

CHARTING STARS

Portraits of Excellence

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CHARTING STARS: PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE

Section 1: Introduction

The fifth annual report of the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation Project (CEP) is an independent evaluation of Nebraska's School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln characterized by the highest level of integrity, with respect and equitable treatment for all persons involved in the study in order to maintain confidentiality and protect the privacy of participants in the study (Appendix A). The CEP was originally contracted between the Nebraska Department of Education and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, College of Education and Human Sciences in 2001. The CEP was supported jointly by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS). Dr. Jody Isernhagen, Associate Professor, served as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Leon Dappen, Associate Professor, and Dr. Shirley Mills, Research Assistant, served as secondary investigators. Dr. Al Steckelberg, Associate Professor, and Lan Li, Graduate Assistant, conducted Study VI for the project. All researchers and members of the assessment team for the Comprehensive Evaluation Project are listed in Appendix B.

OVERVIEW

In pursuit of instructional excellence complimented by the implementation of the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS), Nebraska schools are leading the nation with a unique classroom-based assessment and accountability system. Over the past five years, the comprehensive evaluation study focused on sustainability of the STARS process; its impact upon curriculum and instruction, professional development, and school leadership. Throughout this process of evaluation, a growing number of educators have been asking new questions about teaching and learning to ensure that all Nebraska students are given the necessary skills and the opportunity to excel.

SUMMARY OF FIFTH YEAR STUDY

Nebraska has built a School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) that required Nebraska's school districts to develop a local assessment system to measure student performance on local standards that are equal to or exceed the state standards. This process honors educators and trusts their professional judgment, but demands a great deal of leadership and work based on a clear vision for learning. As a result of this vision of learning excellence, school leaders and teachers joined together to share expertise, time, and resources to develop local assessment systems that truly focused on the best interest of students.

STUDY I Comparison of Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts

The first study (Study I) of the fifth year of the comprehensive evaluation examined the similarities and differences between Benchmark Districts and Grade-Level Expectation Districts which were defined by Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment for the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), in the following manner:

Benchmark School Districts are those school districts that have developed assessments to measure only the standards that are required to be assessed by the state: grades 4, 8, and 11. Some Benchmark school districts have designed assessments to measure locally developed standards at grades other than 4, 8, and 11 but have still limited the formalized assessment processes to only three designated grades.

Grade-Level Expectation School Districts are those school districts that have developed standards or learning expectations for all grade levels in the district and have designed assessments to measure those expectations. This approach has spread the assessment process across grades.

These two district approaches emerged as schools implemented the STARS process in a very diverse landscape across Nebraska. Each school district made the determination based on how they would implement the assessment process and align their curriculum and instruction. This study of Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation School Districts was conducted to determine the impact of STARS on total support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and support from external agencies.

Two hundred and eighty-eight (288) K-12 school districts returned survey data for the Comprehensive Research Study conducted in year four. One hundred fifteen (115) districts were identified using Question 24 from the survey instrument to determine whether they were Benchmark or Grade Level Expectation Districts. These districts were contacted and asked to self identify as Benchmark or Grade-Level Expectation Districts. Only 72 districts self reported, 39 were Benchmark Districts, and 33 were Grade-Level Expectation Districts. This was an adequate sample for the purpose of this study.

Secondly, open-ended interviews were conducted in 2005-06 to collect detailed views about the STARS process in each of the district models. Twelve districts were selected for interviews. These districts represented sample schools from the original sample in 2001 and included a geographical representation across the state. Eighty-three (83) interviews with Nebraska educators were conducted statewide during the 2005-06 school year.

STUDY II: Perceptions of Elementary, Middle, and High School Teachers

The second study (Study II) was conducted to determine if there were any similarities and/or differences between elementary, middle, and secondary teacher perceptions concerning the impact of STARS on district support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and external support.

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers completed a survey in 2004-05 and interviews from sample schools were conducted. Of the 504 teachers completing surveys, 155 were elementary teachers, 150 were middle school teachers and 199 were secondary teachers.

STUDY III: Portraits of 2001-2005 Reading and Math Achievement

A longitudinal achievement study (Study III) was conducted in 2005-06 for the comprehensive evaluation. District achievement scores for reading and math were compared on criterion referenced and norm referenced measures from 2001 through 2005. District portfolio ratings for reading and math from 2001 through 2005 were also compared.

STUDY IV: Portraits of 2002-2005 Writing Achievement

The fourth study (Study IV) was a longitudinal study that focused on writing achievement. District writing scores were compared on Nebraska STARS Statewide Writing Assessment from 2002 through 2005.

STUDY V: Portraits of 2001-2005 Reading, Math, and Writing Achievement for Special Populations

In study five (Study V), district reading, math, and writing scores for English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students were compared on criterion referenced measures from 2001-2005.

STUDY VI: Role of Technology in Supporting the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led Assessment System

In study six (Study VI), Nebraska educators responded to a 2006 survey focused on the use of technology in the STARS process.

VALIDATION: Nebraska's Standards, Assessment, and Accountability System

Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment for the NDE, designed a Validation of Nebraska's Standards, Assessment, and Accountability System for the CEP (Appendix C) for the long-term evaluation of STARS. This validation of Nebraska's standards, assessment, and accountability framework places these studies in proper context to the overall long-term, statewide evaluation plan.

YEAR FIVE COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION FORMAT

This comprehensive report has been designed to serve multiple audiences and provide the most pertinent information available on the implementation of STARS based on the data collected during the 2005-06 school year. All of the studies contributed to creating a portrait of assessment and instructional practices across the state of Nebraska and will provide assistance for continued implementation of the STARS process.

This report is divided into five sections beginning with an introduction of the total report (Section 1); followed by an executive summary of the complete findings of all studies conducted during the fifth-year study (Section 2); the third section (Section 3) focused on portraits of assessment and instructional excellence; the fourth section (Section 4) focused on the six major studies (Studies I-VI) conducted during the 2005-06 school year and finally, the fifth section (Section 5) contains the Appendices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We offer a special thanks to the many educators in school districts and Educational Service Units (ESU's) for sharing their expertise and enthusiasm for tackling the complexities of assessment and instructional excellence to ensure learning for all Nebraska students.

We wish to acknowledge the support provided by the NDE staff, including the Commissioner of Education, Douglas Christensen; Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment; Bob

Beecham, Administrator of Education Support Services; Sue Anderson, Coordinator of the Statewide Writing Assessment; Dottie Heusman, former National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Coordinator; Jackie Naber, Office Administrator of Statewide Assessment, and Carol Bom, Office Assistant.

To our team of interviewers, Larry Bornschlegl, Ron Klemke, and Bob Whitehouse, we wish to thank you for the travels across this great state to conduct interviews in school districts. To my fellow researchers, Leon Dappen and Shirley Mills, thank you for the long hours and dedication you continue to give to the project. I could not have done it without you. I wish to offer Al Steckelberg and Lan Li a special thank you for their work on the technology study.

To Susan Wilson, Cindy DeRyke, Diane Gronewald, Tracy Helmink and Tammie Herrington, a special thank you for helping to bring the project to fruition. A special thanks to Marjorie Kostelnik, Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences; L. James Walters, Associate Dean; and Larry Dlugosh, Chair of the Department of Educational Administration, for their continued support for the Comprehensive Evaluation Project.

CHARTING STARS: PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE

Section 2: Executive Summary

I've been involved with STARS since the beginning. And I really do think the state did a good job of letting districts plug along in their own way and let them develop things that would be good for them. The state really tried to do what was best for individual school districts, and I do give them credit for that. I think Commissioner Christenson has really stood up for Nebraska at the federal level and made it easier for us and led the way.

A Benchmark Superintendent

INTRODUCTION

Nebraska educators have been supported through professional development efforts aimed at developing quality classroom assessments, using data and research based teaching strategies over the past five years. The growth of educators has been evident by their commitment to change the status quo to meet the challenges for the implementation of STARS and improve learning for the students of Nebraska.

These assessments were based on the six indicators of high quality assessment as designed by the Buros Center for Testing in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education. The six quality indicators for assessments used in each district were: 1) match and measure the standards; 2) provide opportunity for students to have learned the content; 3) be free of bias; 4) be written at the appropriate level; 5) be reliable and consistently scored; and 6) have appropriate mastery levels. Building on the district assessment portfolio statewide process in 2006-07, school districts will have the opportunity to showcase their assessments, curriculum, and instruction to experts in Nebraska and across the nation. These teams of experts will visit all school districts this year.



FIFTH YEAR RESEARCH STUDIES

There were six major studies conducted during the fifth year of the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation Project (CEP). Each of these studies is summarized in this section of the report and presented as separate studies (Studies I – VI) in the full report.

STUDY I: COMPARISON OF BENCHMARK AND GRADE-LEVEL EXPECTATION DISTRICTS

Dr. Jody Isernhagen, Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Dr. Leon Dappen, Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Omaha
Dr. Shirley Mills, Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Introduction

The fifth-year primary study concentrated on the similarities and differences of Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts. These two district models emerged as schools implemented the STARS process in a very diverse landscape across Nebraska. Each school district made the determination as to how they would implement the assessment process and align their curriculum and instruction. Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment for the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) defined the two district models in the following manner:

Benchmark School Districts are those school districts that have developed assessments to measure only the standards that are required to be assessed by the state: grades 4, 8, and 11. Some Benchmark School Districts have designed assessments to measure locally developed standards at grades other than 4, 8, and 11 but have still limited the formalized assessment processes to only three designated grades.

Grade-Level Expectation School Districts are those school districts that have developed standards or learning expectations for all grade levels in the district and have designed assessments to measure those expectations. This approach has spread the assessment process across grades.

Methodology

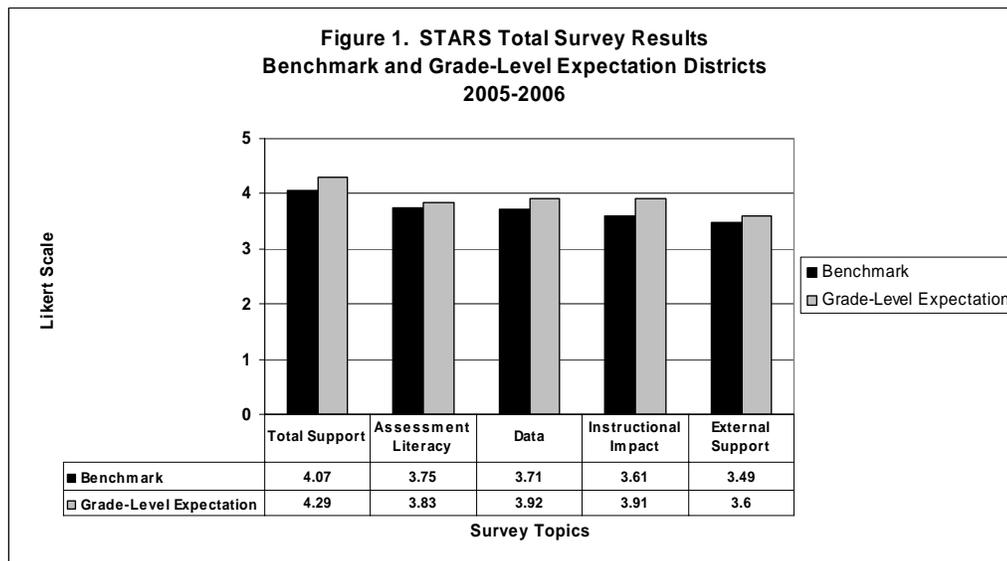
This mixed methods research study focused upon the Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation District models to implement STARS. The quantitative study utilized a 2004-05 survey (Appendix D) to identify the impact of STARS upon total support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and support from external agencies. A sample of survey responses from school districts identified as Benchmark and Grade-Level Districts were selected for the purposes of this study in 2005-06. Surveys were sent to teachers, principals, superintendents, assessment coordinators, and Educational Service Unit staff developers. Participants responded to the 46 item survey on a five-point Likert format for each item, with “1” representing “none of the time,” “2” “very little of the time,” “3” “some of the time,” “4” “most of the time,” “5” “all of the time.” Five themes were explored relative to the quantitative data: Total Support, Assessment Literacy, Data, Instructional Impact and External Support.

For the collection of qualitative interview data, twelve sample school districts were selected. During the 2005-06 school year, 83 interviews were conducted. The interview protocol for

teachers (Appendix E) and leaders (Appendix F) was utilized to gather qualitative data. Five additional themes emerged from the qualitative interviews. They were: Educator Expectations; Culture of Improvement; Collaboration and Communication; Student Educational Opportunities; and Educating Special Populations.

Findings

Survey results indicated that Benchmark Districts’ perceptions were lower than Grade-Level Expectation Districts for all survey categories. Therefore, Grade-Level Expectation educators’ perceptions indicated that their districts were stronger on all areas measured by the survey. The graph displays the average scores for each of the categories for Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts.



Based on the qualitative interviews conducted, five additional themes emerged. They were: Educator Expectations; Culture of Improvement; Collaboration and Communication; Student Educational Opportunities; and Educating Special Populations. These themes created portraits of assessment and instructional excellence throughout Nebraska as viewed through the eyes of Nebraska educators implementing the STARS process.

Portrait of Benchmark Districts

Benchmark District educators believed STARS was the way they do business and the “normal” routine of the school year. They administered STARS assessments at only benchmark grade levels identified by their district. Teachers at the benchmark grade levels perceived greater pressure even though teachers at other grade levels tried to provide the support needed. Strong ownership for the STARS process existed at benchmark grade levels rather than being K-12 focused. Communication was more limited and often did not connect to other schooling issues such as the use of data, grading, interventions and new pathways for students that were not successful at the benchmark levels. Benchmark districts relied primarily on ESU’s to support and direct their assessment efforts.

A Benchmark superintendent shared:

- ◆ We use the results of STARS to drive our curriculum and to drive school improvement, and of course, the whole staff is involved with the school improvement process.

A Benchmark principal stated:

- ◆ It's been a challenge and yet it's one that our staff hasn't really backed away from. I think the other grade level areas are glad they don't have to write the assessments that are being reported. And yet they are involved in the curriculum and what's taught in the building and so they participate in that.

A Benchmark assessment coordinator noted:

- ◆ Coming here and actually getting involved in the process and seeing what it does to the teaching side, the learning side, the assessment side, and how they can all be connected is just incredible. It's what the commissioner always says, 'Who knows the most about the students?' It's the teacher in the classroom with the students at that time and we need to rely on their professional opinion.

Benchmark teachers described their perceptions:

- ◆ I believe in the simple fact that there are standards that people across the state determine are important that all school districts should incorporate. I think it's beneficial; it kind of gives me direction. Our school district has adopted STARS assessments as part of our curriculum expectations for both the state and the district, and I think it gives us a direction and a guideline.
- ◆ In the beginning, it made me much more aware of what the expectations from the state were and what standards our kids needed to meet. I've not always agreed with their emphasis but it has definitely focused my priorities to make sure that the content the state feels is important has been taught, and that the kids to quote the state, 'Have an opportunity to learn.'

Portrait of Grade-Level Expectation Districts

Grade-Level Expectation district educators endorsed STARS and what it's done for the students in their districts. K-12 Grade-Level educators did not only demonstrate strong ownership within their districts but many had also involved public and community in their work. They had a common understanding of the purpose of K-12 assessment and its revision. They no longer needed a lot of support in maintaining their assessment process. They tended to seek ESU support for identifying new interventions and instructional strategies. Their daily business was the work of teaching students the skills, attitudes, and responsibilities needed to be successful for transitioning from one grade level to the next. They have developed systematic ways to monitor student performance and provide alternative paths for students who are unsuccessful. They indicated a greater concern for all students by conversations that they shared through professional learning communities with their own colleagues, with their community, and within the state.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents described their experiences with STARS:

- ◆ We can report at any grade-level on any standard that's assigned there. It won't make any difference if you're selected to report this year on the standard, you can do it and you can go to your grade book immediately and you would have it. And we'll see if we get that done in a timely and well done fashion.
- ◆ You know, it's not a fourth grade problem. We'd never have any fourth grade teachers or eighth grade teachers or eleventh grade teachers if everything was dumped on them. It can't be viewed that way because the purpose of the assessment at these Benchmark areas is to see what the cumulative learning has been up to that point and

then to make decisions about what needs to happen subsequent to that time. So it's got to be a shared responsibility.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator experienced a sense of gratitude:

- ◆ I certainly feel a sense of gratitude. As I've gone to other states, it is clear that the other departments of education are not particularly interested in working with teachers or administrators and that is not collaboration. I feel very fortunate to be in a state where educators are valued. I also appreciate from my assessment background a department of education that gets it! Assessment isn't a score, you need multiple measures and there are lots of things we want kids to know and be able to do. So, I appreciate that.

Grade-Level Principals talked about their involvement in STARS:

- ◆ They (all teachers) really are involved in the STARS process. Our school improvement process has been really overhauled from the time that I first started. We are really teacher-led at this point. I think that the teachers gained some benefit from having gone through that process. Now that it's teacher-led, it's so much more so. And really, they come away from the process with a lot of ownership that isn't there when it's principal-led.
- ◆ I think that the STARS process, as it began in 1998, was a scary thing for teachers and administrators. As it has evolved through the years, it has become a good thing. And speaking with teachers, I think they really do appreciate STARS and see the value of having standards that promote consistency throughout the district and throughout the state. They appreciate the trust that administrators and the state department had in allowing teachers to create and work with assessments, to work with kids at a local level. I think that it has made teachers more accountable, and I think they appreciate that.

All Grade-Level Expectation teachers are involved with STARS demonstrating great ownership for the process:

- ◆ As a school district, we've gone back and re-evaluated. We are asked and required to provide that we are teaching all the things that the state has required that obviously match up with our district. I think it's definitely given me more of a focus as to what I need to teach and when I need to have it taught by. It hasn't affected my creativity, whatsoever. It still allows for that creative approach, but yet it's kind of a governing body as to what I need to do. For a newer teacher like myself, it's helpful because I have a better insight as to what I'm supposed to teach.
- ◆ When I started teaching my first year here, our math curriculum was kind of all over the place. We weren't aligned grade to grade. And STARS has helped me so much as a teacher as far as knowing what I need to cover each quarter and the kids are given a practice test at the beginning of the quarter. They know what to expect, so it's easy for me to have high expectations because they know exactly what they're going to need to know at the end of the quarter. My expectations have gone up quite a bit, knowing that my kids need to do well and they work really hard at it.
- ◆ So, everybody knows what everybody's supposed to be doing and where and when it's going to be done.



STUDY II: PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Dr. Jody Isernhagen, Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Dr. Shirley Mills, Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Dr. Leon Dappen, Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Omaha

INTRODUCTION

This mixed methods research study focused on the similarities and differences of elementary, middle, and secondary teacher perceptions concerning the implementation of the STARS process at the classroom level. This study supported the primary study by extending the researchers' understanding of the impact of STARS on instruction in the elementary, middle, and high school teachers' classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods research study examined the perceptions of elementary, middle, and secondary teachers with the analysis of a 2004-05 survey. The following themes: total support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and external support were explored. Surveys were returned and analyzed from 155 elementary teachers, 150 middle school teachers, and 199 high school teachers. Based on an analysis of the survey data, significant differences were found particularly in the area of instructional impact between elementary, middle, and high school teachers.

Interviews were conducted in 2005-06 to enrich the findings (Appendix G). In addition to the five major themes three additional themes emerged. The emergent themes were Learning Opportunities for Students, STARS Challenges, and Next Steps.

FINDINGS

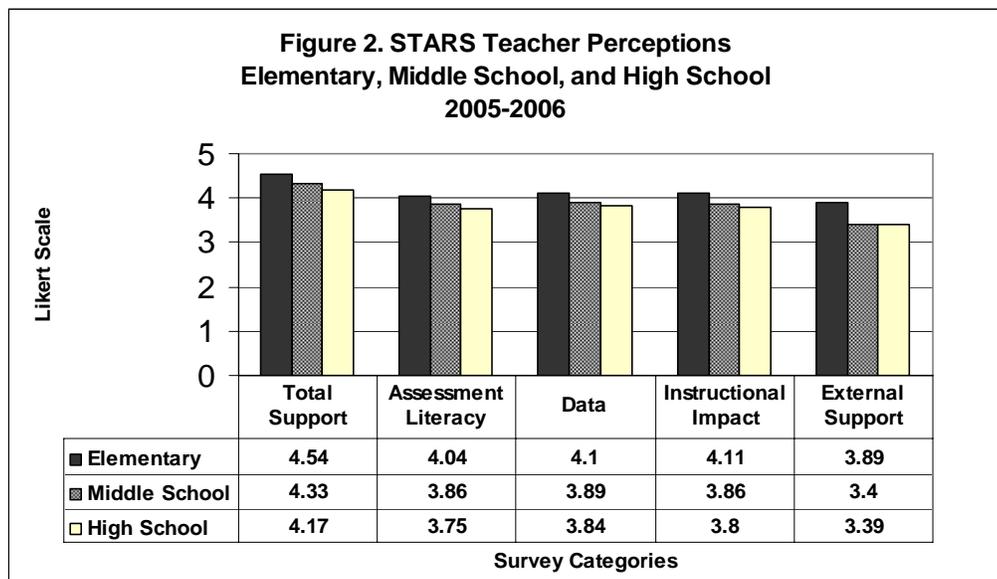
Elementary teacher perceptions of the STARS process were consistently higher than either middle school or high school teachers on all survey categories. Elementary teachers indicated a stronger understanding of assessment and its connection to improving instruction in the classroom. An elementary teacher said,

I think it has sharpened all teachers' focus on the entire curriculum rather than specifically on what we personally are teaching. I think first of all to understand and second of all to just get the sequence down and what's taught where and just tweak the system.

They shared that the data obtained from the assessment process had increased opportunities for students particularly those that needed additional help in mastering the standards. This connection created new pathways for students to succeed particularly in the area of reading which elementary teachers deemed as the most important learning for students. An elementary teacher shared,

Well, after we look at those results, we definitely have to go back and see what we need to review, see what we maybe need to hit a little harder next time. And each year, each class really is different. One year you might get that and the next year you might have to hit it again and again and again.

Elementary teachers consistently scored higher than both middle and high school teachers on all survey categories. Middle school teachers scored slightly higher than high school teachers. Figure 2 indicates the average scores in the five survey categories: Total Support, Assessment Literacy, Data, Instructional Impact, and External Support.



Within the three emergent themes: Learning Opportunities for Students, STARS Challenges, and Next Steps, all teachers indicated that the opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do was impacted by the STARS process. Teachers have become better learners in the process of helping their students become successful learners. Expectations for students have risen as all teachers have become more confident in their ability to use data in developing instructional strategies. An elementary teacher stated, “I think the kids know that the expectations are very high and so they just come knowing that they need to study, they need to work hard and so they already know what I expect and that’s the very best that they can do.”

A consistent challenge that all teachers faced with the STARS process was balancing the demands of teaching and assessing students. A high school teacher stated, “It’s become a real challenge to fit that in, especially now that we’re getting into where we’ve added the math standards at the high school level.” You still have the content within your courses that you want to teach and it’s hard to fit it all in.

Some reporting grade-level teachers perceived that they were held to a different standard than non-reporting grade-level teachers. The final challenge for all educators was the achievement issues centered on special populations. They were in search of new strategies and ways to help all children learn especially those in special populations.

Nebraska teachers have grown in their understanding of standards, assessment, and accountability since the inception of STARS. All teachers consistently spoke about the need

to use data to direct classroom instruction. The issue of providing quality and seamless instruction for students of mobility moving from school to school needs to be addressed statewide. Training is needed in research-based instructional strategies used for special populations. Finally, educators indicated a need to ensure that information regarding STARS was clearly understood by students, parents, and community to build public trust.



STUDY III: A Portrait of 2001 to 2005 Reading and Math Achievement

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Dr. Shirley Mills, Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Introduction

Nebraska’s School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) required each district to either adopt state standards or develop local standards that are at least equal to or exceeded the state standards. Each district then developed a plan for assessing their standards. The plan was based on locally developed criterion referenced tests (CRT’s) reported at three selected grade levels. In addition, districts were required to administer a standardized norm referenced test (NRT) of their choosing, which provided an external common “touch point.” The purpose of this study was to examine achievement data available to date, three years each in reading and math, and district portfolio ratings.

Methodology

Data were included for all Nebraska Class 3, 4, and 5 school districts and represented just over 94% of the public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and cooperation for use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education.

Findings

District criterion referenced measures showed increases in both reading and math. The district average percent of student scores reported by districts as proficient or better in locally defined criterion referenced reading at the fourth grade-level increased from 74.99% in 2001, to 79.39% in 2003 and 87.20% in 2005. The district average percent proficient for the eighth-grade level increased from 73.67% in 2001, to 74.78% in 2003, and 84.49% in 2005. The district average percent proficient at eleventh-grade level increased from 73.54% in 2001, to 74.74% in 2003, and 82.26% in 2005.

The district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient or better in locally defined criterion referenced math at the fourth grade-level increased from 78.29% in 2002, to

85.16% in 2004 and 89.00% in 2005. The district percent proficient at eighth-grade level increased from 68.58% in 2002, to 75.34% in 2004, and 80.27% in 2005. The district percent proficient at eleventh-grade level increased from 66.22% in 2002, to 72.20% in 2004, and 76.24% in 2005.

The stronger increases in math may be based on the extra year of training and experience that schools have had with the process in reading. Ongoing longitudinal results will provide more information regarding this point. District norm referenced measures in reading have generally increased, though not as strong.

The district average percent of students in the top two quartiles on the norm referenced reading test used by districts at the fourth grade increased from 64.93% in 2001, to 66.75% in 2003, and to 67.59% in 2005. The eighth grade declined from 62.85% in 2001, to 62.56% in 2003, and increased to 63.01% in 2005. The eleventh grade increased from 59.87% in 2001, to 61.44% in 2003, and 63.67% in 2005. Proficiency, as determined by the percent of students in districts in the top two quartiles on norm referenced measures also increased from 2001 to 2005.

The district average percent of students in the top two quartiles on the norm referenced math test used by districts at the fourth grade increased from 68.12% in 2002, to 71.31% in 2004, and 72.05% in 2005. The eighth grade declined from 67.34% in 2002, to 66.67% in 2004, and increased to 73.67% in 2005. The eleventh grade increased from 67.49% in 2002, to 67.90% in 2004, and declined to 67.13% in 2005. Proficiency, as determined by the district percent of students in the top two quartiles on norm referenced measures increased for fourth and eighth grades from 2001 to 2005.

These reading and math findings have been positive since there was concern from educators as to whether the attention focused on criterion referenced measures might result in a decline in traditional norm referenced measures.

Independent professional ratings of staff gain in assessment skills revealed strong, consistent growth in the Quality Criteria identified as the backbone of the STARS system and essential for the program credibility. The average District Assessment Portfolio rating across grades in reading increased from 3.50 in 2001, to 4.35 in 2003 and to 4.55 in 2005 with a total change of 1.05 from 2001 to 2005. The average District Assessment Portfolio rating across grades in math increased from 3.97 in 2002 to 4.74 in 2004 and decreased to 4.61 in 2005 with a total increase of .64 from 2002 to 2005.

Real school improvement with student academic achievement as the goal is not a short-term process. Nebraska is in the fifth year of STARS implementation and comments would indicate that we are still several years from full implementation of the program (e.g. getting all staff literate, adding other content areas). It is clear that changing the paradigm to focus on data from criterion referenced measures impacting curriculum and instruction for academic student gain is a tall order and requires significant commitment, resources, and time. But it is happening. Effective and efficient models for implementation of the STARS model have been developed, are in use, and the data are positive.



Study IV: A Portrait of 2002-2005 Nebraska STARS Statewide Writing Achievement

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Introduction

With the emphasis on education to demonstrate increased writing achievement for all students, Nebraska chose to use the six trait writing model as a requirement for a statewide writing assessment included in the Legislation establishing Nebraska's assessment system. Research supported large-scale assessment because it enhanced the ability of teachers to write themselves, to assess student work, and to rate student writing. This approach created higher expectations for student writing performance and prompted decision makers to ask important questions--when, where, and how writing was being taught. The purpose of this study was to examine the district achievement data available for the Statewide Writing Assessment for the Nebraska STARS Program.

Methodology

Data was included for Class 3, 4, and 5 school districts that represented just over 94% of the public school students in Nebraska. The process for development of writing prompts for use in the Statewide Writing Assessment relied on involvement of Nebraska classroom teachers who were selected by the NDE to participate in a writing development task force upon recommendation of their district superintendent or assessment contact person. From this task force, writing prompts were chosen and field-tested with students in grades four, eight, and eleven. Nebraska teachers chosen for their expertise then scored the writing assessments at a central location. The unit of analysis for this study was the district average percent of students rated as proficient or better in class 3, 4, and 5 school districts for the state of Nebraska in writing at grades four, eight, and eleven. Because the assessment was a common measure across districts and was an equal interval scale, inferential statistics were also used to examine statistical significant differences between pre/post scores from inception to last scoring.

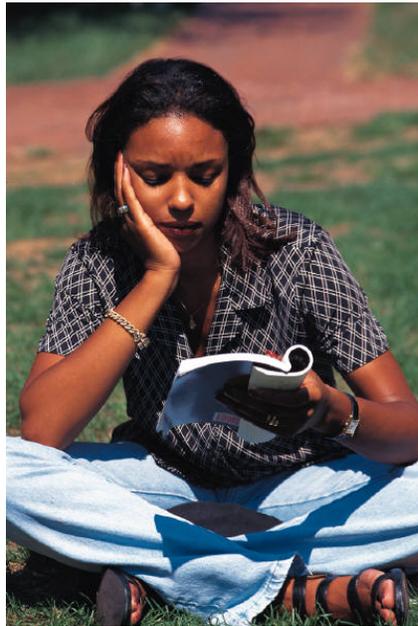
Findings

Fourth and eighth grades made significant gains in the first pre/post score comparisons on the Nebraska STARS Statewide Writing Assessment. This was very positive for the STARS process and indicated strong support for continuation of the program. It was interesting to note a difference in the two language arts measures. Reading, which was the first area to be tested in 2001 and 2003 revealed strong gains at fourth grade, but only a slight gain at eighth

grade. This writing data, fourth grade comparing data from 2002 to 2004, and eighth grade comparing data from 2003 to 2004, revealed strong gains at both grades.

District average writing gains were made at nearly all grades and years of comparison. At fourth grade gains from 2002 to 2004, and 2004 to 2005, were significant ($p < .001$). At eighth grade, the gain from 2003 to 2005 was significant ($p < .001$); the gain from 2004 to 2005 was not significant. The gain in eleventh grade from 2004 to 2005 was significant ($p < .05$).

This may reflect the history of many school districts involvement with six trait writing preceding the formal statewide assessment process, and/or growing sophistication of staff over the years with the Nebraska STARS process.



Study V: A Portrait of 2001-2005 Achievement for Special Populations

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Introduction

A key component of No Child Left Behind was to demonstrate increased academic achievement for all students. States have taken different approaches to accomplish this end. In Nebraska there was no single high-stakes test. STARS has been in place for five years and has a strong success record with total group data (Roschewski, Isernhagen, & Dappen, 2006). However, this was the first time that English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) populations were examined within the Comprehensive Evaluation for STARS.

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic change of special populations, in this case, ELL and SPED students from Nebraska. This study examined criterion referenced assessments for reading, math, and writing.

Methodology

The criterion referenced score (CRT) for reading and math was the district average percentage for ELL and SPED students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local district for their locally developed measure for class 3, 4, and 5 school districts for the state of Nebraska. Because the reading and math measures were not on a common scale only descriptive data was provided.

The unit of analysis for the criterion referenced writing score was the district average percent of ELL and SPED students rated as proficient in class 3, 4, and 5 school districts for the state of Nebraska in writing at grades four, eight, and eleven. Because the assessment was a common measure across districts and was an equal interval scale, inferential statistics were also used to examine statistical significance between pre/post scores from inception to last scoring.

Findings

The reading scores for SPED students reflected a stronger positive change in all content areas than the scores for ELL students. The math and writing district average scores across the state indicated that students in both the ELL and SPED groups at 4, 8, and 11 were increasing with grades 4 and 8 showing stronger gains. Nebraska educators are indeed making efforts to improve the math, reading, and writing achievement of special populations of ELL and SPED students.

Study VI: Role of Technology in Supporting the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System

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Lan Li, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Introduction

Prior STARS evaluations suggested that further information on the role technology plays and the issues it both addresses and creates would be helpful as schools and the Nebraska Department of Education develop policy and create support resources. To address this need, perceptions were collected on three additional aspects of technology and STARS current uses of technology, the impact of technology, and future systems and issues.

Methodology

This document reports the results of an assessment of the role of technology in the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). A Web-based survey was completed by 321 school and ESU personnel who had been identified by the Nebraska Department of Education as STARS contacts. Respondents were primarily superintendents, principals, and assessment coordinators. The reported demographic information reflected the initial sample with a majority of the respondents representing schools with less than 600 students. Because small schools may represent a unique perspective, additional comparisons were made between small schools and the remainder of the sample. Significant differences did occur and are noted. Nearly half of the respondents indicated their schools participated in a consortium. A large percentage also indicated that ESU's assisted in the development of the assessment process and provided training. A substantial majority indicated that funds were available for technology, particularly if it reduced other administrative costs or led to school improvement.

Findings

The majority of survey respondents indicated that basic productivity tools such as word processing and spreadsheets were the most extensively used tools in a number of aspects of the assessment process. Dedicated assessment software, Web-based software and locally developed software or Web applications were used less extensively. When broken down by school size, the use of dedicated and locally developed software was proportionally higher in larger schools than in smaller schools. Scanning, computer and Web-based systems, and electronic portfolios had low ratings for use in general. Despite the low reported use of technology specifically designed to support the assessment process, a majority of respondents agreed that the technology-based systems are a good match to the Nebraska assessment model. Participants rated the quality of the technology used by their district in the assessment process as moderate to moderately high. These results would seem to indicate that there is a potential to improve and increase the use of technology in the assessment process in many Nebraska schools.

Impact of Technology

Data from the survey clearly showed that survey participants felt technology has the potential to positively impact the assessment process. A majority of respondents indicated that technology reduced the amount of time involved, increased the value of assessment data, assisted teachers in understanding and utilizing assessment data for instructional decision-making and at the same time did not increase the complexity of the assessment process. A number of potential contributions of technology, such as consistent data collection, were viewed as having a moderate to extensive impact.

Future Systems and Issues

Survey data also provided information useful for guiding future policies, support and resources. The most significant barriers were costs of technology, staff and administrator time to learn systems, and teacher training. Interoperability was also rated as an issue in larger school districts. The quality of current technology systems was rated as moderate for comprehensiveness, quality, reporting features, and interface with State reporting. Interestingly, ratings of classroom level reporting features and interface with state reporting, although still moderate, were higher in small schools. A number of features of technology-based assessment systems were rated as highly desirable including: usefulness of results for instructional decisions, ease of data entry, match with reporting requirements, and ease of learning systems. Survey participants felt that the areas of State support with the greatest potential for impacting were grants for technology implementation and teacher training. These areas were closely followed by the provision of exemplars in the form of models for data collection, management and reporting, and software templates for collecting and organizing data.

Results from the survey indicated that STARS assessment leaders in Nebraska schools recognized the potential impact of technology on the assessment process, but at this point do not extensively make use of dedicated or locally developed software, although this may be occurring in larger districts or consortiums. Schools saw support for implementing technology and training school staff as likely to have significant impacts on the quality, usefulness, and value of the assessment process.

CONCLUSIONS FOR STUDIES I-VI

STARS...The Beginning

In the beginning of our STARS journey, we found educators searching to find their new role in the process. Regardless of role or assigned position, there was a need for new knowledge and skills about the purpose and development of assessments before STARS could get off to a running start. Staff development played a huge role in this new learning and ESU staff developers across Nebraska quickly acclimated to their new role through building their own skills, as they learned about quality assessment. The NDE provided many opportunities to support ESU's by bringing in experts in classroom-based assessment.

Obstacles to the success of STARS were many during the initial implementation. First and foremost, was the issue of "time". Educators needed extra time from their regular school routines to develop assessment skills, write quality assessments and score them. Time remained an issue with using technology effectively to analyze data and produce it in useful formats to successfully impact instruction.

Many educators viewed STARS as something that they must respond to because the state required them to do so and it wasn't until about the third year that school district personnel really began to ask the question "How can we make this meaningful to us?" It was at this time that researchers began to hear some teachers respond to STARS as "this is about our kids and we can do what we think is best." Educators began sharing a clear understanding of the value of STARS to students and to the improvement of schools. It became clear to researchers that STARS was off the ground and some school districts were taking ownership for the process. Educators were more able to verbalize what they were doing and why they were doing it.

STARS...The Fifth Year

While learning new skills and knowledge, new partnerships formed, educators collaborated with new colleagues across the state, and professional learning teams emerged in school districts. This allowed educators to go back to their own school districts and create their own process that would fulfill the requirements of STARS but more importantly that allowed them to act in the best interest of the students that they served. Staff developers across the state helped districts mold the assessment process to fit the needs of their own students and district. One staff developer reflected on the process:

STARS has done much to encourage schools to get their curriculum in line and in order. It also has developed a communication between our SPED teachers, Title I teachers, and regular education teachers in regard to the importance of standards, the importance of assessment, and the importance of how our curriculum looks K-12 for instruction. So, I would say that has been a real benefit.

