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NCEE Proposes New System of School Accountability and Professionalizing Teaching

Report calls for replacing outdated system with one that professionalizes teaching and draws on effective solutions used by top performing education systems in the world

WASHINGTON — A new report from the [National Center on Education and the Economy](#) (NCEE) calls for replacing the current system of test-based accountability with a system much more likely to result in improvements in student performance.

The report, [Fixing Our National Accountability System](#), authored by NCEE President [Marc Tucker](#), argues that the current system has not only failed to improve the performance of the at-risk students it was designed to help, but has alienated the best of our current teachers and created an environment in which able, career-seeking young people are less likely to choose teaching.

“The current education accountability system is not only ineffective but harmful,” said Tucker. “By requiring grade-by-grade testing, it creates an incentive to use low-quality, cheap tests that fail to measure the very skills that will be most in demand in the modern work place. By focusing testing on English and mathematics literacy, it encourages schools to drastically limit the curriculum for the very students who most need a full core curriculum.”

Tucker, a longtime expert in analyzing top performing education systems in the world, also points out that those countries whose students are outstripping the achievement of U.S. students are not using accountability systems like ours, which they view as more appropriate for industrial-era blue-collar workers than the kind of professionals they want in their schools.

Fixing Our National Accountability System says the alternative to the kind of punitive accountability measures now dominating U.S. schools is not just a different accountability system — but a different kind of education system. Rather than focusing on how to get rid of our worst teachers, Tucker’s plan outlines strategies for producing a surplus of very good teachers and making sure those teachers are equitably distributed among our students, so that students who are harder to educate have more access to high-quality teachers. To access the full report, visit www.ncee.org/accountability.

Today, the countries that outperform the United States in comparative studies of student performance have educational systems that differ in significant ways.

- They are recruiting teachers from the upper ranges of their high school graduates, greatly raising the standards for getting into schools of education and making sure that prospective teachers have a very strong background in the subjects they will one day teach.
- They also make sure new teachers learn their craft with early and comprehensive experiences in real school settings overseen by experienced mentor teachers (there are no “alternative routes” into teaching).
- Top performers attract first-class candidates into the teaching profession by offering them starting salaries comparable to those of high status professionals, using career ladders to create real careers in teaching, as well as recruiting and

training school leaders who are very good at making schools the kind of places where true professionals want to work.

“Emphasizing drastic punitive measures for the teachers of our most vulnerable students drives capable teachers away from schools that serve those students,” said Tucker. “Emphasizing the hunt for bad teachers instead of the need for great teachers perpetuates the very problems it is designed to address. A new style of accountability must be developed within a new design for public education, linked to a much more comprehensive approach to teacher development.”

Key Recommendation in the report:

- **Testing:** The report would change the current testing regime by calling for fewer, but much higher quality, tests. Each student would take a high stakes accountability test only three times in his or her entire school career, [as is the case in most top performing countries](#). Tests that sample the student population (and oversample the population of vulnerable students) would be used to track the performance of schools in some “off-years.” Parents could easily access complete public reports on school performance on state web sites designed for that purpose.
- **Data:** Data from the high stakes and sampling tests would be used to identify schools that might be in trouble. Those schools would receive visits from inspection teams of expert educators charged with identifying problems and proposing solutions, such as pairing successful schools with low performing schools and similar strategies used in the top performing countries to boost the performance of low performing schools.
- **School Design:** Schools would be redesigned along the lines of organizations employing high-status professionals and the teachers in those schools would be accountable to each other for their performance, in much the same way the professionals are accountable to each other for their performance in other professional workplaces.
- **State Education Agencies:** A distinguishing feature of this plan is the expanded role of State Education Agencies in determining curriculum and high-quality tests, creating meaningful career ladders and incentive structures for teachers, providing public access to education data, and building capacity for schools in trouble.

“We know this form of accountability will work because it is already working at a national scale in the [countries that are outperforming us](#),” according to Tucker.

“Marc Tucker has once again authored a thought provoking piece,” said Terry Holliday, Commissioner of Education in Kentucky and President of the Council of Chief State School Officers. “The premise is that we must look at the entire education system and not put blame on individuals for the failures of the U.S. education system. Marc is clear that nations outperforming the United States provide examples that we need to study. This piece is a must read for policymakers as they chart the course for next generation accountability systems.”

To download the full report, read additional quotes of support, and view an accompanying infographic and visual display of the recommended accountability testing system, visit: www.ncee.org/accountability.

The National Center on Education and the Economy was created in 1988 to analyze the implications of changes in the international economy for American education, formulate an agenda for American education based on that analysis and seek wherever possible to accomplish that agenda through policy change and development of the resources educators would need to carry it out. Follow NCEE on Twitter [@CtrEdEcon](#) and on [Facebook](#).