

Council for Basic Education

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

by John M. Goff

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Introduction

For almost two decades the call for the improvement of student achievement in the core academics has been at the center of political and educational agendas at the state and local school district level. At the same time, the need for an accountability system to monitor progress is also being called for. The consensus that is emerging is that we need an accountability system that focuses clearly on student progress toward meeting the established standards for learning in the core academics -- a "standards-based" system. Nearly every state and thousands of local districts are developing standards for student learning and aligning their assessments to measure those expectations. And while the features that tend to dominate these accountability systems vary -- such as the standards by which to judge success and failure, use of multiple indicators, rewards and sanctions, and public reporting of results -- they are nearly all centered at the school building level. The purpose of this article is not to elaborate on the specific components of the accountability system, but rather to propose a more *Comprehensive Accountability Model* in which all of the players with responsibility for educating our children are held accountable. (The "Responsibility Schema," at the end of this article, summarizes the list of players and their responsibilities.)

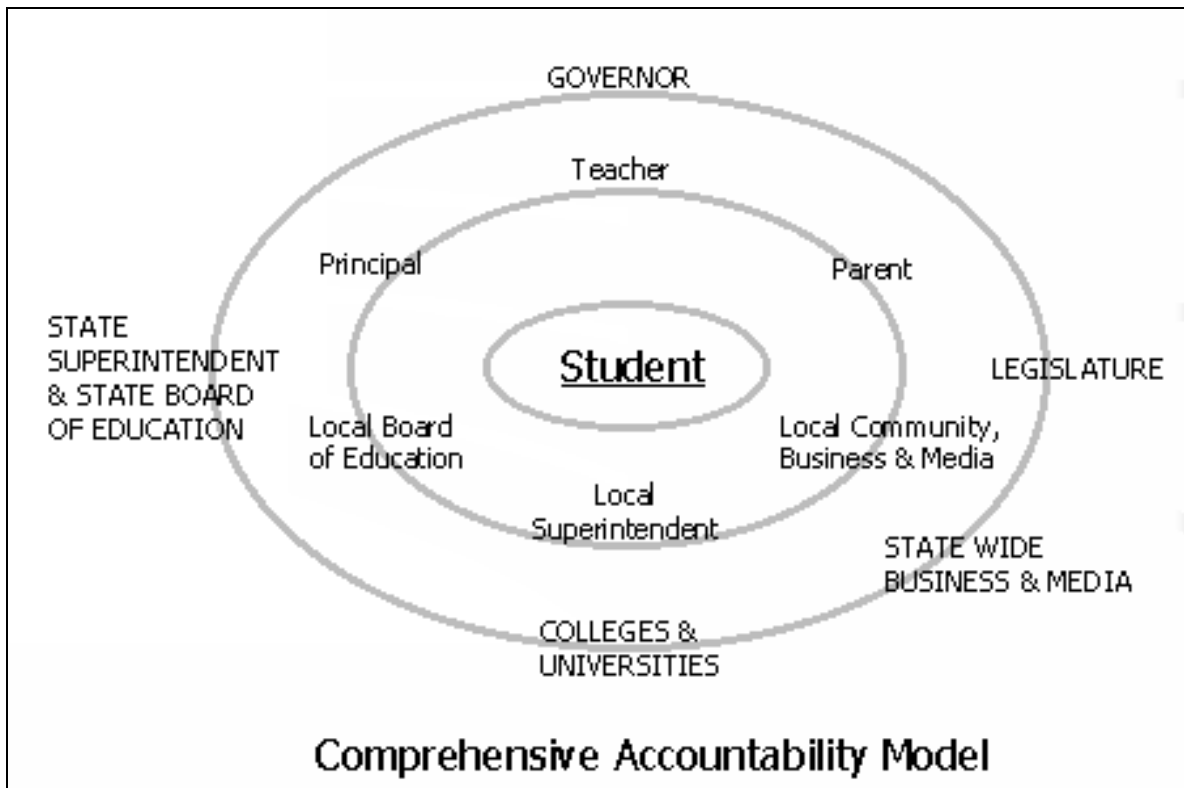
In the existing models of accountability, the emphasis has been placed primarily on the student and what he/she has or has not learned in school, and to some degree on those who work closest with students--teachers and principals. In many states students must pass certain academic requirements to graduate or be promoted to the next grade level. At the same time, the individual school has become the center of attention when trying to determine the cause(s) of success or failure of students to learn. The performance of teachers and principals obviously becomes a primary focus when undertaking school-based assessments. School reconstitution and the concept of rewards

and sanctions for staff have become a means for addressing the success or failure of schools to meet the desired expectations. This has caused much angst among school faculties who feel that others do not understand the problems they face in trying to educate all students, of varying backgrounds, to the standards that are expected, and/or that they lack the support and resources to meet those expectations. While we certainly cannot allow these school personnel to escape the eye of the accountability camera, there must be an acknowledgment of the important roles and responsibilities that others have in this quest to educate all of our students to higher levels.

The individual school as the focal point of accountability is as it should be. This is where the "rubber meets the road" in the delivery of education to our nation's children. To make such demands however, when key stakeholders, including local board members, parents, superintendents and district staff, state agency staff, state board members, teacher preparation institutions, and other policy makers are not carrying out their responsibilities creates conditions that are neither fair nor reasonable. The individual school, as the focal point for improved student learning for example, will be hard pressed to achieve the expected standards without the support of the local superintendent and school board. Vice versa, the superintendent and school board could do all the right things and still not be successful in improving student achievement if the teachers and principal of the school do not carry out their responsibilities. Even if all of these groups are working together, this is not enough. They need backing from others within the local community and beyond.

