

## Accountability in the Emerging Education Landscape

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The public's attention is focused on standardized test results and school labels as a way to hold teachers, administrators and students accountable for the quality of our public education system. The concept of public school accountability is not new however; it has been a part of this country's education landscape for more than 200 years.<sup>1</sup>

Today's version of K-12 public school accountability uses academic standards to measure school and student performance. As such, academic standards should align each school's curriculum, methods of instruction, internal assessments and incentives.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce standards-based accountability and its application in Arizona's K-12 public school system. The public policies that shape standards-based accountability will also be discussed along with three major dilemmas inherent in these policies.

### What are Arizona's Academic Standards?

In 1996, the Arizona State Board of Education (State Board) established academic standards in

nine subject matter areas.<sup>2</sup> These standards describe what students should know and be able to do at every grade level. Created and periodically revised by a statewide committee of teachers, academic standards are arranged by increasingly detailed tasks that range from general academic goals to the specific performance objectives that guide curricular development and classroom instruction.

The academic standard expresses an academic performance goal in the most general terms. For example, the Mathematics Standard is described as a connected body of mathematical understandings, conceptual knowledge and skills that provide a foundation in mathematics for all students. Performance objectives are detailed tasks that constitute the academic standard at each grade level. Each performance objective assumes the student has mastered the concepts and skills from the previous grade level.

Table 1 illustrates the hierarchical sequence of certain performance objectives by grade level for the *numerical operations* concept, one of several concepts included in the Mathematics Standard.<sup>3</sup> Notice how the tasks become more difficult as the grade level rises. For example, in

kindergarten, students are required to identify simple mathematical symbols. In later grades, students are required to apply these symbols in

mathematical equations. And in the highest grades, more complex symbols are introduced and later applied.

**Table 1.** Select performance objectives, mathematics standard

<b>Concept 2: Numerical Operations</b> Understand and apply numerical operations and their relationship to one another.									
Kinder- garten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	High School
Identify the symbols: +, -, =.	Apply the symbols: +, -, =.	Apply the symbols: +, -, ×, ÷, =, ≠, <, >, %.	Apply the symbols: ×, ÷, /, *, %, and the grouping symbols ( ) and ", ".	Apply the symbol: • and ( ) for multiplication, and ≤, ≥.	Apply the symbol "[ ]" to represent grouping.	Apply the symbols for "...", or "—" to represent repeating decimals and ":" to represent ratios, superscripts as exponents.	Apply the symbols + and - to represent positive and negative, and "     " to represent absolute value.	Apply the symbols "√" to represent square root, "±" to represent roots, and "{" as grouping symbols.	Apply subscripts to represent ordinal position.

Source: Arizona Department of Education, "Mathematics Standard Articulated by Grade Level" available online at <http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/math/articulated/introduction.pdf>

### The Role of State Assessments

Arizona law requires the State Board to assess student performance in reading, writing and mathematics as a means of measuring student achievement of the academic standards. In addition, the State Board has the authority to administer tests in social studies and science but these tests have not been developed.<sup>4</sup>

The state assessment test is Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). It is intended to reflect the content of the State Board's academic standards. Like performance objectives, AIMS items are developed by committees of teachers from across the state.<sup>5</sup>

There has been considerable debate within education circles about how well AIMS is aligned with the content of the academic standards. The issue of test alignment is beyond the scope of this text; however, here is a simple example of question alignment that illustrates how assessment should function

under the standards-based accountability system.

Figure 1 includes a selection of test items at two different grade levels that align with the *numerical operations* tasks outlined in Table 1.

**Figure 1**

<p><b>Grade 3:</b></p> <p>Subtract: <math>623 - 359 =</math></p> <p>A. 264* B. 274 C. 364 D. 374</p>	<p><b>Grade 8:</b></p> <p>Simplify: <math>6 \times 2 + 4^2 - (\frac{21}{7} + 2)</math></p> <p>A. 35 B. 27 C. 25 D. 23*</p>
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Source: Arizona Department of Education

Unfortunately, the credibility of AIMS has been damaged by test scores that arrived late or worse yet, incorrect.<sup>6</sup> These problems were caused by pursuing an overly aggressive implementation schedule.<sup>7</sup> Arizona is not alone, however, several other states have encountered similar problems.<sup>8</sup>

Mistakes with AIMS' implementation have prevented an in-depth evaluation of the

effectiveness of standards-based accountability policies in Arizona. Educators and policy makers have been forced to divert their attention away from educational outcomes and instead, concentrate on finding workable test administration procedures.

