

STANDARDS IN THE INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

Standards-based reform assumes that all students are capable of meeting high expectations of learning. These expectations vary widely from state to state in the requirements of their specific core standards. Although there is this variance, standards are viewed across the country as leveling the playing field for all types of students. Minority or economically disadvantaged students' needs are addressed in a more equitable manner when based on standards that all students must achieve.

The states of the Intermountain region have been working on raising standards for their students for many years. These seven states are: Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The following illustrates the number of years the seven states have been involved in improving their children's education:

- Idaho: 2 years
- Montana: 4 years
- Nevada: 2 years
- Oregon: 10 years
- Utah: 17 years
- Washington: 8 years
- Wyoming: 4 years

The intermountain states set the academic standards for schools, but leave the formation of the curriculum to the individual districts. Assessment measures are uniform for each district relative to each state's requirements, but alignment of the set standards to the curriculum is left to the districts.

The general goal of the seven states is to produce graduates that will be able to either go directly

into the workforce and/or postsecondary education without additional remedial-level requirements. Eventually, the student must understand the connection between personal effort and performance in school, and their future career and educational opportunities.

STANDARDS MEASUREMENTS

Different types of standards are implemented by each state based on their specific goals in measurement and improvement in the students they serve. Academic Content Standards define what students are expected to know. Performance Standards define how well students need to perform on the assessment measurement. Washington State refers to these as "Essential Academic Learning Requirements" (Bergeson, 2001). Content and performance standards are also utilized, and some states like Idaho use exiting standards.

The type of assessment plays a large part in the determining of standards being met. Norm-referenced tests, for instance, do not accurately measure the mastery of state standards set. While these states do use norm-referenced tests, many have added other measurements that more accurately determine the mastery of state standards.

The Oregon Legislature passed the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century in 1991, and this was bolstered by supportive legislation in 1995 (Oregon State Department of Education, 2001). Teachers, parents and others developed more rigorous standards with this legislation in place. Two types of standards are being developed in Oregon to meet these new demands:

1. Academic Content Standards that define what a student is expected to know
2. Performance Standards that define how well they perform

PROGRESS REGARDING STANDARDS REFORM

The National Education Association's report, "Good News About American Schools," examines each state concerning their progress in improving schools. The following progress demonstrated by each state reflects the impact of a reformed standards system in their specific states:

IDAHO

- Steady progress in reading has been evidenced by a 13 point raise in percentile
- SAT scores have gone up in the last 6 years; 31% in Math, and 8% in the Verbal SAT
- Idaho increased the numbers of Advanced Placement examinations receiving grades high enough to qualify students for college credit by 57%
- Idaho's school dropout rate declined for three years in a row
- Idaho's public schools are among the leaders in the nation in computer technology
- Idaho's public high schools are offering more and more challenging courses.

MONTANA

- 91% graduation rate, the highest percentage in the country
- Ties for first in the nation for 8th grade science scores
- In the top 4 in the nation for high percentage for 8th graders' scores in math
- Is in the top 3 in the nation for high percentage of scores for 4th and 8th graders in reading

NEVADA

- In four years, has increased the number of high school graduates enrolling in college by 7 %
- SAT math scores have risen almost twice as fast as the national average rate
- *Education Week* ranks Nevada among the top 10 states in academic standards and accountability

OREGON

- Oregon is number 1 in Verbal, second highest in Math, and 1st in combined SAT scores among states with high participation rates
- Math degrees awarded to students have increased 6%
- One of the few states that earned high marks from the American Federation of Teachers
- 8th graders are in the top 10 states in reading

UTAH

- 1 of 5 states to receive a grade of "A" for how well it prepares students for college
- U.S. Department of Education awarded the state a Reading Excellence Act Grant
- Also has a 91% graduation rate

WASHINGTON

- 89% of teachers participate in in-service or professional development programs
- students have the highest Math SAT Scores, and second highest Verbal Scores
- 23% of teachers have training in teaching students with limited English proficiency

WYOMING

- 8th grade science standing is rated second only to Singapore
- Tied for second in the nation for having the most computers in the classroom
- The number of high school students going immediately in to college has increased by 8%
- The number of mathematics degrees increased by 9%

Continued fine-tuning of standards on the state level and implementation on the district level will maintain the on-going progress of the students of the seven states. The intermountain region is progressing in the education of their youth with on-going methods of standards reform.

