

A paper commissioned by the  
Council of Chief State School Officers  
**Accountability Systems and Reporting State Collaborative**



# Key Elements for Educational Accountability Models in Transition:

## A Guide for Policymakers

June 2010

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## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

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## INTRODUCTION: EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MODELS IN TRANSITION

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State educational accountability models are in transition. Whether modifying the present accountability system to comply with existing state and federal requirements or anticipating new ones—such as the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) Race to the Top competition—recording the experiences of state education agencies (SEAs) that are currently undergoing transitions is both informative and important. Despite varied contexts, demands, and priorities, states charged with implementing transitions in their accountability models may find the experiences of the Accountability Systems and Reporting (ASR) collaborative member states useful in their own planning.

Defining *accountability* has become more complex as our understanding of it has grown. In the past, definitions have focused primarily on the interaction of goals, indicators, decision rules, and

**The purpose of accountability is not simply to identify and punish ineffective schools and districts, but to provide appropriate supports to cultivate effectiveness.**

consequences. Although those components are still central to any accountability model, more recently the focus has expanded to include building capacity and providing appropriate supports. The state experiences described herein reflect the changing purpose of accountability from identifying and punishing ineffective schools and districts to providing appropriate supports and cultivating effectiveness.

In 2007 the ASR collaborative commissioned a paper titled *Key Elements for Educational Accountability Models* (Perie, Park, & Klau 2007). The paper was the culmination of discussions and analysis conducted by state members and consultants concerning the theory, research, and practice of educational accountability. The authors identified seven components they believe must be considered in developing or modifying an accountability system: *goals, performance indicators, design decisions, consequences, communication, support, and system evaluation, monitoring, and improvement*.<sup>1</sup> Given the dynamic nature of accountability in many states, the advent of a new federal education administration, and the prospect of a coming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a follow-up paper on several states’ experiences undergoing transitions is both timely and worthwhile.

The audience for this paper is educational leaders responsible for the development, implementation, and evaluation of large-scale, school- and district-based state accountability systems.

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<sup>1</sup> For a broader discussion of these components, please refer to (Perie, Park, & Klau 2007) *Key Elements for Educational Accountability Models*, available online at [www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=359](http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=359).

## METHODOLOGY

We asked representatives from 10 ASR collaborative member states to contribute their insights with respect to accountability transitions that were implemented in the last few years or are planned in future years.

Using the *Key Elements* paper as a starting point for identifying possible topics, we asked state education leaders from participating states to share their experiences of an accountability transition in their state. Each member was asked the following:

1. **State event producing transition:** What was the accountability transition in your state?
2. **Context of transition:** What triggered this transition? What was the event or policy decision?
3. **Effects of transition:** What components of the state accountability system were or will be affected by the transition?
4. **Lessons learned:** What lessons were learned from the transition in your state?
5. **Changes in goals:** How have the goals of your state accountability system changed due to this transition?
6. **Communication, training, and support:** What were or will be your plans for communication, training, and support?
7. **Evaluation and system monitoring:** What were or will be your plans for evaluation and system monitoring?

ASR project consultants and staff collated and edited the responses, which were then provided to the initiating SEA leader as well as a second SEA leader for validation purposes. Contributing states were then given the opportunity to review the final text prior to publication.

Please note that the information contained herein does not necessarily provide a comprehensive picture of a state's experience with transitions; details were selected based on responses from ASR members.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

To help the reader locate the information that is most useful to them, the content is organized in two ways:

- **Components of accountability:** Readers wishing to understand how ASR states have dealt with transition within a particular accountability component (e.g., goals of accountability) can read just those sections.
- **Individual state case studies:** Readers interested in the context underlying a given state’s transition—particularly if a certain component above resonates with them—will find this section useful.

## COMPONENTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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### GOALS: WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES, USES, AND CONTEXTS FOR THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM?

**Goals** refer to the purposes, uses, and contexts for the accountability system. We distinguish between the purposes, which provide an overarching reason for using an accountability system, and the goals, which specify the intended outcomes. The key activity is to develop an “explicit theory of action” linking intended outcomes to the various indicators and supports provided.

- **Alabama** is implementing the National Governor’s Association (NGA) cohort graduation rate (pages 10–11).
- **Hawaii** is developing new codes to account for transfer students in four-year graduation rate calculations (pages 11–12).
- **Iowa** is improving the accuracy of cohort graduation rate data (pages 12–14).
- **Kansas** is aligning its high school end-of-course tests to successful course completion (pages 14–15).
- **Kentucky** is responding to a legislative push to develop a new system of standards and assessments, coupled with the desire to minimize the time spent by teachers and students on the state assessment (pages 15–17).
- **Massachusetts** is incorporating the four-year cohort graduation rate as a component of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations (pages 17–21).
- **Michigan** is developing a work skills assessment and college entrance examinations (pages 21–24).
- **Minnesota** is implementing a “second generation of high school assessments” (pages 24–25).

## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: WHAT INDICATORS WILL BE USED TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT?

A major issue in any accountability system is the question of what to measure—**performance indicators**. One must examine the data that are available, the targets of the data collection, and the timing of the data collection. Consideration also needs to be given to ensuring the reliability and validity of the data.

- **Alabama** is implementing a new data collection process (pages 10–11).
- **Kansas** is increasing flexibility and accuracy of high school course completion (pages 14–15).
- **Hawaii** is reporting adjusted graduation rates alongside standard cohort graduation rates so that local educators can map the progress and attainment of students continuously enrolled in their schools (pages 11–12).
- **Iowa's** expanded data collection system allows expanded analyses at the point when students enter and exit the public education system (pages 12–14).
- **Michigan's** schools had to transition from a three-week testing window at the high school level to giving the test to all students on the same day for each of three days (pages 21–24).
- **Minnesota** is aligning passing grades in high school courses to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) proficiency levels (pages 24–25).
- **Nebraska** is shifting from a locally based state assessment system to a common system statewide, in part to ensure more valid comparisons among districts (pages 25–27).
- **West Virginia** is employing multiple indicators of student performance to create a holistic picture of student performance (pages 28–31).

## DESIGN DECISIONS: HOW WILL INDICATORS BE USED TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT TEACHER, SCHOOL, AND DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS?

Once policymakers have decided on a set of indicators, the next question is how to use them to make decisions about teacher, school, and district effectiveness—the **design decisions**. This issue gets at one of the main points of discussion about the ESEA regulations—whether, for example, school effectiveness is best measured using a status, improvement, or growth model—or some combination of these. Policymakers face design decisions such as how to combine indicators to make decisions about students, teachers, schools, and districts. For example, will the indicators be combined in a compensatory fashion, where low performance on one measure can be offset by high performance on another? Or will there be a minimum level of performance set for each measure? In addition, decisions must be made regarding school classification, such as how high to set a bar, how often to raise a bar, and how to balance reliability and validity concerns. In all cases, the decisions are guided by the goals of the system.

