
education policy analysis archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

Volume 26 Number 7

January 29, 2018

ISSN 1068-2341

Redesigning Assessment and Accountability: An Introduction

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Citation: Stosich, E. L., Bae, S., & Snyder, J. (2018). Redesigning assessment and accountability: An introduction. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 26(7). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.2906>
This article is a part of the special issue, *Redesigning Assessment and Accountability for Meaningful Student Learning*, guest-edited by Soung Bae, Jon Snyder, and Elizabeth Leisy Stosich.

Abstract: This special issue advances the discussion of redesigning assessment and accountability that began in the August 2014 *Education Policy Analysis Archives* article, “Accountability for college and career readiness: Developing a new paradigm” by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit and Linda Pittenger. This issue focuses on the potential for multiple measures approaches to accountability and performance assessment to support more meaningful learning as part of a redesigned system of support and accountability. We bring together two reviews of state policy with commentaries that describe district, network, state, and university efforts to integrate multiple

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>
Facebook: /EPAAA
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Manuscript received: 1/19/2018
Revisions received: 1/24/2018
Accepted: 1/24/2018

measures and performance assessment in systems of accountability. This issue helps to illustrate how educators at all levels of the system—schools, districts, networks, and state education agencies—are taking action to reimagine a more supportive and equitable educational system.

Keywords: performance assessment; education policy; accountability

Rediseño de evaluación y responsabilidad: Una introducción

Resumen: Este edición especial avanza la discusión sobre el rediseño de la evaluación y la responsabilidad que comenzó en Agosto de 2014 en *Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, “Evaluación y responsabilidad en la preparación universitaria y profesional: Desarrollando un nuevo paradigma” por Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit y Linda Pittenger. Este tema se centra en el potencial de los enfoques de medidas múltiples para la rendición de cuentas y la evaluación del desempeño para apoyar el aprendizaje más significativo como parte de un sistema rediseñado de apoyo y rendición de cuentas. Recopilamos dos reseñas de la política estatal con comentarios que describen los esfuerzos del distrito, la red, el estado y la universidad para integrar medidas múltiples y la evaluación del desempeño en los sistemas de rendición de cuentas. Este problema ayuda a ilustrar cómo los educadores en todos los niveles del sistema educativo—escuelas, distritos, redes y agencias estatales de educación—están tomando medidas para reimaginar un sistema educativo más solidario y equitativo.

Palabras clave: evaluación del desempeño; política educativa; responsabilidad

Redenção de avaliação e responsabilidade: Uma introdução

Resumo: Esta edição especial avança a discussão sobre o redesenho da avaliação e a responsabilidade que começou em agosto de 2014 em *Arquivos Analíticos de Políticas Educacionais*, “Avaliação e responsabilidade na preparação universitária e profissional: Desenvolvimento de um novo paradigma” de Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit e Linda Pittenger. Este tema centra-se no potencial de abordagens de múltiplas medidas para a responsabilização e avaliação de desempenho para apoiar uma aprendizagem mais significativa como parte de um sistema redesenhado de apoio e responsabilidade. Compilaram duas avaliações da política estadual com comentários que descrevem os esforços do distrito, da rede, do estado e da universidade para integrar múltiplas medidas e avaliação de desempenho em sistemas de responsabilização. Este problema ajuda a ilustrar como os educadores em todos os níveis do sistema educacional - escolas, distritos, redes e agências estatais de educação - estão tomando medidas para reimaginar um sistema educacional mais cuidadoso e equitativo.

Keywords: avaliação de desempenho; política educacional; responsabilidade

Redesigning Assessment and Accountability: An Introduction

In this special issue, we respond to and build on the model for accountability proposed by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit, and Linda Pittenger (2014), which focuses attention on meaningful learning, professional accountability, and resource accountability to support continuous improvement. The authors argue, “Genuine accountability must both raise the bar of expectations for learning—for children, adults, and the system as a whole—and trigger the intelligent investments and change strategies that make it possible to achieve these expectations” (p. 5). These scholars are part of a growing group of researchers, educators, students, families, and community members who are calling for more authentic and meaningful learning opportunities for children that will prepare them for success in college, career, and life and a more holistic approach to supporting such learning opportunities. Ensuring all students have access to and benefit from rich and meaningful learning

opportunities would require a fundamentally different approach to accountability than the narrow focus on testing that has often dominated discussions of educational reform. As Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2014) and Elmore (2004) argue, an accountability system that supports deep levels of learning for students must be *reciprocal*, holding students, teachers, and schools responsible for learning opportunities and outcomes while also holding federal, state, and local education agencies responsible for supporting their success.

Building on a series of three special issues (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), this issue examines how state and local education agencies are redesigning their systems of assessment and accountability to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes of the students they serve. The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 gave states greater responsibility for and flexibility in their approaches to assessment and accountability than 2001's No Child Left Behind (NCLB; Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). As described in this special issue, many state and local systems had already made bold changes prior to ESSA, including some state and local systems that took advantage of increased flexibility granted by NCLB era waivers. We bring together two reviews of state policy—one focused on multiple measure approaches to accountability and one focused on performance assessment—and complement these reviews with six commentaries that illustrate how state and local educational leaders are fundamentally rethinking how their educational systems can foster more authentic and equitable learning opportunities to prepare students for college, career, and life.

The issue opens with an article by Soung Bae that describes how a multiple measures approach to accountability can promote continuous support and improvement. Reviewing state- and district-level systems in the United States and Canada, Bae identifies five innovative features related to a multiple measures approach: 1) broader set of outcome measures, 2) mix of state and local indicators, 3) measures of opportunities to learn, 4) data dashboards, and 5) School Quality Reviews.

