

**Accountability in Public Education**

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### ***Introduction***

**Measuring the amount of achievement in working toward goals and objectives is an endeavor that touches every facet of our lives. We are constantly evaluating our performance. How well did we do at the office last week? Did we clean the outside AND the inside of the car? How far have we come in saving for that big widget we've been working for? Last Tuesday, we took part as a nation in a kind of evaluation – the presidential election. This was a contest of philosophy as measured against the outcomes of the previous eight years.**

**In the field of public education everybody has an opinion, an expectation, and a 'say' in what gets done. After all, we taxpayers are footing the bill, and we are constantly reminded that the education of our young people is essential to the continued prosperity of our country.**

**So, how are we doing today really? The following facts about our schools were listed in the "Where We Stand: American Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," an endeavor funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation:**

- Out of 30 developed countries, U.S. students rank 25<sup>th</sup> in math and 21<sup>st</sup> in science.**
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce gives most states a C, D, or F in preparing young people for the workplace.**
- In 1970, the average college graduate earned about 45% more than a high school graduate; today, the gap is 84%.**
- The U.S. spends 7.4% of its gross national product on education. It ranks at the bottom worldwide in percentage of Federal spending on education.**

- Last year, the U.S. spent \$489.4 billion to educate an estimated 49.6 million K-12 students in public school.
- 24 out of 50 states spend less per pupil in low-income districts than affluent ones. While 40% of U. S. high schools do not offer college prep classes, 1.2 million high school students took Advanced Placement (AP) exams in 2005; more than twice the number in 1997.
- 87% of Americans have finished high school before their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday; 30% have bachelor's degrees.
- In 2007, Americans earned 699,000 associate's degrees; 631,000 master's degrees; and 55,300 doctoral degrees. (Gates, Bill and Melinda Foundation)

Accountability in public education is a high-stakes concern of our society. That said, finding a way to measure our educational program in light of the fiscal resources available to them is of great importance. However, until recently “. . . the structure and workings of accountability systems were not well understood by policy makers or educators. (Ladd, p. 89) Everybody knew the questions, but nobody knew how to determine the answers. Those questions, among others, included: What should students be accountable for? What, specifically, should students know and/or be able to do, and at what grade level should they do it? What or who is at fault if they can't do it, and what are the interventions in place to help them catch up? Finally, to whom is the student accountable – to him/her self, to parents, to the economic community that will be their future employers, or to all of the above?

If you chose “all of the above,” you were right. I remember a discussion with colleagues years ago about what it would take to create the ideal school. After a long discussion, we agreed that the very best way was to let the principal select the parents. The implication here is that the best schools involve the teacher, the

students themselves, and the parent as well as the community in a young person's education. It's the "It takes a village to raise a child" thing.

But back to accountability. Reduced to essentials, accountability in education seeks to assure that the dollars spent to provide for and enable learning (the costs) can be justified by the quantity and quality of the learning acquired (the benefit). The tools that measure the success of school systems, of teachers, and of students, begin with the expectations of the society for the world of work and for the quality of life.

Cognizant of those expectations, public schools must organize a sequential learning program that accepts students where they are developmentally, and takes them, at the least, where society expects/needs them to be. Costs and benefits go hand in hand. And doing more with less IS the expectation. Doing better than others in the state, nation, and world is the hope.

#### *Accountability Through the Years*

Accountability practices have changed throughout the history of American public education. As you might expect, some kind of test has most often been used to determine success, failure, or the amount of growth. Tests have been, and continue to be, the scorecard--the bedrock of accountability. An example of one such accountability piece is a test for grade eight students in Kansas in 1890. This test assesses the skills needed for employment and for functioning in daily life in 1890.<sup>(8th</sup>

Grade Final Exam: Salina, Kansas-1895) The content of the Kansas test reflects the nature of the society it served. It is important to remember that the needs of society determine what we teach and what students are expected to learn.

Education was cited by the Founding Fathers as a necessary and sufficient condition for a successful Republic. In the early years, most people lived in small communities or on farms and earned a living off the land or the sea. Local communities and, later, individual states provided whatever education was deemed necessary.

The curriculum of early public schools consisted of reading and arithmetic. Reading was included so individuals could read the Bible, pamphlets and almanacs. Arithmetic was included so that individuals could engage in the business of living. The early private schools offered what we would call today a classic education. They served students who wanted to pursue the clergy, the law, or another profession.

