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POLICY & ACTION

IMPROVING ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS to Achieve Meaningful Results for Children

A National Parents Union Special Report



INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of assessment and accountability systems in education is a cornerstone of student success. These systems, when designed and implemented thoughtfully, provide valuable insights into academic progress, inform resource allocation, and foster collaboration among educators, students, families, and policymakers. However, current practices often fall short of delivering actionable results, leaving critical gaps in communication, equity, and transparency and depriving many children of the support they need to succeed. Many parents feel disconnected from their children's academic progress due to a lack of regular updates, insight into schoolwork, and clear explanations of educational policies. This disconnect is further exacerbated by inequities in access to supplemental support, such as tutoring, which disproportionately burdens families in underserved communities.

The National Parents Union launched the Leaders Council for Assessment and Accountability in collaboration with UnidosUS - the nation's largest nonprofit Latino advocacy organization - and the National Urban League - a historic nonpartisan civil rights organization advocating for African Americans and underserved communities - as part of the [Future of Assessment and Accountability Project](#). The Leaders Council, composed of ten Parent Leaders representing diverse regions and backgrounds across the United States, was established to examine and inform the future of educational assessment and accountability systems. Over the course of a year, the Leaders Council engaged in a structured series of in-person convenings and virtual working sessions to co-create a bold, community-informed vision for the future of educational assessment and accountability. Through a participatory and iterative process, the Leaders Council developed a framework aimed at reimagining traditional assessment models and outdated accountability structures. Centering the lived experiences of families and students, the council prioritized the co-design of systems *with* communities, rather than *for* them, and produced a comprehensive playbook to guide the development of more equitable, transparent, and community-informed practices that promote shared responsibility and continuous improvement in educational outcomes.

Decades of research has shown that receiving a high-quality education considerably lowers the likelihood of inequalities later in life. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson emphasized that continued neglect of the country's schools would lead to higher unemployment rates, lack of employable skills as the world continues to modernize, and increased spending on adult and youth incarceration and family welfare programs.¹ In a speech to Congress, President Johnson proposed a "national goal of Full Educational Opportunity"², leading Congress to pass The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which required that all children in the United States be provided the opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education.³ The law was intended to raise educational standards and make education more equitable by including testing and accountability requirements.⁴

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To ensure every child has access to high-quality education, we must address the imperfections in the system, while preserving the core elements of accountability that are working to drive collective continuous improvement. By broadening the metrics used to evaluate student achievement, fostering better communication with families, and enhancing data accessibility, we can empower all stakeholders to effectively support children’s academic and personal growth. This paper outlines actionable strategies to enhance and refine assessment and accountability systems, focusing on delivering meaningful, measurable results that directly impact student outcomes. By addressing key challenges, such as gaps in communication, inequities in resource allocation, and over-reliance on narrow metrics of success, we can create systems that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of our children and communities.

In this rapidly evolving educational landscape, these reforms are not just necessary—they are urgent. Schools, families, and communities must come together to create systems that reflect the diverse needs of students, provide meaningful feedback, and drive lasting improvements. This paper offers a roadmap to achieve these goals, ensuring that the promise of education is fulfilled for every child.

BY BROADENING THE METRICS USED TO EVALUATE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, FOSTERING BETTER COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES, AND ENHANCING DATA ACCESSIBILITY, WE CAN EMPOWER ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT CHILDREN’S ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL GROWTH.

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I. CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Every child has the right to a supportive educational environment, and parents, educators, and policymakers want to see students finish school ready to thrive in an ever-evolving global market.⁵ Yet, recent studies on pandemic-era learning show that math and reading scores of 13-year-old students declined on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments.⁶ The data collected from assessments serves multiple purposes in education, from resource allocation to guiding instruction and informing interventions. Assessments can also be a powerful tool used to hold education systems accountable for student learning outcomes and allow educational institutions to foster academic success and close achievement gaps.⁷

The effectiveness of assessment and accountability systems in education is undermined by persistent challenges that hinder collaboration, fairness, and transparency. Addressing these issues is critical to creating systems that support all students and foster trust among stakeholders.