- **Kansas** found the need to develop consistent policies, procedures, and business rules governing when students would be eligible to take retests in subjects covered under its Opportunity to Learn (OTL) program (pages 14–15).
- **Massachusetts** recognized the need to report graduation rates in a timely way, but that objective had to be balanced with ensuring that the reported rates are as accurate as possible (pages 17–21).
- **West Virginia** is tying its accountability index to school accreditation (pages 28–31).

### **CONSEQUENCES: WHAT REWARDS OR SANCTIONS WILL BE TIED TO THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM?**

Policymakers implement **consequences** tied to the goals of the accountability system. In most accountability models, schools that meet the goals are rewarded, and schools that fail to meet the goals are sanctioned and receive some type of intervention or support. States must determine appropriate consequences, target them to the appropriate people and organizations, apply them effectively, and monitor their impact on student achievement and other outcomes.

- **Massachusetts** is incorporating accountability for student subgroups in graduation rate calculations (pages 17–21).

### **COMMUNICATION: HOW WILL DATA BE PROVIDED TO STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN A MANNER THAT IS BOTH UNDERSTANDABLE AND USEFUL?**

**Communication** includes communication about the goals and consequences of the accountability system as well as the communication of results, such as score reporting. This element focuses on providing data to stakeholders and the general public in a manner that is both understandable and useful.

- **Alabama** has placed a priority on communicating details about its transition to the NGA cohort graduation rate via multiple, yet cost-effective means, including “living documents” and webcasts (pages 10–11).
- **Hawaii** is using two separate graduation rates over a two-year transition period (pages 11–12).
- **Iowa** is implementing a coding process beginning in 2008, which will affect AYP in 2010 (pages 12–14).
- **Kansas** is utilizing a two-year cycle to communicate its new approach to assessment to stakeholders (pages 14–15).
- **Kentucky** is working collaboratively with state legislators to craft the final language defining the state’s accountability system (pages 15–17).

- **Massachusetts** convened stakeholders from across the state to address graduation rates with respect to AYP determinations and build school/district capacity in increasing graduation rates (pages 17–21).
- **Minnesota** is phasing in one high school assessment per year (pages 24–25).
- **Nebraska** is leveraging the expertise of local educators in developing its statewide assessment system amid rapid changes in legislation (pages 25–27).
- **West Virginia** is working on changes to standards and assessments as part of a five-year process (pages 28–31).

### **SUPPORT: WHAT RESOURCES AND SERVICES WILL SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS AS THEY TRY TO ATTAIN THE GOALS OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM?**

**Support** focuses on resources and services that support schools and districts as they try to attain the goals of the accountability system. The focus is on the roles of state, district, and school agents in developing a plan for school improvement, communicating this plan, and providing the necessary resources to ensure that each school can meet the overarching goals.

- **Alabama** has placed a priority on using multiple, yet cost-effective, training and support mechanisms, including “living documents” and webcasts, to convey information about its transition to the NGA cohort graduation rate (pages 10–11).
- **Iowa** utilizes the state’s fiber optic network, the *Iowa Communications Network*, as well as a series of larger, all-inclusive, face-to-face meetings on data topics (pages 12–14).
- **Massachusetts** piloted an early warning system to help local educators identify and intervene with students at risk of not graduating on time (pages 17–21).
- **West Virginia** provides extensive training to educators on standards and assessments (pages 28–31).

### **SYSTEM EVALUATION, MONITORING, AND IMPROVEMENT: WHAT ARE THE MECHANISMS FOR CONTINUALLY ANALYZING AND ADJUSTING THE MODEL TO ENSURE THAT THE GOALS ARE MET?**

**System evaluation, monitoring, and improvement** focuses on the mechanisms for continually analyzing and adjusting the accountability system appropriately. Successful systems develop an evaluation plan and use the results of the evaluation to make improvements. This evaluation should also answer questions regarding the effectiveness of various rewards and sanctions as well as other intervention or support strategies.

- **Alabama** incorporates an opportunity for district review in conjunction with quality checks (pages 10–11).

- **Hawaii** convened an adjusted graduation cohort workgroup (pages 11–12).
- **Iowa** utilizes a three-step data collection process: training, testing, and production (pages 12–14).
- **Kentucky** works with special advisory groups that represent those involved, including the state board of education, superintendents advisory, DAC advisory and other key groups (pages 15–17).
- **Nebraska** leverages a long-standing evaluation contract with the University of Nebraska as well as many external experts (pages 25–27).

## STATE CASE STUDIES

### ALABAMA’S TRANSITION TO THE NCLB/NATIONAL GOVERNOR’S ASSOCIATION METHODOLOGY FOR CALCULATING COHORT GRADUATION RATES

In 2007 Alabama adopted the National Governor’s Association (NGA) methodology for calculating cohort graduation rates, with the goal of reporting the new rate beginning with the 2012 graduating cohort. It replaced the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) leaver rate as the additional AYP indicator for high schools.

The NGA rate, as recalculated under this transition, will be lower than previous rates, which is being communicated to stakeholders in advance.

Alabama has learned a number of lessons that can be shared with other states undergoing similar transitions:

- **Transfers versus dropouts:** Because of the accountability implications associated with low graduation rates, the accurate reporting of

#### Communication and support

Alabama has invested considerable effort in communicating details of this transition both within the different departments of the state education agency and externally through training sessions with local school districts, accountability coordinators, principals, counselors, and other parties.

Training has focused specifically on ensuring a clear understanding of the transition details and timeline, with special attention given to the new data documentation required.

Communication devices include the posting of a “living document” on the state’s website, to which changes are made and communicated to stakeholders on a regular basis. The website also hosts a variety of supporting materials, including presentations and a transition timeline. Costs for communication, training, and support have been intentionally kept low due to economic constraints at the state and local levels. As such, Alabama uses webcasts as the primary communication tool.

students who transfer out of high school versus those who drop out has been a matter for concern. This concern has been mitigated by Alabama’s recent legislative act requiring exit interviews with any students wishing to leave school prior to graduation. An additional byproduct of these exit interviews, which are designed to encourage students to stay in school, is that a school is able to accurately determine if the student is simply transferring or if the student is dropping out.

- **Missing records:** Missing records in data collection resulted in the need to use unofficial replicated data from the local systems in order to accurately track student movement through the four years of high school.
- **Midyear promotion and first-time status:** The majority of students begin high school in ninth grade; however, the system required business rules to handle the tracking of students promoted at midyear.
- **Mobility tracking:** Alabama discovered that tracking students as they enter and leave schools and districts is a difficult and complex process. Solutions include the use of a unique student identifier for all students in the state, performing sufficient data quality checks, and ensuring that local school districts have the opportunity to review the data and make corrections prior to the public release.
- **Communication and support:** In addition to the need to communicate the difference between the NCES and NGA methodologies—and their impact on accountability decisions—Alabama has found that professional development to all stakeholders is essential, especially with regard to accurate data reporting at the district level. At the state level, Alabama has learned the importance of involving all offices in the transition process.

