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Advocacy for Letting Schools Be Schools

Jason Major

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

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Advocacy for Letting Schools Be Schools

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

Jason Major
Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership

Approved:

_____   _____
Chair/Co-Chair, Dissertation Committee   Program Director

_____   _____
Member, Dissertation Committee   Dean's Representative

                                                       _____
                                                       Date Approved

DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION STATEMENT

Though these three projects have different topics, the overall theme of doing education differently can be read throughout. We do not always have to do things the way that they have always been done. Schools need to re-focus on tasks, empowering students and teachers and providing them a voice to speak up for what is best. In a new age of information available anywhere at any time, schools need to adjust for that and re-think the way things are done to make sure for what students will need in their lives.

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning. In this program evaluation, an overall theme that originated was a re-focus on student problem solving and relationships with adults and students.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006). An overall theme from this change plan that emerged was allowing students to throw away any semblance of a traditional curriculum and pursue their interests, find what their passions are, and explore and fail in a low-stakes environment.

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995). In this Policy Advocacy, top-down accountability was determined to have too much of a detrimental effect on the ways schools conduct business, creating an environment of compliance and rote tasks. Dropping high-stakes accountability allows schools to be schools.

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools have been in an era of

high stakes accountability around test scores, attendance, and climate and culture. This

has also ushered in a wave of accountability down to teachers in the form of paperwork,

mandates, and a heavy emphasis on reading and math. In Chicago Public Schools, all

schools in the district are rated on the School Quality Rating Policy, which utilizes the

Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress assessment to

determine student growth from the spring of one year to the spring of the next. This

heavy focus on reading and math has caused schools to abandon or limit the focus on

other subjects like science, social science, and the arts, as well as rely on technology

based skills programs to boost knowledge on items that schools know will be on these

yearly growth assessments. Campbell's Law says that the more a social indicator is used

for accountability, the more apt it is for mischief, and there are multiple examples that

show that this is the case. Could it be that no accountability, or intrinsic accountability at

the grassroots within a school, trusting teachers and administrators to consider the context

of their own building to do what is best to move their school and students forward, is a

better policy? This paper looks at many examples of schools and districts that have had

to give some things up in order to hit metrics given by accountability measures, as well as

examples of national scandals that occurred because of the amount of pressure put down

on schools due to high stakes testing and accountability, and sees a better way through

school based intrinsic motivation.

PREFACE

When I did my internship for my administrative program in 2012, I started math clubs at more than 20 schools in Chicago, the Chicago suburbs, and across the state of Illinois. It was in this context when I realized how drastically difficult it was to implement any kind of change at all in the school environment. Even if the school principal was very gung ho about an idea, if there was no teacher within the building to take it from there and run with it, the idea would fall short. Similarly, if the principal of the school forced someone to take on the program even if they were not very interested in it, it would also fizzle out. I realized then, before even taking my first administrative role in education, that policy implementation was colossally difficult. Having the best idea for students of a school is only the beginning, and often times by the time it trickles down to the teacher level, the original intent is lost. I have spoken to many start ups over the years that have this same issue: they have the most brilliant idea with a no brainer activity for students, but it fizzles out by the time teachers are implementing it at the student level.

Enter school accountability, and why policies that are made more levels up are a problem. In theory, it makes sense for schools to be held accountable for what goes on in their schools, but all intention is lost by the time it gets to the student level. I recall walking into a 6th grade classroom and seeing all 32 students staring at a computer screen of basic mathematical fact based algorithmic problems, and each geared towards their level on the NWEA assessment. They were answering multiple choice problem after multiple choice problem, mindlessly, on their own, without any collaboration with peers, and minimal direction from the teacher. I thought that there had to be a better way. Had

there not been pressure from above to hit mathematical "growth targets," there would have been a much different atmosphere in this classroom, but the pressure of hitting goals led to programs that were specifically for hitting these growth goals. Difficult and collaborative tasks were left by the wayside in this respect.

I believe that all change in schools must come from the grassroots level. Each school and situation is unique, and the less structures and constraints that we put on educators and school leaders, the more likely creativity and intrinsic motivation flourish. It is with this in mind that I advocate for less top down school accountability.

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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Awareness

Working for more than 40 elementary schools on the northwest side of Chicago, I have visited dozens, and possibly even hundreds, of classrooms; in these visits, I spoke to nearly 100 school leaders and met with hundreds of teachers. Something that struck me over and over again was how much elementary schools focused on reading and mathematics and, more specifically, improving scores on the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment—the assessment Chicago Public Schools (CPS) uses to evaluate teachers, administrators, and schools. On many occasions, I would walk into classrooms and the students were working in an online platform that was supposedly research-based to improve performance on this assessment. I could not help but think that there must be a better way. Students were staring at a screen, teachers were not driving the instruction, and students were not speaking to each other. I thought about the underlying issue of high-stakes accountability and testing as it translates down to the student level in a school. If schools were trying to educate, was this the best use of time? Was this the best focus? In meetings with principals for goal-setting, I heard the word "science" once in a three-year period, and never once heard anything about the arts or enrichment—all of which are subjects that no serious educator would justify leaving out of a well-rounded student's curriculum. A school leader would never consider such a change either. I became convinced that high-stakes testing and accountability were destroying creativity in schools and that there had to be a pendulum swing back the other way.

The School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), the evaluation system the district used to judge schools, was driving down the work. This five-tiered rating, which goes from Level 1+ (highest) to Level 3 (probation), goes on school report cards and the CPS website. Schools strived to maintain or improve their rating each year. Principals have it as their goal on the signature of their email, and schools often had banners made when they achieved the highest status. It was the end-all, be-all of schools and the guiding principle by which the district judged schools. Based on the SQRP, policies are made at the network- and district-level regarding which schools received more support, which grade levels were targeted as needing intervention, and even which school leaders were removed when they failed to improve their rating over multiple years.

While working in this realm and analyzing numbers regarding the categories that went into the rating (see Appendix A), I began to get curious as to whether the metrics that the district was using were actually improving schools. Since reading and math were the only tested subjects that were part of the evaluation, I only heard the word "science" once in more than 150 goal-setting meetings with principals. Since teachers and students took a survey in the spring regarding the "5 Essentials" of school improvement—effective leaders, collaborative teachers, rigorous instruction, supportive environment, and involved families—was worth 10% of a school's rating, I was shocked at the amount of time principals were spending trying to improve their SQRP score through means other than trying to fix the problems that led to low ratings. Instead, they provided food for teachers while they took the survey, reminded them how important it was to answer the questions positively, and even outright sat next to people as they took the survey. I became more and more frustrated with the answer to low growth on the NWEA MAP

exam, the test that overwhelmingly is used as the majority of the way schools are rated. The answer, often seen as the easy yet necessary way out to make sure numbers were being hit, was to have student practice basic facts over and over, which is often called the skill and drill method. Students would complete low-level multiple choice questions on a computer just because they may see questions like that on the MAP test. While people thought of better ways to evaluate schools, I was mindful of theories like Campbell's Law (Ravitch, 2011), which says that the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and disrupt the processes it is intended to monitor. I began to wonder if the best school rating system was no rating system at all.

