

NextEd

TRANSFORMING CONNECTICUT'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Continuous Improvement Plan from The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

The CAPSS Educational Transformation Project

Project Partners

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RETOOL ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**A Chapter in the
Background Paper for the Report**

**NEXTED:
Transforming Connecticut's Education System**

**Developed By
Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
(CAPSS)**



November, 2011



Transforming Public Education in Connecticut

The Challenge of Creating a Learner-Centered School System

Purpose

Connecticut's public school superintendents believe that each child should come to school well fed, adequately clothed, and without fear. Every child should be inspired and challenged by a relevant and important curriculum that tackles real world problems. Every child should be taught by highly trained, professional educators in schools equipped with the technology necessary to enhance teaching and learning. Each child should graduate as a young adult, fully prepared to study at a high level, able to compete on the global stage, and committed to being a contributing member of our society.

Yet the current educational system is not working for all Connecticut students. It is not designed to meet the expectation of universal student success. A strong public school system is essential to maintaining our democratic heritage to create a climate of justice for all our citizens and contribute to the economic stability of our state. Our state must operate its schools understanding that the success of all of us is built on the success of each of us.

Tinkering with Connecticut's system of schooling will not help the state recapture its competitive advantage. The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents calls upon all of our citizens to enter into a spirited and thoughtful dialogue about what is required of a successful school in the 21st Century, what skills will be demanded of our graduates, and what accountability standards must be in place to make this educational transformation a reality.

With this call, it is necessary to revise our own vision of schooling and the social, economic, and political systems that support it. That cannot be done unless Connecticut decision-makers challenge the status quo, setting the cornerstone for a stronger, more equitable, and more vibrant Connecticut. The conversation will not be an easy one. But let us begin.

The Genesis of this Document

This report is the product of research, soul-searching, and debate among Connecticut's public school leaders, and their philanthropic and social service partners. We are grateful to Project Partners and their representatives including the H.A. Vance Foundation, The Nellie Mae Education Foundation, The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, and Dell whose contributions clarified our thinking and strengthened our message. The Educational Transformation Group examined Connecticut's current educational practices, policies, and student results.

Connecticut's educational, political, and social structures present a maze of challenges that cannot be fixed with one single strategy. The current system of public education must evolve in order to meet the dynamic needs of our children. Poverty, ethnicity, neighborhood instability, and individual disability cause inequities that imperil our economic and social fabric as a state.

As we drafted this report, we worked to define our core values, fundamental beliefs, and shared commitments as Connecticut's educational stewards. In our conversations, we shared moments of great pride and equally great despair. We saw notable achievement and insightful decision-making as well as evidence of failure and short-sighted thinking. Throughout our study, the Educational Transformation Group heard from internationally-noted experts. Some provided an ominous glimpse of the future, others advised restructuring of our economic and political supports, still others argued for dissolving most existing educational structures. Many of those ideas earned a place in shaping this report.

We present this vision of an educational transformation to the citizens of Connecticut in the hope that it will provoke statewide conversations about the nature of schooling and what we should expect of our pre-K-16 system. Examining our system of schooling will not be easy. Yet the people of Connecticut will never undertake a more important task.

The Core Principles Supporting the Transformation of our Schools

- Our citizens deserve schools that are second to none.
- No child in Connecticut should be deprived of the opportunity to reach his/her potential due to circumstances of geography, financial inequity, quality of teachers or the school support system.
- Each child's advancement through school should be based upon the mastery of a clearly-defined and sequenced series of skills and a base of knowledge in all disciplines. Each child should have access to instructional technologies, thought-provoking academic activities, and extra-curricular programs that promote the development of a fully functioning adult capable of asking difficult questions and solving sophisticated problems.
- Each child in Connecticut should daily enter a school environment that is designed for and committed to meeting individual academic needs and interests, while also respecting individuality and ensuring personal safety.
- Each educator in Connecticut must be well-educated in a chosen field of study, highly trained in pedagogy, capable of adjusting instruction to meet the needs of every child, and subject to valid accountability standards.
- Those charged with the governance of education K-16, those elected in local communities, our state's legislators, and the executive branch must act with efficiency, harmony, and wisdom to make Connecticut's education second to none. There is no higher responsibility for our state's leaders than to provide a world-class school system.

