APPENDIX A: RESEARCH TOOLS

For this project, we used adapted research tools from Achieve, a national education policy organization that conducts nationwide research on standards, assessments, and accountability. Achieve developed the Student Assessment Inventory to support school districts in determining the appropriate balance of testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes. Mississippi First modified the Student Assessment Inventory to capture more information about how assessments impact the whole school environment. The original tool from Achieve can be found here: http://achieve.org/assessmentinventory. In addition, we developed a Technology Inventory to assess the technological capabilities in each district. This tool was developed with guidance from some technology experts in Mississippi school districts. Finally, we used a focus group guide from Achieve to create our teacher focus group protocol. Below are the tools we used.

Student Assessment Inventory for Districts (Adapted from Achieve)			
Name of Assessment	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3
Entity requiring assessment			
Grade(s) Tested			
Course(s) or subjects tested			
Which students are eligible or required to take assessment?			
Type of assessment *Summative; interim/benchmark; formative; diagnostic*			
Number of years assessment has been administered in the district			
To which content standards is the assessment aligned? *(source of alignment verification)*			
Intended purpose(s) of the assessment			
Intended use(s) of the assessment			
Users of the assessment			
Do users of the assessment use it for its intended use(s)?			
To what degree do users of the assessment find it useful or not useful? *1 – not useful* *2 – somewhat useful* *3 – useful* *4 – very useful* Explain why.			
Type of administration			
Item type(s)			
Accommodations			
Expected test administration time			
Common factors that impact test administration time			

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH TOOLS, CONTINUED

Student Assessment Inventory for Districts (Adapted from Achieve)			
Name of Assessment	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3
Testing window			
Test frequency			
Number of days required to test all student testers			
Disruptions to non-testing students during testing days			
Disruptions to non-tested subjects during testing days			
Number of days dedicated to test review			
Other disruptions to school day not captured			
Time between test administration and results to users			
Vendor			
Contract expiration date			
Entity that holds contract			
Annual cost (total and per student)			
Funding sources			

Technology Inventory for Districts (Created by Mississippi First)	
Name of School	School 1
Number and types of devices available to students for assessments (do not include devices only available to teachers or staff)	
Vendor(s)	
Cost of devices *(total and per student)*	
Funding sources	
How old are your devices?	
What is the life expectancy of your devices?	
Number of computer labs	
How many technicians do you have on staff? How many instructional technologists do you have on your staff? What are the responsibilities of each?	
Internet bandwidth into district	
Internet bandwidth between buildings (school to school and between buildings on campus)	
Do you have a direct connection to the internet or does your internet connect back to the central office?	
Are there wireless access points in every classroom?	
Are there enough access points for the number of devices at the school?	
Can all devices be on the network at the same time?	
Do all devices have updated virus protection software?	
What is your process for keeping devices protected from viruses?	
Do any of your districtwide or schoolwide tests require the installment of software? Which ones?	
What is your process for installing software and keeping it up to date?	
Describe the training that users (admin, teachers, students) of the software get. Is it required?	
If there is an issue with the assessment or the software, who can fix it? What is the response time?	
If there is a technical issue with a device, who can fix it? What is the response time?	
Do you track response time to tickets when a device is broken?	
Who controls student passwords and PINs for assessment software? What is the response time for resetting forgotten passwords and PINs?	
Describe how technology is factored into the planning process for assessments.	
What student testing accommodations are you able to provide through technology? Who administers accommodations?	
Common factors with technology that impact test administration time?	

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH TOOLS

Focus Group Protocol (Adapted from Achieve)

Introduction of Moderator and Focus Group Guidelines

- My name is_____, and I'll be moderating today. Thanks for agreeing to talk with me. This conversation will be extremely casual, and I want you to feel as comfortable as possible. I'm here on behalf of the organization that I work for, Mississippi First, to gather information from you. I will meet with three groups of teachers in your district today.

- Mississippi First is a nonprofit organization that specializes in education policy and advocacy. We advocate for policies that are best for Mississippi kids. We are interested in conducting a research project to gain a better understanding of the time devoted to testing in districts. We will use our research to make informed policy recommendations to education leaders and policymakers in the state, including district superintendents, state education officials, and legislators. All of our findings will be published in a report that will be available to the public. The names of districts or people will NOT be published in public reports.

- We will be talking about your thoughts and experiences with testing at your schools. This will help us and your district leaders learn about what testing is like at the classroom level, and it will help provide an understanding of the quality and use of assessments given in the district.

- One person should speak at a time.

- There are no "wrong" answers to any of these questions. We are interested in hearing your perspectives as teachers.

- We value confidentiality. We will not associate any feedback that comes out of this focus group with a particular individual.

- Everyone will have a chance to speak. If you have not had an opportunity to provide your perspective, I may call on you.

- Are there any questions or additional norms you would like to add?

Disclosure of Note-Taking

- I will be taking notes to make sure we get all of your feedback. I will not associate feedback with names.

Parking Lot

- There is a "parking lot" chart where we can put our ideas or thoughts that come up in our discussion that are important but may not be related to the purpose of this group. We want to capture those important thoughts, but we also want to keep focused on the purpose of our meeting. These ideas or thoughts will be shared with appropriate individuals following the meeting.

Communicating Results of Focus Groups

- The results of the focus groups will be summarized, and you will receive a summary by December 31. If we missed any key points you raised during this conversation, please let us know.

Focus Group Questions

1. What grades and subjects do you teach? How long have you worked in the district?

2. How have you seen testing change in the last five years?

3. Do you think students in this district are given too many assessments, not enough assessments, or about the right number of assessments throughout the school year? Why?

4. What are you hearing about assessment from other teachers? What are you hearing from parents? What are you hearing from students?

Teachers	Parents	Students

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH TOOLS

Focus Group Protocol, continued

5. What are some examples of district assessments that have been helpful to your work, such as informing instructional practice, diagnosing student needs or predicting a student's later performance? How have they been helpful? *(Moderator prompt: strong alignment to standards, timely results, helpful reporting, helps inform instruction, etc.)*

6. What are some examples of district assessments that you have not found helpful in informing instructional practice, diagnosing student needs or predicting a student's later performance? How have they not been helpful? How could they be changed to be more helpful? *(Moderator prompt: assessment not aligned to standards, results not timely or in a helpful format, not designed to inform instruction, etc.)*

7. What district assessments, if any, would you suggest the district continue to administer as it does today? Why?

8. What district assessments, if any, would you suggest the district consider eliminating from the assessment program? Why?

9. What district assessments do you think need significant changes? Why? *(Moderator prompt: improve alignment or reporting, reduce frequency of administration, limit the grades or subject areas assessed, focus on a smaller subset of students who must take the assessment, etc.)*

10. Do you see any current gaps in the assessment program that the district should address?

11. What are some changes that occur in your classroom as testing windows approach? Are these positive or negative changes in your opinion?

12. What are some changes that occur in your classroom during the testing windows? Are these positive or negative changes?

13. Does the administration of state and/or districtwide tests take too much time, not enough time, or just enough time in your opinion? If too much, what are some factors that contribute to long testing days? *(Moderator prompt: lack of proper planning, technology failures, student discipline problems, etc.)*

14. Are there any other comments you have about district and state assessments?