

REL Pacific Ask A REL Response

Educator Effectiveness; Data Use
September 2020

Question:

What does the research say about the relationship between K–12 school accreditation processes and education quality?

Response:

Following an established REL Pacific research protocol, we conducted a web-based search for resources related to the relationship between elementary and secondary school accreditation processes and education quality. We first prioritized studies in the Pacific and other Indigenous contexts for greater relevancy to our partners in the Pacific region; however, we included studies with more generalizable findings due to the limited amount of research available in these contexts. During our search, we additionally found that most research on this topic was limited to dissertations on accreditation and education quality in secondary schools (see Methods section for search terms and resource selection criteria).

References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. Descriptions of the resources are quoted directly from the publication abstracts. We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, our search included the most commonly used research resources, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.

Research References

Davis, S. H., & Fultz, M. (2015). *An initial evaluation of the ACS WASC accreditation cycle of quality*. Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) and Desertfrost Consulting Group, Inc. <http://www.acswasc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ACS-WASC-Study-Report-FINAL.pdf>

From the executive summary: “As one of six major preK–12 school accrediting agencies in the United States, the Accrediting Commission for Schools Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) accredits nearly 5,000 public, private, and adult schools worldwide in California, Hawaii, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Asia and other parts of the world ... The study’s primary purpose has been aimed toward gaining a deeper understanding of:

- How ACS WASC-accredited schools implement the self-study process
- The relationship between ACS WASC accreditation and ongoing school improvement
- The effects of the ACS WASC accreditation process on schoolwide improvement and increased student learning.”

Eshleman, T. (2016). *Comparison of Nebraska accreditation options and effect on student achievement: A mixed methods study* (Publication No. 273) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska Lincoln]. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/273/>

From the abstract: "The purpose of this study is to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. A mixed-methods study was developed. Phase I quantitative analysis determined whether a significant difference existed in the ACT composite scores and the NeSA reading and math assessments in schools accredited by either the Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. The analysis revealed that NeSA math was influenced by accreditation choice. Based on the quantitative results, school superintendents were identified for Phase II qualitative methods to survey and interview to share (a) attributes that contributed to their academic success, (b) how accreditation influences best teaching practices, and (c) what challenges affect student achievement. Respondents did not attribute their success to accreditation process. The districts' successes were based on processes that were developed by the district leaders. Personnel contributed to the success according to the respondents. Policymakers should focus on reducing the requirements for accountability and accreditation that would allow districts to focus on improving student achievement."

Fleming, D. P. (2018). *AdvancED systemic process approach vs Michigan Department of Education non-systemic process approach to school improvement* (Publication No. 13857014) [Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University Portland]. Concordia University Commons. https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd/216/

From the abstract: "The author of this causal-comparative study examined the differences in academic achievement and school improvement between Michigan schools accredited by AdvancED, which uses a systemic process approach for school improvement, and schools accredited by the Michigan Department of Education, which does not use a systemic process approach. The data for the study was a random sampling of Education YES! self-reports, fed by the School Systems Review (SSR) completed by Michigan-accredited schools and the Interim Self-Assessment (ISA) completed by AdvancED-accredited schools. Schools that follow a systemic process were more likely to be successful than schools that do not. In addition to the SSR and ISA, the author examined the statewide Top-to-Bottom list for comparison. Supplemental tools, the School Lookup tool and the MI School Data portal, provided triangulated data to support the advantages of using a systems approach. The researcher used a comparative quantitative quasi-experimental methodology, which, to date, had not been used to determine the success of AdvancED-accredited schools in Michigan. The findings provide support for the principal arguments addressed in the research that AdvancED-accredited schools score higher in improvement than schools that do not implement systemic reforms"

Johnson, C. A. (2012). *A quantitative comparison of Pennsylvania high school student achievement by Middle States Association's accreditation status* (Publication No. 1373094523) [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University]. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED542731>

