



# NEW Accountability

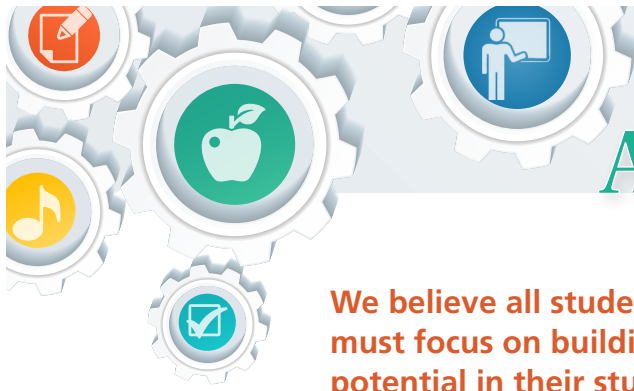
A NEW SOCIAL COMPACT FOR AMERICAN EDUCATION

On the 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the promise of that historic decision remains unfulfilled. Stark inequities continue to define American education, and far too many American youth—especially students of color, immigrant students and students living in poverty—do not have access to a high-quality education that meets their learning needs. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was conceived out of a desire to tackle this persistent inequality in America's schools by establishing crucial goals for achieving educational equity. Unfortunately, the system of accountability developed for NCLB did not substantially expand educational equity or significantly improve education outcomes, and instead gave rise to harmful unintended consequences. Achievement gaps and opportunity gaps remain large, struggling schools have made little progress and student achievement on international assessments has been flat since 2001. While progress on these fronts has stalled, American education has been increasingly driven by a system of sanctions based on standardized test scores. These scores have been used to determine the futures of students, educators and schools, with severe sanctions imposed for poor test performance. In desperate attempts to avoid these penalties, many American schools have resorted to the widespread use of impoverished “test prep,” with the resultant loss of the meaningful teaching and learning and the rich curriculum that young Americans need to be fully prepared for college, career and civic life. Our accountability system is broken, and with its singular focus on testing and sanctions, it distorts and damages the essential purposes of education.

We share the common convictions that the promise of *Brown* must be fulfilled, and that to accomplish that vital national objective, America must rethink our current system of education accountability. Our new social compact for American education would be built on these principles of shared accountability:

**We believe the purpose of accountability is to improve education.**

From Finland to Singapore, the most educationally accomplished nations use accountability to support good educational practices and to drive continuous improvement in their schools. If we are to compete with these world-class educational systems, accountability in American education must focus both on gathering complete information on the performance of students, educators, schools and districts, and on providing the feedback, resources and supports necessary for their improvement. A fundamental paradigm shift in our accountability regime will be required, as the failed approach of “*test and punish*” is replaced with a strategy of “*support and improve*.”



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**We believe all students can learn and achieve, and accountability must focus on building the capacity of schools to actualize this potential in their students.**

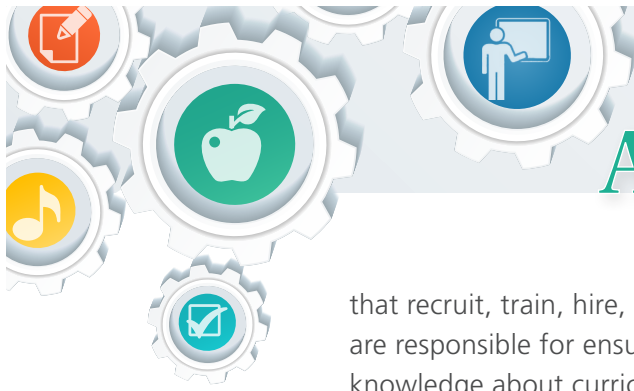
In American schools today, many of our youth—especially students of color, immigrant students and students living in poverty—receive a separate and unequal schooling that denies them full opportunities to learn. Often the most vulnerable students, such as students with special needs and English language learners, do not receive the educational, health and social services required to meet their needs. For *all* students to be successful in school, *all* of American education must be accountable: Genuine accountability rests on *shared responsibility* for educational outcomes. All of the institutions participating in American education—from the federal government, state governments and higher education to school boards, school districts and schools—must be accountable for the contributions each must make to ensure high-quality learning opportunities for every child. Government must be accountable for equitably allocating adequate resources—dollars, curriculum and learning tools, well-qualified educators, and safe, healthy environments for learning—to meet student needs and support meaningful learning. At the school level, this shared responsibility demands a culture of collaborative leadership with teachers and principals working together with a common focus on student achievement.

