

October 2015

## Getting the Most Out of Michigan's New Assessment

Wendy Zdeb-Roper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

---

### Recommended Citation

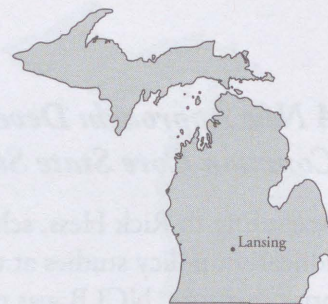
Zdeb-Roper, Wendy (2015) "Getting the Most Out of Michigan's New Assessment," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol47/iss2/12>

This Voices from the Region is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

# Getting The Most Out of Michigan's New Assessment

by Wendy Zdeb-Roper,  
Michigan Association of Secondary  
School Principals (MASSP)



Note: *This article does not express the views of the Michigan Reading Association or the Michigan Reading Journal. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors.*

As Michigan transitions away from the 40-year-old MEAP test toward a new generation of assessments, the state has been primarily focused on having an assessment system that is closely aligned to its new content standards. This nearly singular focus comes at a high cost – the opportunity for Michigan students to receive more and better instruction.

## *The Cost of Alignment*

Make no mistake, alignment to Michigan's new standards is important. If an assessment does not measure the content we are teaching, it cannot possibly tell us whether our instructional methods are successful. But alignment is not binary; it is a measure on a continuum, and it is never perfect. Michigan's educators have been building local assessment systems for years and understand the importance of balancing alignment with data quality and time spent testing. When an assessment system is balanced, educators get data they need to make decisions while sacrificing as little instructional time as possible.

Educators also understand the importance of building an assessment system that meets their needs. The M-STEP is primarily an accountability measure to be used by the state and federal government to gauge whether schools are successfully instructing students in the state's content standards. As a summative assessment aligned to Michigan's standards, it can help schools to adjust their instruction for future years and future students, but it does not provide information early enough

in the year for educators to help current students. And it will not replace the assessments and other measures that districts use to assess these students. Michigan should be wary of investing too much instructional time in an assessment – however well aligned – that serves such a limited purpose.

## *No Silver Bullet*

A single test cannot be expected to replace all assessments. Using multiple measures is essential, as one test cannot hope to measure all the different aspects of learning. Neither can a single summative assessment give schools the information they need during the course of the year to adjust instruction or identify areas for intervention. That is why schools use a combination of formative, interim, and summative assessments; locally developed and vendor provided assessments; and a different combination of measures in each subject.

Likewise, no single assessment or even set of assessments can act as a replacement in every district. Each of Michigan's local school districts serves a unique population and is responsible to its community to provide students with an education that meets their needs. Which means that they need an assessment system that measures not only the state standards, but also the expectations of their parents, students and the community.

And to the extent that these myriad tools provide students and educators with high-quality, actionable information, they are worth the price – both of money and time – that schools invest in them.

But when an assessment costs too much – in already scarce resources – for the information it provides, schools look for a better alternative.

Especially given the low quality of information educators have received in the past from the MEAP and the Michigan Merit Exam, secondary principals are left scratching their heads. Why is the state requiring that they invest as much as 16 hours of lost instructional time in a single summative assessment that seems unlikely, based on past practice, to deliver much informational value to Michigan's students or educators?

### *Finding the Best Value for Our Students*

Because alignment beyond a certain point comes at a high price in lost instructional time and because no assessment can replace a system of multiple measures, Michigan should focus on buying or building a summative assessment that meets the needs of both the state and local schools. This summative assessment should fulfill the requirements of state and federal law by providing sufficient alignment for Michigan to determine whether schools are successfully instructing students in the state standards. It should also be minimally disruptive and provide the best data possible for each minute of lost instructional time invested.

This may mean sacrificing some level of alignment with the breadth or depth of content knowledge being assessed for a shorter and more efficient test. No assessment can offer perfect alignment to the state's content standards, which is one of many reasons why educators have been skeptical for years about the over-reliance on using a single test for accountability purposes. Rather than investing so much time and money in trying to build the perfectly aligned assessment, the state should take a lesson from its local districts and minimize the impact of this one imperfect test. Instead, Michigan students, parents, and schools deserve an accountability system that considers multiple measures of student success.

The remainder of resources the state spends on testing should then be invested in an optional suite of efficient end-of-course assessments that high schools can use to fill the ninth and tenth grade assessment gap and to support local districts in designing assessment systems that meet the needs of their students and their communities.

This assessment strategy would provide Michigan with a much better value for its significant investment by maximizing instructional time and data quality, while minimizing disruption in our schools. All together, that means more and better instruction for our students and better education outcomes...and that is worth any price.