District support was important but as the assessment process evolved over time, it became essential as leadership came on board supporting STARS. A superintendent shared:

I believe that we're all in this together—this teaching and learning game. When a teacher doesn't do their job or a student fails or somebody doesn't handle a difficult situation appropriately, we're all letting each other down. I believe that we have to handle all problems with professionalism and work together to solve them. So, that's the kind of climate that I'm trying to create. Whatever, we're expected to do, we need to do it with positive enthusiasm, and with the attitude the cup is half full and not half empty.

Teachers supported that statement by talking about leadership support and accountability to the students they served:

The administration helps. They're such great leaders because they don't push you to do it. They ask. They don't tell you completely what to do. They let you find out, but yet, they expect a lot out of you. We held our kids accountable. We need to hold our teachers accountable for their teaching too, to make sure kids are learning.

Assessment literacy has grown exponentially with the implementation of STARS. Grade-Level Expectation Districts were stronger than Benchmark Districts on all areas measured by the survey: Total Support, Assessment Literacy, Data, Instructional Impact and External Support. Elementary teacher perceptions were consistently higher than both middle and high school teachers in all of the above categories on the survey. Conversations in classrooms focus on how assessment and instruction are tied and what the best interventions are to reach all students. An assessment coordinator shared the connection between assessment and instruction:

I think one of the ancillary benefits of the STARS assessment system has been that teachers teach to a specific purpose(s) more so than they ever did before because, once those standards were approved by the state and then by our local district as school board policy, teachers became aware that they needed to teach to those standards. It was those standards that the students were going to be assessed on. The whole concept of teaching to a purpose improved considerably.

Teachers talked about the confidence they now have in writing quality assessments:

The whole process was very new to me. I've become a better test maker. I've learned more about how you have to have all four levels in your tests and you have to make sure you completely covered the standard in your testing. I've learned how to do reliability, how to collect data and use it to better myself next year and maybe do a rewrite on that test or whatever needs to be done. I've learned a lot.

I think the value of STARS is that it definitely enabled me to be a better teacher for the children. I had all these teaching tools and knew of great ways to teach children but never had great ways to assess children. So just through learning about assessment and also having the kids be a part of that assessment, I think STARS has been of great value. Also, it's not just me writing up a test and saying this is how it is. It's having the children involved in the process.

Leaders played a major role in the assessment process as well as interpreting data and using it to help improve student learning in their own school buildings and districts as shared by this assessment coordinator:

Put the data in front of them to motivate teachers to want to change and get involved. We have to first face the brutal facts of where we're at before we need to know where we're going to go.

A principal shared:

The point of looking at the data is to determine whether or not you need to make changes to address a population. We just got through looking at some data on our reports and in our case we really couldn't see any disparity between the abilities or the achievement of students that were from different ethnic cultures or from poverty. They still showed that they were gaining, too.

Technology survey results from Study VI clearly indicated that participants felt technology had the potential to positively impact the assessment process. A majority of respondents indicated that technology reduced the amount of time involved, increased the value of assessment data, assisted teachers in understanding and utilizing assessment data for instructional decision-making and at the same time did not increase the complexity of the assessment process.

The most significant barriers to the use of technology were costs of technology, staff and administrator time to learn systems, and teacher training. Interoperability was also rated as an issue in larger school districts. The quality of current technology systems was rated as moderate for comprehensiveness, quality, reporting features, and interface with reporting.

Finally, technology results from the survey indicated that STARS assessment leaders in Nebraska schools recognized the potential impact of technology on the assessment process, but at this point do not extensively make use of dedicated or locally developed software, although this may be occurring in larger districts or consortiums. Schools saw support for implementing technology and training school staff as likely to have significant impacts on the quality, usefulness, and value of the assessment process.

Of course, the real challenge with the use of data is being able to use the data to improve instruction in areas needing improvement as shared by teachers:

Well before STARS, you'd just teach it. You'd give your little unit test, and then you were done with it. And now, after STARS, we teach it, we assess it, probably within a month. I usually wait longer because I want to make sure they really retain what I've taught them. And it's just making all the kids more successful.

It's raised my expectations for my students, even the lower ones. You have that expectation that they should get to a certain level by the end of the year. So I guess maybe my expectations for my students have raised since we've implemented STARS. I guess I'm being held accountable with STARS, and I probably do a better job of teaching.

Data is always tied to finding the appropriate intervention strategies. It is critical that populations of students that have not yet mastered the skill have multiple opportunities to do so. Although it is not an easy feat for even the most seasoned teacher to meet the needs of all students, the district average scores for all students for Class 3, 4, and 5 in Nebraska Schools and the students in ELL and SPED from the same population were showing improvement although greater for some grade levels than others. Perhaps this superintendent's statement is part of the reason why this success is occurring:

I think it's put more emphasis on special populations acquiring some of the same skills that are done in a regular classroom even though the instruction may be altered. Also the assessment may be altered in the actual level of competence that is required for them. All I care about is that we get all of our students, I don't care if they're ELL, SPED, or Title I, to get them to grow and improve as much as they are individually capable of doing.

An assessment coordinator focused on disaggregated data for special populations:

I think one of the strong positive things about STARS is that we've disaggregated data to see if we have any discrepancies in delivering services to special populations; SPED, Title I students, gender. I remember a couple years ago when we got it

disaggregated it happened to be the SPED population. The day we got the data back we were already having the think tank team and saying, ‘Why do we see this large of a discrepancy at this grade level? What support services or what interventions can we provide to the students to help them increase their skill level?’

Leaders are key players in negotiating these moments of tension between acting in the best interest of students by verbalizing and modeling behaviors that show how the connections between instruction, assessment, curriculum and the best interest of students. A superintendent indicated:

What we’ve seen is that we went from the beginning of this process spending all of our time on curriculum and assessment development and nothing on the instructional piece. It was the curriculum assessment process. And now it’s the curriculum, instruction, and assessment process. We’ve evolved to the point that we are now focusing on the instruction piece. We’re with the learning teams. We’re focusing on strategies and interventions.

ESU staff developers that have provided professional development for STARS indicated that their role was changing:

I think we are moving more towards the instructional strategies and curriculum now. Teachers have a pretty good handle on what the assessments are, and they’ve been developed, and they’re finally to the point where they’re not feeling this is all there is in life. They’re starting to see it’s connected to school improvement; they’re also connecting it to instruction.

We’ve seen growth in distributed leadership since the inception of STARS. The need for everyone to be on the same page in this new model was critical to success for students. From STARS a new model of leadership emerged that was difficult to facilitate as it looks different in every district based on who stepped up to the plate. Leaders collaborated with teachers to find the right interventions for students. One superintendent talked about the focus on students in the STARS process:

We’ll do it for our kids, and that became the focus. Everything that we did was student centered. I told teachers to let me worry about the state, let me worry about whether or not any of this stuff works out. They wanted it to be a local process with a focus on the kids. We didn’t have a whole lot of templates. We didn’t beg, borrow, and steal from other people which a lot times you try to do as districts. Let’s just focus on our kids and see what works. And so simple things like annotating when it was taught, when it was assessed and things such as that, those were all developed.

Superintendents indicated that they were finding new ways to communicate the importance of assessment to students and parents:

But probably the best way that parents are gaining access and understanding is the teachers are actually sharing information at conferences where they’re able to quickly give them a visual and here’s the color coded chart. Parents can see very quickly in a matter of seconds that their kid is doing really well on the standards or not doing well.

Sharing it with the kids! Hey, class look at this. Here are your results. What do you see from this? Wow, it looks like we need to spend more time on this. OK, what else can come from this? When we have them sit down to take the Terra Novas, we talk about the impact that those things have, that we take that information really seriously because we make decisions based on those results that impact them as students.

An important next step for instruction was identified by this teacher:

My gut feeling is that I'd like to see our report card the way that we show the community and the patrons, the parents, that we're assessing their children. I'd like to see that become aligned with the assessments. We've got these assessments. They're criterion referenced. They're unique to our district and yet they fulfill the state standards. And then we have this report card that comes out of post-World War II . . . A, B, C, D, and so I guess we need some real training on how to do this.

Once the structure changed in schools, educators were able to put the pieces together especially those that were successful and have created a culture of teaching and learning along the way. A teacher shared:

We work together, we converse, and we talk about problems. It's a good climate, it's a good rapport that we have together, and very cooperative. I think we get along very well and we both have our students' best interests at heart and whatever it takes to do what we need to do for those kids, for those assessments, and beyond, we do.

Only then could they see how the pieces truly interacted with one another. In some schools this happened naturally while it was illusive for others.

I've learned a lot and in talking with the superintendent and such, I said, 'Oh, now I'm starting to get it. We're all driving toward this goal, but I didn't see the goal. I was too focused on the individual yard markers.' So I'm learning to look down the road—long-term vision. I'm planning for long-term, not just for the week or the year.

In order for the pieces to fall together there must be a true student-centered culture that allows teachers and administrators to build on each others strengths that focuses on teaching and learning as stated by this superintendent:

I would say you have to model it. You have to give credit when credit is due and be sincere rather than just fluffy. I try to demonstrate it by just getting in the trenches. I will not expect any one to anything that I wouldn't do myself. I try to be visible. I try to be involved and show them that we value their professionalism and what they're doing in the classroom. I think this entire process has empowered teachers so they have more of a say of what's going on in their classroom and how they're working with students. I think it's very important that administrators give them the credit, the time and resources so that they can do what they have been prepared to do.

All things point in one direction--a student-centered environment that is truly nurtured by all of the adults modeling a team effort focused on student learning. Nurturing a culture of continuous improvement in a district was the key to success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations remain from previous studies:

1. Disseminate step-by-step processes and methods for districts to improve their local assessments, especially on sufficiency.
2. Use local talent to model the building of data processes and the integration of data into school improvement.
3. Continue to focus professional development offerings for all educators in working with (i.e., interpreting and using) data.

4. Continue to educate various constituencies about the nature and purposes of STARS. Focus special attention on local media and educators.
5. Continue to sponsor a “leaders of learning” academy for principals and superintendents.
6. Develop assessment literacy and participation in the STARS process for **all** teachers.
7. Research parent/community perceptions of the impact of STARS on the quality of education offered by their district.

New recommendations based on 2005-06 study:

1. Require all districts to have an assessment coordinator.
2. Assist all districts in moving toward a K-12 focused standard, assessment and reporting process to ensure ownership at all grade levels.
3. Help districts to develop quality, seamless instruction especially for students not meeting the standards.
4. Design a system of tracking students of mobility to ensure that assessment data stays with the student.
5. Work collaboratively with ESUs to provide professional development for all teachers linking STARS data results to instructional interventions for all students. (i.e.: special populations)
6. Provide leadership to help districts connect standards to grading and reporting systems.
7. Provide additional study of technology for instructional decision-making including software templates for collecting and organizing data, data collection systems, management and reporting.
8. Collect baseline data for the first year implementation of the Nebraska-Led Peer Review of STARS.
9. Research the assessment literacy knowledge and skills provided by higher education for teachers entering the field.
10. Research student perceptions on the impact of standards, assessments, and accountability on their achievement.
11. Research perceptions of the impact of STARS upon teachers of math, science and special populations.

CHARTING STARS: PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE

Section 3: Portraits of Assessment and Instructional Excellence



Nebraska is known nationally for its position concerning local districts being responsible for the statewide assessment systems that monitor and report the progress of Nebraska students (Roschewski, Gallagher, & Isernhagen, 2001). Over the last six years, Nebraska educators have created an innovative approach to standards, assessment, and accountability designed to improve achievement for all students in the K-12 setting. Through the leadership of Dr. Douglas Christensen, Commissioner of Education, and his vision of academic excellence for all students in Nebraska, educators have developed and refined assessments, collected and analyzed data, and implemented research-based instructional strategies. As educators across the state strived to bring the vision alive, two district models emerged—Benchmark Districts and Grade-Level Expectation Districts. While both models share many characteristics of educational excellence, distinct differences became apparent. Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment, defined the models:

Benchmark School District—School districts that have developed assessments to measure only the standards that are required to be assessed by the state: grades 4, 8, and 11. Some Benchmark School Districts have designed assessments to measure locally developed standards at grades other than 4, 8, and 11, but have still limited the formalized assessment processes to only three designated grades.

Grade-Level Expectation School District—School districts that have developed standards or learning expectations for all grade levels in the district and have designed assessments to measure those expectations. This approach has spread the assessment process across grades.

Educators in both models shared the common vision of improved academic achievement for all students but believed that it could be achieved in different ways. Grade-Level Expectation Districts distributed the standards and assessments across several grade levels while Benchmark Districts assessed at only the three required STARS reported grade levels. Grade-Level Expectation educators perceived a greater ownership across grade levels and subject areas than educators in Benchmark districts as stated by this Grade-Level Expectation principal:

We make no differentiation whether teachers are at reporting grade levels or the non-reporting levels. They all receive the same training and background. When we sit down to review the data, they look at the data at their particular grade level, not just at 4, 8, and 11. So, they're involved, every teacher is involved in the same way. We don't differentiate for just those that are reporting.

Educators perceived assessment literacy as slightly stronger for Grade-Level Expectation Districts than Benchmark Districts. While there were slight differences, ESU's had leveled the playing field for both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts by playing a strong role in the training of all educators. An ESU staff developer explained how STARS evolved throughout the state:

All the trainings we had at the service unit level and statewide were on the strategies. I mean we have all supported each other on this whole process as we went through it. Like the six quality criteria, we got together, all the service units, to make decisions. Are we going to do this or are we not going to do this? We're going to do it because that's what the schools need. There's a real network that started to develop. A lot of sharing went on with our service unit group staff developers. And every year there's continuous training like we've had training in data retreats. We've had training in school improvement. We've had training in the six quality criteria.

The ownership of the STARS process appeared to be stronger in the Grade-Level Expectation model because everyone was involved. A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator gave this explanation for ownership:

We look at our assessment data, not only the STARS tests, but the norm referenced tests that we give. Each year in late summer/early fall, our teachers at every building level and all grade levels will take that data, break it down, see how their kids scored and see what intervention is the one they should develop for the kids. We do that at every grade level Kindergarten through 11th grade.

Using data was common for both models with Grade-Level Expectation Districts perceiving that they were stronger in collecting, analyzing, and developing interventions to meet the needs of students as defined by the data. Benchmark Districts used data as well but relied more heavily upon the expertise of the Educational Service Units to assist them with data retreats. A benchmark teacher discussed how data was used in the classroom:

I am, even though it's not my assessment year, a part of being responsible for students meeting that benchmark. I'm conscious about looking at the curriculum and making sure. I keep going back through and making sure I have covered that.

The greatest significant differences existed in the area of instructional impact for these two district models. Grade-Level Expectation Districts perceived that they were educating students better at every level because they had assessment data to substantiate what was happening at most grade levels while Benchmark Districts monitored primarily at the STARS three reporting grades. A Grade-Level Expectation teacher said:

What we were asked to do was think in terms of the concepts that we wanted to teach, develop units based around those concepts and around essential questions that you develop activities based on just those questions. So you have this big picture. But at the same time, you're figuring out these little pieces in that big picture. And by having that picture and structure, I think it's making things better for me.

While Benchmark teachers at grades 4, 8, and 11 still felt somewhat pressured due to the amount of testing done at their grade levels, they were still feeling responsible for students passing the assessments as explained by a Benchmark teacher, “STARS made me be more time conscious and probably has made me realize that I need to teach and explain things better. Then I question, is it because I want them to pass the assessment or do I want them to learn it.”

Educators in both models perceived that support from the NDE and ESU's across the state was adequate. ESU support was outstanding as expressed by a Benchmark principal, “The ESU does a wonderful job of offering assistance when we need it or when we ask for it, and I would credit our ESU for much of our knowledge and training.” A Grade-Level Expectation principal shared that while teachers are encouraged to use the ESU, they are also encouraged to use other means of gathering information, “We have cadres of teachers that we will send to different places, ESU or they may just work at the district office for times during the school year and during the school days where substitutes are provided.”

The district models both proved to have high expectations for teachers, leaders, and students. Teachers held each other to high teaching standards as they collaborated across grade levels and disciplines. A Grade-Level Expectation teacher said, “I think with STARS we’re all more consistent on what we’re expecting from our students, and I definitely think our expectations for ourselves are higher.”

As academic expectations changed so did the cultures of districts. A culture of continuous school improvement with a focus on student achievement emerged. A Benchmark principal explained how the district was striving to create a culture of improvement when he stated, “I think when you’re talking about culture; you need to have a few characteristics. Trust for one. . . I think if people, whether it’s students or staff, believe that you trust them and care for them, you’re going to have a positive work place and a positive school . . .” A Grade-Level Expectation principal talked about the culture of the district, “I think our district has done an outstanding job. They have organized us by grade level so that we have an opportunity to meet with all of the teachers in our district to discuss the assessments. And we’ve had an opportunity to work together which is really important for us . . .” A Grade-Level Expectation principal concluded that the expectations of the district were high for everyone with this statement, “I think we all have high expectations as leaders and educators. We ask our teachers as well to have that high expectation for their kids.”

Communication and collaboration were of utmost importance to both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts. It seemed to be essential to both district models. Districts found ways to communicate with all stakeholders the importance of the STARS process and how it was affecting students across Nebraska. Districts experimented with innovative communication methods as well as the tried and true methods of the past with patrons of the district. They listed websites, school-to-home computer-linked programs, additional parent teacher conferences, newsletters, articles, student-led conferences, open houses, and online reporting systems to name a few.

Collaboration was seen throughout the research study both internally and externally with all districts. Teachers felt more connected to each other because of the STARS process. A Benchmark teacher explained, “We work together, we converse, and we talk about problems. It’s a good climate; it’s a good rapport that we have together. . .” Parents felt more involved and districts were doing more to increase the level of collaboration among district and

community. As a Grade-Level Expectation principal stated, “I field phone calls from parents who want to understand. I mean it’s not confrontational. They want to understand.”

One premise that Nebraska built their assessment portfolio reviews upon was districts giving all students the opportunity to learn. Both district models were cognizant of this important attribute of the STARS process. A Grade-Level Expectation principal noted how it had changed their district’s approach to student learning, “We have made changes in our district; we are going through the data and looking at every child’s score, not just a composite for the grade level. We have it broken down to where we can show growth for every student we have. . .” A Benchmark principal reiterated these thoughts, “I think some of the new pieces of the assessment process are making sure that everyone has had the opportunity to learn. . . Teachers actually are following through and it is in their lesson plans that you can document.”

In conjunction with giving every student the opportunity to learn, Nebraska educators in both district models were faced with a new issue. Educating special populations was becoming more important due to changing demographics in Nebraska. Districts that had little or no ethnicity five years ago were inundated with an emerging English Language Learner (ELL) population creating yet another challenge for districts. Nebraska educators implemented interventions to increase the achievement levels of special populations. Educators in both district models faced the challenges of educating special populations with limited resources and time. A Benchmark principal said it succinctly:

The STARS program is about raising everyone’s level of education higher. So what we’ve done more in the last five years is identified those kids that are not above the benchmark, and then planned interventions to help them. . . we’ve tried to help these students raise their level of achievement just like we’re trying to raise everybody’s level of achievement.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent explained their district’s efforts to educate special populations:

The special populations we have, almost half of our students, also have a tremendous degree of poverty. Since we have to deal with addressing these standards, the work that we do with them has become more focused, more important. It isn’t just a matter of getting them through school. They have to reach these levels too. And they’re capable of it . . . I think we’re doing a better job of it. I really do.”

Both district model portraits, Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation, are constantly changing to meet the challenges faced by districts. As Nebraska school districts have met the challenges of STARS, the portraits have been modified. A new model may emerge as Nebraska educators grow and develop in the pursuit of instructional excellence. One thing is unquestionable, Nebraskans value the education of their children. STARS will continue to be in the forefront for Nebraska educators in order to provide the best education possible for students.



**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE
Section 4: Research Studies**

**Study 1: Comparison of Benchmark
and Grade-Level Expectation Districts**

“I like what we’re doing in Nebraska better than having a state test. I appreciate that because at least I feel like I have some input in the test. Therefore, it can be unique to Nebraska and then, in turn, unique to different areas of Nebraska. But yet, all kids are learning and achieving.”

A Benchmark Teacher

“I also appreciate the fact that in our state, we have the opportunity to develop assessments that are appropriate for our students and our curriculum within the umbrella of the particular standard.”

Grade-Level Expectation Teacher

Dr. Jody Isernhagen, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Dr. Leon Dappen, University of Nebraska-Omaha
Dr. Shirley Mills, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

INTRODUCTION

The fifth year primary study was a mixed methods research design. This design increased the credibility of the study results due to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. As Nebraska’s schools implemented the STARS process, two models emerged in response to developing assessments at 4, 8 and 11 or at all grade levels (K-12). These models became known as Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts defined by Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment, as:

Benchmark School District—School districts that have developed assessments to measure only the standards that are required to be assessed by the state: grades 4, 8, and 11. Some Benchmark School Districts have designed assessments to measure locally developed standards at grades other than 4, 8, and 11, but have still limited the formalized assessment processes to only three designated grades.

Grade-Level Expectation School District—School districts that have developed standards or learning expectations for all grade levels in the district and have designed assessments to measure those expectations. This approach has spread the assessment process across grades.

With the inception of Average Yearly Progress (AYP) as a requirement of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), all Benchmark and Grade Level Expectation Districts must assess and report the results for designated standards at grades 3-8 and one year in high school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to examine the perceptions of Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts regarding total support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and support from external agencies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Quantitative data was collected using a 2004-05 survey to assess the impact of STARS on total support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and support from external agencies. Approximately 2000 surveys were sent to teachers, principals, superintendents, assessment coordinators, and Educational Service Unit staff developers.

This data was used to identify Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation School Districts. The selection of sample Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation School Districts for the survey was based on a stratified purposeful sample using geographical location (East, Central, and West), district class (Classes I-VI), and free and reduced district lunch rate (high, middle, low based on the state average.).

One hundred sixteen (116) school districts responded to the survey representing Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts. Some school district participants did not respond to all questions on the survey. Of those districts identified, seventy-two (72) were Grade-Level Expectation Districts and 44 were Benchmark Districts. These districts were identified based on Question 24 from the survey instrument. Any school district reporting that their school established benchmarks for meeting state standards for Kindergarten through twelfth grade by reporting “some of the time” (3), “most of the time” (4), “or all of the time” (5) were identified as Grade-Level Expectation School Districts. Benchmark Districts reported “none of the time” (1) or “very little of the time” (2).

Secondly, open-ended interviews were conducted in 2005-06 to collect detailed views about the STARS process in each of the district models. From the survey sample, we selected four districts in the Eastern, four districts in the Central, and four districts in the Western regions of the state. Educational Service Unit staff developers located in the same geographic areas as the sample districts were also interviewed. Sample districts that had been used previously, identified by purposeful sample in 2001, were used first and then other districts were selected based on sampling criteria.

Eighty-three (83) interviews with Nebraska educators were conducted statewide during the 2005-06 school year. Of these 83 interviews, 32 were Benchmark educators, 41 were Grade-Level Expectation educators and 10 were staff developers. The interviews were designed and conducted based on the results of the survey in an effort to better understand the varied images of curriculum, assessment and instruction within the STARS process.

Five major themes were identified based on the quantitative significance. An additional five themes emerged from the qualitative interviews. These themes were: Educator Expectations, Culture of Improvement, Collaboration and Communication, Student Educational Opportunities, and Educating Special Populations.

Instruments

The STARS survey was designed by the researchers to address recommendations identified in previous studies conducted about the STARS process. The survey examined the areas of (1) District Support, (2) Assessment Literacy, (3) Data, (4) Instructional Impact, and (5) External Support. Participants responded to the 46-item survey on a five-point Likert scale for each item, with “1” representing “none of the time,” “2” “very little of the time,” “3” “some of the time,” “4” “most of the time,” and “5” “all of the time.” Analysis of variance was used to compare mean scores of the survey data for Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts.

The STARS Research Interview Protocol consisted of demographic information, eight questions for teachers, and nine questions for leaders. These questions targeted the participants’ perceptions of district provision of time, resources, and training for STARS; how STARS has impacted their educational expectations personally and for students; the implementation of instruction strategies based on STARS results; differentiation of classroom instruction for special populations; the ways they monitor and report student performance to students and the community; the changes made to ensure opportunity for all students to learn; and the creation of a culture of improvement within the district. Probes were identified for interviewers to use with each question. Interviewers were provided a STARS Interview Manual and received training to conduct the interviews.

RESULTS

An analysis of Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation District survey data indicated strong support for the STARS process with Grade Level Expectation Districts consistently scoring stronger than Benchmark Districts. In the area of Total Support both models, Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts, were strongest in district support for “school based teacher led assessment.” This strength provided creditability to the STARS Process and demonstrated the level of commitment by all educators in both models.

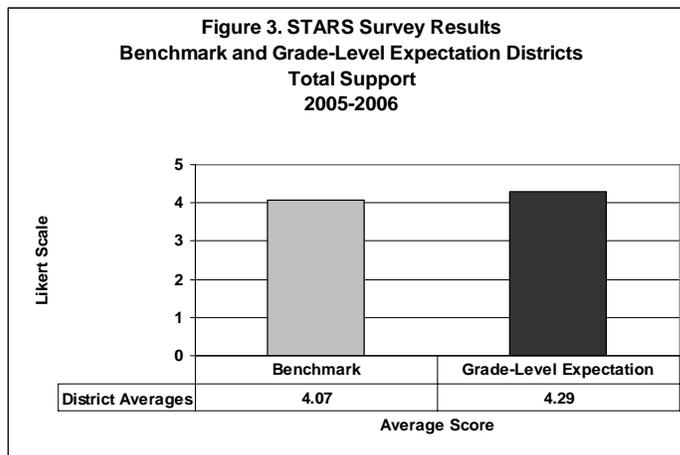
Results of the survey and qualitative interviews for this study resulted in ten themes. This section will highlight the statistically significant findings for the first five themes and the noteworthy findings are included for the remaining themes. Surveys were administered to language arts and math teachers in grades 4, 8, and 11, principals, superintendents, assessment coordinators and staff developers serving those districts. The significant findings will be supported with quotes that were collected during the interviews for those items where quotes were available.

THEME 1: TOTAL SUPPORT

(Survey Questions 8-11)

In the area of Total Support all district responses ranged from 3.79 to 4.50 on the five-point Likert scale with “1” representing “none of the time” and “5” representing “all of the time.” In the area of Total Support, Benchmark Districts ranged from 3.79 to 4.20 and Grade-Level Expectation Districts ranged from 4.15 to 4.50 on the Likert scale.

In both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts the strongest perception indicated that district support was present for “school-based teacher-led assessment.” However, Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than the Benchmark Districts in providing support for “school-based teacher-led” assessment.



A Benchmark superintendent expressed concern:

- ◆ The only concern I have with STARS and all of the testing that we do, I sometimes think we almost need to expand the calendar to make up for the time that we spend on testing that was taken away from regular instruction.

Benchmark principals stated:

- ◆ We are heavily involved with the ESU and they provide most of the training, the workshops. We send teachers to them. We also use them for our North Central accreditation improvement process and they come to our district to work with teachers. We have late starts just about every month. And those are dedicated to North Central and staff development.
- ◆ I think STARS is really serving a valuable purpose. I think the State of Nebraska is probably being held up as an exemplary state in what they're doing with STARS because it pretty much is locally designed, locally handled. Now that brings about frustration, that feeling of being overwhelmed, can we ever get it done, and teachers feel that sometimes. They also know that we're really getting great results.

Benchmark teachers felt frustrated with the testing requirements of reporting grades:

- ◆ So, I heard in educator circles, "We hear there's a big train coming and we don't know where it's going. But we know there's change coming." I think we need to take a really good look at where we're going and really start to evaluate, are the kids really learning or are we just testing them to death?
- ◆ I think time is the tough thing. If you talk to any teachers, it's hard to find that time to get days in for them to just work. It seems like a lot of times when we have an in-service, we have necessary things that we need to do as far as a group goes. You wish you had more time built in the calendar where teachers could just work on their assessments for their classroom.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent shared:

- ◆ I'm a huge supporter and proponent of STARS. I can see the advantages and the benefits that it has served; not only for the students of this district, but the benefits that it served to the teachers of this district. They might not always agree with that and at various times would definitely disagree with some of the things that they've had to do throughout this process. But I've never heard anybody argue with what it's

done for kids. I can see the benefit that it's had on this district because of the leadership and the ownership that our teachers have.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator noted that theory and practice still are disconnected:

- ◆ In theory the STARS system for assessment is outstanding because it identifies standards, it assesses according to those standards, it teaches to those standards. In practice, STARS has become an unbelievably huge imposition on teachers' time. STARS had to be implemented quickly. All of a sudden, many teachers had to make a major paradigm shift in their teaching. It came so quickly that the first reaction was, "I don't like it." In theory, it was wonderful. However, in practice, we still have to deal with the time problem and the perception that STARS is an interference with classroom responsibilities or an add-on to classroom responsibilities rather than an integral part of what you do in the classroom.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal indicated:

- ◆ The thing that I like about STARS is it was developed in Nebraska so it's attuned to Nebraska kids. I think that's important because kids in the upper Midwest in particular tend to do much better on national norm-based tests than those in other parts of the country. So that comparison is not as meaningful as what we are doing amongst ourselves to move kids forward and help them to achieve better. I think STARS has got to be a great vehicle for it.
- ◆ I think from the leadership standpoint, making sure that you compensate teachers for their additional time is very important. Providing them time during the normal school year has made a huge impact on morale and their willingness to work, and just always keeping the students' best interest in focus, and not saying this is what the state's telling us to do, so we have to do it. What kind of a message does that send? We're going to do this because the kids are going to benefit and this is how.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator stated:

- ◆ One thing that Nebraska has done . . . they had an assessment conference. That training was great . . . to hear the speakers, to have the dialogue, to have the sharing with other districts about what best practices are at different grade levels. I thought that conference was really worth my time.

A Grade-Level Expectation teacher noted:

- ◆ We don't have extra time. You just have your classroom time to give the test and administer the test. So it really takes away from my classroom time. I've had to take out activities that we have been able to do in previous years because of the time it takes to administer the standards. Kids don't get to do a lot of those fun and enrichment type activities.

In area of total support, Benchmark Districts showed strong support for the district's provision of services that schools needed to implement STARS.

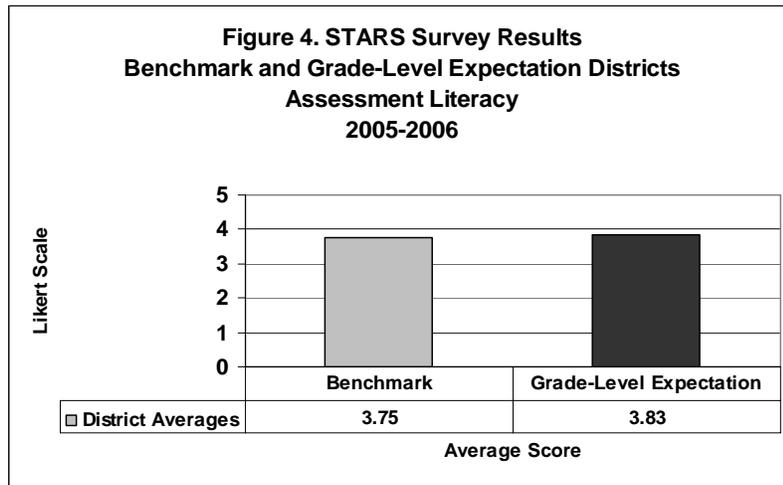
Benchmark educators indicated:

- ◆ If we had not gotten into STARS, I don't think the instruction would be as good as it is.
- ◆ We do a lot of work as far as in-service time. Every Friday we let out at 2:10 and so, from 2:10 to 4:00 we can have staff development time for STARS. We are using our

STARS grant money to hire subs for teachers for assessments and grading on their own. If there is a need for any type of curriculum meeting to take place during the day, we'll hire subs through the STARS grant. We have sent various individuals to various conferences concerning STARS and how it works.

THEME 2: ASSESSMENT LITERACY
(Survey Questions 1-16)

In the area of Assessment Literacy, all district responses ranged from 2.47 to 4.26 on the five-point Likert scale with “1” representing “none of the time” and “5” representing “all of the time.” Benchmark District responses ranged from 2.81 to 4.26 and Grade-Level Expectation Districts ranged from 2.47 to 4.25.



In the area of Assessment Literacy, Benchmark District responses were strongest for administrative support of “school-based teacher-led assessment.”

Benchmark principals commented on providing time and training opportunities for teachers to develop assessments:

- ◆ The training is part of it; we’ve sent teachers to ESU sponsored workshops. We send them to any workshops that we feel would be beneficial to them. Resources . . . we try to provide whatever they need as far as completing the STARS process and the time.
- ◆ We provide time with regularly scheduled early outs and teacher in-services throughout the school for our entire staff. I believe that after training that teachers received, they are a much more effective teacher in the classroom because of their knowledge.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent shared district commitment to providing resources:

- ◆ I think historically, to give you kind of a backwards perspective here, the time and the resource issue is the big one. And we said all along that that’s an administrative concern. We have to come up with the resources that will allow staff the time and financial compensation.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal shared:

- ◆ Our assessment coordinator is very active and she's been an excellent resource to our staff in organizing data and planning training activities, doing our state-wide reports, all the things that need to be done.

A Grade-Level Expectation teacher shared how administrators supported STARS:

- ◆ We're never denied anything that we would need to do our work. If you feel like you need to go to a workshop to learn about something, we ask and we're usually not denied. We get to go to the workshops. If we need somebody brought in to explain something to us, that's done. So, I feel like we're given all the support we can have for this.

In the area of Assessment Literacy, Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts in teachers writing their own STARS assessments.

Benchmark principals shared their thoughts on assessment development:

- ◆ The special education (SPED) teachers at the elementary, the middle school, and high school are very involved in the assessment writing. So they don't have trouble getting them involved in the summer workshop. They are really in tune.
- ◆ We're on block scheduling so we have a block of time that we get teachers together in like subject areas so that we can discuss assessments.

A Benchmark teacher shared:

- ◆ We have been given time to go out to the ESU and actually help write some of the STARS tests.

Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinators stated:

- ◆ Well, that's been a real strength for us because we have had the time, resources, and training to learn how to assess our students. And we do so in a variety of ways. We send teachers to various workshops run by the Department of Education, for one thing.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal discussed how time is provided to develop assessments:

- ◆ The school district provides time through in-service days. Early releases are part of that as well as full teaching work days. As far as resources, we are more centralized in terms of going to the central office with our requests and with rationale. They really do a good job of trying to make sure we have what we need to address those kinds of things. As far as training, we do extensive training through the ESU.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers shared how they are involved in writing assessments:

- ◆ That happens through our grade level meetings, through working with the consortium at the ESU. We have the opportunity to develop those assessments and then have training on how to administer them. We've had the opportunity to go back and revisit them if we think there are things at a grade level that are not working for us or perhaps we need to tweak, so we've had the flexibility to do that while maintaining the integrity of the standard.
- ◆ Now just everyone is involved in assessment and it's just a habit. It's just a part of your teaching day.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers were significantly higher than Benchmark teachers for using rubrics in assessments since the inception of STARS.

Benchmark teachers revealed:

- ◆ Everything I have has a rubric.
- ◆ To be honest, I haven't used rubrics a lot in the mathematics part of it.
- ◆ That's courtesy of my Masters program. I had someone who was big on rubrics. Most of those are student-created or created with me. If we're going to be working on a writing assessment, for example, this is how you're going to get a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, whatever it is. And in the six traits it's the same thing, too. We use rubrics.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers shared that using rubrics with writing has influenced their use in other areas:

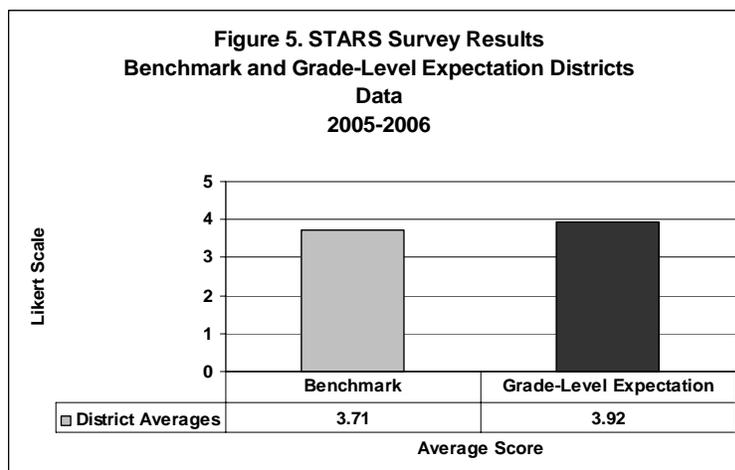
- ◆ I use them almost all the time because of six traits and the state writing assessment being all rubrics based. Obviously, that being one of the best ways of evaluating something subjective, I absolutely use them.
- ◆ We use rubrics for evaluating speeches, evaluating all of our writing assignments, and for other things as well. We use them for a wonderful little world geography project that goes across the curriculum with the English department. And we share those rubrics with the students in advance of the project or assignment so they know what our expectations are.

An ESU staff developer shared how they helped teachers develop rubrics:

- ◆ If we were proposing a rubric for evaluating paragraph writing on the 9th grade level, we'd have to show the teacher what would go into the rubric, how it would be created, and the advantages of it. It would make the evaluation of students more efficient rather than less. That would be the key.

THEME 3: DATA
(Survey Questions 17-22)

In the area of Data, all district responses ranged from 2.93 to 4.52 on the five-point Likert scale with "1" representing "none of the time" and "5" representing "all of the time." Benchmark District responses ranged from 2.93 to 4.38 and Grade-Level Expectation Districts ranged from 3.23 to 4.52.