### Assigning Responsibility

There are two central questions in all accountability policies: Who is being held accountable and how are they held accountable? When answering the first question, it is important to note that there are two different levels of accountability, system and student. The distinction is important because the issues and implications of accountability policies differ profoundly based on who is being held accountable. Arizona has accountability policies that apply at both the system and student levels.

System level accountability includes holding teachers, schools or districts responsible for student achievement. The methods used to hold the system responsible include, but are not limited to, public recognition, salary incentives and school takeovers.

Student level accountability holds students responsible for demonstrating proficiency on the academic standards. The two most common student accountability policies are exit exams, which prohibit grade promotion without a passing score, and graduation tests, which prohibit graduation without a passing score.

### The History of Standards-based Accountability

Today's standards-based accountability has evolved over 30 years, initially measuring educational quality based on *input* indicators to the current methods to evaluate educational quality according to *performance* measures.<sup>9</sup>

Standards-based accountability today is distinct from previous outcome-oriented accountability policies in several ways. First, standards-based accountability is distinguished from its predecessors by the scope of its application. Every state has adopted school accountability policies and they are billed as an ambitious effort to reform public education in this country.<sup>10</sup> Second, rigorous academic standards establish more ambitious academic expectations for all students than previous education reforms. And third, standards-based accountability is enforced through a complex system of rewards and consequences based on performance outcomes that potentially impact all levels of the public school system.

The central elements of standards-based accountability policies, academic standards and assessments, have been supported by the last four presidential administrations. *A Nation at Risk* is often credited as the genesis of the standards-based accountability movement. This influential report, released in 1983, criticized the shortcomings of public education and the degenerating impact of low academic expectations perpetuated by the minimum-competency testing policies of the 1970s. *A Nation at Risk* called for higher academic standards and a focus on student achievement as the measure of education quality.<sup>11</sup> Despite widely publicized counter-arguments that questioned the underlying assumptions of *A Nation at Risk*, it had widespread impact.<sup>12</sup>

The standards-based education reform movement gained momentum in 1989 with the adoption of the National Education Goals. In 1994, the Clinton Administration instituted standards and assessments as part of *Goals 2000*.<sup>13</sup> By 1998, 49 states had adopted or were in the process of adopting academic standards for students in the core academic subjects. States were also required to track academic progress through the implementation of state assessments aligned with academic standards.

Approximately half of the states, including Arizona, were administering state assessments in the late 1990's to meet the provisions of *Goals 2000*.

The prominent role of accountability standards and assessment continues under President George W. Bush's sweeping federal legislation, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB)<sup>14</sup>, which has been the most powerful force in the national emergence of standards-based accountability. The law requires all states receiving federal education funds to develop and implement assessments aligned to academic standards by the 2005-06 school year. The assessments measure reading and mathematics skills and must be administered in grades 3 through 8, and at least once in grades 10 through 12.<sup>15</sup> States are required to develop and implement "a single, statewide accountability system that will be effective in ensuring that all districts and schools make adequate yearly progress, and hold accountable those that do not."<sup>16</sup> All major student subgroups (economically disadvantaged, major racial and ethnic categories, students with disabilities and Limited English Proficient students) must also meet acceptable levels of student performance or the entire school/district will fail to make adequate yearly progress.<sup>17</sup>

NCLB mandates corrective actions for schools failing to make adequate yearly progress such as replacing school staff, appointing an outside expert to advise the school, reopening the school as a charter school or turning over operations to the state or private company.<sup>18</sup>

### **Accountability in Arizona**

In November 2000, the citizens of Arizona passed Proposition 301 which established system level accountability in the state's public school system. Also referred to Education 2000,

it included a 0.6 cent sales tax increase to finance public education. Proposition 301 included school accountability provisions and teacher pay increases based on performance criteria, as well as across the board increases in teachers' base salaries.

Following the passage of Proposition 301, Governor Hull appointed the Task Force on Efficiency and Accountability in K-12 Education. This task force made five major recommendations on the use of standards and accountability in the state's school system which largely mirrored national discussions on standard-based reform. The Task Force's recommendations included aligning curricula in all subjects to the state's academic standards and holding students, teachers and administrators accountable in all public schools.<sup>19</sup>

The task force recommendations supported the Proposition 301 accountability provisions requiring the State Board to adopt the criteria for an "Annual Achievement Profile" for each public school in the state. These criteria consist of the following academic achievement indicators:

1. *For schools serving grades K-8:* the percentage of students meeting or exceeding AIMS and the percentage of students making one year's growth according to the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), an indicator of academic gain.<sup>20</sup>
2. *For schools serving grades 9-12:* the percentage of students meeting or exceeding AIMS, their annual dropout rate and their annual graduation rate.

