

**Public Education:
Informing Discussion of
Next Generation Assessment and Accountability Systems**

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Goals and Purposes of Public Education

- First, we need to be clear on whom we are trying educate and what they need to get ready to deal with a changing future.
- **Goals of K-12 education:**
 - being self-directed by the end of high school – as in anchored
 - being part of a community (part of being civil, part of a democracy)
 - positioned to pick up and get skills that you need to be productive in your area of interest however you choose to pursue that area through college, technical school, or some other pathway
- **Are these goals easily measured through the two areas of reading and mathematics?**
 - No, clearly not. Absolutely not measurable comprehensibly through just those two areas.
 - Networking, social contract, self-directness are key non-academic pieces
 - A whole array of 21st century skills that is not really new, it is just that we have new terminology
 - However, the issue of the use of technology, access to and comfort level with technology, particularly as in instrument for searching for information, processing information, and communicating information is clearly dramatically different today – the shift from paper-and-pencil, catalog cards to the Internet, the capacity to project with multimedia in terms of how you communicate.
- **Are there advantages/disadvantages to focusing primarily on core subjects such as mathematics and reading as a starting point?**
 - If you understand and have bought into what appears to be evident in the research, that student interest and student motivation is the primary way in; and real learning is only real when it is owned by and demonstrated by a student (by whatever methods are accepted and supported at the time). If that is true then interest in individual subject areas is the way into individual students.
 - There may be advantages or disadvantages to focusing primarily on core subject areas (e.g., math, reading) as starting point in the sense that adults like to organize themselves. It is a place to start.
 - But the idea that you can only actually master these things in the context of a discipline alone is wrong. They can be mastered only in some application of the discipline in some combination with the humanities or sciences or technology, etc.

Equal Access and Opportunity for All Students

- **What do we mean by equal access and equal opportunities for all students?**
 - We have been at this battle for a very, very long time, we have not gotten there yet, but we have learned
 - resources do make a difference,
 - the community compact that gets you to fair and equitable funding is hugely political
 - to get there, money alone does not solve the problem. It may be a necessary but insufficient part of the answer.
 - Having the indicators and a much complex information infrastructure so that you can track information such as expenditures against goals, track student results against investment strategies, and track teacher changes in practice against training investments is absolutely imperative.
 - That information would better inform the equity and access discussion, but not solve it. It is already evident that equity and access is a problem. However, there are obviously political and public policy battles that have not been resolved – our American dilemma that when we say “all” we generally mean “ours” and not “theirs” whomever they are.
- **Does equal access/opportunity mean the “same” opportunity for all students, “most appropriate” opportunity for each student, or something different?**
 - If you accept the previous analysis of the inequity and unfairness in the system, you can either respond
 - get over it and let’s get all kids to these high standards, or
 - you can admit that even if we have figured out the financing, even if we did everything we think we can do as well as we think we can design it, there is always going to be a distribution. You can move the distribution radically to the right – as in all kids are performing higher – but you are never going to have all kids performing “the same” unless you make that line so absolutely mediocre (and even then you would still have a distribution).
 - We need to stop fighting about that and realize that every kids has capabilities, every kids has aptitudes, every kid has the right to access whatever pathway is most likely to engage them. Then use that pathway to bring them to what is the accepted public policy around common access to knowledge and skills.
 - Competencies are probably best demonstrated through an area of interest that would not be the same for all students.
 - Struggle with the issues of what is core (i.e., those things you need to graduate), what is good enough in those areas, and then how do you include or account for an area of interest where you would expect a significantly different performance level because it is an area of strength for a particular student – particularly when those will vary across students.
 - How does an accountability system and assessment/measurement system measure those things well enough so that it passes the credibility test while being student-centered enough and supportive enough so that it does drive ownership on the part of the student to own their learning?

- Therefore, equal access and opportunity means the most appropriate opportunity with equal quality even if it is different strategies.
- **We need to understand the distinction between tracking and offering different pathways for individual students.**
 - Other countries track in response to student interests and skill sets, but the quality of what they “track” into is always of such a quality that when a child decides to change pathways they do not have to “go back to where they started” or where their pathway split off.
 - In any pathway they are still learning how to read critically, solve problems, and all of those related critical skills.
 - Until we have allowed for pathways that look to some people like you are over-tracking a student and confront the issue of the quality of the “track” rather than the area itself, then we are always leading ourselves back to all students receiving the same content and the same courses – for a reason like “because that’s the way you get to college.”
- **How do we provide these opportunities in a system with limited money, limited number of teachers, and limited availability of qualified teachers within many urban/rural areas or in some content areas?**
 - This gets into the public policies around states, and incentive systems, and taking on the convention we have allowed to grow over 50 years between both the education bureaucracy and labor management structures, and
 - the convention that not all kids could learn. We created that convention, not the students.
 - You have to consciously approach this as trying to correct a systemic imbalance that we created as adults
 - You will need to rethink how teachers are selected, how they are groomed, what are the pathways for their own certification,
 - You need to be able to monitor the distribution of high-skilled, mid-career, novice teachers well enough so that you can put incentive systems in at the state level, through districts, that don’t command and control and kill spirit, but include reward systems, promotional opportunities, incentives that increase the likelihood of an appropriate distribution. There will be a mix of some coercion, some incentives, some state policies and strategies.
- **Resources in terms of money and personnel are never going to be unlimited so there will always have to be tradeoffs.**
 - As an urban superintendent, I never expected you to spend the same amount of money on students as the best suburban system. However, if you are monitoring the important indicators well you will see patterns emerge that are associated with kids who have access to “better.” When that access becomes a generalized access for a significant portion of students – when it recenters the norm – then it is obligatory on the part of the big system (i.e., state, federal) to drive that new norm into the system that does not have the capacity. It is never going to be absolute; one system or group of systems will become the barometer or benchmark for the new standard and that standard has to be forced into the systems that need it through public policy.