Connecticut's citizens must challenge the status quo to bring about transformational changes in educational outcomes.

CORE BELIEFS STATEMENT

- The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) holds to the following core beliefs.
- Every child is precious. Each child, regardless of any racial, ethnic, economic, physical, mental or cognitive condition, can and must learn to the same high standard
- Each child has sufficient ability to learn to high standards.
- There must be a strong, vibrant, and flexible public education system in order to meet the goal of every child learning to the same high standard.
- The public education system, as it is designed and functioning today, is not designed to achieve the goal of every child learning to high standards.
- Transformative change in public education cannot take place in isolation from the public.
- The family structure is vital to the growth of every child. It must be reinforced and fostered on an equitable and consistent basis.
- The public education system must integrate services to children and raise community expectations both for the education system and for the other systems that offer services to children and their families.
- In order to achieve the result of every child learning to high standards, the system of public education must be transformed.
- Effective leadership is essential for building the capacity for transformative change resulting, in every child learning to high standards.

Education Policy Direction

Policy making for education at federal and state levels are based on bureaucratic assumptions of hierarchy, centralized decision making, standardization, regulation, inspection. These characteristics are designed to limit unit and individual discretion, provide only one point or source of legitimacy, and depress creativity. The chief outcome of bureaucratic assumptions and thinking is stability, not change.

For local school administrators the model has produced ever increasing explicit formal legal and regulative constraints, less decision- making authority and flexibility, greater goal ambiguity and conflict about directions, more intensive external political influences, fewer incentive structures, and greater involvement of external authorities in the leadership of schools. Complicating the situation are the public organization constraints related to the lack of incentives for conserving resources and improving performance.

Virtually all the state and federal solutions of the “educational reform movement” have been bureaucratic: increase centralization, power and direction for the “top”; increase standardization through testing; increase regulations and mandates to limit school district and school discretion. None of this has resulted in any substantial improvement. The US is just as far behind or further behind the foreign competition as before the “reform movement” started. The agenda of expanding centralized controls, raising standards, top down change model, prescriptive policy, and incremental change has failed and will continue to fail.

Two major forces shaping organizations are the centralization of information due to technology and the decentralization of capability to the operational level. A balance of centralization and decentralization is needed to guide activity and encourage initiative and innovation. At government levels this means that activities should be directed more toward defining overall directions, providing capacity-building resources, and analyzing results using meaningful indicators. State Education Departments, for example, should be organized around “problems to be solved”, rather than regulative or narrow programmatic functions. Decentralized to the school district or school level should be responsibilities for the focus and content of the educational program, design of the instructional organization, determining staffing patterns, determination of expenditure priorities, and the development and evaluation of programs and priorities to address problems and priorities. The intent is to avoid separation of decision-making and implementation.

What is needed is the flexibility of operating units to invent, adapt and change to local conditions. If local schools are to be held accountable for outcomes they must have real authority for policymaking and implementing local decisions. Talking about holding schools accountable is useless until schools have the authority structures to be accountable.



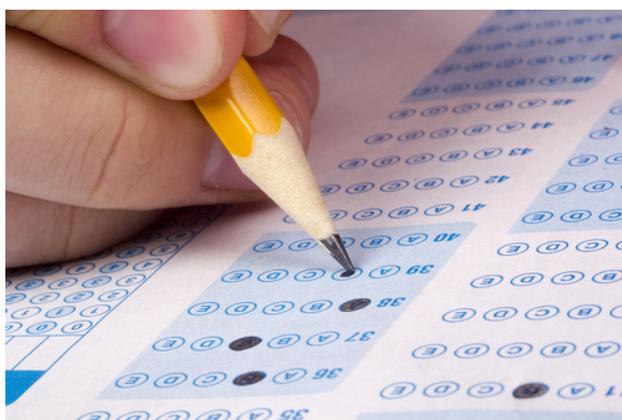
RETOOL ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Rationale for Transformation

The American public school system is failing. That is the message that has been pervasive across the United States, and that conclusion has been reached for the most part based on the accountability component of the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* of 2001.

