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**October 2016**

**Experience with the Implementation of  
SBAC: A Survey of CEA Teachers  
Who Teach Math and Language Arts  
in 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Grades**

Commissioned by  
**Connecticut Education Association**

**Survey Report**

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This report is the product of a scientific, random sampling of 600 CEA teachers who teach in the subject areas assessed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test—math or English Language Arts—in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The survey was conducted from June 1 to June 6, 2016, after the SBAC assessment had been administered in Connecticut Public Schools for the 2015-2016 school year. The margin of error for the survey is +/-3.9%.

The Connecticut General Assembly has raised questions about whether Connecticut's Mastery Examinations, and in particular SBAC, respond to student needs and inform teachers of student progress (Public Act No. 15-238). With clear responses from teachers who have firsthand knowledge about what is occurring in classrooms, this survey assists in answering some of the questions raised by the legislature.

## **OVERVIEW**

The results of this survey raise concerns regarding the following key issues:

- SBAC has significant challenges in providing adequate and equal accommodation for students. In Connecticut's poorest school districts, teachers have observed that students are disproportionately and harmfully impacted by SBAC.
- SBAC's computerized format has created a technology gap that may directly impact the results and validity of the test. Teachers report a wide disparity in computer resources among different schools, and a wide disparity in students' computer fluency. The technology gap is especially burdensome for students who have less access to computers in the school or at home, and for schools in high poverty districts.
- SBAC does not measure student growth within a school year. As a result, teachers are clear that SBAC fails to provide useful feedback concerning students' needs, or strategies for improving instruction.
- Preparation for SBAC takes away time and resources from classroom teaching. This challenge is present throughout the state, but is worse in high poverty school districts.
- SBAC leads to student frustration, anxiety, and disengagement, and negatively affects the social and emotional well-being of children in the classroom. These concerns are present throughout the state, but are worse in high poverty school districts.

- Most teachers say that Connecticut should find or develop an alternative test to use in place of SBAC.

The survey finds the issue of inequity to be especially important. Teachers have observed firsthand that the SBAC test has unintentionally created barriers to equal access and school success, especially for students in high poverty districts. These impediments are contrary to Connecticut's obligation to provide every student with an equal opportunity to learn and succeed,<sup>1</sup> and raise concerns regarding the denial of basic civil rights to students who are harmed by inequities in the construction and technical administration of the test.

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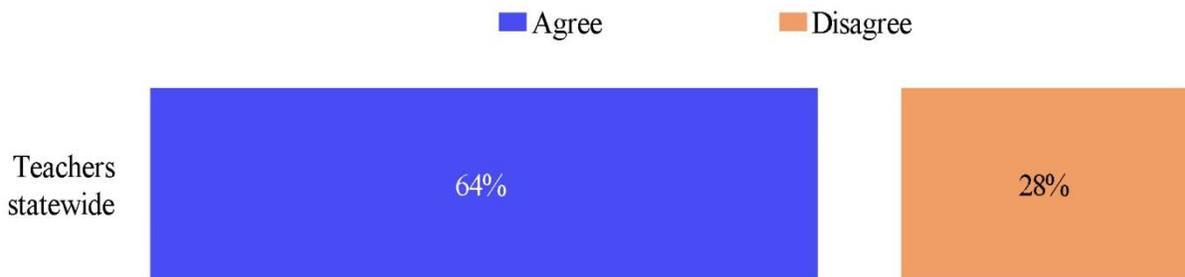
<sup>1</sup> *Horton v. Meskill*, 376 A.2d 359 (1977)

**SECTION ONE: SBAC FAILS TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND EQUAL ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS**

Teachers have directly observed that the computerized format of SBAC creates problems for students regarding the technical administration of the test, with students exhibiting widely disparate computer skills and experiencing other computer-related technical problems. These problems are significant throughout the state, however, they are much worse for students in high-poverty school districts where students often have less exposure to and familiarity with computers and keyboards.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of teachers statewide agree that *students exhibit widely disparate computer skills when taking SBAC* (Figure 1).

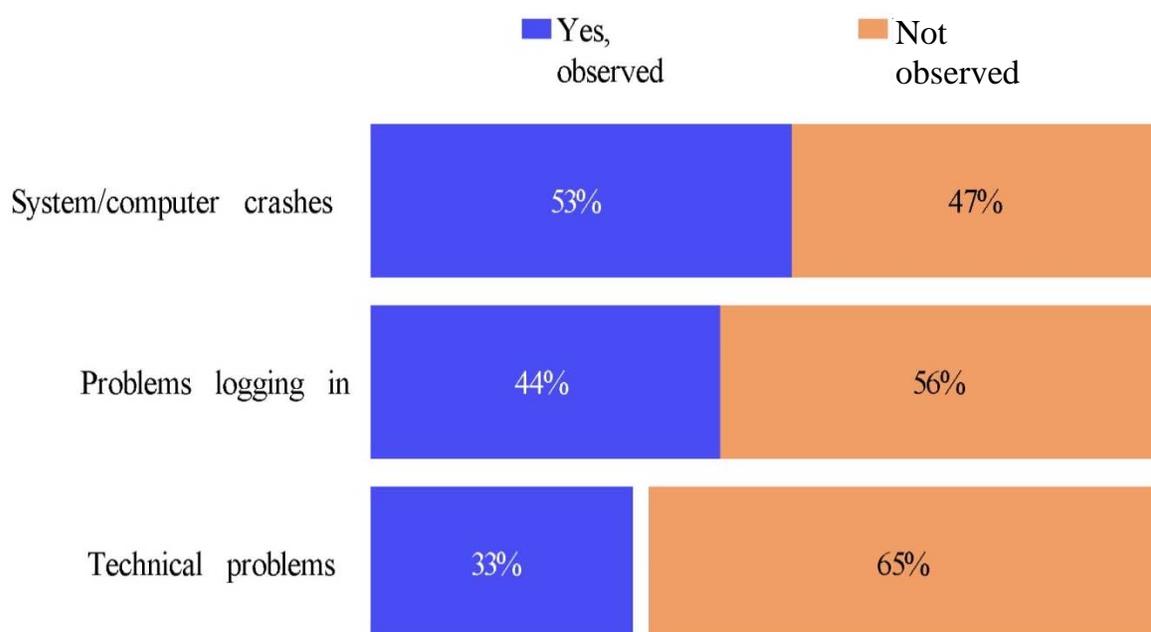
**Figure 1. Agree/Disagree with Statement: *Students exhibited widely disparate computer skills when taking the SBAC test.***