CHALLENGES FACING STANDARDS REFORM

Funding is the biggest challenge the seven states face in standards reform. The states need money for implementation of the new standards, professional development for the teachers, assessment implementation, and accountability systems. These four components are intricately intertwined to form a successful standards reform program, and all require additional funding to be productive. Some states have become resourceful in finding moneys to accommodate their reform systems. Washington State has taken its budget surplus and put it into a special “Student Achievement Fund,” (Trotter, 2001) that is distributed equally to all school districts to assist with expenses of the implementation. Other states have looked to grants and other inventive sources for financing their education needs. The standards, once defined within a state, need follow-thru from the state on district implementation in the form of funding and teacher development. Stephen Nielson, executive director of the Partnership for Learning in Washington state, says: “That this is a long haul.” (Jacobson, 2001), referring to the reforms needed in standards systems that need to be implemented.

Oregon found that although the schools identified as low performing were given assistance, the other districts struggled to find ways to reach the higher standards (Reid, 2001). Much work is still needed that will require funding to implement to achieve the new standards.

METHODOLOGY

Establishment of uniform standards and their assessment is an on-going process. In order for this reform to be productive, and to allow continual improvement of the system, the public needs to be made aware of the changes and their benefits. The necessity of informing the public that this is a works in progress is one of the major components of making this a viable, productive system.

Idaho took the initiative when new reading standards were implemented by informing the

parents about the change with a major effort to include the parents in the process. The state also prepared a detailed resource guide for teachers to utilize. Marilyn Howard, State School Superintendent, states “. . . that it will be important to make sure that people in the schools are involved every step of the way, . . .” (Galley, 2001). An example of this statement is evidenced in the Exiting Standards Committee members. The members include educators at all levels as well as representatives from business, the Hispanic community and the Native American community (Idaho State Board of Education, 2001).

Many in Montana feel that the standards-based reform has led to working on a sometimes-overlooked student population, the Native Americans. These students make up 11 percent of the school population, and the standards system addresses many of their needs and concerns (Zehr, 2001). In addition to the needs of students being addressed with the introduction of standards reform, Montana also recognizes the needs of their teachers. The state hopes to strengthen implementation of standards through professional development for their teachers, thus providing the necessary resources to enable teachers to effectively and efficiently implement the standards in their classes.

Nevada also feels that professional development is critical to the success of standards reform. The last time the legislature met, they allocated \$3.4 million each year for the following two consecutive years (Gewertz, 2001). It was used to establish and operate four regional professional development programs for teachers. The programs are based on a tiered-training model. One or more teachers from each school are instructed on how to implement the state standards, and they return to their schools and train their colleagues with that information.

Utah feels that a reduction in the number in classes will be beneficial in the implementation of standards. The student-to-teacher ratio has dropped by ten students in the last decade. This change has been primarily due to the Utah Education Association’s effective lobbying the

state legislature. The legislature also approved the U-PASS program and the \$3.5 million to get it going (Walsh, 2001).

Wyoming is moving forward at a steady pace, and Annette Bohling, the director of standards for the State Education Department, says that they expect to have all standards in place by June. This has been a big change for the state, particularly in the fact that, "Districts will no longer have sole authority over whether a child receives a diploma," states Bohling (Coles, 2001). Wyoming also acknowledges that teachers will need time to align curriculum to the new standards before proposed rules for graduation are implemented. Teachers will use a wide range of instructional strategies to help meet the needs of the students so they can master the standards set by the state (Wyoming State Department of Education, 2001).

CONCLUSION

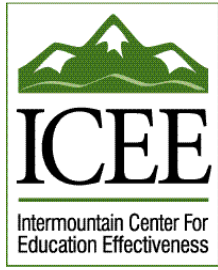
The intermountain states have many challenges to deal with in the standards reform movement. While they are addressing these needs in ways specific to their states, they are all progressing in the implementation of standards in their schools. Funding is seen as the number one problem to overcome to make this reform productive and effective.

Standards will undoubtedly improve the education system; to make sure it is effective in doing this will take time. Many aspects will need to be considered and programs will need to be revamped to meet the requirements of new standards. The seven states recognize the fact that curriculum alignment and assessment alignment to the standards will take time, and professional development is essential to that process.

Many benefits from the standards for the students will be evidenced long after the student leaves the public school system. The goal of producing students that will be able to make real choices of employment and/or postsecondary education right out of high school will hopefully help the students to see the long-term effect education has on their quality of life.

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