THE WYOMING STATEWIDE TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OCTOBER 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Pursuant to State law, and based on six months of deliberation and outreach throughout the State of Wyoming, the Wyoming Statewide Task Force on Student Assessment and Education Accountability [the Task Force] recommends modifications to Wyoming's statewide assessment system and the establishment of a single statewide accountability system with consequences. These recommendations are designed to:

- Improve teaching and learning and promote school improvement (in both the short- and long-term).
- Promote high standards and expectations for all students.
- Provide valid and reliable measures for accountability purposes at the school, district, and state levels.
- Maximize the usefulness and timeliness of information to improve student achievement.
- Minimize the burden, including financial cost, administrative burden, and time away from class (to the extent educationally and psychometrically appropriate).
- Respect local educational control while promoting efficient and effective implementation of federal and state legal requirements, including the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [the NCLB].
- Build on and strengthen existing policies to value consistency and maximize previous state and district investments.
- Be understandable to and have the support of parents, teachers, administrators, and the public.

The Statewide *Assessment* System

The Task Force recommends the establishment of a statewide assessment system that will include:

- A summative assessment, which will maintain some—but not all—of the features of the current WyCAS;
- Embedded tools and assessments in language arts and math (and possibly science) that: (1) are developed and implemented over time, based on ongoing research and evaluation; (2) fit within existing district assessment systems; (3) are administered periodically during the school year (preceding the summative assessment); and (4) inform instructional strategies, assist in improving student learning during the year, and supplement summative assessment results; and

- NAEP results for the State (and ultimately all districts) to provide national comparison data.

This system will:

- Satisfy the core requirements of the NCLB that relate to testing and accountability; and

- Provide timely and meaningful feedback to educators, parents, and students regarding student, school, district, and state performance, which will (among other things) improve teaching and learning over the course of the school year.

A Statewide *Accountability* System

The Task Force recommends the establishment of a single statewide accountability system in Wyoming, with annual accountability determinations for all Wyoming public schools and districts and with a range of educational consequences tied to those determinations.

Wyoming's accountability system should be a "blended" system in which overall school accountability is determined based on AYP determinations (as required by federal law) and additional state criteria that reflects each school's progress in improving student achievement for the same students over time – using a value added, student growth model.

Wyoming's accountability system must include consequences for every school and district (as mandated by federal law). These consequences should be largely the same for both Title I and non-Title I schools, based on their performance under Wyoming's accountability system. The focus of these consequences should be on promoting educationally sound interventions to continuously raise student achievement in all Wyoming schools. In particular:

- Schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria should be "rewarded" with increased autonomy, public recognition, etc.

- Schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria should be required to take action and face escalating consequences if such underperformance continues over consecutive school years. Districts should be afforded a "menu" of options to intervene most appropriately in schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria. However, the required interventions should become more intense and the range of options more structured over time.

Major Recommendations

1. *Purpose.* Wyoming's Statewide Assessment System should be comprised of multiple sources of information that, when taken together, provide reliable measures of school, district, and state performance with regard to individual student achievement.

2. *Uses and Consequences.* Wyoming's statewide assessment system should provide data that will be used: as a measure of AYP and broader accountability; to enhance teaching and learning; and, along with other measures and information, to inform decisions about individual student progress.

3. *Coverage.* The summative statewide assessment should measure student performance and progress against (and be aligned with) state content and performance standards in grades 3-8, and at least once in grades 10-12, in the subjects of language arts and math, effective in the 2005-06 school year (and at least once in grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12 in the subject of science, effective in the 2007-08 school year).

4. *Format.* The statewide assessment system should include multiple measures and item types, including age-appropriate multiple choice and open-ended questions (such as constructed-response, extended-response, and performance-based tasks).

5. *Comparability of Scores.* The statewide assessment should be scaled across grades to ensure that individual student performance and progress can be meaningfully evaluated as the same students move from grade to grade and to ensure that scores in the same grades from year to year can be meaningfully compared.

6. *Validity.* The statewide assessment system should include assessments that are valid for their particular purposes and uses.

7. *Fairness.* The statewide assessment should be fair and free from bias, including with regard to race, ethnicity, limited English proficiency, and socio-economic status (and specifically with regard to Native American students).

8. *Special Populations.* State assessments should be designed for full inclusion of students with disabilities and English language learners, who should be provided with appropriate accommodations or alternate assessments that will ensure fairness while maintaining the validity of the assessments.

9. *Administration.* The summative statewide assessments should be administered as late in the school year as possible.

10. *Reporting Results.* Data from statewide assessments should be reported to students, parents, teachers, schools, districts, and the public in a manner that is complete, accurate, accessible, contextual, and timely.

11. *Valuing Status and Progress.* Wyoming's single statewide accountability system should value both absolute school performance (as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] and its AYP requirements) and school progress in improving student achievement for the same students over time.

12. *Continuous Improvement.* The statewide accountability system should focus on continuous improvement in raising student achievement at all Wyoming schools and on appropriate educational interventions that can promote such improvement – rather than on punitive sanctions.

13. *Options for Local Control.* The statewide accountability system should afford discretion to local districts in determining appropriate consequences, with more intense interventions and more rigidly defined requirements tied to repeated low performance over consecutive years.

14. *Consistent, Escalating Consequences.* The statewide accountability system should promote similar, escalating consequences for similarly situated schools, including Title I and non-Title I schools to the extent appropriate.

15. *Integrating Resources.* The statewide accountability system should be integrated with other state systems and educational interventions to the full extent appropriate, and Wyoming should provide sufficient resources to promote technical assistance for schools in need of improvement.

16. *Teacher and Administrator Quality.* The statewide assessments and accountability system should focus on teacher and administrator quality as a primary component of consequences for schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria.

17. *Student Remediation and Consequences.* The statewide accountability system should be meaningful for individual students and their educational development.

18. *Rewards.* The statewide accountability system should include a range of rewards for schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

19. *Cost.* When determining the entity(ies) that will be responsible for the design, development, and implementation of the statewide assessment system, the Wyoming Department of Education should ensure that policy objectives are evaluated in the context of capacity and cost.

20. *Timing and Transition.* The recommendations regarding Wyoming's statewide assessment system relating to language arts and math should take effect during the 2005-06 school year. Prior to that time, a Design Task Force should continue the work of this Task Force and work with the Wyoming Department of Education to develop further recommendations regarding the design and implementation of the summative and embedded assessments that will comprise the statewide assessment system.

INTRODUCTION

The Wyoming Statewide Task Force on Student Assessment and Education Accountability [the Task Force] has prepared this Report to recommend changes to Wyoming's statewide assessment and accountability systems, as charged by state law. The overarching goal of this Report is to help ensure that all of Wyoming's public school students are provided with a high-quality, high-standards education. Achieving this goal will also help ensure that the State of Wyoming is fully compliant with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB]. As required by state law, this Report contains two sets of recommendations:

1. The Task Force recommends modifications to Wyoming's statewide *assessment system* that are designed to improve teaching and learning, foster school improvement, and enhance Wyoming's compliance with the NCLB; and

2. The Task Force recommends the establishment of a single statewide *accountability system*, with consequences, that will enable the state, districts, and schools to satisfy the NCLB's accountability requirements in ways that ensure sound educational decision-making, promote the robust implementation of state standards, and preserve appropriate levels of local control—all with attention to issues of cost and burden.