In Benchmark Districts and Grade-Level Expectation Districts the responses were strongest in schools receiving assessment data in a format for disaggregation by district results only. School, classroom, and individual student results were not significant.

A Benchmark superintendent shared:

- ◆ I think it's put more emphasis on special populations acquiring some of the same skills that are done in a regular classroom even though the instruction may be altered. Also the assessment may be altered in the actual level of competence that is required for them. All I care about is that we get all of our students. I don't care if they're ELL, SPED, or Title I to get them to grow and improve as much as they are individually capable of doing.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal shared:

- ◆ The point of looking at the data is to determine whether or not you need to make changes to address a population. We just got through looking at some data on our reports and in our case we really couldn't see any disparity between the abilities or the achievement of students that were from different ethnic cultures or from poverty. They still showed that they were gaining, too.

The lowest rating for Benchmark Districts was in districts providing recommendations for responding to assessment results.

A Benchmark principal expressed how the district responds to assessment results:

- ◆ We've used our testing information to show us what we're doing, what we're not doing, and what we ought to be doing so that we can help our kids in that area. I think it's been really good that we've taken on differentiated learning, so that we aren't just teaching the same kind of middle of the road thing to all kids.

Benchmark teachers discussed how they use data:

- ◆ Whenever we administer one of the assessments, we get the feedback immediately on what the child's level of performance is. From there we know that we need to either reteach or move on. And so depending on the number of students within the group and the performance level, that might lead to direct instruction of the concept again or it might mean that we just try and do some general reintroduction to the entire group and then some specific drill work with the students.
- ◆ I think the biggest change is the reteach which leads to the reassess. I'm very hesitant to just move on and say you didn't achieve. I've put a lot more emphasis on we need to be able to achieve this level on this assessment and if we didn't do it well enough, we're going to go back and learn what we didn't learn the first time.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator shared how their district uses data:

- ◆ If I see on the state writing assessment, for example, that a particular class of students may not have done so well, and if that one data piece is reinforced by some other data pieces, say the language skills assessed on the ACT, the PLAN test, or the ITBS, then I will focus even more of my attention on that particular skill because it's been identified as a weakness for the students.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers shared their experiences with the use of data:

- ◆ Well before STARS, you'd teach it. You'd give your little unit test, and then you were done with it. And now, after STARS, we teach it, we assess it, probably within

a month. I usually wait longer because I want to make sure they really retain what I've taught them. And it's just making all the kids more successful.

- ◆ One of the things that we've taken a close look at was our writing in first grade because we discovered that although our writing scores were excellent, they were not at the level of some of the other areas. And so, it gave us an opportunity to look at our instruction district-wide at my grade level and see what changes we could make.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were lowest in their districts scoring STARS assessments for schools.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers shared how the district has supported scoring assessments:

- ◆ You know, it's really hard for me to give up my class time to do that. So just to know that if I want to spend my Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon scoring these, then I'm going to get compensation for it, is really a nice benefit.
- ◆ One of the things our school does that I think is wonderful is allow substitutes to come in and give you time away from class to score your papers.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts in providing data in a format that allows for disaggregation by relevant populations including free and reduced lunch, gender, etc. for individual students.

A Benchmark principal shared how the district used disaggregated data:

- ◆ We use that information very definitely in our SPED programs, our Title I program. We meet very regularly with our SAT (Student Assistance Team) team, and we have a lot of children who don't qualify for SPED or Title I but we brainstorm ideas about what can we do to help them. We have an aide who will work extra time with them. Our Title I teacher has been able to go take two or three of them and work out a little extra program for them, even though they don't quite fit. She can help the teacher with some interventions, and sometimes she herself helps those students.

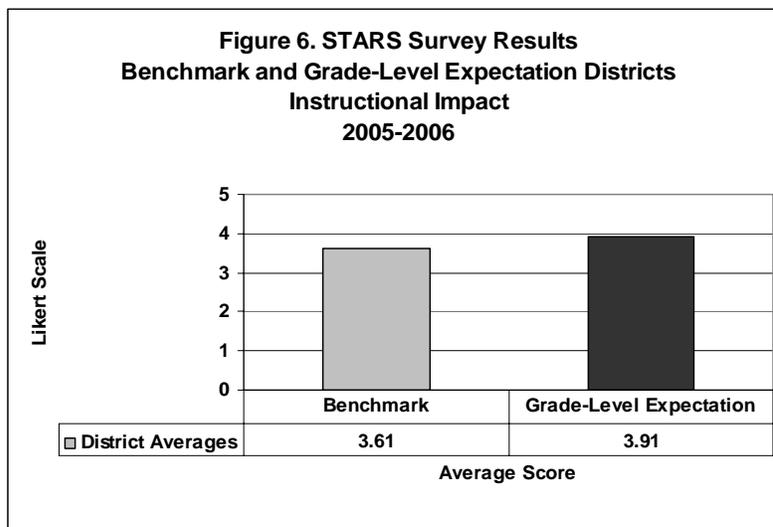
A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator stated:

- ◆ I think one of the strong positive things about STARS is that we've disaggregated our data to see if we have any discrepancies in delivering services to special populations: SPED, Title I students, gender. I remember a couple years ago when we got it disaggregated it happened to be the SPED population. The day we got the data back we were already having the think tank team and saying, why do we see this large of a discrepancy at this grade level? What support services or what interventions can we provide to the students to help them increase their skill level.

THEME 4: INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT

(Survey Questions 23-35)

In the area of Instructional Impact, all district responses ranged from 3.07 to 4.28 on the five-point Likert scale with "1" representing "none of the time" and "5" representing "all of the time." Benchmark District responses ranged from 3.07 to 4.02 and Grade-Level Expectation Districts ranged from 3.52 to 4.28.



Additionally, the average of all survey questions in the area of Instructional Impact was significantly stronger for the Grade-Level Expectation Districts than the Benchmark Districts. Instructional Impact was the only section of the survey where the total area was significant.

In Benchmark Districts and Grade-Level Expectation Districts the responses were strongest in instructional units assigned to appropriate grade levels in schools.

A Benchmark superintendent shared about curriculum development:

- ◆ It is a long-range goal to have a scope and sequence for our curriculum. But it is not down in black and white the way we want it. But that is our goal. We will be there in a couple years.

Benchmark teachers talked about classroom changes and stated:

- ◆ I know what we're looking for with the STARS. I definitely set my lesson plans so that they follow along with preparing the students to be able to meet the standards.
- ◆ Reading, we've really gone to a direct instruction approach for SPED. It's very direct instruction. It's like we just had a consultant here last week observing our SPED teachers give their lessons and give us feedback, constantly trying to improve that. Just make it direct and focused, a lot more responses in a short amount of time. The SPED teacher uses duet reading or paired reading.
- ◆ We've noticed that kids who aren't fluent never kind of push on to comprehend. And the resource teacher reads a word, the child reads a word, and it's amazing how that makes them concentrate to keep it fluent. We shared that with the parents, and they practice that at home. It's just one little piece of the whole thing.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent talked about how the process is changing:

- ◆ What we've seen is that we went from the beginning of this process spending all of our time on curriculum and assessment development and nothing on the instructional piece. It was the curriculum assessment process. And now it's the curriculum, instruction, and assessment process. We've evolved to the point that we are now focusing on the instruction piece. We're back to methodology. We're with the learning teams. We're focusing on strategies and interventions.

Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinators shared how curriculum development has improved with STARS and how attitudes are still changing:

- ◆ Nebraska local curriculum drives school districts . . . Right now, we're revising our language arts curriculum. We revised it a few years ago to make it match with the standards; however, we saw some areas that we missed, so now we're revising it again. That revision comes from our teachers, not from the top down, not from the state and not from the administration. If you're asking me how we develop our methods and standards for dealing with assessment, it's because of collaboration of teachers.
- ◆ We've tried to make our curriculum, update it, match it with the standards, make it something that's a product of what teachers want to see happening in the classroom.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal shared how STARS has benefited instruction:

- ◆ I think if there's a benefit of STARS it's brought a greater awareness of how our curriculum articulates what we need to be teaching. In my teaching days, you taught what was most interesting to you and it didn't matter that the fifth-grade teacher was teaching about dinosaurs. If I liked it in seventh- or eighth-grade, I taught it. And really, I think STARS gives us a big picture and it creates that awareness.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers shared how instructional units are developed and used:

- ◆ We've definitely, as a school district gone back and re-evaluated our entire curriculum and aligned it with the district standards and the state standards. As a district, we are asked and required to provide that we are teaching all the things that the state has required that obviously match up with our district. So I think it's definitely given me more of a focus as to what I need to teach and when I need to have it taught by.
- ◆ We keep track of when we teach what assessment, what standard. We keep track in our lesson plans or I guess I just have a graph sheet. Week one, I highlight it yellow if I taught it, green if I assessed it, red if I reviewed it. And we just do all the weeks in the school year for each standard. At the end of the workday, at the end of the year, we're reviewing. We do a data retreat and share all our information on assessments and how we kept track and when we taught them.

An ESU staff developer noted:

- ◆ STARS has done much to encourage schools to get their curriculum in line and in order. It also has developed a communication between our SPED teachers, Title I teachers, and regular education teachers in regard to the importance of standards, the importance of assessment, and the importance of how our curriculum looks K-12 for instruction. So, I would say that has been a real benefit.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts in the district helping schools to establish benchmarks for meeting state standards at Kindergarten through 12th grade.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent reasoned that STARS has impacted their buildings:

- ◆ It goes right back to continuous assessment mode that you have to continually be watching to make sure that you are making that progress or that you are working to close the gap. You don't just wait until the next year's ITBS and say, 'Whoops, well we're a little closer' or 'We're not closer. What do we do about it?' It does all come together when you start to think about it that way.

Grade-Level Expectation principals discussed their thoughts on benchmarks and standards:

- ◆ A lot of the setting of benchmarks usually starts with grade level type meetings.
- ◆ If there's a district committee in a certain content area, we'll get some feedback as far as getting the process started. Then it's just a matter of making sure that everybody's on the same page and we work the logistics of how we're going to get it done.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers spoke of benchmarks and standards:

- ◆ Each quarter we know exactly what standards we're covering for the nine weeks and so each quarterly test is kind of a benchmark for us because we report scores for each quarterly test and that shows us how our kids did on those standards.
- ◆ If you look at the standards, it isn't what the district has done with the STARS standards now. Those obviously give you a real target to work with. If you see what the support standards are for those STARS standards, then you can decide should I address the STARS standard first and then work away from that or should I build up to the STARS standard by going the other way.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts in teachers developing clear and appropriate instructional targets based on assessment results.

A Benchmark superintendent noted how the district provided assistance:

- ◆ I think you look for weak areas, things that aren't as high as you would like them to be. I think something they've done very well here is sit down as a staff and talk about those. We're in our first year of school improvement, so we spent probably an extra amount of time on it this year. And we'll be using that as we set our goals here in the next week or two.

A Benchmark principal stated:

- ◆ If we look ahead, it looks like it could be very challenging for our school to meet some of the expectations that have been set for the school district. So what we've created is an academic intervention team and right now the team is visiting some other school sites exploring what methods other schools have found as successful.

A Benchmark teacher shared how instructional target goals guide instruction:

- ◆ The STARS and the state standards guide the instruction that I carry out with my students. Being a resource instructor I tend to write my goals and objectives using the standards as benchmarks. We just make sure that the student involved is getting the information at their particular grade level that would match with STARS.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent shared thoughts on instructional target goals:

- ◆ I believe that we're all in this together—this teaching and learning game. When a teacher doesn't do their job or a student fails or somebody doesn't handle a difficult situation appropriately, we're all letting each other down. I believe that we have to handle all problems with professionalism and work together to solve them. So, that's the kind of climate that I'm trying to create. Whatever, we're expected to do, we need to do it with positive enthusiasm, and with the attitude the cup is half full and not half empty.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator said:

- ◆ I think one of the ancillary benefits of the STARS assessment system has been that teachers teach to a specific purpose(s) more so than they ever did before.

Grade-Level Expectation principals indicated that it's all about the conversation:

- ◆ I think all of that, creates a conversation about teaching and re-teaching, and how to teach concepts. I think instruction is held to a new level because it's not the power of one person saying how to teach. It's the power of the collective intelligence of the group.
- ◆ Once teachers saw the data to back up the facts, they were a lot more accepting. We still have the teachers who don't want to give the kids another chance, but it's getting better.

ESU staff developers shared:

- ◆ Districts are really taking advantage of the Title I programs, moving it down to really concentrate on a lot of those kids. We've got people wanting intervention program trainings. We've got people who want grouping trainings, co-teaching trainings, etc.
- ◆ We've just seen a lot of that awareness piece has really gone up. Lots of progress monitoring going on.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts in the school's assessment accurately measuring what students know and can do.

Benchmark teachers shared how they have used planning as a tool for improving student learning:

- ◆ I do try to make sure that every day I know what I am doing is on a standard, that it isn't just something frivolous or let's just throw this in today. And I do think that this is one of the things that I've seen a difference. I have known teachers that would walk into the classroom in the morning and not know what they're going to teach. They would come in early and figure out what they're going to do. There's none of that now.
- ◆ I think any more you have to plan ahead so much. And I think I maximize the output I'm getting from my students by being well prepared for each and every class that I'm teaching.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent noted:

- ◆ We'll do it for our kids, and that became the focus. Everything that we did was student centered. I told teachers to let me worry about the state, let me worry about whether or not any of this stuff works out. They wanted it to be a local process with a focus on the kids.

Grade-Level Expectation principals shared how districts are accurately assessing:

- ◆ We have at least one time where we reteach if there needs to be re-teaching done. Our standards-based summer school program has been developed. It gives students another opportunity if they have not met a standard to be re-taught at summer school. That has dramatically changed because that was not the way it was before.
- ◆ STARS is based on our state standards as are the other assessments that we use. Our teachers are involved in dealing with standards and looking at test scores and where the strengths and weaknesses of the students are from the test scores. So the ones that are not at reporting grade levels may not necessarily be directly involved with the STARS process, but they do see the same information that the other teachers see from the testing.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers discussed how they assess what students know and can do:

- ◆ Everybody knows what they're responsible for. You're responsible for these standards. You can teach these other ones, but you have to make sure that the kids get these.
- ◆ Well, knowing what's on the test, I can make sure I have covered what I need to before the students actually take the assessment. I don't think it's fair that a student gets assessed on something that they haven't had a unit on or haven't been taught recently. So I make sure that what I'm teaching is relevant to the STARS assessment itself.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts in using rubrics in instruction since the inception of STARS.

A Benchmark teacher discussed how rubrics are useful:

- ◆ I always use rubrics. For example, the day they did posters, I have a poster rubric for the specific topic. My rubrics are modified to target what I'm particularly grading for in an essay or in a project.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator shared how rubrics are used:

- ◆ We have rubrics, up and down. And we have made, in the last two years, a concerted effort to ensure that we have refined those rubrics K-12.

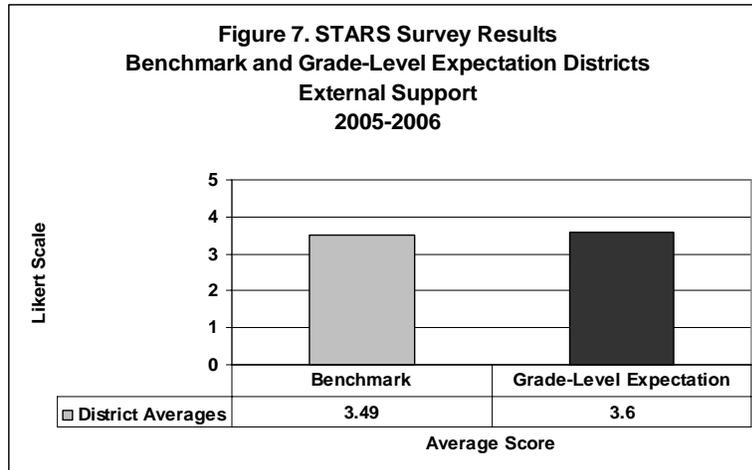
A Grade-Level Expectation teacher noted how rubrics assist students:

- ◆ I think the kids appreciate being handed a rubric and knowing what they have to do because you have the overachievers who question. Is this OK? What do I need? The kids are really getting to the point where they ask for a rubric.

THEME 5: EXTERNAL SUPPORT

(Survey Questions 36-42)

In the area of External Support, all district responses ranged from 2.78 to 4.00 on the five-point Likert scale with "1" representing "none of the time" to "5" representing "all of the time." Benchmark District responses ranged from 2.78 to 4.00 and Grade-Level Expectation Districts ranged from 3.29 to 4.00.



In Benchmark Districts the responses were strongest in external support for the ESU's providing on-going assessment training for teachers.

Benchmark principals shared the importance of the ESU:

- ◆ We've done a great deal of work up to this point. In the past we've had in-services. We send people to the service unit and I might add that the service unit has been absolutely wonderful in helping school districts to achieve the goals of the STARS. There's never any restriction on whether they can go or not. If they need to go to the training, they go.
- ◆ Most of that is done through training at the ESU. The ESU does a wonderful job of offering assistance when we need it or when we ask for it, and I would credit our ESU for much of our knowledge and training.

Grade-Level Expectation principals shared how ESU's have provided assistance:

- ◆ We have cadres of teachers that we will send to different places, ESU or they may just work at the district office for times during the school year and during the school days where substitutes are provided.
- ◆ The district gives us time. We have the opportunity to go to the ESU for training and in the summer we can use our own time and they give us credit. Many of the classes that we take offer stipends. We do have the opportunity to have training.

ESU staff developers have witnessed changes in the attitudes of teachers as they work with the STARS process:

- ◆ Instruction is more important than ever. I think the next step for staff development is not going to be as important as it has been in the past because we've got everything in place now. We've got the assessments in place. We have the curriculum in place. School improvement and data analysis is coming. Don't expect us to change everything. We'll tinker with it. So I think the next steps are we've got to be really cognizant of where teachers are in relation to instruction and where they are mentally in regard to all this.
- ◆ Some of our teachers still see it as the thing I have to do over here for the state department because they insist that we send in the report every year. Some of them are starting to make that connection. I think we're still in a transition stage there.
- ◆ I want teachers to be involved from the curriculum piece to the assessment piece to the grading piece so that they can see what standards-based education looks like

because right now I feel like in so many of our schools we still have the traditional educational model with standards thrown in.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts were strongest in ESU's providing on-going leadership training for school administrators for implementing the STARS process.

Benchmark superintendents shared their training experiences:

- ◆ Most of my training came from my previous school district where I was the school assessment leader and provided most of the training for staff.... I probably have more than most superintendents because I've dealt directly with it and have been responsible for all the reporting and documentation of the assessments.
- ◆ By working with schools, in schools, and in my district, I've gained knowledge from workshops, classes, and things like that about assessment and how to utilize assessment data to make changes in education.

A Benchmark principal shared frustration with the lack of training:

- ◆ I've had very little training. Probably my biggest weakness is standards and assessments. The high school principal is our standards and assessments expert and I help him gather the information, get it where it needs to be, and get it in his hands. As far my knowledge of it, I need to do a better job because I'm just not very knowledgeable because I haven't had to be.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents expressed these views:

- ◆ Truly, very little training and that's my own fault because I have a person who is the Director of Curriculum who monitors all of our assessments in the district. I rely on that person heavily. I truly have not spent a lot of time in this area.
- ◆ I did attend basically everything that was taking place that the ESU had to offer. A lot of it was trial by fire.
- ◆ I think I had a pretty good understanding coming in about what it was. In the job of superintendent I've always thought I should recognize who are smarter than me and empower them and use them. So I try hard to do that.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal discussed how training opportunities were provided:

- ◆ I think being a practitioner exposes you to a whole lot of things in terms of formalized training. I came to this interview thinking, 'What do I really have to offer?' because our teachers have done so much of this work. I think I have a professional obligation to stay knowledgeable about that because I'm making decisions every day about can I really justify a teacher leaving the classroom, putting a sub in the classroom so the teacher can go over here and work on standards and assessments and better their overall work. For me to make those decisions, I have to have some sense of what they're doing, why they're doing it, where we're at in the process, what needs to be done. So, have I had formal training; I've had very formal exposure. I would by no means call myself an expert, but I'd be leery of anyone that did.

The lowest rating for both Benchmark Districts and Grade-Level Expectation Districts was for the NDE providing assessment training for teachers in schools. Grade-Level Expectation Districts were significantly higher than Benchmark Districts for the NDE providing assessment training for teachers in schools.

A Benchmark teacher spoke of her many varied experiences with trainings:

- ◆ First of all, the assessment classes I had way back when I worked on my specialist degree helped, and then workshops that the department of education has provided. But most pointedly, ones through the service unit and working with them to develop the assessments were a good learning situation.

A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent shared his relationship with the NDE:

- ◆ First of all the state department knows who we are. And that's a plus. You know, you might as well parlay that into some good things. We've had a lot of conversations with people at the state department.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal noted:

- ◆ We really do it at a classroom level but I don't know if even myself as the principal, I truly understand how everything comes together at the state level.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts are solving their own problems with assessment as they gain experience with STARS as noted by:

- ◆ First of all, I think everyone in my building has got a level of expertise that they can share with one another in that open communication so that when a problem or issue arises that we think needs improvement, no one is afraid to say it. When we identify a need, we try to send people, myself, others, to workshops and such that will bring back the information we need to start addressing the problem. Our professional learning community talks about issues that come to them through other staff members. But most of our decision making is whole group. I think the open communication and the willingness to help one another is probably first and foremost.

THEME 6: EDUCATORS' EXPECTATIONS

Educator portraits from Nebraska emerged as interviews were conducted statewide. The following quotes and comments provided insight into the personal expectations set by educators as they developed the STARS process.

A Benchmark principal stated:

- ◆ I think the state has provided adequate money, but there's nothing they can do about the time just because I think most teachers' days were pretty full before the assessment process started. It's just added more work for them. I think a lot of teachers are really frustrated about it, especially the teachers that really care about what they're doing and want to do everything right. So I think that's definitely been a major negative. It's made life a lot more difficult for good teachers. You know if you hear Dr. Christenson tell it, this is the greatest thing since sliced bread. And, I don't agree with him on that. But if I sit down and hear him talk about it, he makes me feel that it is a good thing and that we are doing things right.

Benchmark teachers' experiences and expectations emerged:

- ◆ Maybe it's kind of raised my expectations for my students, even the lower ones. You have that expectation that they should get to a certain level by the end of the year, so I guess maybe my expectations for my students have raised since we've implemented the STARS testing. I'm held accountable with the STARS tests, I probably do a better job of teaching.

- ◆ STARS puts accountability on us that we are all teaching the same and that students are going to get the best education not just because you happen to draw a certain teacher that year or you're assigned to a certain teacher.
- ◆ I think we look at our student population because it has been constantly changing and the high need that they have. A lot of us do feel that we have to just work that much harder to make sure that our students are staying up to the state level of expectations. So far so good on that one.

A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator stated:

- ◆ It has made me more aware of the things that good teachers were already doing. What STARS did was to systematize good teaching, give a name to it and identify specific standards. Were good teachers doing those things before? Sure. Good teachers were. But it's enhanced our awareness of all aspects of assessment.

A Grade-Level Expectation principal noted:

- ◆ I would say, personally, I have benefited from STARS as a teacher and a principal because it's forced me in a good way to be more aware of what's being taught in school and it's like any other change agent. Sometimes you need to be pushed over the cliff to accomplish what needs to be done.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers explained how personal expectations have changed:

- ◆ I really appreciate the courage that's been exhibited by our commissioner and his staff and the state board. You know they've stood up and fought a battle when it would have been very easy to just listen to the people who said, 'Oh shucks, just give us a test.' Their understanding has been great.
- ◆ I think with STARS we're all more consistent on what we're expecting from our students, and I definitely think our expectations are higher.
- ◆ I've always had extremely high expectations as does all of the staff in our district. I think what it once again has done is just verify what we've been doing and provided an important accountability piece for the students as well, that they know what the expectations are.

ESU staff developers expressed their personal expectations with STARS:

- ◆ We're always trying to stay ahead of where NDE is leading teachers for improvement. Right now we're saying everything needs to be based on research. You need to have all of the pieces of your puzzle working together. Everything that we do, whether it be school improvement, strategies, or interventions, falls under the umbrella of school improvement.
- ◆ I think some of the things we've been asked to do by the state...sufficiency, the six criteria...those kinds of things, have made us so much better test developers than we would have been without it.

THEME 7: CULTURE OF IMPROVEMENT

Regardless of the model adopted by the district, Benchmark or Grade-Level Expectation, the culture of improvement was a primary focus. As district leadership evolved in their understanding of the STARS process, it became clear that the culture of districts had to change. Initially all the energy of both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts focused on the "nuts and bolts" of implementing the process—

writing assessments, aligning curriculum, training key staff, and just plain surviving the chaos of shifting a paradigm of an entire state's beliefs.

Leadership of both models over the last few years have taken on the task of building a culture based on continuous school improvement built around the data generated by the STARS process. Students from both models were impacted by these cultural changes. Educators spoke of the impact felt by students as they experienced the changes in standards, assessment, and accountability. These quotes illustrated the many changes that occurred as educators continued the work of STARS.

Benchmark superintendents expressed their thoughts on creating a culture of improvement:

- ◆ The creative part is we've been able to hook our teachers even though it's so much work for them. We are acknowledging their extra work, giving them ownership, and reimbursing them for their extra time whenever possible. They also are acknowledging and informing our board at work meetings that they will share what they've learned, what they're doing, and how it's working.
- ◆ I'd have to say that our students value and try to do their best on the assessments. Obviously, since they do not achieve the level of competence they want, they're going to be re-taught and they're going to be retested. They sometimes don't like that. When they go into the assessments, they're serious about it.
- ◆ We put a little bit back onto students that stress that this is important and that they do need to try their best. We did quite well on the 11th grade writing assessment this past year. We had a celebration with all of this year's seniors, gave them all an ice cream party after school to congratulate them on the work that they did. Just things like that to give feedback to the students that we do know how they scored, whether good or bad and they've got a little responsibility in that part, too as part of their school.

Benchmark assessment coordinators stated:

- ◆ We rely on scientifically research based programs and try to implement them with fidelity, trying to have focused professional development, not just sending people here and there to conferences. We bring high quality trainers in so all of our staff get trained at the same time. We've provided a lot of follow up training besides the pre-service training. We bring people in to our classrooms to watch our teachers teach. It's just a continuous process to monitor the progress continually to figure out where we need to go next and where our strengths and weaknesses are.
- ◆ Put the data in front of them to motivate teachers to want to change and get involved. We have to first face the brutal facts of where we're at before we need to know where we're going to go.

Benchmark principals noted the changes in culture:

- ◆ They stay involved through our school improvement teams. We're a small staff. We range somewhere between 25 FTE and 29 FTE as we change in size and population. But they've all been assigned a place in the school improvement committees. Our school improvement goals have been along the lines of language art skills, writing skills, and math skills. So as they attend those meetings, what became dominant were the interventions needed for us to meet our goals.

- ◆ When we were talking about professional learning communities and how it comes from the bottom up, quite honestly the only things that succeeds that I've seen in the last 13 years are the ones that come from the bottom up. If they come from the top down, for some reason, even if it's good stuff, teachers wrinkle their noses and pooh-pooh it.
- ◆ I think when you're talking about culture; you need to have a few characteristics. Trust for one. You need to have a trusting environment. You need to have a caring environment. I think if people, whether its students or staff, believe that you trust them and care for them, you're going to have a positive work place, a positive school and I think things filter down from there.

Benchmark teachers added their thoughts about creating a culture of improvement:

- ◆ Our grade level is really good about working together. If any of us have a problem we sit down and we talk about it and try to solve it together.
- ◆ I do a lot of integrated curriculum with other teachers. For example, the business teacher and I do the freshmen research paper together so that we do the research and the writing in my room. They do the keying in and the formatting in her room.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents shared how the change in the culture of improvement impacted all:

- ◆ I would say you have to model it. You have to give credit when credit is due and be sincere rather than just fluffy. I try to demonstrate it by just getting in the trenches. I will not expect any one to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. I try to be visible. I try to be involved and show them that we value their professionalism and what they're doing in the classroom. I think this entire process has empowered teachers so they have more of a say of what's going on in their classroom and how they're working with students. I think it's very important that administrators give them the credit, the time and resources so that they can do what they have been prepared to do.
- ◆ Help students to see that there's more that can go on and that attending school regularly and all of those things are important. We help kids to attain a sense of vision that they can be something.
- ◆ If we're going to be competitors in this country, then truly we can't leave any children behind. We can't afford to throw away kids. We need them all. And that's the challenge that we have.

Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinators noted the many changes they have made to improve the culture of continuous school improvement:

- ◆ I think what you want to do is convey to the students that feeling, 'We're not just taking a test here kids. This assessment is over important information that you absolutely have to have before you get out of this school. How you do on this assessment sends us a message about whether we're meeting your needs as a student.'
- ◆ We're talking about going ahead and having learning teams based on what different people need, whether it's going to be district-wide or building-wide. We do want to have that as part of our school improvement process.

Grade-Level Expectation principals shared their thoughts on cultural changes:

- ◆ We sent teachers to workshops and some of our movers and shakers went. I think when you get those people on board it creates the momentum there. So those people just tend to emerge and you can work with them that way and it tends to move everybody forward.
- ◆ I had a teacher with chest pains on conference day and couldn't make it. I had teachers with tears say my kids are not getting the grades. And I said have some faith. Stay the course. This will work. And you know what? It did work. And we had kids that came in the morning when they didn't understand a math concept and get help. And if it works in math, why wouldn't it work in the other areas? And it's been a major shift in how we do business. It's been fun to watch.
- ◆ We meet once a month and teachers have taken a leadership role in school. They have taken actually a different role than what they used to, I think, becoming more involved with the kids, getting the message out to the community as much as they can

Grade-Level Expectation teachers speak of the changes:

- ◆ The administration helps. They're such great leaders because they don't push you to do it. They ask. They don't tell you completely what to do. They let you find out, but yet, they expect a lot out of you. We held our kids accountable. We need to hold our teachers accountable for their teaching too, to make sure kids are learning.
- ◆ I think now it's just open communication. Everybody's engaged in the curriculum and can talk the lingo that goes along with it. I think we all feel comfortable. Everybody expresses their ideas, their opinions. We all try to improve each other.
- ◆ I think our district has done an outstanding job. They have organized us by grade level so that we have an opportunity to meet with all of the teachers in our district to discuss the assessments. And we've had an opportunity to work together which is really important for us to have the collaboration.
- ◆ Our philosophy is multiple chances to pass. You have to reteach.
- ◆ Yes, it has been a struggle, but I think we're all seeing benefits and parents know there are high expectations and they're seeing the good results from that.

ESU staff developers shared their views:

- ◆ If we had not gotten into STARS, the way Nebraska's set up; I don't think the instruction would be as good as it is.
- ◆ We have a continuous improvement process for our service unit and our goal is student achievement. We monitor the performance of our schools very closely because it is the reflection of our improvement.
- ◆ It's a take on the learning team. We're looking at a service delivery model where we would ask schools to set aside time for professional learning teams to study and we would help them facilitate that with the idea that this is how true school improvement will take place.
- ◆ Right now we're saying everything needs to be based on research. You need to have all of the pieces of your puzzle working together. Everything that we do, whether it is school improvement or the strategies and interventions that fall underneath that, it's all under improvement.

THEME 8: COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

As educators faced the task of changing their own culture and creating a paradigm of change, other paradigms began to shift. Teachers who had spent years teaching in isolation were encouraged to step out into the mainstream. Just having teaching skills was not enough. Collaborating and communicating with fellow teachers and administrators became the norm. The interviews generated thoughts about the value of collaboration and communication. It was a strong theme for both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectations District educators.

Benchmark superintendents have found unique ways to communicate with the public:

- ◆ It was not difficult at all to show the board this is where we're at, this is where we want to be, and these are the resources that we believe we need to achieve our goals.
- ◆ I just keep hammering home how important student achievement is. How important the connection between home and school is. I encourage parents to contact teachers, teachers to contact parents.
- ◆ Obviously, you can't involve the public in every decision that you make, but there are certain things such as this that you want their opinions and their thoughts before you do it.

A Benchmark assessment coordinator noted how essential communication is to the district:

- ◆ How you involve students, parents, and community in improving teaching and learning is with open houses. At each elementary, we have grade level meetings. We put lots of information in our local newspaper. Our superintendent writes an article every week and reports our data very frequently. The local newspapers have done a really good job of covering. We also send home reports on how students are doing with their report cards and at the middle of quarters we send home progress reports to let parents know how students are doing.

A Benchmark principal stated:

- ◆ Parents are on the North Central accreditation steering committee. We enlist the help of our newspaper to print our newsletter. They print it on newsprint and it goes to every box holder in the district. We try to get out and interview people for that.

Benchmark teachers revealed their thoughts on collaboration:

- ◆ We work together, we converse, and we talk about problems. It's a good climate, it's a good rapport that we have together, and very cooperative. I think we get along very well and we both have our students' best interests at heart and whatever it takes to do what we need to do for those kids for those assessments and beyond, we do.
- ◆ When we first got into the STARS program, started using assessments, and we had a number of workshops with other teachers from other districts. It was really valuable to learn what everybody else was thinking about, what things they were doing, and we kind of helped each other to develop some of the assessments that we use.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents found new ways to communicate the importance of assessment to students:

- ◆ But probably the best way that parents are gaining access and understanding is the teachers are actually sharing information at conferences where they're able to quickly give them a visual and here's the color coded chart. Parents can see very quickly in a matter of seconds that their kid is doing really well on the standards or not doing well.
- ◆ This year we started a new site counseling group where we have parents involved at the building level in an advisory nature. Our first work with them is educating them to understand what the curriculum looks like, what assessments look like, what interventions we're using in the particular buildings to help students. We are involving parents as an advisory group but it gives us a perspective from the parents' viewpoint.
- ◆ Sharing it with the kids! Hey, class look at this. Here are your results. What do you see from this? Wow, it looks like we need to spend more time on this. OK, what else can come from this? When we have them sit down to take the Terra Novas, we talk about the impact that those things have, that we take that information really seriously because we make decisions based on those results that impact them as students.

Grade-Level Expectation principals commented on the changes perceived in education:

- ◆ When the state report card comes out that creates a whole other level of understanding of literacy for our parents. They want to know what that means. I'm not sure that we're there yet, but I know that we've tried to make attempts to explain and make the information meaningful because we're reporting it.
- ◆ You had conversations taking place between secondary and elementary that really hadn't happened in many districts at all. And you learn from each other and you develop ways of working together that I think have benefited kids....
- ◆ We meet once a month and teachers take a leadership role in school, which is actually a different role than what they are used to because they are becoming more involved with the kids, getting the message out to the community as much as they can. I try to speak to any organization that I can.
- ◆ I field phone calls from parents who want to understand. I mean it's not confrontational. They want to understand.
- ◆ I do know at the district level we have a cable channel which is public access which the school uses and we put information on that. As far as parents coming into the central office, we've got different areas of this particular building where the data is put up. It's good information.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers shared thoughts on collaboration:

- ◆ We thought we'd all be going into our little classrooms and doing our thing. But it's actually been more of a time when we've collaborated more. We're really supporting each other better in our work.
- ◆ The math department is known as the nerds. We eat together at lunch in a separate room and, quite frankly, there can't have been one lunch period gone by that we didn't discuss math at some time. How you do this or what are you doing here or how did they do on this quiz? We talk math a lot; sharing an interest in being part of that conversation instead of fleeing if it comes up.

- ◆ I think that the school improvement process, which is entirely its own unique beast, allows for a great deal of collaboration with a specific target in mind. And the STARS assessments bring together the grade levels at least. I think the whole idea of being able to test and retest, in itself, brings together improvement that can be made. It opens up what is working, what isn't, and how can we rearrange things to make them work.
- ◆ I know that they have a separate grading section on Power School which is a web-accessed tool for parents. They can access what their students have done on the state standards immediately once those grades are entered.
- ◆ We do student-led conferences which allows primarily for the students to share directly what they're involved in.
- ◆ One of the other things we like to do is to have goal setting with parents; every child grows a year within that year. We do some goal setting with kids that they take home and show their parents.

Grade-Level Expectation Districts have developed strong ownership for the STARS process while Benchmark Districts had more difficulty.

A Benchmark superintendent talked about the teachers who were not responsible for STARS assessments:

- ◆ They're all part of the in-service that we provide. Perhaps they're not sent to the service unit but they are involved. We use the results of the STARS to drive our curriculum and to drive our school improvement, and of course, the whole staff is involved with the school improvement process.

Benchmark principals added their comments:

- ◆ It's been a challenge and yet it's one that our staff hasn't really backed away from. I think the other areas and grade levels are glad they don't have to write the assessments that are being reported. And yet they are involved in the curriculum and what's taught in the building and so they participate in that.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents noted the importance of shared responsibility:

- ◆ It's not a fourth grade problem. We'd never have any fourth grade teachers or eighth grade teachers or eleventh grade teachers. Everybody would want to go to a different place if everything was dumped on them. It can't be viewed that way because the purpose of the assessment at these Benchmark areas is to see what the cumulative learning has been up to that point, and then to make decisions about what needs to happen subsequent to that time. So it's got to be a shared responsibility.
- ◆ Teachers were told that they could do this for the state and just do it, or we could do what's best for our students. And the staff agreed that they were going to do what was best for the students. And that would be to get everybody involved so everybody was doing the same thing.

Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinators talked about how they involved all teachers:

- ◆ How are they involved? Well, first of all, they wrote the curriculum. Second of all, they identified at what points in time would it make the most sense to assess and then they actually wrote the assessments.
- ◆ I guess they wouldn't call themselves the non-reporting grade because they take just as much ownership for that 2nd grade test as they do the 4th grade test. They have participated in the writing of the curriculum. They have participated in the selecting of the test items and then choosing the particular test items and they have provided feedback for us of the ones they liked. We usually lump the grades by standard, how they're grouped standard-wise. Teachers work together, usually to talk about the results and who's testing what and where and so they work together across grade levels and in their own grade level.

Grade-Level Expectation principals commented about involvement of staff:

- ◆ We have teachers at all grade levels giving assessments. Even though they are reported at fourth grade, we have third grade teachers giving assessments. We have second grade teachers giving assessments. So they do some assessing and they have also been part of the cadre of teachers that have developed assessments specific to a curricular area.
- ◆ We make no differentiation whether they're at reporting grade levels or non-reporting levels. They all receive the same training and background. We do assessments on the off reporting levels and when we sit down to review the data; they look at the data at their particular grade level, not just at 4, 8, and 11.

THEME 9: EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Providing an opportunity for all students to demonstrate what they know and can do was a priority for the STARS process. This theme was strong in both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts.

Benchmark superintendents indicated that students and teachers were adjusting instruction to meet student needs:

- ◆ We help our teachers to become successful. We use the test, retest, reteach model. We've implemented that here so that our kids can reach the expectations that we have.
- ◆ I think you have to let the students know that you really do care about them and they see that. And they realize that we won't accept less than their best. And failure is just not going to be an option.

Benchmark assessment coordinators responded to student needs:

- ◆ I've always prided myself on making sure that students are treated fairly in my classroom. But with the new emphasis in the last few years on assessment, I think I've simply become more aware of the need to help students who struggle academically to make sure that they aren't left out of the process.
- ◆ Put the data in front of them. I think from third grade on up, students need to know how they're performing and where they need to go. I think if we just test kids and never talk with kids about where they're at, they're not very motivated to do better. So we try to set high academic standards and then provide incentives for academic accomplishments.

- ◆ Early on when we began to collect all this data for standards at the elementary level, we found out we had to change. We used to just do our parent/teacher conference in the fall and spring and then at the end of the year, we just sent the results home and the kids went on to the next year. What we have instituted now is a third conference. It's the last day of school and we talk over all the data, the standards that have been done.
- ◆ Before, students were moved on chronologically by age and now we're really looking at skill level. We're pinpointing, do they have enough skills? Are they equipped with enough skills to send them on to the next grade level? And if not, they might have to spend more time in an educational setting to learn more.

Benchmark principals communicated with students about the changing world of education:

- ◆ I think some of the new pieces of the assessment process are making sure that everyone has had the opportunity to learn. It just added another step to make sure that teachers aren't just giving lip service to student opportunity to learn. They actually are following through and it is in their lesson plans that you can document.
- ◆ I really like talking to kids and it gives me a good excuse to do that, and I need to do that more. I need to talk to them about some of the offerings we have with our curriculum and what's going to benefit them.
- ◆ I think we're pretty responsive to how our kids score as far as how many are proficient in areas. We're very sensitive to our kids that don't prove to be proficient in writing. We've had very good support from our superintendent and our school board.
- ◆ Opportunity to learn? We've hired more para-professionals to assist. They do not only have study hall settings, but those people go in the classroom and help the students take notes. Show them how to take notes from a lecture format or from information which is presented on an overhead. They assist them with study skills. We do a lot of work with study skills.
- ◆ Well, our superintendent is a big proponent of making sure that all kids learn. We constantly talk about differentiating instruction.

Benchmark teachers indicated that giving students the opportunity to learn has created changes in the classroom:

- ◆ We just instituted what's called a mandatory tutoring after-school program on Tuesdays and Thursdays for students that are on the down list. You know they can succeed; they are required to go and redo assignments or do extra assignments to show you that they have the skills that are necessary.
- ◆ Now for the SPED kids, sometimes it's as simple as giving them more time, encouraging them to use computers and use the spell check and grammar checks. Helping them! I give them more help individually with their graphic organizers when they get the prewriting step, that sort of thing.
- ◆ I believe it's made the students more aware of whether they're proficient or progressing. They're learning a lot of the vocabulary just as we are. They know what they are trying to achieve.
- ◆ I think if you lay the expectations in front of the students, they know what it takes. They're willing to do the work what it takes to learn the information and be able to apply it to all the assessments. I think that works very well for us.

- ◆ I know what's expected of the students and I just make them aware of it. I think there's a comfort level. I think the information that you give your students allows them to relax and do well on the assessments.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents changed the way they were doing business in the K-12 arena:

- ◆ I can see that we took our assessment up to another level. I can see that happening. Where before you were always just spinning your wheels doing the same things over and over and over, now we get a little bit better each time. It is possible to raise the bar every year, and it's not just in a vacuum. You have data to support why you're raising the bar to that next level. That's been happening for us and that's an exciting element.
- ◆ But if you bring in 220 kids in the ninth grade, graduate 140, even I can figure out there's something wrong with this picture. We've got to do some things to address that. We have to come up with some different ways. Maybe it's just to sit down honestly with them and their parents and say this is what you're going to have to do if you're going to be successful and we're going to work with you to get that. Maybe it's just the extra time or a different kind of an academy setting.
- ◆ The superintendent's job is to lay out the challenge. You have to be smart enough to be able to describe the vision and the challenge and to be there, but you also have to realize that you can't do anything by yourself.
- ◆ We do have several of our teachers that have a dualistic report card primarily in the elementary. They have one sheet that has the normal type of report card and on the back side, it shows all of the standards that their student has done and where they're at in terms of those. We're reporting those as well.

Grade-Level Expectation principals indicated the many ways they are seeing the impact of STARS on student opportunity to learn:

- ◆ Understanding assessment literacy is allowing us to see other factions of our school differently because we have new knowledge. It's a whole new world out there once you see things differently.
- ◆ As far as students, the team approach in the staff trickles down to the students. We have a lot of support from not only the teachers, but from teachers' assistants and from parents. We have a lot of volunteers coming in and assisting students either in the classroom or a mentoring program where students are pulled and work with mentors. It's truly a team effort in helping kids achieve. It's amazing just to have teachers sit down and talk about what interventions can be used to help students. Our staff process is an important piece in student achievement.
- ◆ We have made changes in our district; we are going through the data and looking at every child's score, not just a composite for grade level. We have it broken down to where we can show growth for every student we have. And especially longitudinally, if we've had kids for five, six, seven, or eight years, we can show their growth over that time. And I think that's been a real change. It is good to sit down with parents with that information and we can show the growth in relation to how other students in the district are growing and how students in a particular building are growing and how they match up nationally.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers noted that giving students the opportunity to learn provides student ownership:

- ◆ Before, learning was always kind of a hidden agenda. That's not the case anymore.
- ◆ So I guess the effect on the students would be that I think we're doing a better job of allowing them to learn more about data analysis.
- ◆ Students don't seem stressed out in seventh grade whatsoever about taking the tests. They don't seem overwhelmed or upset. Honestly, I don't see a huge impact on them negatively. Positively, it proves that they know what they know and that they are learning.
- ◆ I would have to say that at the high school level, when I first started teaching, we took the assessments and never saw them again. Or if we did, we didn't interpret them. Now we have started looking at the assessments, looking at individual students, at classroom teachers, at entire subject areas, at entire departments, and trying to look at where our weaknesses are and where our strengths are, and look at the student, even.
- ◆ You know . . . the one on one. They come before school and after school. I think it's very important to establish immediately that you care about them. I try very hard to know what it is they're doing in their lives.
- ◆ Students need a chance to learn. They need to know. Testing is not tricking. It's OK to know what you're going to be tested on.
- ◆ I actually have one period where we just work on math skills that they need help on and if we have extra time we work on other subjects that they need help on. So that is scheduled in.

ESU staff developer roles are changing as STARS has evolved over the past five years:

- ◆ I think we are moving more towards the instructional strategies and curriculum now. Teachers have a pretty good handle on what the assessments are, and they've been developed, and they're finally to the point where they're not feeling this is all there is in life. They're starting to see it's connected to school improvement; they're also connecting it to instruction.
- ◆ We have several schools that have increased math requirements from two years to three years. Three or four schools are piloting Ken O'Conner's material as far as standards-based reporting. I think that's going to eventually lead to some differences in report cards.

THEME 10: EDUCATING SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Nebraska has experienced a major demographic change in population in the last five years. Nebraska's leadership has identified many ways to address the changes to better meet the needs of students.

Benchmark superintendents talked about their changing role with special populations:

- ◆ We have put more emphasis on the non-traditional students and special needs students because the population is changing. We're getting more of the ELL students and other special needs students. We're putting our dollars and personnel in that direction out of necessity.
- ◆ I think STARS made those special areas more accountable for what they're doing because their scores are included in with everybody else's. It's made everybody aware that we can't forget about them, that they do have to live up to the same

assessments and be able to perform at a passing level. I think it's helped in that respect; it's made everybody a little more accountable.

Benchmark principals expressed their thoughts concerning special populations:

- ◆ The Title I teachers and special teachers have been greatly involved in the aligning of the curriculum, the writing of the assessments, and accommodating those assessments for their students. They've attended every workshop, every retreat we've had. They've been integrally involved in the process.
- ◆ The STARS program is about raising everyone's level of education higher. So what we've done more of in the last five years is identified those kids that are not above the benchmark, and then what interventions can be used to help them. The resource people have beefed up their program curriculum-wise and staff-wise to try and help these students raise their level of achievement just like we're trying to raise everybody's level of achievement.
- ◆ We have several different programs that we initiated here. In our seventh and eighth grade, we have available to them an educational learning area where students who are falling behind can go.
- ◆ The ELL population is a big one obviously with our population. The first year we were told you can make modifications but by year three, they're supposed to take the test. Yet all the research shows that it takes at least 7 years to acquire the language. I know how hard these kids work on a day to day basis. I see the kids who give me absolutely everything they have and more. They are performing way above whatever test that they're supposed to be performing on but yet it's not "good enough."

Benchmark teachers talked about the impact on classrooms:

- ◆ I guess on an individual basis, I have a higher expectation for those students, whereas, I didn't in the past. You just kept them at the level and hoped that they learned as much as they could. With STARS, you're expected to make sure they do.
- ◆ I want their parents to see that they are successful. They're just successful at a different place in time.

Grade-Level Expectation superintendents shared their thoughts on special populations:

- ◆ We've had tons of discussion in this district about what's developmentally appropriate, which seems to me sometimes to be a cop out. It's not developmentally appropriate for our kids because of their background. OK, we understand their background. But this is the expectation if these kids are going to have the chance to compete in our society.
- ◆ I think it's made us very aware that in all the areas, SPED or ELL, Title I, poverty students, we need to do a better job with providing instructional strategies to help them be more successful on the STARS assessments or any other assessments that we use. So, it's increased our understanding of the need to do a better job with assessments for special groups.
- ◆ The special populations we have, almost half of our students, also have a tremendous degree of poverty. Since we have to deal with addressing these standards, the work that we do with them has become more focused, more important. It isn't just a matter of getting them through school. They have to reach these levels too. And they're capable of it. We're finding that they can do this

work. It does call for us to be more creative sometimes in how we deal with them. I think we're doing a better job of it. I really do.

Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinators talked about special populations:

- ◆ It's not STARS alone. Quite frankly, having a pretty large ELL population, title population, migrant and a mobile population, there were groups of students sometimes who were just maybe not taught certain things because the teacher didn't feel that they could know it or had to know it. Based on the standards, we have been able to say that all students need the opportunity to learn it. And it's been the best thing that we've done in math and reading especially. If we're going to give an assessment, they have to have had the opportunity to learn it.
- ◆ I think we have probably cut back on modifications for some students, tried harder to at least expose them to grade level materials, tried to create that balance of instructing students at the level they are, but at least being aware of how far off they are from the grade level.

Grade-Level Expectation principals added their thoughts on special populations:

- ◆ We try to include our SPED teachers. But I think a lot of times, they don't have as close communication with classroom teachers as they would like and as the classroom teachers would like because of the time.
- ◆ Our ELL kids come in about the pre-school or Kindergarten level. We've been very fortunate. The Title I kids are probably the ones that it's most difficult for and we noticed that we'll probably have to have a little re-teaching. Our Title I program is wonderful; however, they don't have accommodations like the resource children can have.
- ◆ It's made us more aware of the fact that the special programs and special populations need to receive more of a broad-based education than they have. They not only need to receive what's on their IEP, but in order to do well on the tests, they may need to get into more of the standards. It's made teachers more aware that they have to branch out and teach more of the curriculum than they have before.

Grade-Level Expectation teachers talked about the impact of STARS on special populations:

- ◆ Well, I think it's made us more aware. We continue to modify the work for students who are in those special populations according to their learning or behavior disability. We've been doing that for a long time. But, we're simply more aware of the necessity for that documentation now.
- ◆ I do modify for those based on what their IEP is. For example, we're doing little practice stories right now with little questions over the stories to work on reading comprehension main idea and those kinds of things. If it's written in the student's IEP that a test can be read to them, when we do the practice tests, I read it to them.

DISCUSSION

The STARS assessment process gave districts latitude in delivering programs to meet the needs of Nebraska students. While there were differences between the Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation models, both models used the six quality criteria. They were: (1) match and measure the standards; (2) provide opportunity for the students to have learned the content; (3) be free of bias; (4) be written at the appropriate level; (5) be reliable and

consistently scored; and (6) have appropriate mastery levels. Educators in both district models responded to the quality criteria of providing opportunities for all students to learn. As a Benchmark principal stated,

I think some of the new pieces of the assessment process are making sure that everyone has had the opportunity to learn. It just added another step to make sure that teachers aren't just giving lip service to student opportunity to learn. They actually are following through and it is in their lesson plans that you can document.

There were differences between Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts in the delivery methods. Grade-Level Expectation educators felt they were more supported by their districts because all educators at all grade levels were involved in the assessment process. Educators in Benchmark Districts at benchmark grade levels (4, 8, and 11) felt strongly supported but expressed that all educators needed to be involved in the process.

Assessment literacy perceptions were strong in both Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation Districts. Grade-Level Expectation educators were much stronger in writing their own STARS assessments and in the use of rubrics. The researchers saw strong ESU support in Benchmark Districts, while Grade-Level Expectation Districts were providing training in assessment writing within their districts. A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator shared, "Well, that's been a real strength for us because we have had the time, resources, and training to learn how to assess our students. And we do so in a variety of ways."

Grade-Level Expectation educators indicated that they were strongest in receiving assessment data in a format for disaggregation and were involving all teachers in data collection and analysis. Benchmark educators were strong in data collection and analysis but only at benchmark grade levels where assessment data was collected. A Grade-Level Expectation assessment coordinator indicated, "I think one of the strong positive things about STARS is that we've disaggregated our data to see if we have any discrepancies in delivering services to special populations: SPED, Title I students, gender...."

The area of greatest difference between Benchmark and Grade-Level Expectation educators fell in instructional impact of STARS. Grade-Level Expectation educators were more involved in the process and felt greater ownership for it in their classrooms. Two Grade-Level Expectation principals shared, "I think if there's a benefit of STARS it's brought a greater awareness of how our curriculum articulates what we need to be teaching," and "It creates a conversation about teaching and re-teaching, and how to teach concepts...."

Benchmark districts indicated that they depended upon ESU training support for the STARS process as stated by this Benchmark principal, "Most of that is done through training at the ESU. The ESU does a wonderful job of offering assistance when we need it or when we ask for it, and I would credit our ESU for much of our knowledge and training."

In both models educators held high expectations for themselves as well as for their students. Due to these high expectations there has been a change in the culture of schools. Continuous school improvement was directly tied to the STARS assessment system for both models as shared by this Benchmark superintendent, "I'd have to say that our students value and try to do their best on the assessments." A Grade-Level Expectation teacher acknowledged, ". . . Everybody's engaged in the curriculum and can talk the lingo that goes along with it. I think we all feel comfortable. Everybody expresses their ideas, their opinions. . . ."

Collaboration among staff members was essential for both models. However, Grade-Level Expectation educators felt more involved than Benchmark educators because their total staff was involved in the assessment process while benchmark districts primarily had teachers involved at grades 4, 8 and 11. Grade-Level Expectation educators had strong collaboration and communication within the district and with their communities. These districts were searching for better ways to communicate the results of STARS assessments with the patrons of the district so that everyone understood the meaning of the results.

Finally, the demographic landscape of Nebraska's school population has changed and providing an opportunity to learn for all students is a challenge. Helping students of mobility and English Language Learners with standards mastery surfaced as a challenge for both models. A Benchmark principal commented, "The STARS program is about raising everyone's level of education higher. So what we've done more in the last five years is identified those kids that are not above the Benchmark, and then what interventions can be used to help them . . ." A Grade-Level Expectation superintendent stated, "I think it's made us very aware that in all the areas, SPED or ELL, Title I, poverty students, we need to do a better job with providing instructional strategies . . ."

It is clear that both models of delivery focused on the needs of Nebraska students and rose to the challenges of a changing Nebraska population. Regardless of the model, the STARS process is embedded in the daily routine of districts and teachers have risen to the challenge of improving student performance for all students.

**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE
Section 4: Research Studies**

**Study II: Perceptions of Elementary,
Middle, and High School Teachers**

I hope it's made me a better teacher. I've gone to different classes and that sort of thing, and the administration talks about assessments and standards, you think, OK, how can I incorporate that into what I'm doing and where am I not doing this? I need to find a way to do this. I mean, it just brings a clear picture to me of what I need to do. So, yes, it's definitely beneficial.

A High School Teacher



**Dr. Jody Isernhagen, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
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INTRODUCTION

This section will highlight the statistical or noteworthy findings of the major themes addressed by a 2004-05 survey and interview data analyzed during the 2005-2006 year. Surveys were administered to teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The significant findings were supported with quotes that were collected during the interviews for those items where quotes were available.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the perceptions of elementary, middle, and secondary teachers regarding total support, assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, and external support as well as to better understand how teachers at all levels were using STARS results in instruction.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed methods design was selected for use to strengthen the study results. The study began with a broad survey in order to generalize results to a large statewide population of educators at all levels. As a second step, open-ended interviews collected detailed views from a purposeful sample of educators based on geographic location, school district class, and the percentage of students above and below the state average of free/reduced lunch students. This selected group of participants was interviewed to help uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic findings from the survey and discover other pertinent understandings from the voices from the field.

Survey Sample

There were 495 school districts in the state at the time this study was conducted. Selection of sample school districts for the survey was based on a stratified purposeful sample using district class (Classes I-VI), geographical areas (East, Central and West), and free and reduced district lunch rate (high, middle, low based on statewide average). A total of 507 teachers responded to the STARS survey. A total of 154 elementary, 151 middle school, and 202 high school teachers responded to the STARS survey. Only the results from surveys conducted with elementary, middle, and secondary teachers were used.

One hundred twenty-six (126) teachers were male, 377 were female, and four (4) failed to indicate their gender. Of the total teacher group, 134 teachers had 0-10 years of experience, 143 had 11-20 years of experience, 152 had 21-30 years of experience, and 78 teachers had 31 or more years of experience.

Interview Sample

From the survey sample, researchers selected elementary, middle and high school teachers from nine districts in the East, seven districts in the Central, and eight districts in the Western part of the state. Sample districts that had been used previously were included first and then other schools were selected based on sampling criteria using district class (Classes I-VI), geographical areas (East, Central and West), and free and reduced district lunch rate (high, middle, low based on statewide average).

Instruments

The STARS survey was designed by the researchers to address recommendations based on previous studies conducted about the STARS process and to examine the areas of (1) Total Support, (2) Assessment Literacy, (3) Data, (4) Instructional Impact, and (5) External Support. Participants responded to the 46-item survey on a five-point Likert scale for each item, with “1” representing “none of the time,” “2” “very little of the time,” “3” “some of the time,” “4” “most of the time,” and “5” “all of the time.” Analysis of variance was used to compare mean scores of the survey data for the three teacher groups.

The STARS Research Interview Protocol consisted of demographic information and six major questions. These questions targeted the participants’ role in the assessment process, new learnings from their involvement, data to improve student performance, major obstacles faced in the implementation, next steps for better implementation, and the role of their district in the STARS process. Probes were identified for interviewers to use with each question. Interviewers were provided a STARS Interview Manual and received training to conduct the interviews.

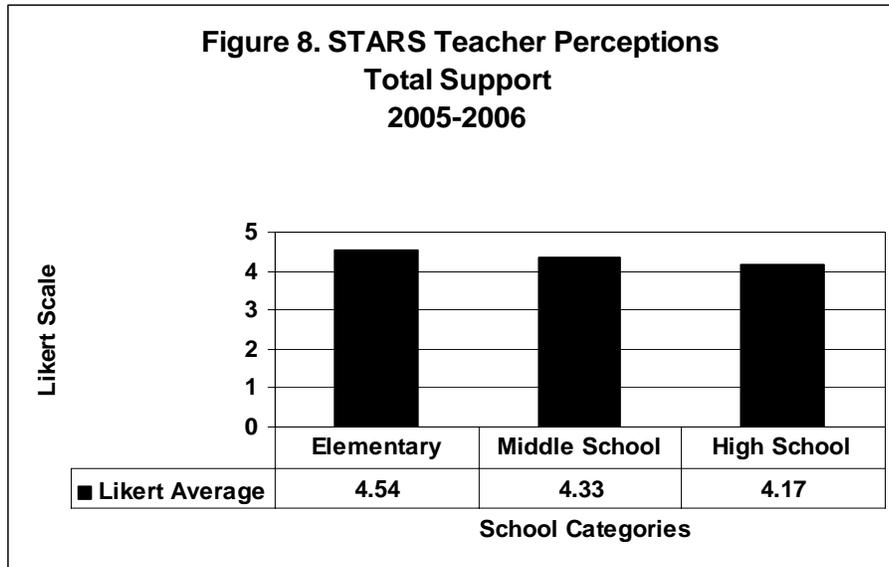
RESULTS

The survey and interviews supported the five themes examined on the survey and three additional themes emerged. The eight themes were: Total Support, Assessment Literacy, Data, Instructional Impact, External Support, Learning Opportunities for Students, STARS Challenges and Next Steps.

These themes helped to paint a portrait of the STARS process through the eyes of teachers as they grew in their knowledge of assessment, collection and interpretation of data, and the application of their new learnings in instruction.

Theme 1: Total Support

In the area of Total Support for all teachers, responses ranged from 3.96 to 4.61, with an average of 4.33, on a five-point Likert scale with “1” representing “none of the time” and “5” representing “all of the time.”



The strongest perception from all teachers indicated that district support was present for “school-based teacher-led assessment.”

Teachers also indicated a strong perception of the district’s provision of services that schools needed to implement STARS. In the area of Total Support, the perceptions of elementary and middle school teachers were significantly stronger than high school teachers on the district’s provision of services that schools needed to implement STARS.

A teacher at the elementary level emphasized:

- ◆ They take the recommendations from the teacher and then they allow or make provisions for you to go to the meetings, or whatever, to do the job with it.
- ◆ Our ESU, district, and school have been good support from beginning to end. I know the teachers, myself included, drug our feet at times. But in the long run, it's made us better teachers.

One middle school teacher indicated:

- ◆ They really are helpful. I feel that they help us just as much as they possibly can.

Elementary teachers were significantly stronger than middle and high school teachers in their districts providing on-going assessment training for teachers.

The value of on-going assessment training was shared by this elementary teacher:

- ◆ It's just been a learning process. I think that we've really grown from the first standards and aligning the curriculum compared to where we are now. I still think that it's going to be a learning process that we're going to constantly have to work on.

One middle school teacher expressed a different view by indicating:

- ◆ Well, I do think that STARS has been a good thing. I think the state probably doesn't want to hear this, but I think it would have been a lot easier for us if we just had a state test to begin with. We weren't that interested in creating our own assessments, but it's been a good learning process for us.

In all survey questions focused on Total Support, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle school and high school teachers. Middle school teachers were significantly stronger than high school teachers.

An elementary teacher said:

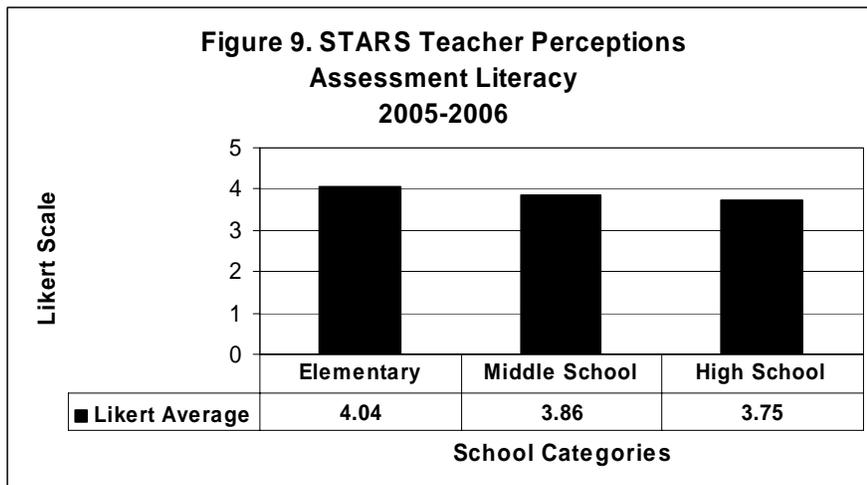
- ◆ It's really a good way to assess the state standards for math. I believe it is. And if we had just a bit more help with the bookkeeping part of it, I'd be fine with it.

One middle school teacher indicated:

- ◆ I think it better enabled me to prepare our students in proper instruction with the standards and address those standards.

Theme 2: Assessment Literacy
(Survey Questions 1-16)

In the area of Assessment Literacy, teacher perception responses ranged from 3.10 to 4.34, with an average of 3.87, on the five-point Likert scale with “1” representing “none of the time” and “5” representing “all of the time.”



Perceptions of teachers rated highest in administrative support of “school-based teacher-led assessment” and were strong in the school being involved in designing

assessment items for the district. All teacher perceptions were lowest in the selection of items from a common bank or pool.

In the area of Assessment Literacy, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in their perceptions for commitment to improving personal assessment competence.

An elementary teacher shared the value of STARS:

- ◆ Well, I've learned a lot. I've learned what good question techniques are, watching for the biases, and the value in just knowing what a good assessment looks like.

A middle school teacher stated:

- ◆ It gave me another way to focus what we work on in writing or listening skills or things like that. It gave me something to focus on instead of just hey, let's do this. It gave me a couple of clear things to kind of hone in on.

A secondary teacher shared:

- ◆ The process is good. And we need to be accountable. I mean, we have kids that are going everywhere in the United States and our school system in our state, we need to be accountable for that. We need to know that, when those kids graduate, they have had, not just exposed to, but know certain things. How else are you going to do that unless you have some sort of assessment?

In the area of Assessment Literacy, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in their perceptions of involving students in understanding their own progress and achievement.

An elementary teacher stated:

Having the kids be a part of the assessment I think is a great value. It's not just me writing up a test and this is how it is. Having the children involved in the process through developing a rubric.

A middle school teacher stated:

- ◆ For me, getting the assessment, collecting the data, working with cut scores . . . this whole idea of proficiency and looking at the entire body of the eighth graders, for instance, and seeing what percentage are failing and looking at the individual student and then reworking those assessments and how they fit the curriculum. I'm much better able to look when I see individual students and see which ones are struggling, I can better align my teaching, my lesson plans to that.

In the area of Assessment Literacy, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in their perceptions of their ability to design valid and reliable assessments.

An elementary teacher noted:

- ◆ I'd say everything. The whole process was very new to me. I've become a better test maker. I've learned more about how you have to have all four levels in your tests and you have to make sure you completely covered the standard in your testing. I've learned how to do reliability, how to collect data and use it to better myself next year and maybe do a rewrite on that test or whatever needs to be done. I've learned a lot.

When talking about designing tests, a middle school teacher said:

- ◆ Actually, just the whole overall process of making sure that the test is a fair test. Things like checking for bias, if it's at the right grade level, all those different aspects.

A secondary teacher shared the value of training:

- ◆ I created the questions for our local district. I went through all the training for Six Traits. I went to all the service unit meetings on these. I went through all the steps where we did the criteria to meet bias, grade level, and so forth. I revamped the questions. I wrote the 11th-grade portion of the first portfolio that we sent in by myself. The second time we had to do this when language arts went around, I reviewed the questions again, went through and tested my students, went through reliability and worked with our tech instructor to work on the portfolio.

In the area of Assessment Literacy, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in their perceptions of their district support for the growth of assessment literacy.

An elementary teacher indicated:

- ◆ Primarily the most important role in the classroom is scoring and assessing. I've also been a part of being on that district team that re-assesses. They like to have anybody . . . since I'm the one doing fourth-grade assessment scoring, they'll pull high school/junior high teachers to score those . . . my fourth-grade samples, and then also I've done the same in return for them. So I score other district math plus my own.

A middle school teacher noted:

- ◆ One thing that we tried to do when they decided to set up the assessments was to see what we were already doing and what assessments we had in place or what activities we had in place that could act as assessments. So with other English teachers, we had several meetings, went through our curriculum and came up with some assessments.

In the area of Assessment Literacy, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in their perceptions and participation in learning teams to improve assessment skills.

An elementary teacher served as a coach for other teachers and stated:

- ◆ I wasn't actively writing the assessments, but I was working with teams as they wrote their assessments. When they did the unpacking of a standard, we were to guide them through that process. Then when they started looking at what kind of questions or what type of an assessment they wanted to create, we were to provide input in terms of do you have enough questions at the progressive level, the proficient level, and the advanced level. Did you keep the big picture in mind? So I just kind of saw myself as a coach, not necessarily a writer myself.

In the area of Assessment Literacy, elementary teacher perceptions were significantly stronger than high school teachers in administrative support for "school-based teacher-led assessment;" teacher support for assessment; and district development of standards-based assessments for their school.

Elementary teachers reviewed the process of writing the STARS assessments:

- ◆ They got us together, helped us to understand how they were going to help us as far as using the computers, how that was going to speed everything up. But then they brought us up to code with everything that the state was going to want as far as making sure that we had gone through the proper steps, making sure that we had checked everything and rechecked it.
- ◆ I've learned a lot about writing tests. It has focused me on what students are learning, or what they should learn. If he doesn't learn it in first grade and he learns it in fourth, it's OK with me as long as he learns it.
- ◆ The value for me has been knowing how the tests were written, knowing what the value of the test was, and knowing when there have been some test questions that were not well written. We rewrote those questions, and we do this on a year-to-year basis.

A high school teacher believed they were supported by the district in the development of the STARS assessments:

- ◆ Our school really didn't have much direction when we first started. We didn't really understand what we had to do. So the first year we sent our portfolio in, it was probably pretty bad. Going to the service unit really was our lifesaver and they got us started.

In all survey questions focused on Assessment Literacy, elementary teachers' perceptions were significantly stronger than both middle school and high school teachers.

An elementary teacher noted:

- ◆ And it's just the experience of doing something completely new. You just have to keep doing it and learning about what works and what doesn't and just keep making changes.

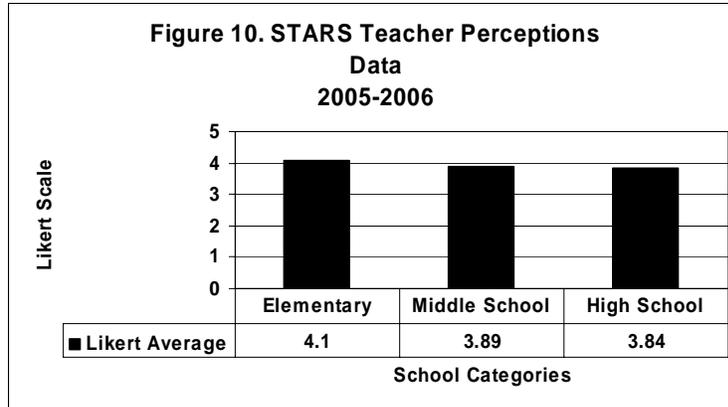
A middle school teacher indicated:

- ◆ I suppose if I were to pinpoint it, it would just be a broader understanding of the standards that have been passed down from the Nebraska Department of Education. And perhaps just to widen my spectrum on what needed to be addressed and taught in the classroom.

Theme 3: Data
(Survey Questions 17-22)

In the area of Data, teacher responses ranged from 3.08 to 4.55, with an average of 3.91, on the five-point Likert scale with "1" representing "none of the time" and "5" representing "all of the time."

Teacher perceptions rated highest in receiving assessment data in a format that allows for disaggregation at the district and school level. The lowest rating by teachers was the district scoring of STARS assessments for the school.



In the area of Data, the perceptions of elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in receiving assessment data in a format that allows for disaggregation by school, classroom, and student results.

An elementary teacher shared her means of tracking each student:

- ◆ We do put down whether students are receiving free or reduced lunch. We enter that data for each student and we also indicate whether they're receiving Title I or SPED help. So when the data comes back to us, we can see how students performed according to socioeconomic status or how they performed according to Title I or SPED status.

A middle school teacher noted how data is disaggregated and used:

- ◆ We usually sit down as a school and take a look at the data when it's disaggregated, see how socioeconomic status is affecting our scores or how gender or special ed, Title 1, how those are affecting our scores and see which populations we might need to focus on a little more.

High school teachers indicated a lack of attention to data:

- ◆ I don't pay a whole lot of attention to that. That's more of an administrative deal. I just look at the basic raw data that says as a group this is where we need to concentrate our efforts a little more. I don't say because it's free or reduced lunch, or because you're a girl, or because you have green hair, or because you have blue hair. I just go for the overall.
- ◆ I've looked at that but to be honest; I've never done anything with that. That's always been in the hands of either our administrator or our tech person.

Elementary teachers' perceptions were significantly stronger than high school teachers in the district providing recommendations for responding to assessment results.

An elementary teacher shared thoughts on record keeping:

- ◆ When we worked with our groups, we helped set up the scoring. We actually do the scoring and then we report it to the state at different times. I also report on the student's record. So we really don't keep those records in with their big file. We haven't done that yet. We keep it as a class, what the class has done.

A secondary teacher shared how data is used:

- ◆ If the kids who are not doing very well have been going to school here the whole time, then red flags go off. What's going on? That's the way I interpret it. I think I got that through our administrator because he started looking at it that way, too. So you kind of disaggregate it by kids that have been with you for a while versus those that just came.

In all survey questions focused on Data, elementary teachers' perceptions were significantly stronger than high school teachers.

Elementary teachers shared the value of using STARS data in the classroom:

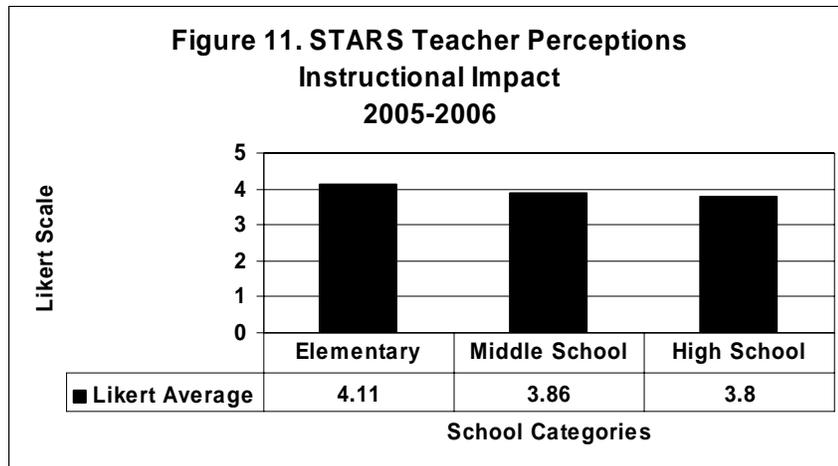
- ◆ I think STARS better enabled me to prepare our students in proper instruction with the standards and address those standards.
- ◆ We can't disaggregate it into individual students but, as a group, we look at free and reduced in our system and say this kid is free and reduced so we need to do more for them.

A secondary teacher indicated lack of knowledge about data:

- ◆ I guess I don't use the data. I did use my assessments, though. I shouldn't say when the data comes . . . I don't use numbers so much from a big group and I probably should, because I don't use standardized tests like I should, either. I admit that but when my students would take an assessment and then I would look at it, I would say, they really don't understand how to do this. So maybe we need to work on this.

Theme 4: Instructional Impact
(Survey Questions 23-35)

In the area of Instructional Impact, teacher responses ranged from 3.44 to 4.24, with an average of 3.92, on the five-point Likert scale with "1" representing "none of the time" and "5" representing "all of the time."



The strongest teacher perceptions were in reviewing units of study for alignment to state and local standards and instructional units being assigned to appropriate grade levels in the school. The lowest teacher responses were in teachers using rubrics in instruction since the inception of STARS.

In the area of Instructional Impact, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in developing clear and appropriate instructional targets based on assessment results.

An elementary teacher said:

- ◆ After I get the data back, I try to look at it for the next year. I find out what is it that we didn't master? What was it we really need to work on? And I try to improve my own curriculum for the following year by the results of what has happened the year before.

A middle school teacher noted how rubrics are used:

- ◆ And with the rubrics, it's really helpful because they really pinpoint exactly where we're lacking in our teaching and lacking in student growth, so we can really focus our emphasis on that.

In the area of Instructional Impact, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in lesson planning aligned with state standards.

An elementary teacher indicated:

- ◆ I look at them (lesson plans) and see what I could do better so the next time I present it I can use that to help me teach.

In the area of Instructional Impact, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in modifying instruction in cases where students did not perform well on an assessment.