There is a need for a more Comprehensive Accountability Model that appropriately divides the labor of education from the school house to the state house if the effort to improve student learning is to be successful. The difficulty we face in implementing a fair and equitable accountability system is that there is presently little or no accountability for parents, other citizens of the community, legislatures, and others outside the educational system itself. And, in fact, there is minimal accountability for those who are connected to the educational system but work outside the individual school. This results in a system where the standards and accountability effort becomes disjointed, and we all engage in the "blame game" as to who is responsible for the lack of improvement.

The picture that emerges must be seen not only as an accountability system but as a "circle of support" for students and schools. (See following figure.) The student is at the center of this system and all others have key roles and responsibilities in designing and delivering the very best educational environment possible for students. The participants in the internal circle are closer to the student and carry a much more visible and direct responsibility -- teachers, principals, parents, superintendents and district staff, local boards of education, and the citizens of the community. The external circle -- state superintendents and state boards of education, teacher and administrator preparation institutions, legislators, and governor -- may be further removed, but they cannot escape the fact that they, too, have important obligations in creating the supportive environment and building the capacity of students, faculties, and schools to meet the performance expectations demanded under a strong accountability system



In addition to creating this circle of support for students, selected individuals and groups within both the internal and external systems are also responsible for establishing the academic content standards that define what knowledge is most important for students to learn in the core academic subjects, and how well they should learn it. Although the elements that comprise an accountability system may vary, the academic content standards serve as the key ingredient for judging student and school/district success or failure.

As the focus of the Comprehensive Accountability Model, students must come to school each and every day prepared to do the work that the teacher, school district, and community have deemed to be important for them to learn. Students must be responsible for putting forth the time and effort to do their work well. A key ingredient of a healthy, productive educational environment is the decorum of the student body. Students, collectively and individually, must understand and meet their responsibility in complying with the conduct codes established by the local board of education and expected by the community.

The Internal Circle

There are four important groups--parents, teachers, the building principal, and the local superintendent--that share the responsibility for reinforcing with students their stake

and responsibility in learning. Students should be constantly reminded of the importance of their efforts.

Parents should be their children's first and most important teacher. They establish the academic and behavioral expectations that will guide the children through their years in school. If much is expected, the probability is that a child will do his/her best to meet those expectations. If a laissez-faire or negative attitude toward school is projected, the chances are the child will adopt a similar mindset, and in turn, not meet his/her potential. Where possible, parents should work with their children on their studies, especially at the early ages, and they should establish quiet areas in the home where studying can take place under the best possible conditions. Attendance at school events, especially parent/teacher conferences, is extremely important. Parents should find time to meet with their child's teacher to develop a positive relationship that will allow them to closely monitor their child's school work. They should become informed about school issues such as the content and student achievement standards that their schools have established, school board elections, curriculum and graduation/promotion standards, and school levy campaigns so that they can make informed decisions about events and decisions that will have a significant impact on their child's education.

Teachers need to provide engaging, challenging academic work for students that includes all elements of the state and local content standards. It is also clear from the research that teacher's beliefs about whether their students can achieve the academic expectations set for them is a major determiner of student success. They must create a learning environment which motivates the student to want to learn the material the teacher has prepared for them. To do so, teachers must be experts in the subject matter they are teaching and understand various instructional techniques. The school and school district, and to some degree the state, have a clear responsibility for providing teachers with quality professional development experiences which enhance their subject matter knowledge and teaching skills. We are asking teachers to perform a task that has never been expected of them in this country because of standards-driven curriculum and assessment: to educate all students to levels that have never been asked of many. This is a daunting task that calls for substantial retraining of many of our teachers. At the same time, teachers must accept the personal responsibility to participate in these professional development experiences and to seek out such experiences when they are not provided by the school/district/state. Teacher dialogue with the parents of students and with their colleagues is extremely important as all are key participants in the internal ring of the Comprehensive Accountability Model.

As a part of the internal circle of the Comprehensive Model, the school principal has a critical role in setting the educational climate of the building. Being involved in the development of and having a clear understanding of the academic and behavioral standards established for students is key for a principal. Good principals articulate school goals, demand high quality teaching, are themselves instructional leaders, and find ways to provide substantive professional development for teachers. They cannot be an expert in every subject, but they know what quality academic work is and they see that it is embedded in the teaching and learning provided to all students in the school. The term

"instructional leader" is an often-used descriptor for the principalship, but in reality, few principals devote the necessary time and energy to this most important role. Setting aside the time for planning, observing, and leading the school improvement effort is critical for a building principal if students and schools are to meet the demands of standards-based reform. Holding high expectations for student learning, good principals are able to monitor student achievement and engage teachers in meaningful discussions that lead to improved practices and results. They must become good evaluators of what goes on in the classroom between students and teachers. Effective teacher evaluation, which includes observation, substantive feedback, and provisions for staff development when needed, is a fundamental responsibility of the building principal. Finally, they recruit good teachers and reach out to parents to gain their support and involvement in their child's education. Good principals create an environment that is open and inviting to parents.