The Task Force prepared this Report following extensive research and consultation with: educational stakeholders; members of the public; and legal, policy, and test measurement experts. Much of the work of the Task Force occurred over the course of six months, during which the Task Force convened six public meetings (most lasting one-and-a-half days). During those meetings, the Task Force: reviewed resource information; received briefings relating to testing and accountability systems in Wyoming and legal and test measurement principles applicable to its work; and engaged in rigorous discussions regarding ideas and draft recommendations related to its legislative charge. At each of those meetings, members of the public offered ideas and provided reactions to Task Force discussions.

The Task Force appreciates having had the opportunity to address some of the most fundamental educational policy issues that the State of Wyoming will face in the coming years. Although there are many daunting challenges that the State must address as we work to ensure that all students learn to high standards, there should be no mistake about our recognition of the substantial progress in education the State of Wyoming has made in recent years. Indeed, this Report *builds upon* many substantial foundations that (as a matter of state law and policy) need not change. But there is also room for improvement and growth, and there are substantial new requirements that need to be met as a matter of federal law. We believe that we have identified the areas in which Wyoming must work to ensure sustained and substantial advancement in student performance, consistent with federal and state laws. In the end, we are all committed to leaving no child behind. That is our collective vision. Our hope is that the implementation of this Report will help make that vision a reality.

The Task Force acknowledges the work of many individuals and entities that were instrumental in the success of the Task Force's efforts and in the preparation of this Report. They include: the Wyoming Department of Education, including State Superintendent Trent Blankenship, Deputy Superintendent Annette Bohling, and Jason Nicholas; the Wyoming Legislative Service Office, including Dave Nelson; Dr. Rebecca Kopriva, of the University of Maryland, who provided test measurement advice; and Art Coleman and Scott Palmer, of Nixon Peabody LLP, who facilitated the Task Force meetings, provided legal and policy advice, and who, along with Task Force members, authored this report.

I. BACKGROUND

A. State Legislative Charge and Activities of the Task Force

The Wyoming State Legislature established the Task Force and provided two central charges to this group. The legislature asked that the Task Force:

1. Recommend modifications, if necessary, to Wyoming's statewide assessment system to improve teaching and learning and foster school improvement; and

2. Recommend an accountability system with consequences that will assist in meeting NCLB's accountability requirements while maintaining uniformity and quality of state standards.

Under State law, the assessment system must:

- Measure student progress based upon the uniform student content and measurable, academic performance standards at levels established by the state board of education in designated areas of knowledge and skills;

- Be administered at appropriate levels at specified grades and at appropriate intervals aligned to standards;

- Be aligned to the statewide education program standards;

- Include open-ended testing such as constructed-response, extended-response and performance-based tasks; and

- Measure year-to-year changes in individual student achievement and school performance, as required by the NCLB.

Under State law, the accountability plan must:

- Integrate federal and state accountability requirements;

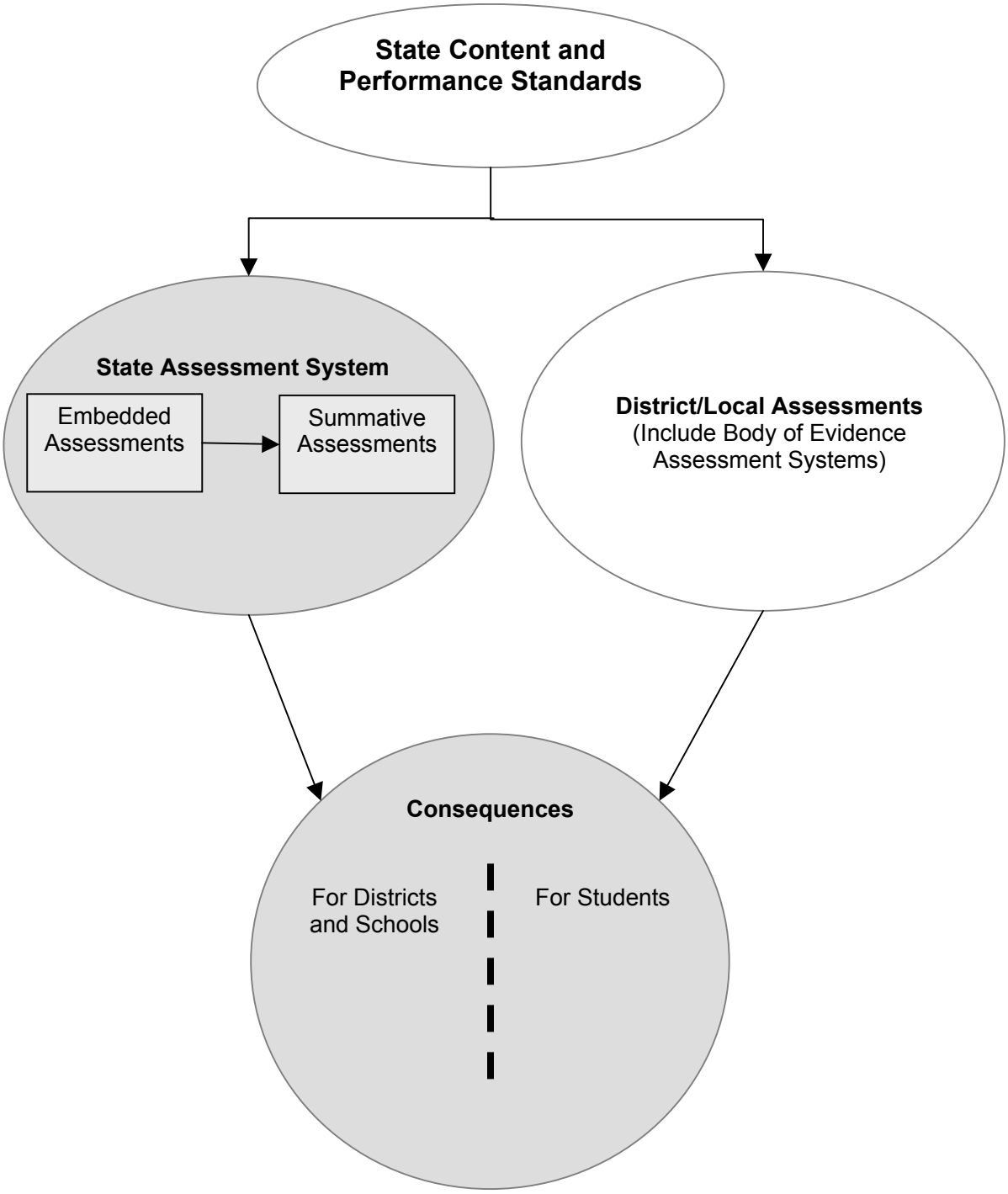
- Specify a level for and measure annual progress of schools and districts;

- Enable the implementation of NCLB-related rewards and sanctions, based on district and school performance/progress; and

- Develop a system of rewards and sanctions for all schools and districts, which includes a corrective action component.

Wyoming's Statewide Accountability System

[Task Force Recommendations address issues arising in the shaded circles.]



The Task Force was charged with issuing findings and recommendations to the Joint Education Interim Committee [JEIC], which are designed to serve as a basis for recommendations to be made to the state legislature in its 2004 budget session.

By letter report dated July 30, 2003, and Draft Recommendations dated August 20, 2003, the Task Force presented preliminary information, findings, and recommendations to the Wyoming State Legislature and, in particular, the JEIC. During a day-long meeting held on August 28, 2003, the Task Force presented its preliminary findings and recommendations to the JEIC and received feedback from the JEIC, which served as a foundation for the preparation of this Report.