An elementary teacher stated how assessment impacts instruction:

- ◆ I have a list and record the scores, and then I highlight and color code it. I know if we're all pink and blue I'm feeling pretty good. If we're green and orange, then I can go back over and reteach if it's the large group. If it's not, I can pull out a couple of people and reteach and just kind of go from there so it really does give me immediate feedback.

A middle school teacher said:

- ◆ I do keep track on index cards as to what they got on those, and if a student didn't do as well as what I thought, then we'll do a retake on it. Then what I do is I pass that information onto the eighth-grade teacher so that she knows how they did on it. If they want to take it again as an eighth grader, they have that opportunity depending on how well they did. But it kind of tells me where I might not have hit something as well as I thought I did, because a lot of times when you're doing a chapter test, it's just what was in that chapter.

In the area of Instructional Impact, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in sharing successful instructional strategies.

Elementary teachers shared ideas for improving student learning:

- ◆ Especially schools that have really been committed to Reading First training and they're looking K-6 at what things look like. They're taking advantage of the Title I program, moving it down to really concentrate a lot on those kids. We've got people wanting intervention program trainings. We've got people who want grouping

- trainings and co-teaching trainings to improve student achievement.
- ◆ Modeling is the best way that you can teach excellence to students. I mean, be proud.
 - ◆ You just have to approach everything clearly and more explicitly. You have to work really hard with these kids to get them to understand.

A middle school teacher said:

- ◆ If I have a substantial amount of kids that did not pass a standard, I'll go back and look at some of the questions that they missed and see if I should have presented my class material in a different format. Maybe do some additional kinds of activities to bolster their scores and their understanding.

In the area of Instructional Impact, elementary teachers were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in using assessment results as feedback to measure their teacher effectiveness.

Elementary teachers said:

- ◆ It's probably made me teach differently to different students. I'm aware of their reading levels. I'm thinking, okay, which student am I teaching to? Am I teaching to the sixth grade level or am I teaching to the second grade level? And I better vary what I'm asking or saying depending on which student I'm talking to.
- ◆ The data that we collect is like on each assessment. After we give the assessment, we rate the child as beginning, progressing, mastered or advanced. And using that information sometimes we should say it does give you a direction of what they need to learn again to have it mastered. It does help you see what you should work on for teaching.

Elementary teachers were also significantly stronger in integrating assessment into instruction to inform teaching and learning.

An elementary teacher indicated that they integrated assessment into instruction because:

- ◆ It tells me where I need to go. I can proceed on and add to it, keep building, or if I need to, go back and change. It tells me if I need to take a nucleus of kids and work with them while other kids are working on another skill so that I can get them caught up and ready to go.

A middle school teacher shared how they integrated assessment results to inform their teaching and learning:

- ◆ I'll look at a couple of things. I've got a pretty even split between boys and girls so I'll look at whether one gender did better than another. Maybe some of the title kids didn't do as well as others and I'd make some adjustments in my teaching based on that kind of stuff. Try to do more hands-on materials to kind of get it to stick in their minds a little better and use a wide variety of instructional methods.

Elementary teachers were also significantly stronger in measuring what students know and can do and using results of assessments to help identify student strengths and weaknesses.

Elementary teachers shared how assessment results are used:

- ◆ It gives me an idea did I hit everything real strong, or do I need to go back and change

how I teach writing to make sure that they're strong in all the areas.

- ◆ I look and see which assessments kids have the most trouble with. That's usually the ones that I like to start with so that I have a longer time to teach or re-teach it and that's why I say I'm getting better but I'm not there yet.

A middle school teacher said:

- ◆ I do take a grade for the ones that I really believe are beneficial. Then I teach those standards and I make sure that I give them credit for having learned that. We do have rubric ones as well for the ones that are—obviously writing and speaking, listening-based assessments. I utilize that information as well.

On the other, hand a secondary teacher stated:

- ◆ I don't much because of the time factor. After we test an assessment, I don't really have time to look through the individual questions. It's just a time factor. But I look at the general idea, and if there's something that they're really bombing out on, then I look at what we're doing to teach that. Am I addressing that? Is it something we missed? Making sure that I catch everything as we're teaching the material before they test on it is a struggle.

Elementary teachers were significantly stronger than high school teachers in establishing benchmarks for meeting state standards at each grade level.

An elementary teacher indicated:

- ◆ What I have appreciated most is it's really been beneficial for me to see where my first graders are and exactly what they need to be ready for second grade. So it's nice to know where the standards are and what process I need to be using to prepare my younger students. I'm looking ahead the whole time. I've appreciated knowing the direction I'm heading.
- ◆ I guess the major ones just for me being in the district is just the time element of it. It's gotten better, too, over time. We've been able to tweak, revise, and do things better and more efficiently.

Elementary teachers shared their apprehension about establishing and meeting benchmark standards:

- ◆ We always do a re-teach and then a retest but after that, if kids aren't passing, we really don't have any kind of program set up for the kids that aren't passing the standards. I know that has been a big topic that we've talked about for several years about what do we do with kids who aren't passing the standards, aren't meeting that proficiency level?
- ◆ What do we do with these children that aren't reaching the proficiency on the standards? I do think those are the students that we worry about; students that are not always able to read or that struggle in school. We need programs for them so that they're getting whatever help they need in order to help them be successful.

In all survey questions focused on Instructional Impact, elementary teachers' perceptions were significantly stronger than middle and high school teachers.

An elementary teacher said:

- ◆ I use rubrics that were developed by the six traits of writing as my assessment, especially at the very beginning of the year. Before I even give them the story, I give

them the rubric. We go over the rubric so that the kids know exactly what I will be looking for in their writing for whatever trait it is.

A middle school teacher indicated:

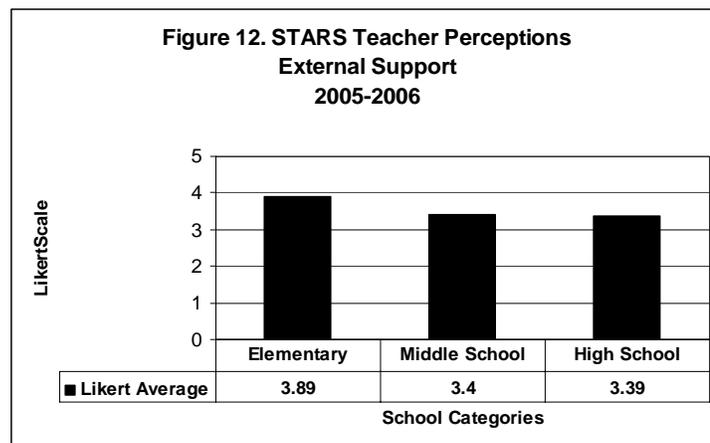
- ◆ I mean, whenever you get a bunch of teachers together, it's just like getting a bunch of coaches together. We discuss how we have taught different subjects, and how we handle teaching like the rubrics. So it's been kind of nice to say now, how did you handle this? How would you handle this type of thing and I think I know what I'm going to do now without driving us all crazy.

Secondary teachers shared concerns about retesting:

- ◆ Pretty much we report it the way it is and go on. I'm not sure how reliable or how accurate the test results would be if I gave the test today to somebody and then re-taught the lesson and then gave them the exact same test again. We don't have another test that could be given. They have just now said to us that if we feel like the student has progressed or has learned something more, that if a certain amount of time has elapsed and if you have re-taught the lesson, then you can retest them on the same test. I still have a problem with it being the same test.
- ◆ We've decided in our district that they can take the test twice, so if they do not get to the proficient level the first time, then we go back and re-teach concepts. Within a two-week period, we test them again. At that point, if they still have not reached the level, we seriously have to look at it as is this a student problem or is it a teacher problem.

Theme 5: External Support
(Survey Questions 36-42)

In the area of External Support, teacher responses ranged from 2.84 to 4.04, with an average of 3.56, on the five-point Likert scale with “1” representing “none of the time” and “5” representing “all of the time.” Teacher perceptions were strongest in Educational Service Units (ESU) providing on-going assessment training for teachers in their schools. The lowest area was the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) providing assessment training for teachers.



In all survey questions focused on External Support, elementary teachers’ perceptions were significantly stronger than middle and high school teachers.

In the area of External Support, elementary teachers' perceptions were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in the ESU providing on-going leadership and assessment training; providing data retreats and software for scoring, analyzing and reporting data.

Elementary teachers indicated how ESU's assisted them:

- ◆ I was sent to the ESU for training. I've been there several times. When we first started the standards, we didn't have much direction, so the ESU pretty well started us out on how to proceed with the process.
- ◆ It's kind of nice to have someone else help you develop a test. Our district doesn't have people that can do just strictly assessments, so our ESU helps us greatly with that.

Middle school teachers said:

- ◆ I suppose more training to make sure that we're doing it right. But then you'd have to find the time to train. Some of the questions still need to be revamped and trying to get everybody together at the same time and on the same page.
- ◆ I feel like I can call the ESU if I have a question or anything, and somebody will have an answer for me. And they've really helped us throughout the whole process.

A secondary teacher shared how support was given:

- ◆ Well, the ESU took us right from the very beginning. They went through the criteria with us and told us what each one of them meant. We went through how to tell if an assessment had bias. We had several speakers from the state department that came and gave presentations on standards.

In the area of External Support, elementary teachers' perceptions were significantly stronger than both middle and high school teachers in the NDE providing leadership and assessment training.

Elementary teachers expressed their appreciation for the support received from the NDE:

- ◆ I appreciate the fact that in our state we have the opportunity to develop assessments that are appropriate for our students and our curriculum within the umbrella of the particular standard.
- ◆ We tap into the STARS funding that comes from NDE and teachers can use it on any non-contract time to revise assessments, work on assessments, and those are done throughout the year.

A middle school teacher reflected on support received with STARS:

- ◆ I'd just like to say that I really didn't know what this was going to be about too much at the beginning but I think it's a good process for the state to go through because then they're going to get input from the people who are actually as they say, "in the trenches" for trying to get things done. And so coming and getting at least feedback from the teachers in the school, I think that's good.

A secondary teacher shared how the district received support:

- ◆ The district sent different people to these writing conferences and then had the departments get together. As far as the math department, we chose which assessments we wanted to use that were written across the state for our standards

assessment that we would turn into the Nebraska Department of Education.

Theme 6: Learning Opportunities for Students

The interviews generated many thoughts from teachers about the impact of STARS and the learning opportunities for students that were created. All teachers indicated that the opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do has been impacted by STARS.

Elementary teachers have great empathy for their students:

- ◆ Most of our students are interested in learning. They come to school with a good attitude. Now what happens to them when they're not here, it's kind of hard to say, but for the most part, we use our data to help us achieve better scores and to look at areas where we think we may have some weaknesses so we can shore those areas up for the tests.
- ◆ Some kids are at early developmental stages and weren't ready for anything beyond maybe beginning or progressing stages. With more instruction and another opportunity to take that assessment, they might score higher. The first year I think we were just so overwhelmed and we were trying our assessments for the first time. We kind of waited until the end of the year and then just ran out of time. Now we're doing a better job of giving students more of an opportunity to learn.

Teachers believed that they have become better learners themselves and, in turn, have helped their students become better learners through a variety of ways.

Elementary teachers shared their thoughts about what they had learned and the impact upon their students:

- ◆ I think the value of STARS is that it definitely enabled me to be a better teacher for the children. I had all these teaching tools and knew of great ways to teach children but never had great ways to assess children. So just through learning about assessment and also having the kids be a part of that assessment, I think STARS has been of great value. Also, it's not just me writing up a test and saying this is how it is. It's having the children involved in the process.
- ◆ It's made me a better teacher. It's opened my eyes that what you learned in college was great. You don't have to follow that. Every teacher teaches in a different style. Use that to your benefit. Understand that you have to change some to meet different learning styles as well. I love to use humor and approach kids and get an understanding between us; I have to build a good working relationship with them to be successful.

Input from a secondary teacher emphasized that we have raised the expectations for students:

- ◆ The standards that were written are very complex and at a very high level of learning which probably isn't in my mind exactly what we need to have for standards. It's almost set the bar for the excellent student rather than for the average student and I understand that standards are to push every student. But I think some of them are a little bit too high, for even the average student. That would be one of the things that I've realized. We try to push students but sometimes we can't push them past their abilities.

Giving all students an opportunity to learn was one of the Nebraska six quality criteria.

As teachers have become more confident in their own ability to assess students, it is becoming evident that assessment results are being used to make instructional decisions to benefit all students.

Theme 7: STARS Challenges

Providing quality education for all Nebraska students continues to challenge the STARS assessment system. As Nebraska's student portraits change and evolve with the new century, educators speak of those changes. Perhaps A. E. Stevenson, (2005) said it best, "We can chart our future clearly and wisely only when we know the path which has led to the present (p. 60)."

Elementary teachers shared concerns about time:

- ◆ Finding time to not only assess the kids but also recording everything. Even though I send the writing tests to get scored, when they come back I have to record all that data and then we have several different places where we need to record that. Whatever the state is asking for we record it there, plus our district asks for us to record it and then we have parent things that we send. So there's lots of time that we don't have needed for recording.
- ◆ As a benchmark teacher, I know that's how my day is spent. Other teachers that aren't in the standards as much as fourth grades are, they have the time to do their grades and do their bulletin boards in their room. So it always feels like we're just constantly running, running, running, trying to do the assessment things. I just know that I would like to have more time to do those things and for them to be done on school time.

Middle school teachers also voiced concerns about time:

- ◆ It would be nice to have some time within my scheduled day to do some of that grading, finding the cut scores, compiling that, or getting organized so that I can report it in an organized manner.
- ◆ It works pretty well as far as what we're doing right now. Getting all the things in has really compacted the learning. We crunch more in than we ever used to.

One secondary teacher admitted that probably one of the biggest obstacles is change by stating:

- ◆ The most difficult one is just that people don't like change and it's hard to get everybody on board and agree with it. Just from my standpoint that's what I see as the biggest overall is just people don't like to change.

Elementary, middle and secondary teachers appear frustrated by the challenges of low achievers and special education student performance:

- ◆ If you have a group of low achievers in a small class and maybe four of them are SPED or really low Title students, you can still be doing your job and they can be performing to the very best of their ability but those numbers just shoot the bottom out of what it looks like you're doing.

Nebraska's STARS has eliminated many obstacles and challenges over the last five years, but time remains an issue for all educators.

Theme 8: Next Steps

Creating a culture of improvement is an ongoing challenge. Using assessment results as a means to improve Nebraska students' academic achievement continues to provide portraits of improvements.

A middle school teacher indicated that they had been focused on the markers along the way rather than seeing the big picture:

- ◆ I've learned a lot and in talking with the superintendent and such, I said, 'Oh, now I'm starting to get it. We're all driving toward this goal, but I didn't see the goal. I was too focused on the individual yard markers.' So I'm learning to look down the road . . . long-term vision. I'm planning for long-term, not just for the week or the year.

All elementary, middle and secondary teachers indicated that important next steps are needed for working with students in special populations:

- ◆ We don't have a list of the accommodations that some of the SPED students needed, and so it's tough for us.

A secondary teacher stated concerns about assessing high school students:

- ◆ From the assessor's point of view and from the kids' point of view, we have many kids that miss so many days. I know as a person who gives the tests that I have to spend a lot of time going back and catching kids out of other classes to get them caught up. If a kid is gone and misses a skill that you're working on a particular day, it's really hard to go back and get him caught up.

Mobility is another factor in assessing the standards for all grade levels that needs to be considered:

- ◆ One of the problems we face is mobility. I have a class of 11 and out of that class of 11, I've had five that have gone to school someplace else this year. That's a hard thing to test for and to be responsible for. When I started the year with six kids and then I have five new ones and some that have left and come back and it just sometimes gets to be a nightmare. What do I do with what I've got? Do I forward that to the other school or do I make them responsible for the assessment, or when somebody comes in and is starting late, and we're already done several of our assessments. What do I do? How do I get him caught up?

Finding time for continuous training is critical to the continuance of a culture of assessment success:

- ◆ You always need to upgrade things. We're always changing from year to year on what was done the year before, and I don't see any continuity. Does that make any sense? We're constantly breaking the chain.

All teachers were concerned that appropriate communication be given to the public:

- ◆ Pretty positive! I hope the results of STARS and the reporting to the public can be interpreted the way it should be interpreted. Sometimes I think we just throw out there that a district isn't proficient in something. Is there an explanation as to why? It isn't just a black and white issue.
- ◆ My gut feeling is that I'd like to see our report card the way that we show the community and the patrons, the parents, that we're assessing their children. I'd like to see that become aligned with the assessments. We've got these assessments.

They're criterion referenced. They're unique to our district and yet they fulfill the state standards. And then we have this report card that comes out of post-World War II . . . A, B, C, D, and so I guess we need some real training on how to do this. Pull out the stops, bring in the people, and give us time and show us how we can align our overall recording and assessment of the students with the standards. Then I think we've reached the top. I mean, we really have something working.

DISCUSSION

It is encouraging to see that all Nebraska teachers are aware of the STARS process and understand its far-reaching effects on their districts. Elementary teachers were stronger in all categories on the survey than their middle and high school counterparts. They perceived themselves to be more assessment literate, better able to use data to impact instruction and more strongly supported for the implementation of STARS. As one elementary teacher said, "You just have to approach everything clearly and more explicitly. You have to work really hard with these kids to get them to understand."

Middle school teachers' perceptions were stronger than high school teachers in all survey areas as well. While the differences were smaller, they did exist especially in the areas of instructional impact as shared by this middle school teacher, "If I have a substantial amount of kids that did not pass a standard, I'll go back and look at some of the questions that they missed and see if I should have presented my class material in a different format."

Teachers supported the call to provide opportunities for students to improve academic achievement as stated by this elementary teacher, "I think the value of STARS is that it definitely enabled me to be a better teacher for the children. I had all these teaching tools and knew of great ways to teach children but never had great ways to assess children. . . ."

Challenges and next steps for the STARS process still remain in the hearts of all educators. They expressed frustration with time to get everything completed in a teaching day, week, or year. Frustration with changing demographics and the need for the general public to understand the needs of special populations was expressed by this educator, "If you have a group of low achievers in a small class and maybe four of them are SPED or really low Title students, you can still be doing your job and they can be performing to the very best of their ability but those numbers just shoot the bottom out of what it looks like you're doing."

Next steps entail the use of assessment results in instruction at the classroom level for all students including special populations. Meeting the challenges of mobility within and across districts continued to be an issue for teachers, and redesigning a report card to reflect the results of STARS also appeared to be important to teachers. As one teacher shared, ". . . STARS is the way we do business . . ."

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**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE
Section 4: Research Studies**

**Study III: Portraits of Reading and Math
Achievement**



**A Portrait of 2001 to 2005 Reading and Math Achievement
Grades 4, 8, and 11**

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INTRODUCTION

When confronted with No Child Left Behind and Average Yearly Progress requirements, every state but Nebraska decided to use norm referenced or state developed high-stakes measures. In a search for evidence of the positive effects of high-stakes tests on student achievement, Stiggins (2004) found only one study with small gains. Nebraska's School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) is identified by the Partnership for the 21st Century Skills (2005) as "...the nation's most innovative assessment system" (p.13). STARS is being watched closely by national audiences, but most importantly, it is described by a Nebraska school leader as "one of the best things we've done in my 25 years in education."

Nebraska's STARS system requires each district to either adopt state standards or develop local standards that are at least equal to or exceeds the state standards. Each district then develops a plan for assessing their standards. The plan is based primarily on locally developed criterion referenced tests (CRT's), which are, therefore, unique to that district. STARS is reported at fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades. Additionally, districts report for Average Yearly Progress (AYP) at grades 3-8 and one year in high school. Districts are also required to administer a standardized norm referenced test (NRT) of their choosing (e.g., Terra Nova, Stanford Achievement Test) which provides an external common "touch point," and parts of which may also be used to assess some standards.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine STARS data available to date, three years each in reading and math. It is a “snapshot” of the percentage of students in Nebraska school districts demonstrating proficiency in these areas. The report includes locally developed criterion referenced data, norm referenced data, District Assessment Portfolio data, and quotes from interviews with stakeholders. The research questions were:

1. What was the district average percent of students rated as proficient or advanced in reading on their locally developed criterion referenced measure and the norm referenced measure used in that district for 2001, 2003, and 2005 (the three years tested to date for reading)?
2. What changes occurred in the district average percent of students rated as proficient in the criterion and norm referenced data in reading over these years?
3. What was the district average percent of students rated as proficient in math on their locally developed criterion referenced measure and the norm referenced measure used in that district for 2002, 2004, and 2005 (the three years tested to date for math)?
4. What changes occurred in the district percentage of students rated as proficient or advanced in the criterion referenced and norm referenced data in math over these years?
5. What was the average rating for the District Assessment Portfolios in reading and math over the three years of data available?
6. What changes occurred in District Assessment Portfolios in reading and math over these years?
7. What were the implications for the STARS program?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Districts Included

Data were included for all Nebraska Class 3, 4, and 5 school districts. Class 3 school districts are represented by any school district with territory having a population of more than 1000 but less than 150,000 inhabitants. Class 4 school districts (Lincoln only) with a territory having a population of 100,000 or more with a city of the primary class (between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants). Class 5 school districts (Omaha only) with a territory having a population of 200,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the metropolitan class (over 300,000 inhabitants) within the territory (Nebraska Education Directory, 2004-2005). The districts in this study represented just over 94% of the public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and cooperation for use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education.

Score Definitions

The criterion referenced score used was the district average percent of students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local district for their locally developed measure. The norm referenced score is the district average percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles on the nationally standardized test used by that district (e.g., California Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Terra Nova). While the norm referenced measure used will vary, the data reported (percent of students in the top two quartiles) is constant for all districts.

Since tests used to measure standards are a mix of locally developed criterion referenced measures and may include sections of district specific norm referenced tests, there are few

common measures to all districts. It must be remembered that STARS was designed to support instruction in local classrooms, not to facilitate ranking of schools. This strong reliance on district developed criterion referenced measures challenges traditional validity and reliability views. Therefore, the primary measure of credibility for assessments is a District Assessment Portfolio that is submitted annually to the Nebraska Department of Education.

The Portfolio includes school district ratings on six Quality Criteria that were identified by the Buros Center for Testing (Plake & Impara, 2000), the technical advisors to the STARS program. The Quality Criteria include: 1) the assessment matches the standards, 2) the students have the opportunity to learn, 3) the assessment has been reviewed for bias and sensitivity, 4) the assessment is at the appropriate level, 5) the assessment is reliably scored, and 6) the mastery levels have been appropriately set. Portfolios are rated by an independent measurement expert specifically trained in the rubrics of each of the six Quality Criteria. The Buros Institute also arranges for a panel of external reviewers comprised of professionals with an earned doctorate in educational measurement to complete a rating of district portfolios. The rubric-based ratings on each criterion provide the basis for an overall rating. The overall rating scale ranges from “1,” unacceptable, to “5,” exemplary.

A survey and follow-up interviews were conducted as a part of the STARS evaluation. Quotes from various stakeholders in that process are included in this paper.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the composite of class 3, 4, and 5 school district average scores in Nebraska. Based on the fact that criterion referenced scores are unique for each district, norm referenced scores vary with the standardized test used by each district, and District Assessment Portfolio ratings are based largely on the criterion referenced measures; the data is described as unconventional. Traditional inferential statistics, therefore, were not appropriate. Descriptive data were reported and discussed.

RESULTS

STARS Reading Achievement

As shown in Table 1, the district average percent of student scores reported by districts as proficient or better in locally defined criterion referenced reading at the fourth grade-level increased from 74.99% in 2001, to 79.39% in 2003 and 87.20% in 2005. The district average percent proficient for the eighth-grade level increased from 73.67% in 2001, to 74.78% in 2003, and 84.49% in 2005. The district average percent proficient at eleventh-grade level increased from 73.54% in 2001, to 74.74% in 2003, and 82.26% in 2005.

Table 1

Percent Proficient or Higher (Change) on Criterion Referenced Tests in Reading^a

Grade.	2001	2003	2005	Total Change
4	74.99%	79.39% (+ 4.40)	87.20% (+ 7.81)	+ 12.21%
8	73.67%	74.78% (+ 1.11)	84.49% (+ 9.71)	+ 10.82%
11	73.54%	74.74% (+ 1.20)	82.26% (+ 7.52)	+ 8.72%

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

Proficiency on criterion referenced measures increased at all grade levels each year; the average district gain from 2001 to 2005 was 12.21% at fourth grade, 10.82% at eighth grade, and 8.72% at eleventh grade.

Table 2 reports the district average percent of students in the top two quartiles on the norm referenced reading test used by districts at the fourth grade increased from 64.93% in 2001, to 66.75% in 2003, and to 67.59% in 2005. The eighth grade declined from 62.85% in 2001, to 62.56% in 2003, and increased to 63.01% in 2005. The eleventh grade increased from 59.87% in 2001, to 61.44% in 2003, and 63.67% in 2005. Proficiency, as determined by the percent of students in districts in the top two quartiles on norm referenced measures, also increased from 2001 to 2005. At the fourth grade the gain was + 2.66%, eighth grade was + .16%, and eleventh was + 3.80%.

Table 2
Percent Proficient or Higher (Change) on Norm Referenced Tests in Reading^a

Grade	2001	2003	2005	Total Change
4	64.93%	66.75% (+ 1.82)	67.59% (+ 0.84)	+ 2.66%
8	62.85%	62.56% (- 0.29)	63.01% (+ 0.45)	+ 0.16%
11	59.87%	61.44% (+ 1.57)	63.67% (+ 2.23)	+ 3.80%

^a Percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

STARS Math Achievement

As shown in Table 3, the district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient or better in locally defined criterion referenced math at the fourth grade-level increased from 78.29% in 2002, to 85.16% in 2004 and 89.00% in 2005. The district percent proficient at eighth-grade level increased from 68.58% in 2002, to 75.34% in 2004, and 80.27% in 2005. The district percent proficient at eleventh-grade level increased from 66.22% in 2002, to 72.20% in 2004, and 76.24% in 2005. Proficiency in criterion referenced measures increased at all grade levels each year, the gain from 2002 to 2005 was + 10.71% at fourth grade, + 11.69% at eighth grade, and + 11.02% at eleventh grade.

Table 3
Percent Proficient or Higher (Change) on Criterion Referenced Tests in Math^a

Grade	2002	2004	2005	Total Change
4	78.29%	85.16% (+ 6.87)	89.00% (+ 3.84)	+ 10.71%
8	68.58%	75.34% (+ 6.76)	80.27% (+ 4.93)	+ 11.69%
11	66.22%	72.20% (+ 6.98)	76.24% (+ 4.04)	+ 11.02%

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

Table 4 reports the district average percent of students in the top two quartiles on the norm referenced math test used by districts at the fourth grade increased from 68.12% in 2002, to 71.31% in 2004, and 72.05% in 2005. The eighth grade declined from 67.34% in 2002, to 66.67% in 2004, and increasing to 73.67% in 2005. The eleventh grade increased from 67.49% in 2002, to 67.90% in 2004, and declined to 67.13% in 2005. Proficiency, as determined by the district percent of students in the top two quartiles on norm referenced measures, increased for fourth and eighth grades from 2001 to 2005. The fourth grade gain was + 3.93% and eighth grade was + 6.33%. The eleventh grade declined by -.36%.

Table 4

Percent Proficient or Higher (Change) on Norm Referenced Tests in Math^a

Grade	2002	2004	2005	Total Change
4	68.12%	71.31% (+ 3.19)	72.05% (+ 0.74)	+ 3.93%
8	67.34%	66.67% (- 0.67)	73.67% (+ 7.0)	+ 6.33%
11	67.49%	67.90% (+ 0.41)	67.13% (- 0.77)	- 0.36%

^a Percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

District Assessment Portfolio Ratings

As reflected in the last row of Table 5, the total district average of Reading Assessment Portfolio ratings across grades four, eight, and eleven, on the “1” to “5” Likert scale increased from 3.50 in 2001 to 4.35 in 2003 and 4.55 in 2005 with a total increase of 1.05 from 2001 to 2005. The total district average of Math Assessment Portfolio rating across grades four, eight and eleven increased from 3.97 in 2002 to 4.74 in 2004 and decreased to 4.61 in 2005 with a total increase of .64 from 2002 to 2005.

Table 5

Reading and Math District Average Portfolio Ratings (Gain/Loss) 2001-2005

Grade	Reading 2001	Reading 2003	Reading 2005	Reading Total Change	Math 2002	Math 2004	Math 2005	Math Total Change
4	3.57	4.34 (+.77)	4.55(+.15)	+ .98	3.98	4.67 (+.69)	4.57 (-.10)	+ .59
8	3.48	4.35 (+.87)	4.56(+.21)	+1.08	3.96	4.77 (+.81)	4.66 (-.11)	+ .70
11	3.46	4.35 (+.89)	4.55(+.20)	+1.09	3.96	4.77 (+.81)	4.60 (-.17)	+ .64
Total Dist Av Portfolio Rating (4, 8, 11)	3.50	4.35 (+.85)	4.55 (+.20)	+1.05	3.97	4.74 (+.77)	4.61 (-.13)	+ .64

DISCUSSION

District criterion referenced measures are showing good growth. The stronger growth in reading and math may be based on the extra year of training and experience that schools had with the process; ongoing longitudinal results will provide more information regarding this point. District norm referenced measures have generally increased, though not as strong. This has been a positive finding since there was concern from educators as to whether the attention focused on criterion referenced measures might result in a decline in traditional norm referenced measures. Independent professional ratings of assessment skills for staff revealed strong, consistent growth in the Quality Criteria identified as the backbone of the STARS system and essential for the programs credibility. One teacher commented “We have this great STARS system and I’ve got a good handle on what a good assessment looks like.”

Real school improvement with student academic achievement as the goal is not a short-term process. Nebraska is in the fifth year of STARS implementation and comments would indicate that we are still several years from full implementation of the program (e.g. getting all staff literate, adding other content areas). As one administrator commented, “I believe we will get there, but it will take a few more years.” A teacher said, “I go through and see what assessments kids had trouble with so I can do a better job ... I’m getting there but I’m not there yet.” It is clear that changing the paradigm to focus on data from criterion referenced measures impacting curriculum and instruction for academic student gain is a tall order and requires significant commitment, resources, and time.

But it is happening. As one teacher said “I use data to drive my instruction.” Another, “I have a record of scores, and then I color code them so I know where I need to go back and hit things again ... the immediate feedback really does help a lot.” Effective and efficient models for the implementation of the STARS model have been developed, are in use, and the data are positive. Ongoing evaluation has revealed concerns that have been addressed. Surveys and interviews of stakeholders revealed increasing assessment literacy and application. The STARS model fits into best practice for professional development, instruction, and assessment approaches to increase student achievement. The “front end” hard work is paying off, and we can see long-term gain as realistic. As one school leader summarized, “The overwhelming topics of discussion in Nebraska schools revolve around teaching and learning.”

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**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE
Section 4: Research Studies**

Study IV: Portraits of Writing Achievement

**A Portrait of 2002-2005 Nebraska's STARS Statewide
Writing Achievement**

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INTRODUCTION

With the emphasis on education to demonstrate increased achievement for all students and all schools to be accountable to their constituents, states have developed or adopted state mandated tests to assess student academic performance. Nebraska made a decision to implement a system of accountability that focuses upon building assessment literacy among educators as well as enhancing student performance. In the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS), districts first adopt local or state standards. Districts then submit an assessment plan that may include locally developed criterion referenced tests (CRTs) to assess the district's standards at the identified grade-levels. Districts may also choose to use items from their locally chosen norm referenced test (NRT) to assess some of their standards.

Based on previous involvement by a number of Nebraska school districts in the six trait writing model and the natural link of this criterion referenced approach with the emerging philosophy of Nebraska STARS, a requirement for a statewide writing assessment was included in the Legislation establishing Nebraska's assessment system. The merits or lack thereof of statewide writing assessments have been an area of some debate. Concerns include such areas as reducing writing to a formulaic approach and narrowing content in the teaching of writing and teacher time spent on scoring rather than instruction of writing (Hillock, 2003; Mabry, 1999).

Spandel and Stiggins (1997) looked at an important way to bridge the gap between large-scale assessment and classroom instruction in their discussion of large-scale assessments that enlisted classroom teachers as raters. They maintained that teachers, who assessed students' work in the large-scale setting, gave themselves an education both in how to write and how to assess. They further argued that teachers who participated as raters in large scale assessment gained a broader perspective of student writing from throughout a state or district, which was very different from seeing only the writing of their students. But they cited that the primary contribution large-scale writing assessment had made to writing instruction, with the exception of scoring criteria that promoted the reliability of scoring, was a higher expectation for student performance. They also maintained that a state writing assessment,

perhaps more than any other single stimulus prompted decision makers to ask important questions that they may not have asked before, questions that examined when, where, and how writing was being taught.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the district achievement data available for the Statewide Writing Assessment for the Nebraska STARS program. The research questions for this study were:

1. What was the district average percent of students rated proficient or better in grades four, eight, and eleven on the Nebraska Statewide Writing Assessment?
2. What were the changes over the years in the district average percent of students rated as proficient or better in district writing scores at grades four, eight, and eleven?
3. What were the teacher perceptions of the writing assessment?
4. What were the implications for the Nebraska STARS program?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Districts Included

Data was included for Class 3, 4, and 5 school districts. Class 3 school districts are represented by any school district with territory having a population of more than 1000 but less than 150,000 inhabitants. Class 4 school districts (Lincoln only) have a population of 100,000 or more with a city of the primary class (between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants). Class 5 school districts (Omaha only) have a population of 200,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the metropolitan class within the territory (Nebraska Department of Education Directory, 2004-2005). The districts in this study represented just over 94% of the public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and cooperation for use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

Statewide Writing Assessment Prompt Development

The process for development of writing prompts for use in the Statewide Writing Assessment relied on involvement of Nebraska classroom teachers who were selected by the NDE to participate in a writing development task force each year upon the recommendation of their district superintendent or assessment contact person. The task force consisted of three panels, each consisting of 10-15 teachers representing grades four, eight, and eleven from various school sizes and geographic regions. The task force was convened for a one-day workshop facilitated by the NDE for the purpose of:

- Reviewing the characteristics of mode-specific writing
- Learning the criteria for effective writing prompts
- Reviewing and examining areas of bias to be avoided
- Creating writing prompts for field testing

During the workshop, participants read and discussed examples of current research related to best practices in the teaching and assessment of student writing. In addition, participants read about and discussed criteria for effective writing prompts as well as issues related to bias that should be avoided when creating writing prompts. Participants also reviewed a number of

examples of writing prompts including those that had been used in previous Nebraska statewide writing assessments.

Statewide Writing Assessment Prompts Field Testing Process

From information gathered at the Writing Prompt Development workshop, school districts representing various sizes and geographical locations were selected to field test the writing prompts with students in grades four, eight, and eleven before the end of the current school year. Multiple prompts were field tested across multiple school districts.

Participants in the field-testing were at the appropriate grade-level and completed assessments according to standard administration procedures. The size of the student sample selected for the field-testing was adequate to provide responses sufficient for scoring and anchoring purposes. At the conclusion of the field-testing the NDE conducted a review to “fine-tune” the Statewide Scoring Assessment process.

Statewide Writing Assessment Assessors

Nebraska teachers were recruited by the NDE to score the writing assessment each year. The scorer qualifications included:

- (a) The teacher was currently teaching or had taught at or near the grade-level being assessed.
- (b) The teacher was familiar with student writing at the grade-level being assessed.
- (c) The teacher had basic knowledge of the six trait writing assessment model.

Statewide Writing Assessment Scoring Process

Scoring of the state assessment was held at a central location in the state and scorers came to the site for three days during which training and the scoring occurred. The scoring process of Nebraska’s Statewide Writing Assessment required each sample of student writing to be read and scored by two trained teacher raters who assigned a single holistic score within allowable ranges as prescribed by the rubric. The rubric criteria were identified as ideas and content, organization, voice or tone, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions as identified in the Nebraska Content Standards (NDE). Raters assigned a score based on how the writing met these criteria overall. If there was more than a two-point difference, a third scoring was done. The scoring range was from 1 to 4 in + and – intervals resulting in a 10 point scale. The final score was the composite of the two individual scores. The NDE contracts with the Buros Center for Testing to establish the statewide cut-score.

In the first three years, scoring was done at three sites across the state. To improve reliability, scoring is now done at one site. A sample was sent out of state for scoring by an independent contracted testing company. The Nebraska Department of Education released results for the statewide writing assessment and all Nebraska STARS assessments on their website each fall. Local district and individual school data shared included the district average percent of students meeting proficiency or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the district average percent of students rated as proficient in class 3, 4, and 5 school districts for the state of Nebraska in writing at grades four, eight, and eleven. While this statewide assessment took on some formal technical assessment characteristics that would more characterize norm referenced tests (statewide common administration and scoring, common cut-score) than many criterion referenced

assessments, it was clearly not a comparison with a separate norm group. Descriptive data was therefore reported and discussed. However, because the assessment was a common measure across districts and was an equal interval scale, inferential statistics were also used to examine statistical significance between pre/post scores from inception to last scoring. All significance tests were two-tailed.

RESULTS

Ratings of Writing Proficiency

Table 6 indicates that gains were made at nearly all grades and years of comparison. At fourth grade gains from 2002 to 2004, and 2004 to 2005, were significant ($p < .001$). At eighth grade, the gain from 2003 to 2005 was significant ($p < .001$); the gain from 2004 to 2005 was not significant. The gain in eleventh grade from 2004 to 2005 was significant ($p < .05$).

