Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm

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As new Common Core State Standards for learning are being adopted across the country in English language arts, mathematics, and now science, it has grown clear that a new paradigm for accountability must also be developed to support genuinely higher and deeper levels of learning, and more flexible designs for schools that can meet the challenges of a world in which both knowledge and tools for learning changing rapidly.

A new paradigm should preserve advances made under No Child Left Behind – including a commitment to pursuing higher and more equitable outcomes for children across social groups, and a commitment to providing high-quality teaching for all children. At the same time, a single-measure multiple-choice approach to standardized testing will not be adequate to the ambitious goals of the new standards. A fuller array of deeper learning outcomes must represent the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to foster critical and creative thinking, collaboration, multiple modes of communication, uses of new technologies, the capacity to learn to learn, and the social-emotional intelligence that fosters a growth mindset that supports resilience and resourcefulness.

In addition, an accountability model focused largely on ranking, labelling, sorting, and sanctioning students, teachers, and schools will be unable to build school capacity and generate the kind of collaborative change that can transform schools from the industrial model of the past to innovative learning systems for the future. Accountability will need to move from a test-and-punish approach that triggers a negative, reactive culture that impedes innovation to a support-and-improve approach that builds capacity and enables thoughtful risk-taking coupled with continuous evaluation based on multiple measures that can inform improvement. Educators should be motivated and enabled to improve outcomes through opportunities for professional learning and useful information to facilitate problem solving, rather than primarily through the avoidance of punishment, which can lead to dysfunctional consequences, such as teaching to the test, excluding struggling students, or focusing on the "bubble kids."

Genuine accountability must both raise the bar of expectations for learning – for children, adults, and the system as a whole – and trigger the intelligent investments and change strategies that make it possible to achieve these expectations. It must involve communities, along with professional educators and governments, in establishing goals and contributing to their attainment. It must attend to parents’ desires and students’ rights to be taught relevant skills that will matter for their future success by competent and caring professionals in adequately resourced schools that are responsive to their needs. Thus, a new paradigm for accountability should rest on three pillars:

(1) A focus on meaningful learning, enabled by

(2) Professionally skilled and committed educators, supported by

(3) Adequate and appropriate resources.
Such a system should be:

- Reciprocal and comprehensive
- Focused on capacity-building
- Performance based
- Embedded in a multiple measures system

We have become accustomed to thinking that accountability is primarily about testing aimed at holding individual students, teachers, and schools accountable, but not about the other aspects of education that reflect broader goals, and not focused on the obligations of districts, states, or the federal government. When we say that accountability must be **reciprocal** and **comprehensive**, we mean, first of all, that each level of the system should be held accountable for the contributions it must make to produce an effective system.

Second, it must attend to the inputs, processes, and outcomes that produce student learning: In others words, it must **build capacity** to offer high-quality education, while holding educators accountable for providing such education. In addition to adequate, intelligently allocated resources and professional expertise, this should include developing **problem-solving capacity** that guides ongoing improvement, informed by data and by processes such as strategic planning, evaluation, and school quality review that identify and correct problems in effective ways. Intelligent evaluation of accomplishments, needs, and next steps that can guide diagnosis and improvement requires a dashboard of useful measures of student, educator, school, and system efforts and outcomes that are developed at both the state and local levels.

**Accountability for Meaningful Learning**

If meaningful learning for all students is the focus of an accountability system, the system should use a range of measures that encourage and reflect such learning – and it should use those measures in ways that improve, rather than limiting, educational opportunities for students. This means we need both much better assessments of learning, representing much more authentically the skills and abilities we want students to develop, and multiple measures of how students, educators, schools, districts, and states are performing.
A system of higher-quality assessments, both state-designed and locally-developed, should replace the plentiful but low quality standardized tests of the NCLB era, and the system of assessments should include authentic performance tasks (e.g., classroom-based projects and products like those used in other countries) that assess and encourage the development of the full range of higher order skills. These kinds of assessments should be part of judgments about students and should also be part of a multi-faceted basket of evidence for teacher evaluation and school review.