C. Guiding Principles

Early on, the Task Force identified several core educational principles and goals designed to guide our discussions and shape recommendations that will improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students in Wyoming. We concluded that Wyoming's Statewide Assessment and Accountability Systems should be designed to:

1. Improve teaching and learning and promote school improvement (in both the short- and long-term).

2. Promote high standards and expectations for all students.

3. Provide valid and reliable measures for accountability purposes at the school, district, and state levels.

4. Maximize the usefulness and timeliness of information to improve student achievement.

5. Minimize the burden, including financial cost, administrative burden, time away from class, etc. (to the extent educationally and psychometrically appropriate).

6. Respect local educational control while promoting efficient and effective implementation of federal and state legal requirements, including the requirements of NCLB.

7. Build on and strengthen existing policies to value consistency and maximize previous state and district investments.

8. Be understandable to and have the support of parents, teachers, administrators, and the public.

D. Federal Legal Parameters

Building on accountability principles in the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB] resulted in a major expansion of federal accountability requirements for states, districts and schools—correspondingly expanding the federal government's and states' roles in the establishment and maintenance of statewide systems of accountability. In particular, the NCLB established the requirement that each state establish a statewide system of accountability based primarily on statewide assessments (in effect, requiring that states merge their systems of accountability with federal requirements). The NCLB also imposed new requirements and consequences for schools, districts, and states that do not demonstrate adequate yearly progress [AYP] (including public school choice and supplemental education services requirements) just as it

expanded the definition of AYP to include participation and performance requirements applicable to subgroups of students.

These requirements have guided the work of the Task Force in an effort to ensure that the Task Force recommendations will strengthen education in Wyoming in a manner that meets federal legal requirements.

1. A Single Statewide Accountability System Based Primarily on a Statewide Assessment System

Under the NCLB, States must develop a "single statewide accountability system" that holds schools and districts accountable for demonstrating adequate yearly progress [AYP] in raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps – such that all Wyoming students are proficient on state assessments by 2013-14. AYP decisions must be based primarily on state assessments that are aligned with state standards in reading/language arts and mathematics. Beginning no later than the 2005-06 school year, states must administer these annual assessments in each of grades 3 through 8, and at least once in grades 10 through 12. Beginning no later than the 2007-08 school year, states must administer annual assessments in science at least once in grades 3 through 5; 6 through 9; and 10 through 12.

To ensure compliance with the NCLB, statewide assessments must (among other things):

- *Include all students.* Measure the achievement of all public school students in the State and be accessible for all students, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency;

- *Be valid and reliable.* Be valid, reliable, of adequate technical quality for their purpose[s], and consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical standards;

- *Be aligned with State standards.* Be aligned with the State's challenging academic content and student achievement standards and provide coherent information about student attainment of state standards across grades and subjects;

- *Be rigorous.* Involve multiple, up-to-date measures of student academic achievement, including measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding of challenging content;

- *Be objective.* Objectively measure academic achievement, knowledge, and skills without evaluating or assessing personal family beliefs and attitudes;

- *Lead to reporting.* Express student results in terms of the State's student academic achievement standards, and produce individual student reports;

- *Lead to disaggregated reporting.* Enable results to be disaggregated within each State, local educational agency [LEA], and school by each major racial and ethnic group, gender, migrant status, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged students; and

- *Permit analyses.* Enable itemized score analyses.

2. A State Rewards and Sanctions System for All Schools Based in Part on AYP

State accountability systems must include "rewards and sanctions" applicable to all public schools. Specific federal rules govern the mandatory rewards and sanctions applicable to schools that receive Title I funds [Title I schools]. If Title I schools fail to demonstrate AYP as defined by federal law, they face required educational interventions and escalating consequences:

- *Failure to make AYP for 2 consecutive years (identified as in need of improvement):* Schools must develop a school improvement plan and local educational agencies [LEAs] must provide those schools with technical assistance and offer public school choice. Technical assistance may include giving the school assistance in identifying and addressing problems in meeting the requirements of NCLB, identifying and implementing professional development, and analyzing and revising the school's budget. Public school choice involves giving students the option to transfer to another public school served by the LEA that has not been identified for school improvement. Each school must also spend an amount equal to 10% of its Title I funds on professional development.

- *Failure to make AYP for 3 consecutive years:* LEAs must offer supplemental educational services in addition to the above actions (unless delay is permitted due to exceptional or uncontrollable circumstances). Supplemental educational services include tutoring and other supplemental academic enrichment services that are in addition to instruction provided during the school day.

- *Failure to make AYP for 4 consecutive years:* LEAs must take corrective action in addition to the above actions (unless delay is permitted due to exceptional or uncontrollable circumstances). Corrective action must include at least one of the following, consistent with state law: replace appropriate school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP; institute and implement a new curriculum; significantly decrease management authority at the school level; appoint an outside expert to advise the school on its progress toward making AYP; extend the school year or school day for the school; or restructure the internal organizational structure of the school.

- *Failure to make AYP for 5 consecutive years:* LEAs must plan for restructuring in addition to the above actions. Restructuring consists of preparing a plan and making the necessary arrangements to implement alternative governance if the school fails to make AYP in the next year.

- *Failure to make AYP for 6 consecutive years:* LEAs must institute alternative governance arrangements in addition to the above actions. Alternative governance must include at least one of the following, consistent with state law: reopening the school as a public charter school; replacing all or most of school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP; entering into a contract with an entity to operate the public school; turning the operation of

the school over to the state educational agency [SEA]; or any other major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms and has substantial promise of enabling the school to make AYP.

If a Title I district [LEA] fails to make AYP, it also faces escalating consequences:

- *Failure to make AYP for 2 consecutive years:* The LEA is identified for improvement. The LEA must develop or revise an LEA plan, in consultation with parents, school staff, and others, which addresses a range of performance issues.

- *Failure to make AYP for 4 consecutive years:* The LEA is identified for corrective action. The State has the option of imposing corrective action at any time after an LEA has been identified for improvement, but must impose corrective action once the LEA has failed to make AYP for four consecutive years. Corrective action means action consistent with state law that substantially and directly responds to the circumstances that caused the failure and that is designed to meet the goal of having all students achieve at the proficient and advanced levels.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wyoming Statewide Assessment System

1. Overview of Recommendations

The Task Force recommends the establishment of an assessment *system* that will accomplish multiple, inter-related objectives designed to enhance standards-based teaching and learning for all students in Wyoming, and to do so in ways that minimize burden and value local decision-making. The assessment recommendations are also designed to provide more valid and reliable accountability data for schools and districts under the NCLB, which will provide useful information to teachers, parents, and students as they work to improve student achievement. More specifically, the Task Force recommends the establishment of a state assessment system that will:

- Satisfy the core requirements of the NCLB that relate to testing and accountability; and
- Provide timely and meaningful feedback to educators, parents, and students regarding student, school, district, and state performance, which can (along with other relevant information) help improve teaching and learning over the course of the school year.

To accomplish these central purposes, the statewide assessment system should include:

- A summative assessment, which will maintain some—but not all—of the features of the current WyCAS;[1]
- Embedded tools and assessments in language arts and math (and possibly science) that: (1) are developed and implemented over time, based on ongoing research and evaluation; (2) fit within existing district assessment systems; (3) are administered periodically during the school year (preceding the summative assessment); and (4) inform instructional strategies, assist in improving student learning during the year, and supplement summative assessment results; and

[1] Important differences between the existing WyCAS and the recommended new state summative assessment stem from new federal legal requirements and Task Force policy perspectives regarding ways to improve upon the WyCAS. These differences include:

- The expanded purposes of the statewide assessment (See Recommendation No. 1);
- The expanded grade coverage of the statewide assessment (to include grades 3-8), as required by the NCLB (See Recommendation No. 3);
- The reduced test-taking time on the summative assessment, stemming (in part) from the elimination of the norm-referenced test, which are currently part of the WyCAS (See, e.g., Recommendation No. 1);
- The need to align the new assessment to new content and performance standards (approved by the State Board of Education on July 11, 2003) (See Recommendation No. 3); and
- The recommended expansion of bias reviews into more comprehensive reviews of test fairness (See Recommendation No. 4).

