized] it's pretty simple; there's a plus [+] there's a minus [-].

(Instruction) These [performance], all of them. [In both subject areas, then?] Yeah. 'Cause it makes 'em think. And again, thinking about using these for math, no, I don't think is right because they're learning how to do everything else. But if they had these kind of questions in school, they'll be more familiar.

(ST: Y/N)

(PA: Think, Imag, Unfair, Align)

Standardized Tests Reading/Performance Assessments Math (n=1)

5
(STreading+) I like this one better. I think they would get lost by the end of the story [PA]. At her grade level, I don't know if she would remember all these things. Without going back and re-reading. ...Well this one [ST] was like they're getting the understanding of the words, and this all in one short thing so their mind still has all this fresh in their mind.

(PAreading-) ...Probably for kids who are really, really far ahead in their class...it might be good for them.

(STmath,neutral) It doesn't explain enough to keep their mind going. I think they would probably just guess at all the answers.

(PA math++) Yeah. 'Cause it explains to them more how to think it out.

(Instruction) I think they should think up their own things. 'Cause all kids are different. The teacher should think of a broader horizon of things and not just go by the book.

(ST: Guess)

(PA: Think, Hard)

Table 9 (continued)

Both (Likes Both, wants both in instruction) (n=2)

6
(STreading+)(PAreading+) I think that's good [PA] because you have to really—If they have to write it in paragraph form then that means they have really read it well and understood it....I feel like they need to understand the story in more detail than the standardized tests. But one of the bad things about it is the kids who aren't good at putting their thoughts into words are going to have problems with it also.

(STmath+) I think that these standardized tests would be easier for the kids to understand.

(PAmath+) These would go like according to their grade level and everything, right? I would approve. It makes them really think.

(Instruction) In reading? I suppose this one because it does make them, you know, if they learn from the beginning they really have to think, they really have to comprehend. This will probably teach them better. [In mathematics?] Um, that's a hard one. I feel like this one has always been fine. I guess I never thought about doing it different because this has been done for so many years. This [PA] would be more of a variety of teaching probably. [If you had to pick one?] I think this one. [ST]

(ST: Easy,)

(PA: Think, Know, Unfair)

Prefers Performance Assessments (Likes Both) (n=11)

7
M: [You should have two different kinds of tests] because there's children that think one way and there's children that think another way.

F: I think both should be used and I think both should be used in the same test. I mean, one's subjective and one's an objective evaluation....I believe the advantages of multiple choice type questions are that a student that has a hard time expressing themselves is much, is [more] able to show that they understand what they have read....I believe a disadvantage of the multiple choice is that children can guess....Maybe their achievement isn't actually going to be shown as well [with ST] as it might be on this [PA], as you have to write a summary, or write the answers to the questions.

(PAreading+) F: That is, for a child that they can express themselves through writing. This is probably a much better way of evaluating them than the multiple choice, but I believe it does have possible disadvantages for some children.

(Instruction) M: These kinds of questions [PA]. F: I agree. M: Yeah, cause it makes them think....

F: I believe that this gives—for most children—a more true evaluation and it would be harder to teach the test.

M: There's more of an understanding why it's right and wrong, you know, with this way. And the kids, I think, should be taught in math and reading and stuff like that, they should be taught to understand the rights and wrongs of it.

(ST: Obj, Support, Guess)

(PA: Know, Think, Subj, Unfair)

8
(STmath+) The standardized test would measure what is being taught, more typical of what they're working on in their math books. My older child is getting more of [PA] in 6th grade, emphasizes thinking.

Table 9 (continued)

(PAmath-) I don't necessarily think that it measures the way that they're taught to solve problems....This is certainly going to make your child think more...but it would be extremely difficult if they can't read.

(STreading+)(PAreading++) This [PA] looks like a more fun test. Is it just to measure reading, would be doing quite a bit of writing? More interesting test, pictures would capture their imagination. They could look at [ST] and just guess. I would choose [PA] over [ST].

(Instruction) [They should use] questions that make children think, not just a yes or no....In math there is a right answer, but still [our teacher] has them write down the steps, about how did we get it. That kind of thing is really good in math, something I didn't learn in math, they have to look at each step and explain. You should have questions that make them analyze their answers.

(ST: Align, Guess, Y/N)

(PA: Think, Hard, Unfair, Imagin)

9

(STmath+)(PAmath+) F: One of the disadvantages, you know, on the multiple choice, you could just put an "x" there and have a chance of getting it right. Where over here on the other ones you have to explain why you made that choice, so you have to think your answer through.

M: It might be a little overwhelming to some kids....But yet it might would help the teacher by saying well, they're not quite comprehending everything, and see where they're struggling, you know.

(STreading-)(PAreading+) M: Well, I feel basically the same way as he does. You know, I think that this [ST] is more the way that things were. The other one is better. It makes the child have to think more....and they have to kind of use more of their imagination, too.

(ST: Guess)

(PA: Think, Diag, Hard, Imag)

10

(STreading+) F: I would like to see both of them used. You are going to be pretty much right or wrong on it....M: where there is one right answer.

(Pareading++) F: ...The creativity gives a chance to come to their own conclusion. And there is...not everything that is so black and white where it has to be yes or no. M: Every child is going to have a different view. It lets them express why they thought it was that way.

(STmath+) F: There's enough situations throughout life, where you have to have an exact, it's good to know the correct way. M: I think, I don't know, that a disadvantage might be—It's kind of funny but in my college classes I used to call it "multiple guess" instead of multiple choice.

(PAmath++) M: ...I think that it gives the child a chance to show their work and how they came up with the conclusion of the answer....and the teacher can see, well, if the child filled this out and she could pinpoint something and say, well, this is why you are not coming up with the right answer.

(Instruction) F: I would go more for the ones like these [PA]. I feel it would keep more excitement in the class and I think it would keep kids interested. M: ...the kids have to think more. It's a little bit harder. F: they [could] walk away and not remember what they checked in the box whereas something like this [PA] they are going to think about and stimulate them more.

(ST: Y/N, Guess, Life)

(PA: Imagin, Think, Diag, Hard)

Table 9 (continued)

11
(STreading+)(Pareading++) ...Actually I'd like to see them have this type of test but you have to start really young with them, showing them how to communicate and how to really write that out, bring it out of themselves....I would go with this one [PA]. I would strongly approve of this type. I want my son to learn how to write more, communicate better....This seems the faster way [ST] as far as a test time goes, but this [PA] looks like they've really worked out the problem. They've had to sit there and think about it and take the time to do it.

(STmath+) I'm comfortable with these still, so I approve of them.

(PAmath+) This would be interesting. I'd like to see them start working some of these into the program.