Many educators and critics of American schools agree that American schools must be transformed to provide students with the skills and understanding necessary to lead a productive life in a globally competitive society. The current American school system was designed to meet the needs of our society while it was in the Industrial Age. It must be transformed if it is to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Most educators and educational experts also agree with an underlying premise of NCLB that schools should be held accountable for helping students achieve success as learners. However, there is strong concern about and criticism of the approaches to accountability that undergird NCLB.



Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, has been very critical of the fact that “In the currently prevailing paradigm in the United States, accountability has been defined primarily as the administration of tests and the attachment of sanctions to low test scores” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 301).

Another major concern about NCLB accountability is that most of the testing serving as the basis for determining a school’s or district’s success is traditional standardized testing which Tony Wagner, co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduation School of Education, contends “...primarily tests how much students have memorized and can recall at a given moment in time” (Wagner, 2008, p. 125).

“Existing models of assessment typically fail to measure the skills, knowledge, attitudes and characteristics of self-directed and collaborative learning that are increasingly important for our global economy and fast changing world” (p. 1).

Many educators argue that the results of a variety of assessments, both teacher-made and standardized, should be used for accountability purposes. However, they also recognize that the transformation of the assessment of student learning is critical to meeting this challenge. The Partners in Education Transformation (Cisco, Intel, and Microsoft, 2008) state that: “Existing models of assessment typically fail to measure the skills, knowledge, attitudes and characteristics of self-directed and collaborative learning that are increasingly important for our global economy and fast changing world” (p. 1). They conclude that “assessment reform is a key to the transformation of the educational system as a whole” (p. 5). Educational Test Service echoed this in a research memorandum stating that current accountability assessments have “very limited educational value” and “typically reflect a shallow view of proficiency defined in terms of the skills needed to succeed on relatively short and, too often, quite artificial test items (i.e., with little direct connection to real-world contexts)” (Bennett & Gitomer, 2008, p. 3).

State testing results will continue to serve as the basis for conclusions to be drawn about the success of teachers, schools and districts. However, if such conclusions are to be made, they should be based on the results of a very different type of assessment. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) has stated that current standardized tests “do not measure the ability to think or create in any field” (FairTest, 2007, p. 1). The Partners in Education Transformation (Intel, Microsoft, and Cisco) in “Transforming Education: Assessing and Teaching 21st Century Skills” averred that standardized tests have usually “assessed what was easiest to measure rather than what was most important to measure.” Standardized tests rarely assess “the application of a deep understanding of subject knowledge to solve complex, real world tasks and create new ideas, content, and knowledge” (Intel, et al, 2008, p. 1).

W. James Popham, professor emeritus at the University of California - Los Angeles, School of Education and Information Studies, has been a frequent critic of current standardized testing practices and the use of testing results. He argues that: “Educational tests are much less accurate than most parents believe.” Parents need to understand that “tests

themselves only sample a child's skills and knowledge, and this sampling is often far from sufficient" (Popham, n.d., p. 1). Professor Daniel Koretz of the Harvard Graduate School of Education also believes that "we tend to overestimate what tests can do. Tests are *not* designed to summarize all that students and schools can do" (Fusaro, 2008, p. 1). The National Commission on Educational Testing and Public Policy (2000) in "From Gatekeeper to Gateway: Transforming Testing in America," emphasized that: "Test scores are at best an estimate of someone's knowledge or ability, and can be affected by numerous outside factors" (p. 1).

Popham has also strongly contended that, particularly with standardized assessments, careful attention needs to be paid to the reliability and validity of the assessments themselves. "The items and description(s) of any high-stakes test should be reviewed at a level of rigor commensurate with the intended uses of the test (Popham, 2001, p. 6). His opinion mirrors that of the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy which has asserted that "The enterprise of testing must be subjected to greater public accountability. Test quality and use should be subject to some form of independent public scrutiny" (National Commission, 2000, p. 3).



The NCLB debate has resulted in a clear distinction being made between assessment and evaluation of student learning, a distinction that was often blurred in the past. Today evaluation of student learning means making a judgment about student achievement at the completion of a unit of instruction or a period of time such as a semester or a school year. Assessment means a process for measuring student learning in order to provide information for students and teachers. This information serves to assist students in knowing where they must improve and teachers in identifying what changes need to be made in their instruction.