In the first of four commentaries in response to Bae's article, Elizabeth Gil and Taeyeon Kim bring attention to existing inequities in access to resources and limited opportunities for voice from students and communities from historically marginalized communities. Thus, the authors argue that a multiple measures approach to accountability will only foster the desired improvements in educational quality, equity, and transparency if leaders recognize and address existing inequities particularly as they relate to access to technology, capabilities for interacting with technology-enabled data dashboards, and inclusive opportunities for active engagement in the design and use of these systems.

Bae's review includes six California districts, including Oakland's, which developed an innovative accountability system under a waiver from NCLB. Susan Bush-Mecenas, Julie Marsh, David Montes de Oca, and Heather Hough draw on their research in Oakland to describe how this multiple measures approach was helpful for "seeing the whole elephant" and was greatly appreciated by administrators for its focus on transparency and support over sanctions. At the same time, the authors illustrate the challenges of moving to a learning-oriented system, including concern over unintended consequences when strategic behaviors, such as manipulating school climate surveys or under reporting suspensions, could invalidate data and mask areas for learning and improvement.

Next, Amy Fowler brings a fresh perspective to the discussion of state accountability systems, informed by her leadership role as the Deputy Secretary of Education in the Vermont Agency of Education. She likens a school accountability system to a statement of values that articulate what stakeholders deem important for students' successful futures. However, as she points out, it is less about getting the "right" measures in the system than for all stakeholders to understand *why* particular measures have been "selected, what they do and don't tell us about school quality," and what inferences can and cannot be drawn from the data. Finally, the author notes that strong accountability systems rely on the notion of reciprocal accountability between federal, state, and

local actors; improvement efforts are dependent on federal and state agencies' support of school systems.

Finally, Amy Farley, Grant Clayton, and Sarah Kaka respond to and extend Bae's review of multiple measures accountability systems by calling for teacher education programs to embrace the same approach and provide pre-service teachers opportunities to engage deeply with various forms of data in ways that foster continuous improvement in their classrooms and schools. The authors draw on data from a recent pilot-study that suggests using multiple measures—such as student feedback, video observations, assessment data, and other information—may help to identify areas for professional growth, such as cultural proficiency or classroom climate, which a more narrow use of data may have failed to identify. These three papers also highlight the important, yet difficult, shift in mindset needed for multiple measures systems to be used as part of a learning-oriented rather than compliance-oriented system of accountability.

The second half of this special issue focuses on the role of performance assessment as part of a system of accountability and support for meaningful learning. Elizabeth Leisy Stosich, Jon Snyder, and Katie Wilczak review how state and local educational systems in 12 states integrated performance assessment into their systems of assessment and identified four common strategies, including using performance assessment for 1) classroom purposes, 2) as part of a graduation requirement, 3) for school accountability purposes, or 4) applying for a federal waiver to use performance assessment as part of the state accountability system. As Stosich and colleagues explain, these strategies varied in terms of the extent to which they encouraged or required the use of performance assessment and where they initiated—in the statehouse or the schoolhouse. However, there was a shared focus on growing educator capacity to design, use, and learn from performance assessments to support student learning across strategies, demonstrating attention to fostering learning across levels of the educational ecosystem.

In the first of three commentaries in response to Stosich and colleagues' article, Dan French describes the work of the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessments and illustrates how educators—teachers, school leaders, and superintendents—can take the lead in pushing for the use of performance assessment through both their work in their local schools and systems and appealing to state legislators. French's commentary illustrates how a networked approach can support educators in developing capacity to redesign assessments and create pressure for statewide change.

Drawing on his experience as the Chief Academic Officer and Assistant Superintendent of the Virginia Department of Education, Billy Haun describes how state policy created an opportunity for integrating the use of performance assessment in local systems of assessment and brings attention to the deep professional learning needed for educators to use performance assessment, particularly among educators who may have both taught in and attended schools that relied on more traditional, multiple-choice assessments. This state example helps to illustrate how support for professional learning that is driven from both the inside-out and the outside-in can begin to transform the larger system of assessment.

Finally, Kathryn McCurdy, Emilie Mitescu Reagan, Audrey Rogers, and Thomas Schram extend the strategies for integrating performance assessment in state systems of assessment described by Stosich and colleagues to include the assessment of pre-service teachers. The authors, like Farley and colleagues, argue that the larger educational ecosystem that can support the redesign of assessment and accountability includes higher education institutions and describe a network of New Hampshire teacher educators who came together to design a performance-based assessment system for teacher candidates that complements and reinforces the performance-based assessment system for K-12 students in the state.

Together this set of articles and commentaries helps to illustrate how educators at all levels of the system—schools, districts, networks, and state education agencies—are taking action to reimagine and redesign systems of assessment and accountability to support the deep and authentic learning opportunities needed to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life. Since Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2014) first proposed their vision for a system of accountability and support for meaningful learning, the passage of ESSA (2015) has allowed for increased flexibility in state assessment practices, created the opportunity for states to apply to pilot innovative assessment practices that could more comprehensively transform their systems of assessment, and required the inclusion of at least one additional measure of school quality or student success beyond required reporting of students' test scores and graduation rates. In sum, this legislation has contributed to a more supportive climate for state and local leaders to fundamentally rethink how they approach assessment and accountability.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
Redesigning Assessment and Accountability

education policy analysis archives

Volume 26 Number 7

January 29, 2018

ISSN 1068-2341



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