At the time of this writing, Alabama is considering plans for monitoring and evaluating the system, such as an interactive online portal that would allow stakeholders with access to student data the opportunity to track and verify the status of individual students as they move through high school, as well as perform calculations.

### **HAWAII’S INCORPORATION OF NEW CODES TO INCLUDE “TRANSFERS-IN” INTO GRADUATION RATE CALCULATIONS**

Hawaii’s current four-year graduation rate methodology does not include students who transfer in after the cohort of first-time ninth graders is established. The state is now in the process of changing this procedure to include transfer-in students in the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate calculation.

The draft and final publishing of the October 2008 Title I regulations governing NCLB data and reporting triggered state action on this issue.

As required by regulation, Hawaii plans to report the new adjusted cohort rate in its 2011 State and School Accountability Reports (i.e., report cards). The 2007 ninth grade cohort that graduates in 2010 will be the lagged cohort reported in these reports. The new adjusted cohort rate will not be used for 2011 AYP determinations as allowed by

the regulations; at the time of this writing, Hawaii intends to use the current “old” graduation rate on the 2010 cohort for AYP determinations.

At present the primary stakeholders impacted by this transition are those state educational agency offices charged with generating graduation rate calculations. These offices will be responsible for defining *transfer-in* and identifying the related impact on student registration procedures at the local level as data are entered into the state’s information management system. Hawaii has decided to continue its original cohort graduation rate calculation that does not include transfers-in as well as initiate the calculation of the new adjusted cohort graduation rate that includes transfers-in. The intent of this dual set of calculations is to better identify the four-year impact a school has on those students experiencing the school’s entire instructional program. However, Hawaii will continue to communicate the importance of helping all students reach proficiency, regardless of when they transfer into state schools.

Training, professional development, and support will commence once recommendations are approved by the state superintendent and related documentation is prepared for peer review.

At the time of this writing, Hawaii is reexamining the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) established in 2002. Possible revisions include the incorporation of the extended adjusted graduation rate.

Hawaii plans to monitor the use of the new adjusted cohort rate and concurrently compute the old graduation rate to analyze the differences. The use of a five-year extended adjusted cohort graduation rate will also be evaluated in the first two of years of implementation.

**Hawaii established an adjusted graduation cohort workgroup composed of representatives from schools, state officials, experts in curriculum and instruction, and operational support specialists**

The workgroup reviewed the new graduation rate requirements, discussed options and issues, and proposed guideline recommendations to the state superintendent to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of the adjusted cohort graduation rate. Should these recommendations be approved, the procedures, graduation rate targets and criteria will be submitted to ED for peer review in early 2010. Upon approval by ED, information about the new graduation methodology will be shared with stakeholders, including high schools, relevant department administrative offices, and the state board of education.

**IOWA’S DECISION TO EXPAND THE COLLECTION OF ENROLLMENT DATA**

To improve its statewide data system, Iowa expanded the enrollment data it collects, with a particular emphasis on the collection of information and data at the point when

students enter and exit the public education system. In addition to requiring an exit code and date, destination codes and destination locations are also required. As a result, between-district transfers can be verified by matching exits with entries, and more accurate accountability decisions are rendered.

The transition arose as a result of Iowa's decision to calculate and report more accurate cohort graduation rates. As a result of this transition, graduation rates may actually be reduced in some instances; however, Iowa recognizes the importance of basing policy and the related accountability decisions upon meaningful and reliable data. As such, the transition and the related impact on local school districts were discussed beforehand with the attorney for the state department of education, district administrators, and other stakeholders charged with data collection and reporting. Iowa likewise found it useful to learn what has worked in other states.

Iowa maintains a policy of communicating any and all data decisions as early as possible in order to familiarize all key parties with upcoming changes. Beginning in January, decisions regarding changes to current data elements as well as the addition of new data elements are discussed within the department of education. Phone calls with all student information system vendors are held during the month of March to discuss the next year's reporting requirement changes to the required extracts. Ongoing communications between the state and student information system vendors help ensure a timely and accurate release of the next year's reporting module. Training sessions with districts are held during April and completed by early May. The sessions involve communicating reporting requirements for the end-of-year submissions as well as previewing data reporting changes to be implemented in the next year. In August and September, training sessions are held to communicate changes to districts for the new school year.

**Iowa utilizes a three-step data collection process: training, testing, and production**

At the same time training is occurring, the state's data collection site is available to the field to test their data. One month prior to the beginning of the real collection, the field may upload and process test files. This process allows them to identify data errors and incongruent data through a variety of available reports. Throughout the testing and final submission periods, staff members are available to provide assistance. All training materials and timelines for key dates are posted on the state's website.

Training sessions vary in format. The state's fiber optic network, the *Iowa Communications Network*, has been utilized to provide statewide training to many in a short period of time with little travel required. Regional sessions have also proven to be popular, allowing face-to-face interaction. Approximately once every two or three years, a statewide conference is held on multiple data topics. The target audience includes district and building administrators, secretaries, technology directors, guidance counselors, and food service directors.

Iowa has implemented a series of data validity checks. Validity checks are run at the student level at the time of data submission and at the district level before a district is allowed to sign off on the accuracy of the data. At the state level, Iowa is now implementing cross-submission validity checks at the conclusion of a submission period. Students reported as actively enrolled during one submission are reported as missing during the subsequent reporting period if no records were received from the same district. Students marked as graduates in the spring for whom records are reported in the subsequent fall collection are identified and resolved. The state also maintains a policy of documenting all data changes in case of system audits.

## **KANSAS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ASSESSMENT**

Like those in many states, Kansas’ high schools differ in their curricula and course sequences. A topic or subject covered in one grade in one high school, for example, may be addressed at a different grade in another. Yet prior to the 2006–07 school year, the state assessment for high school mathematics was given in grade 10, and the reading test was given in grade 11. Kansas’ implementation of Opportunity to Learn (OTL) gives local educators the flexibility to schedule state assessments in these subjects after students have had the opportunity to learn the knowledge, skills, and concepts addressed in Kansas’ content standards. Moreover, OTL gives a second opportunity for students scoring below “meets standard.”

**While it benefits Kansas’ high school students and improves the accountability system, Opportunity to Learn (OTL) adds a new layer of complexity to the system**

New infrastructure had to be planned and built; scores and assessment results had to be stored or banked and new reports generated so that schools, districts, and the state could track which students had yet to be tested, which had failed to meet standards and were eligible for testing, which had completed the test, and which had not been tested. The agency’s new rules had to cover all of these situations.