Many teachers observed serious computer-related and technical problems while administering the SBAC test (Figure 2):

- More than one-half (53%) of teachers say they observed *system and computer crashes*;
- Forty-four percent (44%) of teachers observed *problems logging in*;
- One-third (33%) observed *students not being able to complete portions of the test due to technical problems*.

**Figure 2. Teacher Observation of Problems While Administering the SBAC Test.**



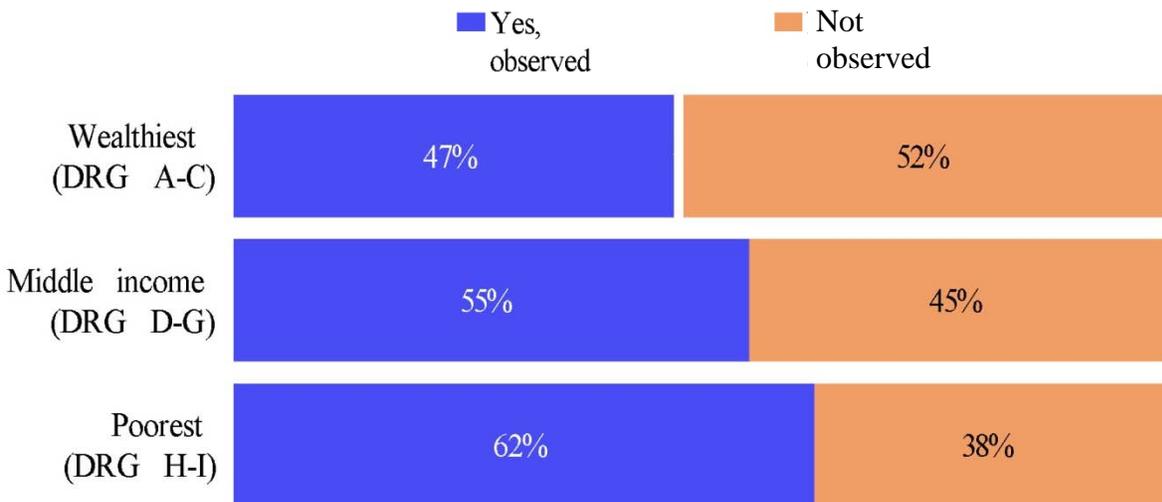
Although these problems exist throughout the state, they are more prevalent in school districts where the average family wealth of the student population is lower:<sup>2</sup>

- Sixty-two percent (62%) of teachers in the poorest districts say they observed system and computer crashes, compared to 47% of teachers in the wealthiest districts (Figure 3).

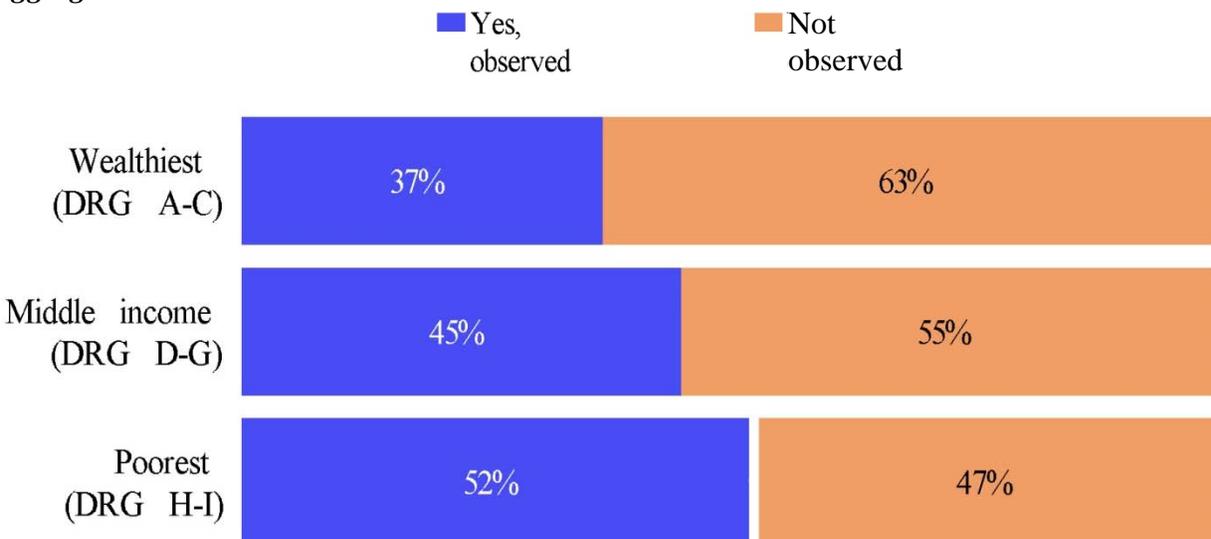
<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report we make comparisons of teachers in public school districts using three categories defined by groupings of the Connecticut State Department of Education's District Reference Groups (DRG). DRG categories are defined by the socio-economic status of the families in the district (i.e., household income, education of parents, parental occupations, employment levels, poverty levels, home language, and district enrollment). We use the shorthand of wealthiest and poorest districts to define the categories, but the definition includes more than just household income. Full definition of District Reference Groups and the school district make-up of each DRG category can be found on the Connecticut State Department of Education website: [http://sdeportal.ct.gov/Cedar/Files/Pdf/Reports/db\\_drg\\_06\\_2006.pdf](http://sdeportal.ct.gov/Cedar/Files/Pdf/Reports/db_drg_06_2006.pdf).