As the country matured, the need for more schooling grew, and the curriculum expanded to satisfy those needs. Facilities grew from the one room school house serving students in grades one to eight to the complexes of buildings and support facilities that serve children in grades Kindergarten through grade 12 today.

In the 1800's, it was the township trustee who was accountable for education. The trustee's job was to provide the building, the books, and the supplies with an eye on keeping costs low. The trustee hired a teacher whose salary likely increased until the money ran low. One option the trustee had then was to dismiss, without cause, the experienced teacher and hire a new, less experienced one at a lower cost. Out of these practices came the teacher tenure laws.

From the beginning, costs and student achievement have been the major concerns in delivering education. When I left teaching for administration in the

early 70's, the first meeting I attended was chaired by the late Dr. John Young, a Quester and a highly respected school administrator. Dr. Young reminded us that even with increased costs in education, the cost of schooling was still a bargain. He was fond of saying that the per-hour cost of schooling was about the same as the per- hour cost of baby sitting. At school, however, the child was cared for six hours a day and was taught to read and cipher in the bargain.

With growth came a need for increased accountability. But how to measure, that was the problem. Until the mid 1990's judgments on quality of education centered on buildings, the number of teachers, and the amounts and types of materials including books, chalk, and slates.

High schools and colleges worked hard to be accredited by the agency for their region. For Indiana, the North Central Association of High Schools and Colleges was that agency. Once accredited, the public was assured that the school met the physical, instructional materials, and curriculum needs for classes taught. Almost without exception, decisions about accreditation of a school were rendered on the basis of what materials, people, and equipment went into education – the inputs – as opposed to measures of the results – or outcomes –of the learning of the students being served.

#### *Management by Objectives*

Following the impact of Sputnik in 1957 and changes wrought by President Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of the 60s, business, industry and schools began to rely on resource management systems for accountability. "Management by Objectives" was one such system. In the early 1970s,

the Indiana General Assembly mandated Indiana schools to participate in a Management by Objectives type of program called the Program Planning & Budgeting System (PPBS). Fort Wayne Community Schools was one of the school corporations in the state to pilot the program. The cost of each school program was determined by projecting costs for teacher salary, facility space, and materials/support services. Resulting data was supposed to be the basis for budgeting school funds. PPBS systems had already been used by many school districts across the country. PPBS generated a large amount a data, data which were intended for use in making decisions about educational programs. The data were so prolific that FWCS people began to call PPBS “Piles and piles of BS.

One hundred school districts with at least five years’ experience each with PPBS were surveyed to determine the extent to which information created by PPBS was being used to make decisions about school programming. Results indicated that decisions were not impacted by data generated by PPBS.<sup>9, p. 129, Item 10</sup> The system had become self-serving. The Indiana General Assembly wisely revoked the PPBS mandate in 1976.

As an accountability piece, PPBS gave school business officials some of what they needed to know. Educators may have benefited from knowing the cost for each program, but what they really needed was information about the success of the educational program itself -- the impact on students. More sophisticated accountability tools were still needed for that.

*A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, edited by Terrence Bell, then Secretary of Education. It expressed concern that American students were STILL

deficient in reading, writing, and computation skills. In reality, that publication gave precise meaning to what the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) had been saying. Our youth were not performing as well as students in other industrialized nations. The Bell report resulted in a host of reforms and innovations. One such reform focused on moving the teaching of reading away from a literature-based approach toward a phonetics-based one. Today, both approaches are used.

Another reform centered on Merit Pay for teachers. Monetary incentives in a merit pay system would be the carrots leading teachers to master a broader range of competencies, and thus leading students to demonstrate higher achievement.

Merit Pay is loaded with problems such as: How much money can be devoted to meritorious rewards when 90% percent of the budget is already going to salaries and wages of school employees? Is or should the amount of monetary reward be indicative of the amount of student achievement realized? The topic, by itself, might be another Quest paper for some fearless person.

### *The Standards Movement*

The late 20th Century ushered in the next big piece of the accountability puzzle--the Standards. Developed mainly by such professional organizations as the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Language Arts Association, the Standards define specifically what students should know and when they should know it.

