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## STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS BEYOND *NCLB*

Many states established systems of accountability in the 1990s, prior to *NCLB*, and some have maintained these prior initiatives after *NCLB* implementation. The presence of dual accountability systems was noted during the *LASA* era (Goertz and Duffy, 2001; O'Day, 1999), when many states had a system that applied to all schools as well as a Title I system charting the AYP of schools that received Title I funds. *NCLB* was intended to reconcile these systems, and states have worked to integrate state accountability practices with new federal requirements.

**By 2006–07, a total of 27 states had accountability requirements that went beyond, or were used in addition to, what is required of these states under *NCLB*.**

By 2006–07, three states phased out their pre-*NCLB* systems, and six states had added new accountability provisions in addition to what is required under *NCLB*. One other state reported plans to implement an accountability system beyond *NCLB* in 2007–08. States that developed systems since the passage of *NCLB* indicated that they were building on the *NCLB* requirements to make more coherent statewide systems that incorporated local priorities. One official, whose state is considering adding accountability requirements beyond *NCLB* explained,

“We are investigating having a state accountability piece to coexist with AYP but we don’t have it in place right now.... [W]e’re interested in including all of our assessments like our writing, our science, a few other things in an accountability system that are not a part of AYP.... We have five subject areas that students are required to pass to get a diploma. We would like somehow to include that, the students passing all five in the accountability some way. So... there are assessment data and other things that we think are important to include in an accountability system that *NCLB* does not include.”

In 2006–07, all state accountability programs that went beyond *NCLB* used designations of school performance that differed somewhat from those of *NCLB* or reported their results in different ways. For example, some used letter grades, others identified “high-improving” schools, and so forth. Another notable difference was that many state programs (15) relied on growth measures to track progress toward accountability targets instead of an absolute target (percent reaching a set proficiency level) as in *NCLB*. As one state official explained, his state system was designed to hold schools accountable for the performance of students below proficiency, as well as above, “It’s not good enough to just have students meet the standard. For those students who are meeting the standards, [we want to know] what are schools doing to help them be performance level four or five years in the future. And then for students who are below the bar, what are schools doing? AYP focuses so much on students below the bar that we wanted to make sure that we were not losing and not forcing schools to not pay attention to those other students.”

Fourteen states used different (or additional) measures of student achievement in their state accountability system (for example, tests in subjects not required under *NCLB*), and two had different inclusion rules for LEP students. As a result of these alternate measures, 15 states that maintain their pre-*NCLB* accountability programs reported that different schools were identified for improvement under *NCLB* than those identified under the state’s other initiative. Of the six states with post-*NCLB* accountability systems, four states identified different schools for improvement under the state system than under *NCLB*.

Earlier in the implementation of *NCLB*, observers reported tensions between the prior state accountability systems and the newer, less familiar *NCLB* accountability requirements, particularly with respect to the identification of low-performing schools based on AYP. For example, in some cases, state accountability designations from spring 2003 testing differed from AYP determinations for the same schools. Reportedly, some schools that did not make AYP targets received high marks under the state system (Hoff, 2004).<sup>47</sup>

***NCLB* and other state or district accountability initiatives did not commonly generate conflicting designations of high- and low-performing schools, according to principal reports for 2004–05.**

In 2006–07, such discrepancies appeared limited. For example, only 2 percent of schools that were identified for improvement under *NCLB* were identified as high-performing under a state or district accountability system. Conversely, only 3 percent of schools that were not identified by the *NCLB* system received a separate state designation as low-performing (see Exhibit 19).

<b>Exhibit 19</b>		
<b>Percentage of Schools Identified and Not Identified for Improvement Under <i>NCLB</i>, by Accountability Designations Under State or District Accountability Initiatives, 2006–07</b>		
<b>Designation Under State or District Accountability Initiative</b>	<b>Schools Identified Under <i>NCLB</i> (<i>n</i> = 469)</b>	<b>Schools Not Identified Under <i>NCLB</i> (<i>n</i> = 918)</b>
Low-performing	34%	3%
No special designation	11%	33%
High-performing	2%	18%
Other/not sure	14%	9%
No other system (other than <i>NCLB</i> )	39%	37%

**Exhibit reads:** Thirty-four percent of schools identified for improvement under *NCLB* were also designated as low-performing under a state or district accountability system.

Note: Analysis includes principal survey respondents in jurisdictions that had a state or district accountability initiative in 2006–07.

Source: NLS-*NCLB*, Principal Surveys.

<sup>47</sup> See Linn (2005) for a more extensive discussion of differences between pre-*NCLB* state accountability provisions and *NCLB* requirements.

**Overall, most respondents reported success in incorporating *NCLB* requirements into state systems, but over one-third of district officials and principals believed that this additional system resulted in staff confusion about targets.**

In 2006–07, a majority of both district administrators and principals agreed that having a state or district program in addition to *NCLB* gives a more complete picture of effectiveness. Nearly three-quarters of district officials also agreed that having a state or district accountability program also helped to make effective decisions about student achievement. Nonetheless, over one-third of district officials and principals believed that this additional system resulted in staff confusion about targets,<sup>48</sup> and about one-fifth believed that the dual system reduced community support for public schools (see Exhibit 20).

By 2006–07, state officials reported that they had managed to integrate *NCLB* requirements with state accountability initiatives and had reconciled conflicts that were apparent earlier in the *NCLB* implementation process. As one state official commented, “the [state level staff] really work hard to make sure the two systems are integrated and that they support each other and are not at odds.”

<b>Exhibit 20</b> <b>Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks of Having State and/or District Accountability Initiatives in Addition to <i>NCLB</i>, in Districts and Schools That Report Having Them, 2006–07</b>		
Perceived Benefit and Drawback	Percent of Districts Agreeing ( <i>n</i> = 154)	Percent of Schools Agreeing ( <i>n</i> = 832)
Gives us a more complete picture of our effectiveness than a single accountability system	69%	65%
Results in staff confusion about our targets for student achievement	46%	37%
Reduces community support for public schools	23%	24%
Allows us to focus on the goals that are most important to us	56%	52%
Helps us make effective decisions about how to improve student achievement	71%	60%
<b>Exhibit reads:</b> Sixty-nine percent of district administrators agree that having a dual accountability system gives a more complete picture of effectiveness than a single accountability system. Source: NLS- <i>NCLB</i> , District and Principal Surveys.		

## DISCUSSION

Three themes are apparent in state policy responses to the standards, assessment, and improvement targets required by *NCLB*.

First, by 2006–07, states had made substantial progress toward compliance with *NCLB* accountability requirements. For the most part, the standards, assessments and AYP provisions had been established,

<sup>48</sup> See Bitter et al. (2005) for an analysis of similar reported confusion among low-performing schools identified in the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program in California.