A. Communication Gaps in Student Progress

Parents consistently express frustration with the lack of communication between schools and families. Schools often fail to provide meaningful feedback on student performance, and insufficient updates from schools leave parents feeling uninformed about critical milestones and areas requiring attention. This disconnect is compounded by the growing trend of reducing or eliminating homework, which further limits parents' ability to assess their child's academic progress. Without access to homework or in-class assignments, families lack a tangible way to gauge their child's understanding of core concepts, readiness for future academic challenges, and whether they need additional support. This issue is particularly concerning in early grades, where foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy are critical for long-term success.

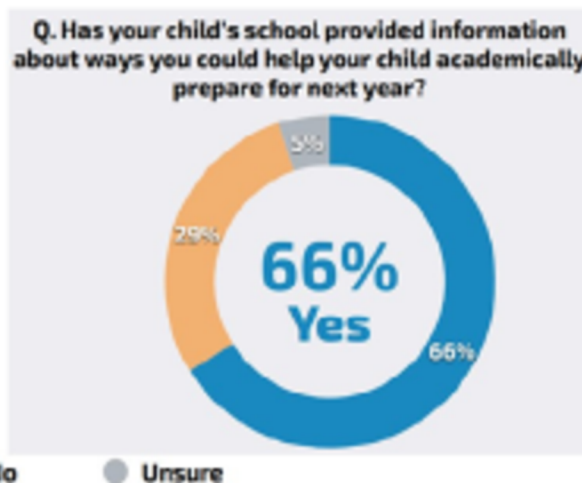
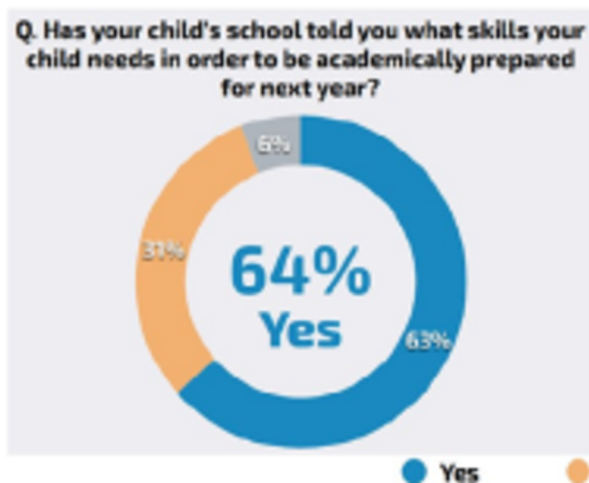
Moreover, poor communication between parents and educators restricts the potential for meaningful collaboration. Progress reports and parent-teacher conferences are not always sufficient for keeping families informed. In the absence of consistent updates, parents are often left to advocate for their children without a clear understanding of whether they are on track to meet academic benchmarks. Effective collaboration between parents and educators is essential for student success, but communication gaps can create barriers to constructive dialogue. Difficulty reaching teachers, inconsistent responses to inquiries, or lack of clarity in school messages can all reduce opportunities for families and educators to align on strategies to support students.

For families from diverse backgrounds, language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of accessible communication tools can exacerbate these challenges. Strengthening communication channels is essential to building partnerships that support success for all students. As such, schools must ensure that communication practices are inclusive so that all parents feel informed enough to participate in their children's education.

As the 2023-24 academic year came to a close, the National Parents Union (NPU) surveyed parents to determine how they felt about their child's school experience and preparedness for the next school year. Thirty-one percent (31%) of parents reported that their child's school did not tell them what skills their child needed to be equipped for the next school year, and 29% said that schools did not provide information about how parents can help prepare them.

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CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

B. Financial and Equity Concerns

As schools face increasing demands with limited resources, many families are turning to external programs to supplement their children's education. While tutoring can provide valuable support, it also highlights systemic gaps in school-provided resources. These gaps disproportionately affect students in underserved communities, where schools often lack the funding and staff to offer robust academic interventions. Schools with limited access to specialized educators for subjects like math, science, and reading may leave students struggling to master key concepts. Without adequate school-based support, many families may feel compelled to seek external tutoring to bridge gaps in their children's education.