Table 6

Statewide Writing Assessment 2002-2005: Mean District Percent of Student Scores at the Proficient Level or Higher^a

Grade	2002	2003	2004	2005	Change 2005 vs. Baseline
4	76.50%		80.89% **	84.57% **	+8.07 [‡]
8		79.55%	85.44% **	86.31%	+6.76 [‡]
11			89.22%	91.02% *	+1.80 [‡]

* $p < .05$ compared to the previous year ** $p < .001$ compared to the previous year

[†] $p < .05$ compared to the baseline year [‡] $p < .001$ compared to the baseline year

Note: 2002, 2003, and 2004 were baseline years for grades 4, 8, and 11 respectively

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

Teacher Perceptions

In “Charting STARS – Sustainability as Challenge and Opportunity,” Gallagher (2003) reported the results of a second year of a research study and comprehensive evaluation of Nebraska’s School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting system (STARS). Among the major findings of the analyses of a survey administered to teachers on their perceptions and classroom practices related to the state writing assessment were that 69% of all teachers placed more emphasis on practice writing assessments, 73% placed more emphasis on sharing assessment criteria in class, and 73% placed more emphasis on explicit instruction in six trait writing.

In addition to these findings, Gallagher (2003) reported that 88% of teachers agreed or agreed strongly that the six traits scoring rubric used to score the state writing assessment was useful for instruction; 75% agreed or strongly agreed that the state writing assessment supported learning objectives they have for their students; 72% agreed or strongly agreed that the results of the state writing assessment were useful for teachers; and 65% agreed or strongly agreed that the six traits were the most important features of writing.

DISCUSSION

Fourth and eighth grades made significant gains in the first pre/post score comparisons on the Nebraska STARS Statewide Writing Assessment. This was very positive for the STARS process and indicated strong support for continuation of the program. It was interesting to note a difference in the two language arts measures. Reading, which was the first area to be

tested in 2001 and 2003, revealed strong gains at fourth grade, but only a slight gain at eighth grade. This writing data, fourth grade comparing data from 2002 to 2004, and eighth grade comparing data from 2003 to 2004, revealed strong gains at both grades. Gains in math were also strong for both fourth and eighth grades from 2002 to 2004. This may reflect the history of many school districts involvement with six trait writing preceding the formal statewide assessment process, and/or growing sophistication of staff over the years with the Nebraska STARS process.

Implications for Nebraska STARS

These findings provide an initial base of support for the STARS process and, along with the gains in reading and math, strong credibility for the process and its continuation.

The very nature of STARS and the assessments used presents challenges to the evaluation process. There is a need to work with the educational measurement community to examine new ways to determine the success of the model. While criterion referenced approaches such as STARS are strongly supported by the measurement community from a standpoint of student learning, little has been done to support the acceptance of what is referred to as unconventional data as evidence of school success. While this writing assessment has technical characteristics that enable inferential statistics to be used in analysis, there may be some question from the traditional measurement community concerning this practice. Reading and math data are more clearly criterion referenced (specific to each district, not scored on a common metric) and descriptive analysis only was used in those comparisons. It must be remembered that the philosophy and purpose of Nebraska STARS is to support teaching and learning, not to focus on development of assessments for technical strengths in ranking results.

Much more work is needed in continuing to examine longitudinal results and the impact of refinements and corrections. As Nebraska educators problem-solve concerns and issues, the program continues to evolve. One of the biggest challenges will be the ongoing effort to work with the United States Department of Education to ensure the STARS program will allow Nebraska to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements.

This study supported the continuation of the Statewide Writing Assessment as part of the Nebraska STARS system. As noted by Roschewski, Gallagher, and Isernhagen (2001), the STARS plan brings together the best of both worlds; student learning is foremost, but public accountability is provided as well. While avoiding the “unintended negative outcomes” of high-stakes assessments, STARS places the responsibility of teaching and learning where it belongs at the classroom level. The teachers and administrators who create high quality learning environments are directly involved in affirming the quality and in measuring the learning of students in their classrooms.

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**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE
Section 4: Research Studies**

**Study V: Portraits of Achievement for Special
Populations**

A Portrait of 2001-2005 Achievement for Special Populations

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INTRODUCTION

A key component of No Child Left Behind is to demonstrate increased academic achievement for all students. States have taken different approaches to accomplish this end. Nebraska has built a School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS), which requires Nebraska School Districts to develop a local assessment system to measure student performance on local standards. There is no single high-stakes test. The STARS has been in place for five years and has a strong success record with total group data (Roschewski, Isernhagen, & Dappen, 2006).

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic change of special populations, in this case, English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students. The questions for this study were:

1. What were the changes in district average percent of students rated as proficient or higher in reading on their locally developed criterion referenced tests for ELL and SPED students?
2. What were the changes in district average percent of students rated as proficient or higher in math on their locally developed criterion referenced tests for ELL and SPED students?
3. What were the changes in district average percent of students rated as proficient or higher in writing on the statewide criterion referenced writing assessment for ELL and SPED students?
4. What were the implications to the Nebraska STARS program from these findings?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Districts Included

Data were included for Class 3, 4, and 5 school districts. Only those districts that had data for ELL and SPED were included. Class 3 school districts are represented by any school district with territory having a population of more than 1000 but less than 150,000 inhabitants. Class 4 school districts (Lincoln only) with a territory having a population of 100,000 or more with a city of the primary class (between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants). Class 5 school districts (Omaha only) with a territory having a population of 200,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the metropolitan class (over 300,000 inhabitants) within the territory (Nebraska Education Directory, 2004-2005). The district data for this study were included on the state website and cooperation for use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education.

Score Definitions

The criterion referenced score (CRT) for reading and math was the district average percentage for ELL and SPED students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local district for their locally developed measure in class 3, 4, and 5 school districts for the state of Nebraska.

The criterion referenced score (CRT) for writing was the district average percent of ELL and SPED students rated as proficient in class 3, 4, and 5 school districts for the state of Nebraska in writing at grades four, eight, and eleven. Because the assessment was a common measure across districts and was an equal interval scale, inferential statistics were also used to examine statistical significance between pre/post scores from inception to last scoring.

Data Analysis

Criterion referenced scores for reading and math were unique for each district, therefore, not on a common scale and did not support common and inferential statistics. Descriptive data only was reported and discussed for reading and math.

The writing assessment was a common measure across districts and was an equal interval scale, inferential statistics were used to examine statistical significance between pre/post scores in writing. All significance tests were two-tailed.

RESULTS

STARS Achievement for English Language Learners

ELL Reading Achievement

The district average percent of English Language Learners (ELL) reported as proficient or higher in locally defined criterion referenced assessments for reading at the fourth grade level decreased from 50% in 2001 to 49% in 2003, and increased to 67% in 2005. Proficiency on reading criterion referenced measures increased 17% from 2001 to 2005 as shown in Table 7.

The district average percent of ELL scores for eighth grade students decreased from 47% in 2001 to 42% in 2003 and rose to 57% in 2005. Proficiency on reading criterion referenced measures for eighth grade ELL students increased 10% from 2001 to 2005 as also shown in Table 7.

The district average percent of ELL scores for eleventh grade students decreased from 45% in 2001 to 32% in 2003 and rose to 47% in 2005. Proficiency on reading criterion referenced measures for eleventh grade ELL students increased 2% from 2001 to 2005.

Therefore, the district average percent for ELL students dropped from the first year (2001) to the second year (2003) for all grade levels but increased from 2001-2005.

Table 7

District Average Reading Criterion Referenced Assessments English Language Learners (ELL) 2001-2005^a (District Sample Size – Number of districts reporting from population)

ELL Grade	District Mean Percent Proficient			Change in District Mean Percent Proficient		
	2001	2003	2005	2001-03	2003-05	2001-05
4	50% (33)	49% (50)	67% (57)	-1%	+18%	+17%
8	47% (27)	42% (44)	57% (51)	-5%	+15%	+10%
11	45% (18)	32% (34)	47% (38)	-13%	+15%	+2%

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

All percentages were rounded to whole percents.

ELL Math Achievement

The district average percent of English Language Learners (ELL) reported as proficient or better in locally defined criterion referenced assessments for math at the fourth grade level increased from 53% in 2002 to 70% in 2004, and increased to 72% in 2005. Proficiency on math criterion referenced measures increased 19% from 2002 to 2005 as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

District Average Math Criterion Referenced Assessments English Language Learners (ELL) 2002-2005^a (District Sample Size - Number of districts reporting from population)

ELL Grade	District Mean Percent Proficient			Change in District Mean Percent Proficient		
	2002	2004	2005	2002-04	2004-05	2002-05
4	53% (42)	70% (53)	72% (57)	+17%	+2%	+19%
8	40% (34)	43% (47)	59% (51)	+3%	+16%	+19%
11	39% (27)	48% (37)	51% (38)	+9%	+3%	+12%

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

All percentages were rounded to whole percents.

The district average percent of ELL scores for eighth grade students increased from 40% in 2002 to 43% in 2004 and increased to 59% in 2005. Proficiency on math criterion referenced measures for eighth grade ELL students increased 19% from 2002 to 2005 as also shown in Table 8.

The district average percent of ELL scores for eleventh grade students increased from 39% in 2002 to 48% in 2004 and finally to 51% in 2005. Proficiency on math criterion referenced measures for eleventh grade ELL students increased 12% from 2002 to 2005.

ELL Writing Achievement

The district average percent of English Language Learners (ELL) reported as proficient or better on the state criterion referenced assessment for writing at the fourth grade level increased from 49% in 2002 to 52% in 2004, and 64% in 2005. Proficiency on the state writing criterion referenced measure increased 15% from 2002 to 2005. These increases were not statistically significant. This is shown in Table 9.

The district average percent of ELL scores for eighth grade students increased from 37% in 2003 to 56% in 2004 and 60% in 2005. Proficiency on the state writing criterion referenced measure for eighth grade ELL students increased 23% from 2003 to 2005 as also shown in Table 9. This increase was statistically significant ($p < .01$). The district average percent of ELL scores for eleventh grade students decreased from 45% in 2004 to 44% in 2005. This decrease was not statistically significant.

Table 9

District Average Writing Criterion Referenced Assessments English Language Learners (ELL) 2002-2005^a (District Sample Size - Number of districts reporting from population)

ELL Grade	District Mean Percent Proficient				Change in District Mean Percent Proficient			
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2002-04	2003-04	2004-05	2005 Vs. Baseline Year
4	49% (50)		52% (61)	64% (56)	+3%		+12%	+15%
8		37% (48)	56% (63)	60% (56)		+19% *	+4%	+23% **
11			45% (55)	44% (47)			-1%	-1%

* $p < .05$ compared to the previous year ** $p < .01$ compared to the previous year *** $p < .001$ compared to the previous year

♦ $p < .05$ compared to the baseline year ♦♦ $p < .01$ compared to the baseline year ♦♦♦ $p < .001$ compared to the baseline year

Note: 2002, 2003, and 2004 were baseline years for grades 4, 8, and 11 respectively

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

All percentages were rounded to whole percents.

STARS Achievement for Special Education Students

SPED Reading Achievement

The district average percent of Special Education (SPED) Students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion referenced assessments for reading at the fourth grade level increased from 44% in 2001 to 52% in 2003, and to 67% in 2005. Proficiency of SPED fourth grade students on reading criterion referenced measures increased 22% from 2001 to 2005 as shown in Table 10.

The district average percent of SPED eighth grade students remained the same from 2001 to 2003 (43%) and increased to 59% in 2005. Proficiency on reading criterion referenced

measures for eighth grade SPED students increased 16% from 2001 to 2005 as also shown in Table 10.

The district average percent of SPED scores for eleventh grade students decreased from 42% in 2001 to 37% in 2003 and increased to 54% in 2005. Proficiency on reading criterion referenced measures for eleventh grade SPED students increased 12% from 2001 to 2005.

Therefore, the district average percent for SPED students increased for all grade levels from 2001-2005.

Table 10

District Average Reading Criterion Referenced Assessments Special Education (SPED) Students 2001-2005^a (District Sample Size - Number of districts reporting from population)

SPED Grade	District Mean Percent Proficient			Change in District Mean Percent Proficient		
	2001	2003	2005	2001-03	2003-05	2001-05
4	44% (169)	52% (190)	67% (201)	+8%	+15%	+23%
8	43% (158)	43% (202)	59% (206)	+0%	+16%	+16%
11	42% (147)	37% (201)	54% (201)	-5%	+17%	+12%

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

All percentages were rounded to whole percents.

SPED Math Achievement

The district average percent of Special Education (SPED) Students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion referenced assessments for math at the fourth grade level increased from 51% in 2002 to 62% in 2004, and to 72% in 2005. Proficiency on math criterion referenced measures increased 21% from 2002 to 2005 as shown in Table 11.

The district average percent of SPED eighth grade students increased 34% from 2002 to 44% in 2004 and increased to 54% in 2005. Proficiency on math criterion referenced measures for eighth grade SPED students increased 20% from 2002 to 2005 as also shown in Table 11.

Table 11

District Average Math Criterion Referenced Assessments Special Education (SPED) Students 2002-2005^a (District Sample Size- Number of districts reporting from population)

SPED Grade	District Mean Percent Proficient			Change in District Mean Percent Proficient		
	2002	2004	2005	2002-04	2004-05	2002-05
4	51% (170)	62% (200)	72% (200)	+11%	+10%	+21%
8	34% (187)	44% (202)	54% (205)	+10%	+10%	+20%
11	28% (168)	36% (195)	43% (201)	+8%	+7%	+15%

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

All percentages were rounded to whole percents.

The district average percent of SPED scores for eleventh grade students increased from 28% in 2002 to 36% in 2004 and increased to 43% in 2005. Proficiency on math criterion referenced measures for eleventh grade SPED students increased 15% from 2002 to 2005. Therefore, the district average percent for SPED students increased for all grade levels from 2002-2005.

SPED Writing Achievement

The district average percent of Special Education (SPED) Students reported as proficient or better on the state criterion referenced assessment for writing at the fourth grade level increased from 46% in 2002 to 55% in 2004, and to 65% in 2005 as shown in Table 12. Proficiency on the state writing criterion referenced measure increased 19% from 2002 to 2005 with statistical significance indicated in 2002-2004 ($p < .05$), 2004-2005 ($p < .001$) and 2002-2005 ($p < .001$) as shown in Table 13.

The district average percent of SPED eighth grade students increased from 48% in 2003 to 55% in 2004 and to 61% in 2005 as shown in Table 12. Proficiency on the state writing criterion referenced measure for eighth grade SPED students increased 13% from 2002 to 2005 with statistical significance indicated in 2003-2004 ($p < .01$) and 2003-2005 ($p < .001$) as shown in Table 13.

The district average percent of SPED scores for eleventh grade students increased from 55% in 2004 to 63% in 2005 as shown in Table 12. Proficiency on the state writing criterion referenced measure for eleventh grade SPED students increased 8% from 2004 to 2005 with statistically significance indicated in 2004-05 ($p < .01$) as shown in Table 13.

In summary, the district average percent proficient for SPED fourth grade students increased 19% from 2002-2005 and was statistically significant ($p < .001$). The district average percent proficient for SPED eighth grade students increased 13% from 2003-2005 and was statistically significant ($p < .001$). The district average percent for SPED eleventh grade students increased 8% from 2004-2005 and was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Table 12

District Average Writing Criterion Referenced Assessments Special Education (SPED) Students 2002-2005^a

(District Sample Size- Number of districts reporting from population)

SPED Grade	District Mean Percent Proficient				Change in District Mean Percent Proficient			
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2002-04	2003-04	2004-05	2005 vs. Baseline
4	46% (193)		55%* (206)	65%*** (204)	+9%		+10%	+19%***
8		48% (207)	55%** (214)	61% (215)		+7%	+6%	+13%***
11			55% (212)	63%** (217)			+8%	+8%**

* $p < .05$ compared to the previous year ** $p < .01$ compared to the previous year *** $p < .001$ compared to the previous year

♦ $p < .05$ compared to the baseline year ♦♦ $p < .01$ compared to the baseline year ♦♦♦ $p < .001$ compared to the baseline year

Note: 2002, 2003, and 2004 were baseline years for grades 4, 8, and 11 respectively

^a Percent of students scoring proficient or higher was calculated for each district and then averaged across the state.

All percentages were rounded to whole percents.

SUMMARY

While the ELL and SPED student district average scores were not as strong as the total group district averages, they were increasing in most instances. This is consistent with most research in this area and indeed the basis for the special supports for ELL and SPED students. The reading scores for SPED students reflected strong general positive change in all areas. ELL students at the fourth grade and eighth grade were somewhat stronger than for eleventh grade. This trend could relate to the difficulty that older ELL students encountered when mastering English as a second language.

STARS has impacted the teaching of all students in Nebraska and especially those in special populations. A teacher shared how expectations for special populations of students had changed due to the implementation of STARS: “I guess on an individual basis, I have a higher expectation for those students, whereas, I didn’t in the past...”

Superintendents were also aware of the change in focus upon all students especially those in special populations. One superintendent shared,

I think it’s made us very aware that in all areas, SPED or ELL, Title I, poverty students, we need to do a better job with providing instructional strategies to help them be more successful on the STARS assessments...it’s increased our understanding of the need to do a better job with assessments for special groups.

**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE
Section 4: Research Studies**

**Study VI: The Role of Technology in Supporting
STARS**

**Role of Technology in Supporting the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led
Assessment and Reporting System**

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Lan Li, Research Assistant
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

INTRODUCTION

Nebraska has implemented an accountability system that emphasizes both local school involvement and attempts to provide meaningful knowledge for school improvement and instructional decisions. *Charting Stars: Voices from the Field Year-Four Report*, an evaluation of the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) summarized numerous challenges and obstacles schools faced in successfully implementing STARS. It was clear from responses across teachers, principals, superintendents, and ESU personnel that the time the process took, the difficulties in the collection, reporting and management of data, and assessment literacy were key issues impacting the implementation of STARS.

Technology-based systems are often used to address issues of time, accuracy in handling large amounts of data, and clarity in reporting and sharing information. Technology can also be designed to support participants in learning and carrying out the assessment process. The role technology plays in the STARS process is evolving as schools develop assessment practices and acquire technology. Previous STARS evaluations suggested that further information on the role technology plays and the issues it both addresses and creates would be helpful as schools and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) develop policy and support resources.

This report represents the results of a survey administered to school assessment coordinators in Nebraska. The survey was designed to assess the extent of technology use by schools as they participated in the STARS process; identify critical issues in using technology-supported planning, assessment and reporting systems; and provide direction for the development of policies and resources that will support more efficient and effective implementation of STARS.

METHOD

Survey Development

Survey items were developed based on a review of open-ended responses from the *Charting Stars: Voices from the Field Year-Four Report* and discussions of the Nebraska Assessment Reporting Management Committee, Nebraska Department of Education and STARS evaluation staff. The survey was constructed in four sections.

The first section gathered demographic information from survey participants. This information provided a picture of the characteristics of respondents including: school size, job title, roles in the assessment process, relationship with ESU's, and the district investment in technology. The second section of the survey gathered information on the current uses of technology including: software used by schools in various aspects of the assessment process, the match between technology-based systems and the Nebraska Assessment Model, and the quality of technology used by the district in the assessment process. The third section addressed respondents' perceptions of the impact of technology on the assessment process including: contributions of technology to various aspects of the assessment process, impact on time and complexity of the process, impact on the value of data collected and understanding and utilization of that data. The final section of the survey addressed perceptions of future assessment systems and issues that might guide future policy decisions. In this section, the survey gathered data on potential barriers to using technology, quality of current available technology, desirable characteristics in technology-based assessment and reporting systems, and the perceptions of the likely impact of potential areas for state support or resources.

The survey was administered via a Web site. Email solicitations containing coded links allowed participants to access and complete the survey. Access to the survey was recorded to allow for follow-up requests to participants who did not respond to the initial solicitation. Survey responses were recorded separately to maintain anonymity. A survey sample can be found in Appendix H.

Survey Sampling

The survey targeted school personnel who coordinated the STARS process in local schools and ESU's in Nebraska. From a list of STARS school contacts provided by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the STARS evaluation project, 681 names and email addresses were identified. An email solicitation to participate in the survey was sent to each name on the list. A follow-up email was sent two weeks later to those who had not yet responded. A total of 312 usable survey responses were received and used in the analysis.

Analysis

Data was exported from the database and imported into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics were obtained as either frequency distributions or means depending on the nature of the data. Additional analysis comparing the differences between responses for schools smaller than 600 students and those in schools with 600 or more students utilized ANOVA to check for disparities based on school size. Where significant differences existed for items, it is noted in the results.

RESULTS

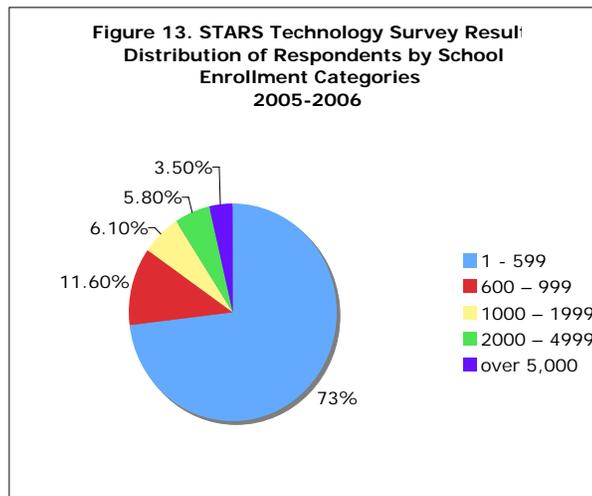
Respondent Characteristics

School size. Respondents were asked to select one of five ranges of student enrollment that best represented their district size. Table 13 shows the distribution of responses. Results are shown in chart form in Figure 13. The distribution of school size closely reflected the distribution of school sizes in the original listing of contacts.

Table 13

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' School Enrollment (n=311)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1-599	227	73.0%
600 - 999	36	11.6%
1000 – 1999	19	6.1%
2000 – 4999	18	5.8%
Over 5000	11	3.5%

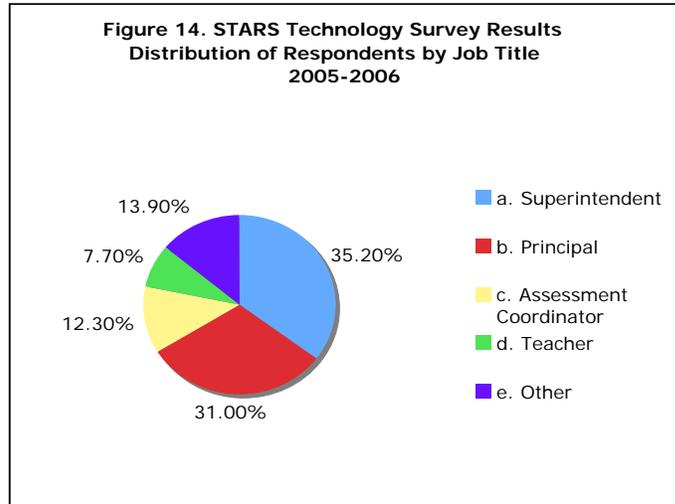


Job title. Table 14 and Figure 14 show the distribution of the respondent job titles in five categories as superintendent, principal, assessment coordinator, teacher, or other. The other category often included variations or combinations of these titles, with the most frequent other title being a variation of curriculum coordinator/director.

Table 14

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Job Titles (n=310)

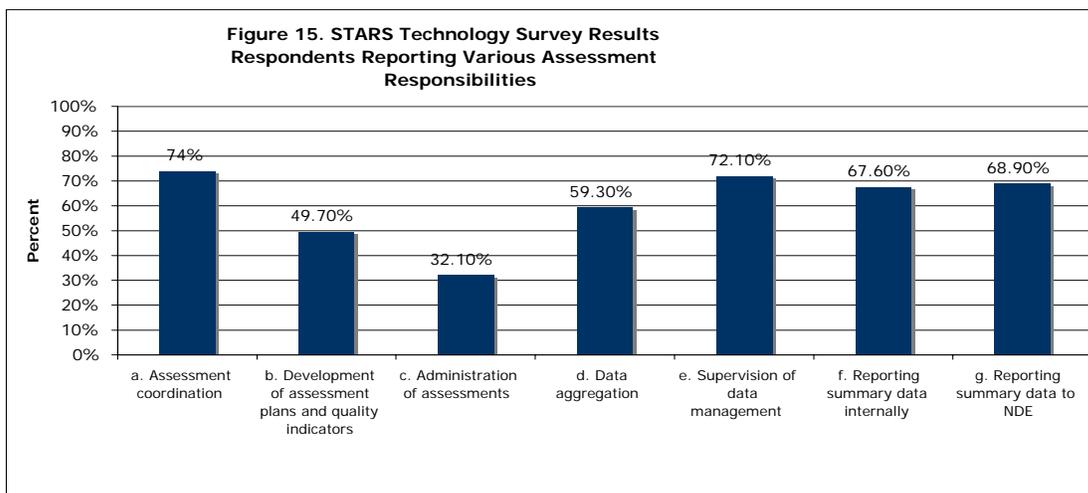
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Superintendent	109	35.2%
Principal	96	31.0%
Assessment Coordinator	38	12.3%
Teacher	24	7.7%
Other	43	13.9%



Responsibilities. Respondents were asked to identify their responsibilities in the assessment process. They were allowed to select all that applied from a list of responsibilities including assessment coordination, plan development, assessment administration, data aggregation, supervision of data management, internal reporting, and/or reporting to NDE. Table 15 provides the frequency and percent that each of these responsibilities was selected. Figure 15 provides a comparison of percentages for each responsibility.

Table 15
Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Assessment Responsibilities (n=312)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Assessment Coordination	231	74.0%
Development of Assessment Plans and Quality Indicators	155	49.7%
Administration of Assessments	100	32.1%
Data Aggregation	185	59.3%
Supervision of Data Management	225	72.1%
Reporting Summary Data Internally	211	67.6%
Reporting Summary Data to NDE	215	68.9%

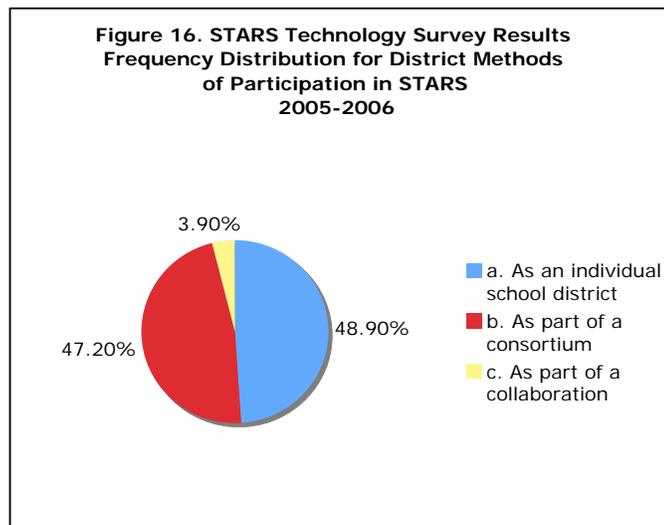


Participation. Respondents were asked to identify whether their school district participated in the STARS process as an individual school district, as part of a consortium, or as part of a collaboration. Table 16 and Figure 16 show the frequency distribution of responses.

Table 16

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Type of Participation in STARS (n=30)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
As an Individual School District	149	48.9%
As Part of a Consortium	144	47.2%
As Part of a Collaboration	12	3.9%

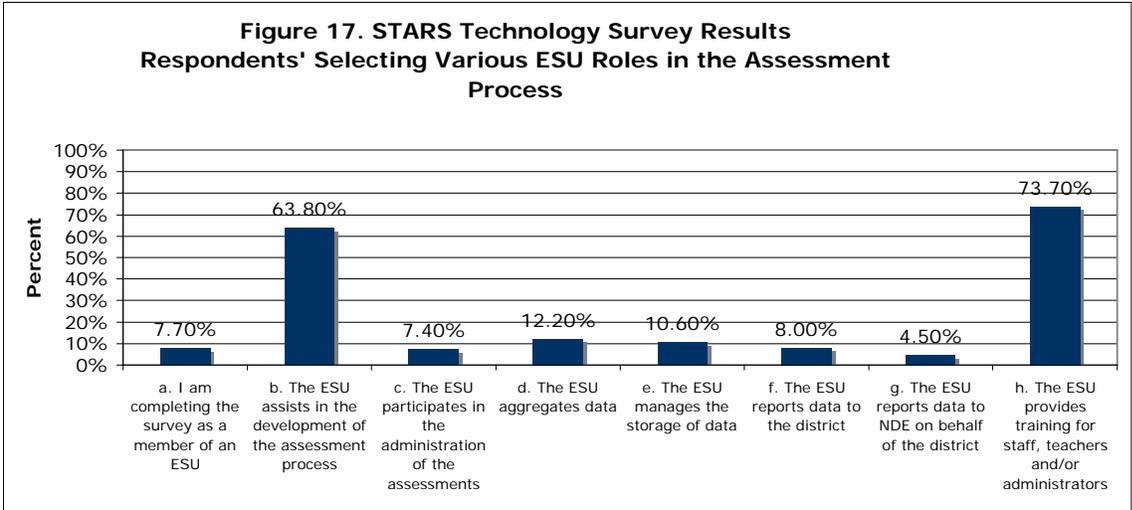


ESU roles. Respondents were asked to first identify whether the ESU played a role in the assessment process in their district. Eighty percent of respondents said that the ESU did play a role. Respondents who indicated that the ESU did play a role were asked to identify which of eight roles the ESU played. They were asked to indicate all the roles that applied. The frequency and percent of their responses are shown in Table 17. Figure 17 shows a profile of the percentage of respondents that indicated each of the possible ESU roles. It is clear that for schools that do use the ESU in STARS, that development of the assessment process and training were primary roles. The ESU's do play roles but do so less frequently.

Table 17

Frequency and Percent of ESU Roles in the Assessment Process (n=302)

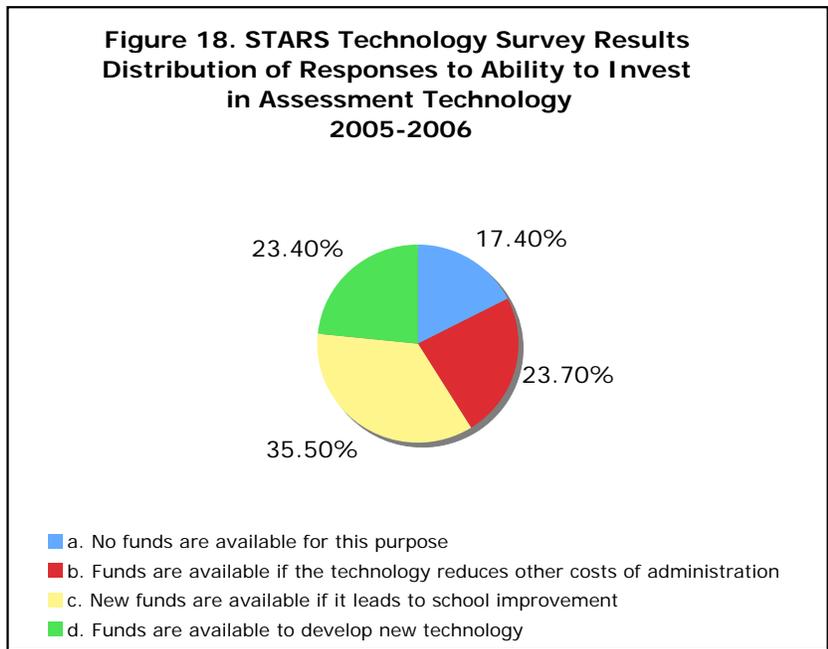
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
I am completing the survey as a member of an ESU	24	7.7%
The ESU Assists in the Development of the Assessment Process	199	63.8%
The ESU Participates in the Administration of Assessments	23	7.4%
The ESU aggregates data	38	12.2%
The ESU Manages the Storage of Data	33	10.6%
The ESU Reports Data to the District	25	8.0%
The ESU Reports Data to the NDE on Behalf of the District	14	4.5%
The ESU Provides Training for Staff, Teachers, Administrators	230	73.7%



Ability to invest in assessment technology. Respondents were asked to choose which of four statements best described their districts' ability to invest in technology specifically to support the assessment process. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 18 and Figure 18.

Table 18
Ability to Invest in Assessment Technology (n=304)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
No Funds Are Available for this Purpose	53	17.4%
Funds are Available if the Technology Reduces Other Costs of Administration	72	23.7%
New Funds Are Available If It Leads to School Improvement	108	35.5%
Funds Are Available to Develop New Technology	71	23.4%



Current Use of Technology

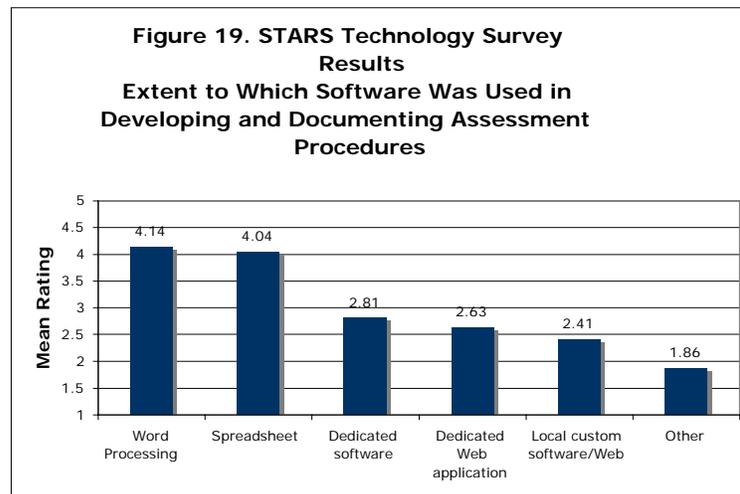
A series of six items were used to gather information on the current uses of technology in the STARS assessment process. Four questions asked participants to report the extent to which they used various types of software in four aspects of STARS: developing and documenting assessment procedures; administering assessments to students; and aggregation, management, and storage of assessment data. Tables 19-21 and Figures 19-21 show the results for each of the aspects. Respondents rated each software type on a scale of 1 representing “not at all” to 5 representing “to a great extent.” Results are reported as mean responses for each type of software.

The first item addressed use of software in the developing and documenting assessment procedures. Results indicated that productivity software such as word processing and spreadsheet applications were used extensively in developing and documenting assessment procedures. Dedicated and local customized software were used to some extent but less frequently than productivity software.

Follow-up analysis for differences between smaller and larger school districts showed significant differences in the extent of software used in developing and documenting assessment procedures. The mean scores were significantly higher for large schools for word processing (larger schools $M = 4.51$, smaller schools $M = 4.0$, $F=11.50$, $p<.001$), dedicated software (larger schools $M = 3.24$, smaller schools $M = 2.66$, $F=7.12$, $p<.008$) and local custom software (larger schools $M = 2.84$, smaller schools $M = 2.26$, $F=7.69$, $p<.006$).

Table 19
Software Use in Developing and Documenting Assessment Procedures

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Word Processing	291	4.14	1.13	4.27	4.01
Spreadsheet	294	4.04	1.26	4.19	3.90
Dedicated Software	284	2.81	1.63	3.00	2.62
Dedicated Web Application	285	2.63	1.63	2.82	2.44
Local Custom Software/Web	282	2.41	1.55	2.59	2.23
Other	59	1.86	1.57	2.26	1.46

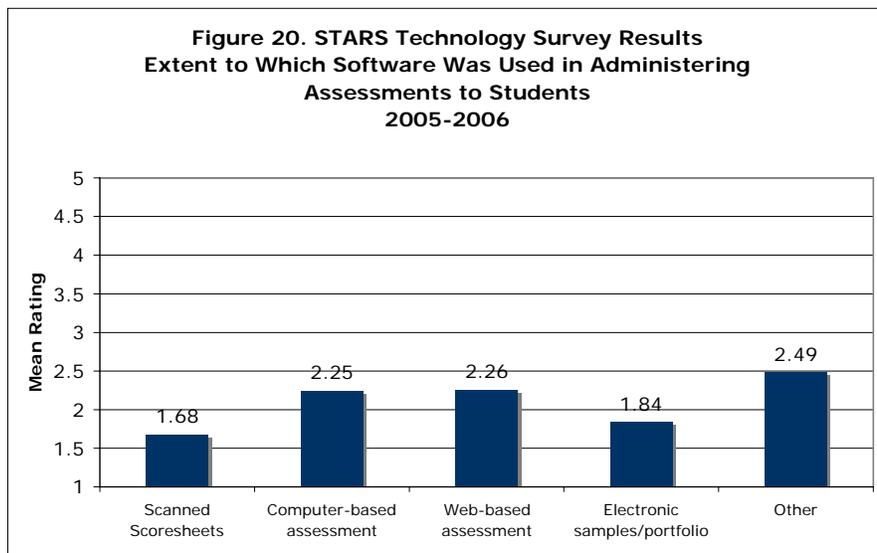


The second item addressed the use of software in administering assessments to students. Results from this item indicated that scanned score sheets, computer-based assessment, Web-based assessment and electronic samples/portfolios were used infrequently in administering assessments to students.

Follow-up analysis for differences between smaller and larger school districts showed significant differences in the extent of software used in administering assessment to students for the use of scanned score sheets. The mean scores were significantly higher for large schools ($M = 2.27$) than smaller schools ($M = 1.46$), ($F=21.88$, $p<.0001$).

