

Accountability in schools



The quality of our workforce is directly related to the quality of education that is provided to us through our education system. This fact is reflected on a daily basis via various media such as TV and radio, and in speeches of our politicians. We live in an economically constantly changing world. As technology progresses a lot of American jobs are being outsourced to other countries. The jobs that remain in the states tend to be more demanding on the work force in terms of education, flexibility, and other skills.

This is why education becomes increasingly more important and why we need to provide only the best for our students. So, why do we allow so many children in America to fall behind by receiving inferior education? Why is the level of illiteracy and self doubt so high among our students? I believe that the problem lies in lack of accountability on part of the student body, school districts, and parents. In this paper current trends toward placing more accountability on schools and students will be discussed.

The federal government along with the state governments has taken various steps toward increasing the quality of education. All of these efforts are based on the system of accountability. The system of accountability revolves around three main factors. Namely, measurable goals are clearly defined for students in all grades. Following that, various techniques to measure the progress toward meeting those goals are designed. A system of documenting and reporting student progress is created with the goal of holding students and school districts accountable through a set of incentives or penalties based on their performance.

This system is created and legalized by a certain set of federal and state laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act. Local school district also plays an important role as many of the tasks around the design of the testing system and the standards are often left to it. In most cases the school districts design a process of reporting and record keeping in form of standardized tests, performance based assessments, as well as report cards for parents and for the government. The standardized way of testing ensures equality and uniformed reports across all districts.

In many cases, such as it is with the No Child Left Behind Act, the amount of funding that goes into the district is directly related to the results of these tests. Standard based accountability system is in no way perfect though. Various challenges for state governments and school districts are created by it and many doubt its effectiveness. The system is uniformed and therefore all students count. This means that students who are traditionally more challenged in school (low income families, second language learners) have to be included in the process.

In order to meet their performance goals these parts of the student body require teachers who specialize in certain areas. Such specialized educators are often not available or simply can not be afforded by the school districts. Additional challenges are provided by the lack of uniformity in the system itself. The requirements regarding curriculum alignment and assessment can vary widely from district to district. Many times, the accountability requirements on local, state, and national levels are not set to the same standard thus making it very hard for individual districts to comply with all regulations.

Implementation and enforcement of legislature dealing with the above mentioned issues is significantly complicated by the lack of uniformed standards on all levels of government. According to Robellen “... while few states have met the requirements of IASA even now, no state education agencies have been financially penalized for not complying with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Robelen, 2001). ” Currently, the federal government is attempting to standardize the process on a national level. This is done with the hope that some of the major issues which are raised by an accountability system in education will be resolved.

The proposed rules, which are now open for public comment, would standardize the definition states use in determining graduation rates, require schools to make extensive efforts to ensure eligible students know they can transfer to different schools or sign up for free tutoring, and force states to publish their scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress alongside their own test results. The rules also would clarify that states’ tests should assess students on more than basic skills (Hoff, 2008).

This would be a very significant improvement over the original legislation. Providing high quality education has to be a priority especially since we are undergoing an economic transition which is eliminating many jobs and thus making the job market more competitive. By passing legislature and making sure that students, parents, and school districts are held accountable for academic progress in their schools we will create a better tomorrow for ourselves and our kids. Education is the best investment today and accountability is the success insurance for it.