"AS A SINGLE MOM, I HAD TO GET A SECOND JOB TO GET MY DAUGHTER PRIVATE TUTORING. AND SHE GREW THREE GRADE LEVELS IN FOUR MONTHS WITH PRIVATE TUTORING." – TRICIA MCGHEE

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This reliance on external support as a remedy for insufficient, school-provided academic resources contributes to the widening achievement gap between socioeconomic groups. However, access to supplemental academic support is unevenly distributed. For many households, the expense of private tutoring and other academic enrichment opportunities is simply unaffordable, further deepening inequities in educational outcomes. Students in well-funded districts often benefit from in-school tutoring programs, extracurricular activities, and advanced coursework, while those in underfunded districts lack comparable opportunities. This creates a systemic disadvantage for students in underserved communities, limiting their ability to compete academically.

Schools must ensure all students have access to needed resources and support to succeed within the school system. This requires a commitment to equitable resource distribution and targeted interventions. Assessments are critical in holding school systems accountable, customizing interventions to individual student needs, and improving educational experiences and student outcomes. Using assessment data to gather, analyze, and interpret information allows school systems to evaluate student learning and progress, shape instructional practice, and highlight disparities in student performance and resource allocation.⁹

Furthermore, by disaggregating assessment data, schools and districts can uncover systemic inequities that may otherwise remain hidden, such as patterns of underperformance among certain groups that can signal a need for targeted interventions.

"TO SAY, I'M SEEING THAT WE HAVE LOTS OF GAPS HERE IN READING, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE THIRD OR FOURTH GRADE, WHY DON'T WE PROVIDE INTERVENTIONS? WHY DON'T WE PROVIDE EXTERNAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?" – PASCALE SMALL, NPU

LEADERS COUNCIL FOR ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEMBER

School systems that commit to equitable resource distribution based on assessment results demonstrate a proactive approach to addressing disparities and fostering inclusivity. Focusing on fairness improves educational outcomes and builds trust and collaboration among stakeholders. Without these measures, education systems risk perpetuating cycles of disadvantage that hinder social and economic mobility and opportunity.

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CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

C. Transparency in School District Budgeting

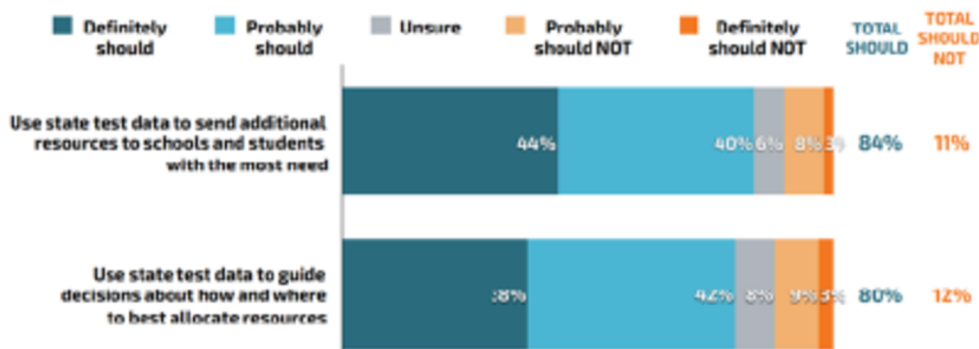
"I THINK IT'S GREAT IF YOU HAVE THE TEST SCORES OF THE DATA OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE, BUT SOMETIMES WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THE WAY [DISTRICTS] ROLL OUT THEIR BUDGETS COMPARED TO THE DATA...WE CAN'T SEE WHAT IS ALLOCATED TO INTERVENTIONS OR STUDENT SUCCESS." – TIARA THOMAS
LEADERS COUNCIL FOR ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A lack of transparency in school district budgets further exacerbates the challenges of accountability. Too often, budget reports are vague or inaccessible, making it difficult for parents and families to understand how funds are allocated to programs, staff salaries, and classroom resources. Parents and community members often feel excluded from discussions about how funds are allocated, leading to skepticism about whether resources are being used effectively. This mistrust is particularly pronounced in districts where academic outcomes remain stagnant despite increased funding.¹⁰

This limited visibility into budget processes erodes trust between schools and the communities they serve. Inadequate communication about budget decisions also reduces accountability for educational outcomes, leaving families without clear information necessary to effectively advocate for the tools and support their children need. When stakeholders cannot assess whether resources are being used effectively or equitably, it creates a barrier to meaningful improvements. When families lack access to detailed budgetary information – such as how data is used to make allocation decisions – they are unable to identify gaps or push for investments in critical areas such as teacher training, special education, or technology infrastructure.