In Fall 2000, the State Board approved the state's school accountability system, called Arizona LEARNS, and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) released the first school achievement profiles to the public (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Achievement profile results, all schools, 2002

Achievement Profile	Count	% of Total
Excelling	3	0.2
Improving	446	35.1
Maintaining Performance	548	43.1
Underperforming	<u>275</u>	<u>21.6</u>
Total Schools Receiving Profile	1272	100.0

Source: Arizona Department of Education

The implementation of the 2003 achievement profiles involved further revisions to the accountability system. The legislature renamed the school classifications to the present alternatives, *excelling*, *highly performing*, *underperforming* and *failing to meet academic standards*.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the State Board made the following changes:

- ★ increased emphasis on the MAP;
- ★ weighted a school’s strongest performance attribute (baseline achievement level or growth);
- ★ required schools to have a minimum number of students in the “Exceeds the Standard” category on AIMS in order to reach the highest school classifications; and,
- ★ modified the achievement profile criteria to meet NCLB provisions.<sup>22</sup>

The 2003 achievement profiles saw a dramatic shift in the distribution of academic profiles. In particular, a notably higher percentage of schools qualified as *excelling* and a considerably lower percentage of schools were classified as *underperforming* under the revised criteria (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Achievement profile results, all schools, 2003

Achievement Profile	Count	% of Total
Excelling	132	12.0
Highly Performing	167	15.2
Performing	663	60.4
Underperforming	<u>136</u>	<u>12.4</u>
Total Schools Receiving Profile	1098	100.0

Source: Arizona Department of Education

Currently, there are 82 Arizona public schools that have been designated as *underperforming* for two consecutive years. Alternative schools, extremely small schools, new schools and schools serving students in grades K-2 only, have not been given an achievement profile, but the State Board has passed policies to include most of these schools in the near future.

### Penalties Imposed on Schools under Arizona LEARNS

Arizona’s Superintendent of Public Instruction is required to designate any school that fails to meet the Arizona LEARNS academic criteria as an *underperforming* school and to assign a “solutions team” to work with the school’s staff to increase pupil academic achievement.<sup>23</sup> The local school board is required to notice all residences within the attendance area of the school about the *underperforming* designation, develop a school improvement plan (SIP) and present the plan to the public. The consequences for charter schools designated as *underperforming* are similar, including public notification and the implementation of a SIP. In addition, funds are allocated to allow parents with students attending either *underperforming* or *failing* schools to be reimbursed for student supplemental instruction services.

If a school is designated as *underperforming* for three consecutive years, the ADE is required to visit the school site to confirm the data and review the implementation of the SIP. Schools may appeal their achievement profile designation.

*Failing* schools are required to continue public notification and the implementation of the SIP. The ADE must also visit each *failing* school to determine if the SIP is implemented properly and may recommend that the school go before the State Board for a public hearing if it is not. At the hearing, the State Board must determine whether a governmental, nonprofit or private

organization may submit applications to fully or partially manage the school.<sup>24</sup>

The consequences also extend to the local school board. If a minimum number of schools in a district are designated as *failing* for more than two consecutive years, a statement to that effect is required to be placed above the listing of local school board candidates on election ballots.<sup>25</sup>

If a charter school is designated as *failing*, the school's sponsor is required either to return the charter school to an acceptable performance level or revoke the school's charter. If the State Board determines that a charter school implemented its improvement plan improperly, the sponsor is required to revoke the school's charter.

### **NCLB School Accountability**

There are substantive differences between the state and federal accountability systems. The differences demonstrate that the term "school accountability" does not have a uniform meaning.

The NCLB accountability system is based on a conjunctive model, meaning that schools must meet all criteria to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the federal designation of acceptable performance. If a school is deficient in one criterion, the entire school fails to make AYP.<sup>26</sup>

NCLB requires schools to test an average of 95% of enrolled students on AIMS over a three-year period, all student subgroups must reach targeted achievement goals on AIMS, and schools must reach benchmarks on an additional indicator (graduation rate for high schools and attendance rate for elementary schools).

According to the federal criteria, almost 24% of Arizona's public schools did not meet the AYP requirements. Generally, schools had the most difficulty meeting the minimum 95% tested criterion.<sup>27</sup>

### **Student-Level Accountability**

In 1995, former Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Graham-Keegan announced plans for a high school graduation test. The following year, the Arizona Legislature passed a statutory provision requiring a high school graduation test and the State Board adopted the academic standards.<sup>28</sup> Arizona, like other states, turned to graduation tests to improve student academic achievement through setting consistent, higher expectations and motivating students and educators to achieve these goals.