Critical Issues

The most critical issue that makes a new policy for evaluating schools necessary to respond to is that high-stakes accountability takes away from student learning (Ravitch, 2011). Teachers feel the pressure and the need to do skill-and-drill tasks to achieve certain scores on the NWEA assessment. When the SQRP in CPS is the driver of principal evaluation, teacher evaluation, and public perception of schools, school policies are driven toward reacting to these initiatives. When a survey called the 5 Essentials is given to teachers and students, and represents 10% of a school's rating, results are questionable because all stakeholders involved know that their school will be rated based partially on how teachers respond to the questions. Principals can encourage or even threaten a staff to respond in a positive manner to increase the score on the survey. Likewise, staff members who are upset or angry at school administration can respond in a negative manner in an attempt to sabotage the rating of the school. While the SQRP's

intention—to make sure schools continue to improve their performance in a variety of

categories—is good, its unintended consequences of using strategies to obtain potentially

artificial growth on standardized assessments, gamification of surveys, and outright

manipulation of other data open the door for a potentially better way to look at school

performance. It is a classic case of what something looks like in theory compared to its

execution.

Policy

I am advocating for a policy that does away with any rating system for schools in

Chicago Public Schools, and replaces it with a system that simply reports the life and

outcomes of a school within four categories: financial, academic, culture/climate, and

employee engagement (see Appendix A). No scores will be attached to these; instead, it

will be a mixture of school- and district-reported data that will tell the story of the school.

It is called FACE reporting. The school will then showcase what it has to offer to parents

in the best way that it sees fit to communicate its strengths, challenges, and goals.

Schools will be responsible for deciding whether to administer annual tests to students, to

test a portion of the students each year and report their findings, or to scale back and

simply use progress-monitoring tools on an as-needed basis. Schools will also decide

how they use the Illinois survey that they provide to teachers and students each year.

Additionally, it will be up to schools to improve their attendance rate without it being part

of a high-stakes system. When people are skeptical regarding whether this is be possible,

I simply ask them to look at the website of the University of Chicago Laboratory School,

or the Catherine Cooke School. Neither one of those schools' websites showcase any

kind of school test score data, survey data, attendance data, or rating system. The school

simply sells itself based on the activities and tasks that students are doing in the school. Appendix B shows how the Parkhill School District in Missouri utilized the FACE categories to showcase the district within the areas of financials, academics, culture/climate, and employee engagement.

Meeting the Problem

In meeting the problem of high-stakes testing and school accountability, I will demonstrate what it may look like for a Chicago public school to showcase its work to the public without any rating system based on attendance rate, test scores, or survey data, but instead displaying what the students have done, programs that the school offers, and reported numbers that live on their own rather than ones that live within the confines of an accountability system. To start, schools will self-identify one area of growth that they will track and work on, but since this metric will come within the school at the grassroots level, it will ideally be more school-specific and foster more buy-in at the school level. As an example, showcasing where students go to high school and college, as well as what alumni of the school end up doing, are another way to get a much clearer picture of the school's outcomes than reported data, which may or may not be genuine numbers in a high-stakes system. The purpose of the SQRP is to show how a school is performing in a variety of metrics and assign a score and performance level based on that. This becomes a one-size-fits-all policy for schools, void of school-specific context. Relieving the pressure of high-stakes assessments and metrics will allow for more flexibility and creativity in elementary schools to get the most of student and teacher abilities. It will also give schools a voice in how they communicate their performance to their stakeholders and the

public, as well as show what they feel are the important measures in a school and what they do differently than others.

School district leaders and reformers must listen to the voices of those doing the work, and there is no better voice to speak up than that of the school principal. The National Association of Secondary School Principals created a policy paper on the 15 states that are now rating schools from A to F; the association expressed opposition to the policy. Its reasoning stemmed from four guiding principles (p. 1):

a. No decision about a school's performance should be based on a single data point or a single test. The focus of education must be on academic learning and growth, as opposed to an isolated performance on a single assessment.
b. A valid measure of school performance should be comprehensive, accounting for school processes, conditions, practices, and outcomes.
c. NASSP believes that quantitative and qualitative data should inform decisions at the classroom, school building, and district levels.
d. Information from any accountability systems should be used for improvement, not for high-stakes consequences.

The association also recommended providing timely information about performance, giving schools autonomy on decision-making regarding the calendar, staffing, budget, and curriculum, and making it attractive for high-performing educators to stay by offering incentives.

Another study on school rating systems, this one in North Carolina (Ableidinger, 2015), found that the school's rating had a high correlation with the income level of the school. Out of all schools in North Carolina serving at least 85% low-income students, none received A grades, and 83% were rated D or F. At the other end of the spectrum, schools that served less than 25% low-income had 89% of the schools ranked either A or B. This analysis found that the current system, with its heavy emphasis on achievement scores, has the following effects:

[It] pits our richest and poorest schools against one another for the sake of comparison. The schools that earn D's and F's in our system, including the vast majority of high-poverty schools, earn those grades because the formula emphasizes factors students bring with them to school rather than what schools do once students enter the classroom. If you believe that all students regardless of their circumstances can achieve at high levels when schools provide strong and consistent supports, then our current formula is misguided at best and insulting at worst (p. 3).

A FACE policy will bring power back to the local level as it relates to how school performance alleviates the pressure of teachers, administrators, and students, and allows some creativity in schools to showcase and report what they feel is important to them, as well as report performance indicators without a point total attached to them. Doing so will allow for improvement coming from within the school at the grassroots level.

Analyzing the impacts and needs in a variety of categories will show how this policy can bring out creativity in schools and take on a new angle of school improvement.

SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

High-stakes testing, attendance, and the 5 Essentials survey of students and teachers are three of the primary components of the SQRP in CPS, composing 80% of the evaluation for elementary schools. Since these are the most crucial elements of the policy, this section analyzes the educational, economic, social, and political aspects of making these the measurable foci of schools and how they are judged instead of the existing elements. When the proposed items become the new crucial elements, a give-and-take occurs within schools; this section unveils the hidden costs, side effects, and unintended consequences of making these school aspects high-stakes.

Educational Analysis

In assessing the impact that a rating system has on the educational outcomes of a school, it is very hard to quantify, but there are some ways that you can give anecdotal evidence as to what goes away from it. Teachers feel the need to skill and drill students in order to master low-level content that they would find on the NWEA assessment. Because of this, teachers will take less risks in having students completing projects, doing real-world exercises, and completing difficult tasks, as well as enrichment activities. The celebrated educational system of Finland is the guide for this model. Hancock (2011) found that Finland had "no mandated standardized tests outside of an exam senior year of high school, no rankings, no comparisons between students" (p. 24). Educators in Finland believe that without these rankings, intrinsic motivation is more likely to kick in and students will improve themselves for the sake of improving themselves. The test scores in Finland back up this thesis, as they routinely perform near the top of the world in international assessments even without mandatory testing each year. When looking at a

high-priced private school like the University of Chicago Laboratory School, a school that costs more than $20,000 a year to attend, just one section of its website deals with standardized testing (Assessment 2017); it says that "Lab views standardized testing as only part of a student's profile; it gives teachers a snapshot of each child's strengths and challenges" (paragraph 2). This idea shows the need to take into account factors for a student that are beyond a test score. The makeup of a student's profile should include learning in different subjects and include extracurricular activities, sports, and enrichment courses like music, art, coding, and recreational courses.