When asked about assessments as part of the [NPU Poll](#):

- 84% of parents said that district leaders **Definitely should** or **Probably should** use state testing data to send additional resources to schools and students that demonstrated the most need.
- 80% of parents that districts **Definitely should** or **Probably should** use state testing data to determine how resources are allocated.



These challenges highlight the need for reforms that address communication gaps and engage families to foster trust and collaboration. Improving transparency requires schools to provide accessible, detailed reports on budget allocations and their impact on student outcomes. By tackling these obstacles, school systems can create a foundation for more effective and equitable assessment and accountability systems.

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II. PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

Transforming assessment and accountability systems requires a collaborative approach that integrates efforts from federal, state, and local governments, and families. Federal laws such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provide firm guardrails for accountability, mandating statewide assessments and requiring disaggregated data reporting to ensure fairness in educational opportunities.¹² However, state and local authorities adapt these frameworks to meet regional needs, ensuring that assessment systems reflect the unique challenges of diverse student populations.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates appropriate accommodations in assessments to ensure accessibility, which is particularly crucial for students receiving special education services under this law.¹³ Similarly, English language learners (ELLs) require tailored assessment strategies that account for their language acquisition progress while measuring academic achievement. Failure to account for language proficiency can lead to inaccurate measurements of ELL's academic abilities.¹⁴ As primary stakeholders, families offer invaluable insights into their children's educational experiences that can help shape responsive and inclusive policies.

By integrating efforts from all stakeholders, decision-making processes become more representative of diverse perspectives, guiding the development of enhanced accountability systems that emphasize collective effort, comprehensive and easy-to-understand success metrics, and data-driven equity. Shared responsibility for continuous system improvement, broadened definitions of success, and the strategic use of data are fundamental for fostering sustainable improvement in educational outcomes. By grounding policies in these areas, we can establish frameworks that not only measure educational outcomes but also foster collaboration, drive meaningful improvements, and address the needs of all students.

The principles and recommendations below reflect the deliberations of the Leadership Council, and were developed in collaboration with the [Civil Rights Principles for Assessment and Accountability](#).

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PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

A. Shared Responsibility for Continuous Improvement

Finding solutions that address systemic and localized challenges in education requires an approach that builds trust and leads to effective collaboration. This shared responsibility ensures that diverse perspectives inform policy decisions, fostering strategies that address the unique challenges faced by various communities. Creating systems that encourage collaboration ensures shared responsibility in decision-making and fosters trust among all participants. This may include:

- Establishing regular communication channels among stakeholders
- Hosting forums and town halls to encourage transparency and input
- Developing interagency partnerships to address resource gaps

Structured participation mechanisms provide a framework for meaningful engagement and incorporating diverse voices in the decision-making process. Establishing advisory councils, community forums, and stakeholder committees allows for meaningful engagement from educators, families, students, policymakers, and community leaders. These groups provide a platform for underrepresented communities to express their concerns and ideas, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued and that accountability systems reflect the needs of all demographics. Tools like multilingual resources and accessible meeting times can help bridge participation gaps, and regularly scheduled meetings and transparent reporting further strengthen these participatory structures.

For accountability systems to be effective, they must incorporate culturally relevant strategies that resonate with the diverse populations they serve. This involves tailoring educational practices to align with the cultural values, linguistic diversity, traditions, and aspirations of local communities. These strategies should:

- Recognize and respect the cultural identities and values of students and families
- Incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices that enhance student engagement
- Align success metrics with the unique goals and aspirations of each community

For example, schools in Indigenous or immigrant communities might integrate culturally specific curricula to reflect students' heritage, fostering a sense of identity and belonging.

These strategies promote equity by addressing systemic barriers and providing targeted support to underserved populations, ensuring that education systems are inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the communities they serve. Successful implementation of these strategies will require ongoing professional development for educators to understand and respect cultural nuances, and resources to implement relevant programs effectively. Collaboration with community leaders, cultural experts, and local organizations is also important to ensure alignment with local values.