OTL was proposed by a former state commissioner of education prior to the advent of NCLB. Plans for high school history and science tests had also included a two-part test—students would be given partial tests in life science and physical science—each after completing the respective courses. Similarly, partial tests would cover U.S. History and World History. The parts, though administered on separate occasions, would be treated as the same test.

Although Kansas had developed OTL beginning in the 2005–06 school year, the implementation of new state assessments that year postponed its launch until 2006–07. This also coincided with ED’s decision to allow high school students who failed to meet state standards to be tested again.

A great deal of communication and clarification regarding policy, guidance, and tracking of individual students has been an important and ongoing effort by the state education

agency. For example, when a student is tested in school A and does not meet standard, and then transfers to school B, does school B have one or two opportunities to assess the student? If the student does not meet standard in school B, in which school—A or B—will the student’s results count for AYP? If a student is officially enrolled in grade 10, and then, because of a large number of credits being awarded, officially becomes a grade 12 student, in what testing cohort is the student’s results included? Can a student be tested more than once in a semester?

Kansas’ lessons that can be shared with other states undergoing or considering similar transitions include:

- **Anticipate all possible scenarios:** While it benefits Kansas’ high school students and improves the accountability system, OTL adds a new layer of complexity to the system. A clear set of business rules needed to be developed to cover them.
- **Communication:** Establish clear channels of dissemination of the new rules and regular communication with schools and districts about any questions that arise.
- **Reporting:** Generate reports that make it easy for schools to know the testing status of their students.
- **If possible, keep the rules consistent for each subject:** Kansas’ schools can retest a student who has failed to meet standards in mathematics or reading; however, they cannot do so in science, history and government, or writing. With two-part assessments in science and history and government, it is not practical, or valid, to make the claim that a student who failed a partial test on the first opportunity should be retested on a partial test. Variations in rules by subject can be a source of confusion.

## KENTUCKY’S DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SYSTEM OF STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

In early 2009 the Kentucky State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1, requiring the SEA to rewrite its content standards and develop new assessments for state and federal accountability. The state accountability system—which had been in effect since 2000 and set biennial targets for schools through the 2013–14 school year—was eliminated.

The previous system included assessments in seven content areas (reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing on-demand, arts/humanities, and practical living/vocational studies) with an additional writing portfolio assessment. The results from these assessments along with results from PLAN, ACT, and nonacademic indicators (attendance, dropout, retention, transition, and graduation rates) were included in the state accountability index.

Bills introduced in prior legislative sessions proposed substantive changes to assessment and accountability systems. Senate Bill 1 appeared to be the result of growing agreement that the assessment system was taking up too much of the instructional time available to students and teachers; additionally, there were longstanding concerns about the state’s locally assessed writing portfolios.

Senate Bill 1 replaced the arts/humanities, practical living/vocational studies, and writing portfolio assessments with a program review system to ensure schools continued delivering instruction in those subjects. Until a new state assessment system is created in 2012, Kentucky will rely on the accountability provisions contained in NCLB for all schools and districts, whether or not they receive federal Title I funds. Kentucky underwent an earlier transition with the redesign of the state assessment system as a result of the federal requirement for annual reading and mathematics assessments in grades 3–8 and in high school. Through 2005–06, the final year of Kentucky’s contract with its existing assessment vendor, the

### **Communication**

Throughout its transition, Kentucky has learned

- shaping policy is as important as policy implementation
- monitor the implementation of the accountability system
- when possible, take the long view
- use varied means of communication
- in linking different assessments for accountability purposes, avoid communicating changes in highly statistical terms

state had used an augmented norm-referenced test (NRT) to meet NCLB requirements. In 2006–07 Kentucky transitioned to a new testing vendor, new standards, and a new test design.

In the 2006–07 and 2007–08 school years, Kentucky implemented a concordance model approach in order to maintain historical trend data over a multiyear period as requested by the Kentucky Board of Education. However, the SEA had difficulty communicating the analysis and the use of the concordance approach with educators and the public. As a consequence, beginning with the 2008–09 school year the board revised baselines and established targets for state accountability purposes using the prior two years from the new assessment.

Throughout this transition, Kentucky has learned these lessons:

- **Shaping policy is as important as policy implementation:** During Kentucky’s transition, a key facet of Senate Bill 1 discussions was the role of SEA staff in providing input, which helped to shape the final bill. SEAs should work with their legislatures to reach a compromise with stakeholders (e.g., superintendents and state legislators) as soon as changes are proposed.
- **Monitor the implementation of the accountability system:** If aspects of the accountability system appear to lack stakeholder support, address those issues proactively. For example, given concerns about Kentucky’s locally assessed writing portfolios, the SEA may decide to make changes amendable to stakeholders yet preserve the integrity of the system (e.g., address time out of

instruction and teacher training issues, consider analytical versus holistic approaches to scoring, consider standard setting process, etc.).

- **When possible, take the long view:** When responding to a change in the accountability and assessment system, consider the implications of those changes in future years with respect to communicating information about the changes to local school districts in timely ways, and in gauging the workload (at the state and local levels) from development through implementation of the new system.
- **Use varied means of communication:** Kentucky has communicated changes to the accountability and assessment system via regular mail, online WebEx meetings, and regional face-to-face meetings with assessment coordinators at the local level.
- **In linking different assessments for accountability purposes, avoid communicating changes in highly statistical terms:** Although technical advisors may agree on the technical quality of such an approach, the public perception and interpretation of the approach should also be considered.

#### MASSACHUSETTS' TRANSITION FROM A COMPETENCY DETERMINATION RATE TO A FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE AS THE ADDITIONAL AYP INDICATOR FOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Beginning with the 2007 AYP determinations, Massachusetts transitioned from using the grade 12 competency determination rate (the percent of students eligible to graduate as of their senior year) to a four-year cohort graduation rate as the additional AYP indicator for high schools.

Massachusetts applies the graduation rate standard to every student group that meets minimum reporting size requirements. To make AYP in 2007 and beyond, a high school group is required to meet the 95 percent participation requirement, either the state's performance requirement or safe harbor, and the state's minimum graduation rate standard for the given year.

Massachusetts developed a student information management system beginning with the 2002 school year, and one goal was to establish an on-time graduation rate as soon as possible. The goal was complicated further by state desire to label five-year graduates as on time.

Massachusetts began calculating and reporting cohort graduation rates in 2006 as part of overall efforts to improve educational outcomes for all students and to use the cohort rate for federal AYP determinations. Massachusetts, along with other states, had committed to utilizing four-year cohort graduation rate data according to the methodology outlined in the *National Governors Association's Graduation Counts Compact on State High School Graduation Data*.

