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STUDENT ASSESSMENTS: A COMPARISON OF STATE AND FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

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In January, Colorado became one of the first five states in the country to have its state accountability plan approved by the U.S. Department of Education under the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001." Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio are the other states that have gained this approval for their accountability plans and qualified for the related federal funds. One of the principal components of the new federal law concerns the alignment of assessments and adequate yearly progress for students under a statewide accountability system.

In Colorado, beginning in 1997, statewide assessments in fourth grade reading and writing were ushered in through the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), with the program expanding to include more grade levels and subject matter in subsequent years. This issue brief examines student assessment requirements under the "No Child Left Behind Act," for comparison with the assessment schedule that Colorado has established as part of its accountability system.

New Federal Requirements

The passage of the "No Child Left Behind Act" formalized accountability measures begun in the 1990s and increased federal oversight over state accountability systems and school reform efforts. Under the new law, by the 2005-06 school year, states must have a system of reading and math assessments in place for grades 3 through 8. No later than the 2007-08 school year, states must also test students in science, at least once, during grades 3 through 5, 6 through 9, and 10 through 12. An additional federal requirement provides that students must be tested at least once during grades 10 through 12 in math and reading. States must report these assessment results, along with other federally required progress measures and descriptions, to the public through state report cards.

Other noteworthy testing requirements under the "No Child Left Behind Act" include:

- annual assessment of the English skills of English language learners;
- reading assessments in English for English language learners who have attended school for at least three years in the United States; and
- biennial state participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) program, which tests fourth and eighth graders in reading and math.

Access to Federal Funds

In FY 2002-03, Congress appropriated $370 million in federal funds for assessments under the "No Child Left Behind Act," with each state receiving $3 million, plus an additional amount based on the state's school-age population (ages 5-17). Under this formula, Colorado receives over $6.13 million for assessment programs. The same amount is expected for FY 2003-04. An additional $17 million will be awarded through competitive grants to states for assessment development.

Funds for the administration of NAEP assessments are retained at the federal level. State participation is mandated contingent on federal support of administration costs. The federal funding level stands at approximately $107.5 million for administration of NAEP assessments during the 2002-03 school year.

Table 1 indicates key implementation deadlines for accountability and assessments set forth in federal law.

Table 1: Key Federal Accountability Measures and Deadlines

Deadline	Requirement for States	Colorado Implementation
2002-03	• State and district report cards issued to the public. • Participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): 4th and 8th grade reading and math assessments.	✓ ✓
2005-06	• Annual statewide assessments in reading and math for grades 3 - 8.	3rd and 4th grade math assessments complete requirement in 2004.
2007-08	• Annual science assessments for each grade span: 3 - 5, 6 - 9, and 10 - 12.	5th and 10th grade science assessments complete requirement in 2005.

Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP)

Under the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), Colorado currently tests students in the areas of math, reading, writing, and science (Section 22-7-409, C.R.S.). As indicated in Table 2, from grades 3 through 10, students are currently required to take assessments in two, three, or all four of the subject areas, depending on grade level. Eleventh grade students take a college entrance examination, the ACT assessment, the results of which are also included in school accountability measures.

In FY 2002-03, the CSAP program represented a state appropriation of over $15.7 million, including the ACT assessment. State funds for school accountability reports and data reporting account for an additional appropriation of over $2 million.

Comparison of Requirements for Assessments

Colorado is preparing to meet federal requirements for four additional assessments by 2005. Currently not administered, math assessments for Colorado third and fourth grade students and science assessments for fifth and tenth graders are planned as indicated in Table 2.

At the same time, Colorado's assessment schedule includes several assessments *not* required under the "No Child Left Behind Act," as follows:

- writing assessments in grades 3 through 10;
- reading and math assessments in grade 9; and
- the ACT assessment in grade 11.

While approximate, Joint Budget Committee and Department of Education estimates provide cost information regarding the Colorado assessments not currently required by federal law. The annual cost of the writing tests in grades 3 through 10 and the reading and math tests in grade 9 is estimated at $5.9 million. Annual administration of the ACT assessment to eleventh grade students costs approximately $1.3 million.

Table 2: Colorado Assessment Schedule 2003-2005*

Grade	Subject Area	Spring 2003	Spring 2004	Spring 2005
3	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math		✓	✓
4	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math		✓	✓
5	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math	✓	✓	✓
	Science			✓
6	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math	✓	✓	✓
7	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math	✓	✓	✓
8	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math	✓	✓	✓
	Science	✓	✓	✓
9	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math	✓	✓	✓
10	Reading	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓
	Math	✓	✓	✓
	Science			✓
11	ACT Assessment	✓	✓	✓

* Shading indicates assessments not required by federal law.