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PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

Sustainable improvement begins with a bold vision grounded in equity and access, and extends through the full policy cycle: goal-setting, resource allocation, implementation, and ongoing evaluation. Accountability must not be compliance-driven or punitive—it should foster a culture of learning, trust, and mutual responsibility. This means providing meaningful benchmarks, evidence-based strategies, expert support, and equitable resources to the schools and students with the greatest needs. Importantly, this process must be shaped through ongoing collaboration with those directly impacted, not imposed solely through top-down decisions. Families and communities of all backgrounds - not just those with power or influence - must play a central role in defining what success looks like and in driving continuous improvement.

B. Well-Rounded Education & An Opportunity to Learn

"I KNOW A LOT OF TIMES WE FOCUS ON WHAT THE CHILD LACKS IN. I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE THINGS ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE GOOD IN... BECAUSE THAT WOULD ALSO HELP US BUILD ON THEIR STRENGTHS." – DEANDREA BYRD
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Ensuring that every student has an authentic opportunity to learn begins with understanding both learning conditions and outcomes. Data must be used not only to measure academic performance but also to assess whether students have equitable access to the resources, support, and environments they need to thrive. Preparing students for the future requires assessment and accountability systems that go beyond academic content mastery to support a well-rounded approach to education - one that upholds academic rigor while nurturing critical life skills such as resilience, creativity, communication, and self-awareness. Accountability systems must move beyond compliance to ensure that data is used not only to track academic achievement but also to examine whether students have equitable access to high quality resources, effective teachers, and supportive environments. A truly equitable system recognizes that academic performance cannot be separated from the conditions in which learning occurs, and must be designed to foster the full range of skills, knowledge, and mindsets students need to succeed in school, work and life.

Academic achievement is the primary benchmark used to assess student outcomes, with the most commonly used metrics being standardized test scores, grade point average (GPA), graduation rates, and college enrollment statistics. Research has shown that higher academic achievement is associated with better job prospects, higher earning potential, and greater overall life satisfaction.¹⁵ However, we also know that a well-rounded education includes more than academic success, and student outcomes also encompass essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration – which we can measure and assess.¹⁶

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PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

Holistic education frameworks prioritize both academic achievement and non-academic skills such as emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and resilience. This holistic approach to education can:

- Equip students with the tools needed to navigate complex social environments
- Foster emotional intelligence and mental well-being
- Prepare students for success in both personal and professional spheres

Implementing curricula, programs, and extracurricular activities that emphasize social-emotional learning (SEL) prepares students for life beyond academics, and local communities must have a voice in defining what success looks like for their students. By involving families, educators, and local organizations, schools can develop metrics that reflect community values, aspirations, and cultural contexts. Empowering these communities to define success metrics ensures that educational goals are meaningful and attainable, fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among stakeholders, enhances engagement and support for educational initiatives, and creates a sense of shared responsibility for educational outcomes.

"ONE OF THE BIGGEST ISSUES THAT I SEE THAT I ALSO WORRY ABOUT AS A PARENT IS: HOW DO THEY PLAY? DO THEY PLAY WELL? ARE THEY GROWING AS A HUMAN TO WHERE THEY WON'T BE OUTCAST WHEN THEY'RE GETTING READY TO GO INTO SOCIETY?" – DR. TERRANCE ANFIELD

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While standardized testing remains an important tool for assessing academic proficiency, it cannot capture the full spectrum of student capabilities or development. Broader indicators such as project-based assessments, portfolio reviews, and community engagement metrics can complement standardized assessments and provide a more comprehensive view of student development. Holistic benchmarks, such as social-emotional growth, community engagement, and vocational readiness provide a more expansive picture of student success. Combined, these methods encourage creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, better preparing students for future challenges. To implement a more thorough assessment of student success, schools can:

- Develop complementary assessment tools, such as portfolios and performance-based evaluations
- Incorporate metrics that track progress in non-academic areas, including SEL and extracurricular achievements
- Engage families and communities in defining and validating these new indicators

Such a balanced approach ensures that assessment systems are equitable, actionable, and aligned with the diverse needs of students.

