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The Age of Accountability

Can we turn the concept of accountability on its head to support professional growth rather than scrutiny?

Overview

Accountability has grown more analogous to a process of criticism and scrutiny rather than one of respect and growth. In this paper, we set out to challenge the traditional view of accountability, and in doing so, draw attention to its role in the feedback process of continuous improvement. We discuss legislative changes in both the K-12 and adult education markets and conclude with a consideration of how accountability pressures are likely to change in the future, predicting the rise of both socioemotional and college- and career-readiness indicators to hold schools accountable.

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Introduction

Opportunities for Excellence

Jensen (2009) asks educators to consider how precious their time with their students really is. As educators, your students are with you in school 30 hours for 36 to 42 weeks a year, leaving you with 1,260 hours annually at most for changing your students' lives. The critical ratio is 1,260 hours out of a total of 4,368 hours, or 28 percent. You get 28 percent of your students' total waking time each year. As Jensen (2009) states: "The significance of that number – 28 percent – is profound. There is very little you can do about students' home lives, or about the people with whom they associate. With the small proportion of their lives that you *do* have access to, you cannot afford to waste a single class or school day…your 1,260 hours have to be so spectacular that they can overcome the other 7,500 hours in your students' lives. Is your school that good?" The time you get as educators to transform your students' lives is outnumbered by more than seven to one. But there is good news. By reframing the accountability argument to emphasize its vital role in the process of continuous improvement while minimizing its value as an evaluative tool, we can change the dialogue from a defensive one to an offensive one determined to give each and every learner a shot at success.

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The recent tidal wave of federal and state account-
ability mandates shadows a cultural consensus that
evidence matters, especially when it comes to educat-
ing our citizens. This accountability movement affected
nearly every aspect of how the government is scruti-
nized and held accountable for its performance, which
is why both K-12 and adult education have operated
under ever-changing landscapes in recent decades.
It is also why educators now face more pressure to
perform than even before. This movement now de-
mands that we produce creative entrepreneurs ready
to compete in the globalized economy.

The K-12 Space Gets Shaken Up

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Pov-
erty" led to the most dramatic overhaul of the U.S. edu-
cation system ever signed into law by congress at one
point in time (Abram, 2012). The 1965 Elementary and
Secondary Education Act (ESEA) established all federal
funding sources for primary and
secondary education. While it has
been revised many times over the
years, accountability reform took the
center stage starting in the 1990s. In
fact, the passage of the Government
Performance and Results Act (GPRA)
in 1993 legally required *all* govern-
mental agencies to begin monitoring
and reporting their performance (U.S. Department of
Education, 2015). The 1994 reauthorization of ESEA,
known as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA),
required all federally funded programs to demonstrate
their effectiveness through ongoing monitoring and
evaluation (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

> "Every student should
> graduate from high
> school ready for college
> or a career"
>
> — **U.S. Department of Education**

IASA included standards-based assessments to
measure school proficiency (*Education Week*, 1994).
IASA's introduction of Yearly Adequate Progress (YAP)
suddenly shifted the assignment of accountability from
the state to the school level (Abram, 2012). Previous-
ly, schools weren't judged on an individual basis – all
accountability requirements were reported at the state
level. The hope was that focusing on the school level
would drive reform and improvement (Abram, 2012).
While IASA left the exact measurement of YAP up
to each state, it defined three performance levels for
schools – proficient, partially proficient, and advanced.
The shift towards holding individual schools account-
able is partly why education has become such a high-
stress profession.

Less than 10 years after IASA, the accountability mech-
anisms under Title I of ESEA were further tightened by
No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Yearly standardized test
scores were tied to a school's YAP measure and states
were expected to impose corrective
actions on underperforming schools
(Abram, 2012). If a school failed to
meet YAP for a few years running,
then starting after the second year
they were designated as schools
in need of improvement and were
mandated to implement improve-
ment plans (Colorado Department
of Education, 2013). NCLB also charged schools with
publishing annual report cards outlining their perfor-
mance and threatened punitive measures against any
schools failing to meet YAP (U.S. Department of Educa-
tion, 2004). One of the positive legacies of NCLB is how
it required schools to break down student performance
among different subgroups of the student population,

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like along gender or racial lines. Data disaggregation will likely continue to be stressed by NCLB's successor. The pressure for results in core subjects like math and reading had the unintended consequence of narrowing of the curriculum, where art, physical education, and other types of extracurricular activities were scaled back. In the high stakes environment created by NCLB, teacher evaluation grew more analogous to a process of criticism and scrutiny rather than one of respect and growth. Many have suggested that NCLB squashed creativity in teaching while applying needless levels of stress on educators. For these reasons, NCLB has earned nicknames like "No Teacher Left Standing" or "No Lawyer Left Unemployed" (Fennell, 2016).

