DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 928 EA 031 521

AUTHOR Hudson, Martha B.; Williamson, Ronald D.
TITLE Human Perspectives on High Stakes Accountability Systems: How Preparation Programs Respond.
PUB DATE 2001-11-04
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration (Jacksonville, FL, November 1-4, 2001).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; *Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; *High Stakes Tests

ABSTRACT

With the current demands for greater accountability, schools must often choose between short-term responses that lead to improved scores or longer-term efforts to build student achievement and ensure quality teaching. This paper considers ways in which the arguments on either side of this issue manifest themselves in particular schools. The emphasis is on context, the specifics that give meaning to data. For 4 years, a school-leader preparation program has been examined which has been undergoing major reforms to align with state and national standards, including the implementation of a national licensure exam. A naturalistic inquiry was designed to rely heavily on the students' opinions as one measure of the impact of program reform. Concerns about accountability systems permeated responses from students, interns, graduates, and practicing principals. Many specific concerns were related to scores that were misinterpreted by principals and parents. Other problems were related to the emphasis on raising scores for a building over helping students who most need help. Faced with the pressures of high-stakes accountability, schools hope to find a quick fix to problems that may require long-term investments in skills and resources that offer a greater chance of fundamental gains over time. (Contains 34 references.) (RKJ)

Human Perspectives on High Stakes Accountability Systems:

How Preparation Programs Respond

Martha B. Hudson, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
628 Ritters Lake Road
Greensboro, NC 27406
(336) 379-9094
e-mail: mlbhudson@aol.com

Ronald D. Williamson, Ed.D.
Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
Suite 304 – Porter Building
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
(734) 487-7120, extension 2685
e-mail: ron.williamson@emich.edu

Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration
Annual Conference
Jacksonville, FL
November 4, 2001

Demands for greater accountability and higher test scores place schools in a precarious position. They often must choose between short-term responses that lead to improved scores or longer-term efforts to build student achievement and assure quality teaching. A new assistant principal recently described the dilemma,

> With the focus on testing, it is terribly easy to lose sight of what administrators are striving to do, which is to provide an environment where teachers can teach and students can learn. That environment does not just happen; it has to be created, cultivated and nurtured...If an environment is created where learning is not only fun, but respected as well, test scores will follow. When I put my head on that pillow at night, I know that I have done all I can do to help in the creation of such an environment.

The tensions embedded in this leader's comments play out day after day in the nation's schools. Responses vary from denial to acceptance. The way school leaders and their faculties resolve these tensions, embrace improved student achievement, but continue to assure caring and nurturing educational environments can inform other educators and those who prepare them. This is their story, a look at their struggle to remain focused on long-term, sustainable student learning.

Arguments for and against educational standards and accountability systems abound. Educators, writers and politicians claim that standards ensure a quality education, one which prepares students for the challenges of the 21st century (Sirotnik & Kimball, 1999). Others argue that standards stifle good teaching and ensure that metaphors for teaching like art, poetry, and mission are replaced by images of automatons reading from scripts (Bushweller, 1997).

Still others suggest that accountability systems, even high-stakes ones, are the best way to ensure the achievement of greater equity in schools (Murnane, 2000). Others contend that the damage done to individual students, teachers, principals, and their families and communities far outweigh any potential benefits (Kohn, 1999; Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 1991).

The intent of this paper is not to argue either side of this issue. Others make those arguments and raise those issues far more eloquently. Instead, we intend to explore ways in which those arguments manifest themselves in the lives of teachers and principals by looking at the impact of high-stakes accountability on particular schools and the people who work in those schools.

There exists an emerging sense of how high-stakes accountability systems can impact particular students. The Texas high school graduate is denied entrance into the military because, in spite of a good record, she does not pass the exit exam. Savvy and informed students in Michigan boycott the state exam because it might compromise their college entrance applications. A young man in Minnesota is excluded from the rituals and celebrations of graduation because the contractor makes errors scoring exit exams.

Such stories, while poignant, do not convey how such systems impact on teachers, principals, and communities. Through the stories of real teachers and

principals, we intend to reveal some of the realities of high-stakes accountability in diverse communities.

Public revelation is inadequate. High-stakes accountability is a reality. Every state, except Iowa, has or is developing some variation of a standards and accountability system. Concurrently, teacher and principal shortages plague school systems nationwide. Some educators leave because systems of high-stakes accountability add pressures to already stressful professions. In Vermont, for instance, 20% of the state's principals left their jobs last year (Steinberg, 2000).

