

# What's a State Leader to Do? The State's Role in Supporting Local Assessment Systems

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# A Question

- Can/should state leaders play a role in formative/classroom assessment?
  - Can they help?
  - Can they mess it up?



# Two Broad Areas of State Action

- Building policy structures that support the use of reform-based local assessments
- Creating and fostering professional learning



# Policy considerations

- Philosophical leadership—setting the vision
  - Standards and curriculum
- Funding and other resources
- Consistency of interventions
- State assessment design decisions
- Accountability policies
- Supporting and leading professional development



# Establishing the Vision

- State leaders should be clear about their vision for learning, instruction, assessment, and school quality
- State leaders should then work to ensure philosophical consistency among various initiatives and policies



# It Starts from the Standards

- Most state content standards are NOT designed using research on learning
- Most state leaders have the authority to craft the content and performance standards that serve as the foundation for most assessment activities
  - Should do so in ways that can support meaningful learning



# The Role of Curriculum

- Debate among formative assessment researchers regarding the degree to which formative assessment activities should be embedded in rich curriculum
- Little debate about the importance of curriculum, but most states outside of the Southeast have little say over curriculum
- It will take some political capital to move this discussion in some states, but I argue it is worth pursuing
  - Research foundation
  - Efficiency



# Consistency and Sustainability

- As part of this vision, state leaders can focus and prioritize all the things states are asked/required to do
- Avoid hopping from one reform to the next
  - “This too shall pass”



# Resources

- Money matters!
- State leaders create legislative funding priorities and requests
- These requests operationalize the state's educational values and vision
- It is not just money—can reallocate existing resources to support formative and other local assessment initiatives



# The large-scale assessment

- The state assessment is one of the most visible programs run by any state DOE
- It is particularly important for the influence it can have over “formative” assessment practices
- More reform oriented designs can signal to the field about the types of learning outcomes and tasks that are valued



# Accountability Policies

- The types of inputs and outputs that get included in school and/or district accountability can have tremendous repercussions throughout the system
  - Many of these policies, e.g., NCLB, can hinder reform-based assessment practices
  - However, state policies—e.g., WY and RI—can direct attention and efforts toward improving local assessment practices



# Supporting Professional Development

- Through resource decisions, vision, and intellectual leadership, the state office can both support—e.g., flow through—and lead professional development efforts
- Some might argue about the quality of state (or contractor)-led PD, but the quality of district-purchased consulting services leaves a lot to be desired



# Professional Learning

- A tremendous need for professional development related to learning and assessment reforms
- Overheard... “we need to reform teacher education” to address this need
- Teacher education programs cannot meet this need (they can help) because of the contextual nature of the knowledge needed



# Professional Learning

- We are asking for assessment and instructional actions that go far beyond how most teachers have been prepared
- But it is not just teachers who have to learn...
  - School and district leadership is key to supporting meaningful assessment and learning in classrooms



# Assessment-instruction interaction

- What is the mechanism for turning an assessment result—broadly speaking—into a useful instructional action?
- With all of the claims for the instructional benefits for a variety of assessments—value-added, benchmarks, formative—I see little attention to the black box by which teachers are supposed to turn these results into a teachable action



# Assessment Literacy?

- This term gets used often to capture the professional development needs to improve teachers' assessment knowledge and skills
- It is more important to focus on increasing instructional literacy
  - Pedagogical content knowledge
  - How people learn
  - Deep understanding of content
- And yes, teachers need to learn how to select/create meaningful assessment activities, but is that enough...
  - Analyzing the lemonade task



# Two Models of PD

- State-led PD program
  - Standards-based schools institutes
- Initiatives to support policy requirements



# Standards-based schools institutes

- Loosely based on Wiggins and McTigue
  - The “unit” plan
- 9 days throughout the year
  - Design, try-out, review student work
- School teams only
  - PD for both teachers and leaders
  - Specific PD designed to assist principals become assessment/instructional leaders in their schools
- Effectiveness—change in familiarity concepts and use of tools



# Wyoming's Graduation System

- Confluence of policy support and professional development initiatives
- Focused on multiple levels of the system
  - Peer review of system criteria
    - District and school leaders along with a few teachers
  - BOE consortium
    - Teachers and a few school leaders
      - Task development project
      - WY Consortium's move to instructional/assessment coaches
      - Learning from the best teachers
- Most powerful reform I've ever experienced
  - Based on "real" work