- NAEP results to provide national comparison data.

2. Recommendations (1-10)

Recommendation No. 1: Purpose

Wyoming's Statewide Assessment System should be comprised of multiple sources of information that, when taken together, provide reliable measures of school, district, and state performance with regard to individual student achievement.

1.1 The state assessment system should include an annual *summative assessment* designed primarily to measure school, district, and state performance, which (with other measures) can provide information about individual student performance useful to teachers and parents.

1.2 The state assessment system should include *embedded tools and assessments* (that lead to the summative assessment) designed to provide useful and timely information regarding individual student performance during the school year, which may also be factors in Wyoming's accountability system for NCLB compliance and other purposes. [See also Recommendations No. 2 and No. 20.]

1.3 The state assessment system should include data from NAEP, which will "benchmark" Wyoming's performance in the context of national assessment data. Wyoming's statewide summative assessment should no longer include a norm-referenced test or embedded norm-referenced items.

Rationale

- No single assessment can or should likely serve all purposes, especially with low burden; however, the state assessment *system* should serve multiple purposes, with each assessment serving some primary (and other) goals.

- Wyoming's statewide assessment system should provide annual *accountability* measures of school, district, and state performance based upon students' satisfaction of state achievement standards, as required by the NCLB.

- Wyoming's statewide assessment system should provide individual *student achievement* data that will provide accurate, useful, and timely diagnostic information in combination with other information as appropriate.

- Wyoming's statewide assessment system should provide data upon which state (and district) performance can be benchmarked against *national norms*.

Note:

- As used in this document, "embedded assessments" refers to one or more items or tasks administered during the school year as part of the statewide assessment system, which correspond to state content standards.
- The Task Force believes that the inclusion of embedded assessments as part of the statewide assessment system can serve several related goals. Adhering to principles of legal and educational soundness, the design and implementation of embedded assessments as part of

Wyoming's statewide assessment system can: (1) improve standards-based teaching and learning over the course of the school year, including enhancing educators' abilities to make more meaningful educational interventions; (2) provide foundations for making more valid and reliable judgments regarding district, school, and student performance,; (3) minimize the administrative burden (and student stress) associated with the current end-of-year WyCAS; (4) improve the performance of students (and correspondingly schools and districts) on Wyoming's summative assessment; and (5) maintain appropriate local control while simultaneously promoting efficient and effective implementation of federal and state legal requirements, including those of the NCLB.

- The Task Force acknowledges that the concept of embedded assessments as part of the statewide assessment system in Wyoming is new. Consequently, the Task Force believes that great care should be taken in the design and implementation of embedded assessments—consistent with the Recommendations contained in this Report and with relevant principles of law and test measurement. Various design options relating to the embedded assessments (including, e.g., with respect to the structure of the assessments and the timing of their administration) may be pursued, consistent with these Recommendations. Notably, there are likely to be different design and implementation strategies—as well as different design and implementation timetables— that make sense at different grade levels and in different subjects.

  For example, the Task Force believes that, at the outset, embedded assessments in writing are likely to be appropriate for inclusion in the new statewide assessment system. In the context of the Recommendation that writing prompts on the current WyCAS be scaled back, it makes sense to seek a design pursuant to which such writing prompts may be administered during the school year—and scored by teachers in the state who have been trained to perform such duties. [See Note, Recommendation No. 3]. By contrast, more research and evaluation will likely be necessary before a determination regarding the use of embedded math assessments as part of the statewide assessment system can be made.

- Student-specific embedded assessment results should be provided to parents, relevant teachers, and school administrators only. These results should not be separately reported to the public.

- The Task Force also believes that the development of educationally appropriate tools and instructional materials (as a complement to embedded assessments) should be a central part of the design of the statewide assessment system.

- The work of a future Design Task Force should focus on the further development and design of the embedded assessments as part of the statewide assessment system. [See Recommendation No. 20].

Recommendation No. 2: Uses and Consequences

Wyoming's statewide assessment system should provide data that will be used: as a measure of AYP and broader accountability; to enhance teaching and learning; and, along with other measures and information, to inform decisions about individual student progress.

2.1 Data from the statewide assessment system, including some combination of the summative assessment and other assessment data, should be used to inform AYP decisions under the NCLB.

2.2 Data from the state assessment system should be timely and useful at a programmatic level in helping schools and districts improve teaching and learning and close achievement gaps.

2.3 Data should have real value and meaning for individual students. However, decisions affecting students, individually—such as those affecting placement, attendance in remedial programs, or "high-stakes" decisions such as grade-to-grade promotion or high school graduation—should not be made based on a student's performance on any single statewide assessment. More specifically, no statewide assessment should operate as a sole criterion with individual student consequences or be used to dictate individual student consequences without the consideration of other compensatory factors. Judgments regarding the ways in which statewide assessment data may affect student consequences should, consistent with these recommendations, be made at the local district level.

Rationale:

- Building a state assessment system has the potential of permitting more complete, robust, reliable data for AYP and broader accountability decisions with less burden than use of a single assessment alone – assuming the system can meet relevant educational and federal legal requirements.

- Given the substantial investment and role of the state assessment system and its focus on educational improvement, the system must be valuable as a component of efforts to improve teaching and learning.

- Statewide assessment data should also be meaningful to individual students, parents, and teachers – where used appropriately in conjunction with other data to inform decisions regarding individual students. In elementary and secondary education, decisions that have a major impact on students, individually, "should not be made on the basis of a single test score. Other relevant information should be taken into account."[2]

Recommendation No. 3: Coverage

The summative statewide assessment should measure student performance and progress against (and be aligned with) state content and performance standards in grades 3-8, and at least once in grades 10-12, in the subjects of language arts[3] and math, effective in the 2005-06 school year (and at least once in grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12 in the subject of science, effective in the 2007-08 school year).

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2 See American Educational Research Association, et al., *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing,* at 146 (1999) [*"Joint Standards"*]; National Research Council, *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation,* at 165-66 (1999) ["*High Stakes"*]; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *The Use of Tests as Part of High-Stakes Decision-Making for Students: A Resource Guide for Educators and Policy-Makers* (2000) [*"OCR Guide"*]. Any use of statewide assessments for "high stakes" purposes should be pursuant to a compensatory model, pursuant to which a student may demonstrate knowledge by compensating for a low test score with satisfactory performance relative to other requirements and measures, such as grades in required course work. See *High Stakes* at 165.

3 As the term is used throughout this document, "language arts" refers to the subject areas reflected in the Wyoming Language Arts Content and Performance Standards, which includes reading and writing.

3.1 For language arts, the summative statewide assessment should be aligned with all state content and performance standards, including major benchmarks.

3.2 For math, the summative statewide assessments should be aligned with all state content and performance standards.

3.3 For science, the summative statewide assessment should be aligned with all state content and performance standards.

3.4 The embedded statewide assessments should complement the coverage of the summative assessment and provide additional assessment information of knowledge and skills (with emphasis on cognitive complexity and depth), aligned to selected state standards in the areas of language arts and math (and possibly science).