- **Qualified teachers**
 - There is hope that as we have begun to realize through technology and good wrap-around images of more comprehensive school systems and begun to acknowledge that kids are actually learning all the time.
 - with some degree of quality assurance systems work and technology, you can begin to value the non-school learning, assess it a context that can become valid in the sense of what it was trying to do, reliable in the sense of who is making the decision (e.g., a coach, the orchestra leader). You can come up with systems centered on the accreditation of what kids are doing relative to who is supervising and working with them. Upon a demonstrated capacity or a demonstrated proficiency through some means, that learning folds itself back into the formal system both for credit and for evidence of learning/proficiency.
 - This is an emerging “technology” with national networks examining ways to bring credibility and accreditation to non-school activities to assure that at least the “21st century” components of the activities – civic learning, teaming, problem-solving – that are not done very well in schools yet are as well done out of schools. As we are building the infrastructure to assure that those skills are brought “schooling” there’s no reason why that cannot be the same infrastructure that allows for non-school learning to be part of school. It brings to mind the Clay Christensen image, if we don’t do it very well anyway, why would we fight it going on outside, why would we not work with outsiders and change agents.

Equal Outcomes for All Students

- **Should we have an expectation of equal outcomes for all students?**
 - No, we do have to wrestle with the public policy issues as a community of what it is that we think is core, and
 - what that looks like in terms of what it means to graduate, and
 - to be certified as an engaged, productive citizen.
 - We need some common understandings of what and at what level the outcomes are, but have to accept the fact that there is always going to be a distribution.
 - There is going to be not only a distribution within an area, but there are going to be distributions across multiple areas - kids who really excel in something, but do not excel in all things.
- **How do you frame that in ways that results in agreement on what constitutes good enough as an exit standard?**
 - Exit standards are probably increasingly going to be looked at in terms of landing somewhere. For example, a student who may never be a scientist, but is going to do something in the humanities and is not only good at it, but actually has the credentials to land someplace post high school for additional training and/or job opportunities. That is going to have to be good enough.
- **This still begs the question of tracking.**
 - If tracking ends up being predicted by class or race then it is wrong.

- However, if it ends up that aptitude or achievement is equal everywhere or predicted by avocation that is OK.
- There must be a good system in grades K-10 (particularly 8-10) that ensures that all students have adequate counseling to ensure that they have access to and can explore well lots of different things, leading to the time that they are “tracking themselves”.
- There is always going to be the danger that the system tracks the wrong one to the wrong place.
- We need to resolve the pathways question as opposed to tracking for the wrong reasons. We have to figure that out if we are going to meet our larger objective all kids to any standards or high standards.
- **What is the level of performance that we expect students to reach in some key areas?**
 - The first attempt at setting a level is arbitrary. It is some sort of tension between a combination of a criterion and a normed distribution so that you can even have a conversation about what is expected against how far we are from having all kids reach that standard – a distribution of real kids v. an aspiration.
 - From then on, it is a constant iterative process driven by the student work itself and by hundred of thousands of benchmark samples of student work.
 - It is always a moving target, but the first issue is to even have a target and to know whether it is aspirational or normative.
 - Then we need to determine the appropriate instrumentation for assessing and monitoring the results in ways that always let you examine performance in terms of both aspirations and norms.
 - Will differences between aspirations and norms changes the aspiration level (i.e., public policy) or does it confront patterns in the norms because the norms begin to reflect class, race, gender, etc.?
- **What we are doing now with the national “core” is an example of this.**
 - We will end up with a content standard, but when we draw the line for proficiency, we are going to act as if proficiency is defined by landing in college – college ready.
 - Of course, this instantly begs the question of which college. The reality is that college ready is not uniform.
 - If the level really is supposed to mean “college ready” at some point higher than the midpoint of college distributions, then you are right back to large groups of students that, by definition, are not going to be ready on that single, simple measure.
 - So, that leads you right back to the concept of multiple measures, multiple pathways, and multiple ways of demonstrating proficiency that involve more than a single test in a single subject area.
 - All of this will continue to go around. It has to be viewed as a search, dynamic, and transparent. And the high skill sets of psychometricians and others charged with finding and anchoring the answer has to be thought of in terms of public policy. It is going to be a messy business. It will not be as simple as defining a simple performance level as the answer.