(Instruction) I would like to see them use these ones [PA], because as I'm looking at this, you're reading it and it's asking you, and its almost as though you're talking to the teacher one on one. As you're looking at this [ST], you say 4 times 8, what is that? Well, this one [PA] is giving you a little bit more challenge. It's kind of almost speaking, you say OK, now you figure this out. "Suppose you couldn't remember what 8 x 7 is. How could you figure it out?" It seems like this is better communicated this way.

(PA: Think, Align)

12
(STmath++)(PAmath++) This [ST] shows exactly where a student is....This makes the student do a little more thinking. They don't see the answer right away. They have to figure it out.

(STreading+)(PAreading++) This [PA] helps with memory skills. They have to read it. They have to go back over it to answer the questions at the end. It helps with comprehension. They must come up with their own answers. No answer is wrong. I have trouble comprehending what I read. If I had had to do things like this, it would have helped my comprehension.

(Instruction) [PA] They focus on the whole spectrum. They don't have to comprehend with the standardized reading test. They would have to read the whole thing with this [PA]. This would be better at judging where the student is at. It pertains more to actual life situations. The answers are not in front of them. They have to think about it.

(ST: Y/N)

(PA: Think, Imagin, Diag, Life)

Strongly Prefers Performance Assessments (n=11)

13
(STreading+) F: The main thing I see about this is that it is a non-judgmental way to compare the kids. It gives you, maybe not a perfect handle but it gives you comparison on how kids are doing in the school system which may point out flaws in the school systems or flaws in the kids. As far as the teacher goes, because it is standardized that you know exactly what the right answer is....The only disadvantage of this is, is that I have always in my life been able to pass any multiple choice whether I have an inkling of what the answer or not.

(PAreading++) M: I see advantages because he can express himself....To me, you are getting to know more about your child through this one than you would on the other [ST]. F: Exactly. You get a lot more handle on whether or not he actually comprehended what he read if he has to go ahead and rephrase what he's read and give a synopsis....The disadvantage to this test [PA], the big one is the grading is so subjective. The grading of it depends totally on the quality of the teacher or the person sitting down to grade it because it is totally subjective.

Table 9 (continued)

(ST math-) F: This to me, by handing them the answers again doesn't really test their skills. Somebody that doesn't even grasp addition could guess on these answers. M: I just think these [ST] are good for comparison just like the other ones but I like these [PA] better.

(PAmath++) F: ...I love these because they actually make the kid read the problem and come up with the answer instead of picking it from a list that is right here beside it. ...M: The disadvantage I can see is, if your kid is not up to reading level for this, he is going to be much better on the other one.

(Instruction) F: For classroom instruction, this [PA] is the only way to go. In the classroom to sit down and say, which of these is right? That doesn't make them come up with the solution. M: I feel to make my kids well rounded, he needs to express himself. These [ST] don't do it. To me, I hate rote.

(ST: Norm, Obj, Guess)

(PA: Think, Imagin, Know, Diag, Subj, Unfair)

14

(Streading-) ...M: It doesn't really force you to think, I mean, the answers are right there. ...F: It makes you have one, their choices instead of one of your own choices.

(PAreading+) ...M: This one has you also like explain. Like right here [ST] you don't really have to think too much about it, and this one [PA] you really have to kind of pull it all together—and reason it out. ...M: The only problem I see with this if they were at a lower level of third grade reading, you know, they probably couldn't grasp some of this.

(STmath-)(PAmath++) F: If I had the option, something like this [PA] would be a little bit better. ...M: Yeah. I think this would make them, if they were to teach, obviously they'd have to teach this to take these tests. We'd probably get better quality in teaching. Things that would probably stick with them a little bit more. ...M: I think you can probably guess more on [ST]. On these [PA] you can't really guess, you kind of have to think about it F: Plus, I think this [PA] makes it a little bit more interesting for the kids. This is pretty cut and dried.

(Instruction) F: Well, like we said, this one. This one, I think the kids could relate to this. ...M: It's more practical. You can apply to it, like it kind of stresses more of life skills.

(ST: Support, Guess, Y/N)

(PA: Think, Align, Imagin, Unfair, Life)

15

(STreading+)(PAreading+) This one [PA] will tell you more about what they get out of the book...or the story. Just by the questions they ask, and that you have to re-write.

(STmath-) Well I just don't like the pick or choose. [PAmath+] I approve of this. They have to work out the problems.

(Instruction) This [PA]. They make them work on 'em more....the other ones they could [just] choose.

(ST: Guess)

(PA: Think)

16

(STreading-)(PAreading++) F: Okay. This test [ST] is not very subjective. You know, there's a right or wrong answer, but it doesn't require or doesn't allow for a lot of input....I think it does test their comprehension because...there're some good questions there. You know, "What is a good title for the story?" I think is a good question, 'cause then they're gonna have to understand and comprehend the overall picture....This test [PA], on the other hand, does require them to write something out and

Table 9 (continued)

...M: It also causes them to think for themselves a little bit more. F: Yeah, the answer's not provided for them, they have to fill in the answer. ...F: I just think it'd be tougher to grade this test. ...M: But this test would say a lot more, it would tell a lot more. F: The advantage to this [PA] is I can't guess. On the other one [ST] I can guess and I have a 25% chance of getting the right answer.

(STmath-)(Pamath+) ...M: This one [ST], it gives you an example of what is right, it gives you one answer that is right, so you can come up with the right answer fairly easily. F: It's not gonna help them. M: It's not gonna help you to understand the solution to the problem a number of different ways like this one [PA]. ...F: This one [PA], by writing out the answer in most of these on the other test, they're going to show you the process that they used to come up with the answer, so I think it goes beyond what this test [ST] asks, which is for the right answer.

(Instruction) M: Well...I like the fact that [...] these tests [PA] here help you to help the child to think about what their answer is. F: And I think it'd be important to ask questions that help the child understand how they're solving problems and how they're comprehending things. ...F: I don't think that this standardized achievement test allows the child to understand why he, how he comes up with the right answer. I think the performance assessment does, you know, it allows them to actually give examples of how they solve the problem.

(ST: Obj, Know, Guess, Easy, Y/N)

(PA: Think, Diag, Align, Subj)

17
(STreading-) Well, to me these are very simple to grade...I mean, very simplistic. I mean, it's right or wrong. You know, it's an easy man's way out. [laughs] It requires little imagination...

(PAreading++) I would strongly approve of the way to test [my daughter's] reading skills and things....It asks her a great, a variety, it asks her to use her mind to remember, I mean, she has to pay attention to detail. She has to evaluate on her own, she has to learn to make a judgment call.

(Instruction) I definitely like the one that allows them to express themselves....I do. I think that it's, it takes more time on the part of the educator, but I think that the education system would benefit immensely from it. I think you pick up, you know, learning deficiencies much quicker with a performance assessment than you would with standardized. I think that they have a good chance of picking out the [right answer] just by even guessing....But with having to explain it, you see their abilities, you see whether they can or cannot explain....It shows their understanding level, where this one [ST] doesn't.

