

Strengthening K-12 Accountability: What Could Be Better than Peer Review?

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Technical Quality of State Accountability Systems

- The NCLB peer review system has led to:
 - Great emphasis on documenting the reliability and validity of state accountability systems and assessments that support them
 - Public scrutiny and discussion of technical quality issues
- But
 - Peer review requirements have far exceeded federal assistance in developing the capacity to meet these requirements.
 - The capacity of most state departments of education and their contractors has been stretched past broken just producing the required assessments.
 - Enforcement of the requirements has appeared to be uneven and ever-changing.
 - Widely different approaches from n-size to AYP goals accepted.
 - Great evolution of rules for alternate assessments.

Alternative Approaches for Strengthening Technical Quality

- Two approaches that might be better than (or at least supplement) peer review are:
 - State Technical Advisory Committees (TACs)
 - Expanding their role
 - Expanding their capacity
 - Collaborations across state borders to develop:
 - Common content and performance standards
 - Common assessments
 - Common technical documentation

Technical Advisory Committees (TACs)

- Most states have a TAC for their assessments and/or accountability systems.
 - Testing experts independent of the state and its contractors
 - Meeting 2-4 times each year to review technical issues
- Effectiveness of TACs may be limited by
 - Limited capacity relative to wide range of issues addressed
 - Not always being asked the right questions
 - Agenda may be set by state staff with limited technical expertise or contractor staff who may not want divergent answers.
 - Not being asked to make specific recommendations
 - Endless interesting discussions that go nowhere
 - TAC not listened to when they do make recommendations
 - Message does not get back to policy-makers (including legislatures) who must take action to implement/support recommendations.

Strengthening TACS

- Some ideas for strengthening TACS
 - TAC School to train potential TAC members and increase awareness of common assessment/accountability issues
 - Standardize knowledge and skill across different state TACs
 - Certification program for TAC members
 - Ensure complete knowledge of *Test Standards* and common approaches to technical problems
 - Increased/standardize role of TAC chairs
 - Greater involvement in setting the agenda
 - Responsibility for documenting consensus recommendations
 - Leadership in requiring review of follow-up to recommendations
 - More frequent meetings
 - Or subcommittees to work on specific issues between meetings
 - Also use to support professional development of state staff

Strengthening TACS (Continued)

- Mechanisms for strengthening TACS
 - Federal involvement
 - At least for funding common training, certification, and the TAC meetings themselves
 - Federal role should be more like a coach than a police person.
 - State collaborations
 - Perhaps organized as a CCSSO SCASS
 - Independent organizations (Underwriter's Lab model)
 - Like the Center for Assessment
 - Funded by state or federal grants

State Collaboration

- Example: New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)
 - Three states (NH, RI, VT) working together to develop:
 - Common content and performance standards
 - A common assessment
 - Common technical documentation of the standards and the assessment
 - Google NECAP for more specific information on this effort
 - Results to date have been highly successful
 - Reduced costs relative to separate standards and assessments
 - Contractor can build one good test rather than three mediocre ones
 - Note: State TACs meet jointly to address common issues

State Collaboration Issues

- Ownership of educational goals
 - Separate and unequal expectations for student achievement may no longer be acceptable!
 - But federal imposition of content and performance standards may be politically infeasible
- Funding
 - State budgets currently quite limited
 - Federal development and implementation grants might not require federal regulation of results
- How many?
 - Need to develop/evaluate alternative approaches (more than just 1 collaborative)
 - Need to realize economies of scale (fewer than 50)

Summary

- NCLB has had several positive effects on state accountability systems by
 - Requiring explicit expectations for student achievement
 - Encouraging high achievement for all students through attention to achievement gaps
 - Requiring and reviewing documentation of the technical quality of assessment and accountability systems
- Technical quality could be further increased by
 - Strengthening state Technical Advisory Committees
 - Encouraging collaborative efforts to develop standards and assessments
- Alternatives to federal control of these efforts should be explored
 - Including independent organizations and state collaborations