Accountability: An Unfulfilled Promise?

Damian Betebenner, Chris Domaleski, and Susan Lyons

Center for Assessment

Reidy Interactive Lecture Series
September 27, 2018
Test based accountability is not a “new” idea.

Nearly two decades ago, Linn was discussing “balanced accountability” and the use of summative assessment for high stakes accountability (2000, 2002, 2003).

Since then, states have investigated a myriad of ways of creating accountability systems through NCLB, waivers, and now ESSA.

Has accountability fulfilled its promise?
Background

• The Center has been extensively involved in accountability design from the beginning.
• At the Center we’ve had the honor to work with some of the most intelligent and hard working state leads to develop and implement accountability systems.
• We’ve tried (and invented) almost everything under the sun with regards to summative accountability.
• Has accountability fulfilled its promise?
• There’s some evidence to suggest small systemic improvement attributable to high stakes accountability (Ahn & Vigdor, 2014)

• I’d wager that most who were enthusiastic about the possibilities of large scale assessment and accountability are underwhelmed with the results in 2018.

• Has accountability fulfilled its promise?
• Probably not.
Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.
Stepping Back

• Seriously, how much systemic improvement should we expect from an optimally designed accountability system?
• In terms of John Hattie’s Visual Learning Effect Sizes, what’s the upper bound? 0.25, 0.5, 1.0?
• Expectations for what accountability can, in theory, yield leads to different paths forward.
Stepping Back

• If there is an expectation that an ideal system can yield significantly superior results to current systems:
  • Worthwhile to improve current systems.
  • Changes to improve current systems to reach optimal status likely to be significant.
  • Small tweaks (e.g., fifth indicator, demographic adjustments) unlikely to bend the needle yield big changes.
Stepping Back

• If there is an expectation that an ideal system will do about as good as current systems:
  • From an efficacy perspective not clear whether
  • Changes to improve current systems to reach optimal status likely to be significant.
  • Small tweaks (e.g., fifth indicator, demographic adjustments) unlikely to bend the needle yield big changes.
Conclusions

• We’re optimistic: We feel there is likely significant improvements possible from an optimally designed accountability system.

• Will likely require most than just tweaks to existing systems.

• My colleagues have some ideas in that regard :-)
For more information:

Center for Assessment
www.nciea.org