BACKGROUNDER: ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENTS

The Challenge

No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) approach to measuring school effectiveness harmed schools by mislabeling successful schools as failing, under-serving those schools that are truly struggling, and placing undue emphasis on federally mandated standardized student assessments as the accountability yardstick for entire school systems. Some of the schools labeled as failing are working hard to address students' social and psychological needs that undermine their academic achievement. Others are improving academic achievement but not as quickly as required under NCLB's arbitrary targets in multiple categories. Still others are improving academic achievement, but by reluctantly teaching to the test and limiting access to a complete education that includes arts, social studies, and other areas of learning important to the whole child, such as promoting higher-order thinking skills.

As a result of NCLB's failures, the federal government is now granting waivers from many of the requirements of NCLB. Waiver approval, however, comes without sufficient reprieve from standardized testing and is contingent upon additional conditions, such as a state's acceptance of teacher evaluations based on student test scores.

The Opportunity

The National Education Association (NEA) believes in a more complete picture of the performance of schools in districts and states, instead of the current system that holds them accountable based solely on how many students reach an arbitrary cut score on a standardized test in reading, math, and science on a particular day.
States should learn from the mistakes of NCLB by measuring school effectiveness through a broad range of indicators and using the results to provide support for struggling schools and students instead

of punishing them. In addition, the results should be used for self-evaluation at the classroom, school, district, and state levels, decisions about the need for resources, and to allow for transparency concerning school performance.

Indicators for Family and Community Engagement

Student learning can be one indicator of school effectiveness, but should not be measured solely by student performance on one or two standardized tests. Instead, multiple, valid, and reliable measures of student learning should be considered, beginning with the professional assessment by the classroom teacher. Such measures of student learning might include district- and school-level assessments; classroom-level written, oral, performance-based, or portfolio assessments; and, written evaluations. Valid measures of student learning should be developed with the agreement of teachers and other stakeholders, take into account the multiple factors influencing a student's learning, (i.e., English language acquisition and development stages), and must be considered as one- but not the only- important indicator of overall school effectiveness.

Other indicators of school effectiveness, which also should be identified in cooperation with education stakeholders as well, could include- but are not limited to- graduation rates; attendance rates; student mobility or transfer rates; the percentage of students participating in rigorous coursework (including honors, AP, IB, dual enrollment, early college); the percentage of students with access to courses infused with 21st century skills (communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity); and the percentage of students participating in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), humanities, foreign language, creative and fine arts, health, and physical education programs.

Great Public Schools for Every Student

NEA Education Policy and Practice Department | Center for Great Public Schools | 1201 16th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

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The NEA Great Public Schools Accountability and Assessments Indicators reflect NEA's commitment to high-quality public schools. They include:

Appropriate Student Assessments

▸ State allocates funding towards the development of a valid student assessment system.

▸ 100 percent of districts use assessments that employ multiple measures of student growth 1.

Positive Achievement Outcomes

▸ State allocates funding to programs to ensure positive achievement outcomes for all students, including strategies to reduce learning gaps.

▸ 100 percent of students entering a two- or four-year college did not require remediation or learning support courses.

Adequate School Capacity

▸ State has a comprehensive, aligned, and integrated information management system that enables districts and schools to analyze, evaluate, and continuously improve student, educator, and school performance 2.

▸ 100 percent of educators surveyed indicated they feel confident in analyzing and interpreting formative and summative assessment data.

School Effectiveness

▸ State offers support to low-performing schools 3.

▸ 100 percent of students in a school categorized as "low-performing" receive additional supports.

Conclusion

A broad range of measures of school effectiveness, resources, and supports should be used to direct needed resources to schools, allow for self-evaluation and improvement, and allow for transparency. They should not be used to place an undue emphasis on measuring over learning, or to simply label as failures schools with few resources or high percentages of students who need extra support, without recognizing the challenges these schools and students face, the efforts these schools and students make, and the supports these schools and students need.

For more information please visit
nea.org/gpsindicators

Notes

1. Measures of student growth may include pre-and post-tests, percent change in GPA, group work or presentations, end-of-course papers or portfolios, and project-based inquiry activities

2. A comprehensive system must include multiple measures of student, educator, and school performance.

3. Support includes needs assessments, on-site evaluations, assistance and training in data analysis, additional funding for the school improvement planning process, professional learning, and school support teams.