The arts are an important part of a child's development, as well, and another portion of a school's curriculum that is often left aside in a high-stakes environment. Gibson (2017) reported on a study that found that "pupils studying art, music, drama, and dance accrued heightened enjoyment and fulfillment, an increase in skill and knowledge, advances in personal and social development, development of creativity and thinking skills, and the enrichment of communication and expressive skills" (p. 3). Relieving pressure on schools to perform well on standardized tests in reading and math will reopen their willingness to focus on these subjects; high-stakes accountability takes away from these subjects even when their integration has been proven to provide a well-rounded curriculum, creating happier and more successful students.

Narrowing the focus to simply math and reading does a disservice to enriching the students' curriculum and putting all eggs in one basket, which is often what happens in a high-stakes environment focused on reading and mathematics. Jacobs (2005) studied the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on performance on standardized tests in CPS; Jacobs' findings included the following:

An item-level analysis suggests that the observed achievement gains were driven by increases in test-specific skills and student effort. I also find that teachers responded strategically to the incentives along a variety of dimensions—by increasing special education placements, preemptively retaining students and substituting away from low-stakes subjects like science and social studies. (p. 11)

The point about test-specific skills is key, as it is one that educators continue to make regarding the NWEA, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and other computer-based assessments, namely that it is testing more computer skills rather than the material presented.

Economic Analysis

Accountability costs a lot of money. The PARCC test that every student in Illinois takes costs $23.97 per student (Stantis, 2017), which comes to nearly $6 million in a district the size of Chicago. The NWEA assessment that CPS uses as its district assessment cost the district $2.2 million during the 2016–2017 school year (Stantis, 2017). The cost in human capital and time, however, cannot be measured. When trying to analyze how much the "true" cost of the NWEA assessment is to a school and district, you must include calculations of the following:

Direct Costs

- Time taken away from extracurricular activities, specials classes such as gym and the arts, and core instruction due to the amount of time that is spent preparing for and administering the tests.

- Time spent on updating the software necessary to administer the tests, as well as upgrades to the network software in order to make it run correctly.

- The amount of money spent on IT personnel who must update software related to the NWEA test.

- Time spent analyzing, grouping, and discussing the results of each NWEA test, which could be spent looking at work that the students are producing in class.

- On the NWEA assessment, you are unable to see the questions students received and how they answered them.

- Time and money spent on NWEA and PARCC.

Indirect Costs

- Accountability and pressure causes unnecessary stress on teachers, administrators, and students. Employees who are overstressed and under pressure are inefficient and should not be dealing with children.

- Resources that are allocated only toward improving reading and mathematics instruction, often through online learning platforms, take away resources from extracurricular activities, the arts, and enrichment.

Part of the cost analysis must focus on what comes down from the district, as there are certain programs and initiatives that the district encourages or even forces schools to purchase. Giving schools more autonomy on funding helps bring that grassroots approach to schools. It is not just funding that can be negatively influenced from higher up in the system, as other directives from districts can hinder progress within the schools.

A top-down accountability system creates more bureaucracy from schools, which, once it trickles down to the student level, can have the opposite effect of what it was meant to achieve. Chubb (1992) argued that less bureaucratic influence in schools, like in private schools, made for well-organized schools, which increased student achievement (p. 27). An argument could also be made that if schools are increasing their profiles, they

are selling themselves to the public—and this kind of grassroots activity raises the bar for other schools, making for free-market choices on what schools have to offer.

<center>**Social Analysis**</center>

One push in recent years in schools across the country has been in social/emotional learning (SEL). Ridge (2017) defined SEL as "the skills used to understand and manage our own emotions, and recognize and show empathy for the emotions of others" (p. 1). Research around emotional intelligence in the 1990s is what sprung about this effort to push SEL in schools. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) cited competencies in the following five different areas that can support SEL in schools:

- Self-awareness: an ability to recognize one's own thoughts and emotions, and understand how these items influence behavior

- Self-management: regulating emotions and behaviors in different situations

- Social awareness: taking perspective and empathizing with others

- Relationship skills: maintaining and establishing healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse groups and individuals

- Responsible decision-making: ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions

Companies cite emotional intelligence as a key factor when looking for new employees. D'Costa (2017) said that "companies have never been more publicly focused on culture" (p. 2) In Malcolm Gladwell's 2008 book, "Outliers," he discussed how—once a person reaches a certain level of intelligence or brainpower—then emotional intelligence, work ethic, and luck take over, and that is what separates highly successful

people from others (p. 47). The company Talent Smart tested more than one million people and found that of the upper echelon of top performers, 90% of them had high emotional intelligence (Bradberry, 2017).

What does the emotional intelligence of students have to do with accountability systems in CPS? For one, it is clear that emotional intelligence and SEL are an important aspect of a child's development, and it is also a piece that plays no role whatsoever in the system in which schools are evaluated. Could a school be rated high but have students that are not hitting the five competencies of SEL? Indeed. Lee (2016) reported that "since 2013 teenagers have reported stress levels that exceed that of adults. Almost half of parents reported moderate to extreme stress in their kids" (p. 4). SEL would help to bring a balance to these stressed-out students, teaching them coping strategies, mindfulness, and awareness of their thoughts and emotions. Focusing on the SEL portion could also make educators become mindful of the stress that they are providing to students themselves, and rethink the assignments and work they are providing to students in class. In an interesting twist, some of this stress is directly related to the work amount that teachers give to students, as well as the pressure put on them because of the very high-stakes exams that schools are being evaluated on each year.

By narrowing a focus on math and reading in schools, a gigantic piece of the puzzle is missing when looking at schools. Once students reach a certain level of proficiency in both subjects, their emotional intelligence, socialization, and ability to work with others in a collaborative fashion become some of the most important parts of having a successful life and career. These critical components are not only arguably

immeasurable, but also do not show up in any evaluation system, making them often pushed to the side in favor of other needs to hit accountability measures.

I am not advocating that schools be measured on SEL, simply because it is hard to be convinced that such a thing is possible. But with many metrics in education, that is not going to stop some from trying. NWEA, the very organization that puts out the exam that is the major part of the SQRP in Chicago, recently won the Social-Emotional Assessment Design Challenge, which was a competition to measure SEL (NWEA, 2017). In its winning submission, the association found that rapid-guessing behavior on the NWEA exam directly correlates to the constructs of self-management and self-regulation; students who demonstrated a random-guessing pattern also showed lower abilities to manage and regulate their behavior in school. One can remain skeptical about this finding since it only encourages more schools to use NWEA as their assessment and put more trust into using it as a way to guide even more policies within a school or a district. If schools are trying to figure out the best way to measure SEL among their student population, and NWEA is saying that its exams in reading and math can help guide schools in measuring this, the cycle of testing students in these subjects and analyzing the data will only gain momentum. Going back to Campbell's Law, the fundamental question becomes, "if teaching students not to guess on an NWEA test results in them not guessing on tests as much, how does that translate to regulating their behavior in school?"