The solution, according to The Education Commission of the States (ECS) in "A Guide to Standards-Based Assessment" is for standards-based assessment to be used for the state testing mandated by the "No Child Left Behind" legislation. ECS (2002) points out that assessment plays a major role in standards-based reform by:

- Communicating the goals that school systems, schools, teachers and students are expected to achieve
- Providing targets for teaching and learning
- Shaping the performance of educators and students and, ultimately, school systems. (p. 1)

In standards-based assessment, students are evaluated on how well they have achieved clearly defined standards of understanding and skills.

In standards-based assessment, students are evaluated on how well they have achieved clearly defined standards of understanding and skills. Such assessment compares student accomplishment to pre-established learning objectives rather than to the achievement of other students. A major strength of standards-based assessment, according to ECS, is that "Most externally imposed assessment measures generic skills and achievements – intentionally separated from any specific curriculum, course of study or content standards. In contrast, standards-based reform advocates a tight alignment between what is taught and what is tested" (ECS, 2002, p. 2).

Evaluation of student learning during the past century was primarily summative, focused on determining student achievement through traditional testing. However, research suggests that, while important, summative assessment has "little or no influence on student learning" (Stupski Foundation, 2009, p. 2). Educational experts on assessment such as Rick Stiggins, founder of the Assessment Training Institute, and Linda Darling-Hammond have concluded that we need to rethink and reshape assessment so that it becomes assessment for learning instead of assessment of learning (Stiggins, 2002 v& Gewertz, 2010).

The key to this is the transformation of classroom assessment. Typically, teachers have relied on summative assessments in the form of end of the unit or end of the year tests or standardized tests, with all students taking the same test at the same time. Carol Campbell, Executive Director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, contends that we need to shift from "did students learn what we taught them to what can students do with what they have learned" (2010, p. 5). Assessment is most valuable when it is ongoing because it provides vital information to teachers, guiding their planning and choice of instructional methods, and allowing them to adjust their instruction during the learning process. Such results also guide students in their learning, helping them to understand what they need to do to improve their achievement and to become more successful learners. This is formative assessment (FAST, 2007).

A 1998 research review based on 250 empirical studies of classroom assessment drawn from more than 580 investigations established that research conclusively demonstrates that formative assessment does improve learning. The review stated unequivocally, “Firm evidence shows that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement” (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 140). In formative assessment, students are taught to self-monitor and evaluate their own learning. Research has clearly demonstrated that such metacognition leads to improved academic performance (Stupski Foundation, 2009, p. 15).

Yet even when it is necessary and appropriate to make summative judgments about student learning, an ever increasing number of educators agree that performance-based assessment is far more valid than the traditional, selected-response testing. Performance assessments “ask students to demonstrate what they can actually *do* with their knowledge when it is applied” (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010, p. 3).

Performance assessments “ask students to demonstrate what they can actually do with their knowledge when it is applied” (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010, p. 3).

Further, research on performance assessment has clearly established significant benefits in assuring that assessment is valid and reliable and fair to all students. “Research shows that well-designed performance assessments yield a more complete picture of students’ abilities and weaknesses, and can overcome some of the validity challenges of assessing English language learners and students with disabilities” (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010, p. 3).

Classroom assessment also needs to be differentiated in recognition that just as students learn best in a variety of ways, so too can they best demonstrate their achievement of learning objectives in a variety of assessment modes. Differentiation of assessment would be far more equitable than a one-size-fits-all test. D. Monty Neill, Executive Director of the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) believes that:

Traditional tests have presumed that assessing all students in the same format creates a fair situation. However, the process of test construction, the determination of content, and the use of only one method – usually multiple-choice – all build in cultural and educational biases that favor some ways of understanding and demonstrating knowledge more than others (Neill, 2008, p. 3).



Evaluation will continue to be a critical component of communication of student achievement in a transformed educational system. However, for over 100 years, evaluation in American education has meant making an overall judgment about student learning and communicating that judgment with a single number or letter grade. Such grading neither provides a clear understanding of the student’s progress toward meeting the curriculum standards nor identifies specific weaknesses on which the student needs to improve. It is interesting to note that: “Prior to the late 1700s, students were not given grades *per se*. Rather, teachers gave students feedback on their performance through narrative comments” (Marzano, 2000, p. 11). When grades are on a report card, they often “incorporate more subjective factors such as behavior and effort along with a student’s level of knowledge of a specific subject or mastery of skills” (EdNews Parent, 2010, p. 1).