Table 20
Software Use in Administering Assessments to Students

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Scanned Score Sheets	282	1.68	1.32	1.83	1.52
Computer-Based Assessment	283	2.25	1.59	2.43	2.06
Web-based Assessment	284	2.26	1.70	2.46	2.07
Electronic Samples/Portfolio	279	1.84	1.30	1.99	1.69
Other	73	2.49	1.94	2.94	2.05



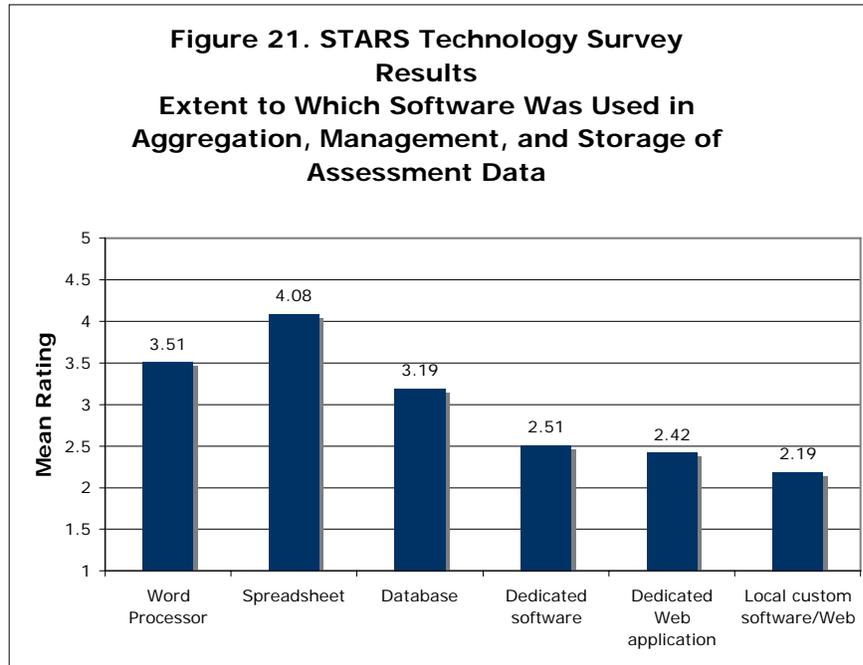
The third item addressed software use in the aggregation, management, and storage of assessment data. Spreadsheets, word processing, and databases were the most extensively used types of software in the aggregation, management, and storage of assessment data. Dedicated software, Web applications, and local custom software were used less extensively.

Follow-up analysis for differences between smaller and larger school districts showed significant differences in the extent of software used in aggregation, management, and storage of assessment data. The mean scores were significantly higher for large schools ($M = 3.11$) than smaller schools ($M = 2.29$) for dedicated software ($F = 14.23$, $p<.0001$).

Table 21

Software Use in Aggregation, Management and Storage of Assessment Data

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Confidence Interval</u>	
				<u>Upper</u>	<u>Lower</u>
Word Processor	285	3.51	1.44	3.68	3.34
Spreadsheet	287	4.08	1.34	4.23	3.93
Database	286	3.19	1.71	3.39	2.99
Dedicated software	281	2.51	1.65	2.70	2.31
Dedicated Web Application	285	2.42	1.71	2.62	2.22
Local Custom Software	271	2.19	1.58	2.38	2.00



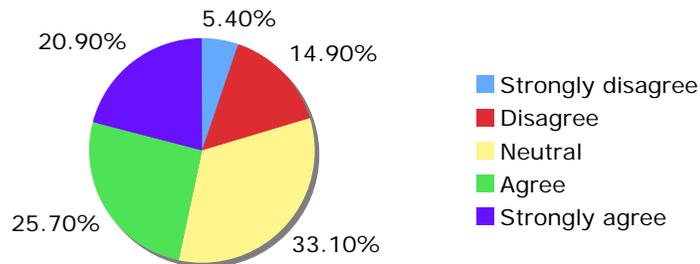
Survey participants were also asked to indicate their agreement with the following statement: “Available technology-based assessment systems are a good match for the Nebraska Assessment Model.” Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Thirty-three percent were neutral and twenty percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results are provided in Table 22 and depicted in

Table 22

Technology-based Assessment Systems are a Good Match for the Nebraska Assessment Model (n=296)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Strongly Disagree	16	5.4%
Disagree	44	14.9%
Neutral	98	33.1%
Agree	76	25.7%
Strongly Agree	62	20.9%

**Figure 22. STARS Technology Survey Results
Percentage of Respondents in Agreement That
Technology-based Systems Are a Good Match for the
Nebraska Assessment Model
2005-2006**

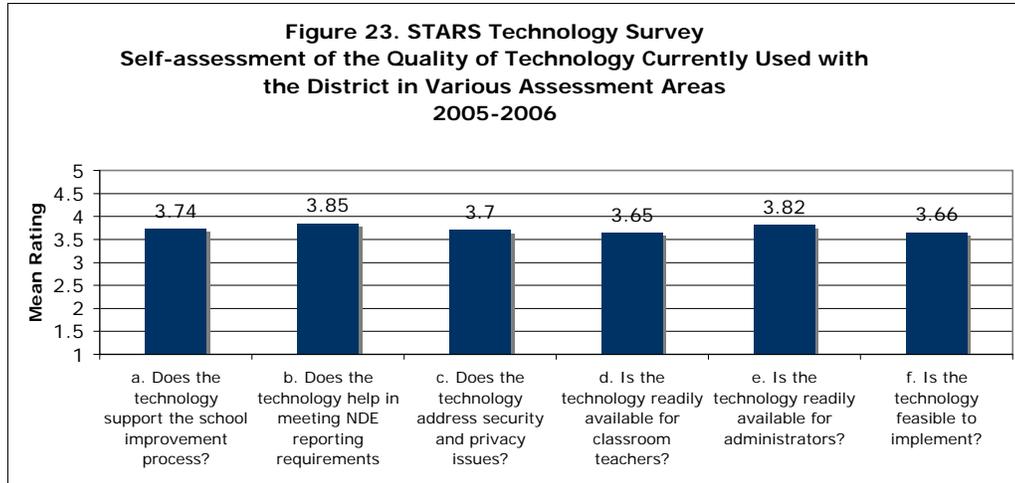


Participants were asked to rate the quality of the technology their district used in the STARS assessment process in seven areas including: supporting the school improvement process, meeting NDE reporting requirements, addressing security and privacy issues, being readily available for classroom teachers, being readily available for administrators, and being feasible to implement. Participants rated each area on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing low quality and 5 representing high quality. Table 23 and Figure 23 show the mean responses for each of the areas.

Table 23

Self-assessment of the Quality of Technology Currently Used with the District in Various Assessment Areas

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Does the Technology Support the School Improvement Process	294	3.74	1.10	3.86	3.61
Does the Technology Help in Meeting NDE Reporting Requirements	293	3.85	1.11	3.98	3.73
Does the Technology Address Security and Privacy Issues	293	3.70	1.21	3.84	3.56
Is the Technology Readily Available For Classroom Teachers	294	3.65	1.28	3.79	3.50
Is the Technology Readily Available For Administrators	294	3.82	1.20	3.95	3.68
Is the Technology Feasible to Implement	288	3.66	1.16	3.80	3.53



Impact of Technology on Assessment

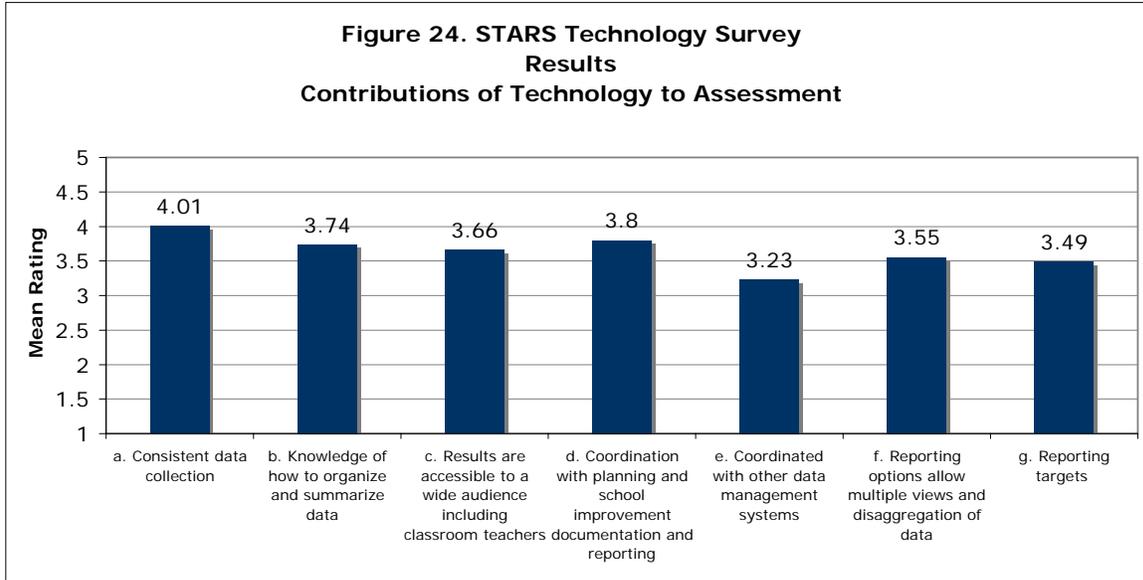
This section of the survey posed a number of questions targeted at gathering participants' perceptions of the impact that technology has on assessment. Items asked about the potential contributions of technology, the impact of technology on time involved in STARS, the impact on the complexity of the STARS process, the impact on the value of assessment data, whether technology assists teachers in understanding the data collection process, and whether technology assists teachers in utilizing data for instructional decision-making.

Respondents were presented with a series of potential contributions made by currently available technology and asked to rate the extent to which they contributed to the assessment process. Each potential contribution was rated on a scale of 1 (not at all) to five (to a great extent). Table 24 presents the mean, standard deviation, and confidence interval for each of the seven potential contributions. Ratings ranged from 3.23 to 4.01 indicating that participants saw technology moderately contributing to the assessment process. Consistent data collection had the highest rating. Figure 24 shows mean ratings for each of the potential contributions in a bar chart.

Table 24

Contributions of Technology

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Consistent Data Collection	290	4.01	1.05	4.13	3.89
Knowledge of How to Organize and Summarize Data	289	3.74	1.13	3.87	3.61
Results are Accessible to a Wide Audience Including Classroom Teachers	290	3.66	1.24	3.80	3.52
Coordination with Planning and School Improvement Documentation and Reporting	289	3.80	1.31	3.93	3.67
Coordinated with Other Data Management Systems	288	3.23	1.25	3.37	3.09
Reporting Options Allow Multiple Views and Disaggregating of Data	290	3.55	1.29	3.70	3.40
Reporting Targets	286	3.49	1.26	3.63	3.35

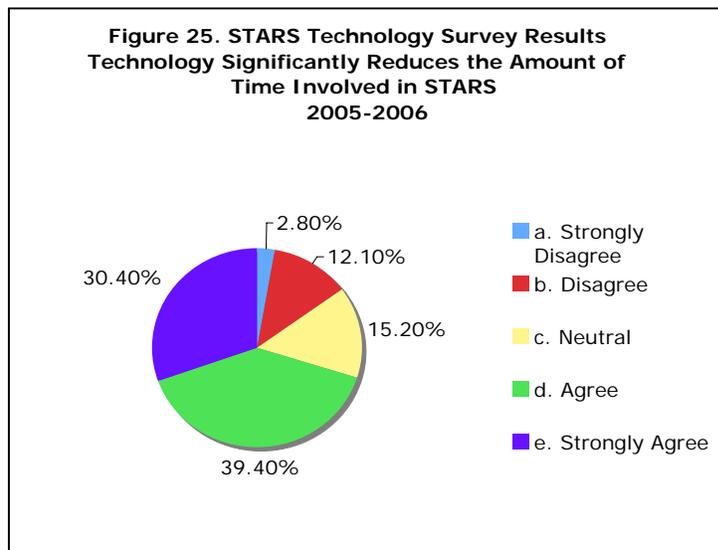


When asked to rate their agreement with the statement “The use of technology significantly reduces the amount of time involved in STARS” on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), a majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Frequency and percent of respondents selecting each category are reported in Table 25 and depicted graphically in Figure 25. This response would seem to indicate that the respondents saw technology as one way to address the time demands noted in previous STARS evaluation data.

Table 25

Technology Significantly Reduces the Amount of Time Involved in STARS (n=289)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Strongly Disagree	8	2.8%
Disagree	35	12.1%
Neutral	44	15.2%
Agree	114	39.4%
Strongly Agree	88	30.4%

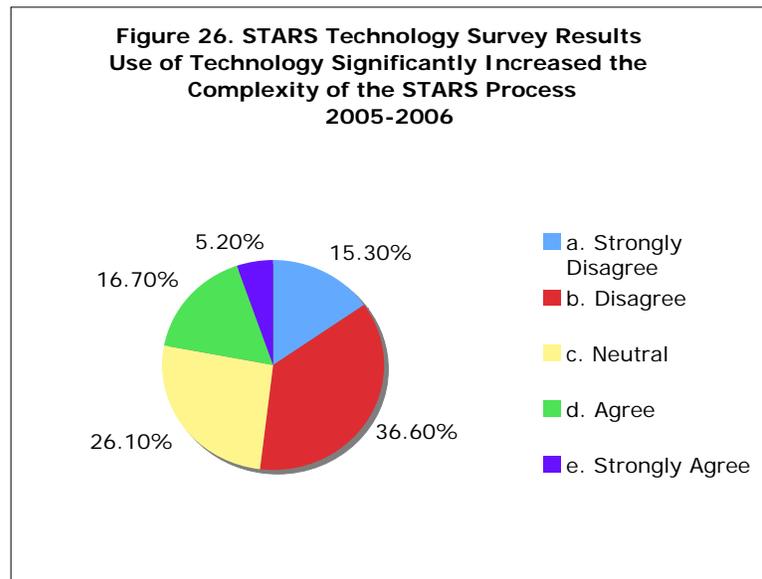


One potential side effect of employing technology is the addition of complexity to the assessment process. To gather survey participants' perceptions of the impact of technology on the complexity of STARS they were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement: "The use of technology significantly increases the complexity of the STARS process." Participants responded on a scale of one to five (1 = strongly agree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Results indicate that only about 22% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Frequencies and percentages are listed in Table 26 and shown in Figure 26.

Table 26

Use of Technology Significantly Increased the Complexity of the STARS Process (n=287)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Strongly Disagree	44	15.3%
Disagree	105	36.6%
Neutral	75	26.1%
Agree	48	16.7%
Strongly Agree	15	5.2%



Perceptions of the impact of technology on the value of assessment data was assessed by asking participants to rate their agreement with the following statement: "The use of technology increases the value of the assessment data collected in the STARS process."

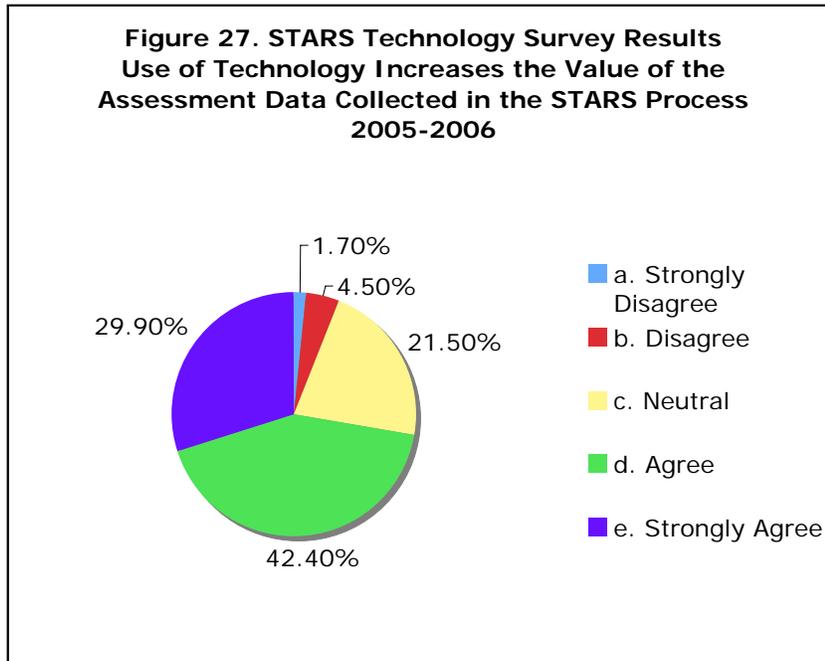
Table 27

Use of Technology Increases the Value of the Assessment Data Collected in the STARS Process (n=288)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Strongly Disagree	5	1.7%
Disagree	13	4.5%
Neutral	62	21.5%
Agree	122	42.4%
Strongly Agree	86	29.9%

This item used a similar five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). A clear majority (73%) indicated that they agreed or strongly

agreed with the statement. Results are show in Table 27 and Figure 27.



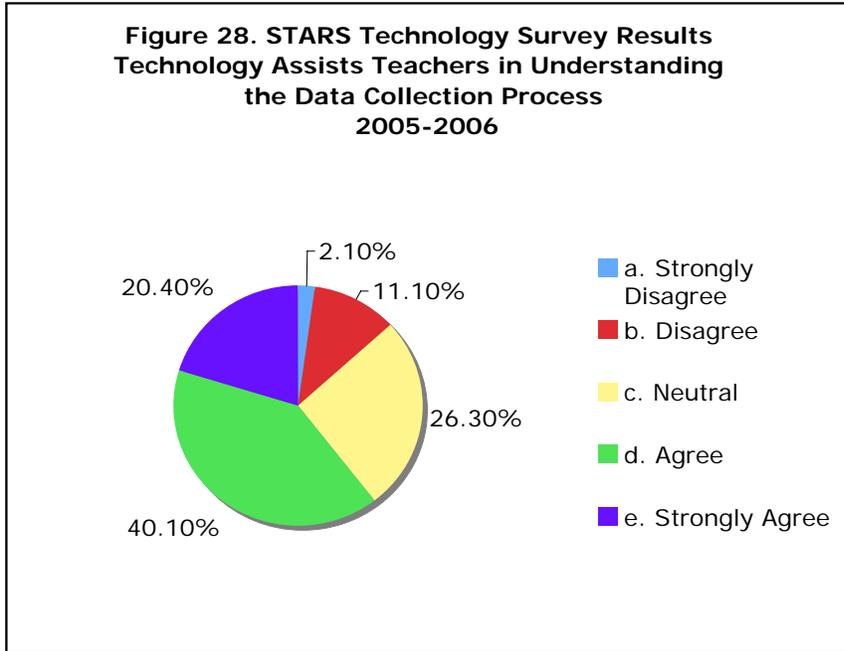
Perceptions of the impact of technology on teachers’ understanding of the data collection process was assessed by asking participants to rate their agreement with the following statement: “The use of technology assists teachers in understanding the data collection process.” This item also used a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). A majority (60.5%) indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Frequencies and percentages are provided in Table 28 and depicted in Figure 28.

Table 28

Technology Assists Teachers in Understanding the Data Collection Process (n=289)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Strongly Disagree	6	2.1%
Disagree	32	11.1%
Neutral	76	26.3%
Agree	116	40.1%
Strongly Agree	59	20.4%

**Figure 28. STARS Technology Survey Results
Technology Assists Teachers in Understanding
the Data Collection Process
2005-2006**

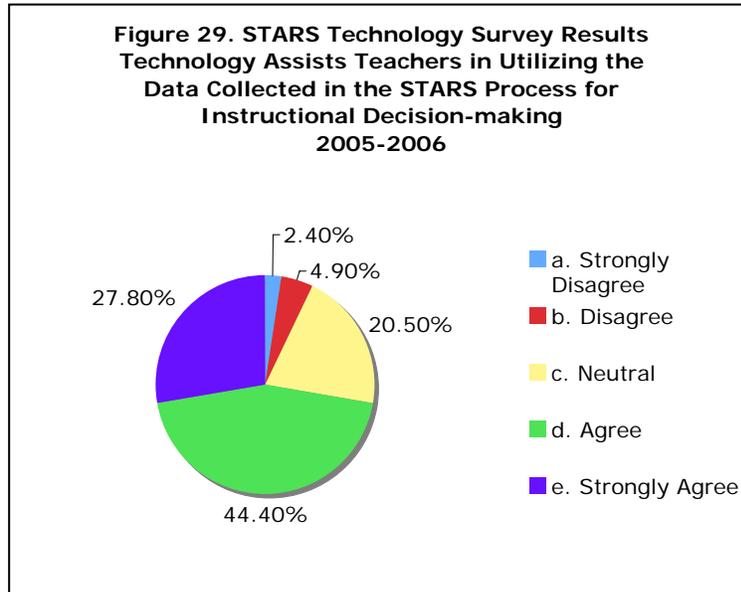


Nebraska’s approach to assessment is designed to provide opportunities to develop and implement assessment that will support instructional decision-making on the part of teachers. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement on technology’s impact in this area: “Technology assists teachers in utilizing the data collected in STARS process for instructional decision-making.” A scale of one to five (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) was again used for this item. A clear majority (72%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Frequencies and percentages are shown in Table 29 and depicted in Figure 29.

Table 29

Technology Assists Teachers in Utilizing the Data Collected in the STARS Process for Instructional Decision-Making (n=288)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Strongly Disagree	7	2.4%
Disagree	14	4.9%
Neutral	59	20.5%
Agree	128	44.4%
Strongly Agree	80	27.8%



Items in this section of the survey examined perceptions of the impact of technology on the assessment process. Results indicated that respondents were positive about the potential of technology to contribute to the process. A majority of respondents indicated that technology reduced the amount of time involved, increased the value of assessment data, assisted teachers in understanding and utilizing assessment data for instructional decision-making and at the same time did not increase the complexity of the assessment process. Respondents on average also indicated that they saw a number of potential contributions of technology as having a moderate to extensive impact. Technology’s contribution to consistent data collection was rated as having the greatest impact among the list.

Future Systems and Issues

The final section of the survey was designed to provide information helpful in planning, allocating resources, and developing policies related to the implementing technology in the STARS assessment process. Questions addressed the potential barriers in using technology, perceptions of the quality of currently available technology, and the desired features and characteristics of technology-based data collection, management and reporting systems. Participants were also asked to rate the likely impact of a number of potential areas of State support or resources.

In order to assess perceptions of potential barriers to using technology, participants were presented with a list of ten possibilities. Each possibility was rated on a scale of one to five with one representing low and five representing high. Mean ratings for “Initial Cost” (4.09) and “Staff Time to Learn System” (4.05) were rated as the most significant barriers. Maintenance costs (3.8), teacher training (3.83), and administrator time to learn (3.8) were rated nearly as high. Mean responses for all items in the list were at a level of moderate or above. Means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals are presented in Table 30. Figure 30 presents a comparison of mean scores for each potential barrier.

It should be noted that the analysis for differences based on school size showed that the mean score for interoperability with other systems rating as a barrier to using technology was higher ($F = 12.84, p < .0001$) for larger schools ($M = 4.05$) than for small schools (3.51).

Table 30
Potential Barriers Related to Using Technology to Support Assessment
(1 = Low, 5 = High)

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Initial Cost	289	4.09	.98	4.20	3.97
Staff Time to Learn System	289	4.05	1.02	4.17	3.93
Teacher Training	290	3.83	1.07	3.95	3.71
Administrator Time to Learn System	289	3.80	1.13	3.93	3.67
Maintenance Costs	289	3.80	.95	3.91	3.69
Technical Expertise to Maintain	289	3.70	1.15	3.84	3.57
Interoperability with Other Systems	288	3.66	1.16	3.79	3.52
Knowledge to Choose Best System	288	3.64	1.11	3.77	3.51
Commitment to Single Vendor	289	3.23	1.24	3.37	3.09
Fear of Obsolescence	288	3.19	1.23	3.34	3.05

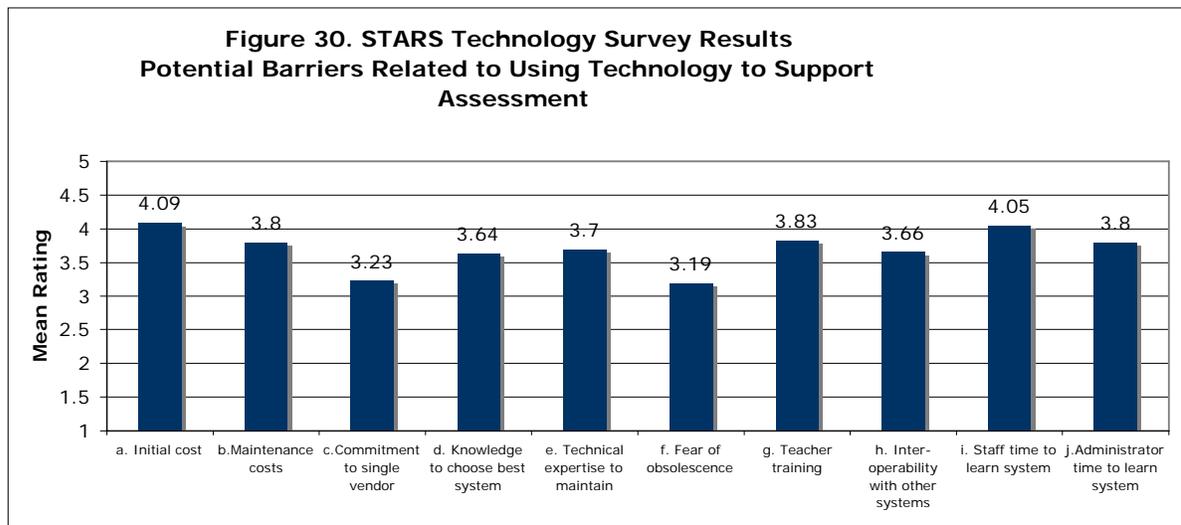


Table 31 and Figure 31 present results from the survey participants' ratings of the quality of currently available technology used in collection, management and reporting of assessment data. Respondents rated each of five aspects of current technology on a scale of one to five with one being low and five being high. Mean scores for all five aspects were in a moderate range from 3.16 to 3.48.

Follow-up analysis for differences between smaller and larger school districts showed significant differences in the quality of currently available technology used to support the collection, management, and reporting of assessment data. The mean scores were significantly higher for smaller schools ($M = 3.52$) than for larger schools ($M = 3.07$) for classroom level reporting features ($F = 8.99, p < .003$). Mean scores for smaller schools ($M = 3.30$) were also higher than larger schools (2.77) for interface with State reporting ($F = 11.86, p < .001$).

Table 31

Quality of Currently Available Technology Used to Support the Collection, Management, and Reporting of Assessment Data (1 = Low, 5 = High)

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
District Level Reporting Features	283	3.60	1.05	3.72	3.48
System Quality	283	3.48	1.03	3.60	3.36
Systems Are Comprehensive	282	3.42	1.08	3.54	3.29
Classroom Level Reporting Features	284	3.40	1.13	3.53	3.27
Interface with State reporting	283	3.16	1.15	3.29	3.02

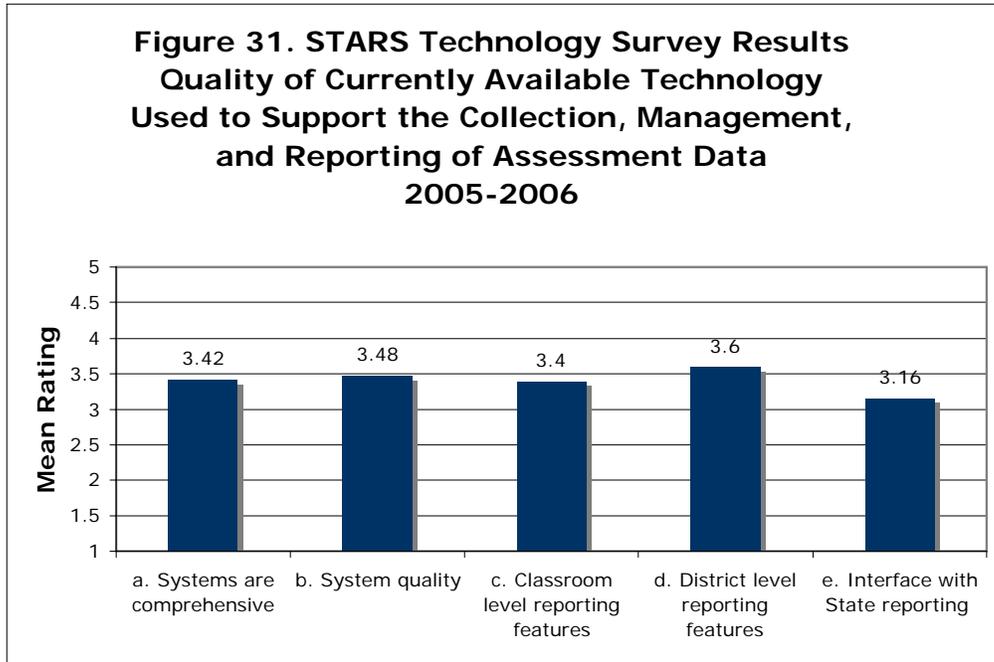


Table 32 presents the results of survey participants' ratings of the desirability of various characteristics of technology-based data collection, management, and reporting systems. Respondents rated each of six characteristics of technology-based systems on a one to five scale with one representing low and five representing high. All six of the characteristics were rated at a high level with averages ranging from 4.06 to 4.43. Ease of data entry, usefulness of results for instructional decisions, and match with reporting requirements had the highest average ratings among the listed characteristics. Results would indicate that all of these characteristics should be considered when evaluating or recommending technology-based assessment systems. A relative comparison of mean responses is also shown in Figure 32.

Table 32

Desirability of Characteristics in a Technology-based Data Collection, Management, and Reporting System (1 = Low, 5 = High)

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Confidence Interval</u> Upper	<u>Lower</u>
Usefulness of Results for Instructional					
Decisions	287	4.43	.93	4.53	4.32
Ease of Data Entry	285	4.41	.89	4.52	4.31
Match with Reporting Requirements	286	4.40	.89	4.50	4.30
Ease of Learning System	286	4.27	.93	4.37	4.16
Interoperability with Other Systems	283	4.11	1.02	4.23	3.99
Comprehensive Features	286	4.06	.96	4.17	3.95

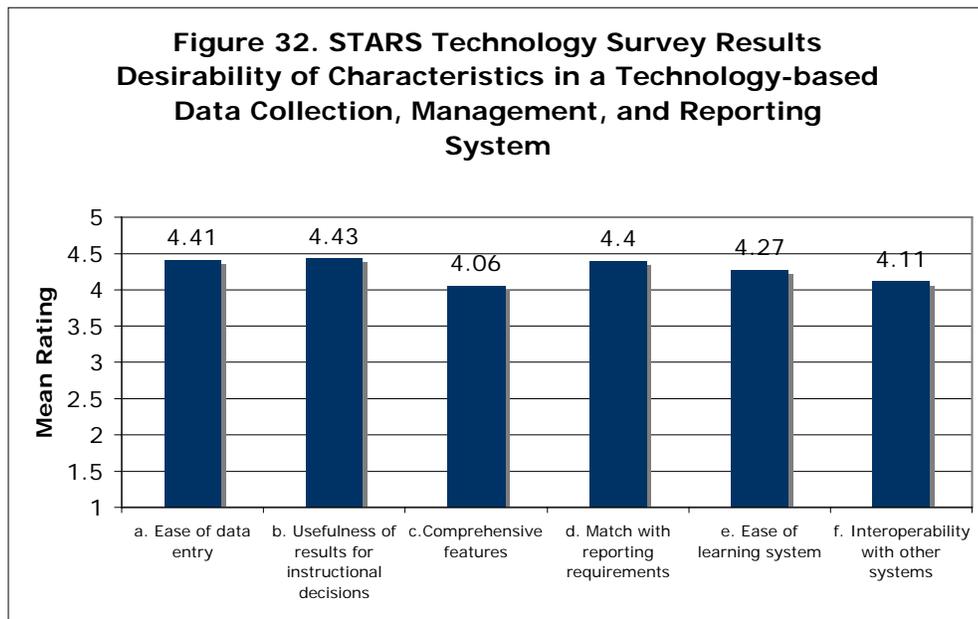
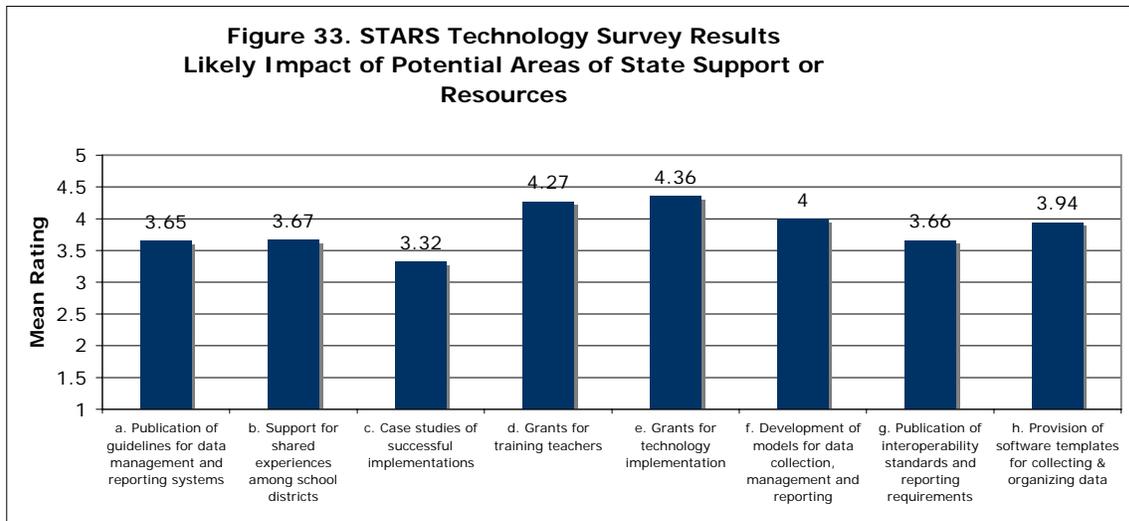


Table 33 presents data on survey participants' ratings of the likely impact of potential areas of State support or resources. Respondents rated a series of eight potential areas of support or resources on a scale of one (low) to five (high). Grants for technology implementation (4.36) and for training teachers (4.27) received the highest ratings. The provision of models for data collection, management and reporting (4.0) and software templates for collecting and organizing data (3.94) were the next most highly rated as likely areas of impact. Figure 33 shows the relative mean rankings of each of the potential areas of State support or resources.

Table 33

Likely Impact of Potential Areas of State Support or Resources (1 = Low, 5 = High)

	N	Mean	SD	Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Grants for Technology Implementation	284	4.36	.98	4.47	4.24
Grants for Training Teachers	286	4.27	1.01	4.39	4.15
Development of Models for Data Collection, Management, And Reporting	284	4.00	.95	4.11	3.89
Provision of Software Templates For Collecting & Organizing Data	286	3.94	1.06	4.07	3.82
Support for Shared Experiences Among School Districts	286	3.67	1.00	3.79	3.56
Publication of Interoperability Standards and Reporting Requirements	285	3.66	1.00	3.77	3.54
Publication of Guidelines for Data Management and Reporting Systems	286	3.65	1.07	3.77	3.52
Case Studies of Successful Implementations	286	3.32	1.05	3.44	3.20



SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge of the characteristics of typical respondents was helpful in interpreting the results. Responses indicated demographics similar to those expected from the initial list of STARS contacts and coordinators in local districts and ESU’s. Respondents were primarily from smaller schools but were often part of larger consortiums. Respondents were often superintendents, principals, or assessment coordinators, with teachers and curriculum coordinators also being represented. The majority indicated funds were available for technology particularly if it reduced other administrative costs or contributed to school improvement.

The survey provided useful information on the current uses of technology. The majority of respondents indicated that basic productivity tools such as word processing and spreadsheets were the most extensively used tools in a number of aspects of the assessment process. Dedicated assessment software, Web-based software, and locally developed software or Web

applications were used less extensively. When broken down by school size the rated extent of use of dedicated and locally developed software was proportionally higher in larger schools than in smaller schools possibly because of differences in resources. Scanning, computer and Web-based systems, and electronic portfolios had low ratings for use. Despite the low reported use of technology specifically designed to support the assessment process, a majority of respondents agreed that the technology-based systems were a good match to the Nebraska assessment model. They also rated the rating of the quality of the technology used by their district in the assessment process at a moderately to moderately high level. These results would seem to indicate that there is a potential to improve and increase the use of technology in the assessment process in many Nebraska schools.

Data from the survey clearly showed that survey participants felt technology has the potential to positively impact the assessment process. A majority of respondents indicated that technology reduced the amount of time involved, increased the value of assessment data, assisted teachers in understanding and utilizing assessment data for instructional decision-making, and at the same time, did not increase the complexity of the assessment process. Respondents also indicated that they saw a number of potential contributions of technology, such as consistent data collection, as having a moderate to extensive impact. It appeared that among school personnel who work with the STARS assessment process that technology was viewed as having a positive impact.

Survey data also provided information useful for guiding future policies, support, and resources. The most significant barriers were costs of technology, staff and administrator time to learn systems, and teacher training. Interoperability was also rated as an issue in larger school districts. Quality ratings of current systems regarding their comprehensiveness, quality, reporting features, and interface with state reporting were moderate. Interestingly, ratings of classroom level reporting features and interface with state reporting, although still moderate, were higher in small schools. A number of features of technology-based assessment systems were rated as highly desirable including: usefulness of results for instructional decisions, ease of data entry, match with reporting requirements, and ease of learning systems. Survey participants felt that the areas of state support with the greatest potential for impacting were grants for technology implementation and teacher training. These areas were closely followed by the provision of exemplars in the form of models for data collection, management, and reporting and software templates for collecting and organizing data.