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PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

C. Data for Equitable Decision-Making

Data plays a crucial role in identifying areas for improvement and tailoring interventions to specific needs. Real-time access to timely, locally relevant, disaggregated data allows educators and families to more quickly identify and address students' needs for timely and informed decision-making. Localized data enables targeted interventions that address specific community challenges, and data systems presented in user-friendly formats ensure that all stakeholders can:

- Understand the challenges facing their communities
- Develop targeted solutions that address identified disparities
- Monitor the effectiveness of interventions over time

Disaggregating data by demographics such as race, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, or geographic location reveals inequities that may be obscured in aggregate data. This transparency allows policymakers to allocate resources where they are needed most, addressing systemic disparities and promoting equity in educational outcomes. Transparent reporting practices are critical to building trust and ensuring accountability in the use of this data, but the ability to understand the data is equally as crucial.

Educating families on how to interpret and use data fosters informed advocacy and collaboration with schools. Workshops, online resources, and community outreach programs can build data literacy, enabling families to engage meaningfully in accountability processes and support their children's academic journeys. By fostering data literacy, schools can strengthen partnerships with families and ensure that educational decisions are inclusive and informed.

III. ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

"WHAT TENDS TO HAPPEN IS THAT I ONLY MEET WITH THE TEACHERS OF THE CLASSES THAT MY KID IS NOT DOING WELL IN, BECAUSE THAT'S SCHOOL POLICY. YOU ONLY GET PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES IF YOUR KID HAS A 'C' OR BELOW IN THEIR CLASS. SO, THERE ARE SOME CLASSES WHERE MY KIDDO MIGHT HAVE AN OKAY GRADE, BUT SHE'S TOTALLY DISENGAGED. AND SO, I WANT TO KNOW IN EACH CLASS, 'IS SHE ENGAGED?' INSTEAD OF THE TEACHER DEPENDING ON ME...TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE DOING WELL." – TRICIA MCGHEE

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ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

A. Improving Communication and Engagement

Improving accountability and assessment systems requires concrete actions across key areas. Communication and engagement can be enhanced by establishing consistent practices and protocols. Strategies may look like:

- 1. Implementing Regular, Clear Updates on Student Progress to Parents.** Establishing consistent communication methods, such as digital platforms, weekly newsletters, or parent-teacher conferences, ensures families stay informed. Timely updates help parents identify and address areas where their children need support.
- 2. Reintroduce or Adapt Homework Policies for Visibility into Student Understanding.** Homework provides insights into student learning. Schools should create inclusive policies that accommodate diverse family structures and ensure assignments are meaningful and manageable for students.
- 3. Foster Proactive Communication Channels Between Parents and Teachers.** Encouraging ongoing dialogue between educators and families builds trust and enhances collaboration. Schools can establish communication protocols, such as regular check-ins or open office hours, to support parent-teacher engagement.

B. Addressing Financial Barriers and Resource Gaps

Addressing financial barriers involves expanding publicly funded tutoring or academic support programs to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. Schools could also prioritize resource allocation to underserved communities by adopting needs-based funding models and forming partnerships with non-profits to provide essential materials like technology and books. Transparent reporting on school budgets is crucial for rebuilding trust and enabling families to advocate for fair distribution of resources.

- 1. Expand School-Provided Tutoring or Academic Support Programs.** Publicly funded tutoring initiatives can bridge gaps for students who cannot afford private services. Expanding programs like after-school support or weekend classes ensures all students have access to additional learning opportunities.
- 2. Ensure Equitable Access to Resources, Particularly in Underserved Communities.** Schools must prioritize resource allocation to address disparities. Strategies include needs-based funding models and partnerships with nonprofits to provide technology, books, and other essentials.
- 3. Increase Transparency in Resource Allocation to Rebuild Trust.** Clear, accessible reporting on how schools allocate budgets fosters trust and enables communities to advocate for fair distribution. Schools should publish detailed spending reports and engage families in budget discussions.