Algebra, for example, is a strand that goes all the way through the K-12 math curriculum. Why? As early as 20 years ago employers in manufacturing areas said



employees of the future would need a working knowledge of algebra. The needs demanded an addition, in this case, to the math curriculum. When kids today take the homework home for help, their parents say things like... “This is not what I learned in third grade – we learned to multiply. This new math is nuts.” The point is, today’s students are still expected to know multiplication tables by the end of grade three, but concepts related to problem solving, graphing, estimating, and geometry are also expectations for mathematics.

Of course, not every child will work with algebraic algorithms, but all will need some skill in finding an unknown quantity. Thankfully, one of the rare principles of education is that any subject can be taught to students in an academically honest way at any age providing the level of abstraction is appropriate and enough time is provided for the learning to occur. Algebra, Chemistry, Latin, and even Opera can be taught to preschoolers if the material is presented at the proper level of abstraction. Of course, Opera to a youngster might look and sound like *The Lion King* or *Cinderella*, but the child can grasp some of the conventions of Opera and understand the message.

Until recently, what was being taught was not aligned with what was being tested. Students may have learned about use of proper nouns in grade three, for example, but may not have been tested on them until grade five. As a result of the Standards movement, school systems have had to revise their curricula—dropping and adding as necessary—and have aligned what they are teaching with what the state expects students to know and be able to do. The Standards movement, then, is

**a major development that has led to improved and authentic measures of student achievement.** (Ladd, p. 99)

**Specifically, a Standards-based curriculum centers on:**

- **Measured student performances as the basis for school accountability**
- **The development of a system of standards that are aligned with test items so that results can be compared by class, individual, school, and locality (the apples to apples factor)**
- **The creation of systems of rewards, penalties, and intervention strategies as incentives for improvement at the individual school level.**

(Ladd, p. 65)

**Most states have adopted a set of standards for each of the major academic disciplines: math, language arts, social studies, science, and history. For Indiana, the standards for mathematics and language arts are the subjects tested on ISTEP, the statewide test for educational progress. There is also some testing on Science and social studies.**

**All the ISTEP test questions are derived from the Standards, making the test a great accountability piece. Knowing that, teachers began teaching to the ISTEP...as they should have been doing all along. Where is the value in holding students, or anybody for that matter, accountable for content and material they have not studied? Most recently, ISTEP has been given in the fall of the year with disaggregated scores available in November. But effective in 2009, ISTEP will be given in the spring of the year so that teachers have data on student weaknesses by opening of the new fall term.**

**A new tool the state has required this year is yet another accountability piece--the "curriculum map." It reflects the specific standards taught, instructional**

materials used, and teaching methodologies used on a daily basis. A blank cell on the spreadsheet is included for the teacher to add personal materials and remedial or enrichment items and to record effectiveness of the materials used.

*No Child Left Behind*

NCLB was designed to be an accountability piece, one imposed by the Federal government that directs work through State Education Agencies. Congress passed No Child Left Behind in 2002 with significant bipartisan support. It is landmark education legislation. To meet the demands of the law “all students are expected to meet or exceed State standards in reading and math within 12 years.”

(Spillings , p-1)

According to Margaret Spellings, the United States Secretary of Education, “accountability is central to the success of No Child Left Behind. States need to set high standards for improving academic achievement in order to improve the quality of education for all students.” The NCLB mandates that the state define the particulars of concepts central to NCLB. The law demands that “...adequate yearly progress (AYP) be demonstrated to determine the achievement of each school district and school.”(Spillings)

The two most challenging provisions and the core of NCLB are: 1.) that every student is expected to make adequate yearly progress, and 2.) that “...schools are held accountable for the achievement of all students,” not just an average of student performances.

The statute does give the local district some flexibility in designing its plan including a “...list of consequences under ‘school improvement’ for ‘corrective

**action’ and ‘restructuring’. For example, under ‘corrective action’ the options range from limited consequences such as hiring an outside expert to advise a school on how to make adequate yearly progress, to more significant measures such as replacing school staff or restructuring the internal organization of a school.” “States are free to build on the statutory requirements and to develop differentiated responses based on the degree to which a school has not made Annual Yearly Progress. The law does not prescribe how States must officially designate schools that do not meet AYP requirements.” That is left to the States to determine.<sup>(Spillings)</sup>**

