

## **About Short-term Outcome Indicators for School Use and the Need for an Expanded Policy Framework**

(March, 2011)

### **Abstract**

This brief (1) defines indicators, (2) places the concept into the context of the various ways indicators can be used in education, (3) explores some specific considerations and concerns that arise in evaluating results, (4) offers a categorization and examples of short-term outcome indicators for school use, and (5) stresses the need for policy makers to expand the accountability framework for schools.

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## About Short-term Outcome Indicators for School Use and the Need for an Expanded Policy Framework

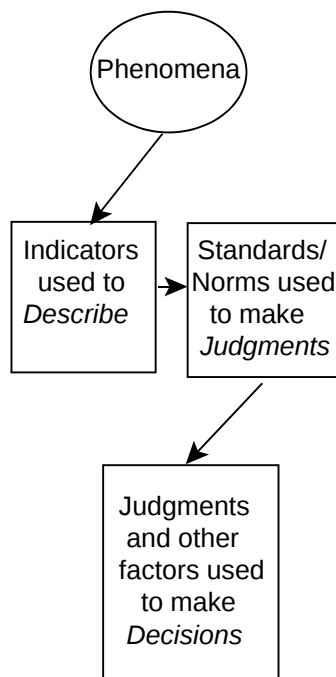
*Given the large emphasis that society places on using indicators as measures of performance and descriptions of status and change, the rarity with which we exercise any critical assessment of these measures is surprising.*

Planty & Carlson (2010)

**W**ith accountability mandates and the emphasis on science-based interventions, the term indicators is widely used in school circles. However, it often is employed so generically that many users are unclear where it broadly fits into assessment and evaluation practices and decision making for policy and planning.

The following discussion (1) defines indicators, (2) places the concept into the context of the various ways indicators can be used in education, (3) explores some specific considerations and concerns that arise in evaluating results, (4) offers a categorization and examples of short-term outcome indicators for school use, and (5) stresses the need for policy makers to expand the accountability framework for schools.

### What Are Indicators in Education?



Simply stated, an indicator is a pointer that has been developed to focus on and usually quantify useful information about a matter of interest (e.g., current status of students, school performance). Indicators vary in the degree to which they provide direct information, usually expressed quantitatively. Single statistic indicators (e.g., dropout rates) often are used in conveying the status of the education system. Several indicators can be combined into a composite index that encompasses multiple dimensions and increasingly complex phenomena.

Indicators have been described as bits of information that help clarify the characteristics and status of individuals and systems, highlight changes, underscore distance from intended goals, and project the future. To these ends, indicators may focus on inputs, processes, outputs, and/or outcomes.

The importance of indicators stems from reasons underlying their use. Broadly defined, indicators can be used to meet education's many *assessment* needs and play a major role in policy and practice decision making. In general, indicators are used to monitor and describe a myriad of phenomena in order to make judgments ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative. Of particular concern are current conditions relevant to learning and progress in achieving immediate objectives, intermediate goals, and long-term aims. Indicators also are used to project what the future will bring.

Shavelson, McDonnell, and Oakes (1991) proposed the following working definition as a heuristic guide: *An indicator is an individual or composite statistic that relates to a basic construct in education and is useful in a policy context.*

They state:

“Education indicators are statistics that reflect important aspects of the education system, but not all statistics about education are indicators. Statistics qualify as indicators only if they serve as yardsticks. That is, they must tell a great deal about the entire system by reporting the condition of a few particularly significant features of it. For example, the number of students enrolled in schools is an important fact, but it does little to tell us how well the education system is functioning. However, data on the proportion of secondary students who have successfully completed advanced study in mathematics can provide considerable insight into the health of the system, and can be appropriately considered an indicator. ...

Whether indicators are single or composite statistics, a single indicator can rarely provide useful information about such a complex phenomenon as schooling. Indicator systems are usually designed to generate more and more accurate information about conditions. However, an indicator system is more than just a collection of indicator statistics. Ideally, a system of indicators measures distinct components of the system and also provides information about how the individual components work together to produce the overall effect. In other words, the whole of the information provided by a system of indicators is greater than the sum of its parts.”