(ST: Y/N, Guess), Obj)

(PA: Think, Imagin, Diag, Know)

18
(STmath-)(PAmath+) I prefer this [PA], because no matter what, they can still guess on this [ST] and possibly get it right. On this they're going to have to get it right....They're going to have to figure out how to come up with the answer.

(STreading-)(PAreading+) ...This way [PA] you have to read it, they have to give a reason, they have to solve the problem. This you have to tell why, you know, why did it have a good ending? The whole thing. You have to explain yourself.

(Instruction) Well like this [PA]. Ones that they have to explain—tell the answer, and then tell why they think that.

(ST: Guess)

(PA: Think)

despite their preference for performance assessments, noted that performance assessments might be unfair because of the extra demand they placed on students to write their answers. Key idea codes are recorded at the end of each representative segment in the first analysis but are discussed in more detail later.

The categories in Table 9 are ordered roughly from the position most favorable toward standardized tests to that most favorable toward performance assessments. Only 3 of the 33 fall parents or parent dyads preferred the use of standardized tests for both district and instructional purposes. Respondents in this category saw standardized tests as more cut and dried, more aligned to instruction, easier, and providing more support (because having the answers there made it clear what was expected). Another subgroup of parents preferred standardized tests for math and performance assessments for reading. This group of parents liked the opportunity for children to express themselves and the possibility for more than one right answer for reading assessment but maintained that there is one right answer for math. Two sample transcript segments are shown for this category in Table 9. Like them, a third respondent explained: "In mathematics, I think this type (ST) is probably the best . . . because math is pretty basic as far as having the right answer and you have to have the right answer. With this (PA reading) they can use their imagination and they can tell you a story the way they see it. It doesn't always have to be one way." One respondent preferred standardized tests for reading and performance assessments for math. Two responses were assigned in the "middle" category meaning that they liked both types of measures for both district purposes and classroom instruction.

By far the majority of respondents preferred performance assessments. Twelve interview segments were placed in the category "Prefers Performance Assessments (Likes Both)" and another eleven responses were in the "Strongly Prefers Performance Assessments" category. Although the "Prefers PA (Likes Both)" category was heterogeneous, the dominant response was to approve of both kinds of measures being used for district purposes but to prefer that performance assessments be used for classroom instruction. Across responses in all categories the most frequently mentioned feature of performance assessments is that they make children think. As shown by the counts in the fall, key ideas analysis (Table 10), this was noted by 10 of the 12 responses in the Prefers PA category. In addition to the several responses shown in Table 9, other respondents

Table 10

Key Features of Interview Responses Identified by Subgroups of Fall Parents (n=33)

Codes	Strongly Prefers ST (n=2)	Prefers ST (Likes Both) (n=1)	ST Math/ PA Reading (n=4)	ST Reading/ PA Math (n=1)	Likes Both (n=2)	Prefers PA (Likes Both) (n=12)	Strongly Prefers PA (n=11)
Guess				1		6	9
Y/N	2	1	3			6	3
Easy	1		1	1	1	2	2
Obj	1					2	3
Support	1	1				3	1
Know (ST)					1	1	2
Life (ST)						3	
Norm						2	1
Think		1	2	1	2	10	8
Imagin	1		4			7	5
Diag	1		1			8	6
Hard	1	1		1	1	5	1
Unfair	1		1		1	5	2
Subj	1				1	3	3
Know (PA)					1	4	4
Life(PA)						5	1
Align		1	1			4	3

Guess	ST allow students to guess the correct answer.
Y/N	ST have yes-no, black-white answers.
Easy	ST are easy for students.
Obj	ST are objective, easy to grade.
Support	ST provide support by helping students know what is expected of them.
Know (ST)	Performance on ST demonstrates that student has math skills and can comprehend.
Life (ST)	ST question format is like real life—balancing checkbook, taking employment tests.
Norm	ST provide normative information, national comparisons.
Think	PA require students to think in order to answer the questions.
Imagin	PA allow students to use their imaginations, be creative; they aren't constrained to one right answer.
Diag	PA provide information for teacher about what the student is thinking and where they are having problems.
Hard	PA are difficult problems.
Unfair	PA place too many reading and writing demands on the student.
Subj	PA are subjective tasks which are difficult to grade.
Know (PA)	Performance on PA demonstrates that student has concepts because they have to explain their answers.
Life(PA)	PA tasks are like real life—having to problem solve, figure out what to do.
Align	Instruction must be aligned to PA tasks in order to use PAs fairly.

in this category explained why they preferred performance assessments for instruction:

> I think this [PA] would make them think more.
>
> I think in order to learn any kind of subject you have to have concepts down and I think number 2 is going to show how to develop the concepts better. . . . You need to get those basics. . . . But I do think this [PA] is going to make them think more.
>
> I just think, like here [ST] they get to choose where here [PA] they really have to think about it and you're really gonna know that they know exactly what they read or what have you.

Even respondents who preferred standardized tests for other reasons often noted that performance assessments would stimulate children's imagination or make them have to think.

The substance of comments regarding both standardized tests and performance assessments was similar for parents in both the Prefers PA and Strongly Prefers PA categories with the distinction tending to be that parents in the first group gave approval ratings to standardized tests for district purposes. Both groups, however, criticized standardized tests because it was possible to guess and because the results of such tests would not tell you much about the process of a student's learning or where they were failing to comprehend. In contrast, we used the code "Diag" to note the many instances where parents commented on the diagnostic value of performance assessments. For example, from one of the Prefers PA responses not shown in Table 9:

> The other tests [PA math] kind of makes them tell you the concept, not just the right answer. I like the "explain your choice," or "what would you tell Adam" type questions. . . . this would give a teacher more information to think about, especially on the concepts that they haven't quite grasped yet.

Several parents also commented that standardized tests were more objective in contrast to performance tests that would be either difficult to grade fairly or more time-consuming to grade. In some cases, however, parents went on to say that this was exactly the kind of attention or commitment that was needed in education. Concerns about grading were voiced along with the concern that reading level might create problems for some students on the math assessment or that writing might be a problem on both performance assessments. Although these concerns were mentioned as problems to be resolved, for the most part they did not appear to affect parents' enthusiasm for using performance assessments in instruction. For some parents in the Prefers PA (Likes Both) category,

however, these features were cited specifically as the reason that both types of tests should be used at least for district purposes. "Different children learn in different ways." Some children, especially those who "are not good with words," would be helped by having the answers there so they could show that they understood. (Answers of this type were coded "Support" in Table 10.)

