



POSITION PAPER:

AUDIT OF STATE ACCOUNTABILITY/ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

HB21-1294 calls for an independent third-party audit of our public education accountability system to determine whether it is meeting the needs of all Colorado students. Advocates for Public Education Policy believes that this audit is vitally necessary, particularly because the accountability system was adopted mainly to comply with federal testing requirements, but it has ceased improving students' literacy and math skills and has resulted in an over-reliance on test scores for evaluation of student learning and instruction.

We believe that an audit of the accountability/accreditation system is (over)due.

- The state's accountability/accreditation system was adopted over a decade ago - to align Colorado's system with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). There has been no evaluation of its success in all that time.
- Five years ago, NCLB was reauthorized as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), but Colorado has not made any changes to our system to align with the changes in ESSA.

We believe that test-based accountability has narrowed the curriculum.

- Because of NCLB's reliance on test scores for evaluation of student learning and instruction, the state system has a similar basis, using consecutive-year testing for the "growth model" in the system. Only two subjects are used in the growth model: reading/English language arts and math (although science testing, which is done in only 3 grade levels, is also mandated).
- The focus on federally required standardized testing has resulted in less instruction time dedicated to subjects including other subjects that are highly valued. "In recent years, the emphasis in public education has been squarely placed on the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science, but it is important to emphasize public education's historic mission for active participation in democracy." – Colorado state statute 22-7-1002(1)(c)
- "The need to meet specific testing standards pressures teachers to 'teach to the test' rather than providing a broad curriculum." (american.edu/blog/effects-of-standardized-testing)

We believe that standardized testing has negatively impacted schools and classroom instruction.

- "Teachers have expressed frustration about the time it takes to prepare for and administer tests. Achievement test scores can place unfair blame on good teachers if scores are low and obscure teaching deficiencies if scores are high." (american.edu/blog/effects-of-standardized-testing)
- Current mandated interventions imposed on low-performing schools – firing the teachers, converting to a charter school, or turning the school over to a private management company – are punitive, unfair, costly, and ineffective.

We know that standardized tests have a cultural bias.

- "Too often, test designers rely on questions which assume background knowledge more often held by white, middle-class students." (Oakland School District Manager of Performance)
- "When standardized testing is biased against minorities and those from lower socioeconomic status, it can encourage racism and misconceptions about people from those backgrounds. (Leadership Project - Columbia Univ Teacher College)"
- "If the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of the individuals being tested are not adequately represented in the norming group, the validity and reliability of the tests are questionable when used with such individuals." (International Journal of Critical Pedagogy)

We see that the system is not closing the “Achievement Gap” as it was supposed to do.

- Even schools with very few low-income students still have a large achievement gap between the students from low-income families and the others. (School View on CDE’s website)
- The current test-based accountability system has failed to close the achievement gap between schools with mostly poor students and those with very few. “Poverty correlates very strongly with academic results. Schools with low test scores nearly always have a lot of families living in poverty. Schools without a lot of poverty and/or English language learners nearly always have good scores. This correlation is very stable. The connection between poverty and education results is one of the most enduring relationships in education research. It shows up everywhere.” (EDU100.org/lessons/poverty)