A system of assessments could include both state and local sources of information: standardized test measures of certain aspects of students’ learning that are assessable in a testing context – ideally with performance elements that measure some higher-order analytic skills – augmented by more robust local performance assessments that can support and evaluate harder-to-measure abilities: the ability to design and conducted extended investigations; to collaborate; to communicate in multiple forms; to persevere, exhibit resilience, use feedback productively, and learn-to-learn.1 As the CCSSO Accountability Advisory Committee recommended:

Each state should establish rigorous statewide measures of CCR (such as through Common Core-aligned assessments), but should also provide latitude for district innovation to expand on those measures to include additional indicators of CCR skills or dispositions deemed important by the local community.

As in jurisdictions like Australia, Finland, and Singapore, the standardized measures would be used to validate the local assessment results. The performance assessments would be used to inform instruction, provide feedback to students and teachers, and enable diagnostic decisions, as well as to provide evidence of student learning. Both should be part of a research and development process to validate the assessments and to provide evidence of their effects on instruction and learning.

As performance tasks offer more detailed information about how students think and perform, they are more useful for formative purposes, although they can offer information for summative judgments as well. In a new system of assessment, it should be possible to move from an overemphasis on external summative tests to a greater emphasis on assessment that can shape and inform learning. (See below.)

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1 These could be state-designed or locally-designed and, where desired, could be assessed with common rubrics and moderated scoring to assure consistency of results.
In a new system of accountability, **multiple measures**, used in thoughtful systems of judgment, should be used to inform decision making at each level. Like businesses that use a dashboard of measures to provide a comprehensive picture of performance, we need to allow and enable accountability systems that create **dashboard of indicators** for all key decisions (student placement, promotion, graduation; teacher evaluation, tenure, dismissal; school recognition, intervention). In line with professional standards, test scores should never be used alone for any such decision.

- Multiple measures of student learning should be coupled with **indicators of important education outcomes**, including:
  - for students, social-emotional competence, responsibility, citizenship, etc.;
  - for teachers, professional contributions to the professional team and the school as a whole, as well as evidence or individual practice; and
  - for schools, graduation rates, attendance, evidence of school climate (via surveys of teachers, students, and parents), rich curriculum opportunities; and college and career readiness.

-- Data should be **thoughtfully interpreted and weighed** by experts who make decisions based on multiple sources of evidence.
  - For decisions affecting students, this would include educators and parents.
  - For decisions affecting teachers, this would include trained evaluators with appropriate expertise who combine multiple sources of evidence.
  - For decisions affecting schools, this would include school quality review teams, who look at many indicators of practice and a range of outcomes.

-- Information should be used in a system that makes **strategic investments in educational improvement** rather than being used mechanically to mete out sanctions.

Appendix A includes an example of such a system in the CORE districts in California.

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Resource Accountability in a Reciprocal System

Accountability tools must address the barriers to good education that exist not only within schools and classrooms, but at the district, state, and national levels as well. For although schools themselves may be appropriately viewed as a key unit of change in education reform, the structuring of inequality in learning opportunities occurs outside the school in the governmental units where funding formulas, resource allocations, and other educational policies are forged. In sum, if students are to be well-served, accountability must be **reciprocal**. That is, federal, state and local education agencies must themselves meet certain standards of delivery while school-based educators and students are expected to meet certain standards of practice and learning.

Thus, in addition to learning standards that rely on many kinds of data, accountability must encompass **resource standards**. With the advent of more challenging and authentic measures of student performance, the creation of accountable schools and school systems will demand methods for inspiring and ensuring equitable access to necessary learning opportunities, so that all students can achieve these learning goals. A complete view of accountability must take into account the appropriate roles of states and school districts in supporting local schools in their efforts to meet standards. This includes:

- Allocating adequate school **resources** in relation to students’ learning needs;
- Ensuring equitable access to high-quality **curriculum** and instructional materials that support students in learning the standards (including, e.g., computers, science labs); and
- Providing well-prepared **teachers and other professional staff** to all students in settings that allow them to attend effectively to student needs.

Professional Accountability

Also critical are **professional standards of practice** that should guide how educators are prepared and how they teach and support students. Accountability for implementing professional practice rests not only with individual educators but also with schools, districts and state agencies that recruit, train, hire, assign, support, and evaluate staff. Collectively, they hold responsibility for ensuring that the best available knowledge about curriculum, teaching, assessment, and student support will be acquired and used. Individuals and organizations should be responsible for building their own capacity for professional practice; they should be accountable for evaluating practice and student progress, and engaging in continual improvement based on the results.

