



The State of K-12 Assessments

What Educators Need to Know
from a New National Survey

Introduction

As K-12 math and reading scores have reached historic lows, the focus on assessment has intensified.¹

Most states now require schools to administer assessments beyond federally mandated standardized tests.² More and more schools, for example, use interim and progress-monitoring assessments as well as screeners for dyslexia.

High-quality assessments have the power to provide educators with insights to inform instructional decisions and help boost educational outcomes for students.

But questions remain.

For starters: How well are classroom assessments working? Where are educators seeing success with assessments? Where do they need to improve? What challenges do they face in assessing students? How is their use of assessments evolving — especially as artificial intelligence (AI) comes into play?



Pearson School Assessments has been a leader in the assessment field for more than **80 years**. K-12 districts across the country turn to Pearson for its high-quality, research-based instruments.



Among the key survey findings:

<50%

Most educators use a range of assessments — but **fewer than half** believe their current assessments are “very effective” at measuring students’ understanding of key academic concepts.



The biggest challenge for educators is that using assessments takes too much time.

7 out of 10

Seven out of 10 K-12 leaders and educators say it’s “very important” to be able to easily access assessment results and to measure students’ progress toward learning targets...

~50%

...but only about half strongly agree they have such capabilities.

Pearson Assessments and K-12Dive’s studioID surveyed K-12 leaders and educators nationwide. The 150 respondents serve at all different levels of K-12 education and include district and school leaders, classroom educators, and specialized educators.

The biggest surprise from this survey involves AI. Much of the debate about AI has centered on its potential drawbacks in K-12 education.³ But the survey reveals that K-12 leaders and educators have become bullish on using AI with assessments. Among those surveyed, 72% say they’re already using AI or are considering using it soon.

This report digs into the survey results to show K-12 educators where they stand with assessments relative to their peers. The report also reveals assessment-related challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

A range of assessments, but questions about their effectiveness

The survey confirms that K-12 educators now use a variety of assessments. **At least two-thirds** of respondents say they administer formative assessments (69%), teacher-created assessments (67%) and progress-monitoring assessments (66%), in addition to mandated summative assessments (68%). More than half (53%) use interim/benchmarking assessments.

Fewer educators are convinced of the effectiveness of their tools. According to the survey, educators are most satisfied with formative and teacher-created assessments. But fewer than half (46% and 45%, respectively) say these tools are “very effective” at measuring students’ understanding of the content being assessed.

Other assessment types receive even lower marks. Only 39% of those surveyed rate progress-monitoring assessments as very effective. Just 38% give that top mark to interim/benchmarking assessments. And only 29% find state summative assessments to be very effective at measuring student performance.

Percentage of K-12 educators and leaders who rate their assessments as “very effective” at measuring students’ understanding of key academic concepts

46% Classroom assessments for formative use

45% Teacher-created assessments

39% Progress-monitoring assessments

38% Interim/benchmarking assessments

29% State-mandated summative assessments

The assessment gaps school leaders need to close

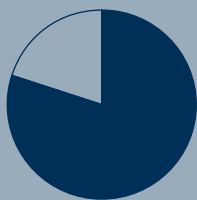
The survey also identifies sizable gaps in the areas educators consider most important.

For example, **70%** of respondents say it's very important to be able to measure students' progress toward specific learning targets. But only **44%** strongly agree that their assessments give them this capability.

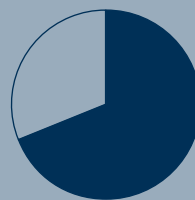
About **two-thirds** say it's very important for assessments to pinpoint student needs. Unfortunately, just **38%** strongly agree that their assessments do so.

And **62%** emphasize the importance of using assessment results to personalize instruction. Yet only **37%** strongly agree that their assessments enable such personalization.

K-12 educators and leaders also believe assessments should measure two skills above all else:



72%
critical
thinking



69%
problem
solving

Here again, gaps appear. Only **43%** report that assessments prove very effective at measuring critical thinking. And **51%** say the same for assessing problem solving.

