

# More Than Just A Number: Qualitative systems in accountability

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# Accountability trends

- More external accountability
- More test-based evidence
- More standardized methods, comparisons
- More inclusion of different groups of students
- Higher stakes, stronger consequences
- More extensive reporting
- More formula-based systems for identifying schools and districts



# Most states use a formula and decision rules

## ■ Example:

- ◆ Make a decision about each student's performance (e.g., performance level, pass/fail)
- ◆ Aggregate to a summary for each school (e.g., index score, percent passing)
- ◆ Make a decision about each school's performance (e.g., made adequate improvement, met a minimum percentage passing)
  - ◆ Goals for adequate improvement also based on a formula
  - ◆ Consideration of other conditions fed into decision rules that do not depend upon human judgment



# Some uses of qualitative information and judgments

- Draw on qualitative information, such as observations, interviews
- Require qualitative synthesis to characterize complex information
- Decision is based on human judgment not following quantitative decision rules



# States' systems include qualitative information for variety of reasons

- To make more certain an action or label is warranted
  - ◆ Consider other factors, more depth
  - ◆ Get a more current “read” on school
- To decide how and how much to help
  - ◆ Identify specific needs
  - ◆ Direct resource allocation
  - ◆ Distinguish between types of assistance
- To spur change process at school
  - ◆ Persuade school staff change is needed
  - ◆ Create focused plans



# Examples of uses of qualitative reviews

- Wyoming – Considering other factors/details, is the school truly low performing?
- Massachusetts – Is it likely the school will improve on its own?
- Kentucky – What should school focus on to improve?
- Oregon – And... What resources will make a difference?



# Examples of approaches – WY

- Title I Peer Review (mostly for small-n)
  - ◆ Consider other data in addition to performance on state assessment (how much/enough improvement, movement in/out of low/high categories, participation rate, Title 1 students)
  - ◆ “Does consideration of these other data indicate school should (not) be identified?”
  - ◆ Points, combined into total score, cutpoints set for labels (based on examination of school cases)



# For more information about WY

- [www.k12.wy.us](http://www.k12.wy.us)
- Scott Marion (Director, Assessment and Accountability) [smario@state.wy.us](mailto:smario@state.wy.us)





# Examples of approaches - MA

- Massachusetts – three tiered review
  - ◆ Initially identify by formula (status and improvement)
  - ◆ Provisionally identify (“under-performing”) by short review (plan and conditions for improving sufficiently on own)
  - ◆ Finally identify (“chronically under-performing”) by extensive on-site review (will be chronically under-performing without dramatic intervention; need to provide for student transfer)



# For more information about MA

- [www.doe.mass.edu/ata/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/)
- Juliane Dow (Director, Accountability and Technical Assistance) [ATA@doe.mass.edu](mailto:ATA@doe.mass.edu)



# Other states' approach and experiences

- Oregon (see presentation by Jon Bridges, Oregon Department of Education)
- Kentucky (see presentation by Cindy Owen, Kentucky Department of Education)



# Lessons learned from experience

- Qualitative reviews increase validity, credibility, and help direct and extend scarce resources
- Can be done effectively; challenge to think of how to scale up well
- Can be powerful process for school improvement
- Details in how implemented make a lot of difference in impact
- States should talk with each other before NCLB hits
- Essential to focus question: valid decision; capacity; what to do next; change process



# Challenge to states

- Go beyond “simple” identification
- Merge “accountability” and “assistance”
- Get state plans thought through
- Get state plans approved for *No Child Left Behind*



# For more information

The Center for Assessment

[www.nciea.org](http://www.nciea.org)



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Check website for information on 2002 RILS conference sponsored by the Center and WestEd

- ◆ What states are doing with *No Child Left Behind*
- ◆ Reliability and *NCLB*
- ◆ Alignment and *NCLB*