Political Analysis

Michelle Rhee was a former Teach for America teacher who moved her way up into the Washington, DC, chancellor's role. She was notorious for dismissal of teachers, and was huge on improving standardized test scores, which she did improve—much due

to the thousands of dollars in bonuses that she handed out for improving these scores. She became a media darling, with articles written about her, and even inspiring a PBS documentary, "The Education of Michelle Rhee," in which cameras followed her while she was firing principals (Brown, 2013). The 2008 presidential debate even had both Barack Obama and John McCain mention her work in Washington, DC (Brown, 2008). Before she left the system, there were whispers of massive cheating going on at multiple schools, but an inspector general's report investigated one school and found no evidence of wrong-doing. However, there were problems with that, as well, as Brown (2013) explained:

> The 17-month probe focused on just one school: Noyes, which was named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2009 after students made impressive gains on reading and math tests. It also twice won an award from Rhee that brought cash bonuses for staff, and it had some of the highest erasure rates in the city. Investigators found some test-security problems at Noyes but no evidence of answer-sheeting tampering. Based on those findings, they decided not to examine other schools. But Cothorne, the former principal who alleges that she saw staff members after hours with erasers and test booklets, said investigators never interviewed her.

Winerip (2011) investigated the cheating scandal in Washington, DC, for *USA Today*, and their findings were striking in that they were never followed up on. In addition to noticing that many schools had striking declines once Rhee was out of office as chancellor in DC, they also found that the aforementioned Noyes School was just "one of 103 public schools (in D.C.) that have had erasure rates that surpassed D.C. averages at least once since 2008. That's more than half of D.C. schools" (p. 3) They also reported that the US Department of Education recommended that many more schools than just Noyes should be investigated because of unusually high test scores gains, but that recommendation was dropped.

Meanwhile, in Atlanta, GA, another cheating scandal was unfolding. High-stakes testing was cited as the reason why dozens of educators fixed the system, changing incorrect to correct answers in order to hit predetermined goals the district set. In this case, many educators ended up in prison as a result of the findings.

What is the difference between Washington and Atlanta? Rhee is married to former NBA star Kevin Johnson, has been touted as a school-reform champion, has been mentioned by presidential candidates and had articles and documentaries written about her, and is the face of the school reform movement. School reformers *need* her gains to be real. The Atlanta scandal, while some of the bosses were, in fact, praised and awarded, did not hold nearly the political capital that Rhee had.

Oftentimes, the people who are responsible for the gaming of the system receive promotions or are touted as outstanding educators. In an investigation by the CPS inspector general that found a massive fixing of attendance rates (Grossman, 2016), the four principals who were the biggest culprits of the attendance-rate fixing—sometimes by as much as 20%—were known as "superstar principals," mainly because of the climbing rates. Even more disturbing is that, in an interview with one of the principals, the principal "told the inspector general he launched his attendance program at the direction of his network chief, who is now [the] schools superintendent in Waukegan" (p. 1) People received promotions under false pretenses and problems spread far and wide. Sure enough, scandal has already followed the aforementioned Waukegan superintendent, who was said to have encouraged the attendance rates being fixed. She has been given a 12% raise in her first year. Additionally, her personnel file went missing after a parent group

submitted a Freedom of Information Act to review her job application materials (Coleman, 2017).

There has been some movement in moving power back to the states since the era of the No Child Left Behind Act. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in 2015 and its goal was to "enable state policymakers to make key decisions about standards, assessments, school ratings, interventions, and more" (Smarick, 2017, p. 1). There has been movement towards hiring state leaders in education that had national experience, but the effects of the law have still yet to shake out completely. In Illinois, a state that is deeply in debt and at a stalemate in legislative duties, there has been little to no change since the passage of the law.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

There is a moral and ethical component to having high-stakes accountability systems in schools. Gaming the system for artificial gains, fixing numbers, and other ethical issues can have real effects on students' achievement and futures. Certain scandals that have unfolded across the country had ripple effects in their districts and schools. Masking what really goes on in schools through means that are questionable can give false senses of school improvement and student learning. Some examples of scandals and morally questionable behavior are extreme ways that accountability systems can have effects, but there are smaller ways that these similar practices affect schools on a day-to-day basis. In Atlanta, GA, a massive cheating scandal unfolded due to the exorbitant amount of pressure that was put on students, the teachers, and the schools. Eleven educators were convicted of racketeering for their role in standardized-test cheating in at least 44 schools.

In Chicago, some high schools were caught fixing their attendance. Attendance rate accounts for 5% of the SQRP, so this is an accountability metric that holds serious stakes and weight for schools, as well as their employees and leaders. The CPS attendance office found that (Perez, 2016):

> Administrators at a Chicago high school for years falsely recorded hundreds of students who were truant, missing or had dropped out as transfers to home-school programs in an effort to put a better light on attendance and graduation rates. (p. 6)

These instances of attendance rates being fixed coincide with a more high-stakes approach to attendance rates, in which job security and school ratings play a big part of perception and promotion. The *Chicago Sun-Times* (2016) reported that four CPS high schools were gaming the system so much, marking students present who were not actually in attendance at school, that their attendance rates climbed by 10% to 20% (p. 5). The inspector general's report cited a systematic fixing of the system, where administrators would override the attendance teachers entered at the start of class. Students would also be marked present for the entire day if they showed up at all during the day. They could also "recover" their time missed during a single after-school session. Administrators provided these after-school sessions for no other reason than to try to gain time back and count the students present—teachers provided no learning opportunities or instruction during this time. It was simply a compliance-related activity to give the impression that numbers were being improved upon without actually seeing if true improvement was occurring.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Goals and Objectives

Goals

The goal of the policy is to show that schools can improve their performance using a non-high stakes-system that focuses on student work and outcomes rather than the processes used to raise those outcomes. This policy builds on narrowing the focus to specific action items for school improvement. Schools will still self-report data from each school year in the FACE categories, but there will not be scale scores or probationary action taken as a result of these reports. Regarding personnel, more support will definitely be given to strategically target given aspects of school performance that are lagging behind, but schools will stand alone rather than being assigned ratings or scores.

Policy

The policy is for schools to report their performances using the FACE categories: financial, academic, culture/climate, and employee engagement. The following items are starter suggestions of what schools can report, but they would have freedom to provide or suggest others on their own.

- Financial: Percentage of yearly discretional budget spent on teachers, technology, printing, materials, programs, professional development, and other measures. Each discretionary dollar that a school would spend would be reported in a variety of categories.

- Academic: How the school performs on reading proficiency levels and national assessments.

- Culture/climate: How the students and staff rate their satisfaction levels at school and how it engages them on a day-to-day basis.

- Employee engagement: Level of engagement among employees, their educational levels, and their professional learning beyond the school.