- **What are the key or core academic areas?**
 - I have never been opposed to the way it was done in the early 1990s. You can either say that the core areas are English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and civics (as in civility) or you can think of it as kids are drawn to either the sciences or they tend to be drawn to the humanities.
 - There will be an overlap between the sciences and humanities in terms of critical thinking and habits of mind. The earlier that students have teachers with skill sets broad enough to cross areas and you have activities that are interdisciplinary then as the student grow up then the crossover from integration to specialization or from integration to pathways does start to sort out kids through areas of interest or aptitude.
 - By the time students is leaving high school – even for students who can say that excel in all 5 or 6 core subjects and all extra-curricular and service areas – they are going to have to focus, accelerate, and excel in something.
 - We have to challenge the idea that if the area in which a student focuses, accelerates, and excels is not “core” then it is not right or acceptable. For example, some of the vocational pathways, some of the social studies pathways that may or may not look like the core in a traditional sense of the word.
 - I am struggling with the barrier of subject areas as the structure of a learning environment. As long as you are certifying teachers by subject area, sorting students into 45-minute classes, and scoring students subject areas for graduation in that adult-structured way then you are fighting the integrated application and mastery of interdisciplinary skill sets and knowledge bases. That is a challenge.
 - Any discussion of the key core academic areas are reading must include the arts. The arts give a sense of ownership and purpose to learning in the other core areas.
 - Almost all of the alternative programs that find ways around the conventional barriers have demonstrated this over and over again. It is the very things that we have been shutting kids out of (with an emphasis on core academic subject areas) that are their pathways to engagement and learning.

Next steps

Assessment

- You cannot deliver any of the images of quality education unless we completely rethink the teacher knowledge base around what assessments mean – whether those assessments are formative/benchmark/summative or embedded/external.
- The current preparation programs are totally inadequate to having teachers understand assessment and instruction
 - in the sense of the diagnostic response piece and in terms of
 - the “benchmark” to what. Is my benchmarking in terms of imagined course coverage, how much content the student has attained, how much I have

taught, mastery as defined by a criterion, a trajectory for growth, or defined in terms of norms?

- Are our criteria for mastery based on something that can be easily measured (even if the content is difficult) by a standardized assessment dropped in from the outside or do we have criteria for mastery that require an assessment system that knows the limits of particular instruments, is instructional, and anticipates summative goals/criteria (no matter how complex) throughout the system?
- And have we adequately prepared teachers so that they understand the distinctions between the different components of the assessment system, how to use each, and are much more centered on the component they are using, and have the skills sets to use it? That pedagogy is emerging, but getting that into classrooms and to the level of practice where we can audit and be able to say that practice is getting better is a huge challenge for all of us in the K-12 education system.
- Bringing teachers back into comfort levels with assessment in a systemic manner, as part of the measurement world, is not something we have done and is something that we need to be prepared to do. By keeping teachers out of it, you are hurting kids and you are reinforcing all of the wrong behaviors among teachers regarding what to measure and how to measure it.

Accountability

- We do have to have measures. If disaggregated results of a mathematics or reading test show me the pattern of current achievement that expose all of the flaws in terms of equity, access, measurement, etc. I would never fight that.
- We can use “anchor” state tests only for the purpose of monitoring the distribution in terms equity and access knowing full well that they are only testing some things.
- We need to get from there to a system that can support access to the larger areas of whatever core means, the various pathways, areas of student interest, high levels of analytical performance; and a system in which an individual teacher who may not be an expert in a particular subject has the necessary supports and tools to recognize when a student does something that should be considered an accomplishment.
- That is the type of work that Rhode Island was trying to stay with in developing networks to examine how to use portfolios, how to use panels of judges, how to create and share rubrics across classrooms, schools, district, and state; and how do you audit it so that it recognizes quality improvement and does not stifle it making it a one-size-fits all routine.
- Finally, how do you do all of this within a system that gets teachers to the point that they recognize that this is their profession. These judgment points against a public set of criteria around the content and images of proficiency are something in which their judgment is legitimate. Their judgment is not arbitrary, it is embedded within a profession, embedded within a protocol, and embedded within a monitoring system that is self-equalizing and self-improving.
- We have to be able to demonstrate to the critic or to the ideologue that the instrumentation of the diagnostic measure or the interim measure or the summative measure being practiced by a qualified and well-positioned professional, who is in a

constant self-monitoring network (not unlike the audits on panels) is something that we can trust (auditing on occasion), and that when a student who is certified by that professional lands in the next place his/her performance is consistent with what the professional's judgment suggested it would be.

- The technology to support all of this is emerging. The instrumentation is emerging. The information systems are emerging. However, getting this to scale with hundreds of thousands of classrooms and teachers requires a rethinking of how you get there, how you support it over the career of a teacher, how you find the masters, how the masters train the mentors, and how the mentors are rewarded. This brings you right back into an enormous change in the human capital system.