Rationale:

- The NCLB requires that statewide assessments be fully aligned with state standards and measure the depth and breadth of state academic content standards.

- By integrating the coverage of state standards among summative and embedded assessments, Wyoming can tailor its assessment practices in ways that will enhance classroom instruction and evaluations of individual student performance during the school year, as well as promote better student achievement.

Note:

- With respect to the assessment of writing, in particular, the new statewide assessment system should include writing prompts as part of the embedded assessments, and should include selected sections in the language arts portion of the summative assessment that will be scored for writing purposes. This change should significantly reduce the time of the summative assessment devoted to the measurement of writing skills, while preserving a foundation for validating judgments related to the embedded writing assessments.

Recommendation No. 4: Format

The statewide assessment system should include multiple measures and item types, including age-appropriate multiple choice and open-ended questions (such as constructed-response, extended-response, and performance-based tasks).

4.1 The statewide summative assessment should include, in relative terms, more multiple choice and short, open-ended questions, whereas the embedded assessments should include more extended response and performance-based tasks; and

4.2 The determination regarding the format of the statewide assessments should be informed by judgments regarding the capacity of specific items to enhance the validity of the assessments in the context of the corresponding cost and burden.

Rationale:

- Federal and state law require a range of testing items to measure student knowledge against high standards.

- The degree to which various item types are used should be informed by their ability to enhance valid judgments regarding student performance and their relative burden with respect to, for example, time demands during testing.

Recommendation No. 5: Comparability of Scores

The statewide assessment should be scaled across grades to ensure that individual student performance and progress can be meaningfully evaluated as the same students move from grade to grade and to ensure that scores in the same grades from year to year can be meaningfully compared.

Rationale:

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators should be able to evaluate individual student progress from grade to grade, thereby providing more complete and accurate measures of school performance (based on a value-added, student growth model) and enhancing the ability to provide appropriate educational interventions with respect to individual students, teachers, and schools.

Note:

- In addition, and to the extent feasible, the new statewide assessment should be designed to ensure that results in 2004-05, in 2005-06, and thereafter can be equated, permitting meaningful comparisons to (and evaluations in the context of) results of the WyCAS during its administration. This recommended linkage will be important in establishing a baseline upon which state, district, and school performance over time can be fairly interpreted.

Recommendation No. 6: Validity

The statewide assessment system should include assessments that are valid for their particular purposes and uses.

6.1 The statewide assessment system should include assessments that are consistent with national professional standards and that are backed by substantial evidence of technical quality.

6.2 The statewide assessments should provide accurate information regarding state, district, school, and student performance.

6.3 Scores that will inform determinations about school and district performance should be established in ways that fairly and credibly reflect Wyoming's new performance standards. [See Recommendation No. 20.]

Rationale:

- For any assessment to provide the most accurate measure of performance—and to do so in ways that are most valid, reliable, and fair—the assessment must adhere to technical standards of (among other things) validity and reliability. These requirements are also integral to many federal laws that will apply to the statewide assessment system, including the NCLB.

Recommendation No. 7: Fairness

The statewide assessment should be fair and free from bias, including with regard to race, ethnicity, limited English proficiency, and socio-economic status (and specifically with regard to Native American students).

7.1 The statewide assessment should be designed based on the full input of a Committee on Fairness. The Committee on Fairness should: be representative of the backgrounds and cultures of the students in the State of Wyoming; include significant educator and expert participation; ensure that the statewide assessment does not contain offensive content; and ensure that the test format, wording and context, rubrics, accessibility, etc., are appropriate for the entire student population to be tested.

Rationale:

- The focus on fairness serves an important function in test development—helping promote the educational soundness of tests for the various student populations assessed, as well as enhancing the legal sustainability of those tests. The Committee should, as a result, ensure that its review comprehensively evaluates the full range of issues that may adversely affect the fairness of the statewide assessment.

Recommendation No. 8: Special Populations

State assessments should be designed for full inclusion of students with disabilities and English language learners, who should be provided with appropriate accommodations or alternate assessments that will ensure fairness while maintaining the validity of the assessments.

8.1 Accommodations and alternate assessment determinations regarding students with disabilities should be made by IEP or §504 teams, consistent with state policy-related information that establishes parameters for such decisions to ensure test use validity.

8.2 Accommodations provided to English language learners should be made by education teams knowledgeable about the students, consistent with state policy-related information that establishes parameters for such decisions to ensure test use validity.

Rationale:

- Educationally sound accommodations policies are necessary to ensure that accurate judgments are made regarding school, district, and student performance.

- Federal law requires that state assessments be designed to be accessible for use by the widest possible range of students, and that students with disabilities and English language learners be provided with appropriate accommodations and "alternate" or "alternative" assessments if necessary and appropriate.

- Students with disabilities should be assessed to the maximum extent possible based upon statewide content standards, and they should be provided accommodations that do not affect the validity of the assessments. Students with severe cognitive disabilities who are unable to access material contained on the statewide assessment should be provided with alternate assessments designed to measure performance in the subject matter areas covered by statewide assessments.

- English language learners should be assessed in a language and form most likely to yield accurate results and valid judgments.

Recommendation No. 9: Administration

The summative statewide assessments should be administered as late in the school year as possible.

Rationale:

- Summative assessments, designed to measure student learning during the school year, should be administered as late as possible during the school year in order to maximize students' exposure to the curriculum and instruction assessed.

Note:

- The decision regarding the timing of the assessments must be made in the context of NCLB requirements, which provide that AYP decisions (based in part on such assessments) must be made prior to the beginning of the next school year—in sufficient time to allow the provision of the full range of federal rewards and sanctions required for Title I schools during the school year following the administration of the assessment. In this context, the Wyoming Department of Education should implement this recommendation—including in its preparation of RFPs related to testing—in a way that will ensure legal compliance.

Recommendation No. 10: Reporting Results.

Data from statewide assessments should be reported to students, parents, teachers, schools, districts, and the public in a manner that is complete, accurate, accessible, contextual, and timely.

10.1 Reports of statewide assessment data should provide timely, meaningful, and accurate information about what the results mean—and do not mean—given their particular use. Simple instructions and guidance should be provided to facilitate the interpretation of results, to ensure (among other things) that stakeholders understand the limitations inherent in the published score results.

10.2 *Regarding school, district and State performance:* Absolute performance and trend data (relative to state standards and objectives) and the percentage of students tested/not tested should be publicly reported. All of this data should fully comply with NCLB requirements, including the disaggregation of results by major racial and ethnic categories, gender, English proficiency status, migrant status, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students.

10.3 *Regarding individual student performance:* Students, parents, and teachers should be provided with information that accurately reflects student performance in the context of existing standards and the aggregate performance of the student's peers.

Rationale:

- State, district, school, and student performance should be reported, as described, to provide a comprehensive basis upon which continuous improvement can be most effectively and efficiently made—at all levels of the system.

B. Wyoming State Accountability System and Consequences

1. Overview of Accountability Recommendations

As required by federal law, the Task Force recommends the establishment of a single statewide accountability system in Wyoming, with annual accountability determinations for all Wyoming public schools and districts and with a range of educational consequences tied to those determinations.

First, Wyoming's accountability system should be a "blended" system in which overall school accountability is determined based on AYP determinations (as mandated and defined by federal law) and additional state criteria. In particular:

- Overall school accountability determinations should be based on both school AYP determinations (as defined by the NCLB) and on each school's progress in improving student achievement for the same students over time – using a value added, student growth model.

- As stated in Wyoming's approved AYP Workbook, overall school accountability determinations should be based on both core AYP data and additional data, including data from Wyoming's Body of Evidence [BOE] and related sources, where such data will enhance the reliability of accountability determinations.