Thus, another purpose of this paper is to explore how high-stakes accountability can be reconciled with demands for improved leadership preparation. We will consider what teachers, administrative interns, and practicing principals say about how they contend with the problems. From their voices comes a sense of possibility. Principal preparation programs can learn from those possibilities. Incorporating them into preparation can help assure quality principals--- principals who care, who value teaching and learning, and who understand that the realities of high-stakes accountability must be reconciled in very personal and contextual terms.

Context

People who care about education make arguments for and against standards and accountability. For example, Meier (2000) sees standards as a threat to the democratic principles that lie at the heart of the common school. McNeil (2000) argues that standards limit good teaching. Richard Murnane (2000) responds that standards have promise for improving the quality of

education and offer hope that we may finally address pervasive educational inequalities.

Those arguments are played out in North Carolina. In 1996, the state implemented the ABCs of Public Education. The "A" stands for accountability, focused on the individual school and complete with both rewards and punishments. The "B" stands for basics, referring to the state's standardized curriculum on which the tests are based and which is intended to provide a basic, quality education to every child. The "C" refers to local control, and is intended to give schools latitude in how they go about meeting the goals set for them.

North Carolina, along with Texas and Michigan, has received kudos for the results that have been posted since the system was introduced. Scores on the state tests have improved every year. In addition, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores have risen as well. A recent Rand Corporation analysis, for instance, cites North Carolina's average annual gain of 2.45 percentile points on math between 1990 and 1996 as the highest in the nation (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000).

So what does an average annual gain of 2.45 percentile points for a randomly selected group of 4th and 8th graders mean? Out of context, not much.

Stufflebeam (1971) taught us long ago that we cannot fully understand schools unless we understand the context, the input, and the process as well as the product. More currently, Stake (1991) as well as Sirotnik and Kimball (1999) argue that a good accountability system must evaluate each school in terms of its own context. Even the Rand Corporation analysis suggests that most of the differences among states can be attributed to demographics (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000).

Sergiovanni (1994, 1996, 2000), Goodlad (1984, 2000), Barth (1990), Fullan (1994, 1999) and many other advocates of educational reform have been teaching us for a long time that goodness in schooling is intensely contextual. Such goodness is grounded in passionate teaching, in respectful and caring relationships, in people assuming ownership of their schools, and in developing processes for including all members of the community.

Meaning is contextual. Stake (1995), for instance, tells us that meaning is created when we read stories (cases) and make connections with contexts that are familiar. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggests that such understanding emerges when the ethnographer seeks to understand the subject of the story from the inside out and paints a portrait in words that enable the reader to do the same. The reality of school life is not merely a reflection of external forces but much more complex. "The standards by which schools define their goodness are derived from internal and external sources, from past and present realities, and from project goals," Lightfoot suggests (1983).

The intent here is, through the stories of the struggles of real teachers and principals to deal with high-stakes accountability, to enhance understanding of the meaning of context. The American Educational Research Association (AERA) recently issued a statement urging caution in the use of high-stakes testing (American Educational Research Association, 2000). Among many suggestions, AERA proposes that policymakers and test developers fully disclose possible negative consequences of their programs.

The stories discussed here reveal some negative consequences of high-stakes accountability models. Such a human perspective, placed in the context of very real school communities, will enlighten readers who recognize similarities to their own settings.

Professors who work to prepare tomorrow's leaders can use both the problems and the proposed solutions to improve preparation of school leaders. The stories enhance our understanding of the realities and successes at reconciling the pressures of high-stakes accountability with a commitment to what is good and right for both students and teachers.

Identifying the problem is but the first step. Articulating strategies for resolving the tensions inherent in such accountability systems is a more difficult task. Through their stories, and in their own words, principals and teachers offer suggestions, alternatives, and possibilities that enlighten the debate about the impact of high-stakes accountability.

Methodology

For four years, we have been studying the preparation of new school leaders by examining one preparation program as it underwent major structural reforms to align with state and national standards and implementation of a national licensure exam (Hudson & Williamson, 1999; Williamson & Hudson, 1998, 1999). This investigation was launched in response to the redesign of school leader preparation programs in state universities.

A naturalistic inquiry was designed to rely heavily on the student voice as one measure of the impact of program reform (Williamson & Hudson, 1999). It afforded students the opportunity, in their own words, to share their experience confronting contemporary leadership issues, through the lens of a renormed preparation program.