The "key ideas" codes reflect the specific features of standardized tests and performance assessments as seen by parents. These codes are summarized quantitatively in Tables 10 and 11, for fall and spring data respectively. In Table 12, qualitative data from spring interviews are provided to illustrate each of the codes. The decision was made to base the data display on spring data to avoid redundancy with the extended interview segments in Table 9 and to provide the reader with the opportunity to compare the similarity of parent comments in the fall and spring data. For example, the standardized tests EASY quotations in Table 12 can be compared with the occurrences of this code in the extended interview segments in Table 9. In the fall the parent in interview number 6 said that "these standardized tests would be easier for the kids to understand;" and in the spring five parents said that standardized tests are easier because the answers are right there.

In Table 12, the key features codes have been organized into strengths and weaknesses for each type of measure. Occasionally features such as the right-wrong character of multiple-choice test questions (which we called the Yes/No code) were mentioned as a strength by some parents and as a weakness by others and have been grouped accordingly in the table. Most of the codes are self-explanatory or have already been described as reasons for preferring one type of assessment or the other. However, several coding categories warrant further definition. "Know" was used both for standardized tests and for performance assessments when parents said that being able to answer these questions would really show that a student knows the material. Similarly "Life" was a category used for both types of measures whenever parents said that the test questions were just like what you would have to know in "real life." "Align" was used for performance assessments when parents said something about the need to ensure that children have previous experience with that type of assessment: "I'm assuming that if they were going to be testing this way they would be doing, of course, more papers this way in the first place to get them ready for it."

Table 11

Key Features of Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments as Identified by Subgroups of Spring Parents (n=27)

Codes	Strongly Prefers ST (n=0)	Prefers ST (Likes Both) (n=0)	ST Math/ PA Reading (n=2)	ST Reading/ PA Math (n=0)	Likes Both (n=2)	Prefers PA (Likes Both) (n=12)	Strongly Prefers PA (n=11)
Guess						5	4
Y/N					1	6	2
Easy						2	3
Obj						4	
Support			1		1	3	1
Know (ST)					1	3	
Life (ST)			2			2	2
Norm					1	1	1
Think			1		2	8	9
Imagin			2		2	7	6
Diag						4	5
Hard						3	
Unfair					1	1	1
Subj					1	3	
Know (PA)						6	5
Life (PA)						3	3
Align						2	

Guess	ST allow students to guess the correct answer.
Y/N	ST have yes-no, black-white answers.
Easy	ST are easy for students.
Obj	ST are objective, easy to grade.
Support	ST provide support by helping students know what is expected of them.
Know (ST)	Performance on ST demonstrates that student has math skills and can comprehend.
Life (ST)	ST question format is like real life—balancing checkbook, taking employment tests.
Norm	ST provide normative information, national comparisons.
Think	PA require students to think in order to answer the questions.
Imagin	PA allow students to use their imaginations, be creative; they aren't constrained to one right answer.
Diag	PA provide information for teacher about what the student is thinking and where they are having problems.
Hard	PA are difficult problems.
Unfair	PA place too many reading and writing demands on the student.
Subj	PA are subjective tasks which are difficult to grade.
Know (PA)	Performance on PA demonstrates that student has concepts because they have to explain their answers.
Life(PA)	PA tasks are like real life—having to problem solve, figure out what to do.
Align	Instruction must be aligned to PA tasks in order to use PAs fairly.

Table 12

Illustrative Quotations for Key Features of Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments from Spring Parent Interviews

Strengths of Standardized Tests

Y/N
Is it fair to get a grade on how you feel and how you interpret something? Whereas this is really black and white.

But some of the basics, I think the only way to really measure them is that you have to be able to add to get the right answer, and this does that.

EASY
I guess I would approve of the standardized forms. I think they're easier for the kids than the other one, but I don't think it's always the best to have the easiest [laughs].

Yeah, and I think the reason why he likes this is because it is easier and doesn't make him think.

This would be easier, the standardize would be easier for my son to come up with a quick answer and maybe even get it right and he would like this better.

OBJECTIVE
I like this one better [PA] but, man, I, I can see that this would be much easier to grade [ST]. [laughter]

One advantage is that they're easy to grade. You can't use a computer to grade the other kind of test.

SUPPORT
I think the advantages for this would be it would be, since the answers are right there, a little easier for a child that isn't, that doesn't do well at writing.

Well the advantage is there is an answer in there, you just have to pick the right one. And so if you just totally went blank and you're stumped, it's definitely an advantage to have that there. I'm not sure it's an ultimate advantage to the child for learning, but um and that's what the disadvantage is. That it's not, pushing them to um, problem solving maybe as much as it should.

KNOW
I approve of that. I mean it certainly tells if they know math skills.

Now on the vocabulary side, that's probably a little better. (Having only one right answer) You know, I like that part of it, because it makes them, it makes them take a word that they've had to spell or whatever or heard in the story and then see if they really did understand that word in the context of the story or of the sentence.

LIFE
When you get into the real world doing your checkbook, you either do or don't come up with the right answer, they don't care how you come up with the answer, it's either right or wrong.

So I think they're both important to me because you need, in everyday usage this is what you're going to see. Put the numbers down and add them up.

The advantage of doing something like this would be he...would be used to taking this when he went to go get a job or apply for like in the service if he wanted to go take a service test, or civil service test or anything like that that is geared toward the real world. Everything is like this.

NORM
...these are certainly probably easier to, to compare between one student, or a group of students, compared to another...

Table 12 (continued)

Weaknessess of Standardized Tests

GUESS
This one the standardized, it's almost like it's giving you the answers. You just have a choice, you don't really have to think about it.

This gives them the answer, they could guess at that. This makes them think. Multiple guess, you know?

This is what we grew up with [ST]. Do it this way, but there's so much room for error in these. You know, a kid could guess, they've got a 25% chance of being right or wrong. And on these performance assessments, I mean you know if they're understanding what they're doing or not.

I don't really care for the multiple questions because again I like to find in detail...how they got the answer. And the multiple can be a lucky guess. Where if they were to write out how they got it or like a word problem, you know, I think that would tell a little bit more and give you more information...

In multiple choice like this basically it doesn't develop a skill. I know that they can get to that answer but they can also guess at it. To see what they believe comes closest to it. And that's not an indicator of really knowing.

Y/N
Oh, disapprove. I think this was so cut and dried, you know, it's this is the question, one of these [is the] answer....

...we all see things kind of different and I don't think sometimes that there's just a right or a wrong. Or find out how they got that, because then you can find out where they're coming from

(ST approve) A disadvantage would be that children wouldn't enjoy taking it as much. They might be uncomfortable with, with having to be right or wrong.

NORM
But I guess they need to in order to, to score their, you know how they're doing nationally. So that would probably be a disadvantage. That it lumps them in with everybody else and they just kind of become one of the crowd.