These core building blocks of accountability reveal the capacity of schools to serve their students well:

- **Educator capacity** that enables teachers to teach for deeper learning and administrators to understand and support this work at the school and district level
  -- **High-quality preparation, induction, and professional development**
  -- **Accreditation and licensing** based on evidence of teacher and administrator performance in supporting diverse learners to meet challenging standards
  -- **Evaluation** based on multiple indicators of practice, contributions to student learning, and contributions to colleagues that supports ongoing learning

- **School capacity** to meet student needs, based on school, district, and state actions that ensure the availability of an appropriate mix of well-qualified staff who are properly assigned and adequately supported with professional development, and who are engaged in well-designed curricula and educational programs that are consistent with research
• **System capacity** for professional practice and improvement, supported by awareness of research, as well as inspection or school quality review processes, that evaluate policies, programs, practices, and outcomes, diagnose areas for improvement, and guide appropriate interventions.

It is worth noting that professional capacity and accountability are reinforced by a system that has developed professional judgment as a key expectation for evaluating the work of students, the work of other teachers, and the work of schools. Not only does expert professional judgment, used to make sense of qualitative and quantitative information, support more defensible decisions. It can also help professionalize education by serving as a form of professional development for educators, and it can support a more genuine sense of responsibility as educators, working with students and families, feel a sense of engaging in accountability themselves, rather than having it imposed externally. Finally, a more relational accountability is developed when educators act in a professional community with each other and when they interact in learning communities with families – something that can prove much more powerful than impersonal institutional accountability.
Appendix A:  
Implications for Federal Policy, Including ESEA Waivers

A federal shift to this accountability paradigm would allow (and encourage) states to propose approaches in their ESEA plans or waiver proposals that:

- Assess school-level progress using a dashboard of indicators that reflect College- and Career-readiness (CCR), and use multiple measures (rather than single test scores) in making decisions about students, educators, and schools. The CORE waiver in California, approved by USDOE under guidelines that differ from the current state waiver guidelines, is a useful example that includes student participation, engagement, and inclusion in schooling, along with graduation rates, achievement, social-emotional development, and school climate. (See below.)

- Include in a multiple measure system more authentic and challenging assessments of student learning that include performance-based components measuring the full range of CCR expectations along the continuum of performance. These can complement consortium assessments, which will measure some, but not all, of the standards.

- Propose educator evaluation plans that explicitly anticipate a broader range of measures of student learning and teaching practice considered in relation to one another (not separate unconnected metrics), and in relation to the curriculum and the content being taught.

- Identify schools for intervention (and determine the appropriate intervention) based on a careful diagnostic review of school outcomes and practices, using a process that includes on-site examination by experts as well as multiple sources of data. Set criteria for intervention, rather than requiring a set percentage of schools to be identified.

SEAs plans should include concrete action steps/timelines for developing, field-testing and implementing the new measures and school improvement processes. They should also include:

- Concrete plans for assuring and improving resource adequacy and equity to schools serving high-need students, alongside their plans for improving student performance. This would include:
  -- the equitable distribution of certified, experienced, in-field, and effective teachers and administrators;
  -- the availability of necessary curriculum and instructional materials for implementing CCR standards
  -- equitable distribution of funding and student services aimed at identified student needs (health care, extended learning time, language learning, etc.)

- Plans for appropriate resource investments, following a thoughtful diagnostic process (through an inspection or school quality review process) in schools identified as priority schools.

- Assurances and concrete plans for building educator and school capacity to enact standards through stronger pre- and in-service preparation, as well as through the provision / funding of curriculum materials, coaching, and learning networks.
Other indicators used in California’s Local Accountability and Control Plans (LCAPs) for the Local Control Funding Formula will include each district’s goals for a broad list of state-priority accountability measures that align closely to these indicators and to a more-than-test-scores approach to college and career readiness, which would be measured by:

- State Academic Performance Index (API).
- Statewide assessments (Smarter Balanced + CAHSEE).
- Either a-g completion or completion of CTE sequences which include college preparation/integration.
- Passage of AP exams with score of 3 or higher.
- Participation/readiness rates on the Early Assessment Program