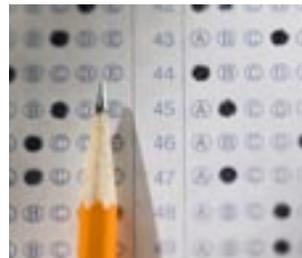
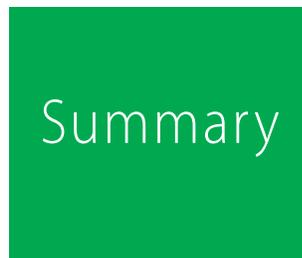
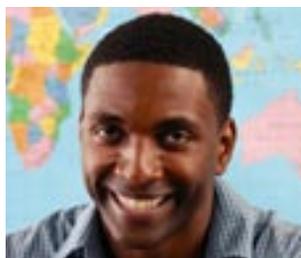




What states can learn about state standards and assessment systems from No Child Left Behind documents and interviews with Central Region assessment directors



Institute of Education Sciences  
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

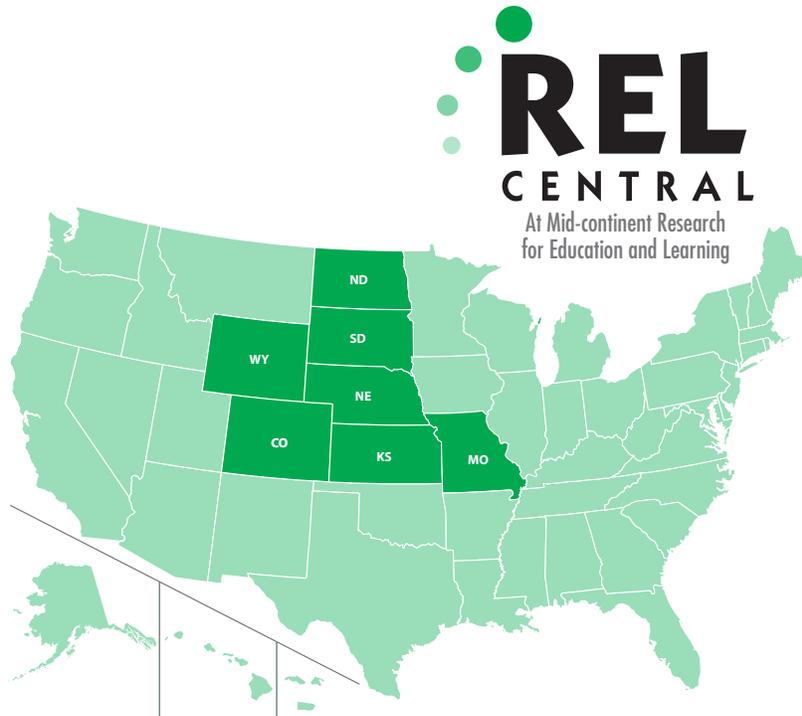
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**Issues & Answers** is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

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This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

## Summary

# What states can learn about state standards and assessment systems from No Child Left Behind documents and interviews with Central Region assessment directors

**The purpose of this study is to describe the No Child Left Behind requirements for state standards and assessment systems. It examined official documents and peer review decision letters and included interviews with state assessment directors in the Central Region to highlight the challenges states face in developing and implementing approved systems.**

For decades teachers have administered classroom assessments to grade students, and districts have administered assessments to monitor districtwide programs. The advent of statewide standards in the late 1980s and early 1990s has, however, led to more centralized assessment systems. Today, student assessments are the center piece of state systems for holding schools accountable, which raises the stakes for schools, teachers, and students.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 added new federal requirements to existing local and state assessment programs. Practitioners and policymakers at the state, district, and classroom levels must address the challenge of understanding the new federal requirements and of devising systems that comply with them, while ensuring that their

assessment systems continue to meet state and local objectives.

The act requires that state systems incorporate seven components—academic content standards, academic achievement standards, statewide assessment system, technical quality, alignment, inclusion, and reporting. State systems must be approved through a formal peer review process. But as with any new legislation, turning directives into directions is no easy task.

Describing the assessment landscape is an important need for states in the Central Region. In a 2005 Gallup survey of principals and superintendents in the Central Region, 82 percent of respondents indicated that creating district assessment systems to support teaching and learning should be a high priority, and 85 percent rated data-based decisionmaking, which depends on a functional assessment system, as a high priority (Gallup, 2007). State educators and policymakers, in conversations with state liaisons from the Central Regional Educational Laboratory, also indicated a need to better understand how to develop and maintain state standards and assessment systems. The situation is clear. States want to develop assessment systems that meet federal requirements but that

are also mindful of state and local needs and capabilities. States with approved assessment systems want to refine and improve their systems in a way that aligns with the NCLB Act.

The purpose of this study is to describe the NCLB requirements on state standards and assessment systems and to highlight the issues and challenges states face in developing and implementing approved systems. The study examined all relevant official NCLB documents and peer review decision letters posted as of February 28, 2007, to summarize the requirements expressed both in the official U.S. Department of Education guidance and in requests of the peer review teams for additional documentation.

To highlight the components of states' peer review submissions that peer review teams were most likely to identify as needing further work or evidence, this report drew on the decision letters and on interviews with state assessment directors in the Central Region. Peer reviewers most frequently raised issues under the alignment, technical quality, and academic

achievement standards components. In the Central Region states inclusion and academic content standards were also significant issues.

While some states only needed to tweak their existing assessment systems to meet the NCLB requirements, others have had to build a system from scratch. The three greatest, and often unexpected, challenges identified by the state assessment directors were promoting assessment literacy, coordinating the development and review process, and identifying internal and external expertise.

These findings indicated that states might benefit from a summary of the requirements that could inform the development, implementation, and ongoing revision of their state assessment systems. To that end, the authors created seven detailed checklists, one for each of the required components, which summarize their understanding of the NCLB requirements for each component of a state standards and assessment system.

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