When the state set out to enforce the graduation requirement, vocal education organizations and parent groups concerned about low pass rates provided formidable public opposition. Education researchers questioned the relevancy of AIMS test items to actual employment requirements.<sup>29</sup> In addition, internal missteps, such as the decision to require high school students to pass five separate mathematics assessments, plagued the initial implementation of the graduation requirement. As a result, the timeline for requiring the first graduating class to pass AIMS before receiving a high school diploma was delayed several times.

Currently, the Class of 2006 will be the first class required to pass AIMS before graduating. Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne's approach to implementing the high-stakes graduation test is "more reasonable." Other states have used strategies to implement graduation tests such as ramping up cut scores (starting with lower scores and increasing over time) altering the assessment content and

awarding dual-diplomas or certificates depending on whether a student has passed the graduation test.

### **Dilemmas in Standards-Based Accountability Policies**

There are three principal dilemmas associated with accountability policies. The first dilemma is the conflict between local control and state/national standards. The second is the use of standardized testing in standards-based accountability policies. The third is the conflict inherent in raising the bar of student performance expectations.

#### *Dilemma 1: Local Control versus State/National Standards*

Historically, primary responsibility for school governance in the U.S. has been vested in local governing or school boards. These bodies still maintain considerable influence today. In Arizona, governing boards are responsible for guiding some of the most important aspects of public education, such as prescribing the curriculum, determining grade promotion criteria, setting graduation requirements beyond state requirements and adopting textbooks.<sup>30</sup>

The combination of federal and state standards-based accountability systems and recent court decisions, however, has eroded the influence of local control. In fact, some opponents of standards-based accountability argue that state accountability systems and the expansion of federal education laws spell the end of local control of America's public schools.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to uniform academic standards, the curriculum and student academic expectations were determined by local officials and teachers. State academic standards and assessments were introduced to develop consistency within the public school system. Centralized policies are

preferred by state policy makers and administrative agencies because they can be externally-mandated and implemented relatively rapidly.<sup>32</sup> The result, however, is state usurpation of local control in the classroom. The following opinion of a veteran educator illustrates the perceived battle lines between local and state authorities, "We've had literally a total takeover of our curriculum, almost minute by minute."<sup>33</sup>

When academic standards are state-imposed there is a loss of local ownership. In Arizona and elsewhere, local educators and communities have asked, "whose academic standards are they?" The implication is that state academic expectations are not consistent with local expectations. The ADE has made extensive efforts in recent years to improve the buy-in of local educators. For example, statewide teacher committees are involved in all phases of the academic standards development process. In addition, AIMS items are now developed by teams of teachers statewide.

Another threat to the local control of schools is lawsuits brought by school districts and others, alleging inequitable or inadequate funding of public education. The plaintiffs have successfully increased state funding of the state's school system but at the expense of local control. For example, in *Flores v. Keegan*, filed on behalf of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, the plaintiffs charged the state with inadequate funding of services for this student group. The consent decree extends beyond funding to include statewide standardized academic testing across all LEP programs.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Dilemma 2: The Use of Standardized Tests*

The difficult policy question is not *whether* to use standardized tests in accountability policies, but *how* to use such tests. Testing itself is not controversial. The basis of the controversy lies in how these tests are used to make decisions about

either the system (i.e. school administrators and teachers) or students. Should standardized tests be the only criterion used in accountability policies? Do the advantages of standardized tests outweigh the unintended consequences?

At the system level, standardized tests are the primary indicator of academic achievement in accountability systems because they yield a consistent measurement, are generally viewed as credible by policy makers and the public, and are relatively inexpensive to administer. Rewards and sanctions in both Arizona LEARNS and NCLB are based on standardized test results.

Standardized tests are a more consistent measurement tool than individual school indicators such as local tests and teacher grades. The content of local tests can vary substantially, even when the tests are based on the same set of academic standards. Teacher grades are even more inconsistent because teachers may consider factors other than academic achievement (e.g. behavior or effort) when assigning grades.

It is important to note, however, that standardized tests are not foolproof and are imprecise measurements of student achievement. All standardized test results include some element of error, and this error must be taken into consideration when making decisions based on the results. From a policy perspective, standardized testing is advantageous because state agencies such as ADE can predict and account for this error at one central location rather than attempting to standardize divergent local practices.