There is no question that the local superintendent falls under the microscope when assigning credit or blame for what happens at the school. In the proposed Comprehensive Accountability Model, the superintendent becomes the crucial connection between the internal and external circles of responsibility. As the leader of the district, the superintendent must understand and exercise responsibility for engaging all of the players in both responsibility circles in meaningful dialogue and action that supports improved student learning. In his book, *Inventing Better Schools*, Phil Schlectly states that "only through revitalizing and redirecting the actions of district-level operations can widespread change that must occur become possible." "Districts," he says, "are the only organizational units that can genuinely serve the interests of the entire community." Thus, the district leadership needs to keep student learning as a clear non-negotiable and the individual school as the focus of the accountability. This means that the superintendent and central office staff must refocus their energy to center more on capacity building of individuals within the district and monitoring results while, at the same time, still meeting the obligation to manage the district well. The central office must become a provider or broker of services that are designed to enhance the capacity of the building staffs to carry out their responsibilities in the best manner possible. Dictating the instructional strategies and learning resources from central office will not produce the achievement results/gains we all want to see.

The superintendent, as the recognized leader of the district, must establish a vision of quality schooling that is anchored in high expectations for all staff and schools, and then design and advocate an improvement strategy for realizing that vision. Overseeing the development of challenging academic content standards for the district is a key role for the superintendent, as is assuring that there is a clear connection between any internal accountability system established by the district and the external system established by the state. These responsibilities cannot be delegated. Connections to the community become extremely critical when major improvement efforts are underway. The superintendent must ensure that parents and the general public are consulted and informed if they are to understand, support, and contribute to shaping improvement efforts. They should be involved early in the process of establishing expectations for student learning, not as an afterthought to ratify what has already been decided. And

finally, the superintendent's budget proposals must emphasize commitment to the classroom and those who are working most directly with students. The quality of the teaching staff, instructional materials, facilities, and the critical support apparatus, such as technology, are key ingredients for a successful educational environment. Budget allocations must reflect that commitment. All of these responsibilities are key for the superintendent and central office team in the Comprehensive Model.

Though local school boards and citizens are further from the student core, their support is greatly needed by those teachers, parents, and principals working on the internal circle of the model. Such support strengthens the resolve, reinforces commitment, and builds the capacity of those who work closest with the students.

Local boards of education are the elected representatives of the people and are empowered to establish both the strategic direction and policies for the district. They hire the superintendent, who is the educational leader of the district, which may be the most important decision they make as a policy body. Working with the superintendent and the citizens of the community, they establish the mission, vision, and goals for the district, adopt policies that guide the development of the academic content standards, give final approval to such content standards, and assist in communicating them to all citizens. Local boards must engage the community in meaningful dialogue about the goals of the district, the improvements needed to realize those goals, and the changes needed in order to gain their support in carrying out those needed improvements. Their policies must be mission driven, advance student learning, promote recruitment and retention of well-qualified, competent staff to teach the students of the district, and adopt budgets that reflect their commitment to the classroom as the first and most critical element for the delivery of quality education.

Boards of education may only act as a "collective body" because it is only when they sit as a board that they have any authority or powers under law. Thus, the ability to put individual agendas and partisanship aside and to act on behalf of all children becomes paramount. They must unite with the superintendent to form and advocate a shared/collective agenda for children and quality education. Many people are questioning the ability of local boards of education to rise above the "petty politics" that too often characterize the office and to truly act in the best interest of all children. Critical to the success of this country's educational improvement efforts will be the ability of local school boards to join with their superintendent, other staff, and community to bring about the dramatic improvements that we desperately need in our public schools and to meet the responsibilities outlined above. Without their commitment to collective and shared responsibility, local boards may increasingly find they are in competition with alternative governance models, as parents and communities search for more effective means of educating their children.

The citizens of the local community must become actively involved in the decisions that impact their schools, for the schools are, in fact, a reflection of the beliefs and desires of the community. Active citizen involvement can produce a strong commitment for the educational improvements that must take place. For it is, in reality,

their money that is going to pay for the education of the communities' children. As the district's leadership and faculty exercise their responsibilities to invite the public into the dialogue and forge connections that must be made with the community at large, the citizens of the community must accept the challenge to become meaningfully involved. It is a partnership built from mutual respect for the shared responsibilities that each of the partners must play. An engaged citizenry that closely monitors the actions of local and statewide elected officials is critical. They should insist on clearly articulated policies and actions that focus on improved student learning and the capacity of individuals within the schools to provide an environment that meets the learning needs of students.

The External Circle

In designing a more Comprehensive Accountability Model it becomes necessary to move beyond those individuals and groups that occupy the internal circle and address those who, although further removed from the local school/district, exert considerable influence on the educational system of any state--colleges and universities that prepare teachers and administrators, state superintendents and state boards of education, legislatures, governors, business communities, and the media. They are important elements of this accountability system and must accept responsibility for their own actions, or lack thereof, in the effort to improve the academic achievement of the students of the state. They comprise the external circle. Few, if any, examples exist for holding these external stakeholders accountable. This model proposes a set of responsibilities that can serve as a base for addressing that void. The creation of an independent body of respected citizens to oversee the accountability process, hold public hearings, and issue public reports could go a long way in assuring that all stakeholders are judged according to the accountability criteria established. The important responsibilities for this body would be to:

1. Monitor the development of the standards that will serve as the basis for the state's accountability system; assure consistency in the implementation of the state's accountability laws, policies, and standards over time despite changes in the political climate and power in the state.
2. Hold public hearings to allow all interested parties to express support/concerns about the laws, policies, and standards that are in place to govern educational accountability in the state.
3. Conduct studies and issues reports on the status of the implementation of the state's accountability system with particular emphasis given to schools/districts and higher education institutions that prepare teachers and administrators. There should be an analysis of schools'/districts' reactions to their evaluations with a specific focus on those that have shown marked improvements and those with little or no improvement in order to identify reasons for their success or failure. Commentary on higher education institutions should focus on their production of high quality graduates in sufficient numbers to meet the demands of the education community.
4. Submit recommendations to the governor and legislature for changes in law that will strengthen and enhance the present policies and standards.

5. Conduct studies and issue reports on each of the individuals and groups set forth in this model to assess the response of each to the duties/ responsibilities established for them and to include recommendations for future actions to address areas of needed improvement.

As part of this expanded accountability system, colleges and universities that prepare teachers and administrators must be responsible for aligning their preparation programs with the real world demands of the schoolhouse/classroom and expectations of the state and local communities. They must demand academic rigor of those who wish to become teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has as one of its basic premises that what teachers know about their subject area(s) and their ability to deliver that knowledge in ways that engage students in meaningful learning is the key to improved student achievement. Institutions that prepare teachers must forge a strong connection to the faculties of Arts and Sciences for the design and delivery of subject matter preparation for prospective teachers. In addition, it is imperative that there be a close connection to the school districts in the field, and professors who prepare teachers must spend significant time on site, in the schools, so they understand the environment in which present day educators work. These colleges and universities must be certain to include the state's academic content standards in their preparation programs so that aspiring teachers and administrators are fully cognizant of the state's expectations for students and for those who teach them. Bottom line: teacher preparation programs must equip graduates, and those returning for additional credit or advanced degrees, with the knowledge and skills to teach in a standards-driven environment. They must also prepare administrators so that they have a depth of knowledge about teaching and learning and are prepared to lead schools/districts to become high performing organizations.

There is also the need for serious analysis of programs that prepare school administrators. Research underscores the critical roles that principals and superintendents play in overall school improvement. Administrators must be provided not only with the leadership and management knowledge and skills needed, but also with a deep understanding of what constitutes quality academic work for students, the knowledge to know good teaching when they see it, and the ability to offer constructive feedback when they don't. Higher education institutions that house the programs that prepare teachers and administrators must place adequate financial and support resources behind these programs. Preparation programs must be carefully evaluated for effectiveness and modifications made when problems are identified, and when necessary improvements do not materialize, programs should be closed down. These are the criteria that should guide the evaluation of our institutions that prepare teachers and administrators.

Further removed from the student and local eco-system, but no less important, are governors, state legislatures, state superintendents and state agency staff, and state boards of education. Some might question how these people could possibly be part of an educational accountability system for local school districts. But, the fact of the matter is that they have a significant impact on the day to day operations of schools by virtue of

the very important roles they play in establishing state laws and policies for governing the processes and results of schooling. With school finance litigation, workforce development and economic competitiveness issues very much in the minds of state policymakers, these individuals and groups have assumed a more directive, hands-on role in educational policymaking since the early 1980s.

The state has the ultimate responsibility for setting the standards that will drive the accountability system. In practice that responsibility is usually delegated by the legislature that passes the laws, which call for the creation of standards and sets forth the specific criteria that will serve as the basis for the accountability system, to the state education agency. In order for the standards to have the desired effect on school improvement, they must be of high quality to begin with, set high expectations for students, schools, and districts, and the academic component of the standards must be teachable. Districts and schools must have time to put into place the necessary actions that are designed to bring about the improvements called for in the accountability system. Substantial time and effort over a number of years will be needed if we are to see improved learning from all students.

Governors have the ability to garner the attention of the citizens of the state through the use of the “bully pulpit” that is accorded the governor’s status as the political leader of the state. If the governor is committed to educational improvement and demonstrates through policy and legislative recommendations that commitment, then there is a greater chance that others will give serious attention to what is being proposed. Also critical to the success of education reform efforts is the willingness of the governor to request sufficient dollars in the budget proposal to support the reform initiatives that have been proposed and to lobby the legislature to appropriate the dollars that have been requested. Standing strongly behind challenging academic content standards and the type of accountability measures outlined above for schools, principals, teachers, and school districts is only the first step. The governor must also forge a working relationship with the State Board of Education and legislature if his/her ideas are to become reality and not just remain as rhetoric.

State legislatures enact legislation that establishes the accountability system for a state, and as such, must share in the responsibility for the improvement of schools and student learning on an ongoing basis. Cohesive legislative action that is demanding but fair, consistent over a number of years, strategic and systematic, and that ensures alignment between the various actions passed is of utmost importance. Disjointed legislative actions from one legislative session to the next only add confusion to the already difficult task of improving our nation’s schools. A key guiding principle for the legislature in the accountability arena is that they should be “clear on expectations and loose on controls.”