To the extent appropriate and permitted by federal law, these further criteria could be considered as part of Wyoming's AYP determinations (especially in the case of small schools where AYP data alone may not afford sufficiently reliable school accountability determinations under federal law). Otherwise, they should be considered as part of Wyoming's broader statewide accountability system, such that each school's overall, annual accountability status is based on two factors: (1) an AYP determination based primarily on Wyoming's statewide assessment system (as defined above); and (2) an additional performance determination focused on student growth and based on Wyoming's statewide assessment system and other data as appropriate.

Second, Wyoming's accountability system must include consequences for every school and district, as mandated by federal law. These consequences should be largely the same for both Title I and non-Title I schools, based on their performance under Wyoming's accountability system (as described above). The focus of these consequences should be on promoting educationally sound interventions to continuously raise student achievement in all Wyoming schools. In particular:

- Schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria should be "rewarded" with increased autonomy, public recognition, etc.

- Schools that do not make AYP or do not satisfy other state accountability criteria should be required to take action and face escalating consequences if such underperformance continues

over consecutive school years. Districts should be afforded a "menu" of options to intervene most appropriately in schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria. However, the required interventions should become more intense and the range of options more structured over time.

2. Accountability Recommendations (Recommendations 11-18)

Recommendation No. 11: Valuing Status and Progress

Wyoming's single statewide accountability system should value both absolute school performance (as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] and its AYP requirements) and school progress in improving student achievement for the same students over time.

11.1 Overall school accountability determinations should be based on two overarching criteria: (1) AYP determinations *and* (2) a determination that considers school progress in raising student achievement for the same students over time. These determinations – taken together – should determine each school's annual accountability status.

11.2 The measure of school progress for state accountability should be based on statewide assessment data and other information (including the BOE) to the extent that the consideration of such information is permissible under federal law and will enhance the validity and reliability of state accountability determinations.

Rationale:

- Federal law (with the exception of "safe harbor") relies on absolute school performance based primarily on state assessments to determine AYP and compares different cohorts of students over time (e.g., the performance of this year's fourth graders compared to that of last year's fourth graders). This approach raises reliability concerns based on cohort variability and Wyoming's demographics, and it does not fully recognize that students enter school at different levels of achievement and readiness to learn (based on poverty, disability, limited English proficiency, and other factors).

- Wyoming's overall state accountability system should value both AYP as defined by federal law and a determination of school progress in moving each individual student from where he/she is to where he/she needs to be. This determination of school progress should be based on state assessment data and additional information to the extent that such information is permissible and will enhance the reliability of state accountability determinations.

Recommendation No. 12: Continuous Improvement

The statewide accountability system should focus on continuous improvement in raising student achievement at all Wyoming schools and on appropriate educational interventions that can promote such improvement – rather than on punitive sanctions.

12.1 All schools (both those that demonstrate AYP and those that do not) should produce annual school improvement plans based in part on state assessment data (rather than waiting for two years of failing to demonstrate AYP, as required by federal law).

12.2 All schools should receive appropriate support and technical assistance from the state and their district – mandatory for those schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state

accountability criteria and optional for schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

Rationale:

- Federal law requires a state system of "rewards and sanctions" for all schools, including school improvement plans and escalating sanctions for Title I schools (and districts) that fail to make AYP for two or more consecutive years.

- Wyoming's state accountability system should focus not on "rewards and sanctions" but on continuous improvement for all schools, with educationally appropriate "consequences" based on school performance that are designed to enhance student achievement.

Recommendation No. 13: Options for Local Control

The statewide accountability system should afford discretion to local districts in determining appropriate consequences, with more intense interventions and more rigidly defined requirements tied to repeated low performance over consecutive years.

13.1 The state accountability system should afford discretion to districts to choose from a "menu" of options related to required consequences, particularly in the earlier years, for schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria (consistent with the framework established for Title I schools under federal law).

13.2 The state accountability system should require an independent audit, with consequences, for schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for several consecutive years to determine what issues need to be addressed and what options are appropriate.

13.3 The state accountability system should require districts to take more significant interventions following consecutive years of underperformance, with options narrowed as appropriate.

13.4 The state accountability system should afford flexibility and autonomy to schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

Rationale:

- Federal law affords districts some discretion in imposing consequences in Title I schools.

- With state support and technical assistance, districts can best determine what interventions are most appropriate to improve student achievement at the local level. Therefore, schools that are demonstrating high performance should be afforded substantial flexibility at the local level, and underperforming schools should also be afforded flexibility in early years to target the specific issues causing the underperformance.

- However, after consecutive years of underperformance, more strict state-required interventions are appropriate.

Recommendation No. 14: Consistent, Escalating Consequences

The statewide accountability system should promote similar, escalating consequences for similarly situated schools, including Title I and non-Title I schools to the extent appropriate.

14.1 In general, both Title I and non-Title I schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria should face similar consequences, with the exception of public school choice and supplemental educational services (which should be required only for Title I schools as required by federal law).

14.2 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for one year should be required (each year) to adopt continuous improvement plans consistent with the requirements for school improvement plans under Title I (with schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria).

14.3 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for one year should receive (each year) appropriate technical assistance from their districts and/or the state to assist in implementing their school improvement plans (with the option of technical assistance available to schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria afforded greater flexibility).

14.4 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for one year should be required to focus on teacher quality and professional development as a primary component of their school improvement plans and technical assistance (consistent with federal requirements for Title I schools, to the extent appropriate).

14.5 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for two or three consecutive years should receive an independent expert audit (with state support) to determine the reasons for such continued underperformance and to identify appropriate interventions. (The independent audit could be voluntary after two consecutive years and mandatory after three consecutive years.)

14.6 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for two or three consecutive years should be required to take schoolwide actions to promote individual student remediation, such as extending the school year or school day for lower-performing students (including a full range of options such as before- and after-school programs, summer school, expanded course time in language arts or math, etc.), except that public school choice and supplemental educational services should only be required only for Title I schools (where appropriate) and be options for districts with regard to non-Title I schools.

14.7 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for four consecutive years should be required to take corrective action consistent with the findings of their independent audits and with Title I; such corrective action for Title I schools shall include at least one of the following (which shall be in addition to any interventions previously taken unless prior actions demonstrate substantial progress toward accountability goals): extending learning time, replacing appropriate school staff, instituting a new curriculum, decreasing management authority at the school level, placing an expert in the school, or restructuring the internal organizational structure of the school.

14.8 All schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria for five or six consecutive years should be required to institute restructuring or alternative governance consistent with the findings of their independent audits and with Title I; such restructuring shall include at least one of the following (which shall be in addition to any interventions previously taken unless prior actions demonstrate substantial progress toward accountability goals): reopening the school as a public charter school, replacing appropriate school staff, contracting with an outside entity to manage the school, turning over operation of the school to the state, or other major reform efforts.

Rationale:

- Federal law mandates a defined system of escalating consequences for Title I schools that fail to demonstrate AYP for consecutive years.

- In general, the required Title I consequences are consistent with the types of consequences that exist and should exist for all public schools in Wyoming, including school improvement plans, technical assistance, teacher professional development, individual student remediation, and a range of corrective actions. Moreover, as a matter of fairness and legitimacy, similar schools should generally be treated similarly.

- At the same time, specific federal sanctions (public school choice and supplemental educational services) do not fit as readily in the broader Wyoming context. They may be options but should not be mandated for non-Title I schools.

