

## A New Era for Accountability: AYPF Forum Recap

Under the recently signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states now have unprecedented levels of flexibility concerning student assessment, allowing them to look beyond the limits of previous accountability systems.

On Monday, February 8, 2016, The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) hosted a [Capitol Hill forum](#) featuring **Linda Darling-Hammond**, President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute, and **Paul Leather**, Deputy Commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Education, to discuss emerging trends in accountability systems and some promising practices for the future under ESSA.

“It’s a wonderful time to be looking ahead,” said Darling-Hammond, who stressed the importance of adopting models of accountability that move away from narrowly-focused tests. “We’re preparing for a world that is rapidly changing, and we’re moving away from keeping schools pointed toward the past, and more so towards the future.”

Pointing to lessons learned from Silicon Valley industry leaders in recent years, Darling-Hammond explained that **team performance exercises** are quickly replacing test scores as meaningful predictors of highly-skilled, effective employees, and that accountability systems must adapt to allow students to learn in environments that emphasize communication and critical thinking skills.

While the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era showed partial improvement in graduation rates, Darling-Hammond explained, the progress was not as good when compared to pre-NCLB levels of math, science, or reading scores. The limits of the NCLB tests often incentivized teaching to the test, stressed low-level skills, or left some subjects out entirely, said Darling-Hammond.

“Testing is not the same as accountability, it informs the accountability system,” said Darling-Hammond, who stressed the need for a broad, nuanced approach to assessment, one that includes **high quality teaching and learning, tools for continuous improvement, and means for correcting and addressing missteps or problems** during the process. It will also be critical to emphasize student engagement, teacher leadership programs, capacity building, and data-driven, flexible systems for states to constantly review and refine their methods, said Darling-Hammond.

“We’re starting to think about this era as **Accountability 3.0**, “ said Leather, referring to personalized, competency-based systems of assessment and accountability. Leather envisioned a new accountability system that supports **student mastery** in order to make them truly college and career-ready, and engages teachers in the process as well. Leather shared lessons learned in New Hampshire’s [Performance Assessment Competency Education \(PACE\)](#) program, where students apply deeper learning to subjects such as math and science by

solving problems that require group collaboration, or use critical thinking skills in real-world career situations such as town planning or building solar heaters. “It’s more indicative of what students will face in college and career,” said Leather.

Why should states adopt a similar system? The previous “top down” approach disenfranchises local leaders and provides disappointing results, said Leather, who pointed to local engagement, input, and support as key to PACE’s success. PACE stresses heavy student engagement and outcomes, compatibility across school districts, and places an emphasis on **internal motivation** for students and teachers.

States, students, and teachers all have different needs and circumstances, and under ESSA, states enjoy new flexibility to customize assessment. Models that emphasize deeper learning, critical thinking, and meaningful student learning and engagement will be critical. “As we embark on this new opportunity to improve accountability, it’s going to be important to keep eyes the on prize for kids, to prepare them to lead in the century they’re going to inherit,” said Darling-Hammond.

***To learn more about this event, download the presenter slideshow, and access forum video content, please visit our [resource page](#).***