Effective assessment systems inform the support frameworks schools use, notes Trent Workman, Senior Vice President of Pearson's School Assessment division. But survey respondents identify key areas where their assessment tools fall short. Only about **a third** say their data-driven decision-making, tiered interventions, or universal screenings integrate very well with their support frameworks.

"Every assessment tells a story. When educators get what it's measuring, they can turn data into real wins for students. This survey is a call to action for more effective and coherent assessments," Workman concludes.

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Trent Workman,
Senior Vice President of School
Assessment, Pearson

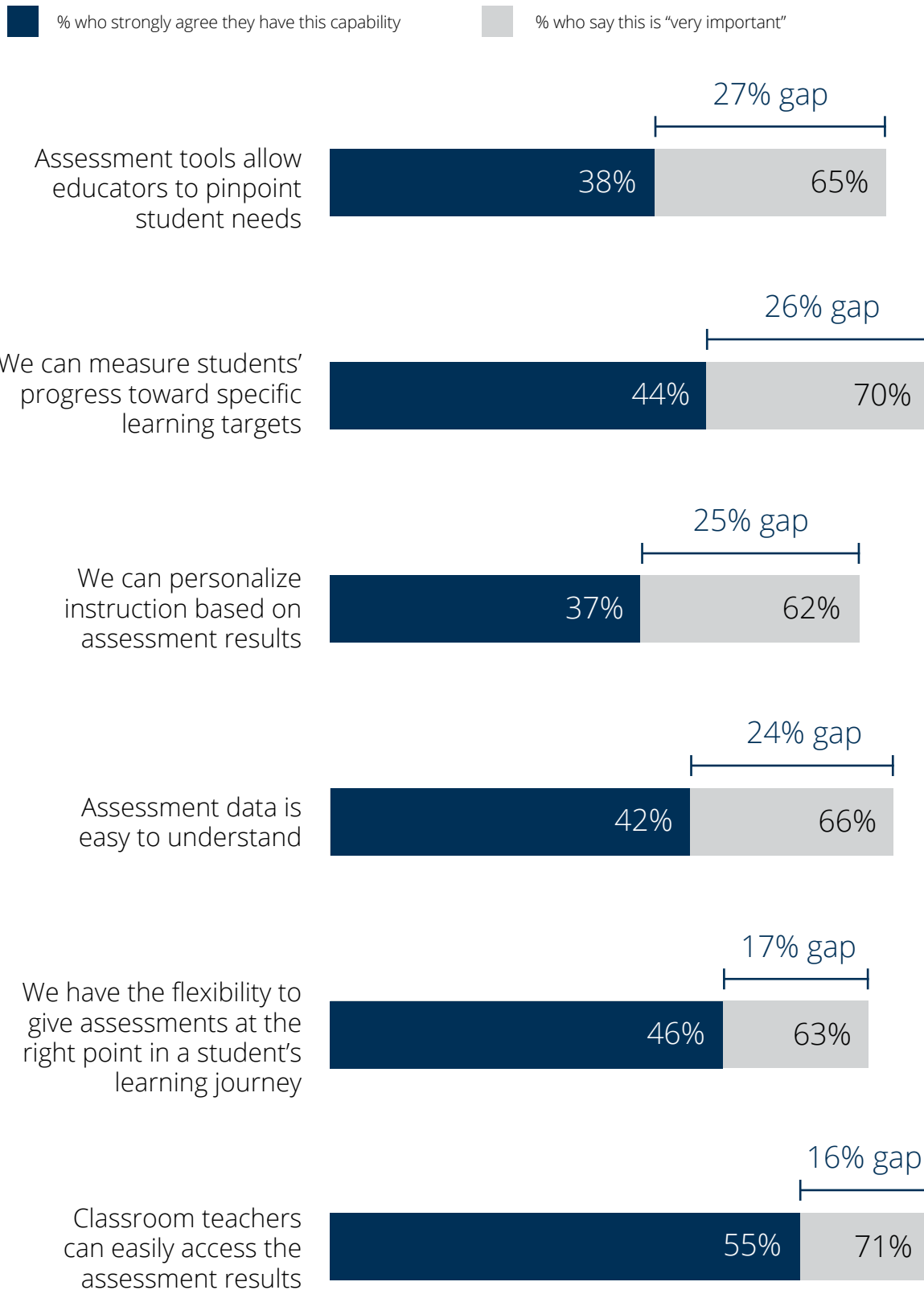


1 in 3

respondents say their data-driven decision-making, tiered interventions, or universal screenings integrate very well with their support frameworks



Where do educators see gaps in assessments vs. their school or district's capabilities?