Strengths of Performance Assessments

THINK
This encourages the child to think of his own way to get a solution.

This [ST] just is memorization. I'd rather have them know how to get from here to here. I would rather see the kids learn how to think and find out what they're doing and find out how to get the answer than somebody just saying memorize the multiplication table and we'll have a test on that and then you'll be fine.

Strongly approve. I mean they make the child think. They have to think about what they, what they read. They have to think about what they're going to write. It helps with their, work on their writing skills even. This is just coloring in a box, you know. So they, they even, they get more practice on writing and spelling, things like that on these.

The advantage of this would be that the child has to read the problem in order to figure out the answer. It seems to me like getting more of that....So this to me, at this age when they are learning to do this, it is going to make it a little bit easier when they get into the high school and into the college because this is what college and high school is all about—you know, being able to solve your own problems—read it yourself, figure it out yourself.

This type. [PA] It makes them think more....You can see what you are doing—and see where you are coming from and where you are getting your answers.

Table 12 (continued)

...like essay questions here where he has to write his own—he has to think a little more instead of just slash in a box, so that is good.

So you can't just guess and be done. They have to do it. They have to use their brain and think and try.

I would prefer to see these. [PA] Because I think that those are more conceptual rather than a lot of these could be just like rote memorization type stuff. I mean if you're going to teach towards the test I think these are more teaching, teaching them to think.

Well the advantage of this is that it causes them to really think things through.

I would like to see a combination of both. But I think if you're going to generate discussion probably this kind of test is going to do more of that. You know, everybody here is going to give you the same answer. Whereas here you can get five different answers. So it's going to generate more discussion and talk and from that hopefully there's more learning taking place.

They have to think about it a little bit, it is not all right out there in front of them.

IMAGIN
D: I like this because it gives independence. M: Right, you can express yourself. D: Self expression, independence.

They can do it in their own words.

It allows kids to give their personal thinking. Teacher can see how they're reacting and there can be that relationship there.

This one seems to use like their imagination a lot more than those couple questions—is it a good title, why or why not?—they're asking why or what the child thinks about it.

It's almost like when you're looking at the questions in the book that they know about this story and they feel it too and it's just, it's pulling more creativity out of the child and maybe being able to draw more out of them things that they learned that would definitely not come out in this test [ST].

But I think if you're going to generate discussion and more things, probably this kind of test is going to do more of that....You know, everybody here is going to give you the same answer [ST]. Whereas here you can get five different answers.

They get to be themselves. The can put their own personality into the answers.

I strongly approve of this. And I think the advantage is it allows for creativity and some open thinking.

KNOW(PA)
Not only does it make you think, but you must perform all of the skills that are taught to you here. Everything is inclusive.

...there the student has to explain it so I think it would probably be a more accurate assessment of the student....This would definitely tell you whether they know or not. I think it would be better.

The advantage of this would be that the child has to read the problem in order to figure out the answer.

But yet essays give you more of an opportunity to explain what you know type of thing.

I feel that when they're presented this way you can understand if the child truly understands what he's aiming at.

Table 12 (continued)

...because you will know if the child really understands the concept of how they came to a particular answer and the reasoning behind it.

DIAG
I think you'd get more information out of the assessment than you would just, you know, something written on a piece of paper and say, well you've got to learn this.

You can see what they're thinking.

The good part about these performance assessments is you kind of show a thought process. You know whether, I think that they would be a lot more helpful in determining if they're grasping a concept if there's just a basic lack of understanding....I think it will let the teacher know, according to the answer, where the child is.

This is like even if you get the answer wrong, if you can explain why you chose it at least it shows a little more of where your thinking was coming from and if it is wrong then your teacher can help you straighten it out instead of just you did it wrong.

LIFE
These [PA] are more like what they would have to work with, if somebody was to ask them a question. This looks more like how they would come about an answer or look for an answer.

It's more real. This is just more like life. I mean, books look like this, they don't look like that paper [ST].

PA looks like it has an application in the real world. You can see the practicality with this.

ALIGN
I am assuming that if they were going to be testing this way they would be doing, of course, more papers this way in the first place to get them ready for it.

Weaknesses of Performance Assessments

UNFAIR
I don't know, it seems like this is too, like this is a little much....But is it as much physical writing?

I think maybe a below average child um, I think this would be real hard for them. Just because they might not write complete sentences. They just, I think it would be frustrating to maybe write out the answers more so than just check a box.

HARD
The disadvantage is there's a lot more work involved. A lot more writing.

SUBJ
Of course, it brings that personal thing into grading.

...is it fair to get a grade on how you think? Is it fair to get a grade on how you feel and how you interpret something? Whereas this [ST] is really black and white.

Changes in Parent Opinions From Fall to Spring of the Project

Parent opinion data were gathered in the context of the larger assessment project intended to help third-grade teachers in participating schools implement new forms of assessment in reading and mathematics. A pretest-posttest design

was used to be able to detect changes in opinions associated with the year-long project. However, it should be noted that the "intervention" that parents might have experienced was weak and indirect. Consistent with research on teacher change, changes in instructional practices can be expected to occur only slowly (and for some teachers not at all). As documented in other articles from this project, even the most ambitious teachers in the project did not feel comfortable incorporating project activities *in place of* regular instruction until sometime in the second semester. Furthermore, when teachers did try out new forms of assessment they tended to hold on to student products for subsequent scoring and workshop discussions rather than sending them home for parents to see.

Based on teacher comments about the lack of parent awareness, the project team made several efforts to inform parents about the rationale for developing performance assessments and to give them the opportunity to see specific examples of the assessments being used at their school. A newsletter was sent home that included an argument about new curriculum standards and assessments and sample assessment tasks. A separate folder was devised to send student work home with first-semester report cards. Presentations were made at special third-grade Parent Nights where a detailed explanation could be given for why the new assessments were thought to be important. At one school the session was held in conjunction with a major third-grade event resulting in nearly 100% participation; but at the other two schools only 10% to 20% of families were represented. In our judgment these activities, had a hit-and-miss quality. Some parents became aware of the project and might well connect later questions about performance assessment to experiences their child had had that year. Other parents might be just as unaware of the project in May as in September.

Efforts to evaluate changes in parent opinions were also seriously undermined by the timing of interviews held in conjunction with parent conferences. In two of the schools, including the one with nearly 100% attendance at the Parent Night, parent interviews had already been conducted by the time of the Parent Night presentation. The pre and post questionnaire administrations at least spanned the entire year and therefore had greater opportunity to detect project effects.