Until 2006, graduation rates for Massachusetts high schools could only be estimated from annual dropout data or from grade-level enrollment information. By 2006,

however, the state had collected a sufficient quantity of longitudinal student-level data via its Student Information Management System (SIMS) to be able to track individual students from their initial entrance into ninth grade through graduation.

At its February 2007 meeting, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to establish a minimum four-year graduation rate standard of 55 percent as the “must meet” AYP target for all public high schools. The 55 percent standard, used in 2007 AYP determinations, was applied to data from the 2006 graduating cohort.

In 2008 the board voted to raise the four-year standard to 60 percent and to apply that standard to the 2007 graduating cohort. Student groups that did not meet the 60 percent standard could also make AYP by showing an improvement of at least two percent between 2006 and 2007. These criteria applied to 2008 AYP determinations.

This transition affected the second indicator for high schools. When the initial set of graduation rate data was released to the public in February 2007, Massachusetts found that in 209 of the state’s 279 school districts with high schools, at least 80 percent of students in the class of 2006 graduated within four years. And in 104 districts more than 90 percent graduated within four years; in 35 districts more than 95 percent graduated within four years. Despite this positive news, only 62.3 percent of students in urban communities statewide graduated within four years. The districts with the lowest graduation rates included Lawrence (41 percent), Chelsea (45.8 percent), Holyoke (49.4 percent), Springfield (51.2 percent), Fall River (54.2 percent), New Bedford (57.4 percent), and Boston (59.1 percent).

Given the differences in performance among Massachusetts’ communities, coupled with the state’s commitment to include all student groups in AYP determinations for this indicator—a policy not required under NCLB—the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s accountability and targeted assistance group worked closely with the data collection group to recommend a reasonable four-year standard to the board for approval.

As 2007 was the first year of implementation, and calculating improvement from the previous year was not possible, the minimum graduation rate target was set at 55 percent, which was comparable to the previous target using the competency determination rate. In its July 2007 and August 2008 decision letters to Massachusetts, ED approved the state’s 2007 and 2008 AYP targets with the expectation that Massachusetts set a more challenging graduation rate target in future years.

Massachusetts can share the following insights from its transition:

- **A major challenge was defining what is meant by on-time graduation and its relationship to “the standard number of years” described in Section 1111(b)(2)(C)(vi) of NCLB.** The state explored basing such judgments on individual expectations regarding the expected time it will take each student to graduate, but concluded that this approach was not appropriate because it can lead to lower expectations for students, be difficult to implement, and create a

lack of transparency and comparability in the final data. Therefore, the SEA decided to publish a straightforward four-year graduation rate in 2006, a five-year graduation rate in 2007 and beyond, and additional rates as policy and program needs may warrant. Rates are generated for the entire student population and for individual student subgroups at the state, district, and school levels.

- **The SEA recognized the need to report data in a timely way, but that objective had to be balanced with ensuring that the reported rates are as accurate as possible.**

This was particularly true in 2006, when the data were first used for high-stakes findings. The SEA began collecting student-level data through SIMS for longitudinal analysis in the 2002–03 school year. The 2006 cohort graduation rate calculations included data going back to the inception of SIMS, when

districts were still becoming familiar with the system. The SEA had no way to know whether the students in the first SIMS data collection were first-time ninth graders. The rates would have fluctuated substantially between 2006 and 2007 because large percentages of students are retained in ninth grade in Massachusetts. Consequently, the SEA allowed for the possibility of a limited number of corrections. Student-level data making up the 2006 graduation rate were released to districts in the fall of 2006, and district staff had approximately one month to review and request corrections to the data. These data were provided to districts via the Security Portal—the SEA’s secure, online data transmittal application used by authorized school and district personnel to submit and review data. The SEA reviewed all requests and identified limited instances in which changes to the data were warranted to ensure accuracy.

- **Massachusetts wanted the completed diploma to clearly represent that a student had met local and state standards, whether it took four years or more to meet those standards.** Relying on an AYP indicator that valued only four-year graduation rates contradicted that state policy, but little flexibility was initially

**While the key goals of Massachusetts’ accountability system have not changed due to this transition, the transition has highlighted the need to ensure that accountability is reciprocal: for every unit of accountability demanded of school and district leaders, the state should strive to provide a corresponding set of supports and interventions**

Examples include convening stakeholders from across the state to address graduation rates with respect to AYP determinations and to build school/district capacity in increasing graduation rates and piloting an early warning system to help local educators identify and intervene with students at risk of not graduating on time.

offered by ED on this matter. Massachusetts also had a strong desire to calculate the on-time graduation rates by subgroup, even though ED did not require it.

- **Public reporting of results can increase stakeholder understanding of and involvement in helping students graduate from high school.** The new rules were described in numerous memoranda and conference calls as well as integrated into trainings at the local level. In addition, the state's four-year graduation report attracted a great deal of press; the report helped describe a problem that had been masked by the relatively low annual dropout rates. The public had not yet grasped the cumulative effect of dropouts and retentions.

At its February 2007 meeting, the board voted to establish a Graduation Rate Taskforce comprising representatives from business and industry, school districts, high schools, alternative education programs, teacher organizations, student organizations, private non-profits, and SEA staff. The taskforce met three times over the course of six months to review additional data related to the high school graduation rate and to consider other issues, such as making recommendations for AYP improvement targets and addressing capacity and resources needed to increase the percentage of students graduating from high school. The taskforce collected research to identify the reasons students drop out of school; identified what steps Massachusetts could take to increase college and career readiness, as well as to increase graduation rates; and developed recommendations on policies and programs that could make a positive change in high school graduation rates. The taskforce identified a primary need to increase the number of high-quality pathways for students who are most at risk of not graduating, and for bringing back students who have dropped out of school.

AYP reports for a given year show graduation rates for the previous year's cohort; for example, 2007 AYP reports showed graduation rates for the 2006 cohort. While using data from for the previous year's graduating cohort allowed the SEA to use a data set for high-stakes purposes that had been thoroughly reviewed by district and SEA staff, these graduation rates alone are of limited utility to stakeholders because they are "lagged" indicators—the population measures the educational outcomes of students who already graduated or dropped out of school by the time the data are reported. In spring 2008 the SEA piloted an early warning system for the state's 24 urban districts. Called the Early Warning Indicator Index, the system is intended to help local educators identify high school students at risk of not graduating on time so that proactive measures can be taken to make timely interventions in educational programming for these students. In addition to identifying individual students for intervention, the index uses a set of core indicators based on data from all districts—therefore applicable across all schools and districts—and provides the data in a user-friendly format for presentation and analysis at the local level.

The index has appeal because it assists schools and districts with issues over which they have some control, such as aspects of their organizational and programmatic design. The index remains a work in progress as the SEA investigates additional statistical techniques to improve the validity and reliability of the system.