**The rigor of the term “all” students makes such a goal seem unrealistic to many because it increases significantly the expectations for achievement by students with special needs. Students with special needs like learning disabilities, slightly or even greatly reduced abilities to learn, students with unpredictable emotional issues and speech and or hearing problems, physical and mobility issues are now being tested on the same playing field as students without these special needs.**

**The tried and true normal distribution of intelligence--the bell curve--is no longer relevant. In reality, most educators I know believe that all children can learn, but not at the same level or depth. Many also believe that the learning for children with special needs will take more time --more time for drill and practice, more time for hands on experiences, more time for self-image building, more time for mastery of the basic skills of living. NCLB is up for reauthorization by the next Congress. Hopefully, in its reauthorization cycle, issues like special needs and adequate yearly progress can be addressed with more understanding.**

***Balanced Scorecard***

**FWCS implemented a new assessment tool system-wide this past year called the Balanced Scorecard.** <sup>(What is the Balanced Scorecard?)</sup> **Based on the three goals adopted by the FWCS school board, the Scorecard is a management system that allows the school corporation to set, track, and achieve their goals and strategic objectives. The three FWCS goals include: to achieve and maintain academic excellence, engage parents and community, and operate with fiscal responsibility, integrity, and effectiveness. John Kline, the director of school improvement for FWCS, characterizes the Balanced Scorecard as a model with teeth because it is so specific.**

**The Scorecard sets targets for continuous improvement. For example, one objective for academic excellence is to increase the number of students passing the Language Arts section of ISTEP/ for students in grades 3-5 from 67% for year 2007-08 to 72% for year 2008-09. That level of specificity is set for students in all grades in math and language arts. That level of specificity is also set for expected performance levels for principals, and for building facility concerns. An evaluation piece for teachers, all administrators, and support staff will also be added in coming years. FWCS is the first corporation in the state to use the system. Indianapolis is adding it this year and it is expected that the state will adopt it for all Indiana schools in the near future.**

#### ***Other Factors***

**I have not mentioned other factors related to public education that impact the whole accountability issue. Charter Schools, Private Schools including parochial, and even the Magnet School/programs within a public school corporation reflect the public's attitude about its schools. People do vote with their feet. For**

**Charters and Privates, the data on student achievement varies. For Magnet Schools there is clear evidence—at least in Fort Wayne-- that parents favor magnet programs within public schools. The decision to stay with any school, when made over time, is another accountability factor in terms of the faith and trust extended by the community.**

**Other factors are often overlooked in measuring the quality of schools. About 20 percent of families in the U.S. (one out of every five) move every year. Yet there is no national curriculum. Students who move from one state to another have more and different challenges than those who stay in the same school. Within FWCS, as many as 70% of the students at one of the elementary schools will move to another school within the year. Having a uniform curriculum throughout the system helps the students adjust more readily when moving from one attendance area to another.**

**Keep in mind here too that there have always been students who perform below expected levels or who cannot perform at average or above-average levels. Until the 1970's, many such students could quit school and get good-paying jobs in manufacturing, transportation, or the service industry. When I was the assistant principal at Snider in the 70's, scarcely a week passed without a student wanting to drop out of school to work at the Harvester. It was possible for them to earn as much or more than beginning teachers in those days. And it was not unusual for parents to support their child's intent to quit school.**

**But, in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, good paying jobs for low-skilled workers have vanished. Global competition has created a demand for increased productivity.**

**Workers are needed now who have positive attitudes and skills and are sufficiently well educated and flexible enough to change when job demands change.** (Ladd, pp. 1-3)

**World events are another factor impacting schools. For example, when Sputnik was launched in 1957 by the Russians, a cry for increased science and math was heard throughout the country. It was the birth of the science fair and addition of lots more science classes. Nearly a decade later under President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) went into effect. Two of its goals were: to train K-12 and college teachers in math, science, social studies, language arts, and humanities and to provide remedial education for students from economically deprived homes. Now we have President Bush's No Child Left Behind as the response to fear that the U.S. is not competing globally.**

### **Conclusions**

**As a society we are slow to embrace change, especially change that is not fully funded by the directing agency. The title of this paper is Accountability in Public Education: What Works? Before a final response to that question can be framed, other pieces of information need to be put in the mix and considered. The 1,000 pound gorilla in the room is that educators, researchers, neurologists, psychologists, and sub-Continent gurus still don't know everything or maybe even much about learning. While there are theories of how learning occurs, there are no laws of learning. There are no silver bullets. There is some understanding of the relationships between certain methodologies and learning, however, and these understandings are the stuff of teacher continuing education.**