Parent questionnaires were administered to randomly equivalent but mutually exclusive samples of parents in October and May in both participating

and control schools. The fall data were summarized in previous tables. In Table 13, four questions are repeated that showed significant change from fall to spring in the participating schools. It must be acknowledged, of course, that interpretation of change is clouded by the very poor response rate of 30% from the spring sample. However, the following consistencies in the data support the argument that there was a real (not artifactual) decrease in parent approval of standardized tests in the participating schools. First, there were no differences between parent opinions in participating and control schools in the fall. Second, both participating and control schools suffered the same poor return rate in the spring. Finally, there was no corresponding change in parent opinions in the control schools.

Table 13

Four Questionnaire Items With Significant Fall–Spring Change in Participating Schools (Fall n=69; Spring n=30)

	Fall	Spring
12. Do you approve or disapprove of using standardized tests with questions like those in **Box A** to measure your child's achievement in <u>math</u>? (1=strongly disapprove; 5=strongly approve)	x=3.67 s=0.97	x=3.27 s=0.94
14. Do you approve or disapprove of using standardized tests with questions like those in **Box A** to measure your child's achievement in <u>reading</u>? (1=strongly disapprove; 5=strongly approve)	x=3.61 s=0.99	x=3.13 s=1.07
16. Currently in the nation there is some concern that standardized tests have had an undue influence on what gets taught in school, because of too much "teaching to the test." **IF** it is true that tests influence instruction, indicate below whether you would prefer for children to be taught <u>mathematics</u> using questions like Box A or Box B. (1=strongly prefer Box A; 5=strongly prefer Box B)	x=3.19 s=1.27	x=3.70 x=1.32
21. Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students? (1=favor; 2=oppose) Note: the number in each sample decreased due to omission of "don't know" responses.	x=1.43 s=0.50 n=54	x=1.67 s=0.48 n=21

Note: alpha=0.10. Control Schools had a parallel drop in response rate but there were NO differences between Fall and Spring parent opinions in control schools.

Although the assessment project was not directly aimed at changing parent attitudes, it would have been our hope to improve opinions about performance assessments rather than merely to increase disapproval of standardized tests. The apparent effect only on questions about standardized tests must be interpreted in light of the initial very high positive ratings of performance assessments in the fall. In the spring, parents in the participating schools continued their high approval ratings of performance assessments to measure math and reading achievement (hence there was no significant change) but significantly decreased their approval of standardized tests as shown by questions 12 and 14. Responses to question 16 are important because they mean that the subgroup of parents who in the fall had made a distinction, preferring performance assessments for reading and standardized tests for math, had mostly switched over by spring to preferring performance assessments for both math and reading.

The increased opposition to standardized tests in the participating schools was also reflected in the set of Gallup Poll questions. As shown in Table 13, by spring fewer parents favored the use of standardized achievement tests (question 21). In addition, Gallup Poll questions 22-26 about specific purposes for using standardized tests—to rank local schools, to pass students to the next grade, etc.—showed increasing disfavor in participating schools from fall to spring. In sum, the questionnaire data showed that parents started out with high approval ratings of performance assessments and continued this high opinion over the course of the year. In participating schools where parents had some direct experience with performance assessments, there was also evidence that parents lowered their approval of standardized tests significantly.

With the caveat that "spring" data were collected in February, March and April, the comparison of fall versus spring interview data is presented in Table 14. The major categories of preference for standardized tests and performance assessments are tabulated. Although these data are too sparse to warrant statistical analysis, the absence in the spring of any responses expressing strong preference for standardized tests is noteworthy. Also the tendency for fewer parents in the spring to say that standardized tests are essential for mathematics takes on more importance because it parallels a significant effect found in the questionnaire data. Thus the nature of change in parent opinions is very similar in both the questionnaire and interview results.

Table 14

Comparison of Fall and "Spring" Parent Interview Data Breakdown of Subgroups

	Strongly Prefers ST	Prefers ST (Likes both)	ST Reading/ PA Math	ST Math/ PA Reading	Likes both	Prefers PA (Likes both)	Strongly Prefers PA
Fall (n=33)	2	1	1	4	2	11	12
"Spring" [a] (n=27)	0	0	0	2	2	12	11

[a] Second round interview where scheduled in February, March and April in the three schools.

A final look at change is provided by shifts in the frequencies of some of the parent key ideas about the two types of measures (Table 15). As part of the qualitative analysis, checks were made to ensure that the meaning of the codes and preference categories had not changed from fall to spring. This was done by

Table 15

Fall and Spring Comparisons of CODE Frequencies (in percentage respondents)

CODES	Fall % (n=33)	Spring % (n=27)
Guess	48%	33%
Y/N	45	33
Easy	24	19
Obj	18	15
Support	18	22
Know (ST)	12	15
Life (ST)	18	22
Norm	9	11
Think	73	74
Imagin	52	63
Diag	48	33
**Hard	30	11
**Unfair	30	11
Subj	24	15
Know (PA)	27	41
Life (PA)	18	22
*Align	27	7

* Significantly different at alpha=0.05.

** Significantly different at alpha=0.10.

the two authors reading each other's coding and discussing any discrepancies and by rereading the fall coding after completing the spring analysis. Then the frequencies for each of the codes were tabulated for fall and spring. Three "key ideas" about performance assessments were mentioned by a third of the parent sample in the fall but were mentioned by significantly fewer parents in the spring: Hard, Unfair, and Align. Note that these codes could all be characterized as "worries," associated with performance assessments—that is, that the assessments might be too hard for some children, that it would be unfair to have to write about your answer in math, and that kids would need practice with new kinds of assessment. We speculate that these issues may not have come up as often once parents had had some experience with performance assessments being used in their child's classroom.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to examine parent opinions about standardized tests and new performance assessments in greater depth than can be understood from national survey data. The classic Gallup Poll question showing a high percentage of citizens and public school parents in favor of standardized national tests is often interpreted as a mandate for external, machine-scorable accountability measures. What was discovered in this study is that parents' favorable ratings of standardized national tests do not imply a preference for such measures over other less formal sources of information for monitoring their child's academic progress or for judging the quality of education provided at their local school. Approval of standardized tests likewise does not imply disapproval of performance assessments.

In this study, third-grade parents considered report cards, hearing from the teacher about their child's progress, and seeing graded samples of student work to be much more useful in learning about their child's progress than standardized tests. In interview data, parents often mentioned the need for comparative information to know how to interpret their own child's progress, but they trusted the teacher to tell them how their child was doing in relation to grade-level expectations or to other children in the class. Comparison to external or national norms was mentioned rarely. Even for accountability purposes, the usefulness ratings for standardized tests increased but did not equal parents' high ratings for talking to the teacher and seeing student work. According to parents, these

sources of information are indicators of school quality because they allow them to see what is being taught and what expectations are set by the classroom teacher.