- Over one-half (52%) of teachers in the poorest districts say they observed students having problems logging in, compared to 37% in the wealthiest districts (Figure 4).
- Forty-one percent (41%) of teachers in the poorest districts say they observed students unable to complete portions of the test due to technical problems, compared to 29% in the wealthiest districts (Figure 5).

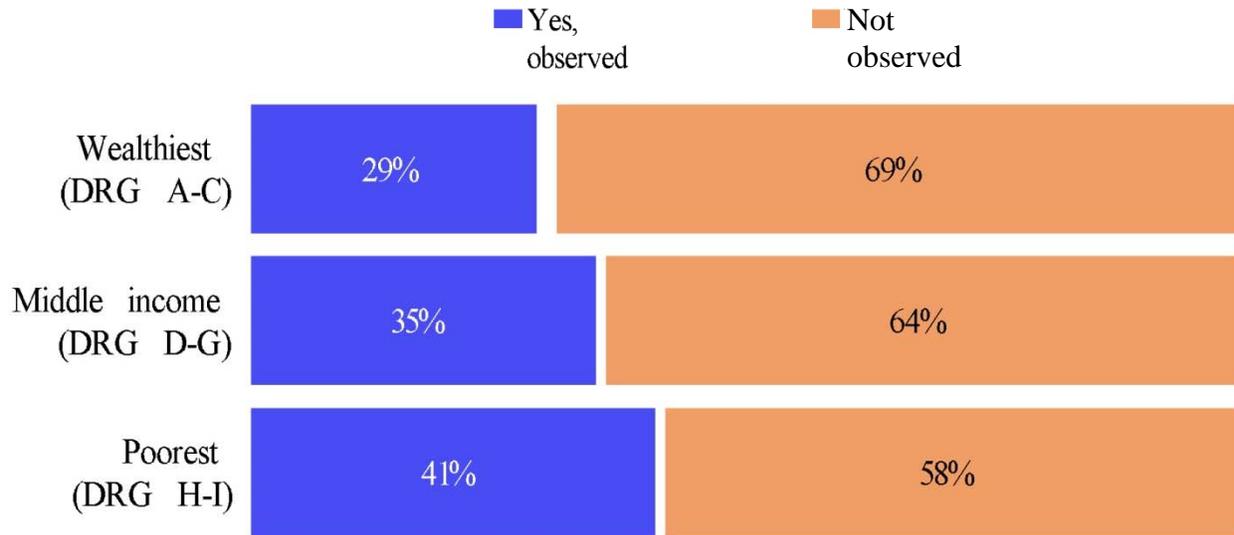
**Figure 3. Teacher Observation While Administering SBAC by District Reference Group (DRG): System and computer crashes.**



**Figure 4. Teacher Observation While Administering SBAC (by DRG): Problems logging in.**

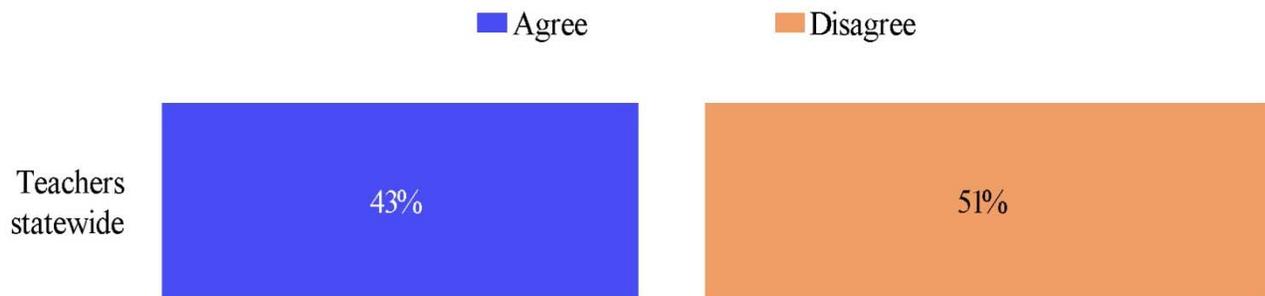


**Figure 5. Teacher Observation While Administering SBAC (by DRG): Students not able to complete portions of the test due to technical problems.**



A majority of teachers find that SBAC’s accommodations for students with disabilities do not work well in practice. Fifty-one (51%) percent of teachers state that SBAC’s built-in methods of providing testing accommodations to students with disabilities did not work well in their class (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Agree\Disagree with Statement: SBAC's built-in methods of providing testing accommodations to students with disabilities worked well in your class.**