The SEA continues to investigate other options for the additional improvement indicator for the AYP graduation rate, with an emphasis on factors local educators may be able to address in timely ways. These options include showing an increase in the grade nine attendance rate from one year to the next (some studies have demonstrated a relationship between freshman year attendance and on-time graduation) and showing a reduction in the high school dropout rate from one year to the next. The SEA will continue to explore the benefits and limitations of these possible approaches in the coming months and years.

## MICHIGAN'S DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK SKILLS ASSESSMENT AND COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

Michigan legislation passed in 2005 required a work skills assessment and a college entrance examination as components of the high school assessment. The legislation also required compliance for approval of the use of the high school test under NCLB. This meant, in essence, that augmentation would be required to round out alignment of the new test to Michigan's high school content standards.

The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) has partnered for many years with ACT, Inc., and high schools are approved by ACT as test centers on Saturdays. ACT

reported that approximately 70 percent of students in Michigan took the ACT. MASSP stated that students applying to college were motivated to do well on the ACT, while students were not motivated to do well on the state high school assessment. In addition, MASSP claimed that making the transition would save the state significant funds—it would be less expensive to administer the new assessment than to administer the old assessment.

The state department of education initially opposed the proposal for several reasons:

- Despite the MASSP claim that the transition would save money, the SEA projected a manifold increase in overall costs based on cost estimates for the multiple components.
- The increased strictness of the administration procedures would cause more schools to have invalid scores, leading to more schools not making AYP.

### **Advocacy by the High School Principals Association was the primary force underlying Michigan's adoption of a work skills assessment and college entrance examinations**

Michigan has historically been an ACT state for college admissions. All of the major universities, including private colleges, use the ACT for admissions. ACT had also previously worked with the state of Illinois to develop a state high school assessment that is structured to include the ACT, WorkKeys, and a state component. The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and ACT devoted considerable resources to advocacy for this proposal.

- The reduced flexibility in scheduling and carrying out assessment activities would place a significant new burden on schools.
- The requirement for augmentation to provide for adequate alignment to Michigan’s high school content standards would result in a longer test than was previously administered.

However, the governor's office supported the proposal because it would provide baseline information and a measure of progress on efforts to increase the percentage of Michigan high school graduates that are prepared for postsecondary success.

The legislation was passed in 2005, a pilot was carried out in spring 2006, and the full transition occurred for the spring 2007 assessment.

Because ACT won the competitive bid, the fully customized state high school assessment was replaced by a regimented three day testing process, with day one being composed of the ACT + Writing test, day two being composed of WorkKeys assessments, and day three being composed of Michigan-specific augmentation to round out alignment to Michigan’s high school content standards. This test was named the Michigan Merit Examination (MME).

Schools had to transition from a three-week testing window to giving the test to all students on the same day for each of the three days. Students who missed the test days are allowed to take a makeup for each missed day exactly two weeks later. Schools also had to transition to the increased rigor of becoming established as an ACT test center, including severe consequences for mis-administrations. Schools also had to transition from appealing to the SEA on issues of invalidated scores to appealing to ACT.

The change in the assessment required analysis to determine whether the AYP annual measurable objectives (AMOs) needed to be reset. From the results of the standard setting activity, the state board of education adopted proficiency cut scores that were approximately equivalent in rigor to the cut scores from the previous, fully customized high school assessment. Therefore, the AMOs were not reset, as the impact of the new assessment on AYP calculations was minimal. The transition did have an impact in other areas, as noted below:

- **The transition had significant cost implications.** The new high school assessment costs were significantly higher than the costs of the previous fully customized assessment. The previous assessment cost the state \$19 per student. The ACT component of the new MME alone costs the state \$47 per student; the WorkKeys component costs \$15 per student; the augmentation costs approximately \$5 per student; and the project management, IT requirements, psychometrics, and reporting systems necessary to create a single score for each subject using all components of the test cost \$58 per student.
- **The transition had significant implications for individual students and schools.** In the first years of the program, many scores were invalidated on an individual or schoolwide basis because of prohibited behavior or mis-administration. While

the SEA would have made the same decision as ACT, in many cases, significant numbers would not have been deemed invalid by the state under previous policies. Therefore, some students did not receive valid scores, and some schools did not make AYP because of the new, stricter policies on test administration that came with using ACT products.

- **The transition had an impact on the availability of retesting opportunities for high school students.** With the previous test, students could retest in the fall or spring of the next year. The MME initially allowed for retesting in fall or spring. However, the fall retest period was eliminated because of prohibitive costs for an additional cycle involving the ACT products and the untenable burden on schools of two test cycles per year with the new strict requirements. The spring retest was also largely eliminated through legislation because of the prohibitive costs.
- **The transition had an impact on students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs).** Whereas states must comply with NCLB, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ACT's policy has been to comply only with ADA. This resulted in many of the state-offered accommodations not being allowed by ACT if students desired to get an official ACT or WorkKeys score report. When an Individualized Education Program (IEP) designated an accommodation allowed by the SEA, but not by ACT, the student received official MME scores, but no official scores on the ACT or WorkKeys. ACT does not approve accommodations specifically for ELLs. Therefore, all accommodations provided because of ELL issues resulted in official scores for MME, but no official scores for ACT and WorkKeys.
- **The transition had effects on the usefulness of the data, because individual item data could not be provided to schools.** Because ACT products are proprietary, no item information could be provided to schools. Many schools have lamented the loss of the individual item data.

Ultimately, however, the transition was successful. Part of the reason for the success was a significant ongoing communications and training campaign to keep all stakeholders apprised of the progress of the transition, administration procedures, registration procedures, and of the new requirements that would become a part of the new test.

Throughout this transition, Michigan learned the following lessons:

- **Make sure all schools are identified and trained as ACT centers.**
- **Train heavily on accommodations and timing codes.**
- **Formally include vendor compliance with all state and federally required legislation applicable to the SEA.**

- **Carefully examine and evaluate claims on cost and impacts on schools and students.**

Numerous formal communications to the field, to district administrators and to high school principals have formed the communications strategy. Training has been provided on test administration, student registration, and data use.

## MINNESOTA’S IMPLEMENTATION OF A “SECOND GENERATION” OF HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS

Minnesota is in the process of implementing a “second generation” of assessments as part of the high school graduation requirements. The state legislature first required graduation tests for Minnesota students in 1996. In 2003, the state Academic Standards were revised and a new generation of graduation tests was required. A new writing test was implemented in 2007, a new reading test in 2008, and a new mathematics test in 2009. Also, the first administration was changed from grade 8 for reading and mathematics and grade 10 for writing to grade 9 for writing, grade 10 for reading, and grade 11 for mathematics.

**Since the change occurred within the legislative session, numerous stakeholders were aware of the change: it was a closely watched legislative discussion**

Subsequent to the bill passing, the SEA provided documentation about the change in legislation:

<http://www.education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/FAQ/014639.pdf>.