For assessment to become a truly useful tool in improving student achievement, traditional grading needs to become standards-based. Robert Marzano, a leading researcher in assessment of student learning, has defined standards-based grading: “At its core, instead of only an overall grade for an area, it’s also broken down into specific topics that were covered in that subject” (Dodson, 2010, p. 2). Each of the topics usually receives some kind of grade, whether it is a traditional letter or number grade or some other symbol of the level of achievement.

It is often argued that a standards-based grading system will be unacceptable to universities and thus will put students at a disadvantage during the admission process. In 2009 the Hanover Research Council conducted a study of the potential impact of standards-based grading on college admission. Included in this study was input from 29 universities, including 16 top-ranked institutions such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and MIT. The Hanover report concluded “None of the college admissions offices contacted expressed a concern or a negative view of a transcript based on standards-based grading” (Hanover, 2009, p. 2).

“This next-generation model will include differentiated roles for assessment at the federal, state, and school levels; the use of multiple measures; and assessments that support accountability programs focused on both growth and current status”

(Rabinowitz, 2010, p. 3)

In order for the transformation of assessment to occur, a new emphasis on assessment in teacher preparation and professional learning must happen. W. James Popham, Professor Emeritus at the University of California and widely recognized expert on assessment, contends that dearth of teacher assessment literacy is a major roadblock to transforming education. Popham believes that “Many of today’s teachers know little about educational assessment” (Popham, 2008, December, p. 1). Stiggins also believes that “Few teachers are prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment because they have not been given the opportunity to do so.” He points out that few states “require competence in assessment as a condition to be licensed to teach” and “no licensing examination...verifies competence in assessment” (Stiggins, 2002, p. 5). Obviously the preparation of teachers must be changed if assessment is going to play such a major role in education.

If transformation of assessment is to occur, another key necessity will be the availability of technology. Educational Testing Service (ETS), in their research memorandum “Transforming K-12 Assessment: Integrating, Accountability Testing, Formative Assessment, and Professional Support” asserted that transformation of assessment will be “heavily dependent on new technology.” New technology will need to “allow for the presentation of richer assessment tasks and for the collection and automated scoring of more complex student responses” (Bennett & Gitomer, 2008, p. 1).

Diane Ravitch, Research Professor of Education at New York University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, has summed up many educators’ beliefs about the NCLB accountability approach:

Accountability as we know it now is not helping our schools. Its measures are too narrow and imprecise, and its consequences too severe. NCLB assumes that accountability based solely on test scores will reform American education. This is a mistake. A good accountability system must include professional judgment, not simply a test score, and other measures of students’ achievement such as grades, teachers’ evaluations, student work, attendance, and graduation rates (Ravitch, 2010, p. 163).

Stanley N. Rabinowitz, Director of the Assessment and Standards Development Services program at WestEd, has a clear vision of a transformed assessment system. “This next-generation model will include differentiated roles for assessment at the federal, state, and school levels; the use of multiple measures; and assessments that support accountability programs focused on both growth and current status” (Rabinowitz, 2010, p. 3). The challenge inherent in turning such a vision into reality is truly great, but our students’ future demands that we meet that challenge.



Guiding Beliefs

- Assessment can improve learning when it is an individualized assessment system that identifies a child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Assessment literacy and the effective use of data from assessments are key professional skills for teachers. Assessment results can and should inform instruction, helping teachers to identify what works, what doesn't work, and what needs to be re-taught or taught differently.
- Assessment can be an effective motivator of children.
- Assessment should include the self-assessment by children of their own learning progress.
- Assessment should be ongoing and learning progress should be analyzed over time.
- Assessment of children's learning should include multiple measures that reflect a diverse student population and that assure fairness to all children.
- Assessment should provide as broad a view of the children's skills and understanding as possible.
- Accountability in a learning system provides useful, actionable feedback regarding both the individual child's progress and the system's ability to achieve its goals of high quality education for all children.
- Students do not all learn at the same rate and thus should have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery when they are ready, not once a year at "testing time," and should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery.
- Good accountability systems are transparent, clear, and tailored to different uses.
- A good accountability system communicates learning progress with equity.
- An accountability system should include a system of rewards and incentives as well as sanctions.