Flexibility must be provided for schools within legislative action so that they may take advantage of unique circumstances or special needs that exists within their communities. While health and safety issues must never be compromised, the “one shoe fits all” approach to schooling that we have held over the years simply has to be rethought. Although the responsibility for evaluation and oversight of the accountability system rests with the state legislature, this function is usually delegated to some other

organization such as the state education agency or an independent body of citizens such as the one proposed in this paper. In delegating this responsibility, the legislature must assure that the system created does not over regulate schools and that it is thoroughly and consistently implemented.

Adequate, reliable, and predictable school funding systems are a must. If school districts are expected to develop effective continuous improvement/strategic plans to guide their improvement efforts, a funding system that supports those efforts and allows for long range planning is essential. This is a legislative responsibility. There must also be sufficient legislative attention and financial support given to the institutions that prepare teachers and administrators for the schools. And time must be allowed for many of the improvement initiatives to bear fruit, rather than searching for the "quick fix!" There must be recognition that the redesign of schooling in America calls for a much more comprehensive approach and that it will take time. There are few, if any, quick fixes to the school improvement challenge.

Legislatures play a critical role with Governors, State Boards of Education and Chief State School Officers in creating the environment within which school reform takes place. That environment must be one that establishes high expectations for student achievement as embodied in clear, challenging academic content standards, provides support and resources, and encourages shared responsibility for schooling success at the state and local level.

In addition to contributing to the climate of school reform and improvement, Chief State School Officers and State Boards of Education are responsible for carrying out most of the state policy and oversight responsibilities connected with schools and are, in general, the implementers of the legislation that relates to schools. But the leadership of each is important. Working together, the state board and superintendent are responsible for making recommendations to the governor and legislature that will impact legislative decisions about the operations, financing, programs, and ultimately the accountability of the schools of a state. Consistency and alignment of those recommendations over time are just as critical for the State Board of Education as they are for the legislature and governor. These individuals must also take advantage of their positions to communicate the need for improved academic results for all students and to engage the public in meaningful dialogue about the changes and improvements that must take place in our schools.

The state superintendent, state board of education, and state agency staff are most often responsible for leading the effort of the state in developing the academic content standards that will serve as the fundamental element in the state's accountability system. As the key policy advisor to the state board, governor, and legislature, the state superintendent must push for improved academic results from students and schools, while at the same time helping all to understand the significant challenge that we face in our efforts to reform our public school system. The State Board of Education is a key advocate for quality schooling and needs to play an ambassadorial role with the other policy makers and constituents in securing a standards-based school reform agenda.

The design and delivery of quality professional development opportunities and technical assistance for districts, schools, teachers, administrators and others at the district/community level have become essential elements of school improvement. Capacity building is paramount! Whether delivering the programs with agency staff, or becoming a “broker” that identifies others who can provide the training and/or assistance, the state education agency must assume a leadership role in these two important areas.

The demands for higher standards and improved academic achievement, combined with the establishment of strong accountability systems, has placed a premium on communications with parents of students and citizens in general. Individual school districts and states are producing and reporting an unparalleled amount of information regarding their results, and so is the media! Thus, the shadow of accountability also falls upon the print and electronic media because they are a major source of information for citizens seeking to understand how their schools are performing in this standards-driven environment.

By what standards should the media be judged? According to Gene Maeroff, former Education Editor of *The New York Times*, “Above all, news consumers have a right to expect that reporting on education will be fair and impartial, that it will be honest and candid. Reporting on education, as on other topics, should be done without showing fear or favoritism. Furthermore, those reporting on education should be informed and bring a solid background to their work," a challenging standard for the media in this most demanding and controversial arena. It means that reporters assigned to cover the education beat need to be experienced, have some depth of understanding of the issues they are reporting, and be prepared to do the in-depth analysis that is required to meet the criteria set forth by Maeroff. They must also understand that they cannot serve as a public relations vehicle for schools or they will lose their credibility.

Looking beneath the numbers to obtain a more detailed picture of the results is also an important responsibility. Such analysis may reveal that some schools serving students from low socio-economic conditions have done quite well in improving their achievement, and may in fact, have done better than other schools serving more advantaged students. Again, according to Maeroff, “This is part of providing depth and context.” He cautions, however, “that if this is reported, it should be noted that the value added in what had been a low achieving district is apt to exceed the value added in the high achieving district simply because there was much more room for value to be added. Furthermore, after adding value, if the low achieving district still significantly trails the high achieving district, this too is part of the story. “

Coverage of all groups and individuals in this model is important. From the schoolhouse to the statehouse, all individuals and groups set forth in this model should come under the eye of the media and be judged according to the standards established for them.

The business community in this country has been out front in calling for reform and improvement in our nation’s schools. They are, after all, prime consumers of the school’s products--the individuals that have graduated from the nation’s secondary schools and universities--and thus should be highly interested and involved in school

improvement. The National Business Roundtable and the National Alliance for Business, many of their state affiliates, and individual businesses in states and local communities have become significantly involved in educational reform initiatives. This is as it should be. Business has faced the need to reform and improve itself in order to survive in the global economy, and they have learned much that can be applied to the efforts to improve our schools. They also have significant political power and influence which can be used with governors, state legislatures, and other state policy bodies to influence, enhance, and improve reform and accountability initiatives.

