

Issue Brief

Accountability

3/31/05

What some people say:

Public education is not accountable.

Public schools and districts in Colorado have never been more accountable. School districts continue to be accountable to their local communities through the locally elected school board. Three formal accountability systems in Colorado measure student progress: School Accountability Reports, State Accreditation, and No Child Left Behind (mandated by the federal government). In addition, school and district performance on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) is reported annually in the media as soon as the scores are available in early August.

Facts:

- Colorado's School Accountability Reports (SARs) are published annually and distributed to parents across the state. The SAR provides two kinds of academic ratings (growth and achievement) based on CSAP. SARs also provide information about safety and discipline, staff education, experience and salaries, district financial status, and student/teacher ratios, among other things.
<http://reportcard.cde.state.co.us/reportcard/CommandHandler.jsp>
- Districts accredit schools in Colorado and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) accredits districts through a process established by the State Board of Education. The criteria for accreditation range from student academic performance to compliance with state regulations in finance, bully proofing, and a variety of other areas. There is no state summary of districts' or schools' accreditation status, but information on individual school districts and schools is available from that school district's administration office.
http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_accredit.htm
- The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision of the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act sets annual targets for student achievement for districts and schools overall and for nine subgroups (e.g. race, income, English language proficiency, and disability). If they have enough students in each subgroup to report results, districts can have more than 150 targets to meet each year and schools can have more than 50 targets. Schools and districts that miss one target receive the same failing rating as those that miss all of them and are subject to the same sanctions. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/ayp/index.asp>

Challenges(s):

The three accountability systems each have a different focus. While all three systems use CSAP data to measure student performance, different criteria are applied in each system, producing conflicting, and often confusing, ratings about how well students and schools are performing. In addition, the system of accountability in Colorado needs to be evaluated to determine whether it meets its goals.

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