The transition from the SQRP to the FACE reporting would be a four-year hiatus for any SQRP rating for two elementary schools in each "range," 1+, 1, 2+, 2, and 3. Schools will have an opportunity to opt into the pilot program, and two schools would be selected based on the referral of the network chief. These schools leaders would then present their plans to report out their work in the FACE categories and, while they would still have self-reported data that is part of the SQRP, the FACE categories would be stand-alone even in the first year of the pilot.

Schools would be autonomous, similar to the Independent Schools Program (ISP). In the ISP, schools are free from district oversight, and principals are not required to attend any meetings the district or network offices provide. Schools administrators would only receive help when they ask for it, rather than be required to complete compliance documents, attend meetings, and send teachers to professional development that requires the expenditure of substitute teachers.

Schools would still use the district assessment, but would only be required to test half of the grades 3 through 8 each year, once per year, at a flexible time, as long as the students were a truly random sample of the half of the student population. They could still use the assessment on an interim basis to show student progress.

Schools would develop their own plan for showcasing the work that students do as a way to give the public an idea of their progress. The district would suggest certain ways to showcase this work through ideas like makers' fairs or student portfolios.

Schools would be given an additional $30,000 to use flexibly for school improvement due to the lack of oversight savings. They can use the money at their discretion as long as it is itemized and justified using the school's improvement plan. Schools would not have data "scrubbed" prior to release or report—the data would be as it is originally.

Schools would self-report data falling under the FACE categories:

- Financial: Where schools spend their money

- Academic: Standardized test score data (which would include the population of students who were tested that particular year, as well as their growth-rate data), pass rate, higher-level course information, extra-curricular activities, special classes, performance-based assessments, curriculum used, and curriculum maps

- Culture/climate: Student morale, staff morale, anecdotes regarding culture-building activities around the school, student demographics, English learner status, diverse learner status

- Employee engagement: Staff credentials, attendance, experience, professional development, schedule of activities for professional development days

Evaluation of the Program

At the end of the four-year hiatus from the SQRP, schools would be again given an SQRP report card, and those results would be compared to the report card from the opt-out process. The hypothesis is that schools will improve on the SQRP metrics at a

faster rate with no oversight or rating system at all, rather than if they had one on a year-to-year basis.

Needs, Values, Preferences

Among the needs represented in this policy are students. Without high-stakes testing, teachers can refocus their energy on rigorous, relevant, real world-oriented tasks that engage students without the pressure of accountability. It is on a similar note that teachers' needs are also represented in this process, because they can refocus their energy toward designing tasks relevant to students. In a stress-free testing environment, teachers can relax and be at ease knowing that there is no end-of-year high-stakes test on which they will be evaluated.

By testing a pilot in an environment where there is no top-down accountability, teachers can take the education profession back, and work in an environment where intrinsic motivation to do what is best for their students takes over. Noneducators and school reformers, many of whom were trying to take a business-like approach to education, dominated the ideas of accountability and high-stakes testing. Not having an accountability system, in a way, is in response to what educators—those who are in the trenches doing the job—have been clamoring for in the reform-accountability age (Ravitch, 2015). An overwhelming amount of teachers and school administrators would prefer to work in an environment without an inefficient accountability system. Parent support is necessary, as well, and it could be a challenge to change their views after more than a decade of being told that accountability metrics are the best way to evaluate schools, through rating systems and probationary periods and punishment for low-performing schools.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

In education, even the smallest changes can seem like quantum leaps because the status quo is so entrenched in the way that things are done in schools. Therefore, it is important to think of the pros and cons of any new policy, especially one that represents a major paradigm shift in the way things have been done in the past two decades. This section looks at some of the positives and negatives of putting the accountability back on the schools from their own point of view.

The foremost authority on the pros of this policy is a former school reformist Diane Ravitch, who has sounded the alarms about the downfalls of school accountability for years. She believes that teacher autonomy is the key level to improving schools, citing countries such as Finland, where teacher collaboration in a relaxed environment improves trust and student outcomes (Ravitch, 2015).

Emulating Other Nations that Lead the World in Education

Sahlberg (2015) looks to countries like Finland where teachers work in relaxed environments and are part of the decision-making process in a school, and came away with a powerful lesson:

> Teachers need greater collective professional autonomy and more support to work with one another. In other words, more freedom from bureaucracy, but less from one another. (p. 3)

Countries that lead the world in education and are often cited as models that the United States should emulate have no accountability systems. Finland is often cited as the leader that the United States should strive to be; there, much more time is spent on teacher professional development, curriculum development, and collaboration (Hancock, 2011). Its performance on international examinations like the Programme for

International Student Assessment (PISA) far outpace other nations (Anderson, 2017), as its strategy is to treat teachers as if they are professionals along the lines of doctors and lawyers—jobs historically more well-respected and emulated in the United States. Relieving some pressure from teachers and reinvesting time and resources toward developing them is much more possible under a non-high-stakes system.

Unmeasurable Growth among Students

Simplifying the performance of schools and their students based on yearly standardized tests, attendance, and a survey does a disservice to the complex intricacies of schools. The manifest of schools is academic curriculum, but there are other major functions of schooling besides taking examinations. Thus, there are other ways to measure student growth other than standardized tests in reading and mathematics. As was demonstrated in Section Two, emotional intelligence and social/emotional learning are important aspects in schools that are not measured, and growth in these areas can often handsomely pay off for students. Anecdotal records also demonstrate growth in a student that cannot be measured on an exam. Take the example of a student who comes in new to the school and refuses to do any work or speak to adults out of lack of trust, and seems genuinely unhappy on a day-to-day basis. By the end of the school year, the student has three adults for whom he or she can go to for personal problems, smiles often, has several friends, and is completing assignments in class. No standardized test can measure such growth, but this is student growth that a school should get credit for, but would not under an accountability system.

Mathematics assignments give a peek into another unmeasurable growth metric. If students are solving difficult problems, they must show perseverance and stamina

while solving them. If, at the start of the school year, a student spends 20 seconds on a problem and leaves a blank sheet of paper, but, by the end of the school year, can spend 10 minutes, have a page full of work, but still get the incorrect answer, that is tremendous—but unmeasurable under any accountability system—growth. Students also grow at different rates. A year-to-year accountability rating system does not account for the nuances and slow, steady pace needed for school improvement. School improvement takes time, and it is not realistic to think that a school can change its performance overnight given the constraints of the educational system at large.

Refocus on Student Collaboration and Tasks

Recent research has indicated that reading on a screen is far less effective than reading on paper, and recall decreases substantially when reading on a screen. Students also spend exorbitant amounts of time on screens outside of school. Going back to Section Two, companies today are looking for people who are able to interact and collaborate with other individuals, and schools should embrace that they have an opportunity to allow for this in-person collaboration. If we know that employers are going to be looking for students who are able to communicate face-to-face, work as a team, and verbally express their thoughts and feelings in an engaging way, wouldn't we want the same going on in our schools?

In implementing any new policy, it is best to anticipate any potential issues that could arise, in addition to making sure that nothing is lost in the process.

