

# Accountability Systems in the Pacific

By Don Burger, EdD and Jennifer Ryan

In traditional education systems, teachers were accountable for covering the textbook for the year. Teachers would map each chapter onto the school calendar, beginning with the first chapter and finishing with the last chapter at the end of the school year. Accountability was based on covering all of the information in the textbook. It was the students' responsibility to learn.

During the 1980's, the focus of accountability began to shift from "coverage" to "student learning." From a systems perspective, this change was directed toward the output side; student learning became the desired output. Beginning with English language learners, entitlement programs began requiring schools to show improvement in student learning each year.

*The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) transformed the concept of accountability in education. NCLB outlines specific requirements for the inputs and outputs of education systems. For example, NCLB requires highly qualified teachers as one input and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as an output. AYP is measured by student performance on assessments.

The NCLB focus on AYP has largely shaped accountability systems in the states. AYP includes annual proficiency goals that culminate with all students meeting or exceeding performance standards in reading, math, and science by school year 2013–2014. NCLB requires states to publish information regarding AYP status at each school. Under NCLB, the schools are held accountable for reaching proficiency goals. Schools that do not demonstrate adequate student performance

and progress are targeted for school improvement, corrective action, and/or restructuring.

Pacific entities have more flexibility than the states concerning NCLB requirements. Accountability systems in the Pacific are developing at different rates. American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, have defined core content and performance standards. The Federated States of Micronesia are in the process of developing content standards. These entities are also building standards-based assessment systems that measure student progress toward those goals.

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The autonomy of island nations provides an opportunity to customize our accountability systems. Rather than apply negative consequences (e.g., corrective action), Pacific nations can use accountability models that build the capacity of our educational systems. For example, highly qualified teachers and administrators are in short supply in the Pacific. Just as coaches work to strengthen the players of athletic teams, principals can take the initiative to develop the abilities of classroom teachers. Standards-based accountability systems can be utilized to consistently improve student learning.

Developing an accountability system that focuses on student learning outcomes takes time. School change

consultants frequently mention 5 to 7 years as the time it takes to make this transition. When developing an accountability system, make sure that key stakeholders are involved. Having more people engaged at the beginning of the process ensures greater support later on.

Pacific teachers, principals, and central office administrators can begin building the concept of accountability by focusing on one goal of student learning, then measuring and reporting progress on that goal. The process includes the following steps: (a) choose a standard that teachers and administrators are willing to be accountable for, (b) conduct assessments and use the data to define educational strategies, (c) learn what effort it takes in order for all students to meet or exceed this standard, (d) add another standard once teachers and administrators have learned how to be successful with the first standard, and (e) build the accountability system on success.

There are many positive aspects of accountability. An accountability system can be designed to reflect local priorities. Accountability systems can help clarify what students know in relation to locally derived standards, how Pacific students construct knowledge, and which instructional resources work best for the teachers. In this way, the system can explore how to make changes that improve student learning in schools.

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