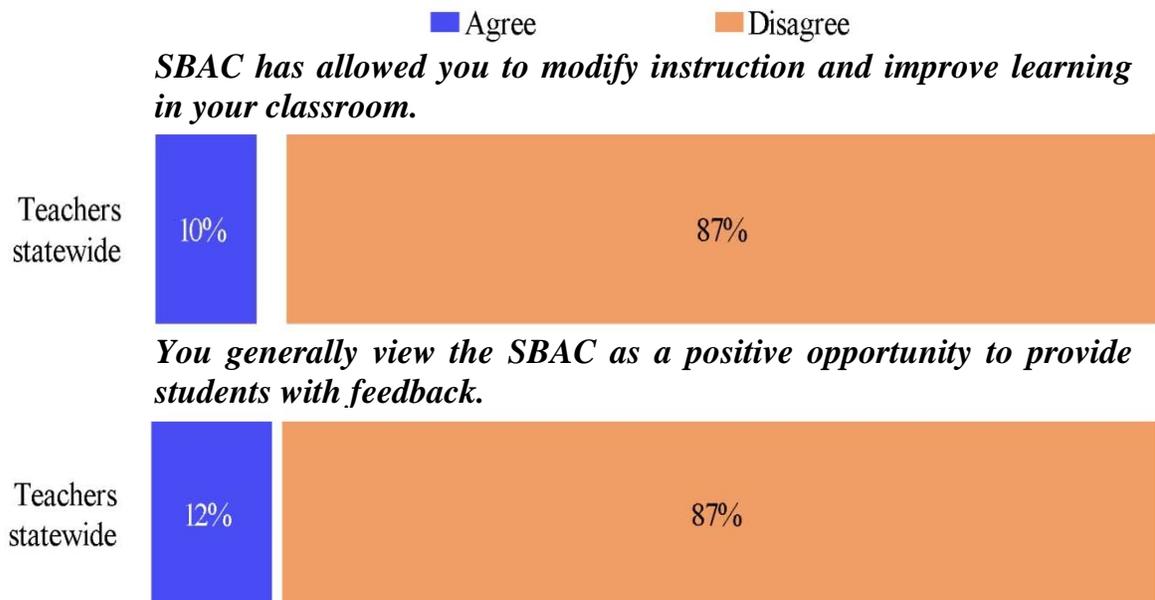


**SECTION TWO: SBAC FAILS TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION OR PROVIDE FEEDBACK ABOUT STUDENT GROWTH IN THE CLASSROOM**

SBAC—which does not measure growth within an academic year and does not provide feedback to teachers about student needs within an academic year—has not provided information to assist teachers in improving learning and student success in the classroom or addressing specific student needs (Figure 7):

- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of teachers say that, *overall, SBAC has not provided them with information to help them improve student learning in the classroom.*
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of teachers say that *SBAC does not provide a positive opportunity to provide students with feedback.*

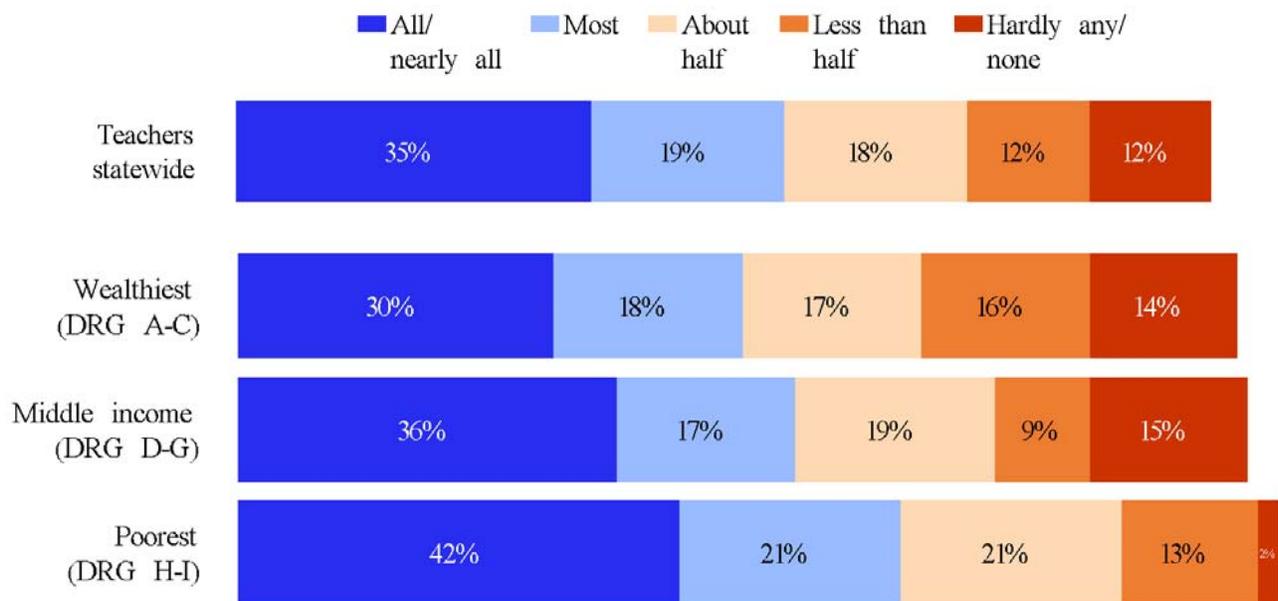
**Figure 7. Agree\Disagree with Statements:**



Teachers have also observed that the questions on the SBAC test are often confusing to students. This confusion can lead to misinterpretations of what is being asked and impact the outcome and validity of the test (Figure 8).

- More than half of the teachers (54%) say a clear majority of their students were confused by the wording of one or more SBAC test questions.
- This problem is worse in the state’s poorest districts, where 42% of teachers say that all or nearly all of their students found the wording of one or more test questions to be confusing, and nearly two-thirds (63%) say a clear majority of their students had that experience.

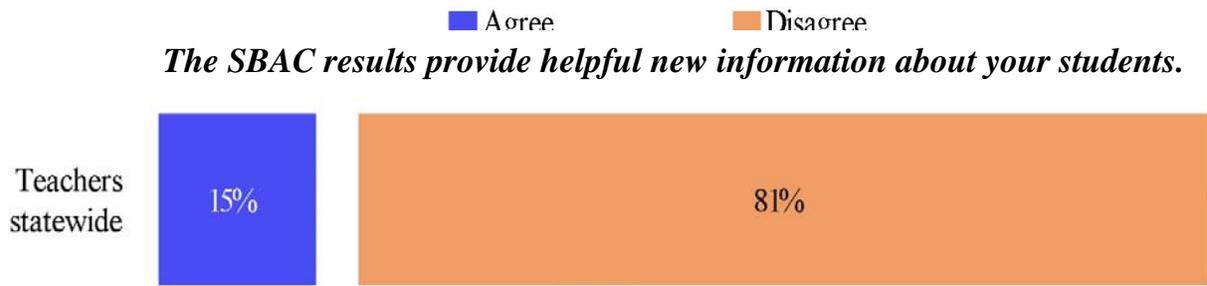
**Figure 8. Results by District Reference Group (DRG): *Approximately how many of your students stated that they found one or more SBAC questions confusing in the way they were worded?***



Teachers overwhelmingly say that the SBAC test does not provide new or actionable information to assist students in their classroom (Figure 9).

