

# Insights

ON EDUCATION POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH

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## “TOUGH LOVE:”

State Accountability Policies  
Push Student Achievement

*States have assumed a broader role in education than ever before. Across SEDL's region and others, state leaders are promoting systemic improvement with tough accountability policies.*

Education in the United States has always been a state responsibility. But until recently, most states limited their activities to licensing teachers, accrediting schools, and issuing rules and regulations on matters such as the length of school day and year. State education agencies in a small number of states, Louisiana and Texas among them, also adopted textbooks.

Today, all that has changed. State leaders, including those in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, are leveraging improvement through complex accountability systems made up of standards, assessments, public reporting, rewards and sanctions—all designed to raise student, school, and district achievement.

Some states have produced impressive results, winning wide public support for groundbreaking accountability procedures. Texas, for instance, has gained national recognition for its insistence on holding schools accountable for helping poor and minority students meet the same achievement levels as other students. Its efforts have been rewarded with not only higher test scores, but also with the ability to remove some schools from the ranks of “low performing.”

Others are moving more cautiously or, like Oklahoma, are still wrestling with ways to finance their accountability systems. And a growing number are finding themselves up against the political ramifications of their new measures and contemplating mid-course corrections. Among the issues these states are



reexamining are: Should states and districts hold schools to absolute standards or adjust their expectations to account for differences in family income or existing student achievement? How fast should scores improve? What if too many students fail?

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country.

This issue of SEDL's *Insights on Education Policy, Practice, and Research* reviews some of the assumptions, tensions, and lessons in the current accountability movement as well as the progress states in the region have made in implementing their accountability policies. From time to time, it also draws on the experiences from other states across the

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