The SEA also developed significant documentation about the new high school assessment system:

[http://www.education.state.mn.us/MDE/Accountability\\_Programs/Assessment\\_and\\_Testing/Assessments/GRAD/index.html](http://www.education.state.mn.us/MDE/Accountability_Programs/Assessment_and_Testing/Assessments/GRAD/index.html).

The law (both statute and rule) required several changes:

- Rules for special education students were restricted.
- Rules for new-to-country English language learners were modified.
- Rules for new-to-state students via an assessment taken in a prior state were implemented.

Standard setting for reading in 2008 established an expectation that the passing rate for the graduation tests was equivalent to the proficient level on the NCLB Title I assessment originally set in 2006. This has caused significant concern to be raised in anticipation of this spring’s implementation of the mathematics assessment, because the 2008 proficiency level for high school mathematics was about 34 percent. Also of significant concern is the later time for first administering the reading and mathematics assessments in a student’s high school career—less time is available for remediation.

While the first graduating class required to pass these assessments will graduate in the spring of 2010, changes have already been enacted. Due to concern over the excessive failure rate expected of the mathematics test, the legislature passed a five-year moratorium that no longer required students to pass the mathematics test to graduate. (Students still have to pass the reading and writing tests.) In its 2009 session, the Minnesota legislature created a work group to study the effects of high-stakes graduation tests in Minnesota and future directions for these requirements. A critical lesson here is that a broader group of stakeholders involved in the conversation over time is essential. Previous changes occurred without a sufficient number of key stakeholders aware of the potential consequences of moving the graduation requirement to the high school level and with a higher expectation of proficiency for graduation.

The SEA is developing enhancements to its statewide data warehouse for collection of the alternate pathway in mathematics scheduled to be available in early 2010. Districts will enter this coding for students graduating under the alternate pathway. The SEA will validate that the student has attempted the assessment at least three times as required in legislation. The remaining two requirements are the responsibility of the school district and are subject to audit at the discretion of the SEA.

### **NEBRASKA'S TRANSITION FROM A SYSTEM OF LOCAL ASSESSMENTS TO SINGLE COMMON TESTS IN CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECTS**

State legislation was introduced in 2007 and 2008 that required standards revision and state assessment development. The legislation called for single common assessments in reading, mathematics, and science to begin in the 2009–10 school year, with each subject area to be phased in over time. The writing test remained in the law, but the use of local assessment data for accountability reporting was eliminated. Basically the law was a mirror of NCLB, requiring annual testing in grades 3–8 and in high school. Nebraska signed a compliance agreement with ED allowing the state to receive NCLB funds so long as documentation would be provided that the new tests are being developed and implemented according to the timeline specified by the Nebraska legislation. The test results are to be reported by score and subscore.

The state worked for many years to obtain federal approval for using the established local assessments in calculating AYP. One goal was to maintain as much district control of assessments as possible. As the new system is being developed, compliance with NCLB is a primary goal. Nebraska anticipates increasing the state's role in publishing school and district accountability information as the new state assessments become operational.

**In short, Nebraska is changing everything: policy, practice, and politics. With the change in assessment comes the change in accountability**

With the change in accountability comes a change in culture. Districts and the department of education are caught between two systems: the old and the new, with a gulf of transition between. Each year when a new test is phased in, a piece of the old system goes away. The years of transition will be continuous through 2012. Both the state and local school districts are working on extremely short timelines. Complicating the situation is that the assessment and accountability transition occurred at the same time transitions were being made in senior leadership at the state level.

In 2000 Nebraska built a locally based assessment system, the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). Under the STARS approach, local school districts developed classroom-based assessment to measure student achievement on state-developed standards in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition to reporting student results on the standards, districts submitted their local assessments to the state for review and for a public rating. Local assessment was only one part of the assessment system, as districts were required to participate in the statewide writing test and to administer a norm-referenced test in at least three grades in their districts. The approach allowed the state to gather multiple indicators: student achievement on standards, statewide writing results, assessment ratings, and norm-referenced test results. These multiple indicators were used to make comprehensive decisions about the quality of the schooling and accountability, and those decisions were based in the accreditation rules.

Although the system was effective, comprehensive, and balanced, there were downsides to the combination of the local and state approach. The system did not allow direct comparison between school districts on the same common measures. The system, said some, was too complex, involving too many data factors. It was not simple with a single "bottom line" state test.

Since the primary purpose of the system was that of improving student achievement, not comparative accountability, it became clear that the bottom line of accountability was direct comparison between school districts, and that could only be achieved by single common measures. Coupled with the fact that Nebraska remained one of the few states that had not achieved federal approval under NCLB with its STARS system, the political winds began to shift in the state.

Costs are always an issue, but the legislation also brought additional dollars to assessment. In addition, two-thirds of the new state system will be funded with federal funds.

Nebraska can lend the following insights from its transition:

- **The state will persevere.** A new commissioner took over in the spring of 2009. The department is providing the message “Keeping the Focus, Expanding the Vision, Finding the Balance.” Information as it is known is shared with the field purposefully and completely. The steps of test building are underway and on track.
- **The state is using its finest resource, assessment-literate educators, as the backbone of standards revision and test development.** Because of the knowledge and expertise teachers acquired through the STARS process, they are instrumental in the design and reworking of test items.
- **A contractor has been secured as a competent partner, and advice is sought from external experts.** Although everything is changing, SEA leadership is now stable, reassuring local school districts and encouraging them to maintain local assessments for use instructionally.
- **The state has an extensive communication plan.** Nebraska used telecasts, video streaming, paper documents, speaking engagements, web postings, and its service unit network. Nebraska is also planning professional development throughout the upcoming year as well as professional development within regional service units.
- **The legislation requires verification studies, and the state has a long-standing evaluation contract with the University of Nebraska as well as many external experts.**

The state board of education is undergoing monthly discussions about a new policy framework for standards, assessment, and accountability. Meanwhile, the state department of education maintains a focus on student learning.

## WEST VIRGINIA'S DEVELOPMENT OF NEW STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS TO ASSESS 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY SKILLS

The West Virginia Department of Education transformed the state's educational system into a high-quality global system of education that is current, engaging, relevant, and exciting to 21<sup>st</sup>-century students. The goal of this transformed system was to develop in West Virginia students more complex communication skills, increased critical thinking and problem solving abilities, greater decision making skills, and the ability to thrive in a globally competitive 21<sup>st</sup>-century world. The development of West Virginia's 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning plan—Global 21—provided the framework for this systemic approach to helping children learn by providing rigorous instruction presented at a variety of depths of knowledge (DOKs), integration of technology tools, and balanced assessments that would facilitate and invigorate student inquiry and learning.