- Eight-one percent (81%) of teachers statewide say that *SBAC results do not provide helpful, new information about their students.*

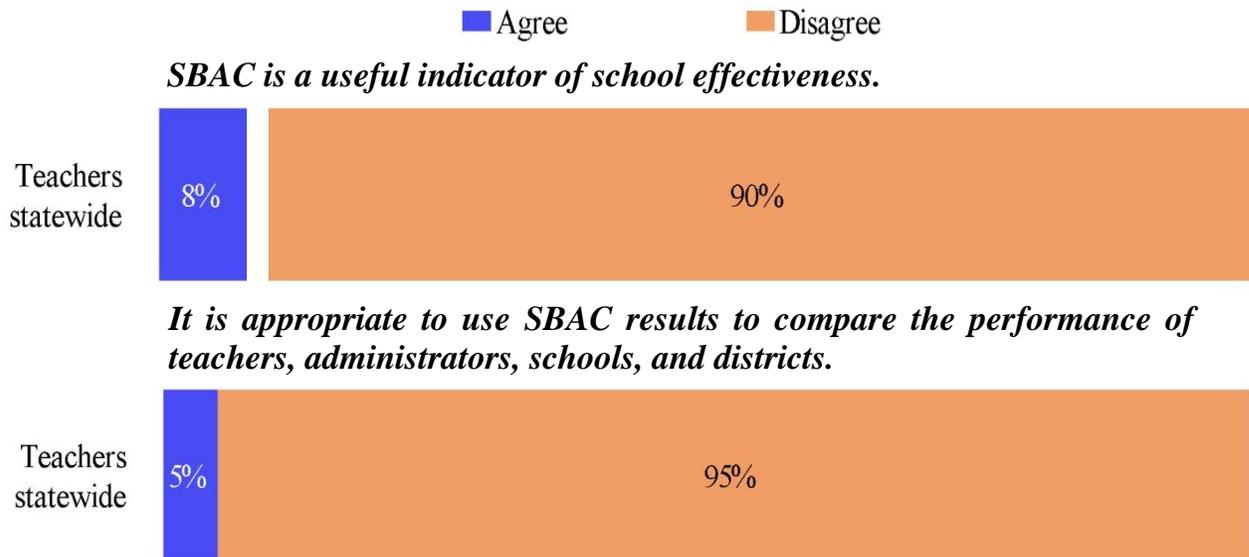
**Figure 9. Agree\Disagree with Statements:**



Teachers also say that SBAC is not an appropriate tool to measure the effectiveness of schools, administrators, or teachers. This observation is also supported by a growing body of research over time.<sup>3</sup>

- Nine out of 10 teachers (90%) say that *SBAC is not a useful indicator of school effectiveness.*
- Even more teachers (95%) say that *it is not appropriate to use SBAC results to compare the performance of teachers, administrators, schools, and districts* (Figure 10).

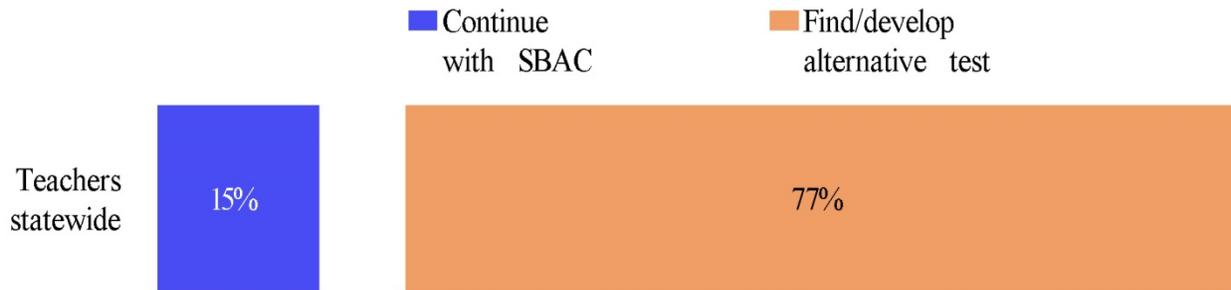
**Figure 10. Agree\Disagree with Statements:**



<sup>3</sup> See Linda Darling Hammond, *Getting Teacher Evaluation Right*, Teachers College Press (2013), pp.70-91; W. James Popham, *The Truth About Testing*, ASCD Publishing (2001), pp.50-74.

When given a choice to continue with SBAC or find and develop an alternative test, teachers—by a ratio of more than 5-to-1—opt for an alternative (Figure 11):

**Figure 11. Tradeoff preference: *That Connecticut continue with SBAC for its annual test or that Connecticut find or develop an alternative test***