The popularity of standardized tests among policy makers is obvious by the prevalence of these tests in state and federal laws. Policy makers are not alone; they reflect the general attitude of the public at large. According to a 2001 national opinion poll, 81% of the public

avored “holding schools accountable for how much students learn” and 63% favored the “increased use of standardized tests for measuring student achievement” in schools.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, policy makers turn to standardized tests because they are an inexpensive reform tool. Although opponents of these tests often argue against their use because of administration, state expenditures on standardized assessments are only a fraction of the total dollars spent on K-12 public education. According to a national study conducted in 2000, states spent less than 0.1% of K-12 budgets for standardized tests.<sup>36</sup> In Arizona, the state standardized testing budget for FY 2003 was \$5.9 million, 0.2% of the total maintenance and operation appropriation.<sup>37</sup>

The cost of standardized tests is minimal if the introduction of academic standards and assessments can help improve curricular alignment and instruction practices in cases where a systemic focus is lacking. There are education experts, however, that caution policy makers not to use standardized tests as a cheap method to improve schools and neglect other important areas in public education, such as adequate teacher preparation and sufficient resources for student intervention programs.

While policy makers are attracted to standardized testing, school accountability policies based heavily on standardized test results have been shown to have a detrimental effect on the education process. One of the most noted unintended consequences is narrowing the curriculum. There is a common saying in education, “what gets tested gets taught.” In an effort to maximize standardized test scores, schools may place heavy emphasis on the subjects tested to the exclusion of other subjects.

School accountability systems based disproportionately on standardized tests can also threaten high-quality instruction. Most standardized tests use a multiple-choice format,

with the exception of some writing tests, such as AIMS. Critics caution that standardized tests can jeopardize quality instruction by encouraging teachers to focus on simpler tasks at the expense of more complex thinking skills. If instruction is narrowed to test preparation skills, the meaningful effect is to tailor instruction to the format of the test, short reading passages, test-taking strategies and the memorization of facts. The effect of narrow, test-preparation activities in a subject such as reading is that students are “less able to read assignments, to make meaning of literature, to complete reading assignments outside of class, to connect reading assignments to other parts of the course such as discussion and writing.”<sup>38</sup>

There are signs of test-oriented policies in Arizona public schools. The Phoenix Union High School District’s 9-point plan for school improvement includes AIMS-related writing assignments, bi-weekly AIMS test preparation activities and semester exams modeled after the AIMS format.<sup>39</sup>

In response, proponents argue that if the test is high-quality, composed of items that promote critical thinking and/or complex tasks, then teaching to the test is acceptable. This is a sound argument with a practical limitation, complex questions that require students to construct a response, such as compositions and short answers, are more expensive to develop and score than multiple-choice questions, and many states, Arizona among them, are including fewer constructed response questions over time.

The decisive policy question is whether or not standardized tests improve student academic achievement. The answer is both. In many states, assessment scores have improved and these gains are regarded as improvements in educational quality. According to some education researchers, this progress is

insufficient evidence of authentic learning outcomes. Authentic learning is defined as the ability to transfer knowledge to settings other than the assessment itself. From a review of the literature, the most common finding is that demonstrated increases on state exams do not appear to transfer to other indicators of academic achievement such as ACT, SAT and AP tests. On this basis, opponents argue that standardized testing does not promote genuine learning outcomes.<sup>40</sup> There are documented instances, however, where the introduction of standards-based accountability has resulted in improved educational processes and learning outcomes.<sup>41</sup>

The most controversial standardized testing policies involve their use in making educational decisions about individual students. In Arizona, and other states, standardized test results ultimately determine whether students receive a high school diploma.<sup>42</sup> According to a 2003 study by the Center for Education Policy, 19 states have mandatory graduation tests and five more states plan to implement these tests by 2008.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the debate over the effectiveness of standardized tests in system accountability, there is general consensus among education researchers against the use of a single test for the purposes of either grade promotion or graduation.<sup>44</sup> There is also legal precedent that students must have the opportunity to learn the academic content before being held accountable to a test. The 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, in *Debra P. v. Turlington*, determined that opportunity to learn requires that the skills are included in the curriculum and the majority of teachers recognize that the skill should be taught.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, one of the primary reasons for postponing the graduation requirement to the Class of 2006 was to allow schools the time to fully implement standards-based curriculum and to provide students sufficient opportunity to learn the test content.<sup>46</sup>

In anticipation of the graduation test requirement, it is important to consider the unintended consequences of this policy. Most studies indicate a correlation between dropout rates and graduation test policies.<sup>47</sup> Graduation tests alone may not cause students to drop out, but graduation tests could be a pivotal factor for some students deciding whether to stay in school, particularly at-risk students. According to a review of the literature, there is mixed evidence on whether graduation tests are associated with higher dropout rates. However, one national panel of dropout experts concluded, “One thing we can conclude from the research to date is that there is no evidence of exit exams decreasing dropout rates. That is, exit exams are not helping to keep students in school.”<sup>48</sup>

In addition, there is consistent evidence that high-stakes graduation tests have a disproportionate impact on some student subgroups, namely minority students, Limited English Proficient students, and special education students. These student groups have failed graduation tests in disproportionate number in other states with graduation test requirement, such as Texas and most recently, Florida.