An indicator is based on underlying assumptions and is only one source for understanding a complex phenomenon

Indicators often are delineated to capture complex phenomena related to students and schools (e.g., student achievement and engagement, school improvement). In such cases, the indicators are focused on *constructs* (i.e., abstract terms used to represent complex concepts). Constructs, of course, are difficult to measure. The construct *engagement* exemplifies the point. This multi-dimensional construct has been divided into three categories – behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Indicators used to measure the construct overlap the three dimensions and are highly correlated with each other. But the three dimension correlate differently with such outcomes as achievement, attendance, and dropping out (National Center for School Engagement, 2006a, b). Other prominent examples of indicators for school-relevant constructs are found in the literature on *school climate* (National School Climate Council, 2010) and *social emotional development* (Isakson, Davidson, Higgins, & Cooper, 2009, 2011).

### **Indicators & Accountability**

Indicators are used as a core facet of accountability and related decision making. Indeed, much of the current emphasis on indicators in education derives from accountability demands (as evidenced by the many formulations of education indicators on the internet).

Thus, the prevailing cry is for specific outcome evidence – usually in terms of readily measured immediate benefits – and for cost containment (see Exhibit 1). Although understandable in light of the unfulfilled promise of so many programs and the insatiable demands on sparse public finances, a narrow results emphasis can be counterproductive. That is, while the prevailing sets of short-term outcome indicators are used as red flags, these indicators alone do not clarify trends or cause and effect, often gloss over important subgroup differences, and rarely include a focus on unintended results. Thus, accountability indicators alone offer too little information to guide practices for improving results.

## Exhibit 1

### Key Performance Indicators and Leading Indicators

The emphasis on accountability has generated considerable discussion of (1) Key Performance Indicators and (2) Leading Indicators.

- (1) As summarized in Wikipedia, “Key Performance Indicators define a set of values used to measure against. These raw sets of values, which are fed to systems in charge of summarizing the information, are called indicators. Indicators identifiable as possible candidates for KPIs can be summarized into the following sub-categories:
  - >Quantitative indicators which can be presented as a number.
  - >Practical indicators that interface with existing company processes.
  - >Directional indicators specifying whether an organization is getting better or not.
  - >Actionable indicators are sufficiently in an organization's control to effect change.
  - >Financial indicators used in performance measurement and when looking at an operating index

Key Performance Indicators, in practical terms and for strategic development, are objectives to be targeted that will add the most value to the business. These are also referred to as Key Success Indicators.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance\\_indicator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_indicator) )

- (2) A *leading indicator* is a statistic that predicts trends, usually economic trends. For example, in education, improved average yearly attendance may be a leading indicator for long-term school improvement. However, short-term increases or decreases in a leading indicator often are not predictive of longer-term trends. Besides achievement indicators (including the achievement gap), examples of other leading indicators in education are attendance/truancy, school attachment/engagement, and dropout/graduation rates.

An example of the use of leading indicators for schools comes from Iowa (Iowa Department of Education with the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development, 2004). The state’s results-oriented approach has specified six long-term aims and a set of leading indicators related to each. Note that the indicators include both school and community data:

- 1) All Iowa youth are successful in school.
  - Leading Indicators:
    - % of 8th graders proficient in reading
    - % of 8th graders proficient in math
    - Average daily attendance rate
    - % of students who drop out of school (grades 9-12)
    - % of youth who are committed to school/learning

(cont.)

- 2) All Iowa youth are healthy and socially competent.  
 Leading Indicators:  
 Rate of juvenile delinquency complaints per 10,000 youth  
 % of youth reporting not using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs during last 30 days  
 % of youth reporting they have neither planned, considered, nor tried to commit suicide  
 % of youth who report that they have not engaged in violent/aggressive behavior
- 3) All Iowa youth are prepared for a productive adulthood.  
 Leading Indicators:  
 Rate at which students graduate from high school.  
 % of 16 – 19 year olds who are not in school and who are not working.  
 % of youth who report that they help others 3+ hours/wk  
 % of 11th grade youth who report that they work 3+ hours per week in paid job  
 Rate of births to teen aged mothers age13-17
- 4) All Iowa youth are in safe and supportive schools.  
 Leading Indicators:  
 # of long-term suspensions or expulsions for violent crimes on school grounds or at school-sponsored events  
 % of youth who report that staff and students at their school support them.  
 % of youth who report that the norms of the peers in their school are positive.  
 % of youth who report that they feel safe at school.
- 5) All Iowa youth are in safe and supportive families.  
 Leading Indicators:  
 Rate of children found to be neglected or abused  
 % of families in the child welfare system  
 % of youth who report that their families are involved with and support them.  
 % of youth reporting that their families provide them with boundaries
- 6) All Iowa youth are in safe and supportive communities.  
 Leading Indicators:  
 Rate of adult arrests  
 % of families living below the poverty level  
 Rate of persons who are employed  
 % of youth who report that their neighborhoods are safe.  
 % of youth who report that their neighborhoods are supportive.