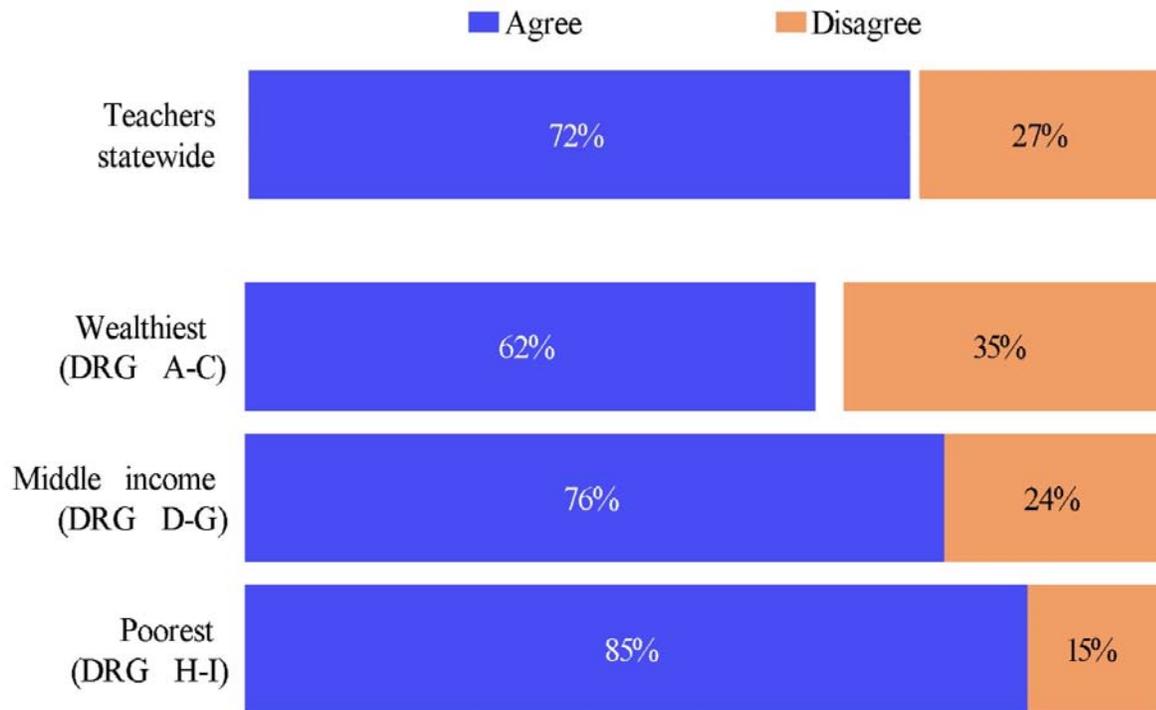


**SECTION THREE: SBAC TAKES TIME AWAY FROM TEACHING**

The survey results indicate that time devoted to SBAC preparation takes time away from student instruction in all districts. In Connecticut’s poorest districts, however, SBAC has a greater negative impact on time and resources available for classroom teaching and learning.

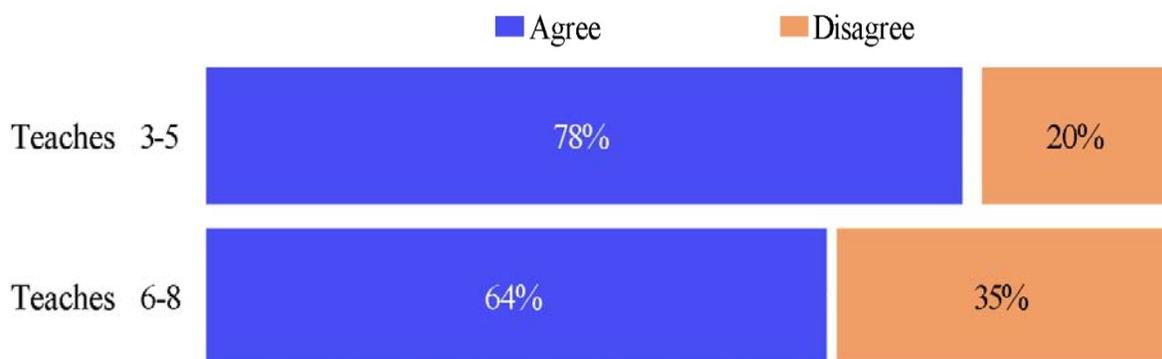
- An overwhelming 85% of teachers in the poorest districts agree that *SBAC prep takes away significant time and resources from teaching and learning in their classrooms* (Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Agree\Disagree with Statement (by DRG): *SBAC prep takes away significant time and resources from teaching and learning in your classroom.***



The loss of teaching time and resources to SBAC test prep is a significant problem in grades 6 through 8 (64% agree), and it is considerably worse in grades 3 through 5 (78% agree— Figure 13).

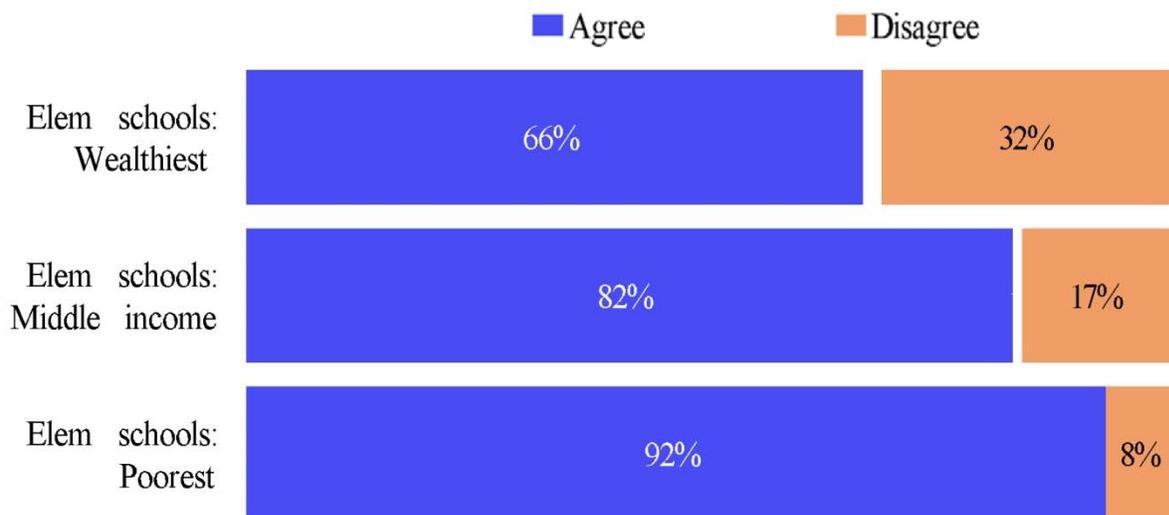
**Figure 13. Agree\Disagree with Statement (by school level): *SBAC prep takes away significant time and resources from teaching and learning in your classroom.***



While the loss of time and resources for classroom teaching and learning is a serious problem across the state, and even more so among Connecticut's public elementary schools, the problem is most intense for elementary school students in Connecticut's poorest districts.