Despite the cautions and numerous studies documenting the potential detrimental effect of graduation test requirements, public opinion is slightly favorable toward the use of standardized tests to make decisions about individual students. Fifty-seven percent of the general public and 54% of public school parents favor a high school graduation exam.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, the federal and Arizona accountability policies do not include explicit teacher-level consequences. Many teachers would argue, however, that they are held accountable to public opinion when test results and school labels are printed in the media. Most of the

research indicates that teachers are overwhelmed by the demands of the new academic standards and stressed about the persistent emphasis on standardized test outcomes.<sup>50</sup>

### *Dilemma 3: Potential Conflicts in Raising the Performance Bar*

This section focuses on the conflicts that potentially arise when student academic expectations are raised. The goal of standards-based education accountability is for all students to meet the same academic standards. As states pursue this goal through specific public policies, a number of important questions arise. Should the same high standards apply to all students? Should all students have to demonstrate proficiency of the standards in the same way? Should all students be required to meet the standards on the same time schedule? Arizona’s education policies have addressed all of these questions.

Arizona’s current graduation policy requires all students to be proficient in the same academic standards. And, all students must demonstrate proficiency the same way, through passing AIMS, a paper and several tests.<sup>51</sup> There currently are no plans to provide an alternative method or review process to allow students to demonstrate proficiency of the academic standards other than by taking the AIMS test.<sup>52</sup> Also, students must pass AIMS in English.

Arizona does not penalize students for taking longer to meet the AIMS requirement. Students who enroll for a fifth year of high school are provided additional opportunities to pass AIMS and, under Arizona LEARNS, schools are not penalized for students enrolling in a fifth year. In addition, Arizona has chosen to focus on improving schools through accountability and support before implementing student accountability policies.<sup>53</sup>


By definition, when the performance bar is raised, regardless of the means, it becomes more difficult for students to meet the grade promotion and graduation requirements. Moreover, those students who had the most difficulty meeting the old standards will be the most at-risk of not meeting the new, higher standards.

The impact of raising standards is best illustrated through an example that does not involve standardized testing. In the 1980s, many states increased graduation requirements, by adding to the required courses to be taken as a prerequisite to high school graduation. Raising the bar through additional course requirements has the same projected effect as standards-based accountability policies. For example, a 2.5 credit increase in course graduation requirements results in a 3 to 7.4% increase in the number of dropouts nationally. Not surprisingly, the dropout rate would have the most impact on students who are poor, Black, recent Hispanic immigrants, and whose parents are high school dropouts.<sup>54</sup>

The paradox of raising standards is most salient for minority and/or poorly-performing students. Repeated studies have shown that a disproportionate percentage of these students will likely fail to meet the higher academic requirements. However, given the low relative academic performance of these students, they are the most in need of improved educational conditions and stand the most to gain.

### **The Dialogue Continues**

The public discourse about standards-based education reform is often reduced to dichotomous position statements or overly-detailed discussions about policy implementation. As a result, it becomes difficult to “see the forest through the trees” and evaluate the overall intent and impact of standards-based accountability policies. However, based on a solid understanding of accountability policies, it is possible to engage in an informed dialogue that distinguishes the merits and dilemmas of such policies and the issues related to Arizona’s approach to implementing them.

 *thinkAZ is an independent, non-partisan research institute dedicated to providing thorough, accurate and impartial information on public policy issues that impact the economic and social well-being of the state.*

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### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Gary Emanuel, “Making the Grade: Arizona’s K-12 Education,” *Accountability*, May 21, 1995, 66:81-103.

<sup>2</sup> Reading, Language (Reading and Writing), Art, Comprehensive Health, foreign and Native Language, Science, Social Studies, Technology and Workplace Skills.

<sup>3</sup> The Arizona Department of Education has a detailed description for each standard available online at [www.ade.az.gov](http://www.ade.az.gov).

<sup>4</sup> Arizona Revised Statutes, § 15-741.