On a national level, Child Trends (2009) has suggested core goals, desired results, and data sources related to 21 leading indicators for the *Promise Neighborhoods* initiative.

*Indicators must be related to one another so that their relationships, and changes in these relationships, can be ascertained to suggest possible explanations for observed changes in outcomes.* (Shavelson, McDonnell, & Oakes, 1991)

#### **Criteria for Choosing Indicators**

If data are already being gathered using a broad band set of indicators, available data may be sufficient. Otherwise proposals for new indicators must be formulated in ways that enhance rather than detract from an integrated approach to meeting education's many data needs.

In choosing indicators, the emphasis is on considerations such as (1) relevance, (2) how useful and timely the data will be,

(3) how reliably and validly the indicators can be measured, (4) which indicators already are being measured and what it will cost to amass existing data, and (5) what it will cost to gather and analyze data related to new indicators. These considerations are of particular concern when new initiatives and specially funded projects are adopted and call for additional data.

### Using Indicators in Schools for More than Accountability

Understanding education's *assessment* needs and practices provides a broad context for thinking about indicators. Formally defined, assessment is the process by which attributes of phenomena are *described* and *judged*. Descriptions take the form of data gathered by formal and informal measures, such as tests, structured observations and interviews, self-reports, surveys, available records, and so forth. Designated indicators guide what is and isn't measured. Judgments take the form of interpretive conclusions about the meaning of data, such as whether a phenomenon is good or bad, above or below standard, dysfunctional or not. Judgments may represent a conclusion about the past, a statement about the present, or a prediction about the future. Judgments inform decision making.

Schools need to pursue assessment related to various functions. Besides system management data, assessment plays a key role in:

1. **Identification.** Indicators are used to help find and label phenomena of interest. The focus may be on person variables, environmental factors, or both, and on problems, strengths, or both (e.g., data to inform identification of effective teachers and effective schools; data to inform identification of gifted and talented students and those who are not doing well at school – including those needing special education).
2. **Selection.** Indicators are used to help make decisions about general changes in status (e.g., data to inform decisions about moving teachers and principals to different schools, choosing schools for special intervention, placing students in specific programs,).
3. **Planning for specific changes.** Indicators are used to decide about immediate and short-term objectives and procedures for accomplishing long-term goals (e.g., data to inform school improvement planning, professional development, specific student interventions – including data from response to intervention efforts and IEP assessments).

- 4. *Evaluation of School Results.*** Indicators are used to decide effectiveness based on positive and negative outcomes and related costs (e.g., focus may be on impact on students, particular subgroups, society as a whole). Data are used to make decisions for system improvement and policy purposes (e.g., accountability).

From this perspective, identifying or formulating indicators begins with clarity about functional needs. And, clearly, most of the above functions call for more than indicators of results.

#### **Indicators Raise Methodological, Political, and Policy Concerns**

All assessment in education is a complex matter, and controversy surrounds prevailing approaches. Some of the controversy is about the deficiencies and limitations of specific procedures (e.g., lack of standardization, poor reliability, poor validity). Broader concerns have been directed at the way assessment is practiced in schools (e.g., an overreliance on indicators of results often means that antecedent conditions/inputs and transactions are given short shrift. Political and policy concerns have been raised related to the way overreliance on indicators of results has reshaped what schools do and do not do (e.g., Ravitch, 2010).

It is important to remember that choices about what data to gather and exclude are guided by policy decisions, and major decisions about education involve considerations that go well beyond the availability of valid data. Profound and conflicting social-political-economic-philosophic agenda are at play; so no one should be surprised that relevant data often are ignored, and some data are manipulated during policy debates and at decision making tables. As Rutkowski (2008) cautions, "Through educational indicators a set of 'truths' is arguably produced. However, these 'truths' are very open to interpretation." And as Planty and Carlson (2010) stress "Indicators of poor quality certainly distort and misguide decision making and policy."

