

Assessment and Accountability 2008-2018: Reflections and Next Steps

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Big picture reminders re: federal and state education policy

- 1958: National Defense Education Act (improving math and science instruction) → first substantial federal investment
- 1965: Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as part of the War on Poverty → federal funding for low-income students; still the largest federal outlay in K-12 education
- 1970s, 80s, 90s → more federal education laws (IDEA, FERPA, EEOA)
- 1994 → Goals 2000 (every school drug free, every adult literate, every child demonstrating competency, 90% grad rate)
- 2001: No Child Left Behind – tying federal dollars to standards, assessments, data reporting; enforced stringently by USED (i.e. now states had to comply)

A short primer on the last 10 years

As President Obama took office, the groundwork was there for the federal government to use supplementary and incentive funds to drive major policy initiatives

- 2008 and 2009: Race to the Top Rounds 1 and 2
- 2011: ESEA Flexibility waivers
- 2015: ESSA reauthorization

Meanwhile, in
Michigan (and
most states)

- The 2009 federal stimulus funds tied to certain policy actions were needed by the state
- Boiling the frog--the requirements of what we (states) had to do to get certain pots of money had been gradually increasing over time—stepping back, the system had become strong in some areas and weak in others
- A period of rampant, fast-paced, and exhausting change in the worlds of assessment and accountability

In assessment

- We needed to replace the many-years-old MEAP with an updated assessment (everyone agreed this was a good idea)
- We started working with Smarter Balanced (leverage resources, comparable tests—seemed smart)
- Common Core battles + federal vs. state education authority + “waivers” + national conversation = no SBAC
- Several years of turmoil to get to the MSTEP; MSTEP changes
 - The MDE has made changes EVERY YEAR for five years—primarily at the behest of the legislature

In accountability

- AYP
- PLA list
- ESEA Flexibility (Priority, Focus, Reward) and Scorecard
- ESSA (Index and Parent Dashboard)

Four systems in 10 years, and changes within the years

Example: Focus schools—stakeholder group to agree on changes between year 1 and year 2

In summary....

The last 10 years have been a period of extraordinary change for all levels of the system—schools, districts, ISDs, and the MDE

Editorial comment: a less technically-savvy MDE would not have been able to meet these wildly changing demands as successfully as we have. Also we are tired 😊

Lessons Learned (and to be remembered)

- Michigan should avoid chasing/overbuilding around federal incentives and/or requirements if they do not:
 - Align with our state's strategic plan
 - Have a coalition of support
 - Relate to broader policy goals
- Assessment and accountability **ALONE** are not effective levers for change → it **MUST** lead to an effective “so what” **AND** the “so what” has accountability at every level of the system
 - In a local control state, district leadership is critical and appropriate policy actions/reactions at the SEA level, the LEA level, and the school level are necessary
 - We need to have clearer conversations about the role of the SEA, ISD, LEA, and school

Lessons Learned (and to be remembered)

- **There is a tension in accountability:**
 - Change the system based on feedback vs. keep the system consistent
 - Stop moving the goalposts vs. these metrics are wrong/too hard and should be changed (usually close to high stakes decision)
 - Accountability is good for everyone vs. this system isn't accurate for me
- After building/revising AYP, PLA, TTB, Scorecard, Index, Parent Dashboard (not to mention various subsystems), one clear conclusion: everyone's favorite accountability system is the one we don't currently have

Lessons Learned (and to be remembered)

- Too many big-system policy changes enacted too fast at the federal and consequently state level can have significant negative consequences
 - My opinion: when federal education policy *required* educator evaluations that included state assessment data/value-added modeling, it:
 - Nearly killed statewide summative assessment entirely
 - Threatened a movement for common standards that was actually a positive step toward the US being more globally competitive
 - Dragged a sleepy research tool (VAM's) out of the ivory towers of academia and jammed it into a policy context for which it was completely unfit
 - Made the very valuable conversation about high-quality evaluations of educators that include feedback, data, and a focus on improvement a hotbed of controversy AND
 - Created very odd alliances that have far reaching consequences for education policy

Solutions

- **More pragmatic:**
 - Under ESSA, the MDE:
 - Used that plan as only a component/vehicle of a larger plan
 - Returned focus to the whole child
 - MICIP—making sure we think about overall NEEDS, then PLANS, then FUNDING—not overbuilding around individual funding streams (i.e. Title as a vehicle for *all* change in a district/building)
 - Explicitly working to reshape the state agency so we have integrated solutions and we evaluate how they drive toward a common goal
 - Don't lead with the assessment and accountability conversation every time. Pay more attention to the “so what” → partnership districts, differentiated supports to districts, aligned supports
- **More personal:**
 - Ask “why” and make sure the MDE asks “why”

Thank You!

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