Insuring a High-Quality Education for All

Under the accountability era, schools that have not performed to the standard of the nation or the district have been put on probation or even shut down as a result of poor

performance. This has helped give the rise to charter schools and a competitive market in education. Why shouldn't, reformers ask, every student in the country have access to the same free and quality education? In this free market-type system, students have multiple choices as to where to attend school.

The biggest counter argument is, "well, you have to do something!" The accountability measures have been such a part of the school culture for nearly 20 years now, and it will be difficult for those who have entered the profession since then to envision a way to evaluate schools without high-stakes testing and accountability.

Accountability Works

Some studies show that threatened accountability also works. Chiang (2009) found that:

> Sanction threats raise school spending on instructional technology, curricular development, and teacher training. Both strands of evidence are consistent with a predominant role for educational reforms in generating test score gains by threatened schools.(p. 11)

In this respect, threatening schools with closure or low ratings gives them the nudge or kick necessary to improve their practice and get their act together.

Positive By-Products of Accountability

Another negative counter-argument is that the accountability systems since No Child Left Behind have shown the great inequities of the system, as shown by the Albeidinger (2015) study that the majority of highly-rated North Carolina schools were the most affluent, and the lowest-rated schools were the ones that had the highest rates of poverty. Shining a light on this issue has shown the need for additional investment in resources for schools with high poverty rates. In Connecticut, the system called NextGen was recently implemented to measure English and math skills and college/career

readiness. New Britain, with an 80% poverty rate, scored 59.7% proficiency, while Greenwich, with a poverty rate less than 15%, scored 89.3% (Semuels, 2016). Without accountability systems in place, the great inadequacies and disconnects of performance across racial and poverty lines would not have surfaced. Having these systems in place showed that the system was in fact working, but it was working for certain segments of the population and not for our most at-risk students.

While there are cons to this policy, the eventual payoff of focusing on the work that students are completing each day, and putting trust back into the schools to do what is best and right for their students, overrides the cons. Most of all, educators want a high-quality education for all, and that is also what is best for their students. Most—if not all—educators perform at a higher level when the accountability systems are within themselves and their schools, and most to all educators are mindful of the fact that achievement gaps and injustices exist within the school system.

Schools within the pilot of this policy would be made well aware of the potential drawbacks of implementation and those schools and their superiors will take steps necessary to address those. Sometimes in education, a leap of faith toward what is the right thing to do is all it takes to ensure a successful policy.

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the FACE pilot policy to supplant the SQRP in CPS will require a general overview of the direction the pilot is headed, but schools within the pilot must take on an amount of flexibility that will enable for adjustments and tweaks to make the pilot successful. The following action plan is recommended for implementation.

Educational Activities

Schools that are in the pilot will be encouraged to slash their online program budget by 50%, since most online programs are geared toward skill-based practice that helps with the NWEA assessment, be it Compass Learning, IXL, ST Math, among others. The pilot encourages performance-based assessments in the classroom as a way for students to demonstrate their learning of the subject. Because of this, a significant amount of staff development will become part of the strategy of policy implementation.

Feedback from Stakeholders

Before the pilot begins, all parents, students, and staff in a pilot school will receive a survey inquiring about the amount of time that students spend studying, time spent on online programs, their own personal stress level as it relates to exams, and the level of knowledge on enrichment and problem-based tasks that the students are reaching in school. This will give a baseline as to the state of the school and its tasks related to improving the SQRP.

A focus group consisting of all stakeholders (the FACE committee) will include a cross-section of five parents, two teachers, one administrator, and one student, who will meet to discuss the qualitative and quantitative measures that the school will utilize in its FACE reporting. These committee members will be selected at an organizational meeting

one month before the school year begins, with their group deciding on the factors in an open meeting two weeks after that. The committee members will be selected based on a vote that will occur at the organizational meeting.

Staff Development

Regarding opening-week professional development, teachers must get the message—and be retrained on the fact—that tests are no longer high-stakes. They should not feel the pressure to hit certain numbers on test scores or growth numbers. Teachers must take the pieces of student work that they are assigning in class and analyze the complexity, as well as identify skill gaps, in the work that would move students forward. Task analysis will become the focus of the work of the school.

Staff development will also include all teachers taking the problem-based learning course from the Illinois Math and Science Academy. This course allows teachers to learn how to incorporate "real-world" problem solving into their day-to-day curriculum.

Because of the nature of how different this approach is, regular meetings of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) will take place on a biweekly basis. These paid, two-hour meetings after school or on Saturday will consist of a debrief of activities that teachers completed with their students throughout the previous week. The focus of the meetings will be to answer the questions of "What did I try differently this past couple of weeks?", "What did I do instead of test prep or nonaccountability-pressured activities?", and "How do I know that these new activities are working better than traditional activities?" The PLCs will also focus on activities students completed that had nothing to do with receiving a grade.

The larger school system and the way things are done within a school building are a microcosm of beliefs for students. The hope of this trial run, during which schools will not receive grades/ratings for their performance and will instead improve performance, is that student-level teachers will move away from assigning students grades. This will also take a massive retraining on behalf of students, teachers, and parents, simply because this is the way that things have always been done.

Staff development will also include an overall view of how the FACE strategy and reporting will work so they can have an idea of the actions that they will be reported on. Such an overall view would include:

Category	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Financial	Percentage of discretionary funds spent on personnel, technology, professional development, substitutes, and curriculum	Itemized list of expenses by the school and its itemized costs	An analysis of programs purchased and their usage reports
Academic	Create metrics that analyze the extra activities and enrichment that students participate in at school	Self-report data on NWEA and primary reading assessments	Student portfolio work
Culture/climate	Report student answers from 5 Essentials survey and try to improve questions related to safety and bullying	School-created surveys to teachers, parents, and students on an interim basis	
Employee engagement	Report employee satisfaction at their positions in the school, as well as advancement opportunities	Report the number of teachers and staff who are returning to school for future endorsements, certifications, and degrees	

One Goal

Schools will also self-identify one area of growth, the reasoning behind it, and their action plan to improve the area of growth. Sometimes these goals are called SMART goals (Specific, Measureable, Agreed Upon, Reachable, Targeted) but, as it often happens in education, this term has somewhat lost the meaning of its original intent, so these goals will just be referred to as the "School Area of Growth." An example follows:

Area of Growth: Kindergarten Reading Proficiency	
2016–2017	2017–2018
School went from 37% proficiency to 29% proficiency from beginning to end of the year	Increase reading proficiency in kindergarten by more than 20%

Table 2: Example of a School Focus Area

Reasoning

Reading starts in kindergarten. We will begin early by identifying students who cannot recognize their letters, as this is the earliest indicator that students will need reading interventions. If students are not reading proficiently by the end of second grade, there is a high correlation, amazingly enough, with high school graduation.

Plan of Action

"Stack the deck" in kindergarten. Identify those students who cannot pronounce letters and provide interventions immediately. Hire an extra literacy teacher in kindergarten to help with rotations in reading. Train student teachers, clinical teachers,

and parent volunteers to complete reading interventions in class and after school. Host parent workshops that stress the importance of reading at home and being around books.

