

Standards-Based Reform: A Powerful Idea Unmoored

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NCLB

- Most recent effort along path of federal efforts to improve education results
- Excellence and equity as twin goals
 - NDEA (1958)
 - Title I (1965)
 - IASA (1994)
 - NCLB (2002)

The “Standards Bargain”

- Steering by results
 - Accountability for achievement (meant to replace regulation)
- Sharing out functions of an “aligned system”
 - Standards (originally called “curriculum frameworks”)
 - Assessments
 - Curriculum
 - Teacher development
 - Accountability

The Mid-Nineties Version

- States set standards—same for all students
- States set assessments—aligned with standards
- These requirements in exchange for Title 1 funds
- Some federal support for teacher dev't
- States to develop accountability

The 2001 Version: NCLB

- Adds federal accountability requirements
- Annual testing
- Disaggregation by “equity groups”
- Every child proficient by 2014
- Sanctions for failing to meet AYP
- Excellence includes equity

Has It Worked?

- Equity: Somewhat
 - Achievement gap is shrinking (NAEP)
 - Strongest in 4th grade math
- Excellence: Not much
 - De facto incentives to lower proficiency standards
- Narrowed curriculum
 - Focus on what will be tested

Overall:

- We have a high stakes TEST-BASED system
 - Tests unmoored from standards
 - Tests systematically under-represent “high cognitive demand” aspect of standards
- Accountability system relies on sanctions
 - There are few “carrots”
 - The goal in most schools and districts is to avoid the sticks
 - The safest thing to do is to “test test”

Redesigning Assessments

- Align to a fuller representation of what we want to teach than current standards
- Curriculum frameworks need to make a comeback
- Specify learning progressions
- Don't do this 50 times (it would break the bank)
- But don't do it only one time (too much chance of getting it wrong)

Redesigning Accountability

- More carrot, less stick
- Graduated incentives for schools

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