

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910778072903321
Titolo	Strong states, weak schools [[electronic resource] ] : the benefits and dilemmas of centralized accountability // edited by Bruce Fuller, Melissa K. Henne, Emily Hannum
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Bingley, : Emerald JAI, 2008
ISBN	1-280-77079-1 9786613681560 1-84663-911-5
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (252 p.)
Collana	Research in sociology of education, , 1479-3539 ; ; v. 16
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Disciplina	371.200973
Soggetti	School management and organization - United States Educational accountability - United States Educational evaluation - United States Teacher effectiveness - United States Organization & management of education Education - Administration - General
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and subject index.
Nota di contenuto	Liberal learning in centralizing states / Bruce Fuller -- Accountability and teaching practices: school-level actions and teacher responses / Laura S. Hamilton ... [et al.] -- District leaders eroding school coherence? The interpretation of accountability mandates / Thomas F. Luschei and Gayle S. Christensen -- Tightening the ship or slowly sinking? Reshaping teacher's work conditions / Kristin Gordon -- Raising achievement or closing gaps? Identifying effective accountability tools / Melissa K. Henne and Heeju Jang -- High stakes diplomas: organizational responses to California's high school exit exam / Jennifer Jellison Holme -- District capacity and accountability: professional development as reform tool / Soung Bae -- Exit exams and organizational change in a vocational high school / Michele

Civic leaders around the globe now press educators to raise the performance of students and schools. Backed by a colorful array of odd bedfellows - from corporate interests to advocates for the poor - politicians seek to narrow the aims of learning, advance routine curricular packages, and tightly align standardized tests. Why are governments pushing to centrally regulate teaching and learning at this historical moment? Do these accountability mechanisms succeed in boosting student achievement? How are teachers responding to top-down rules, incentives, and the recasting of what knowledge counts inside school? These are the hotly contested ideological and empirical questions asked by this volume's contributors, a rich mix of sociologists, applied anthropologists, and education researchers. As public schools struggle to regain public confidence, political actors eagerly try to look strong and forceful. But do centralized accountability policies lift the motivation of teachers and students? Or, is this reform strategy a brilliant political remedy - but one that makes little difference inside the classroom.