

The [Government Innovators Network](#) provides summaries of current academic research in the field of public management that is most pertinent to practitioners, policy advisors and policy makers.

This document summarizes:

Hanushek, Erin A. and Raymond, Margaret E. “Does School Accountability Lead to Improved Student Performance?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* No. 2 2005: 297-327.

In this study, the authors examine the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and other state accountability measures to help policymakers understand how these measures can raise student performance and what still needs to change. The authors find that while accountability standards do lead to higher performance, they also lead to unintended consequences.

Accountability standards, which are supposed to help the bottom group of students, actually widen the Black-White achievement gap. The authors do not clarify the reason why blacks proportionally gain less than whites, but the data raises a dilemma for policymakers. Accountability standards are intended to raise achievement of all students with a focus on lessening the gap between the students at the top and the students at the bottom. The authors point out that no single policy measure can achieve both of these goals. Stricter accountability measures also lead to higher dropout rates and higher exclusion rates from testing (such as placing student in special education) because administrators focus too much on immediate results and want the students at the bottom exempt from testing. However, the authors believe that these consequences are overstated, and that “gaming” the system will only be a short-term problem.

The most effective accountability standards include consequences for both successful and poor school performance. If schools simply report results, student performance typically does not change. On the other hand, if schools face consequences such as monetary awards for good results and takeover threats for poor results, students often perform better. In order to have the greatest effect on students, accountability measures must continue into high school and college. High pass rates in elementary and middle school do not guarantee continued scholastic achievement for students.

Though this study does not provide solutions to the problems with accountability standards, it does provide policymakers with key issues to focus on when developing and changing these standards.