We did not set out to study high-stakes accountability systems or their impact on people in schools. Yet as we have listened to the voices of students, interns, graduates, and practicing principals, we came to recognize that

accountability systems dominate school life. As we listened to these school folk, we came to understand the impact of statewide accountability systems on local schools, schools that operate in very diverse settings.

One of the premises of good naturalistic inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) is that the researcher must be open to unexpected findings and prepared for the research to go in unforeseen directions. Such was the case in our study. The reality of high-stakes accountability was such that it permeated nearly every conversation with both practicing principals and those aspiring to school leadership. The topic could not be ignored. Its prevalence, however, encouraged further investigation into the way that such accountability systems impact local schools and influence leadership decisions.

We honor that premise and seek here to convey how the realities of high-stakes accountability altered our understandings, our practice as leaders and our teaching of prospective leaders. Because greater accountability is such a priority throughout the country, we believe that what we learned from these school leaders can enlighten the work of school leaders and those preparing school leaders who face similar conundrums.

Voices from the Field: Problems

The Teacher Voice

High-stakes accountability systems invariably narrow the curriculum, limit the opportunities available to students, and re-stratify access to knowledge (Sirotnik & Kimball, 1999; McNeil, 2000). They do so because, out of fear and under the threat of punishment, teachers feel compelled to teach what is tested. McNeil (2000) argues that such high-stakes threaten our capacity to offer a

"substantive education," an education that engages the hearts, minds, and experiences of teachers and students in ways that reach far beyond merely teaching to the test.

Our best teachers teach students, not a narrow curriculum driven by the content of a single test. Those teachers may be the most negatively affected by the fear and punishment associated with high-stakes accountability systems. If they buy into the "raise the scores at any cost and do it quickly" game, they sell their souls as creative and compassionate professionals. If they resist, they risk being ostracized by those with whom they work.

In one school, a teacher who works magic with students through a highly creative, interdisciplinary pedagogy was asked to follow the structures and scripts of a packaged program adopted with the goal of increasing student success on the state test. She struggled with whether to abide by the principal's dictate and stifle both herself and her students, or refuse to comply and risk both wrath and low evaluations.

Conflicts for teachers also arise out of their sensitivity to context. A fourth grade teacher, in a state where passing a writing test determines promotion to fifth grade, was excited with how successful her students scored on a writing test. She prepared to celebrate the growth that the children made during the year. Because of the difference in classes from year to year, it mattered not that this year's group scored lower than last year's---they still made significant gains. This year's class was comprised of different children and began the year at very different places. The teacher was chastised, however, by the principal who reacted to the lowered score, not the children's improved writing.

Another teacher saw scores for the entire fourth grade decline sharply from one year to the next. Much ado resulted, mostly at the district level. This teacher's perspective was that the district authorities distinguished between "bad"

scores at "bad" schools and "bad" scores at "good" schools. In the first case, the scores were expected; in the latter, there was shock and chagrin. As a result, the district assumed a "quick fix" mentality and contracted with an outside expert to provide mandated workshops for teachers.

The Intern Voice

Our preparation program is built on the premise that teaching and learning is the central purpose of schools and that school decisions should be grounded in the best interests of students. Students enter the internship believing that student success is best achieved in environments that are student-centered, democratic, and inclusive. As future leaders, they are committed to settings where high expectations co-exist with care and nurture (Williamson & Hudson, 1998).

During one course students discussed the de-emphasis on social studies and science in response to the emphasis on reading and mathematics on state tests. More than half of students in elementary schools reported that their schools, at a minimum, discussed the shift in focus. Over half reported being directed to spend more time on subjects included in the accountability test.

If social studies and science can be impacted, what is the result for other academic experiences like the arts, whose pursuit makes us human and whole? One intern described the impact on a marginal student who was removed from music to participate in additional remediation. The student was passionate about music, but that interest was discounted in favor of time devoted to remedial math and reading instruction. If the loss of the one subject about which this student was passionate contributes to the student dropping out, will anyone care? The intern surmised that the answer was probably "no," because, in part, one lesser low score would be reported.