Summary of Recommendations Regarding Consequences for School Accountability

Did Not Meet AYP and/or Related State Accountability Criteria[4]	Title I Schools[5]	Non Title I Schools
After One Year	▪ Continuous **improvement plans** (focused on teacher quality and professional development) ▪ **Technical assistance** in developing and/or implementing improvement plan	▪ Continuous improvement plans (focused on teacher quality and professional development) ▪ Technical assistance in developing and/or implementing improvement plan
After Two or Three Years	The above plus: ▪ Independent expert audit/support ▪ Schoolwide actions to promote individual student remediation (e.g., extended learning time) ▪ **10% of Title I funds** on professional development (year 2) ▪ **Public school choice** (year 2) ▪ **Supplemental educational services** (year 3)	The above plus: ▪ Independent expert audit/support ▪ Schoolwide actions to promote individual student remediation (e.g., extended learning time) ▪ *Public school choice and/or supplemental educational services optional*
After Four or Five Years	The above plus: ▪ **Corrective action** consistent with findings of independent audit (including at least one of the following: extending learning time, replacing appropriate school staff, instituting a new curriculum, decreasing management authority at the school level, placing an expert in the school, restructuring the internal organizational structure of the school) ▪ **Plan for restructuring** (year 5)	The above plus: ▪ Corrective action consistent with findings of independent audit (including at least one of the following: extending learning time, replacing appropriate school staff, instituting a new curriculum, decreasing management authority at the school level, placing an expert in the school, restructuring the internal organizational structure of the school)
After Six Years	The above plus: ▪ **Restructuring/alternative governance** (including at least one of the following: reopening the school as a public charter school, replacing appropriate school staff, contracting with an outside entity to manage the school, turning over operation of the school to the state, or other major reform).	The above plus: ▪ Restructuring/alternative governance (including at least one of the following: reopening the school as a public charter school, replacing appropriate school staff, contracting with an outside entity to manage the school, turning over operation of the school to the state, or other major reform efforts).

[4] The *type* of consequences become more significant and defined following consecutive years of under-performance on the same indicator – math, language arts, or the other academic indicator (i.e., graduation rate or percent novice in reading). The *nature* of each consequence – including school improvement plans, technical assistance, student remediation, and corrective action – should be tied to the specific nature and extent of each school's underperformance.

[5] Boldface type indicates federally required consequences for Title I schools. Federal law requires that Title I schools institute improvement plans and receive technical assistance following *two* consecutive years of not meeting AYP.

Recommendation No. 15: Integrating Resources

The statewide accountability system should be integrated with other state systems and educational interventions to the full extent appropriate, and Wyoming should provide sufficient resources to promote technical assistance for schools in need of improvement.

15.1 State accreditation teams (including both NCA and/or WDE) should annually assist schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria in developing their annual school improvement plans; state teams should also be available to schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria upon request.

15.2 Sufficient state support should be available to ensure that schools in need of improvement can fully implement their school improvement plans, including further technical assistance.

15.3 The state should establish and expand partnerships to promote school improvement, including partnering similarly situated schools (e.g., based on demographics) to share best practices, creating incentive structures for highly qualified teachers to schools in need of improvement.

Rationale:

- Federal law and the statewide accountability system focus on school-level accountability and educational consequences. Wyoming also has related systems of educational support and intervention in place, such as statewide school accreditation, and related efforts to promote accountability and interventions with regard to schools, staff, students, parents, etc. These systems should be integrated with the statewide accountability system to the extent appropriate to reinforce and strengthen educational improvement efforts.

- More broadly, sufficient state support is vital to ensure that state accountability determinations and school improvement plans lead to effective educational interventions to improve teaching and learning and meet accountability goals.

Recommendation No. 16: Teacher and Administrator Quality

The statewide accountability system should focus on teacher and administrator quality as a primary component of consequences for schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria.

16.1 The state accountability system, including school improvement plans and technical assistance, should focus primarily on teacher and administrator professional development at an early stage for schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria.

Rationale:

- Research and experience confirm that a primary force of school improvement is a continued focus on enhancing teacher and principal quality.

Recommendation No. 17: Student Remediation and Consequences

The statewide assessments and accountability system should be meaningful for individual students and their educational development.

17.1 The state accountability system should include a focus on student accountability, with all schools required to consider state assessment data as one factor in making determinations about appropriate educational interventions and pathways for individual students to the extent valid and reliable for such purposes, but in no case shall such data be used as the sole criterion in student evaluations.

17.2 The state accountability system should focus on student remediation as a core component of consequences for schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria, including making extended learning opportunities available at an early stage for low-performing students who attend schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria.

Rationale:

- Given the level of investment and the need to ensure valid and meaningful test results, the state assessments and accountability system should have meaning for students. Furthermore, it is crucial that school improvement efforts focus on both overall school performance and effective interventions for the individual students who are attending schools that do not make AYP or satisfy other state accountability criteria.

Note:

- The Task Force believes that the statewide assessment system should be meaningful for individual students, but avoid any misuse of statewide assessment system data for individual student accountability purposes. The assessment data should be used as one factor among many to inform particular "lower stakes" rewards and consequences for individual students. For example, students who perform well on the state assessment system and other relevant assessments could be rewarded with additional autonomy or flexibility in their choice of courses. Students who perform lower on assessments that are part of the state assessment system and other relevant assessments may need additional learning time or other interventions. In addition, statewide assessment system scores could be placed on students' transcripts, with appropriate context, to inform educational judgments regarding the appropriate and inappropriate uses of such information.

Recommendation No. 18: Rewards

The statewide accountability system should include a range of rewards for schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

18.1 The state accountability system should include innovative ways to promote autonomy and flexibility for schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

18.2 The state accountability system should include school recognition at the local level, including fostering partnerships between WDE, leading businesses, and others to publicly recognize schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

18.3 The state accountability system should share promising practices from schools that make AYP and satisfy other state accountability criteria.

Rationale:

- Rewards can be important tools to promote school accountability and performance, and the state should develop a range of options in this regard.

C. Fiscal and Implementation Issues

1. Overview of Recommendations

Building on this Report, the Task Force recommends further research and evaluation of design and implementation options that can help ensure that Wyoming's investment in assessments and accountability is fiscally responsible and educationally appropriate, in both the short- and longer-term.

2. General Recommendations (Recommendations 19-20)

Recommendation No. 19: Cost

When determining the entity(ies) that will be responsible for the design, development and implementation of the statewide assessment system, the Wyoming Department of Education should ensure that policy objectives are evaluated in the context of capacity and cost.

Rationale:

- In the context of federal and state budget challenges, the new statewide assessment system should be designed and implemented in a way that will maximize the use of existing resources—including those that exist by virtue of the investments that the State of Wyoming has made in its current statewide assessment system. At the same time, decisions regarding cost should be informed by the policy objectives set forth in these recommendations, which are designed to substantially improve upon current assessment policies and practices.

Note:

- Substantial costs are associated with meeting the requirements of the NCLB and with related State assessment and accountability goals. Although any estimate of such costs is at this stage speculative, the Task Force has received estimates indicating that the annual cost of the statewide assessment system may range from $3 million to $6 million, or more. In addition, although some consequences identified in this report likely reflect current state or district practices, others are new and may require additional funding.

  Given these realities, and current state budget challenges, the Task Force recommends: (1) pursuing the development of the statewide assessment system within the State of Wyoming, if further expert input indicates that such development would be cost effective and legally and educationally feasible; and (2) further study of the likely costs associated with the consequences recommended in this Report, where the Recommendations implicate state, district, or school action beyond current requirements and programs. [See Recommendation No. 20].

