

Educational Accountability for Public Assurance

[2006, revised 2018]

Educational accountability is defined as the process through which the partners in the education system each take responsibility for their actions and report to those who are entitled to the information. Educational accountability for public assurance includes an obligation to improve the capacity and performance of all those responsible for achieving the broad goals of education. This process is ultimately focused on supporting the role and responsibilities of the teacher to diagnose and respond to the learning needs of the student. An effective educational accountability system is guided by seven broad principles:

Principle 1

Education partners have a shared understanding of and commitment to fairness, openness, respect for diversity and stewardship, key values underlying a commitment to equity.

The education system operates within the context of a democratic society. It is purposeful in serving the education needs of children and youth and of society in general. The system operates effectively because the education partners who contribute in specific and unique ways hold similar values. In order for the education partners to trust each other and respond wholeheartedly to the issue of accountability, it is important that they reconfirm with each other a shared understanding of and commitment to the values. By working from this base of shared values, education partners become comfortable in going beyond mere compliance with imposed requirements to commitment to fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities.

Principle 2

The primary purpose of accountability in education is to support the broad goals of education and the diverse learning needs of children and youth.

In order to enjoy continued support from those it serves, the education partners need to show students, parents and the public that the education system is achieving the goals set for it. At the same time, the education partners must recognize and advance the differing gifts, talents and potential that children and youth possess and the different rates of learning. The education partners should be sensitive to the fact that accountability processes provide powerful feedback mechanisms that affect the perceptions and behaviours of those internal and external to the education system. More importantly, accountability should provide information to the education partners for improving the contexts, inputs, processes and outcomes of education, enabling the system to achieve the goals set for it.

The goals of education are broad and long-term, and reflect the diversity of society. This means that information gathered and reported through the accountability system must also be broadly based and include results on a full range of performance measures, not only academic achievement. Assessments should reflect the diversity of student aptitudes and rates of learning. Students identified with a special education need should be respected by increasing expectations for them while recognizing the individualized nature of their learning ability.

As some of the goals are long-term and realized over time, and children and youth develop at different rates, meaningful achievement may not be immediately apparent. Some means of capturing long-term results are used as well.

Principle 3

Information for accountability purposes is gathered in various data infrastructures from all relevant sources, and reported and used in ways that respect the limitations of the data.

Through the accountability system, education partners gather and report timely and useful information that goes far beyond provincial testing. Multiple measures provide information on contexts, inputs, processes and results, and the information is clear and easy to understand. Information-gathering processes are transparent. Measures that assess student learning allow for the diversity of student interest, aptitude and rate of development.

Information that is gathered from education partners is relevant to their roles and responsibilities and ultimately helpful in improving the system's capacity to achieve the goals of education. As information gathering and reporting can be expensive and time-consuming and the information needs of each of the partners and the public vary, the education partners should make decisions together about priority areas for data collection and reporting, and the tools and processes needed.

Mechanisms for gathering and reporting information are selected in terms of the purpose for which they are intended. Care is taken to ensure that the information gathered and reported is accurate and valid, and that any inferences or conclusions about the education system in whole or in part are discussed by the partners prior to reporting.

Principle 4

Sound educational research and practice guide the design and implementation of data infrastructures.

Accountability in education requires a complex system of many processes and interdependent variables that, when designed and implemented well, enhance the system's opportunities to achieve the goals of education. Opportunities are built into the system to review practices in light of new research. The teaching profession works with education partners in the effective use of the research, because pedagogy, rather than political ideology, should have a stronger influence on interpreting and applying research in education.

Principle 5

Responsibility for public assurance in education enhances the capacity of education partners to fulfil their respective roles and leads to sustained improvement of the system.

Through accountability processes, education partners plan, gather and report information that shows how well they have fulfilled their respective roles and responsibilities. By reflecting on the processes used and the results each has achieved, and by engaging each other in the review, education partners are able to support each other in maximizing the effectiveness of their roles and to make continuous improvements to the education system as a whole.

Education partners can be accountable only if they have the capacity to cause a mandated result. This principle means that each partner is challenged to become fully aware of and enhance its knowledge and skills, the technical and financial resources, the autonomy to act, and the know-how to integrate all the resources needed to bring about the result.

Principle 6

Each education partner is responsible for those areas of the system within its authority and expertise.

Legislation defines specific roles and responsibilities for many of the education partners. It is important, however, that the partners' roles and responsibilities are developed together and understandings are shared.

While each partner contributes to creating opportunity and building capacity in the system, it is not held accountable for those areas that exceed its area of responsibility or its capacity to effect change. Education partners should be viewing accountability as much more than monitoring, focusing instead on helping schools build capacity for improvement within the context of the local communities they serve. An effective accountability system recognizes that leadership is needed at all levels in education.

Political responsibility flows from the legislature to the minister, and then on to school boards. The ministry is also accountable beyond elections for its fiscal and policy decisions and for its involvement of the education partners during the decision-making process.

Principle 7

The system of accountability in education is evaluated on an ongoing basis focused on the goal of providing public assurance.

The education partners participate in a review of the various aspects of the accountability system and reflect on its processes, the guiding principles and any opportunities for improving the system on an ongoing basis. A formal review is conducted every five years.