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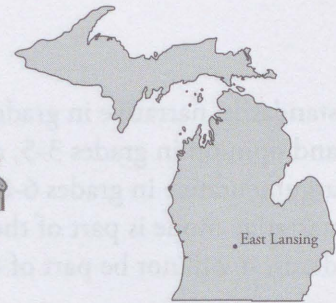
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Looking Back to Look Ahead: How Federal Legislation Has Impacted State Testing

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In the spring of 2015, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) launches its new assessment system, the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP), replacing the previous test - the MEAP. This change aligns with state legislation passed in February 2013. The legislation - House Bill No. 4276 - inhibits the use of the Common Core Standards (CCSS) as well as any standardized assessment aligning to this initiative. This includes the assessment developed by Smarter Balanced - a state-led consortium working collaboratively to develop assessments aligned to the CCSS. As a result, the M-STEP serves as an interim assessment this spring before full implementation of a new state assessment in 2016. Several changes are required in the move from the MEAP to the M-STEP. Among the changes that are currently being instituted include the following: testing occurring online with a paper-and-pencil option (with completed waiver), testing items aligning to state standards, writing assessment offered to additional grades, and students provided with opportunities to demonstrate higher-order skills through constructed responses.

The multitude of changes to test names, requirements, and the like often leaves school leaders, teachers, and parents feeling puzzled about how and why such changes come about. Thus, the purpose of this article is to first provide an historical overview of the evolution of accountability measures stemming from federal legislation and then to take a specific look at the impact of such measures on standardized testing mandates on Michigan education.

Early Accountability: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

While the involvement of the state-level government in education has increased significantly over the course of the last forty years, federal educational mandates still influence state-level decisions. With the implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), states took a more active role in implementing direct oversight and regulation of education. In turn, states were responsible for providing a greater amount of money to accommodate funding discrepancies. One response taken up by state governments was to create and oversee their own established standards. In Michigan, these were the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs). However, this also led to discrepancies in academic standards across states. To rectify these inconsistencies the federal government, under the administration of George W. Bush, reauthorized and renamed ESEA as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

NCLB was intended to focus on measurable academic outcomes such as standardized testing results. However, NCLB was different than other federal education policies because funding was aligned to these outcomes. Under NCLB, states such as Michigan, were now responsible for collecting student data and implementing state standards. If states did not perform to their own standards they would be sanctioned. For example, if Michigan students did not show adequate growth and/or mastery of the GLCEs, this would warrant federal intervention and, likely, a decrease in federal funds directed at education within the state.

A New Approach: Development of the Common Core State Standards

According to Rick Hess, scholar and director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, NCLB was problematic from the beginning (Bidwell, 2014). Under George W. Bush, when accountability mandates and regulation were on the rise, the federal government required that states not only test students, but that the data reported was also to be disaggregated. This was done for the purpose of transparency; however, this transparency put up some red flags as some students were still being left behind. As the NCLB era progressed, more schools were not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In turn, some states began to decrease the rigor of their standards and it appeared that academic achievement was being made. However, the disparity between states became apparent on tests like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). On assessments such as NAEP, the data indicated which states were performing better than others and this fueled the call for national standards. Thus, the 2006-2007 chair of the National Governors Association (NGA) created a task force who started what we now know as the Common Core State Standards.

With the election of President Obama in 2008, the influence of federal government in state education increased with the \$4.35 billion grant proposal Race To The Top (RTTT). According to Grissom and Herrington (2012) "the Obama administration appears committed to a strategy of leveraging federal funds and the incentives that come with them to steer local and state reform efforts," (p. 12). Under RTTT, Michigan and other states were provided the opportunity to apply for NCLB waivers to allow more state flexibility in addressing the mandates instituted by NCLB. However, any state that applied for RTTT or the waiver was required to adopt college and career ready standards by the 2013-2014 school year as well as implement corresponding assessments by the 2014-2015 academic year.

Where are We Now?: Education and Accountability in Michigan

Michigan was among one of many states that submitted a waiver. Like many other states, Michigan's waiver was approved and thus, the state was required to use the CCSS and a national assessment tool such as the Smarter Balanced assessment. Failure to comply with these terms would mean that schools across the state would be not fulfilling the waiver and ultimately, Michigan would be required to meet the original mandates of NCLB. However, due to the backlash against the Common Core, Michigan's legislature delayed the implementation of the CCSS as well as a national assessment, though local school districts had the flexibility to adopt and to implement the standards themselves. The legislature later passed House Bill No. 4276, which led to adopting M-STEP as an interim test.

On the horizon, during the 2015-2016 school year, 9th and 10th graders will be assessed for the first time, and if appropriate, interim K-12 assessments will also be conducted. To remain updated on standardized testing and policy updates within the state, sign-up for the MDE newsletter <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIMDE/subscriber/new>.

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