#### **Some Specific Considerations and Concerns About Evaluation of Results**

Two unfounded presumptions are at the core of most current formal and informal evaluations in education. One premise is that an intervention in widespread use must be at a relatively evolved stage of development and, therefore, warrants the cost of summative evaluation. The other supposition is that major conceptual and methodological problems associated with evaluating intervention are resolved. The truth is that interventions are frequently introduced prior to adequate development, with a view to evolving them based on what is learned each day. This is even true of many empirically supported practices brought to schools. (Remember: efficacy

data does not predict effectiveness when implemented by school personnel under common school conditions.)

Moreover, many well-institutionalized approaches remain relatively underfunded and underdeveloped. As to the process of evaluation, every review of the literature outlines major unresolved concerns. Given this state of affairs, the nature and scope of accountability demands often are unreasonable and chronically reflect a naive view of research and theory.

Evaluation involves determining the worth or value of something. As an assessment function, evaluation is defined as a systematic process designed to describe and judge the overall impact and value of an intervention for purposes of making decisions and advancing science.

Properly developed, a set of evaluative indicators can aid efforts to (1) assess efficiency, effectiveness, costs, and impact, (2) make decisions about what to do to improve schools, and (3) advance knowledge in ways that can enhance understanding of and improve policy, practice, training, and theory.

Given that many more indicators can be formulated than can be feasibly used, decisions must be made about what will be evaluated. In addition to matters highlighted above, these include decisions about (1) the general phenomena of interest (e.g., students, teachers, support staff, administrators; classroom and schoolwide conditions and climate; intervention antecedents/inputs, immediate objectives, intermediate goals, long-range aims), (2) the specific facets to be evaluated, (3) the level of specificity used in designating indicators, (4) the measures and methods for gathering data on designated indicators, and (5) the standards to be used in analyzing the data and arriving at judgments. In making such decisions, concerns arise because what can be evaluated currently is far less than what schools state as their mission. Furthermore, all such decisions are influenced by various sources of bias.

A model formulated by Robert Stake illustrates the type of frameworks used to clarify factors influencing outcomes (see Exhibit 2). Stake stresses that program evaluation requires data and criteria for analyzing the degree to which

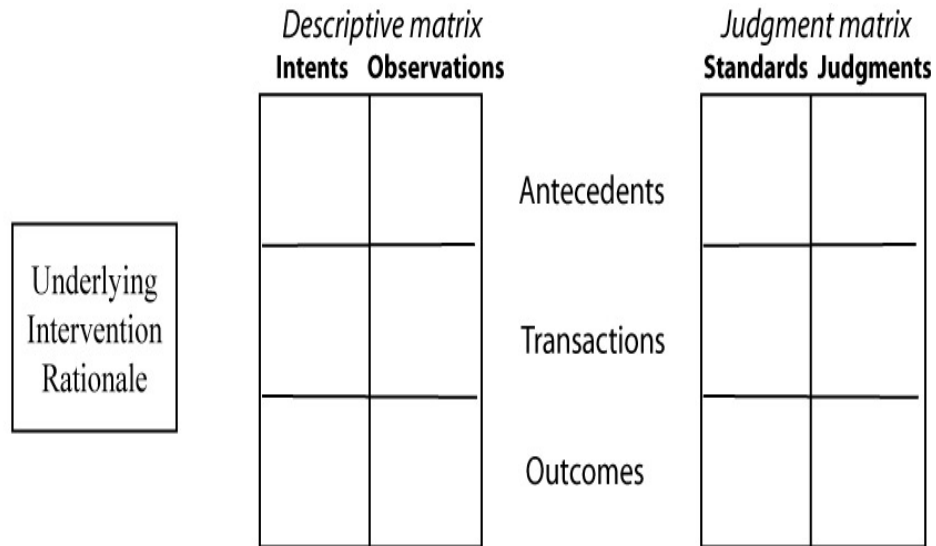
- conditions anticipated prior to the program (antecedents), planned procedures (transactions), and intended outcomes are consistent with the program rationale and are logical in relation to each other
- intended antecedents, transactions, and outcomes actually occur.