Ensuring its Success

Below is an example of how the school's own goal will be reported at the completion of the school year, including the reasoning why or why not school leaders believe their goal was achieved or not achieved. This purpose is for other schools to emulate if necessary.

Example Impact of School Focus Area	
Goal Recap	Proficiency increased from 47% to 75%.
Reasoning 1	Primary literacy specialist began working with struggling readers immediately based on lack of letter recognition.
Reasoning 2	Four parent volunteers and one tutor also took small groups.
Reasoning 3	Teachers tweaked their scope and sequence to include letter recognition and sound simultaneously.

Table 3: Example of a School Focus Area Impact

Time Schedules

Schools will be encouraged to use one hour of flex time each day, as well as have an extra staff member available at all times to provide extra prep time for teachers. This will free up teachers for observing peers, collaboration time, and planning time. Since this is such a new way of working in schools without accountability pressure, adequate amounts of time must be spent on the planning and development of new curriculum and ideas, similar to the Finland model of education described in Section Two. Schools will also be encouraged to use nontraditional blocks of time for traditional subjects, and combine as needed. There is no reason for English language arts to be separated from social studies, as many of the intrinsic skills transcend both subjects. The same goes for

mathematics and science, as a STEM block would make more sense in studying both subjects, and their crossover, especially since we are talking about incorporating problem-based learning into the day-to-day activities.

Program Budgets

Schools will receive a $30,000 stipend that they may spend at their leisure, and they will include the description of how they allocated these funds in their FACE plan. An example is below.

Table 4: Sample Budgeting Activities Example

Area	Amount	Description
Climate/Culture	$2,500	Executive Functioning Training by Rush Neurological center
Academic	$20,000	Tutors for struggling students
Academic	$5,000	Tutors for high-achieving students
Employee engagement	$2,000	Social/Emotional workshop

Subsequent years of the pilot will remain on a similar track but will also include comparing the results to the previous year's results, looking for improvement but also for new areas of growth. The goal would be to see each area of growth addressed and improved upon while building toward a new goal each year.

Implementing the policy this way, without a uniform standard list of categories to rate schools on, is respectful of the complex and nuanced educational institutions that schools are in the 21st century. By broadening the range and scope of what schools are able to report on, while giving them freedom to address and include other categories of reporting, they can take some of the actions back in their own hands and build intrinsic motivation among the staff and students, as well as foster creativity and buy-in as to what the focus areas of the school will be.

Using a policy such as this will also require a plan to assess the progress and make sure nothing is falling through the cracks as it relates to the focus that the district is putting on metrics from the SQRP. It acknowledges that there is validity toward monitoring the things that the SQRP is monitoring, albeit in a different format.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Having an assessment plan that evaluates the effectiveness becomes important to insure that its intentions are on track. When thinking of using the FACE strategy to self-report school performance, stakeholders must make sure that school performance still remains constant under traditional methods while guiding the way towards changing the thinking paradigm that accountability does not necessarily translate to school performance. After year five, the baseline data from the first year's SQRP will be compared with that of the most-recent fifth-year plan.

Outcomes Evaluated

Schools will still report testing results from the NWEA assessment as well as the state-mandated PARCC assessment, but these will be simply reported, not equated to a score or a point total that goes into a weighted score for schools. Also, since half of the grades will be mandatory to be assessed each year, scores that are reported will be the latest reporting of that grade level. The following chart shows a sample of the reporting under the old and new methods:

School Performance Evaluated	School Quality Rating Policy	FACE
NWEA attainment	Fifteen percent of a school's rating in five different categories: Below 10th percentile, 11–39th percentile, 40–69th percentile, 70–89th percentile, 90th and above.	Schools will still report their attainment percentile, but no point total is attached. Schools will also report the median percentile of each grade level in reading and math.
NWEA growth	Forty-five percent of a school's evaluation in different categories that are the same ranges as the attainment measure.	Schools will still report their growth percentiles in each grade level, but no point total is attached.

School Performance Evaluated	School Quality Rating Policy	FACE
5 Essentials survey	Ten percent of a school's evaluation in different categories ranging from "not yet organized" to "well-organized."	Schools will still report their survey results, but no points will be attached.
Attendance	Twenty percent of an elementary school's performance rating ranging from below 94% (lowest) to 96% and above (highest).	Schools will still report their attendance, but no point total will be attached. Each grade level will have its attendance rate reported.
Reading levels in K, 1, 2	Not part of a school's rating.	Schools will report the proficiency level of kindergarten through second grade on the running reading record assessment of the school's choice, as well as show trend data.

Table 5: Performance Evaluation

Schools will also add a reflection, no greater than one page, regarding the strengths and areas of improvement based on the data reported. They will also get into the goals of their work for the following school year.

District Responsibilities

District leaders will be responsible for strategically categorizing each expenditure within a school for reporting the financial section of the FACE strategy. A panel of experts in the district will categorize expenditures to have a uniform comparison across pilot schools. These areas are not yet set, as they will be up to the discretion of the committee, but they could fall into categories such as online programs, professional development, technology, staffing, support staff, and supplemental expenditures.

Principal Responsibilities

The principal's role in the school building will be that of instructional leader. His or her main responsibility will be to make sure that teachers are not using the results of the standardized tests to drive instruction, but instead the day-to-day work that students are producing. The principal will also keep records of classroom visits and what the students are working on when the visits occur. This will help keep track of the enrichment and task analysis that is vital to making sure that the focus remains on student work in the classroom. Principals will lead a FACE committee across pilot schools to keep abreast of the work going on across schools, share ideas, and discuss areas of concern. It is vastly important for the administrators to have similar views and philosophies, as they will drive the work forward and can selflessly share what they are doing.

Teacher Responsibilities

Teachers will have a major paradigm shift. Gone are the days of having to worry about students hitting growth targets and value-added scores from a once-per-year test. At the same time, some teachers will be at a loss for what to do without annual assessment results being the driver of their work. Instead, analyzing the task complexity and looking at the way students answer the tasks will become the main driver of work that occurs when planning and working with students in the classroom.

Scaling Up

Should the policy be successful, two new schools will be added each year through a selection process made of a panel of school leaders from the original pilot. These schools will be chosen from an application process that will consist of a one-page bullet-point FACE strategy example from each applying school. Using a rubric the panel

creates, as well as with a face-to-face interview session regarding the one-page

application, a decision will be made on which schools will be added to the pilot. The

selection for the schools will be highly scrutinized, and it will not be a guarantee that any

schools are added each year; the maximum number added will be two schools.

Schools That Do Not Improve

The lowest-performing schools from the pilot that do not improve enough to

move up a level on the SQRP will return to the accountability-based system after the five

year pilot is over.

If the Policy is Unsuccessful

Tweaks to the policy will be made after each year with the FACE committee and

school leadership and, if the schools and committee decide after the pilot period that the

policy is unsuccessful, schools will return to the districtwide performance evaluation

plan.