Involvement of business can be crucial to reform and improvement efforts. As has been shown in states such as North Carolina, Texas, Washington, and in local areas such as Pinellas County, Florida, business leaders have the ability to bring all parties to the table to discuss areas of agreement and concern, develop compromises where needed, and to build support and consensus around key legislative issues. They can also bring their financial and educational resources to bear in assisting the educational community in implementing some of the best practices from business, such as the education version of the Malcolm Baldrige Award. By building a strong positive relationship with all key players and remaining involved over a long period of time, business can have a significant positive impact on the improvement of academic achievement and educational reform in our schools.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the Model

A system of rewards, sanctions, and targeted assistance is needed in order for the accountability model to be complete. In designing the system, the elements that are used as the basis for establishing the ratings must be focused clearly on student achievement and other factors, such as attendance and dropout rates, that have a direct influence on achievement. Given the fact that student body characteristics at individual schools vary widely in terms of socio-economic background and student mobility, the issue of the fairness of a rewards and sanctions system must be considered.

There are two fundamental ways to judge student achievement. One is to measure success against an absolute standard that is established by the state or district, and the other is to look at how much “value” a school/district adds by focusing on student achievement gains over time. The use of absolute standards sends the message that schools do not expect less from some children than others because they are poor or members of a particular minority group. It reinforces the belief that all students must have high expectations established for them. It does not, however, take into consideration various factors that may influence a school/districts results. The “value added” approach attempts to address the fairness factors that concern many. It takes into account the prior achievement levels of students entering a school and the problems faced by schools with high student mobility. A concern that has been aired about the “value added” approach is the complex statistical calculations used to generate results and the difficulty that school staff, parents, and the general public have in understanding those results.

Both approaches have their pluses and minuses, but used together they have the potential to provide a thorough, accurate, and fair analysis of how well students are being educated in a particular setting. The key is to refine the analysis and reporting systems so that they are understandable, not only to teachers and other school staff, but also to parents and citizens in general. We want an accountability system that holds high expectations for all students while, at the same time, give due recognition to the challenging circumstances many schools face in educating their students. We need a system that provides quality data and analysis that enable us to identify those schools that are achieving at high levels, others that are demonstrating significant gains within a defined period, and those that are failing to provide the education expected. From the success stories we can identify best practices and programs and find ways to replicate them in schools where improvement is so desperately needed. Without this type of data and analysis, replication and widespread improvement will be difficult to achieve, and the ability to deliver targeted assistance to low performing schools will be problematic.

Education is experiencing a “backlash” against the assessment systems that are being used as key ingredients of the accountability systems presently being used in this country. There are two main complaints. First, many believe that the assessment systems give little, if any, feedback to parents and teachers about the specific performance of individual students in the key academic areas. In other words, the feedback is generally presented as a pass-fail with little or no analysis of why students did or did not pass a particular subject in the assessment. Second, the assessments are driving the curriculum taught in the classrooms, and that curriculum has now become much too narrow and void of many important “facts, ideas, events, etc.” that students should be learning. It is essential that districts assure that the curriculum taught in the key academic disciplines is robust and challenging, and that the assessment systems in place for accountability purposes do not result in a narrow, less than comprehensive, curriculum taught in the classroom. In addition, serious work must be undertaken to assure that detailed feedback is provided to parents and teachers about the performance of individual students. The development and design of an accountability system has much value for diagnostic purposes. This must be kept in mind during the developmental stages and should serve as the main focus of the system. It is more than just reporting test scores and ranking of schools and districts.

The particular rewards and sanctions used must be carefully considered. Most accountability systems enacted during this educational accountability period seem to have been dominated by the sanctions side of the equation with less thought having been given to the rewards and recognition possibilities. Early research evidence does seem to indicate that sanctions do motivate those most closely connected to the lower performing schools to do better. Avoidance of negative consequences seems to be a strong motivator that causes individuals to actively search for ways to improve. Although the evidence is not so clear on the rewards side, public recognition for a job well done and the satisfaction of knowing that students have improved in their academic achievement have been shown to have a positive influence on the performance of teachers and administrators. Much more attention needs to be given to identifying positive ways to reward and recognize educators for their roles in school and student improvement, and the research conducted must include those who will be impacted by the system.

There are a series of sanctions that can be used starting with the simple identification of schools and districts that are not performing to the standards and reporting this to the public through both the print and visual media. State or district intervention and the delivery of targeted technical assistance may be necessary when it becomes clear that the capacity of the district or school is such that they will be unable to bring about the needed improvements on their own. In those cases where it becomes clear that more drastic measures must be taken if student achievement is to improve, there are several options that should be considered. These include the reconstitution of some or all of the teaching staff at the school, the replacement of the leadership of the district or school, the “takeover” of the school or district by an identified body such as the state education agency, and allowing parents to choose another school or district for their children to attend. In implementing high stakes accountability systems, it is important that sound, technically defensible procedures and assessments be used to avoid any legal challenges that may arise.

It also seems clear that when a local board of education and community has established its own accountability system and aligned it with the state’s system, the two systems working in tandem enhance the organizational capacity of the district to lead improvement efforts. External systems alone do not seem to effect the same degree of impact on school improvement. The state typically prepares and publicizes district and individual school results and holds local boards and superintendents responsible for addressing areas of needed improvement. Local boards are responsible for holding the local superintendent, building principals, and teachers responsible for designing and implementing clearly articulated improvement plans. Failure on the part of local authorities to successfully address the deficiencies identified must be challenged by parents and citizens of the local community. The state also has an obligation to exert its authority when local efforts do not bring about needed improvements. This may result in the involvement of the state in bringing about the delivery of targeted assistance or, as a last resort, the takeover of the district by the state. State educational agencies and state boards of education have a clear obligation to represent the state in these intervention efforts.