Where K-12 educators struggle most with assessments

The survey identifies educators' challenges with assessment, too.

Time is the number one pain point K-12 educators and leaders mention. Among those surveyed, 40% say assessments always or often *take up too much class time*.

Staff shortages add to the problem. Nearly a quarter of respondents say they always or often lack enough staff to administer assessments.

Unclear reports is another challenge where only **42%** of those surveyed strongly agree that the assessment data they receive is easy to understand. In other words, many or even most teachers need to take extra time to interpret and act on the data — time they can't spare.

K-12 educators already have the highest burnout rate of any industry.⁴ School leaders must find ways to make assessment more effective without adding to teachers' burdens.



Many or even most teachers need to take **extra time** to interpret and act on unclear report data — time they can't spare.



“Integrating a new piece of technology won’t solve underlying problems in your assessment tools.”

Amy Reilly,
Vice President of Assessment Product,
Pearson

The time pressures help explain why educators now look to AI for help with assessments. Incorporating AI can help teachers save time, notes Amy Reilly, Pearson’s Vice President of Assessment Product. But Reilly warns school leaders, “Integrating a new piece of technology won’t solve underlying problems in your assessment tools.”

To support effective teaching and learning, school leaders should take a closer look at their assessment systems. Here are four fundamental questions to consider in evaluating your school’s needs:

1

Do your educators understand the purpose of each assessment tool?

As obvious as this question sounds, many teachers don’t receive enough training to know how and when to use each assessment tool. “Assessments vary based on their purpose, and without training, teachers may use the results in ways the assessments weren’t designed for,” explains Reilly. She gives an example: “Many of our customers want more granular information from our interim assessment, PRoPL. However, its purpose is to measure growth of a particular subject, providing a gut check of where students are a few times a year. It’s not built to inform the next day’s lesson plan.”

It’s crucial that educators think about the types of decisions they would like to make and then the type of data needed to inform that decision. Reilly encourages school leaders to start by reviewing which assessments their educators offer and how the tools are being used.

2

Do you have high-quality assessment content?

Schools run into trouble when they make instructional decisions based on poor-quality assessments. For an assessment to be a valid gauge of what students know and can do, the test questions must align to learning objectives or the academic standards taught in the classroom. If the results are to project student performance

on a summative assessment, it is even more critical that the content coherently shows how a skill is measured and the rigor to which students need to demonstrate their understanding. A simple checklist may help educators evaluate the quality of the content used on the measurements.

Quality Checklist:

- ✓ Which standards are the test questions aligned to?
- ✓ How was alignment determined? External experts? Educator reviews?
- ✓ Is the content grade and age appropriate?
- ✓ How do the test question and passage types align to what are used on the summative assessment? Does alignment matter for the purpose and use of the non-summative assessment?
- ✓ Are the test questions free from bias and sensitivity issues and representative of the population of students engaging with the measure?

3

Do your assessments provide granular data to inform instruction?

Remember, many educators say their current assessment systems don't let them pinpoint students' needs or measure progress toward specific learning targets. One possible factor: reporting is too high-level to be actionable. High-level scores, such as a score on numbers and operations, will do little to guide instruction on a student who needs specific help with just multiplication.

One nonnegotiable in any assessment system: School leaders and classroom teachers must have *confidence* in the results. That means the data must be valid and reliable down to a granular level.

"A holistic, integrated assessment system can make teachers' lives easier, and it produces data that's more likely to be used to inform instruction."

Trent Workman,
Senior Vice President, Pearson



42%

of survey respondents say their assessment data is easy to understand

4

Do your assessments produce results that are easy to interpret and timely enough to guide instruction?