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ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

C. Reforming Assessment Systems

Reforming assessment systems means adopting holistic success metrics that evaluate academic and non-academic growth, such as emotional well-being and critical thinking. Personalized assessments, including adaptive testing technologies and teacher-led evaluations, accommodate individual learning needs. Alternative accountability models, such as competency-based education, can further refine effective approaches. As the world changes, culturally responsive teaching – acknowledging and valuing students’ cultural backgrounds as assets in the learning process – is becoming more necessary. Educators have the opportunity to create instruction that is rich in context, but they also face challenges in making sure that assessments provide fair and unbiased opportunities for students to show their abilities. As such, assessments should be designed to reflect this to be relevant and meaningful to all students.¹⁷

These reforms can be accomplished by:

- 1. Developing and Adopting Holistic Success Metrics (Academic and Non-Academic).**
Assessment systems should measure diverse aspects of student growth, from academic performance to emotional well-being. Holistic metrics offer a more comprehensive view of student development.
- 2. Introducing Flexible, Inclusive Assessments Tailored to Student Needs.** Personalized assessments accommodate different learning styles and abilities. Schools can adopt adaptive testing technologies or teacher-led evaluations that reflect individual progress.
- 3. Piloting Alternative Accountability Systems in Diverse Districts to Refine Approaches.**
Testing new accountability models in varied contexts allows policymakers to identify best practices and scalability. Pilot programs can explore innovations like competency-based education or community-driven evaluations.

To be truly meaningful, assessment systems must be designed with intentional alignment to state academic standards while also being accessible, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, and fully accessible to students with diverse needs. Meaningful assessments serve as a civil rights safeguard, ensuring transparency and equity by providing data on historically underserved student groups. While reimagining assessment, we must maintain federal guardrails for annual testing in math and reading to guarantee comparability and accountability. This ensures that assessments are not only valid and reliable, but also reflective of the diverse learners they aim to serve.

A coherent system should integrate multiple measures - formative, interim, and summative, that collectively capture academic growth alongside other critical dimensions, such as social emotional well-being and problem solving skills. Systems that measure both academic and non-academic growth - such as emotional well-being, problem-solving, and critical thinking - must evolve to capture the full spectrum of student learning. Personalized tools like adaptive testing and teacher-led evaluations can better accommodate individual strengths and needs, but their effectiveness depends on thoughtful design grounded in cultural relevance and inclusivity.

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ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Assessments that are integrated into instruction give educators a clearer picture of student progress, and reduce the risk of biased or narrow evaluations. Children today are growing and learning in a world that demands agility, empathy, and cross-cultural competence. As such, assessment systems must reflect the richness of students' lived experiences, and provide fair, relevant opportunities for all students to demonstrate their knowledge and growth.

D. Enhancing Data Accessibility and Literacy

Without a clear understanding of student progress and the performance of our schools, parents and families cannot advocate for the necessary changes that will support all children in achieving academic success. Enhancing data accessibility and literacy ensures families and educators can make informed decisions.

1. **Create User-Friendly Dashboards for Families to Access and Understand Data.** User-friendly dashboards with visual aids and multilingual support make data accessible, while workshops and resources build parents' confidence in interpreting academic information. Interactive dashboards simplify complex data, making it easier for families to track student progress and advocate for their children. Features like multilingual support and visual aids improve accessibility.
2. **Provide Workshops and Resources to Build Data Literacy Among Parents.** Workshops can help families interpret academic data and understand its implications. Offering resources, such as guides or videos, ensures parents feel confident using data to support their children.
3. **Ensure Timely and Actionable Data Sharing for Educators and Families.** Regular updates enable stakeholders to act swiftly. Schools should establish data-sharing protocols that align with academic calendars and decision-making timelines.

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IV. IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Implementing enhanced accountability and assessment systems involves navigating complex challenges and aligning diverse stakeholder priorities. Effective implementation requires clear transparency, robust educator support, and careful balancing of federal, state, and local policies with community needs. In this section, we discuss key considerations to ensure that these systems are effective, equitable, and sustainable in their application.