From the abstract: "As public school accountability for student achievement has continued to increase, prior to and as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools have sought ways of bringing new instructional services to their students to raise their levels of achievement. Some Pennsylvania public high schools have attempted to improve student achievement by going through an accreditation process called the Middle States Association's (MSA) Accreditation for Growth (AFG) in addition to the mandatory strategic planning process. Controversy exists about the

effectiveness of the process in improving student performance. Researchers have pointed to a significant overlap between the AFG process and the state mandated strategic planning process. The specific problem was that it had not been shown if the AFG process, in addition to the mandated strategic planning process, was effective in improving student achievement. Without this information, stakeholders such as high school principals and other administrators may not have had all the information they needed to make decisions regarding the AFG process, with the corresponding result that student achievement may suffer. This nonexperimental quantitative study collected student performance data to determine if there was a difference in student achievement between schools that had completed the AFG process and schools that had not among Pennsylvania's 745 public high schools. For the purposes of this study, the measures of student achievement were a school's average SAT score, graduation rate, and adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, writing, and math for the current year. The survey was responded to by 152 Pennsylvania public high school principals. This study showed MSA-AFG accredited schools had a statistically significantly larger average SAT score (p less than 0.001), a statistically significant higher graduation rate (p less than 0.001), and a statistically significant higher percentage of schools that met AYP in reading, writing, and math (p less than 0.001), compared to schools that were not MSA-AFG accredited. Therefore, the null hypotheses regarding the absence of a significant difference in student achievement were rejected. It is recommended that future research be conducted to include demographic information, school dynamics, and qualitative questions to increase understanding of this relationship."

Langevin, M. J. (2010). *AdvancED accreditation impact regarding the achievement gap between schools of poverty and schools of affluence for secondary education in a five-state region* [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University]. <http://scholars.indstate.edu/handle/10484/8063>

From the abstract: "The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether there are significant differences among AdvancED accredited middle and high schools that consist of those with high poverty populations and those affluent accredited schools regarding school effectiveness. This study examined whether there was a significant difference between schools of poverty and affluent schools on reading and mathematics state assessments. This study also examined which AdvancED school effectiveness accreditation standards predict student achievement success through standardized test performance in both reading and mathematics. Is there a significant difference between accredited schools of poverty and accredited affluent schools in the seven AdvancED school effectiveness accreditation standards? Is there a significant difference between AdvancED accredited schools of poverty and accredited affluent schools in state achievement scores in reading? Is there a significant difference between AdvancED accredited schools of poverty and accredited affluent schools in state achievement scores in mathematics? Are the AdvancED school accreditation standards predictors of success on student achievement through standardized test performance in the area of reading? Are the AdvancED school accreditation standards predictors of success on student achievement through standardized test performance in the area of mathematics? Based on the findings, this study determined schools of poverty were being rated significantly lower than schools of poverty in the following standards: governance and leadership, teaching and learning, resources and support programs, as well as stakeholder communication and relationships. Schools of poverty that enter the accreditation process still lag behind accredited schools of affluence, but a significant difference was determined when the accredited schools of poverty were compared to non-accredited schools of poverty. When school effectiveness accreditation scores for each standard were examined a relationship was significant between how affluent schools were scored in documenting and using results, as well as stakeholder

communication and relationships and their success on standardized tests in reading and mathematics. When school effectiveness accreditation scores for each standard within schools of poverty a significant relationship between the following standards was determined in regard to standardized testing for reading and mathematics: teaching and learning, documenting and using results, as well as resources and support programs. A negative relationship was determined for schools of poverty between the test results in reading and mathematics and their rating on the commitment to continuous improvement standard.”

Wood, C., & Meyer, M. J. (2011). Impact of the Nova Scotia school accreditation program on teaching and student learning: An initial study. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 124. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ946404>

From the abstract: “School accreditation is one process currently mandated in Nova Scotia schools to facilitate school improvement efforts. This mixed methods study sought to discover and describe the impact of the Nova Scotia School Accreditation Program (NSSAP) specifically on teaching and student learning in three secondary schools in one school board. Surveys, interviews, and school documents provided data concerning the nature of each school's respective improvement goals and subsequent implemented strategies. An analysis follows that considers the NSSAP impact on teacher participation and student achievement, and the ambiguity of program success.”

Yustika, R. I., Diem, C. D., & Petrus, I. (2019). School accreditation, teachers' competence, and students' English performance in South Sumatra. *Lingua: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 19(2), 137–151. <https://ejournal.unsri.ac.id/index.php/lingua/article/view/11096>

From the abstract: “This study examined school accreditation, English teachers' competence, and students' English performance and the correlations among them. The samples of this study were 101 junior high schools and 280 English teachers in 16 regencies and cities in South Sumatra Province. This study analyzed the school accreditation as measured by 8 National Education Standards, English teachers' competence by UKG (Teacher Competence Test), and students' English performance by English National Examination results. The findings revealed that the schools accredited B dominated the results of accreditation (84.55) in which the standard of teachers and educational personnel had the lowest score, English teachers' competence was barely average (51.96), and the students' English performance (ENE results) was in the poor level (43.57). In general, there was no significant correlation between students' English performance and the school accreditation as well as between students' English performance and teachers' competence in South Sumatra Province. However, a positive significant correlation was found between students' English performance and school accreditation in Empat Lawang Regency and Palembang City. A positive significant correlation also existed between students' English performance and teachers' pedagogical competence in Banyuasin, Musi Banyuasin, and OKU Regencies.”