*Not all indicators are  
created equal.*

Planty & Carlson

## Exhibit 2

### A Framework for Program Evaluation



Source: R. Stake (1967). The countenance of educational evaluation. *Teachers College Record*, 68, 523–40.

In general, the types of data Stake's framework calls for can provide a wealth of information for use in describing and judging school improvement efforts and making decisions about ways to enhance such efforts. Clearly, the data can be used for purposes of accountability, but also for guiding improvements and building an empirical body of effectiveness data.

Note that evaluations of whether a practice or set of practices is any good must first address the question: *Is what is to be accomplished appropriate?* The frame of reference for such evaluations may be the underlying rationale or what others think the practices should accomplish or both. After judging the appropriateness of what is wanted or expected, the intended breadth of focus should guide efforts to evaluate effectiveness. Because not everything is measurable in a technically sophisticated way, some things will be poorly measured or simply reviewed informally. Obviously, this is less than satisfactory. Still, from a rational perspective, continued emphasis on the entire gamut of what is intended is better than limiting things to what can be measured readily or to naive accountability demands.

Finally, we stress that evaluative practice can produce negative effects. For instance, over time, what is evaluated can inappropriately reduce and reshape what a school does and doesn't do. The process is especially pernicious when indicators are used to oversimplify the complex nature, scope, and aims of education.

## **A Categorization & Examples of Short-term Outcome Indicators for School Use**

Efforts to categorize and provide specific indicators for schools generally are concerned with both academic learning outcomes and practices identified as contributing to such outcomes. A prominent example of the latter are the categories and specific indicators for effective school practice developed by the Center on Innovation and Improvement

([http://www.centerii.org/handbook/Resources/Appendix\\_Indicators\\_school.pdf](http://www.centerii.org/handbook/Resources/Appendix_Indicators_school.pdf) ).

Analyses of categories guiding evaluation of school and student outcomes indicate a need for rethinking and reframing. For example, greater attention is needed to the following:

- I. Variables Relevant to Interpreting Results
  - A. Clarification of Mission and Rationale for an Approach
  - B. Antecedents & Inputs
  - C. Processes & Transactions
  - D. Current Outcomes (positive and negative) with reference to trends and goals
- II. Content Focus
  - A. Cognitive Development and Engagement
  - B. Physical and Social Development and Behavioral Engagement
  - C. Emotional Development and Engagement
  - D. System Performance and Ongoing Development
- III. Levels
  - A. National
  - B. State
  - C. School District and Surrounding Community
  - D. School and Neighborhood
  - E. Classroom
  - F. Individuals

Exhibit 3 uses content focus (cognitive, physical, social, behavioral, and emotional development and engagement) as categories for outlining a range of short-term outcome indicators. Examples are offered for each category. In reviewing items, remember that dimensions range from negative to positive.

Again we stress that data related to complex phenomena must be interpreted cautiously and with concern for bias. Remember: a student and school are complex entities that are divided and categorized into multiple theoretical dimensions; categories are constructs; categories overlap; indicator measures have limited construct validity; chosen indicators and available measures capture only a snapshot of reality; all school data requires careful disaggregation; outcomes alone are insufficient for determining cause and effect.

## Exhibit 3

### Categories and Examples of Short-term Outcome Indicators

#### I. *Indicators of Cognitive Development and Engagement*

- A. *Maintenance and general application of knowledge* (e.g., evidence of amount learned and use of the learning at school and elsewhere)
- B. *Positive behavioral and emotional engagement in acquiring and applying knowledge* (see examples below)
- C. *Cognitive coping* (e.g., strategies used at school and elsewhere to learn and apply knowledge and overcome barriers to knowledge acquisition and use)

#### II. *Indicators of Physical and Social Development and Behavioral Engagement*

- A. *Physical health* (e.g., age-appropriate body and sensory development, safe behaviors)
- B. *Personal and social functioning and coping* as manifested in
  - 1. expressed expectations and valuing (e.g., expectations of outcomes; valuing and interest in learning at school; types of choices made when options are available)
  - 2. *conduct* (e.g., acceptance of personal responsibility; rule compliance-noncompliance; completing assignments; attendance; truancy; tardies; referrals for misbehavior; expulsion; suspension; dropping out)
  - 3. *persistence and problem solving* (e.g., effort, attention-inattention, coping-noncoping; grades)
  - 4. *participation* (e.g., in academic activities; in extracurricular activities; in social situations; on-off task; leader-follower; degree of enthusiasm; degree of involvement; initiating-withholding)