A. Ensuring Transparency and Accountability

Transparent communication empowers stakeholders to track progress, address shortcomings, and build collective confidence in the education system. As such, establishing robust transparency measures is foundational to building trust and ensuring accountability systems function effectively. School districts should commit to regular reporting on progress, resource allocation, and the outcomes of implemented strategies. Clear metrics should be established to evaluate the success of new initiatives, ensuring that interventions achieve their intended goals. To strengthen transparency, districts must:

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

- **Develop Accessible Reporting Systems:** Ensure reports are user-friendly and easily understood by diverse audiences.
- **Establish Success Metrics:** Create clear benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of interventions and drive continuous improvement.
- **Promote Stakeholder Involvement:** Encourage input from parents, educators, and community leaders in designing and evaluating accountability policies.

These measures establish a feedback loop for refinement and ensure interventions meet their intended goals.

B. Supporting Educators

Educators play a central role in implementing enhanced accountability systems and their support is vital. To ensure effective implementation of systems, teachers must be adequately supported through time, resources, and professional development. Professional development opportunities aligned with proposed changes enable educators to adapt effectively and deliver high-quality instruction. Furthermore, engaging teachers in decision-making processes ensures their buy-in and enhances the efficacy of new initiatives, as they bring practical insights from classroom experiences. Recognizing the critical role of educators, strategies to support them include:

- **Allocate Preparation Time:** Ensure teachers have sufficient time for lesson planning, data analysis, and collaboration
- **Offer Targeted Professional Development:** Provide training opportunities that align with new accountability measures and equip teachers with innovative strategies for student engagement.
- **Engage Educators in Decision-Making:** Involve teachers in designing and refining policies to leverage their expertise and foster buy-in.

C. Balancing Stakeholder Needs

Collaborative frameworks that foster shared responsibility among all stakeholders – including families, educators, and policymakers – help address diverse needs and perspectives. Conflicting goals can undermine progress. As such, fostering alignment is critical. By promoting open dialogue and joint decision-making, education systems can navigate potential conflicts and ensure that accountability measures are cohesive and effective. Balancing these needs requires ongoing communication and adaptability, emphasizing the collective pursuit of equitable and meaningful outcomes.

Strategies to achieve this balance include:

- **Policy Alignment:** Ensure federal and state guidelines align with and complement local initiatives rather than creating competing demands.
- **Collaborative Frameworks:** Establish platforms for joint decision-making among stakeholders, emphasizing shared responsibility.
- **Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:** Maintain open communication channels to address emerging concerns and adapt policies accordingly.

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V. OUR CALL TO ACTION

Improving accountability and assessment systems in education is not just a policy objective – it is a moral imperative. Every child deserves access to an equitable, effective, high-quality education, and achieving this goal requires collective effort and ongoing innovation. By embracing shared responsibility among federal, state, local, and family stakeholders, expanding our definitions of success, and ensuring that data is used to inform decision-making, we can build a more inclusive educational system that prepares children for post-secondary lives.

The success of these initiatives depends on the commitment of policymakers, educators, families, and communities. Transparent communication, sufficient resources, and robust professional development for teachers are key to ensuring these changes are tangible in their impact. Schools must be supported with the tools and structures needed to foster meaningful learning experiences, while also recognizing and engaging with parents as active partners in their children's education. Equity must remain at the forefront of all policies and reforms, ensuring that all students – regardless of their background – have access to the opportunities they need to succeed.

SCHOOLS MUST BE SUPPORTED WITH THE TOOLS AND STRUCTURES NEEDED TO FOSTER MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES, WHILE ALSO RECOGNIZING AND ENGAGING WITH PARENTS AS ACTIVE PARTNERS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION. EQUITY MUST REMAIN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ALL POLICIES AND REFORMS, ENSURING THAT ALL STUDENTS – REGARDLESS OF THEIR BACKGROUND – HAVE ACCESS TO THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY NEED TO SUCCEED.

As we look to the future, accountability and assessment systems must evolve alongside emerging challenges and opportunities. Rapid technological advancements, shifting workforce demands, and an increasingly diverse student population will require constant evaluation and refinement of our approaches. By maintaining a commitment to collective continuous improvement, we can ensure that our educational systems remain responsive, fair, and effective. It is imperative that all stakeholders work together to turn these principles into practice, ensuring that every child has the support and resources needed to thrive.

The time for change is now, and the future of education depends on the steps we take today.

The National Parents Union

Improving
Assessment and
Accountability
Systems to Achieve
Meaningful Results
for Children

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