- Ninety-two percent (92%) of elementary school teachers (3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade) in the poorest districts agree that time and resources for teaching and learning in the classroom have been reduced, compared to 82% in middle income districts and 66% in Connecticut's wealthiest districts (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Agree\Disagree with Statement (in grades 3-5, by DRG): *SBAC prep takes away significant time and resources from teaching and learning in your classroom.***



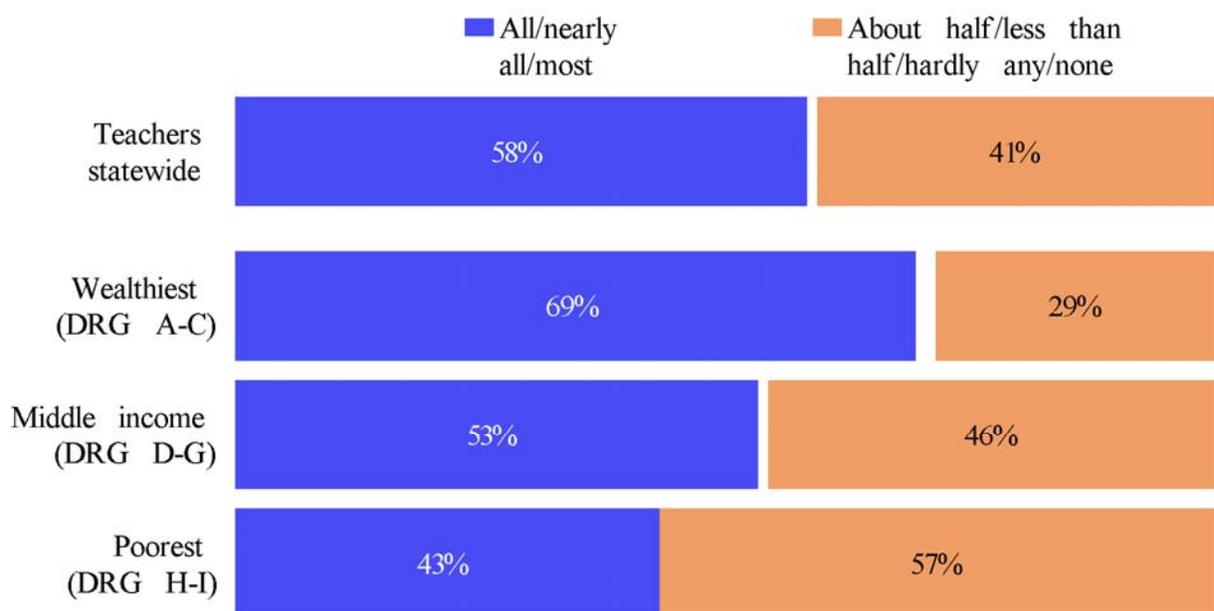
**SECTION FOUR: SBAC CAUSES MORE STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT, FRUSTRATION, ANXIETY AND ANGER COMPARED TO THE CMT**

Teachers have observed that SBAC is having a negative effect on the social and emotional well-being of the students in their classrooms. Compared to the previous state mastery test, the CMT, teachers say that students taking SBAC exhibited more disengagement, frustration, anxiety, and anger. Teachers also say that students are frustrated by the amount of time it takes them to complete SBAC. SBAC’s negative social and emotional impact on children is worse in districts where a child’s average family wealth is lower.

The degree to which this student disengagement and negative impact interferes with the SBAC’s ability to validly measure student performance is not directly quantifiable by this survey but should be explored more deeply. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the negative social and emotional impact the test has on children taking it will introduce error and diminish the validity of the SBAC scores. This problem of error and diminished validity will also result in inequity, since it is worse in Connecticut’s poorest districts (Figure 15).

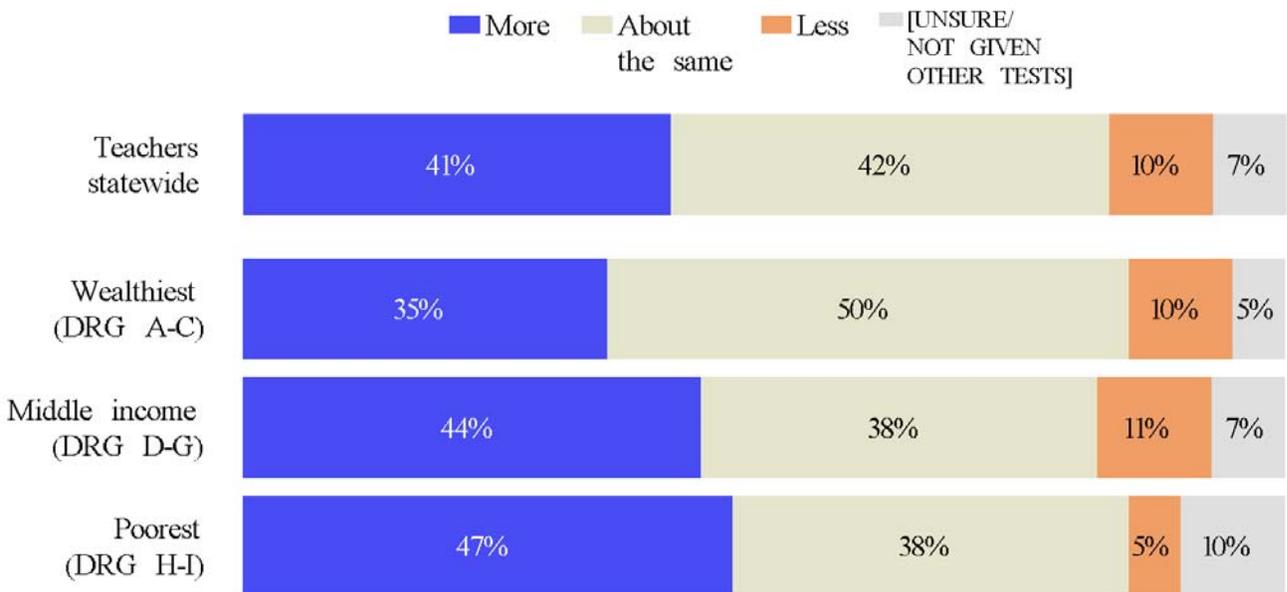
- Teachers in the wealthiest school districts report only 69% of their students are engaged generally engaged and focused when taking the SBAC.
- In the poorest districts the situation is even worse, where teachers report only 43% of their students are generally engaged and focused when taking the SBAC.