Major Recommendations (Selected from the full list of recommendations below.)

Recommendation 1: A variety of assessment opportunities should be used throughout schooling because just as children learn best in a wide variety of ways, they can best demonstrate their success in learning if a variety of assessment opportunities is available.

Recommendation 4: Assessment should occur whenever it is deemed that an individual child is ready for the assessment rather than having all children in a class assessed at the same time.

Recommendation 5: Technology-based classroom assessments should become the norm to provide quicker, if not immediate, results for children. This would facilitate their self-monitoring of their learning and help them to recognize and respond to their strengths and weaknesses. Technology-based assessments would also provide teachers with ongoing data, allowing for more immediate adjustments to instruction when needed.

Recommendation 6: Standards-based grading should be part of classroom assessment and reporting. Standards-based grading will provide information on child progress toward a number of learning targets which are aligned with established curriculum standards. With this information, the teacher would be able to adjust instruction to respond to weaknesses in a child's learning, and children would know where they need to focus their study if they are to achieve understanding and mastery.

Recommendation 11: A major portion of state mandated testing should be performance-based assessment which will more accurately measure depth of understanding and problem solving skills than selected response questions.

Recommendation 13: Teachers should have substantial involvement in the design of and scoring of state assessments. This would increase teacher understanding of and commitment to state testing and assure that the testing reflects the content standards that undergird their teaching.

Recommendation 16: Academic accountability should be based on a variety of indicators that represent a balanced education including the four core disciplines – Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Science.

Recommendation 17: School accountability should be based on longitudinal assessment results of learner cohorts more than year to year comparisons of different cohorts. Accountability should also be partially based on success of students at the next level. Therefore, elementary school accountability should be partially based on student success at the middle school. Middle school accountability should be partially based on student success at the high school. High school accountability should be partially based on student success in college or career.

Key Issues and Supporting Recommendations

Key Issue 1

Assessment should be ongoing to provide continuing information about what the child has and has not mastered. With this information, the teacher can modify instruction and the child can focus on that which has not yet been learned. However, assessment often results in a single letter or number grade that does not provide feedback that will result in improving understanding or mastery, and extraneous factors (e.g., attendance, class participation, and effort) are often included in the grade. Also, classroom assessment has traditionally consisted of selected response questions (e.g., multiple choice, true false, etc.) which usually measure lower level thinking, and assessment usually occurs at the end of a unit of instruction rather than throughout the instruction.

Recommendation 1: A variety of assessment opportunities should be used throughout schooling because just as children learn best in a wide variety of ways, they can best demonstrate their success in learning if a variety of assessment opportunities is available.

Recommendation 2: Formative assessment should be used for informing children of their progress on an ongoing basis during the learning process so that they can have the opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their own work and then to manage and adjust their own learning. Formative assessment also provides teachers with the information needed to monitor and adjust their instruction as necessary and desirable.

Recommendation 3: Teachers should use performance assessment to determine children's progress in developing higher level thinking skills and to assess their ability to transfer skills to real life situations.

Recommendation 4: Assessment should occur whenever it is deemed that an individual child is ready for the assessment rather than having all children in a class assessed at the same time.

Recommendation 5: Technology-based classroom assessments should become the norm to provide quicker, if not immediate, results for children. This would facilitate their self-monitoring of their learning and help them to recognize and respond to their strengths and weaknesses. Technology-based assessments would also provide teachers with ongoing data, allowing for more immediate adjustments to instruction when needed.

Recommendation 6: Standards-based grading should be part of classroom assessment and reporting. Standards-based grading will provide information on child progress toward a number of learning targets which are aligned with established curriculum standards. With this information, the teacher would be able to adjust instruction to respond to weaknesses in child learning and children would know where they need to

focus their study if they are to achieve understanding and mastery.

Key Issue 2

Teachers should have training in developing effective assessments, interpreting assessment results, and using technology-based assessment; however, teacher preparation programs commonly provide minimal, if any, focus on assessment.