Results from the survey indicated that STARS assessment leaders in Nebraska schools recognized the potential impact of technology on the assessment process, but at this point do not extensively make use of dedicated or locally developed software, although this may be occurring in larger districts or consortiums. Schools saw support for implementing technology and training school staff as likely to have significant impacts on the quality, usefulness, and value of the assessment process.

**CHARTING STARS:
PORTRAITS OF EXCELLENCE**

Section 5: Appendices

Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

December 13, 2005

Dr. Jody Isernhagen
Leon Dappen
132 TEAC
(0360)

IRB # 2005-11-103 EP

TITLE OF PROJECT: **Comprehensive Evaluation of School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System**

Dear Dr. Isernhagen:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study. Your proposal seems to be in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Date of EP Review: **11/21/05**.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: **12/13/05**. This approval is Valid Until: **12/12/06**

1. Enclosed is the IRB approved Informed Consent form for this project. Please use this form when making copies to distribute to your participants. If it is necessary to create a new informed consent form, please send us your original so that we may approve and stamp it before it is distributed to participants.

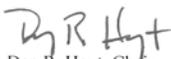
We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact Shirley Horstman, IRB Administrator, at 472-9417 or email shorstman1@unl.edu.

Sincerely,


Dan R. Hoyt, Chair
for the IRB


Shirley Horstman
IRB Administrator

cc: Faculty Advisor

Appendix B
Researchers for the Project

**Researchers for the Primary Fifth Year Project
2005-2006**

Principal Investigator

Dr. Jody C. Isernhagen is an Associate Professor in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She received her doctoral degree from Virginia Tech and has been a teacher, assistant principal, principal, supervisor of elementary education, and superintendent in pre-K through 12 schools. Dr. Isernhagen serves as the primary investigator for the STARS Process and is the primary instructor for the School Improvement Specialist Program, a joint program between the North Central Association on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI). She serves as the State Accreditation and North Central Accreditation External Leader for four school districts in Nebraska. Dr. Isernhagen was awarded the College of Education and Human Sciences Distinguished Teaching Award.

Secondary Investigators

Dr. Leon Dappen is an Associate Professor in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is a licensed psychologist (inactive). He has been a teacher, counselor, psychologist, special evaluation administrator, and assistant superintendent in pre-K through 12 schools. Dr. Dappen is an external evaluator for the Omaha Public Schools Magnet Assistance Grant and Banneker CEMS Math/Science grant. He is actively involved with several schools in their North Central Association School Improvement activities.

Dr. Shirley J. Mills is a Research Assistant and serving as a secondary investigator for the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation. She taught in Nebraska for 38 years prior to receiving her Doctorate in Leadership and Higher Education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2005. Dr. Mills teaches courses in the NCA-UNL School Improvement Specialist Program. She serves as a consultant to K-12 schools in curriculum and school improvement.

Dr. Allen L. Steckelberg is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Steckelberg teaches and coordinates instructional technology and serves as the Technology Coordinator for the College of Education and Human Sciences. Areas of teaching and research include technology in education, Web-based instructional and educational management, and paraprofessionals in school programs.

Lan Li is a doctoral student in Instructional Technology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She teaches courses in Instructional Technology and is currently doing research on improving student learning with technology-mediated peer assessment.

Project Administrative Coordinator

Susan Wilson is on the staff at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and holds an Associate of Science degree in Business Administration from the College of St. Mary, Omaha.

Interviewers

Larry Bornschlegl, Ed. Specialist, retired from Hastings Public Schools in 2002 after having spent 31 years in Nebraska as a secondary principal. The Nebraska State Association of Secondary School Principals named him the Region IV “Principal of the Year” in 2001. In 2002 he received the “Award of Excellence” from the Nebraska Association of Middle Level Education. In 2004 he received the “Distinguished Service Award” from the Nebraska State Association of Secondary School Principals. He remains active in education.

Ronald Klemke, M.A. retired after 33 years of service to education in Nebraska Panhandle schools. Ron served as a teacher and coach in wrestling, track, and golf, and was inducted into the “Nebraska Scholastic Wrestling Coaches’ Hall of Fame” in 1991. He has served as Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners in Garden County since 2001. He is a member of the Oshkosh Economic Development Board and is active in volunteer work with Saint Elizabeth’s Parish and the Grand Island Diocese Deanery Pastoral Council.

Robert Whitehouse, Ed. Specialist, retired in 1999 after 35 years as a teacher, coach, athletic director, junior high principal, and senior high principal with the Omaha Public Schools. He received the “Outstanding Principal of the Year” in 1997, the “National Milken Family Foundation Award” in 1997, and the “Nebraska Council of School Administrators Distinguished Service Award” in 2000. Bob has served in many capacities on local and state boards in both the private and public sectors. He remains active in education as the coordinator of the Nebraska Educational Leadership Institute sponsored by the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the Gallup Organization.

Appendix C
Validation Framework

Validation of Nebraska's Standards, Assessment, and Accountability System

"An Accountability System can be said to have validity when the evidence is judged to be strong enough to support inferences that:

- 1) the components of the system are aligned to the purposes and are working in harmony to help the system accomplish those purposes; and,
- 2) the system is accomplishing what was intended (and did not accomplish what was not intended.)"

The accountability system will be validated as "working" if evidence is found that the following purposes are goals of the accountability system are being met.

Goal One Educators can appropriately and accurately assess and report student performance on content standards using local assessment systems.

Goal Two Student performance and assessment data are being used for school improvement efforts.

Goal Three Student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics have improved because of school improvement efforts based upon assessment and performance data.

Goal Four Does the Nebraska accountability system (both state and AYP) misclassify schools or classify school systems correctly?

Goal Five The consequences of the accountability system are positive ones and contribute to the achievement of the districts in the state accountability goals.

Educators can appropriate and accurately assess and report student performance on content standards using local assessment systems.

Indicators for Study	Research Questions	Method	Who?
District Assessment Portfolio	<p>Are the Six Quality Criteria the right criteria for evaluating local assessment?</p> <p>What is the correlation (if any) between DAP ratings and NRT data? CRT data?</p> <p>In districts where assessment ratings are high, what are school leaders doing? What are their characteristics?</p>	<p>Inter-rated reliability of DAP scoring</p> <p>Outside Evaluator of Portfolio Process</p> <p>Inside Evaluation of Process</p> <p>On-site visitations</p> <p>Surveys of local educators</p> <p>Surveys, case studies</p>	<p>Buros</p> <p>Suzanne Lane, Univ. Pittsburg</p> <p>Twenty Nebraska Reviewers</p> <p>NDE</p> <p>UNL Evaluation</p> <p>UNL evaluation</p>
Local district assessments	<p>Are the local assessments used of sufficient quality to accurately measure student performance?</p>	<p>Examination of assessments</p> <p>Peer review sessions</p>	<p>Peer Review Teams</p> <p>Trained teacher teams</p>
Consortiums, Collaborations, Individual Districts	<p>How do educators working in groups handle local assessment differently from educators in independent districts?</p>	<p>Survey/case studies</p>	<p>UNL evaluation</p>

Goal Two

Student performance data generated from assessment and graduation rates are being used to inform local school improvement.

Indicators for Study	Research Questions	Method	Who?
School Improvement Plan	Are districts basing their school improvement goals on collected data from assessment?	Review of school improvement plans External visitations	NDE NDE/Review teams
Professional development	What are reading and math teachers saying about professional development? What are the characteristics of Nebraska's professional development?	Survey Case Studies	UNL Evaluation UNL Evaluation UNL Evaluation
Instructional change	How is instruction changing in Nebraska schools as a result of assessment data?	External Visitations Case studies	NDE UNL Evaluation
Leadership	How are local leaders modeling effective leadership assessment practices? How are the leaders in effective schools aligned in their thinking about assessment practices? What do principals need to do the local assessment work?	Case studies Survey Survey Leaders of Learning Focus Group	UNL Evaluation Jody Isernhagen &N Leon Dappen Jody Isernhagen & Leon Dappen NDE/UNL

Goal Three

Student performance in reading, mathematics, and writing, as well as graduation rate will improve as a result of data-informed school improvement efforts.

Indicators for Study	Research Questions	Method	Who?
Student performance on reading standards.	Have NRT and CRT reading data improved from 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004? 2005? 2006?	Correlational Studies	UNL
Student performance on mathematics standards	Have STARS 2002 mathematics data improved from 2002-2004 mathematics data? 2005? 2006?	Correlational Studies	UNL
Disaggregated Student Performance	Have NRT and CRT data improved for all groups of students from 2001-2006?	Correlational Studies	UNL
Student performance on Statewide Writing	Have statewide writing results improved? Grade 4- 2002/2004/2006 Grade 8- 2003/2004/2006 Grade 11-2004/2006	Correlational Studies	UNL
	Are Statewide Writing results and reading results comparative?		UNL
	How are statewide writing data being used in classrooms in districts and for programmatic change?	Case studies	UNL Evaluation
Graduate Rate	Has the graduate rate improved from 2003-04 to 2005-06?	Correlational Studies	NDE

Goal Four

Does the Nebraska accountability system (both state and AYP) classify or misclassify schools?

Indicators for Study	Research Questions	Method	Who?
Internal Data Validation	What does NDE do internally to insure the accuracy of its data?	AAR Business Rules Flow Chart Internal Audit	NDE/Research in Action
Decision Verification	How does NDE know its accountability decisions are accurate?		

Goal Five

The consequences of the accountability system are positive ones that contribute to the achievement of the other four accountability goals.

Indicators for Study	Research Questions	Method	Who?
Intended consequences	What kinds of things are happening in schools where accountability goals aren't being met?	Case studies Visitations Survey	UNL Evaluation NDE Jody Isernhagen & Leon Dappen
Emerging consequences	What kinds of things are happening in schools where accountability goals are being met?	Case Studies Survey	UNL Evaluation NDE
Unintended Consequences	What have been the intended and unintended consequences in: a) Schools meeting accountability goals b) Schools not meeting accountability goals	Case Studies Survey	UNL case studies Visitations—NDE ESU Jody Isernhagen & Leon Dappen

Appendix D
2004-2005 Study I Research Survey Sample

STARS Survey Sample

INSTRUCTIONS: Please provide the following demographic information by responding to the questions or marking the appropriate category for each area.

1. **Mark all the position(s) below that you hold in your school district:**

Language Arts Teacher **Grade-Level:** Elementary Middle School High School
 Math Teacher **Grade-Level:** Elementary Middle School High School
 Other—Please identify: Job Title _____ Grade _____

2. **My Gender:** Male Female

3. **Years of experience in my primary role:** _____

4. **My school is participating in a STARS-related collaboration:** YES NO

My collaboration’s name is: _____

My school joined the collaboration (Approximate date): _____

5. **My school’s primary reason for joining the STARS collaboration:**

6. **The main advantage of my school’s participation in our present collaboration is:**

7. **The main limitation of my school’s participation in our present collaboration is:**

DIRECTIONS: Please circle the number that best describes your response for your collaboration.	None of the time	Very little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Collaboration Support					
8. My collaboration supports “school-based teacher-led” assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My collaboration provides services that my school needs for the implementation of STARS.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My collaboration provides on-going assessment training for school administrators.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My collaboration provides on-going assessment training for teachers.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please circle the number that best describes your response for your school or collaboration.	None of the time	Very little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Assessment Literacy					
1. In my school, educators are committed to improving their own assessment competence.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Students in my school are involved in understanding their own progress and achievement status.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers in my school write their own STARS assessments at the classroom level.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Teachers in my school select assessment items from a common bank/pool provided by the collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Administrators in my school support "school-based teacher-led" assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers in my school support "school-based teacher-led" assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My collaboration develops standards-based assessments for my school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My collaboration develops the STARS assessment portfolio sent to NDE** for my school.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers in my school are involved in designing assessment items for the collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
10. All the schools in my collaboration use the same grade-level assessments to meet STARS requirements.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Teachers in my school collaborate on designing assessments for STARS.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Teachers in my school are confident in their ability to design valid and reliable assessments.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Since the inception of STARS, teachers in my school use rubrics in assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My collaboration supports the growth of teachers' assessment literacy.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My collaboration supports the growth of administrators' assessment literacy.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Teachers in my school participate in learning teams to improve their assessment skills.	1	2	3	4	5
Data					
17. My school receives assessment data in a format that allows for disaggregation by:					
a) district results	1	2	3	4	5
b) school results	1	2	3	4	5
c) classroom results	1	2	3	4	5
d) student results	1	2	3	4	5
18. My school receives data in a format that allows for disaggregation by relevant populations (free and reduced lunch, gender, etc.) for individual students.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My collaboration scores all STARS assessments for my school.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My collaboration provides timely return of data.	1	2	3	4	5
21. My collaboration interprets assessment results.	1	2	3	4	5
22. My collaboration provides recommendations for responding to assessment results.	1	2	3	4	5
Instructional Impact					
23. My collaboration has helped my school align curriculum to state standards.	1	2	3	4	5
24. My collaboration has helped my school establish Benchmarks for meeting state standards at kindergarten through 12 th grade.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Teachers in my school reviewed units of study for alignment to state/local standards.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Instructional units are assigned to appropriate Grade-Levels in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Teachers in my school develop clear and appropriate instructional targets based on assessment results.	1	2	3	4	5
28. In my school, lesson planning is aligned to assessment data and state standards.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please circle the number that best describes your response for your school or collaboration.	None of the time	Very little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
29. In my school, assessment is integrated into instruction and is used to inform teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
30. My school's assessments accurately measure what my students know and can do.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Teachers in my school modify their instruction in cases where students did not perform well on an assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Teachers in my school use rubrics in instruction since the inception of STARS.	1	2	3	4	5
33. The results of my school's assessments are helpful in identifying individual student strengths and weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Teachers in my school share successful instructional strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
35. My school's assessments give teachers important feedback about how effectively they are teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
Support					
36. My district provides time and resources for "school-based teacher-led" assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
37. My ESU* provides on-going leadership training for school administrators for implementing the STARS process.	1	2	3	4	5
38. My ESU* provides on-going assessment training for teachers in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
39. My ESU* provides data retreats for my school.	1	2	3	4	5
40. My ESU* provides software for scoring, analyzing, and reporting data to support my school.	1	2	3	4	5
41. NDE **provides leadership training for all administrators in my school for implementing the STARS process.	1	2	3	4	5
42. NDE** provides assessment training for teachers in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
43. List any other organizations/sources from which your school receives assessment training and leadership support for implementing the STARS process. _____					
44. Please use the back of this page to make any additional comments you might have regarding the STARS process.					

*Educational Service Unit
**Nebraska Department of Education

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN NO LATER THAN **DECEMBER 15, 2004**. Use the enclosed self- addressed postage-paid envelope or mail to:

Jody Isernhagen, Principal Investigator
STARS Comprehensive Evaluation
141 Teachers College Hall
PO Box 880360
Lincoln, NE 68588-0360

Appendix E
2005-2006 Study I Research Interview
Protocol for Teachers

STARS RESEARCH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
TEACHERS
Benchmark School/K-12 Grade Level Expectation School
January – March 2006

Qualitative Research Purpose: Explore and understand the similarities and differences in perceptions of STARS on Benchmark Districts and K-12 Grade Level Expectation Districts in the assessment process and its impact upon curriculum and instruction.

Data of interview: _____ Time of interview: _____
Location of interview: _____
Interviewer: _____

Participant Profile

Participant: _____
School District: _____ ESU # _____
Position: Grade Level _____ Subject Area _____
Years in present position/site: _____ Total Years in Education: _____ Gender: M F

Introduction:

1. Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.
2. I am serving as an interviewer for the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This research is being conducted so that the Nebraska Department of Education has a better understanding of how the STARS process is being implemented in school districts and schools across the state. Information gained from this research is used to improve the process and to provide insight into next steps.
3. First, I want to assure you that this interview is strictly confidential. Information provided by participants is reported or released in aggregated form only. Districts, schools, individuals, and ESU's are not identified. Are you participating in this interview willingly?
(Interviewer only: If the participant indicates they are not a willing participant, thank them for coming in to speak with you and dismiss them with the assurance their declination will not affect their relationship with their school, district, the University of Nebraska, or the NDE.)
4. I have an Informed Consent Form outlining your rights as a participant. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw from the study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education, or your school district. Contact persons for the project and the Institutional Review Board are provided on the Informed Consent Form in case you have questions or concerns. I have a copy for you to sign and one for you to keep for your use.
5. I am going to record this interview so that the interview can be transcribed (a typed copy of the interview will be made) and we have an accurate rendering of your responses.
6. It is important that I maintain the integrity of your words and intentions; therefore, I may ask you to review the transcription if I have any difficulties with the interpretation.
7. We are interested in finding out about the perceptions that you hold regarding the STARS assessment process and its implementation in your district. Questions about your assessment process and its impact upon instruction, curriculum, and assessment are specific topics of interest.
(Interviewer only: If there is a question about the school district's identification as a Benchmark School District or K-12 Grade Level Expectation District, you want to clarify by using the NDE definition card (orange) provided in your manual. State that you have spoken to their contact person and this is the correct terminology for their district.)
8. Please feel free to discuss your views openly. From time to time, I may have additional questions to further understand a concept that you have shared.
9. Let's begin. Please state your name, the name of your building/district and indicate permission to record this interview by repeating this statement, "I (your name) at (school/district name) give my permission to record this interview."

Interview Questions

DIRECTIONS: Place a check when the participant mentions each probe so that you do not repeat the probe.

1. How does your school/district provide time, resources, and training for School-based Teacher-led Assessment?

Probes

_____ What creative ways has your school/district used to provide the needed time for STARS?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

2. How has STARS impacted your expectations for you as an:
 Educator? _____
 Student? _____

Probes

_____ How have you maximized the use of time for instruction in your classroom?
 _____ How has your school/district helped you establish benchmarks for meeting state standards?

(EXAMPLE: Benchmark = subtraction of whole numbers)

_____ How has your school/district helped you develop a clear and appropriate instructional targets based on assessment results?
(EXAMPLE: Instructional Target = Concept-type away; communicative property; basic facts; borrowing)

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

3. How have you integrated assessment results into instruction to inform teaching and learning?

Probes

_____ How are your lesson plans aligned to assessment data and state standards?
 _____ How do you modify your instruction in cases where students did not perform well on an assessment?
 _____ How do you use rubrics in assessment and instruction?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

4. How has STARS impacted individualization and differentiation of classroom instruction for special populations, i.e.: Special Ed, ELL, Title I, Gender?

Probes

_____ What are you doing to increase student achievement for these special populations?
 _____ Programs
 _____ Strategies
 _____ Tools

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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5. In what ways do you monitor and report student performance and put that information to use with students in your classroom and in your community?

Probes

_____ How are you involving students, parents and community in improving teaching and learning (meetings, open houses, media, PTA/PTO)?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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6. What changes have you made within your classroom to ensure opportunity for all students to learn?

Probes

_____ Report card?
 _____ Scheduling?
 _____ Increased credits?
 _____ Other? _____

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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7. How do you create a culture of improvement in your classrooms/school for:
 Educators? (professional learning teams, conversations, lesson plans)

 Students? (individual conferencing, small groups working on individual standards)

Probe

_____ In what ways do you participate in conversations with others about improvement of curriculum and instruction?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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8. What comments, recommendations, or final observations would you like to make about STARS that we haven't discussed?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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Appendix F
2005-2006 Study I Research Interview
Protocol for Leaders

STARS RESEARCH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
LEADERS
Benchmark School/K-12 Grade Level Expectation School
January – March 2006

Qualitative Research Purpose: Explore and understand the similarities and differences in perceptions of STARS on Benchmark Districts and K-12 Grade Level Expectation Districts in the assessment process and its impact upon curriculum and instruction.

Data of interview: _____ Time of interview: _____
Location of interview: _____
Interviewer: _____

Participant Profile

Participant: _____
School District: _____ ESU # _____
Position: Superintendent _____ Principal _____ Other _____
Years at present position & site: _____ Total Years in Education: _____ Gender: M F

Introduction:

1. Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.
2. I am serving as an interviewer for the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This research is being conducted so that the Nebraska Department of Education has a better understanding of how the STARS process is being implemented in school districts and schools across the state. Information gained from this research is used to improve the process and to provide insight into next steps.
3. First, I want to assure you that this interview is strictly confidential. Information provided by participants is reported or released in aggregated form only. Districts, schools, individuals, and ESU's are not identified. Are you participating in this interview willingly?
(Interviewer only: If the participant indicates they are not a willing participant, thank them for coming in to speak with you and dismiss them with the assurance their declination will not affect their relationship with their school, district, the University of Nebraska, or the NDE.)
4. I have an Informed Consent Form outlining your rights as a participant. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw from the study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Nebraska Department of Education, or your school district. Contact persons for the project and the Institutional Review Board are provided on the Informed Consent Form in case you have questions or concerns. I have a copy for you to sign and one for you to keep for your use.
5. I am going to record this interview so that the interview can be transcribed (a typed copy of the interview will be made) and we have an accurate rendering of your responses.
6. It is important that I maintain the integrity of your words and intentions; therefore, I may ask you to review the transcription if I have any difficulties with the interpretation.
7. We are interested in finding out about the perceptions that you hold regarding the STARS assessment process and its implementation in your district. Questions about your assessment process and its impact upon instruction, curriculum, and assessment are specific topics of interest.
(Interviewer only: If there is a question about the school district's identification as a Benchmark School District or K-12 Grade Level Expectation District, you want to clarify by using the NDE definition card (orange) provided in your manual. State that you have spoken to their contact person and this is the correct terminology for their district.)
8. Please feel free to discuss your views openly. From time to time, I may have additional questions to further understand a concept that you have shared.
9. Let's begin. Please state your name, the name of your building/district and indicate permission to record this interview by repeating this statement, "I (your name) at (school/district name) give my permission to record this interview."

Interview Questions

DIRECTIONS: Place a check when the participant mentions each probe so that you do not repeat the probe.

1. How does your school/district provide time, resources, and training for School-based Teacher-led Assessment?

Probes

_____ What creative ways has your school/district used to provide the needed time for STARS?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

2. What kind of training have you had as a leader to increase your assessment literacy?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

3. At what grade levels do you report STARS assessment data to the state?

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

What kind of grade levels do you assess locally?

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

4. How are your teachers that are not at state reporting grade levels involved in the STARS process?

Probes

_____ How are your teachers at non-reporting grade levels developing their assessment literacy skills (training, conversations, learning teams)?

_____ How are your teachers at non-reporting grade levels developing benchmarks for their grade levels (instructional targets, outcomes for grade levels)?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

5. How has STARS impacted instruction for special populations in your school/district i.e.: Special Education, ELL, Title I, Gender, etc.?

Probes

_____ What are you doing to increase student achievement for these special populations?

_____ Programs

_____ Strategies

_____ Tools

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

6. In what ways do you monitor student performance and put that information to use in your school/district/community?

Probes

_____ How do you use data to inform decision-making about teaching and learning?
 _____ How are you involving students, parents, and community in improving teaching and learning (meetings, open house, media, PTA/PTO)?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
--------------------	------------------

7. What changes have you made within your district to ensure opportunity for all students to learn?

Probes

_____ Report Card
 _____ Scheduling
 _____ Increased Credits
 _____ Other? _____

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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8. How do you create a culture of improvement in your school/district for:
 Educators? (professional learning teams, conversations, lesson plans)

 Students? (individual conferencing, small groups working on individual standards)

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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9. What comments, recommendations, or final observations would you like to make about STARS that we haven't discussed?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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Appendix G
2005-2006 Study II Research Interview
Protocol for Teachers

STARS RESEARCH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
January – March 2005

Qualitative Research Purpose: Explore and understand the differences identified in perceptions of STARS on assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, leadership, and support from external agencies on consortia, collaborations, and independent school districts.

Data of interview: _____ Time of interview: _____
Location of interview: _____
Interviewer: _____

Participant Profile

Participant: _____
District and School: _____
Position: ___ Superintendent ___ Assessment Coordinator ___ Principal @ HS MS ELEM
 ___ Teacher Grade: 4 8 11 Subject: Math Language Arts
Years at present position and site: _____ Total Years in Education: _____

Introduction:

1. Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.
2. I am serving as an interviewer for the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This research is being conducted so that the Nebraska Department of Education has a better understanding of how the STARS process is being implemented in school districts and schools across the state. Information gained from this research is used to improve the process and to provide insight into next steps.
3. First, I want to assure you that this interview is strictly confidential. Information provided by school and district staff is reported or released in aggregated form only. Districts, schools and individuals are not identified.
4. I have an Informed Consent Form outlining your rights as a participant. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw from the study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Contact persons for the project and the Institutional Review Board are provided on the Informed Consent Form in case you have questions or concerns. I have a copy for you to sign and one for you to keep for your use.
5. I am going to record this interview so that the interview can be transcribed (a typed copy of the interview will be made) and we have an accurate rendering of your responses.
6. It is important that I maintain the integrity of your words and intentions; therefore, I may ask you to review the transcription if I have any difficulties with the interpretation.
7. We are interested in finding out about the perceptions that you hold regarding the STARS assessment process and its implementation in your school or district. Questions about assessment literacy, use of data in classroom settings, instructional impact, leadership, and support from external agencies within your collaboration/consortium/individual district are specific topics of interest.

Interviewer Only:

If there is a question about the school district's identification as a collaboration/consortium/ district, you want to clarify by using the NDE definition and stating that you have spoken to their contact person and this is the correct terminology for your district.

8. Please feel free to discuss your views openly. From time to time, I may have additional questions to further understand a concept that you have shared.
9. Let's begin. Please state your name, school, district and indicate permission to record this interview by repeating this statement, "I (your name) at (school/district name) give my permission to record this interview."

Interview Questions

DIRECTIONS: Place a check when the participant mentions each probe so that you do not repeat the probe.

1. As (Superintendent, Assessment Coordinator, Principal or Teacher) what has been your primary role in the STARS process within your collaboration/consortium/district?

Probes

- _____ a. What was the role of the collaboration/consortia/district in the assessment process?
- _____ b. Can you tell me a little bit about your role in the process that was used for the development of classroom assessments for STARS and how that relates to your involvement in your collaboration/consortium/district?
- _____ c. In your role, what has been the value of you in belonging to a collaboration?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
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2. What new learnings have you had due to your involvement in the STARS assessment process within your collaboration/consortium district?

Probes

- _____ a. You have stated (one, two or what ever has been stated) new learnings due to your involvement in your collaboration. Are there others?
- _____ b. What was the value of your new learnings to you as a professional and to your school or district?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
--------------------	------------------

3. What type of data do you collect from your assessments and how do you use your data in improving student performance?

Probes

- _____ a. How have you been involved in the scoring and reporting of assessments?
- _____ b. How is data disaggregated (free and reduced lunch, gender, Title 1) and what is your role?
- _____ c. How do you interpret the data once it is given to you? Does your collaboration/consortium/individual district support you in the interpretation of data?
- _____ d. How do you use data to develop and implement interventions?
- _____ e. What is the role of your collaboration/consortium/individual district in scoring and reporting, disaggregation, interpreting, and using data for interventions?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes
--------------------	------------------

4. What major obstacles has your collaboration/consortium/district faced during the implementation of STARS?

Probes

_____ a. Are there other obstacles that I should know about?

***Only ask this probe if the participants bring one of the topics up:*

_____ b. Tell me about what you mean when you say you need more time, leadership, NDE support, ESU support, or change etc. What would you do with extra time, etc.?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

5. What would you like for your district's school's next steps to be to better implement the STARS process?

Probes

_____ a. Can you tell me more about that? (If you need additional clarification on a topic)

_____ b. Do you have some ideas of how these steps could be implemented?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

6. How could your collaboration/consortium/district help you better implement the STARS process?

Probes

_____ What would you like to see your collaboration do for you in the future that they are not doing today?

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes

Appendix H
2005-2006 Study VI Research Survey Sample

Survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska STARS

Welcome to the Role of Technology in Supporting Nebraska STARS Survey

We are contacting you because you are listed as a school district contact for the Nebraska School-Based Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). We would like to extend an invitation for you to help us improve STARS by participating in a survey of the role of technology in supporting Nebraska STARS. This survey is designed to assess the extent of technology use by schools as they participate in the STARS process; identify critical issues in using technology-supported planning, assessment and reporting systems; and provide direction for the development of policies and resources that will support more efficient and effective implementation of STARS.

Based on previous evaluation data, we believe that gathering more information regarding technology use in STARS is important. "Charting Stars: Voices from the Field Year-Four Report", an evaluation of the Nebraska School-Based Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) summarized challenges and obstacles to the successful implementation of STARS. It is clear from responses across teachers, principals, superintendents, and ESUs that the time the process takes; the difficulties in the collection, reporting and management of data; and assessment literacy are key issues.

Your time and effort in completing the survey will help us understand how technology is used to address these challenges and will help improve the assessment process for students in Nebraska.

To Begin the Survey

If you decide to continue, you will first come to a letter of consent explaining the purposes of the survey and how the data from the survey will be used. After reading the letter of consent, you may choose to accept or decline to participate. If you agree, you can continue to the survey questions. The survey takes only a few minutes to complete. Please note that the survey is only accessible once, so that you must complete it in one editing session.

[Proceed to Consent Form and Begin the Survey](#)

118 Henzlik Hall / P.O. Box 880355 / Lincoln 68588-0355 / (402)472-2231 / Fax (402)472-2837

IRB #2005-11-103 EP

Dear Nebraska Educator,

We are part of a team of researchers from the University of Nebraska that has been contracted by the Nebraska Department of Education to conduct an independent and comprehensive evaluation of the School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). Because we believe that educators like you are the best source of information about the STARS process, we are asking that you take a few minutes to share your opinions with us by participating in our online survey.

This survey seeks to gather information from educators on how extensively technology is used to support the processes of data collection, management, and reporting, and to identify any major differences in the use of technology based on school size and/or resources. Demographic data including district size and funding resources, identified data collection/management personnel, and percentage of time devoted to task will be collected for the purposes of data analysis.

Your participation in this survey is strictly voluntary and your responses will remain confidential. A report based on the information we receive will be reported in aggregated form to the Nebraska Department of Education. We may also publish articles in scholarly journals or present information at education conferences based on the information contained in our report. The report, articles, or presentations will not include information that will allow individuals, schools, or districts to be identified.

Access and completion of the survey will indicate your consent to participate. There are no known risks involved in participating in this study. You may choose not to participate in the study without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Please contact Al Steckelberg at (402) 472-5491 or asteckelberg1@unl.edu for any questions you have regarding the survey. Direct any questions, concerns, or comments about the study to Jody Isernhagen at (402) 472-1088 or jisernhagen3@unl.edu. Questions concerning your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Your completion of our survey will greatly help us understand the use of technology to support the STARS process at the local level. Please accept our sincere thanks for your willingness to share your knowledge and experience with us. The following link will take you to the online survey.

Sincerely,

Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D.
Coordinator & Principal Investigator
STARS Comprehensive Evaluation
Telephone: (402) 472-1088
Email: jisernhagen3@unl.edu

Allen L. Steckelberg, Ph.D.
Secondary Investigator
STARS Comprehensive Evaluation
Telephone: (402) 472-5491
Email: asteckelberg1@unl.edu

Please indicate your preference.

Survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska Stars

Page 1 of 6

Demographic Information

Thank you! Welcome to the survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska STARS. This survey contains four sections each including between 4 and 6 questions. Respond to the questions on each page and press the continue button at the bottom of the page. You may move forward or backwards through the questions, but after you press the final "Submit" button, the survey will be finished and your access will then be restricted.

1. How many students are enrolled in your district?

- a. 1 – 599
 - b. 600 – 999
 - c. 1000 – 1999
 - d. 2000 – 4999
 - e. over 5,000
-

2. What is your job title?

- a. Superintendent
 - b. Principal
 - c. Assessment Coordinator
 - d. Teacher
 - e. Other (Please identify)
-

3. What responsibilities(s) do you have in the assessment process? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Assessment coordination
 - b. Development of assessment plans and quality indicators
 - c. Administration of assessments
 - d. Data aggregation
 - e. Supervision of data management
 - f. Reporting summary data internally
 - g. Reporting summary data to NDE
-

Survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska Stars

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Demographic Information

4. How does your school participate in the STARS process?

- a. As an individual school district
- b. As part of a consortium
- c. As part of a collaboration

5. Does the ESU play a role in the assessment process in your district?

- Yes No

If yes, what role(s) does the ESU play in your participation in STARS? (Choose all that apply)

- a. I am completing the survey as a member of an ESU
- b. The ESU assists in the development of the assessment process
- c. The ESU participates in the administration of the assessments
- d. The ESU aggregates data
- e. The ESU manages the storage of data
- f. The ESU reports data to the district
- g. The ESU reports data to NDE on behalf of the district
- h. The ESU provides training for staff, teachers and/or administrators.

6. Which of the following best describes your district's ability to invest in technology specifically to support the assessment process? (Choose one)

- a. No funds are available for this purpose
- b. Funds are available if the technology reduces other costs of administration
- c. New funds are available if it leads to school improvement
- d. Funds are available to develop new technology

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Survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska Stars

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Current Uses of Technology

The next series of questions address the extent to which technology is used in your district or ESU to directly support the assessment process. The assessment process includes the collection, management and reporting of assessment results. It also includes the planning and validation of the assessment system used in the district.

Please rate the extent to which you use each of the following types of technology to complete each of the listed assessment collection, management and reporting tasks on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing "Not at All" and 5 representing "to a great extent".

7) Developing and documenting assessment procedures

	Not at All				To a Great Extent
a. Word Processing	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. Spreadsheet	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Dedicated software	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. Dedicated Web application	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Local custom software/Web	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
f. Other (Please identify) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

8) Administering assessments to students

	Not at All				To a Great Extent
a. Scanned Scoresheets	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. Computer-based assessment	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Web-based assessment	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. Electronic samples/portfolio	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Other (Please identify) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

9) Aggregation, management and storage of assessment data

- a. Word Processor
- b. Spreadsheet
- c. Database
- d. Dedicated software
- e. Dedicated Web application
- f. Local custom software/Web

Not at All				To a Great Extent
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

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**Survey of the
Role of Technology
in Support of Nebraska Stars**

Current Uses of Technology

10) Administering assessments to students

	Not at All				To a Great Extent
a. Word Processor	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. Spreadsheet	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Database	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. Dedicated software	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Dedicated Web application	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
f. Local custom software/Web	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

Please rate your agreement with the following statement:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11) Available technology-based assessment systems are a good match for the Nebraska assessment model.	<input type="radio"/>				

12) Please provide your rating of the quality of the technology your district currently uses in the STARS assessment process in each of the following areas. (1 Low, 5 High)

	Low				High
a. Does the technology support the school improvement process?	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. Does the technology help in meeting NDE reporting requirements?	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Does the technology address security and privacy issues?	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. Is the technology readily available for classroom teachers?	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Is the technology readily available for	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

Survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska Stars

Impact of Technology on Assessment

The following questions assess your perceptions of the impact of technology on the assessment process.

13) Please indicate the extent to which you believe currently available technology contributes to each of the following on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing "Not at All" and 5 representing "To a Great Extent".

	Not at All				To a Great Extent
a. Consistent data collection	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. Knowledge of how to organize and summarize data	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Results are accessible to a wide audience including classroom teachers	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. Coordination with planning and school improvement documentation and reporting	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Coordinated with other data management systems	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
f. Reporting options allow multiple views and disaggregation of data	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
g. Reporting targets	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

Please rate your agreement with the following statement:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14) The use of technology significantly reduces the amount of time involved in STARS	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
15) The use of technology significantly increases the complexity of the STARS process	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
16) The use of technology increases the value of the assessment data collected in the STARS process	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
17) Technology assists teachers in understanding the data collection process	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
18) Technology assists teachers in utilizing the data collected in the STARS process for instructional	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

Survey of the Role of Technology in Support of Nebraska Stars

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Future Systems and Issues

This portion of the survey gathers data that will help the Nebraska Department of Education make decisions about how to support the STARS process.

19) Please rate the impact of each of the following potential barriers related to using technology to support the assessment process: (1 Low, 5 High)

	Low				High
a. Initial cost	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. Maintenance costs	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Commitment to single vendor	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. Knowledge to choose best system	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Technical expertise to maintain	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
f. Fear of obsolescence	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
g. Teacher training	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
h. Interoperability with other systems	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
i. Staff time to learn system	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
j. Administrator time to learn system	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

20) Please rate your perception of the quality of currently available technology used to support the collection, management, and reporting of assessment data. (1 Low, 5 High)

	Low				High
a. Systems are comprehensive	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
b. System quality	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
c. Classroom level reporting features	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
d. District level reporting features	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
e. Interface with State reporting	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

21) Please rate the desirability of each of the following characteristics in a technology-based data collection, management and reporting system? (1

Low, 5 High)

- a. Ease of data entry
- b. Usefulness of results for instructional decisions
- c. Comprehensive features
- d. Match with reporting requirements
- e. Ease of learning system
- f. Interoperability with other systems

Low				High
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

22) Please rate the likely impact of each of the following potential areas of State support or resources: (1 low, 5 high)

- a. Publication of guidelines for data management and reporting systems
- b. Support for shared experiences among school districts
- c. Case studies of successful implementations
- d. Grants for training teachers
- e. Grants for technology implementation
- f. Development of models for data collection, management and reporting
- g. Publication of interoperability standards and reporting requirements
- h. Provision of software templates for collecting & organizing data

Low				High
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

[Go Back](#)

This is the last question of this survey. Feel free to go back for any changes that you may want to make. When you press submit, your survey will be complete. Thank you for participating.

[Submit](#)