Recommendation No. 20: Timing and Transition

The recommendations regarding Wyoming's statewide assessment system relating to language arts and math should take effect during the 2005-06 school year. Prior to that time, a Design Task Force should continue the work of this Task Force and work with the Wyoming Department of Education to develop further recommendations regarding the design and implementation of the summative and embedded assessments that will comprise the statewide assessment system.

20.1 In the short term, and guided by the recommendations of this Task Force, a Design Task Force should begin work immediately with the Wyoming Department of Education to develop additional recommendations and data related to the design and implementation of the new statewide assessment system. Those recommendations and information should inform the Wyoming State Legislature regarding possible legislation authorizing an RFP (or other appropriate steps) related to developing the statewide assessment system. Among other things, the Design Task Force should:

a. make recommendations regarding the design, form, and substance of the assessments that should be included as part of the statewide assessment system so that an appropriate RFP can be issued (or other steps taken)—including recommendations regarding how embedded assessments or items can be implemented in a manner consistent with relevant local assessments;

b. make recommendations regarding the coverage of particular standards and benchmarks on the new summative and embedded assessments, weighting the content to ensure appropriate coverage of the depth and breadth of state standards (all in a manner consistent with Recommendation No. 3); and

c. provide additional information regarding the likely feasibility of options and costs associated with the statewide assessment and accountability systems, as discussed in Recommendation No. 19.

20.2 In the longer term, and building on Wyoming's Performance Standards in the relevant subject areas and grades (with a focus on what students at each relevant grade level should be expected to know), the Design Task Force should help operationalize the concepts of "advanced," "proficient," "basic," and "below basic." The work of the Design Task Force in this regard should include recommendations regarding the establishment of cut scores on the new summative and embedded assessments.

Rationale:

- A process that maximizes public participation with a focus on the critical implementation issues that cannot be resolved at this early stage is critical to achieving the vision set forth in these recommendations. The recommended Design Task Force can help continue the work of this Task Force and ensure that the statewide assessment system reflects the values and expectations of Wyoming's citizenry, just as it adheres to principles of sound education policy and legal requirements.

Note:

- Given the time and effort that has been involved in developing this Report, this Task Force recommends that it continue its work as part of the Design Task Force, and that the Design Task

Force also include additional classroom teachers and administrators, as well as university officials with relevant expertise. In addition, it is critical that the Design Task Force include experts in relevant technical, policy, and legal areas (including content experts) and be guided by the expertise and experience of the Wyoming Department of Education. [See also Note, Recommendation No. 19].

- In addition, given the timelines imposed by the NCLB that relate to many of the recommendations contained in this Report, the Task Force strongly believes that its work must continue throughout the fall and winter of 2003-04. Stated differently, much of the necessary research and information gathering that should inform legislative action related to the statewide assessment system cannot wait until the state legislature is scheduled to act on these recommendations, sometime in the early spring of 2004. The following reflects the Task Force's perspectives regarding the timeline related to the development of the new statewide assessment system:

School Year	Assessment Timeline	Consequences of Timing
2003-04	The WyCAS is scheduled to be administered in the spring of 2004.	
2004-05	To effectively transition from the current WyCAS to a new statewide assessment system in a way that satisfies legal and technical requirements, new test items (at least for grades not currently assessed on the WyCAS[6]) should be field tested—just as some version of the current WyCAS is administered for grades 4, 8 and 11.	To have the necessary infrastructure in place to support the kind of field testing that will be integral to the statewide assessment design, the entity(ies) responsible for test development and field testing must begin their work during the summer or early fall of 2004. For this to occur, it will be important to reach agreement with the statewide assessment system developer no later than the summer of 2004. This means that contracts must be executed in the late spring or early summer of 2004. Contracts of this sort cannot be executed without the development of further information, set forth in Recommendation 20.1.
2005-06	Beginning no later than this school year, states must administer annual assessments in reading/language arts and math in each of grades 3 through 8, and at least once in grades 10 through 12 to meet NCLB requirements. Field testing of items can continue in the fall of 2005.	Among the risks associated with a first-time administration of a statewide assessment (without prior field testing) is the risk that such a first-time administration will not provide an empirical basis upon which to make valid educational judgments regarding what test results mean. Thus, without the recommended field testing of items in 2004-05, the results of any assessment in the spring of 2006 are likely to be less valid and reliable, possibly affecting Wyoming's NCLB status.

As a consequence, the Task Force believes that the Design Task Force should begin the recommended work immediately.

[6] Wyoming owns the items that are part of the current WyCAS, some of which may be used in subsequent test administrations.

III. CONCLUSION

The Task Force is grateful to have had the opportunity to work on behalf of the citizens of Wyoming in the name of improving educational opportunities and outcomes for all of our youth. There is no higher calling. And there is no greater challenge.

Based on our work in the past six months, we know that these recommendations may set the course for education reform in the State of Wyoming for many, many years. We are confident in our shared vision, and are hopeful that members of the Wyoming Legislature and the public at large will help ensure that the vision set forth in this Report becomes a reality.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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APPENDIX TWO: TASK FORCE RESOURCES

The resource materials that informed decisions of the Task Force included:

	Title	Author/Publisher
1	Standards For Educational and Psychological Testing	American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education (1999).
2	Testing, Teaching and Learning, A Guide for States and School Districts	National Research Council, Committee on Title I Testing and Assessment, Board on Testing and Assessment, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Richard F. Elmore and Robert Rothman, Editors, National Academy Press (2003).
3	High Stakes Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation	National Research Council, Committee on Appropriate Test Use, Board on Testing and Assessment, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Jay P. Heubert and Robert M. Hauser, Editors, National Academy Press (1999).
4	The Use of Tests as Part of High-Stakes Decision-Making for Students: A Resource Guide for Educators and Policy-Makers	U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2000).

	Title	Author/Publisher
5	Reporting Test Results for Students with Disabilities and English-Language Learners: Summary of a Workshop	Board on Testing and Assessment, Center for Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Judith Anderson Koenig, editor, National Academy Press (2002).
6	Standards and Assessments, Non-Regulatory Draft Guidance	U.S. Department of Education (March 10, 2003).

APPENDIX THREE: GLOSSARY

This glossary provides definitions of terms as used in the text of the Report and Recommendations.

Accommodation. A change in how a test is presented, administered or in how the test-taker is allowed to respond, which does not substantially alter what the test measures.

Assessment. Any systematic method of obtaining information from tests or other sources, used to make inferences about student, school, district and state performance.

Body of evidence assessment system. Wyoming's *body of evidence assessment system* is a component of district assessment systems that determines "the various levels of student performance as described in the uniform student content and performance standards relative to the common core of knowledge and skills" in statutorily-designated subject areas. *See §21-3-110(a)(xxiv) and §21-9-101(b).*

Content standards. Standards that establish the expectations for students in subject matter areas at particular grade levels or at the completion of a level of schooling.

Norm-referenced test. A test that provides scores that may be interpreted in relation to the performance of other students. Norm-referenced tests should be contrasted with criterion-referenced tests, which provides scores that may be interpreted in relation to a functional performance level, such as state performance standards.

Performance standards. A designation of a particular level of performance associated with more general content standards that may guide judgments regarding the establishment of cut scores.

Statewide assessment system. Wyoming's *statewide assessment system* measures student progress based upon "uniform educational program and student content and performance standards," which "shall be aligned to statewide educational program standards." *See §21-2-304(v).* Multiple assessments or other sources of information may, taken together, establish the *statewide assessment system.*