The identified authority for the oversight of teacher and administrator preparation programs in a state must develop the same type of monitoring and analysis system for schools and colleges of education that has been proposed for public schools. Public reporting of the results of such analysis through a “report card” of some sort is necessary, and in cases where results do not meet the identified standards, clear intervention must take place, even to the point of closing programs that cannot meet the established standards. Rewards and sanctions like those proposed for the public schools should also be developed and used.

For other groups and individuals set forth in this model that operate primarily at the state level and outside the local setting, the independent citizens committee and the media must develop methods of reporting to the public that judge the actions of each against the standards established for them. The responsibility for holding elected and appointed officials accountable for their actions rests with the citizens who elected them and the appointing authorities who made the appointments.

Conclusion

The call to significantly improve the academic achievement of all children who attend our public schools is an ambitious goal. It is one that, until a few decades ago, was not a part of most discussions of schooling in this country. Then the reality of the competition from abroad, educationally and economically, that was facing us as a nation made school reform not only a reality, but a necessity. Improving our schools and the academic achievement of all students has become a national priority and with it, has come the call for accountability. The results we want to achieve for our children and schools will only be realized by putting systems into place that hold all individuals and institutions accountable for their roles and responsibilities in this most important school improvement effort.

In the proposed model I have called for a more comprehensive system of accountability for educational improvement. The present accountability system, which focuses primarily on the student, the school the student attends and, in some cases, the teachers and principal of that individual building, is too narrow and limited. That system overlooks a number other players who have significant impact on the day to day operations of schools and those who work in them. Each of us must be aware that we share in the responsibility for accountability, and the success or failure we have in executing our roles, both individually and collectively, will in large measure determine the success or failure of our schools.

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend school regularly• Are knowledgeable about the academic standards that have been established by subject and grade level and understand that they have a major part of the responsibility for achieving the standards• Complete homework each day and be prepared for classes• Put forth the time and effort to do their work well• Meet behavior and conduct codes as prescribed by the local school board and expected by the community
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide challenging, quality academic work for students that is guided by the academic standards set by the state and district• Have a strong belief that their students can achieve the academic standards and expectations establish for them• Are knowledgeable concerning state and local academic content standards for the grades they teach• Know what students are to have learned in the years immediately preceding and following the grade levels they teach• Create a learning environment in the classroom that motivates students to want to learn what is expected of them• Are highly qualified in the subject areas they teach and understand various instructional techniques for delivering subject matter to students• Seek out and engage in quality professional development that enhance/extend their understanding of the academic standards established for the subjects they teach and strengthens their ability to provide effective instruction that is focused on the achievement of those standards• Develop positive working relationships with the parents of their students, assist in helping them understand the academic standards set for their child, and impress upon them the important role they play in helping their child achieve the standards• Work closely with the principal and other teachers in the school to create a positive educational environment for students

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish high academic and behavioral expectations for their child• Learn about the academic standards that their child is expected to achieve each year in every subject and impress upon the child the importance of the achievement of those standards• See to it that their child is prepared for school each day• Establish quiet areas in the home for their child to study• Attend important school events such as parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and district and school discussions about important educational issues• Develop positive working relationships with their child’s teachers and principal• Become informed about school issues such as school board elections, levy campaigns, curriculum expectations, and graduation and promotion standards
Building Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishes positive educational climate for building• Establishes the achievement of the academic standards as the primary mission of the school• Is an instructional leader, knows what constitutes quality academic work and sees that it is embedded in teaching and learning provided to all students• Is involved in the development of the academic content standards established for students, has a clear understanding of them, and sets expectations for all regarding their achievement• Sets high expectations for student learning, tracks student achievement, engages teachers in meaningful discussions that lead to improved classroom practices and results• Is a good evaluator of what goes on in the classroom between teacher and students• Recruits and selects good teachers and other staff• Identifies and provides meaningful professional development experiences for teachers with a special focus on the academic standards• Creates an environment that is open and inviting to parents and encourages them to become actively involved in the life of the school• Creates a safe and secure environment at the school• Demonstrates the leadership and management knowledge and skills to successfully deal with the fiscal and operational functions of running a school

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

Superintendent

- Is the key connector between those in the inner and outer circles of the accountability model
- Engages all players in meaningful dialogue in support of improved student learning with an emphasis on the achievement of the academic standards
- Leads the district office staff in becoming a provider/broker of services that focuses on building the capacity of building staff rather than simply serving a command and control role
- Establishes a vision of quality schooling that is anchored in high expectations for all staff and buildings
- Oversees the development of challenging academic content standards for the district and establishes them as the driving force for the district
- Assures that there is a clear connection between any internal accountability system established by the district and the external system established by the state
- Is a constant internal and external advocate for improvement and support only those programs which have been successful
- Provides quality professional development for teachers and administrators with a primary focus on the academic standards, and seeks opportunities for such staff development outside the district when the district is unable to provide it
- Develops a close working relationship with the parents and citizens of the community in order to assist them in becoming more knowledgeable about the improvements needed in education
- Involves the citizens of the community early in the process of designing educational expectations and academic standards, not after the fact
- Develops and proposes budgets that demonstrate commitment to the classroom and those who work directly with students and focuses on quality teaching staff, instructional materials, facilities, and support apparatus; be willing to stop funding budget items that don't measure up
- Demonstrates the leadership and management knowledge and skills to successfully deal with the fiscal and operational functions of running a school district