Recommendation 7: Significant instruction in developing and interpreting both formative and summative assessments should be required in all teacher preparation programs. Success in teacher preparation courses should be determined using exemplary formative and performance-based assessments that would model good assessment. The efficacy of instruction in assessment should be a standard for approval of teacher preparation programs.

Recommendation 8: Assessment should be a major, ongoing focus of teacher professional learning activities with extended time provided for teachers to work together to develop formative and summative assessments, establish consistency in the evaluation of assessments, interpret assessment results, and use assessment results to inform instruction.

Recommendation 9: The state and districts should build the capacity of educators, education institutions, and developers to use technology to improve assessment materials and processes for both formative and summative uses.

Key Issue 3

Accountability testing does not reflect the education of the whole child nor does it include measures that demonstrate individual student learning and growth. Accountability should be competency based, grounded in the research that indicates what skills and knowledge students must have to be successful in their future. The state standardized tests rely too heavily on selected response questions which tend to measure recall of information rather than higher level thinking.

State testing also does not provide sufficient information about individual student strengths and weaknesses; nor does it provide results quickly enough so that there is time left in the school year for teachers to use that information to help students remediate any identified weaknesses. Too often, parents do not have a clear understanding of what standardized tests do and do not measure and what their child's test results really mean.

Recommendation 10: The state should offer school districts an effective and easy to use assessment data system that would provide teachers with timely access to assessment results, assistance in analyzing such data, and opportunity to communicate the meaning of the data to children and parents. Such a data system should establish basic, uniform data elements but should allow districts to enhance the system by adding data elements.

Recommendation 11: A major portion of state mandated testing should be performance-based assessment which will more likely measure depth of understanding and problem solving skills than selected response questions.

Recommendation 12: Independent research should be established to analyze the efficacy of the design of standardized tests, ensuring the validity and fairness of the tests themselves and the reliability of the scoring of the tests.

Recommendation 13: Teachers should have substantial involvement in the design of and scoring of state assessments. This would increase teacher understanding of and commitment to state testing and assure that the testing reflects the content standards that undergird their teaching.

Recommendation 14: Parents, policy makers, and the public at large should be provided with a clear understanding of what specific tests do and do not measure. This would help to alleviate the drawing of broad-brush judgments about individual children, teachers, schools, and districts based on a single measure of success.

Key Issue 4

NCLB has resulted in an accountability system that is punitive and fails to recognize and reward success. It is primarily focused on year to year standardized test results and fails to consider other key factors that greatly impact the efficacy of schools and districts. This leads to comparisons of differing cohorts of students rather than the improvement of the same cohort of students over time.

The accountability system does not take into account other key factors that impact school and district effectiveness such as instruction, leadership, resources, and parental involvement and support. It also does not address progress or lack of progress in reducing the achievement gap in the state, a major state goal.

Similarly, accountability in districts is often narrowly defined and lacks consistency in implementation.

Recommendation 15: In collaboration with stakeholders, the state should develop and adopt a comprehensive statewide accountability system based on clearly established goals for a transformed public education.

Recommendation 16: Academic accountability should be based on a variety of indicators that represent a balanced education including the four core disciplines – Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Science.

Recommendation 17: School accountability should be based on longitudinal assessment results of learner cohorts more than on year to year comparisons of different cohorts. Accountability should also be partially based on success of students at the next level. Therefore, elementary school accountability should be partially based on student success at the middle school. Middle school accountability should be partially based on student success at the high school.

High school accountability should be partially based on student success in college or career.

Recommendation 18: The state accountability system should include rewards for schools based on increases in student performance and reductions in the achievement gap.

Recommendation 19: School districts should develop and implement an accountability system based on district education goals which are aligned with state education goals and state accountability system, and which include clearly defined measures of school district, school, and student success.

Bibliography

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Complex Problems

Raise the Bar

Make It Personal

Make It Personal By Design

Start With Early Childhood

Reform Leadership

Offer More Options and Choices

Boost Quality

Involve Students and Parents

Leverage Technology

Continue Transformation

The original report and the related Background Papers can be found and downloaded from the NEXTED web site.

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