#### III. *Indicators of Emotional Development and Engagement*

- A. *School-related attitudes* (e.g., about school, teachers, peers, schoolwork, self as learner – including *feelings* of competence, self-determination, and relatedness; psychological reactance; perceptions of belonging and being cared about; perception of fairness; feeling safe-victimized; hope for the future)
- B. *Other attitudes that may be affecting engagement at school* (e.g., positive and negative feelings related to neighborhood, family, peer, self as a person – including *feelings* of competence, self-determination, and relatedness; feeling safe-victimized)
- C. *Emotional coping* (e.g., strategies used at school and elsewhere to respond to affect)

(cont.)

#### IV. Indicators of System Performance and Ongoing Development

- A. *All the above can be used as system performance indicators*
- B. *Stakeholder groups (students, families, staff, community) perceptions of school culture and climate*
- C. *System development for facilitation of cognitive, physical, social, behavioral, and emotional development and engagement (e.g., status of instruction and curriculum and schoolwide programs for facilitating learning and development)*
- D. *System of supports to address barriers to learning & teaching and re-engage disconnected students (e.g., range of interventions; status of development of interventions into a comprehensive system of student and learning supports pre-k through post secondary; integration into school improvement policy and practice)*
- E. *Development of a school-family-community collaboration for system building to enhance cognitive, physical, social, behavioral, and emotional development and engagement (e.g., status of policy, operational infrastructure, and capacity building supports for collaboration)*
- F. *Overall system governance and management (e.g., status of policy, infrastructure, monitoring and capacity building supports -- including professional and other stakeholder development, cost effectiveness and efficiency)*

#### Why Policy Makers Must Change School Accountability Practices

*Accountability indicators have extraordinary power to reshape schools. Systems are driven by what is measured for purposes of accountability. This is particularly so when systems are involved in major reform and transformation.*

Under reform conditions, policy makers often want a quick and easy recipe to use. This leads to measures aimed at holding administrators and staff accountable for specific, short-term results. Little thought is given to the negative effects such a limited focus can have on achieving more complex desired long-term results.

#### A Growing Disconnect

Current school accountability is a good example of the problem. The situation is one where accountability demands focus on a narrow set of outcome indicators. School personnel are quick to learn what will and will not be evaluated, and slowly but surely greater emphasis is placed on teaching what will be measured. Over time what is measured increasingly becomes viewed as the most important outcomes to be achieved (e.g., reading, math, science), and other educational opportunities and essential

student and learning supports are deemphasized and even dropped.

What's wrong with that? Nothing – if what is being evaluated reflects all the important things we want youngsters to learn in school and focuses on enabling equity of opportunity for success at school. This, of course, is not the case.

Prevailing accountability pressures reflect values and biases that are reshaping the entire nature and scope of schooling. As everyone involved in school improvement knows, the only measures that really count are achievement test scores. These scores drive school accountability. What the tests measure has become the be-all and end-all of school improvement policy and planning. This produces a growing disconnect between the direction in which many policy makers and school reformers are leading the public and the realities of what it takes to improve academic performance and student well-being.

The disconnect is especially evident in schools enrolling students from “low wealth” families. Such families and those who work in schools serving them have a clear appreciation of many barriers that must be addressed so students can benefit from the teacher’s efforts to teach. These stakeholders stress that major academic improvements are unlikely until comprehensive and multifaceted approaches for addressing the barriers are developed and pursued effectively.

At the same time, anyone who looks will find no direct accountability for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Ironically, the lack of an accountability focus on these matters contributes to devaluing of and justifying cuts in student and learning supports.

Thus, rather than building the type of system that can produce improved academic performance, prevailing accountability measures pressure schools to pursue mainly a direct and ineffective route to improving instruction. The implicit underlying assumption of the direct route is that students are motivationally ready and able each day to benefit from the teacher’s instruction. The reality, of course, is that in many schools the majority of youngsters do not fit this picture and are not benefitting from promising instructional improvements. The results of persevering in this direction are continuing low test scores and an ongoing achievement gap.