Another full-time intern entered a middle school that was performing well and was highly regarded in the community. They, too, had students who scored low on the state test. As a project, the intern was asked to develop a remediation program. She discovered that some planning had already occurred and was dismayed that because the intent of the program was to raise composite test scores, students selected for help were those with the "highest" of the "low scorers." Those most needy, with the least chance of moving from not proficient to proficient were not chosen. The intern was appalled. She knew from classes that high-stakes accountability systems historically tended to relegate the lowest students to remedial classes (Darling-Hammond & Ancess, 1996) but at this school there were further distinctions. Choices were made, not on the basis of who most needed assistance, but who might best help the school raise it's scores.

During a recent internship seminar the discussion turned to accountability. Students shared their experience in schools and discussed with great excitement the opening of school. They were distressed, however, at the emphasis placed on raising test scores. The conversation was characterized by one comment, "Most of the teachers talked about improving scores so that they would get their bonus, not because of improved student learning." Others joined the conversation and spoke of the dramatic shift in thinking during the past two years. Another stated, "When I was still teaching (two years ago) we talked about student learning. Now, with the bonuses, the talk is about how to spend our money." These poignant remarks capture the often negative impact associated with reward systems linked to high-stakes accountability systems.

The Principal Voice

The American Educational Research Association's (2000) recent policy statement on high stakes testing cautions that, "reliance on misleading or misrepresentative results may cause serious harm." That caution lives in the story of one principal.

In one small town caught between its history of factory work and a future based on tourism, the schools are an integral part of the community. One school has long been regarded as "good," with evidence to support that perception. Part of a reform-minded network that emphasizes teaching though the arts, it has earned its high regard in the community. The school has a dedicated staff and offers wonderful learning experiences for students. Even on the state accountability test, there is evidence that children are well taught. On the measures that matter in the rankings, the school demonstrates that almost 80% of its students are "proficient," a category characterized by the label "school of distinction."

Recently the school did not meet the growth target set by the state. When the results were published in the local paper, the school was the only county school labeled "no recognition." Based on this, the principal remarked that, "If someone used this testing alone to judge our school, they might conclude that [the school] does not do as good a job as most other county schools in helping its students become successful learners." The local paper reported the facts correctly. The problem, however, was that the facts alone could easily be misconstrued and misunderstood. They did not tell the whole story, and in a small town, where schools matter to the community, this was hurtful not only to the principal, but to teachers, students, and families who had worked so hard to ensure that children did well in school.

It may be hard to imagine that scoring well on the high-stakes measures could be a problem. Yet a principal in another school identified as a "school of distinction" because more than 80% of the students were proficient on a state test, saw it as one. While the students were performing well, they did not meet prescribed growth targets. In the same district, another school with many fewer students at proficiency met their target. As a result, those teachers received a bonus while the first group received nothing. How does a principal justify rewards for such narrowly defined "success" to dedicated, caring, and successful teachers?

This principal reported that the scores impacted relationships in the district. Distinctions about leadership were made based on test scores. Community discussion related success to the label awarded the school based on their test results. The tension this principal felt was complicated by the fact that he knew other principals and teachers worked just as hard and cared just as deeply for their students. Those efforts, however, were not reflected in the test scores.

In another case, the tensions and stresses arose when a school was flooded following a hurricane. On the fifth day of flooding the principal traveled to the school by boat. Looking through the windows, he saw desks floating in the muddy waters. In the media center, books rested in soggy piles where they were deposited by the water. When the waters receded, the school was condemned and a temporary site constructed of mobile units.

Three weeks later when school reopened, many members of the school community were still unaccounted for---families fled the flood, some abandoning or losing everything. Teachers had no books, no plans, no materials. Dealing with the human tragedy of the flood became paramount. School became a safe haven for many students where they could begin to deal with their losses and

their fears while participating in a learning environment that was engaging and nurturing.

The principal appealed to the state for an exemption from testing because of the human and physical toll on his school and its students. The state said, "No." How does a principal face the cold fact that his students are going to be held accountable by the same accountability measures as every other school in the state when their resources were seriously depleted? This principal chose to do what was right and necessary for the students and "forget" the tests. Would others do the same? It is a difficult question.

Voices from the Field: Possibilities

The Teacher Voice

Teacher answers to the problems of high-stakes accountability systems are grounded in a sense of efficacy, a strongly held belief that they can and do have real power in their own classrooms (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Teachers with whom we have interacted, who are more efficacious and reflect a continuing commitment to meeting student needs, tend to be resistant to the pressures of high-stakes accountability. Their capacity to resist short-term responses is enhanced when they work with principals who encourage creativity and responsiveness rather than mete punishment for avoiding short-term solutions.