### **The West Virginia Department of Education worked diligently with local school districts to provide a 21<sup>st</sup>-century systemwide approach to assessment within the state**

The SEA funded and provided a network of high-quality support tools, including techSteps, Acuity, Writing Roadmap 2.0, INTEL, Thinkfinity, Teacher Leadership Institutes, Special Education Teachers Leadership Academies, Principal Leadership Institutes, county team conferences, and other supports to assist local school districts in implementing the goals of Global 21. Further, the SEA recognized that teachers, principals, and other leaders required high-quality, sustained professional development that involved emerging strategies and knowledge in areas such as instruction, technology, and assessments. To that end, the SEA has worked to provide an array of these types of professional development opportunities for educators.

To meet the goals of Global 21, West Virginia began the lengthy and vigorous process of developing new state content standards and objectives (CSOs) to include increased rigor and a variety of DOK levels. To measure student achievement of these content standards, the SEA Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Research undertook the goal of developing a new statewide accountability assessment, WESTEST 2, which would align to the new state CSOs and would more accurately measure student achievement in grades 3–11 in reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The first operational WESTEST 2 was administered in the 2008–09 school year.

Prior to 2008, a review of West Virginia's content standards by national experts revealed that the state's CSOs lacked the rigor necessary to meet the challenges of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, and other national and international assessments. This finding was not acceptable for a state that desired its students to be globally competitive and lifelong

learners. By early 2005, the state was poised for major changes within its accountability system.

In 2005, West Virginia became the second state in the nation to implement the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills (P21) model. P21 is an advocacy organization that includes members from the business community, education leaders, and policymakers. This implementation and support further strengthened West Virginia's efforts in developing new state content standards.

In July 2008, the new CSOs became effective for use in every West Virginia classroom, and the revisions to these content standards and objectives significantly broadened the scope of the state's curriculum. More recent external reviews of state CSOs by local and national experts have identified our state curriculum as meeting world-class status.

Many policies other than the content standards have been revised to align with the overall initiative, including accountability policies. The SEA developed a performance index for school accreditation that is consistent with 21<sup>st</sup>-century schools, developed a new assessment system to measure the new content standards, and reorganized some divisions within the SEA to implement the changes in the curriculum.

Because West Virginia made systemwide changes to include the development of new CSOs and a new aligned statewide accountability assessment, WESTEST 2, the state increased the overall rigor of these standards and assessments, which called for a resetting of performance standards (cut scores on WESTEST 2). To that end, in April 2008, West Virginia proposed two amendments to make a substitute trajectory to AYP for 2009 and 2010 and requested approval for these changes from ED. This request was made approximately one month prior to the first administration of the new WESTEST 2 in May 2008. In essence, West Virginia requested approval to use the same substitute for determining AYP for 2009 and 2010 school years as approved in the original Accountability Workbook and reset the trajectory in fall 2010.

In August 2009, ED approved West Virginia's amended accountability plan and posted those changes on the SEA website. As a result, the state reset its starting points based on its 2009 assessments to establish new Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) using the statutory process laid out in ESEA. West Virginia would then reset its starting points using the results of the tests to be administered in 2009–10, average the 2009 and 2010 starting points to establish AMOs for making AYP determinations in 2009–10, and create intermediate goals and AMOs that would result in all students meeting or exceeding the state's proficient level of achievement by the 2013–14 school year.

West Virginia must submit the revised starting points set following the 2009–10 administration of the assessments, intermediate goals, and AMOs to ED for review and approval before they can be used in making AYP determinations.

West Virginia learned many lessons from engaging in the process of changing an entire accountability system, including:

- **Such a process requires a shared vision by all educational stakeholders, tremendous work, sustained diligence in overseeing and completing the process, and a willingness to involve teachers, local and national experts, and other stakeholders in this reinvention process in order to make our state accountability system world class.**
- **Systemwide change requires a great deal of political will and determination to move forward in increasing the rigor and depths of knowledge of content standards while realizing that school assessment performance will not likely measure up in the short term.** Parents, business and community leaders, policymakers, teachers, and other educational leaders will seek answers to why students' scores are lower, and they will need instruction and support in understanding how the increase in academic rigor will ultimately benefit all of the students and citizens in West Virginia.
- **Professional development in clarifying and increasing understanding concerning increased rigor of standards is essential for all stakeholders, including schools, teachers, parents, and the general public.** The SEA has worked with local school districts in providing a network of high-quality support tools and other supports to assist in implementing the goals of Global 21.
- **There is both a need and a challenge to make pertinent information available to all educational stakeholders.** The SEA foresaw that it would need to educate state citizens about why there was a need for public education change within the state and how those changes might impact the performance data of schools. Thus, in 2009, the SEA undertook a major public relations campaign to get Global 21 information out to the public. The SEA developed a website (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/global/publications/>) that provided one-page flyers containing basic information for teachers, parents of pre-K–4th graders, parents of 5th–8th graders, and parents of 9th–12th graders on topic areas including why is public education changing, how is public education changing, and how do we measure progress? In addition, the website contained a copy of the newspaper ad that ran in local newspapers and that provided pertinent information concerning Global 21 initiatives, as well as other tools including screensavers and wallpapers featuring Global 21.

West Virginia's accountability policies were revised to incorporate the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Schools Partnership initiative. A performance index for accountability and accreditation (outside the NCLB model) has been developed and this index utilizes multiple performance measures using a compensatory model that is not dependent on only one subgroup or on one low score being the deciding factor.

West Virginia is expecting student improvement across the continuum of learning rather than just moving students to mastery. For example, the newly developed index gives extra credit for getting students to above mastery and distinguished levels of performance.

Using data collected through the West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS), a management information system that is online, interactive, and operates over a privately addressed intranet, the SEA collects from school files the information needed for state and federal reporting and decision making. From this collected data, West Virginia publishes a state report card as required by state law. An NCLB report card for schools and districts is published annually according to NCLB requirements for state reporting.

## **CONCLUSION**

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A decade ago, it would have been reasonable to expect that a paper on educational accountability models would emphasize goals, indicators, decision rules, and consequences as the primary components of accountability. After all, the fundamental premise underlying standards-based reform is that if you set high academic standards, design assessments to measure student progress toward them, and hold school and district leaders accountable for the results, then student performance will improve.

States' experiences with designing and implementing accountability models since the inception of standards-based reform strongly suggest that communication and support are increasingly becoming the focal points of accountability, and that communication is particularly important when the accountability system is undergoing transition. Moreover, as educational accountability models mature and evolve, communication has increasingly been defined to include training and support in addition to reporting.

Whether the focus is on designing better assessments, improving data collection procedures, or helping students become college and career ready, we anticipate a continued shift from emphasizing consequences and sanctions to the provision of appropriate supports to cultivate effectiveness.