**But much, much more remains on the list of things to be understood. With the push for accountability has come the need for re-education not just of teachers but also of administrators and support staffs, members of school boards, parents and cities as a whole. With curriculum mapping has come the need for teachers to untangle a variety of methodologies, procedures, and/or materials to find the one that will work best with the individual student who just doesn't get it. With the Basic Scorecard has come the need to re-train administrators—especially principals—to be instructional leaders for their buildings and not just facility managers. With ISTEP and NCLB has come a need for students to take responsibility for their own learning, to treat school as a place of preparation for their entry into a global society.**

**Finally, the focus on accountability in the field of public education is good and necessary. After all, we are paying for our public schools AND somebody has to deal with the problems that develop from an undereducated and under-performing work force. It is a given that the education of our young people is essential to the continued prosperity of our country.**

**And, the technological ability to disaggregate data has opened up the world of accountability. It is possible to evaluate student performance on the basis of outcomes instead of the inputs that were used until late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Disaggregated data makes it possible for teachers and principals to identify specific concepts and standards with laser-like precision so they can use a variety of re-teaching and intervention procedures to bring all students up to or above an accepted level of yearly progress.** <sup>(Ladd, p. 57)</sup> **It is now technically possible to disaggregate data from**



**all kinds of resources including standardized tests, inventories, and other assessments to analyze achievement from a variety of perspectives.**

***Additional Observations***

**Teachers are busy people. The pressure to keep current in terms of research findings, techniques of teaching, use of technology and a whole host of other such things is real pressure. Some teachers respond to such challenges –while others, not so much so. Margaret Mead, the noted anthropologist, reminds us that there are really only two kinds of teachers -- those who re-learn everything they know every five years, and those who say the kids just get worse and worse. To re-learn everything they know every five years is an exceptional expectation that demands acknowledgement and accommodation. Accountability has always been a part of the educational process. It was at one time mostly limited to looking at inputs – cost, the size of the classroom, the number of lockers versus the number of students. Now, accountability focuses on achievement. Has Johnny made adequate yearly progress this year? Every facet of the school district personnel has a part in making this happen “from the board room to the classroom.”**

**The purpose of this paper, again, was to identify some of what works in accountability systems. By what works I mean what communicates with stake holders in the education process and what activity results in increased learning and skill development by students. I’ve taken the liberty of identifying some of the practices that seem to contribute to quality accountability.**

**Publication of data:** The results of any accountability study or practice must be published. For the educator, knowing that the outcomes of his/her work will be shared with stakeholders and the public at large serves as a powerful motivator.

1. **Improve communication with stake holders;** Accountability calls for involvement of all the players through communication and feedback with student, parents, administrators, guidance counselors, and support staff.
2. **Use of technology to record and process data as well as present and re-present concepts intended to be learned:** As a culture, we have learned that the use of technology can and usually does increase our productivity. Technology has been especially helpful in managing mounds of data to improve achievement.
3. **Motivation :** Much has been written about the cause and effect of motivation. For teachers, let them lead, let them create, let them inspire, or, in the words of Maslow, let them seek to self-actualize. And above all, give teachers a place in the sun.
4. **Frequent assessments:** This helps to keep all involved -- teachers, students, administrators, and parents--focused on achievement. Assessment is a time when you are up at bat..
5. **Systematic caring for children:** Students lead lives that are often of self-fulfilling prophecies. Caring and achievement are the predecessors of confidence and positive self-concept. Poor achievers have often missed out on the caring that is so necessary for a successful life.

6. **Demand instructional leadership:** The role of school administrators has changed. The administrator might be defined as dictator, the philosopher king, the cheer leader, father/mother figure, manager of all things great and good, or retired coach. While he or she may need to be all of these, above all the principal in today's world must be an instructional leader first.
7. **Create Ownership by Stake Holders:** Success is contagious. When stakeholders understand and have ownership in the schooling they are able to celebrated and witness to other the efficacy of the schooling.<sup>(Platt, p. 129, Item 10)</sup>  
The impact of positive accountability is to create ownership.

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