One fourth grade teacher with a reputation for "producing" high writing scores described the reason for her success, "I want my children to become skilled writers and that is what we work on." The test her students take is anchored in responding to a narrative prompt. This teacher approaches writing more holistically. The children develop the ability to critique, edit, and publish their work. Over time, they work with the prescribed rubric and learn to assess

their own work and that of others. Occasionally, they practice the "unreal" task of writing within a set time, without the benefit of time to process or edit, but they recognize this as the exception rather than the rule. Yet the scores in her classroom are always good. The teacher maintains it is because students are good writers who can apply their skills to the tests, not because they have been taught the test.

A high school biology teacher, renowned for creating an engaging and respectful learning environment for students, faced another result of the focus on testing. Her classes were filled with hand-on activities, encouraged thoughtful and creative problem solving, and incorporated many lab experiences. Assessments were varied, purposeful and real. It is no surprise that her students do very well on state tests. Talking about her work, the teacher said, "I teach like that because it's the only way I know. I couldn't bear to work in a job that wasn't fun--for me and for the students."

This teacher recently asked to teach a greater range of courses, wishing to utilize her skills in other content areas. The principal who wanted to keep the teacher in her current assignment because the biology test "counts" toward the school's score, rejected the request. While it might be fun to teach other courses, she is locked into the high stakes course.

The Intern Voice

Interns tell us that they find clues for dealing with high-stakes accountability in their own preparation. They face a high-stakes test themselves, as they must pass the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Exam for licensure (Educational Testing Service, 1997). As one student said," that's [the test] not the focus, and I don't think it should be." Another commended the program for not becoming "test crazy." This student saw such test craziness coming to schools

and appreciated that, "You didn't start teaching to the test or let the testing permeate everything that's done." Still another intern said of the test, "It wasn't the focus--thank God, because I see teachers doing that to kids all the time. I was glad to see it never did become an issue in our training. There was no panic about it." These interns take those learnings with them into their first jobs, holding to the belief that they can be responsible about the tests without becoming obsessed by them.

One student, currently an assistant principal, described the school where he most recently taught as a school where most teachers had begun to "teach to the test instead of preparing students to think openly and critically." He talked about how refreshing it was to assume the assistant principalship in a school that refuses "to focus on standardized testing to determine its success." He reports that his current school cares about students not test scores. In his current setting this student found a lived vision, a place where, "In addition to academics, arts, and technological skills, the school understands that it is their job to prepare students to be creative problem solvers, team players, effective communicators, and good citizens." The broader focus, grounded in the arts, has not led to any decrease in academic accountability as measured by the state. Rather, this student reported that, "the more the school refuses to allow its teachers to be driven by test scores, the greater success the school has on these indicators."

The Principal Voice

It is impossible to ignore high-stakes accountability. Politicians and the media ensure that it stays at the forefront of the public debate about schools. Principals, however, can protect their teachers from the pressures, can work to keep the overly simplistic public discourse outside the school. Principals who are successful in this regard often describe themselves as "buffers" who "feel the

heat" themselves but absorb it, preventing it from reaching inside the school. These principals remain focused on teaching and learning, supporting teachers and their work with students. Observations and evaluations center on good teaching, not teaching to the test. In fact, examples of over-reliance on simplistic measures to raise test scores are points of contention, not celebration.

Principals can be context sensitive. In one school, there was a distinct difference in two succeeding third grade classes. Compared to the previous group, the entering class had more students who were reading below grade level, eligible for free or reduced meals, and receiving speech and language services. There were more students identified as exceptional, except for the gifted, and fewer of those. Average IQ scores for the group were about ten points lower. On every measure, there was a distinct difference in the two groups of students. Given those differences, it was no surprise that the test scores went down from the previous year. Those scores were posted in the local paper and the decline was noted. On a chart with sixty other schools, who really noticed or cared? At the school level, there were local celebrations of the growth that had occurred over the course of the year. Students and parents joined with teachers in events designed to say, "Look where we were and look where we are now," not "Look where we are compared to last year's group."

Principals can hold to broader definitions of goodness in schools and project those visions to stakeholders. Yes, student achievement is important, but there is so much more. Goodlad (2000) argues that the purpose of schooling is "developing the essence of each individual self in the context of justice, fairness, responsibility, and mutual caring...." (p. 88). Principals who see and express their missions in such terms keep test scores in perspective.