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

Local Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishes mission, vision and goals for the district based upon having students achieve the standards, involves all interested parties in the process, and communicates them to all in the community• Adopts policies that guide the development of the academic content standards for the district and gives final approval to such standards• Engages the community in meaningful dialogue about improvements and changes needed in the district• Sets policies that promote the recruitment and retention of well qualified and competent staff based upon the academic success of students• Approves budgets that reflect a commitment to the classroom as the most important element for delivering quality education to students• Acts as a collective body in the best interest of all children-puts aside “petty politics” and personal agendas• Works collaboratively as a board with the superintendent to bring about needed improvements• Selects a well qualified, competent person to serve as superintendent of schools• Demands information on the research base for programs before they are adopted
Citizens Of the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are actively involved in the decisions that impact their schools--levy campaigns, board policy development, setting academic content standards and expectations, etc.• Support the design and implementation of a comprehensive accountability program for their district• Become informed about educational issues and seeks data on student performance• Learn about the academic standards that students are expected to master• Hold local board members responsible for providing quality educational opportunities for all students.• Monitor statewide issues that impact their schools and hold elected officials responsible for decisions made

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

<p>Colleges and Universities That Prepare Teachers and Administrators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have standards that require academic rigor of all who wish to become teachers and administrators• Link Arts and Sciences faculty with the Education faculty to strengthen the preparation of teachers in their subject matter fields• Assure that the state’s academic content standards are included in their preparation programs and prepare teachers to master content knowledge that will be required• Develop close connections to school districts and require professors who prepare teachers and administrators to spend significant time on-site in local school districts• Provide aspiring teachers with extensive clinical experience• Provides those in administrative preparation programs with knowledge and understanding of what constitutes quality academic work and good teaching as well as providing leadership and management training• Budgets sufficient financial and support resources to demonstrate commitment to programs that prepare educators• Prepare to consult with, perhaps manage, failing schools
<p>Governor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Garners the attention of the citizens of the state to the need for significant improvement in our schools through the use of the “bully pulpit” accorded a governor• Supports and calls for strong academic content standards and high expectations for all students and schools and for strong accountability measures• Develops positive working relationships with the state board of education, state superintendent, and legislature in order to gain their support for needed educational improvements• Makes appointments to the state board of education that are consistent with a commitment to standards• Proposes budgets that reflect commitment to a high quality education for all students• Proposes legislation that will support high standards and high quality teaching

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operates under the guiding principle that they should be "clear on expectations and loose on controls"• Proposes and passes educational legislation that is demanding but fair, consistent over a number of years, and that assures alignment between various laws passed• Holds districts and schools accountable for results, eliminates restrictions that inhibit success• Provides flexibility within legislation passed so that schools can take advantage of unique circumstances or special needs that exist within a community• Provides adequate, reliable, predictable funding for school districts that supports high standards and high quality teaching• Provides sufficient funding for higher education to adequately prepare educators so that they can meet the demands placed upon them• Gives time for educational reform efforts to demonstrate results--does not look for "quick fixes"
State Superintendent and State Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working together, they make recommendations to the governor and legislature that will impact legislative decisions related to the operations, financing, programs, and accountability of schools• Create a vision for schools in the state and articulates the reasons for raising academic expectations• Maintain consistent focus on academic standards as the key to success• Work with all interested parties in leading the effort to establish the academic content standards and achievement levels required• Adopt standards that are of high quality and that set high expectations for students, schools, and districts• Adopt academic standards that are teachable• Are diligent in implementing state laws and policies related to education and to their oversight responsibilities connected with schools• Are sensitive to the need for consistency and alignment of recommendations over a number of years• Assure that alignment exists between standards, assessments, and accountability systems• Assure that a comprehensive reform agenda is in place in policy and law <p>(Continued on next page)</p>

A More Comprehensive Accountability Model

RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMATIC

<p>State Superintendent and State Board of Education (Continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate the need for improved academic results for all students and schools• Engage the public in meaningful dialogue about the importance of standards, what those standards should be, and how accountability should be achieved• Create programs, such as mentoring, to assure high quality teaching and reduce teacher turnover• Whether providing the services directly and/or becoming a "broker" that identifies other providers, the state education agency assures the delivery of high quality professional development and technical assistance to schools and districts
<p>Business Community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses their political power and influence with governors, state legislatures, and other state policy bodies to influence, enhance and improve educational reform and accountability initiatives• Works to bring all parties to the table to discuss areas of agreement and concern, develop compromises where needed, and build support and consensus around key legislative issues• Brings their financial and educational resources to bear in assisting the educational community in implementing some of the best practices from business, such as the education version of the Malcolm Baldrige Award• Demonstrates commitment to the education improvement effort by building strong positive relationships with all key players and remaining involved over a long period of time
<p>Media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engages in reporting that is fair and impartial, honest and candid• Assigns reporters to the educational beat that have experience and some depth of understanding of the issues they are covering• Is prepared to do the in-depth analysis of data and information so that in looking beneath the numbers a more detailed picture of results may be obtained and reported• Gives adequate coverage to all individuals and groups set forth in the accountability model so that they are judged according to the standards established for them

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