Additional Resources to Consult

Oldham, J. (2018). K–12 accreditation's next move: A storied guarantee looks to accountability 2.0. *Education Next*, 18(1), 24–30. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1162395>

From the abstract: “The Current Generation of American public-school students has grown up in the era of centralized, standardized data. Anyone curious about how local schools were doing could look at pass rates on annual exams in math and reading, the foundation of federally mandated, test-based accountability. New rules are poised to change this system. The federal Every Student

Succeeds Act (ESSA), written to shrink the federal government's reach, enables states to embrace a more holistic approach to quality control. Test scores are still important, but so are attendance, school climate, graduation rates, and other non-academic measures. As states redesign their accountability systems, the challenge is how to best measure, report, and utilize this information to improve student learning. One industry is offering itself up for the job: accreditation. For more than a century, schools have hired nonprofit accreditors to determine whether their operations and outcomes meet external quality standards, thereby earning an accreditation seal of approval. While accreditation is better known at institutions of higher education, where it is required for schools to participate in federal student-aid programs, it is also practiced, though little-understood, at K–12 public, public charter, and private schools. This article looks at defining accreditation and how it fits into the nation's K–12 schools.”

Rothstein, R., Jacobsen, R., & Wilder, T. (2009). From accreditation to accountability. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(9), 624–629.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274998852_From_Accreditation_to_Accountability

From the abstract: “School districts must be held accountable for whether they spend public dollars as intended to support education. School boards have proven ineffective at this task, but the nation's voluntary accreditation system has proven to be a system that inspires self-improvement by school districts. With some modifications, the accreditation system might be converted into a system for accountability.”

Ulker, N., & Bakioglu, A. (2019). An international research on the influence of accreditation on academic quality. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(9), 1507–1518. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1224372>

From the abstract: “Due to increasing demand for higher education around the world, concerns regarding the quality of education in higher education institutions have increased. The aim of this study was to determine perceptions of accreditation self-study coordinators and programme administrators on the influence of accreditation on academic quality. Data was collected by means of a scale devised by researchers. To achieve this, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, a pilot scheme was administered, expert opinion and advice were obtained and validity and reliability studies were conducted. The findings revealed that accreditation contributes more to the improvement of processes and practices in institutions in operation for 1–20 years compared to those functioning for more than 41 years. Similarly, accreditation makes a greater contribution during the initial accreditation process compared to re-accreditation. Additionally, accreditation contributes most to importance attached to learning outcomes and least to the number of students who graduate from a programme.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- "K–12" AND "accreditation" AND "quality"
- "Accreditation standards" AND "student outcomes" AND "elementary school" OR "secondary school"
- "Accreditation" AND "impact"
- "Accreditation" AND "education quality"
- "School accreditation"
- "Accreditation" AND "academic achievement"
- "Annual yearly progress"

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of over 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic databases ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google. Finally, we searched the websites of various regional or national accrediting associations for any relevant, yet independently conducted research on the impact of accreditation on education quality.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

REL Pacific searched ERIC and other academic journal databases for studies that were published in English-language peer-reviewed research journals within the last 20 years. During the search, we discovered that the topics of accreditation and school improvement for K–12 schools were often the subjects of dissertations. Even then, most of the research on these topics focused on secondary schools. As this question has a small research base, we additionally relied on relevant educational magazines and organization websites, utilizing resource harvesting to discover additional studies. These topics' relationship has a stronger research base at the tertiary level; we elected to include the Ulker & Bakioglu (2019) study to demonstrate its breadth. Sources included in this document were last accessed in August 2020.

REL Pacific prioritized documents that are accessible online and publicly available, and prioritized references that provide practical information based on peer-reviewed research for the education leaders who requested this Ask A REL.¹ Additional methodological priorities/considerations given in the review and selection of the references were:

- Study types—randomized control trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, etc.
- Target population, sample size, study duration, etc.
- Limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.

¹ This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Pacific Region (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Hawai'i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Pacific) at McREL International. This memorandum was prepared by REL Pacific under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-17-C-0010, administered by McREL International. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.