Assessment results won't do you or your students much good if educators can't see the results in real time. Teachers need the data in near real time to effectively determine next steps for learning.

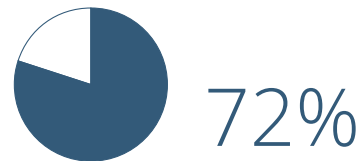
Nor do results help much if they are difficult to interpret. But as we've seen, only 42% of survey respondents say their assessment data is easy to understand. This problem adds to educators' time burden and makes it harder to adapt instruction based on assessment results.

Part of the problem is that educators are often pulling results from multiple assessment platforms, gradebooks, or other sources, making it difficult to find and interpret. Workman says: "Think about how much more difficult and time consuming it is to triangulate data when you need to pull data from different systems that don't talk to one another. A holistic, integrated assessment system makes teachers' lives easier, and it produces data that's more likely to be used to inform instruction."



How AI is changing K-12 assessments

For all the debate about AI in education, the educators surveyed show little hesitation about using AI-powered tools to improve assessment. **Nearly three-quarters** of respondents (72%) are already using AI or are considering using it soon to help with assessments.



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Educators want tools that can help them manage their time and focus on instruction. About half of respondents identify the following AI features as “very valuable”:

51% Reducing educator time spent studying assessment data by providing AI-driven insights

46% Generating assessment questions

47% AI scoring of open-ended responses

45% Suggestions for teachers on what to do next following an assessment

Those already using AI with assessments like what they've seen. Nearly all report that AI's features are very or somewhat effective.

About two-thirds of respondents that are using AI say the following features are "very effective":

67% AI scoring of open-ended questions

67% Suggestions for teachers on what to do next following an assessment

62% Generating assessment questions

Looking at these survey results, Workman says: "AI can turn mountains of data into quick, actionable insights, making life easier for teachers and helping them tailor learning to student needs. But while AI opens doors for innovation, we need solid safeguards in place to ensure it's used responsibly, keeping student success and privacy front and center." Of course, schools can realize these benefits only if AI analyzes valid and reliable assessment results.

It's crucial to have stringent quality measures in place when using AI. "Teachers need to be able to rely on the quality of the AI-insights they are working with -- it can't be inaccurate or misleading," Workman explains. School leaders need to ask assessment providers where they sourced the data to train their AI model. They also need to understand how their future inputs will affect the outputs the model delivers.

Reilly stresses the importance of quality control with AI-generated assessment content as well. "Whether you're using a generative AI tool to create assessment content yourself or using a vendor that has relied on AI, you need humans to review the content before it reaches students," she says. "You need assessment content that is grade-level appropriate, reflects the rigor of the standards, aims to limit bias, and is engaging for students."

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“Do your homework”

Amy Reilly has devoted her career to bringing innovation to K-12 assessment. So she is encouraged that administrators and teachers seem willing to experiment with AI-powered solutions.

The growing number of teachers using AI creates a challenge for districts, though. “Many districts’ AI-related policies and frameworks lag behind teacher use of the available tools,” Reilly says.

The larger issue is that AI will not magically fill all the gaps in schools’ assessment programs. Ultimately, there are no shortcuts to a high-quality assessment system. Reilly understands the limitations of time and budget. But she has seen many schools struggle to recover from shortsighted assessment decisions that stem from a desire to save money.

“When we don’t have tools that produce valid and reliable results,” she says, “we just create more noise for educators and take time away from positively affecting student learning.”

Workman advises school leaders: “Look under the hood of the assessments you consider purchasing or have purchased. How are they designed? Do they use raw scores or scale scores? How are student performance levels established? Is the content aligned to your state’s academic standards, and how was that alignment determined? These will all be indicators of the quality of the measures. That quality has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the decisions you make.”

As the survey data shows, most schools have room to improve their assessments. Yes, AI-powered tools hold the promise of making assessment more efficient. But the best way to support teachers and students is to deploy a high-quality assessment system that educators have the training to use.

To learn more about how your school or district can create a comprehensive assessment system that supports educators and improves educational outcomes, visit pearsonassessments.com/large-scale-assessments/district-assessment.html.