<sup>5</sup> The Stanford Achievement Test Ninth Edition (SAT9) is a nationally-normed test that is administered statewide. The SAT9 is used in the state accountability system but is not used as either a promotion or graduation test for students. In January 2004, the ADE presented a proposal to the State Board to combine AIMS and the SAT9 into a dual-purpose test beginning in 2005.

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- <sup>6</sup> Pat Kossan, "AIMS Rating Doesn't Pass Test Ranking as 5<sup>th</sup> Best Not Based on Facts," *The Arizona Republic*, June 19, 2002.
- <sup>7</sup> Douglas C. Peebles, "Making the Grade: Contracting for State Assessment," *Contract Management*, 2003, 26-30.
- <sup>8</sup> Diana B. Henriques and Jaques Steinberg, "Right Answer, Wrong Score: Test Flaws Take Toll," *New York Times*, May 20, 2001, *LexisNexis*, (March 4, 2004).
- <sup>9</sup> Elmore et al, "The New Accountability in State Education Reform from Process to Performance," *Holding Schools Accountable*, 1996, 65-98.
- <sup>10</sup> There are competing strategies to reform public education, such as school choice. These strategies, however, are outside the scope of this chapter.
- <sup>11</sup> The National Commission on Excellence in Education, "A NATION AT RISK: The Imperative for Educational Reform," April 1983.
- <sup>12</sup> Herbert J Walberg, "Accountability Unplugged," *Education Next*, Spring 2003, <http://www.educationnext.org/20032/76.html> (November 14, 2003).
- <sup>13</sup> United States Department of Education, "Goals 2000: Reforming Education to Improve Student Achievement," April 1998, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/G2KReforming/g2ch1.html> (February 4, 2004).
- <sup>14</sup> Erik W Robelen, "Congress Passes Education Reform Bill" *Education Week on the Web*, December 18, 2001, [http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=15senate\\_web.h21](http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=15senate_web.h21) (January 1, 2004).
- <sup>15</sup> By 2007-2008, science assessments are required to be administered in select grades.
- <sup>16</sup> United States Department of Education, "No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference," September 2002.
- <sup>17</sup> NCLB system accountability provisions are often confused with state-mandated graduation requirements for students. There are no student-level accountability provisions in NCLB. Arizona's high school graduation requirement is the result of state, not federal, laws.
- <sup>18</sup> US Department of Education.
- <sup>19</sup> Governor's Task Force on Efficiency and Accountability in K-12 Education, "Improving Student Achievement in Arizona a Call to Action," December 18, 2001, [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/arizona.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/arizona.pdf) (February 10, 2004).
- <sup>20</sup> The MAP is calculated using SAT9 test scores.
- <sup>21</sup> Arizona Legislature, 2003, Chapter 147, 48<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 1<sup>st</sup> Regular Session. <http://www.azleg.state.az.us/legtext/44leg/5s/laws/0001.htm> (February 2, 2004).
- <sup>22</sup> Arizona State Board of Education, "Arizona Learns 2003," *Information Packet*, September 16, 2003(B).
- <sup>23</sup> According to state statute, Solutions Teams comprise master teachers, fiscal analysts and curriculum assessment experts.
- <sup>24</sup> Arizona Revised Statutes, § 15-241.
- <sup>25</sup> Local school board members are required to insert the ballot language if more than half of the schools in their district, or in any case more than five, are designated as failing for more than two consecutive years.