Accountability among Implementers

As all school leaders are evaluated once per year by their superiors, those

administrators will obviously be heavily weighted in their evaluations toward the

implementation of this policy. Superiors will be encouraged to observe meetings of

stakeholders as they give overviews of their school's FACE with targeted feedback to

improve these presentations in the future. This becomes part of the ongoing continual

assessment and improvement that will be part of the cycles of learning during the pilot.

As we would want principals to do a continual assessment of plans that they push

down to their teachers, while engaging them in the process, this is the same of which we

will ask of schools. A new policy is a work in progress, and the ongoing monitoring and tweaking of the assessment is vastly important to ensure a successful pilot.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

The FACE strategy in school reporting of data and activities that they participate in represents a huge shift in the way that school accountability is thought of, especially in an era of high-stakes testing. Changing the culture around high-stakes accountability in schools will put a refocus on rigorous student tasks, enrichment subjects such as music and the arts, and even science, allowing students to build and innovate tasks aligned to the new Next Generation Science Standards.

The vision for this policy is to think of a before and after in schools. In the before setting are teachers reporting being stressed and pressured on hitting numbers on their testing results, students reporting feeling bored with online programs, online program "drill and kill usage" being off the charts, parents reporting students being loaded up with unnecessary work, and schools reporting that enrichment topics are being brushed aside because of the pressure to hit high-stakes accountability numbers.

In the after setting, students complete more project- and problem-based learning, staff and students report more satisfaction, and students learn more knowledge applicable to their lives. Students also have the opportunity to explore their interests in school and find subjects that are not traditionally found in schools.

The values shared in this policy start with the best interest of students. When pressure reigns down on teachers from the top of the district, students eventually feel the pressure as their teachers do. Having a self-assessed policy of FACE reporting is the appropriate way to relieve pressure from schools and return the focus to student learning. Schools will be able to determine where their needs are and how they are to improve

them rather than worry about hitting specific numbers and metrics on standardized assessments, attendance, and surveys.

In a way, self-reporting and self-goal-setting of school performance at the grassroots level within the school is a more effective way of accountability. When schools set their own goals and evaluate their own performance without the fear of probation, more intrinsic motivation and creativity follows, and teachers, students, and administrators are able to think and plan outside the box to foster ideas.

Rolling the policy out slowly and only with schools that are bought into this different line of thinking engages the needs and concerns of the stakeholders sufficiently because there will be a want within the school to attempt things this way. Rolling out a policy to the masses immediately would mean that things would fall through the cracks and become more compliance-oriented. Starting with a small group of schools ensures that kinks to the policy are worked out and provides schools with time to think through ways to improve it as they go. Committees that analyze this policy will also have a say. Using a pilot for this policy means that the stakeholders want it to work, and they will discuss ways to do so without judgment or punishment.

This policy allows for schools to not get bogged down into the areas of compliance, avoids potential for Campbell's Law to take effect, and encourages schools to utilize and purchase resources that a local team decided was best for what works at that particular school, rather than what someone tells them from above. It allows for the grassroots movement, led by teachers, that moves schools forward and creates buy-in at all levels.

Conclusion

It is ironic that the school reform movement often wants to run schools more like a business, but there are few successful businesses that put themselves on rating scales made from an outside party, making their employees live in fear of losing their jobs or being told to do their jobs a certain way rather than be treated as a professional. This policy would put the power back in the hands of the most important people in a school—those who work there every day to make the students successful—and give them opportunities that are traditionally not found in a school setting. Relieving the staff from the threat of accountability is a way to increase creativity and new ideas, as well as a way for schools to reinvent themselves in the future.

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APPENDIX A: SCHOOL QUALITY RATING POLICY

School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Overview

What is the SQRP and what schools does it cover?

The School Quality Rating Policy is the Board of Education's policy for evaluating school performance. Through this policy, each school receives a **School Quality Rating** and an **Accountability Status** every year. Among other things, the SQRP helps to communicate to school stakeholders the academic success of individual schools and the district as a whole; provides a framework for school goal-setting; and guides the Board's decision-making processes around school support and intervention.

All schools receive a rating, including neighborhood schools, magnet schools, charter schools, selective enrollment schools and option schools.

What indicators are included in the SQRP?

Because different schools serve different populations of students, the SQRP uses different indicators for each type of school. The included indicators are as follows:

Elementary Schools	High Schools	Option Schools
• Student attainment on the NWEA MAP test • Student growth on the NWEA MAP test • Student attendance • My Voice, My School survey • Student growth on ACCESS for English Learners • Data quality	• Student attainment on the PSAT/SAT assessments • Student growth on the PSAT/SAT assessments • Student attendance • Graduation rate • Freshman on-track rate • Dropout rate • Students earning early college or career credentials • College enrollment and persistence • My Voice, My School survey • Data quality	• Student growth on the STAR test • Graduation rate • Enrollment stabilization • Student attendance • Credit attainment

How is a school's rating calculated?

For each of the indicators above, a school can score between one and five points. The indicator scores are then averaged (some indicators are weighted higher than others in this average). The weighted average – which will also fall between one and five points – is then used to determine a school's rating and status based on the table below.

Overall Score		Minimum Attainment Percentile	School Quality Rating	Accountability Status
4.0 or more		90th	Level 1+	Good Standing
Between 3.5 and 3.9	OR	70th	Level 1	Good Standing
Between 3.0 and 3.4		50th	Level 2+	Good Standing
Between 2.0 and 2.9		40th	Level 2	Provisional Support
Less than 2.0		--	Level 3	Intensive Support

From the Parkhill, MO, school district

Strategic Focus Area	Key Requirements
Financial	Financial Responsibility, Integrity, and Efficiency
Academic	High Student Achievement College & Career Readiness Individualization & Rigor
Climate	Safe and Orderly Environment Respectful , Welcoming and Caring Environment
Employee	Well-Qualified Teachers and Staff Supportive Learning Environment

APPENDIX C: FACE GOALS

From the Parkhill, MO, school district

ACADEMIC GOAL: Provide a relevant educational experience that prepares all students for college and career success.	
A1	Increase the percentage of students with a readiness score of 75% or higher, as measured by each students' College and Career Readiness Index. (Index to be developed and baseline data gathered)
A2	Increase the percentage of students proficient in 21st century skills.
A3	Close the College and Career Readiness Gap between ethnic and socioeconomic groups, as measured by each student's College and Career Readiness Index.

CLIMATE GOAL: Provide a safe, respectful, welcoming, and caring learning environment.	
C1	Increase the percentage of students reporting they feel safe at school.
C2	Decrease the percentage of students reporting being bullied.
C3	Increase the percentage of students reporting a respectful, welcoming and caring environment.

EMPLOYEE GOAL: Promote a positive, engaging and supportive work environment.	
E1	Increase the percentage of Park Hill School District staff members reporting their workplace is a respectful and caring environment.
E2	Certified staff will demonstrate high performance, improvement and innovation to support student-centered learning.
E3	Increase the percentage of support staff reporting engagement in activities to increase high performance, improvement or innovation to support the strategic goals of the district.
E4	Increase teacher engagement to support the strategic goals of the district.