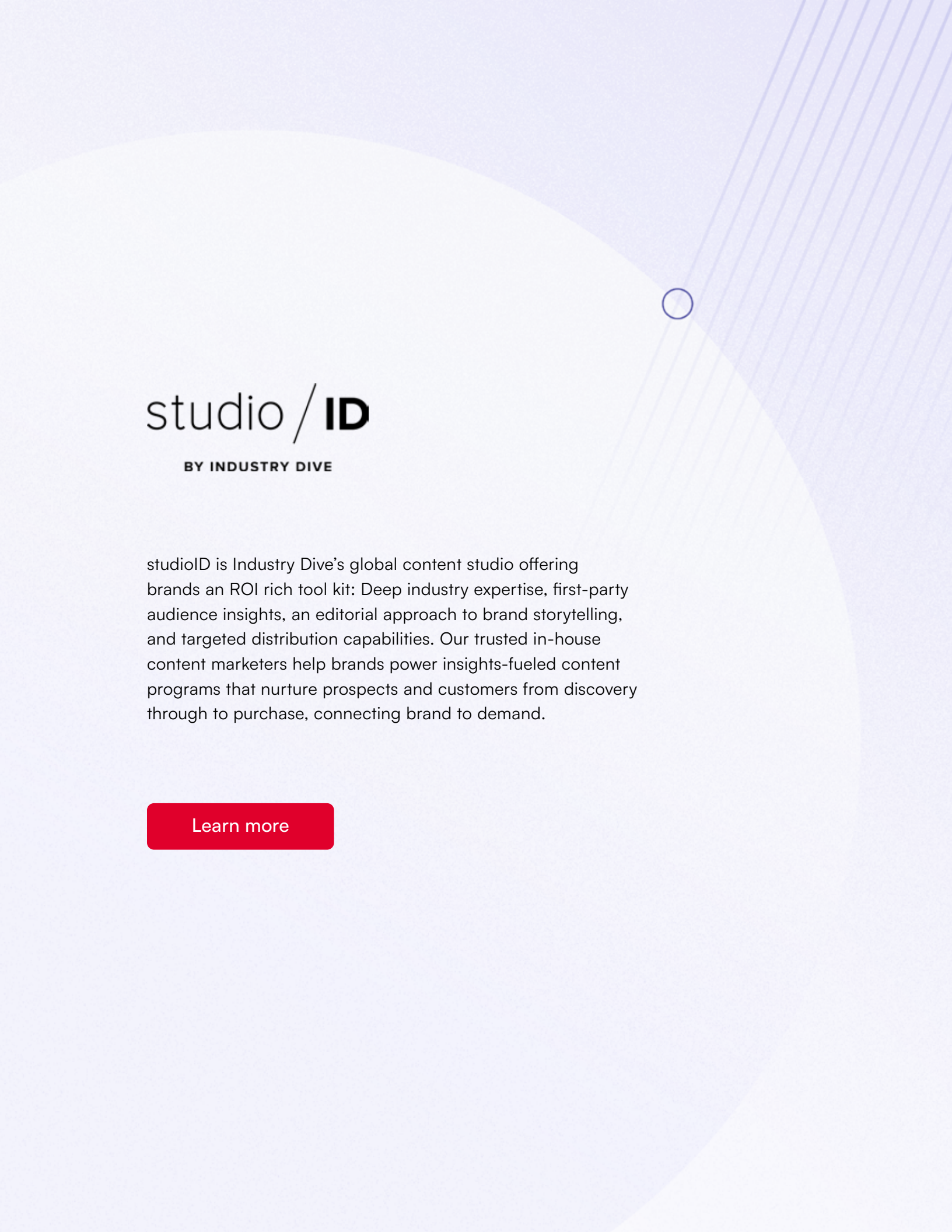
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Our large-scale assessments help state, district and school leaders make informed decisions and help learners reach their potential. Our comprehensive portfolio of evidence-based instruments represents the highest technical quality in assessments today. At Pearson, we partner with schools and educational professionals at every level to help enhance instruction and improve learning outcomes.

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Sources

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