

# Policy brief on michigan's education accountability system



## Policy Brief on Michigan's Education Accountability System

The evaluation of schools is a critical process which determines the amount of federal and state funding educational institutions will receive. The criteria used to determine how schools will be funded on many metrics. However, various states and many national policies support the method of awarding schools funding in line with the number of learners who attain a certain threshold in state exams (Ehlert, Koedel, Parsons, & Podgursky, 2016). Therefore, a school that performs well will receive more funds in a given financial year. This system tends to lead school administrations engaging in questionable practices to pass a specific exam. In this regard, their merit is not a reflection of the education's goals of sending viable citizens to society and thus needs to be changed.

## Overview of the State of Educational Accountability Policies in Michigan and Nationwide

A report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in the mid-1980s paved the way for combating the problems facing the education system in America. State governors were put to task to enact legislation in their respective states to achieve the six set National Education Goals as legislated by congress (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016). This situation marked the beginning of the struggle to close the educational gaps between the radical differences in student achievements in all the demographic groups, social and economic, in the United States.

President George W. Bush in 2002 assented to the No Child Left Behind bill to fix overcome a fragmented education system and to achieve the set

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National Education Goals. This law was replaced by the enactment of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which offered new provisions that focused on evaluating and training educators, assessing the learning process provided in schools and holding schools accountable for results produced by students (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Currently, the ESSA encompasses policies which are in line with the set National Education Goals and outlines guidelines about the assessment of students and schools (Ehlert et al., 2016). It provides for methods on how to train and evaluate educators and gives guidelines on how schools will be held accountable for the results produced by students.

In November 2017, the Michigan Department of Education developed Michigan's ESSA plan, which has a similar set of objectives as the National Education Goals. The new system of accountability practiced in Michigan's Education plan aims to support and improve low performing schools and students and moves away from the old tradition of identifying the worst-performing schools and sanctioning them (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016). The new system eliminates the top-to-bottom school ranking and moves away from the scorecard coloring rating. There is considerable support provided by authorities at various levels of government to assist dismally performing institutions in attaining their set objectives of education.

#### A Discussion on Relevant Research on Accountability

Research has shown that standardized tests often do not adequately measure the level of skill in a student. Rather than offer a well-rounded curriculum, schools often teach to pass tests (Turnipseed & Darling-

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Hammond, 2015). Previously, to meet set objectives that ranked schools performances grounded on the percentage of learners that passes exams, schools would lower their standards to attain high test scores.

The ranking of students or schools based on the percentage of students that pass state exams has several demerits as research has proved. It is unrealistic to attempt to reduce the education rift between low performing schools and better performing schools based on improving the passing rates of standardized tests (Turnipseed & Darling-Hammond, 2015). For instance, a school may hire more teachers to reduce the class size to improve the students' performance by increasing the student to teacher interaction experience. This is a factor that the school has within its power to control. The school might achieve its goal but only to a certain extent as there are other factors at play that are not within its control. Examples of some factors that may be out of the school's control can be differences in the economic status of students or the racial composition of the students within the schools.

The ranking of schools nationwide based on the percentage of students who pass state exams does not take into account factors such as disabilities amongst some students, differences in economic or financial background of students, differences in the level of English proficiency amongst students or differences in the racial and ethnic background of students (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

## Recommendations

It is my recommendation that the Governor for Michigan move forward with the initiative to change the accountability level of schools ranking from a pass rates based system of state exams to a growth-based system that tracks student performance over a period of several years (Turnipseed & Darling-Hammond, 2015). Policies should be formulated to facilitate the improvement of schools performance, and the new education system should move away from ranking schools based on standardized tests and sanctioning them due to poor performance.

Continuous support should be provided by local, regional and state services to identifying low performing schools especially those challenged by factors such as economic disadvantages, disabilities or a low level of English proficiency and offering solutions that will assist in the improvement of the performance of such schools (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015). In the identification of these low performing schools for improvement factors such as student growth and proficiency, schools' curriculum quality, graduation capacity of students, the English learning progress of students and the participation level of students is taken into account.

## References

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