**Figure 15. Results by DRG: *Approximately how many of your students did you observe as generally engaged and focused when taking the SBAC test?***



- In addition, 41% of students statewide are angrier, more disengaged, and/or more anxious during the administration of SBAC than they were in comparison with other standardized tests, such as the Connecticut Mastery Test (Figure 16).
- Students in the poorest districts are considerably more likely to be angry, disengaged and/or anxious when taking the SBAC test (47%) than students from the wealthiest districts (35%).

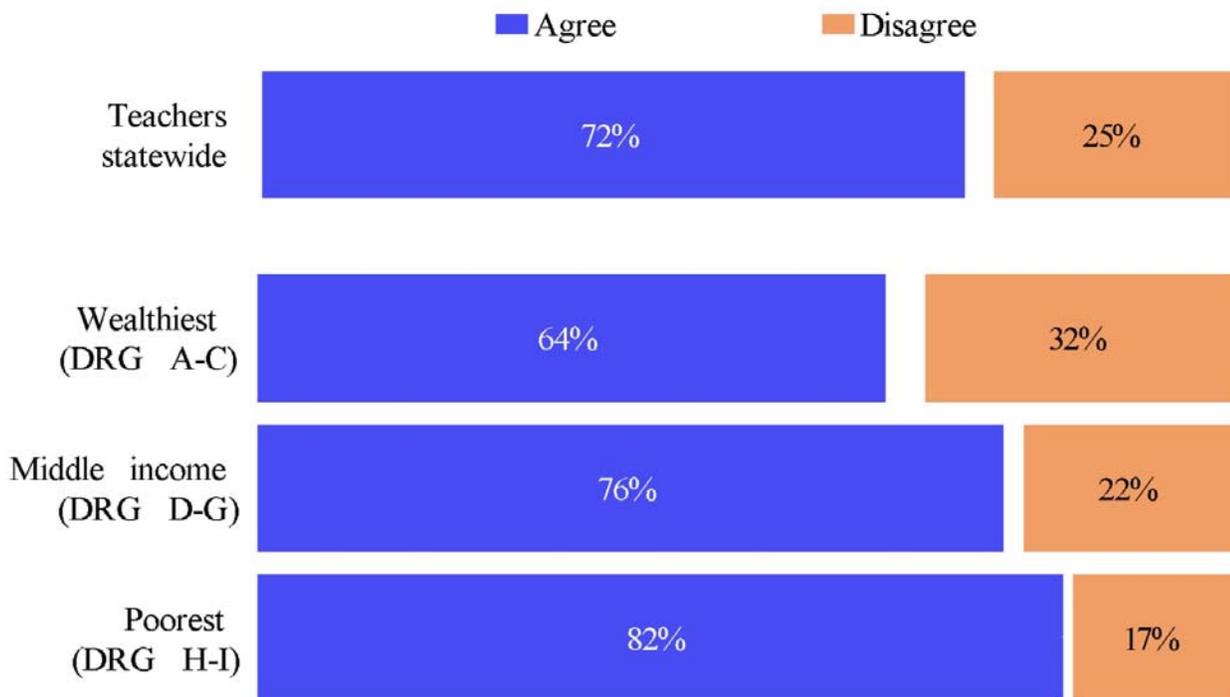
**Figure 16. Results by DRG: Are your students more or less angry, disengaged, and/or anxious, during the administration of the SBAC test in comparison to other standardized tests your students have taken, such as the CMT?**



Teachers also observed that students were frustrated by the time required to complete the SBAC test (Figure 17).

- Statewide, 72% of teachers agree that *the amount of time it took to complete the SBAC test causes frustration toward the test among their students.*
- This issue is considerably worse for the poorest districts (82% agree) than it is for the wealthiest districts (64% agree).

**Figure 17. Agree\Disagree with Statement (by DRG): *The amount of time it took to complete the SBAC test caused frustration toward the test among your students.***



Given the lack of engagement and greater anger, anxiety, and frustration that teachers find students are exhibiting with SBAC, it is clear why they also believe SBAC is negatively impacting the social and emotional well-being of their students in the classroom (Figure 18).

- Statewide, six out of 10 teachers (61%) agree that SBAC is having *a negative effect on the social and emotional well-being of children in the classroom*.
- The impact is greater on students in high poverty districts: More than two-thirds (69%) of teachers in Connecticut’s poorest districts, compared to a little more than one-half (53%) in the wealthiest districts, state that SBAC is having *a negative effect on the social and emotional well-being of children in the classroom*.

**Figure 18. Agree\Disagree with Statement (by DRG): *Having to take SBAC has had a negative effect on the social and emotional well-being of children in your classroom.***