Logically, major systemic efforts should address interfering factors. However, current accountability pressures override the

logic and result in marginalizing almost every initiative not viewed as a direct and quick path to higher achievement test scores. The irony is that such policy not only works against what must be done, it works against gathering evidence on the necessity and effectiveness of directly and comprehensively addressing barriers to learning.

**Needed: An  
Expanded  
Accountability  
Framework**

In moving forward, an expanded framework for school accountability is needed. To this end, our Center has emphasized the need for a framework that

- encompasses a whole person approach to student outcomes (i.e., cognitive development and engagement, physical and social development and behavioral engagement, and emotional development and engagement)
- addresses a fuller range of barriers to learning and teaching
- assesses the school's role in strengthening families and neighborhoods
- evaluates system performance and development and does so in the context of the surrounding neighborhood (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1998).

As to indicators, this brief has highlighted categories and examples relevant to such an expanded accountability framework (see Exhibit 3) and again underscores the matter below.

We view the expanded framework as a move toward what has been called intelligent accountability. The intent is not to deflect from the laser-like focus on accountability for meeting high standards related to academics. The debate will continue as to how best to measure academic outcomes, but clearly schools must demonstrate they effectively teach academics.

Schools also are expected, however, to pursue high standards in *promoting positive social and personal functioning*, including enhancing engagement, civility, teaching safe and healthy behavior, and some form of "character education." Every school we visit has specific goals related to this facet of student development and learning. But, schools currently are not held accountable for goals in this arena. That is, no systematic evaluation or reporting of the work is done. As would be expected, then, schools direct few resources and too little

attention to these unmeasured concerns. Yet, society wants schools to attend to these matters, and most professionals understand that personal and social functioning is integrally tied to academic performance. From this perspective, not holding schools accountable for improving students' social and personal functioning is self-defeating.

For schools where a large proportion of students are not doing well, not attending to benchmark indicators of progress in addressing barriers to learning also is self-defeating. Schools cannot teach children who are not in class. Therefore, increasing attendance always is an expectation (and an important budget consideration). Other basic indicators of school improvement and precursors of enhanced academic performance are reducing tardiness and problem behaviors, lessening suspension and dropout rates, and abating the large number of inappropriate referrals for special education. Given this, the progress of school staff in addressing such problems should be measured and treated as a significant aspect of school accountability.

School outcomes, of course, are influenced by the well-being of the families and the neighborhoods in which they operate. Therefore, performance of any school should be judged within the context of the current status of indicators of community well-being, such as economic, social, and health measures. When those indicators are not improving or are declining, schools find it difficult to make progress. Judging school performance out of context is patently unfair.

In sum, an expanded accountability framework is needed to encourage and support movement toward a broad band approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Such a broad approach recognizes the interconnectedness of neighborhood, family, school, and student factors, therefore, changes in all are a relevant focus of data gathering. We are reminded of Ulric Neisser's dictum:

*Changing the individual while leaving the world alone is a dubious proposition.*

## Concluding Comments: Addressing Policy Needs

*Today's enthusiastic embrace of data has waltzed us directly from a petulant resistance to performance measures to a reflexive and unsophisticated reliance on a few simple metrics.... The result has been a nifty pirouette from one troubling mind-set to another; with nary a mistep, we have pivoted from the "old stupid" to the "new stupid."*

Frederick Hess

The need for professionals to improve their practices and be accountable is obvious. Gathering good data to evaluate schools clearly contributes to school improvement. Doing so, however, is a more complex problem than just focusing on gathering data related to currently emphasized indicators of results .

Because evaluations can as easily reshape programs in negative as in positive directions such practices must be improved, and accountability pressures must not inappropriately narrow a program's focus. This is especially the case for programs designed to enable the learning of students who are not doing well at school, including new initiatives and specially funded projects such as those related to addressing psychosocial and mental and physical health concerns.

In moving forward, policy makers must do more than mandate a narrow band of accountability. They must

- expand the framework for school accountability to ensure that systems are driven in ways that provide an equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school
- invest in the development of a set of broad band indicators, including a focus on (a) a whole person approach to student outcomes, (b) a fuller range of barriers to learning and teaching, (c) the school's role in strengthening families and neighborhoods, and (d) system performance and development in the context of the surrounding neighborhood
- invest in supporting districts and school development of information management systems that enable gathering and sharing data in aggregated and disaggregated ways (including safeguarded data on individuals).

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