Because preliminary analyses of Gallup Poll results showed the third-grade parent sample in this study to be less favorably disposed toward standardized tests than the national sample, follow-up analyses were conducted to determine whether high parent ratings of informal sources of information could be attributed to the particular nature of this sample. However, even the 46% subsample of parents who favored standardized national tests on the Gallup Poll rated report cards, talking to the teacher, and seeing student work as more useful that standardized tests.

Using both questionnaire and interview formats, different samples of parents were provided with specific examples of the types of questions used on standardized tests and on performance assessments in both reading and mathematics. While a majority of parents approve of both standardized tests and performance assessments, approval ratings were stronger for performance assessments. Again this overall pattern could not be explained as merely a selection bias in this particular sample. The group that favored national tests rated the two types of measures equally. A pervasive theme in the interview data was that performance assessment problems "make children think" and are likely to give teachers better insights about what children are understanding and where they are struggling. Parents commented frequently about the desirability of having children explain their answers in mathematics and being encouraged to express themselves in response to stories they read. Standardized tests were seen as easier and more supportive by some parents because having answer choices communicates what's expected and allows children who aren't very verbal to show what they know; at the same time, parents complained frequently that multiple-choice questions allow children to guess the right answer "25% of the time."

When parents in this study had a chance to look closely at performance assessment problems, most endorsed their use for district purposes and especially preferred their use in classroom contexts. Therefore, survey data like the Gallup Poll showing approval of standardized national tests should not be taken to mean that parents are opposed to the use of alternative measures. A few parents expressed concern about the subjectivity of performance measures but lack of rigor—sometimes evoked by the term "alternative assessment"—was never

mentioned. Instead, when parents looked at specific performance assessment problems, they were more likely to comment that the questions seemed hard or challenging. Change data in the participating schools showed that after some experience with performance assessments in their child's classrooms, parents expressed even fewer worries about the difficulty level or writing demands of performance assessments and increased their disapproval of standardized tests. It was the impression of the interview team that seeing real examples of both types of tests affected parent responses. The questionnaire and interview demonstrations served an educative function. Parents might have answered differently if they had to rely on their own ideas about what performance assessments look like.

Appendix P1
University of Colorado, Boulder
Assessment and Testing Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to learn what information you as parents find useful in learning about your child's progress in school and in evaluating the quality of education provided at your child's school.

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you learn about your child's progress in school?

Place a check in the appropriate column to indicate the usefulness of each type of information.	Not at all useful				Very useful
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Report cards					
2. My child's teacher talking about his/her progress					
3. Standardized tests					
4. Seeing graded samples of my child's work					

5. Pick one type of information you think is most helpful in learning about your child and tell what you learn from it and why it is helpful.

_____

_____

_____

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you evaluate the quality of education provided at your child's school?

Place a check in the appropriate column to indicate the usefulness of each type of information.	Not at all useful				Very useful
	1	2	3	4	5
6. Report cards					
7. My child's teacher talking about his/her progress					
8. Standardized tests					
9. Seeing graded samples of my child's work					

10. Pick one type of information you think is most helpful in learning about your child's school and tell what you learn from it and why it is helpful.

_____

_____

_____

11. What other kinds of information help you learn about your child's progress or about your child's school? What do they help you know?

_____

_____

_____

The questions at the bottom of this page and the next ask your opinion about traditional standardized achievement tests (which use multiple-choice questions) as well as your opinion about performance assessments (which use open-ended questions). In Box A and Box B below are examples of typical questions from standardized tests and typical performance assessment problems, respectively.

Mathematics

Box A. Typical mathematics questions on standardized achievement tests:

1. Add.

```
   23
   28
+  36
-----
```

- o 77
- o 85
- o 87
- o 717
- o None of these

2. Multiply.

4 x 800 =

- o 320
- o 3200
- o 3220
- o 4800
- o None of these

3. What is 763 rounded to the nearest hundred?

- o 700
- o 750
- o 760
- o 800

4. How much change will you get if you have $6.55 and spend $4.32?

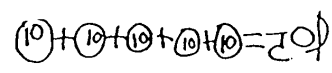
- o $2.23
- o $2.43
- o $3.23
- o $10.87

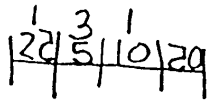
Box B. Typical performance assessment problems in mathematics:

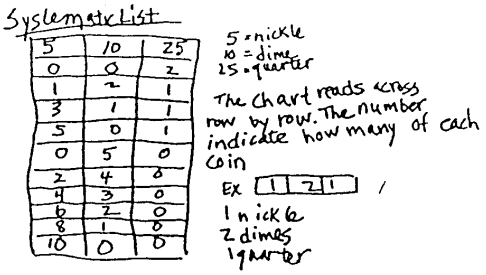
(The first two examples are from the California Assessment Program.)

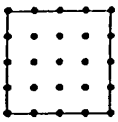
1. Bus Ride -- A friend of yours, who just moved to the United States, must ride the bus to and from school each day. The bus ride costs 50 cents. Your friend must have exact change and must use only nickels, dimes, and quarters. Your friend has a problem because she does not yet understand our money, and she does not know how to count our money.
Help your friend find the right coins to give to the bus driver. Draw and write something on a whole sheet of paper that can help her. She needs a sheet of paper that can show which combinations of coins can be used to pay for the 50-cent bus ride.

Sample Student Answers







2. 

For the figure at left, show 1/2 in as many ways as you can. You may draw more figures, if necessary. For each way you find, explain how you know you have 1/2.

3. Suppose you couldn't remember what 8 x 7 is. How could you figure it out?

4. Our class of 26 students is going to the Denver Art Museum. How many cars do we need if 4 students can go in each car? How many do we need if only 3 students can go in each car?

Suppose the school district were trying to decide whether to use standardized tests, performance assessments, or both standardized tests and performance assessments in all its elementary schools. Indicate below the degree of your approval or disapproval of each type of test or assessment.

Do you approve or disapprove of:	Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve
12. using standardized tests with questions like those in Box A to measure your child's achievement in math?					
13. using performance assessments with questions like those in Box B to measure your child's achievement in math?					

Reading

Box A. Typical reading questions on standardized achievement tests:

Vocabulary

1. pleasant smile
   - o silly
   - o wicked
   - o cheerful
   - o plain

2. frighten away
   - o free
   - o scare
   - o run
   - o finish

Comprehension (Questions come after reading 1 or 2 paragraphs.)

3. A good title for this story would be --
   - o The Pet Store
   - o A Strange Occupation
   - o Going on a Trip
   - o Danny's Pet Snake

4. Why didn't Jenny want to go to the party?
   - o because she didn't have a present
   - o because a clown was coming
   - o because her kitten was sick
   - o because her dress was torn

Box B. Typical performance assessment problems in reading:

Comprehension (Questions come after reading a 3 or 4 page story.)