## 12 Accountability in the Emerging Education Landscape

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- <sup>26</sup> School districts, as well as schools, are held accountable to the NCLB provisions.
- <sup>27</sup> Personal communication from Ildiko Laczko-Kerr, Director of Research and Policy, Arizona Department of Education.
- <sup>28</sup> Arizona Legislature, 1996, Chapter 284, 42<sup>nd</sup> Legislature, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session, <http://www.azleg.state.az.us/FormatDocument.asp?inDoc=/legtext/42leg/2R/laws/0284.htm> (March 4, 2004). Arizona Department of Education, "Standards and Assessment: Academic K-12 Standards" 1996, <http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/contentstandards.asp> (March 6, 2004).
- <sup>29</sup> Gene V Glass and Cheryl A Edholm, "The AIMS Test and the Mathematics Actually Used by Arizona Employees," *Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU)*, October 2002, <http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/EPRU/documents/EPSL-0210-122-EPRU.html> (February 13, 2004)
- <sup>30</sup> Arizona Center for Public Policy, "Arizona K-12 Public Education: Who Does What?" ThinkAZ, May 2003, [http://thinkaz.org/html/research/acpp\\_education\\_brief.pdf](http://thinkaz.org/html/research/acpp_education_brief.pdf) (February 13, 2004).
- <sup>31</sup> Education Reporter, "ESEA Reauthorization Federalized Public Schools," May 2000, <http://eagleforum.org/educate/2000/may00/esea.html> (February 4, 2004).
- <sup>32</sup> Robert L. Linn, "Assessments and Accountability," National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, November 1998.
- <sup>33</sup> Laird Harrison, "To Test or Not to Test?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 2002, p. 120.
- <sup>34</sup> *Flores v. Arizona*, 48 F.Supp.2d 937 (D.Ariz. 1999).
- <sup>35</sup> Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappa International*, September 2001, <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kimages/kpoll83.pdf> (February 10, 2004).
- <sup>36</sup> Caroline M. Hoxby, "The Cost of Accountability," *Education Commission of the States*, 2002, <http://post.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/hoxby/papers/costofac.pdf> (February 10, 2004).
- <sup>37</sup> State of Arizona Joint Legislative Budget Committee, "Joint Legislative Budget Committee Appropriations Report, 2003.
- <sup>38</sup> Linda McNeil and Angela Valenzuela, "The Harmful Impact of the TAAS System of Testing in Texas: Beneath the Accountability Rhetoric Raising Standards or Raising Barriers?" *Inequality and High-Stakes Testing in Public Education*, 2001.
- <sup>39</sup> Betty Reid, "9-Point Plan Gives Schools Boost," *The Arizona Republic*, January, 12, 2004, final edition. The Phoenix Union High School District's 9-point plan is new, and there is no evidence that the plan has narrowed instruction.
- <sup>40</sup> Audrey Amrein and David C Berliner, "High-Stakes Testing, Uncertainty, and Student Learning," March 28, 2002. <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/> (January 19, 2004).
- <sup>41</sup> Scheurich et al, "Thinking Carefully about Equity and Accountability," *Phi Delta Kappan International*, December 2002, [http://labweb.education.wisc.edu/edad735/schedule\\_assignments/Articles/scheurich\\_skrla.htm](http://labweb.education.wisc.edu/edad735/schedule_assignments/Articles/scheurich_skrla.htm) (March 4, 2004).

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<sup>42</sup> Some states require students to pass a standardized test for grade promotions. Many of the issues related to graduation tests are application to promotion tests. This section will not cover promotion tests because Arizona does not have a promotion test requirement.

<sup>43</sup> Center on Education Policy, "State High School Exit Exams: Put to the Test," August 13, 2003, <http://www.ctredpol.org/highschool/1/exitexam4.htm> (March 4, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> American Education Research Association, "AERA Position Statement Concerning High-Stakes Testing in PreK-12 Education," July 2000, <http://www.aera.net/about/policy/stakes.htm> (February 4, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> *Debra P. v. Turlington*, 644 F.2d 397 (5th Cir.(Fla.) May 04, 1981) (NO. 79-3074) <http://print.westlaw.com/delivery.html?dest=atp&dataid=A0055800000044270001518128...> (February 2, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> In 2002, the ADE received signed affidavits from all public school districts and charter schools that the academic standards are being implemented at all levels.

<sup>47</sup> Clarke et al, "High Stakes Testing and High School Completion," *Boston College Website*, January 2000, <http://www.bc.edu/research/nbetpp/publications/v1n3.html> (January 20, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Center on Education Policy, "Effects of High School Exit Exams on Dropout Rates: Summary of a Panel Discussion Held on March 15, 2003," <http://www.ctredpol.org/highschool/1/hspanelsummary/hspanel.summary15mar03.pdf> (March 4, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan International*, September 2001, <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kimages/kpoll83.pdf> (February 10, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Wayne E. Wright, "The Effects of High Stakes Testing in an Inner-City Elementary School: The Curriculum, the Teachers, and the English Language Learners," *Current Issues in Education*, June 2002, <http://cie.asu.edu/volume5/number5> (January 2, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Specific policies are in place for special education students according to their individual education plan.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Massachusetts has instituted an appeals process for students who score near the required score to demonstrate academic proficiency using other indicators such as teachers' testimonials, grades and work samples.

<sup>53</sup> Money for AIMS intervention programs was made available through Proposition 301.

<sup>54</sup> Dean R Lillard and Philip P DeCicca, P, "Higher Standards, more dropouts? Evidence within and across time," *Economics of Education Review*. January 23, 2000: Linn, Robert L. 1998. Assessments and Accountability. November.