**We believe accountability must focus on meaningful learning.**

In a 21st-century world shaped by a knowledge economy and growing inequality, American students need the knowledge, skills and dispositions that will prepare them for college, productive careers and democratic citizenship. Particularly important are the abilities to think critically and creatively; to solve problems and apply knowledge; to inquire and learn independently and collaboratively; to use feedback; to effectively communicate; and to build relationships and persevere in the face of obstacles. To support the meaningful learning required for the development of these abilities, curriculum should be robust and culturally relevant, and instruction should employ project-based learning and student inquiry. In turn, capturing and supporting this learning will require *richer assessments* that more authentically evaluate 21st-century knowledge and skills. These assessments should be used to inform teaching and to expand, rather than limit, educational opportunities for students.

**We believe accountability is built on a foundation of educational knowledge and professionalism.**

Good teaching and school leadership are at the heart of effective education. Accountability for good teaching practices, rooted in professional standards, rests both with individual educators and with the schools, districts and state agencies



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that recruit, train, hire, assign, support and evaluate them. Collectively, they are responsible for ensuring that educators acquire and use the best available knowledge about curriculum, teaching, assessment and student support. Professional accountability requires excellent systems of preparation, licensure, accreditation, professional development, evaluation and career advancement that enable the sharing of expertise. It means that educators must be deeply involved in making important decisions about what happens in their schools and in the system as a whole.

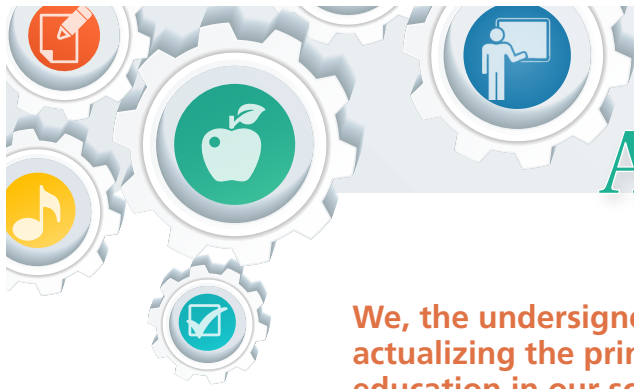
When evaluating student learning, educator performance and school performance, accountability decisions should be made through a process of *reflection, judgment and action* based on multiple sources of evidence. Using professional judgment, educators need to determine what is needed for improvement, with actions ranging from additional resources and supports to corrective interventions. For school accountability, this process should include a school quality review that is led by expert educators, includes peer reviewers, and directly examines school practice and data.

**We believe accountability decisions should be based on multiple and varied measures that are disaggregated by student status.**

Teaching and learning are complex practices. Student learning, educator performance and school performance cannot be evaluated adequately and properly without the use of multiple and varied measures. The use of multiple measures is essential in capturing the many different aspects of education valued by the families of students, the teaching profession and the broader community. Accountability must involve measures of academic learning and socio-emotional learning, and it must include measures as varied as rates of attendance, suspension, expulsion, grade promotion and graduation. To ensure the equitable delivery of education, accountability measures should be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, economic status, language status and special needs status.

**We believe accountability must involve students, families, educators and other school staff, and the community in decision-making.**

Information on student learning, educator performance and school performance must be clear, transparent and accessible, so that it can be readily understood and used by all stakeholders in education. Educators and other school staff, administrators, students, their families, the community and school boards must be empowered with meaningful opportunities for participation in the decision-making of the accountability process.



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We, the undersigned, commit ourselves to the important work of actualizing the principles of this new social compact for American education in our schools, our districts and our states.