1. At the end of the story, the little old man and the little old woman go on living in the little old house. Do you think this is a good ending? Tell why or why not.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. The author uses details to tell how the little old house looked at the beginning and at the end of the story. Fill in the chart to show how the little old house changed.

	Beginning	End
color of outside		
color of windows and door		
color of fence		
color of inside walls		

Suppose the school district were trying to decide whether to use standardized tests, performance assessments, or both standardized tests and performance assessments in all its elementary schools. Indicate below the degree of your approval or disapproval of each type of test or assessment.

Do you approve or disapprove of:	Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve
14. using standardized tests with questions like those in **Box A** to measure your child's achievement in reading?					
15. using performance assessments with questions like those in **Box B** to measure your child's achievement in reading?					

Currently in the nation there is some concern that standardized tests have had an undue influence on what gets taught in school, because of too much "teaching to the test." **IF** it is true that tests influence instruction, indicate below whether you would prefer for children to be taught mathematics and reading using questions like Box A or Box B:

	Strongly Prefer Instruction like Box A	Prefer Instruction like Box A	Neutral	Prefer Instruction like Box B	Strongly Prefer Instruction like Box B
16. For math instruction					
17. For reading instruction					

The following questions were taken from the 1992 Gallup Poll on education. Your responses will help us compare parent opinions in Adams 12 to opinions from the rest of the nation.

18. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here?

○ A ○ B ○ C ○ D ○ FAIL ○ Don't know

19. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally?

○ A ○ B ○ C ○ D ○ FAIL ○ Don't know

20. What grade would you give the information you receive from your third grade child's teacher(s) regarding his or her academic progress?

○ A ○ B ○ C ○ D ○ FAIL ○ Don't know

21. Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students?

○ Favor ○ Oppose ○ Don't know

In addition to measuring the academic achievement of students, do you think these standardized national tests should be used or should not be used for the following purposes?

Place a check in the appropriate column to show your response.	Should	Should not	Don't know
22. To rank the local public schools in terms of student achievement			
23. To determine if a student advances to the next grade level of schooling			
24. To determine how much teachers should be paid			
25. To determine the level of funding each school should receive			
26. To identify areas in which teachers need to improve their teaching skills			
27. To identify areas in which students need extra help			

Your Personal Comments...
We would welcome any additional comments you have about assessment and testing. Please use a separate sheet of paper for any comments you have and return the sheet along with this questionnaire.

Thank you for your help!

Appendix P2

Parent Conference Interview Protocol

[Note: Questions 1 and 5 were administered in both math and reading in a counterbalanced method. The protocol was formatted so that the interviewer could take field notes.]

Researchers at the University of Colorado are working with third grade teachers at this school (name) to develop classroom assessments in reading and mathematics. The letter we sent home explained that we are interviewing a sample of parents from each class. We want to find out what kinds of information are useful to you in learning about your child's progress in school. Our first questions focus on information you get at conferences like the one you just attended. You may answer using examples from this conference or from other conferences you have attended for your child in the past.

1. My first question is about mathematics. What kind of information is most helpful to you in learning about your child's progress in mathematics?

Note: Make sure the parents' responses are clear regarding the following:
1. Specific kinds of information they find helpful.
2. What they learn about their child's performance (skills, understanding).
3. How they evaluate whether that performance is good or bad (comparison to standard, grade level expectation, national norm, etc.)

Possible probes:

1. When teachers show you different things at conferences, what kinds of things tell you the most about how your child is doing?

2. What should your child be able to do to show he(she) is doing well in math?
("Do problems..." Do you mean he should be able to do computations?)

3. Once you find out about the work your child is doing in math, how do you judge whether that level of work is good or needs improvement?

2. Repeat Question 1 in reading.

3. [Hand parents Question Set #1]
The four questions on this page are taken from a questionnaire that was sent home to a different group of parents. Would you mark each of the four items to show how useful you think each type of information is in helping you learn about your child's progress in school? While you're doing that, please tell me why you think each type of information is useful or not very useful.

(1) Report cards
(2) My child's teacher talking about his/her progress
(3) Standardized tests
(4) Seeing graded samples of my child's work

4. Now I want to ask you about a different purpose for assessment information.
[Turn page over to Question Set #2.]
The types of information on this side of the page are the same as before. But now I want you to mark each item to show how useful you think each type of information is in helping you evaluate the quality of education provided at your child's school. While you're doing that, please tell me why you think each type of information is useful or not very useful.

(1) Report cards
(2) My child's teacher talking about his/her progress
(3) Standardized tests
(4) Seeing graded samples of my child's work

5. Now I want to show you some examples of two different kinds of questions. The questions on this page are like the multiple-choice questions that appear on standardized tests in mathematics. And these questions are examples of the kinds of more open-ended questions that are used in performance assessments.
[If asked, "What are performance assessments?" Answer: Performance assessments require that students actually do something and show their work rather than pick an answer.]

Suppose that this school district were trying to decide whether to use standardized tests, performance assessments, or both standardized tests and performance assessments in all its elementary schools. I want to give you time to look at the two kinds of questions. Then I want to ask you whether you would approve or disapprove of using these different kinds of tests or assessments.

[Allow parents time to examine the 2 samples.]

Considering these examples from standardized tests [point to samples], would you say that you
strongly approve, approve, disapprove, or strongly disapprove of using standardized tests with questions like these to measure your child's achievement in math?

What do you see as the advantages/disadvantages of using tests with questions like these?

Considering these examples from performance assessments [point to samples], would you say that you strongly approve, approve, disapprove, or strongly disapprove of using performance assessments with questions like these to measure your child's achievement in math?

What do you see as the advantages/disadvantages of using performance assessments with questions like these?

6. Repeat Question 5 in reading.

Appendix P2 (continued)

7. [Leave examples on the table for parents to look at.]
Currently in the nation there is some concern that standardized tests have had an undue influence on what gets taught in school, because of too much "teaching to the test." IF it is true that tests influence instruction, what type of questions would you prefer to see used in classroom instruction?

in reading?
in math?

Why would you prefer to see this type of question used in instruction? [Ask twice if they choose different types for reading and math.]

Question Set #1

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you learn about your child's progress in school?

Place a check in the appropriate column to indicate the usefulness of each type of information.	Not at all useful				Very useful
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Report cards					
2. My child's teacher talking about his/her progress					
3. Standardized tests					
4. Seeing graded samples of my child's work					

Question Set #2

How useful is each type of information listed below in helping you evaluate the quality of education provided at your child's school?

Place a check in the appropriate column to indicate the usefulness of each type of information.	Not at all useful				Very useful
	1	2	3	4	5
6. Report cards					
7. My child's teacher talking about his/her progress					
8. Standardized tests					
9. Seeing graded samples of my child's work					

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