In one school, the principal makes a broader definition of goodness a part of her communication with stakeholders. She works collaboratively with a

university to collect a variety of data and then reports findings honestly and regularly. A quarterly report includes information on test scores, but in the context of demographic information, summaries of grade distributions, how at-risk students are doing, and other "numbers" like parent association membership and volunteer hours. An accompanying narrative makes the numbers real. For example, one such report cites a particular volunteer effort because, "The students know that there are adults in the school who care about them and are watching out for them." An unintended outcome of this particular program, according to the principal, is the increasing number of adults who see the school "up close and personal" and understand how hard and how effectively the staff is working to serve students. Adults with such knowledge see test scores in perspective.

Implications: Informing Principal Preparation

Staying in Touch

Concerns about high-stakes accountability are not new. Darling-Hammond and Ancess (1996) suggest that earlier accountability tools advocated in the 1970s and 1980s as a lever for school change, were not successful. To the contrary, "these efforts frequently had unhappy results for teaching and learning generally, and for schools' treatment of low-scoring students in particular" (p. 55). We can learn valuable lessons from this history. Yet current versions of high-stakes accountability seem somehow more sinister, especially with regard to inappropriate uses of tests, over-reliance on single points of data for decisions, and damaging repercussions for individual students. We must keep learning--both theoretically and practically. We must know and understand the problems and the possibilities.

Experience in the principalship helps professors understand the problems. Our students tell us that such experience facilitates their connections between theory and practice (Hudson & Williamson, 1999). Yet those who prepare principals cannot rely entirely on such experience. The realities of school life have changed. Even relatively new faculty, even those experienced in school leadership, often struggle to understand the current reliance on tests as measures of school success and the accompanying rewards and punishments. We must experience those realities, at least vicariously, by spending time in the field and both listening and respecting the voices of those who currently practice.

Staying in touch means collaborating with practitioners. We must listen attentively to their voices to understand the pressures that they perceive. In a recent class, a student interrupted a discussion of long-term sustainable learning goals. He cited an example in his district where three assistant principals were recently demoted from principalships because "their scores were low." How, he wondered, do school leaders stay focused on longer-term commitments to teaching and learning in the presence of such threats. In part, answers to such questions come, not only from the knowledge base, but also from the lived examples of practicing principals.

Maintaining and Modeling Perspective

Examples from the field help build student commitment to the larger purposes of schools. Inviting speakers to classes who exemplify such practice, visiting in their schools, reading about such practice, and building personal commitments are part of good preparation programs.

In addition, the program itself can model the centrality of teaching and learning. We prepare principals in a standards-driven context. North Carolina has developed standards and students must pass a licensure exam based on

Interstate School Leader Licensure Standards (Williamson & Hudson, 1998). The standards are incorporated into our teaching, both in terms of content and pedagogy. However, the program does not focus solely on the test. As one student expressed it, "I'm not worried about the test. I'm prepared enough. The real test is when I get into the office and that's what we were prepared for." By preparing students for the "real test," the one that will require them to stay focused on the centrality of real, long-term, sustainable teaching and learning, we can help them avoid the dangers of high-stakes accountability systems.

Understanding the Big Picture

In school leader preparation programs, we must offer students a means for understanding and maintaining perspective. Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000), for example, suggest that the focus on raising standardized test scores exemplifies a "shifting the burden" approach. Faced with the pressures of high-stakes accountability, schools enter the "quick fix" loop that may result in short-term gains. In so choosing, however, the school directs resources away from the "fundamental solutions loop" characterized by a focus on sustainable learning. The "quick fix" does not work over time. Even worse, it diverts the longer-term investments of skills and resources that offer a greater chance of fundamental gains over time.

When asked to describe a student in their classroom, teachers invariably include a variety of descriptors---physical, social, intellectual. Rarely do they talk about results on standardized tests. Recently, we asked a group of teachers to draw an outline of a student. They were instructed to make a mark on the outline reflecting the importance of the accountability score. Most marks were small. One teacher described the dot on her outline as a "small freckle." It becomes clear that test scores tell little about long-term sustainable learning and that

energy spent simply on raising those scores may impede progress toward more sustainable goals.

What if principals did the same? If they asked themselves how important the "tests" are in the larger world of their work? If they stayed focused on long-term interventions that lead to real and lasting changes, could they avoid being drawn into quick fixes that exacerbate the real problems over time? We think so, and we think it is our duty to help the next generation of principals see beyond the current obsessions with high-stakes accountability to the larger purposes of their work.

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