But the good news about the age of accountability is that information doesn't only flow from the top down. Almost anyone working in K-12 education had become aware of the serious inadequacies of NCLB and the adverse consequences it had on teaching as a profession. While the recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) retained the use of standardized testing as a measure of school quality, the federal government's power to coerce low performing schools has been significantly curtailed. The U.S. Department of Education is even required to create a "negotiated rulemaking" committee to help craft accountability requirements under the new act! This committee requires at least one representative from key stakeholder groups in education, including state administrators and state boards of education, local state administrators and state boards of education, parents, students (including the historically disadvantaged), teachers, principals, the civil rights community, and the business community among others (Klein, 2016). The committee is charged with re-creating compliance rules and bringing more flexi-

bility into the process. Though the full effects of ESSA remain to be seen, many have welcomed this decentralization with its more flexible approach to measuring "success" in education.

One of the most welcome changes is the fresh approach to teacher evaluation – requiring states to connect teacher evaluation to student test scores has been relaxed (Sawchuk, 2016). As states set out to re-create teacher evaluation, the calls for utilizing less rigid approaches have certainly been loud. ESSA also explicitly highlights the role of teacher leadership in education. It not only expanded their say in making staffing decisions, but reinforced the view of teachers as professionals in need of ongoing and continuous professional development (Fennell, 2016). Education technology received a boost with the new legislation. ESSA carefully defines most buzzwords in the ed-tech space like "blended learning" and "digital learning" to build a common vocabulary (Montgomery, 2015). One of the most interesting policy changes of ESSA is the way it broadened the definition of school success by requiring states to incorporate at least one "nonacademic factor" into their accountability structures for schools (Blad, 2016). Many are hoping that non-cognitive traits, like grit, a growth mindset, college- or career-readiness skills, or even simpler things like student engagement or belief in oneself can fill this void. Schools are even required to disaggregate data by the chosen metric (Blad, 2016). Many, including acting U.S. Secretary of Education John King, are also drawing attention to the importance of equality as states begin crafting new accountability mechanisms (Klein, 2016). The previously singular focus on standardized test scores – which are infamous for producing socioeconomic biases in favor of the more well-off – suggests that whatever mea-

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sures schools go forward with would be well advised to minimize measurement inequalities of student performance. Some school districts are already far along in this process even though the legislations is so new.

One group of school districts in California with over 1 million students, called the CORE districts, have already spent a few years experimenting with a combination of academic and socioemotional measures for school accountability purposes. This is thanks to a unique waiver they obtained from the federal government under NCLB. As the CORE districts see it, all graduates should be college- and career-ready after school completion. This is why their School Quality Improvement Index breaks down into two domains, the academic and the "social-emotional and culture-climate" domains. The figure below shows a basic breakdown of the measures they use.
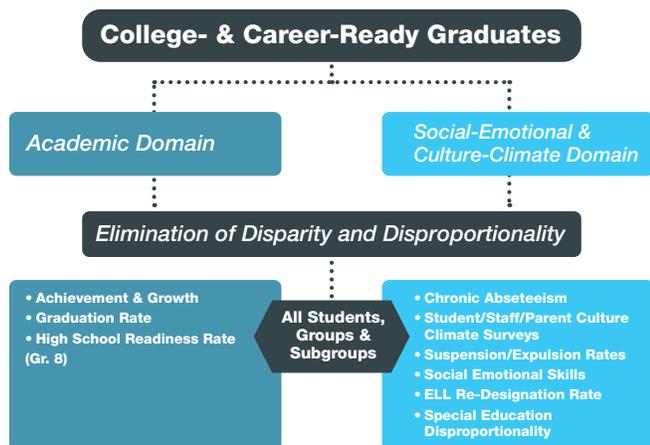

Source: The CORE Districts, "Including Social Emotional Skills and Culture-Climate Surveys in the School Quality Improvement Index," 2015.

They use a dual approach to accountability reporting that emphasizes both academic and nonacademic outcomes. Nonacademic factors are divided into smaller components. One the one hand, they include mea-

sures of social and emotional competence, relying on four key skills: growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness (CORE Districts, 2015). In regards to school culture, they consider aspects of the learning environment, discipline practices, school safety, and sense of belonging – receiving input from students, teachers, and parents.

One of their earliest findings is that school culture matters significantly for the socioemotional development of their kids. In fact, when we look at the graphic below, this becomes apparent: school culture exerts a strong influence on the socioemotional development of students (CORE Districts, 2015). What's more, the results show that SEL skills do have a sizable impact
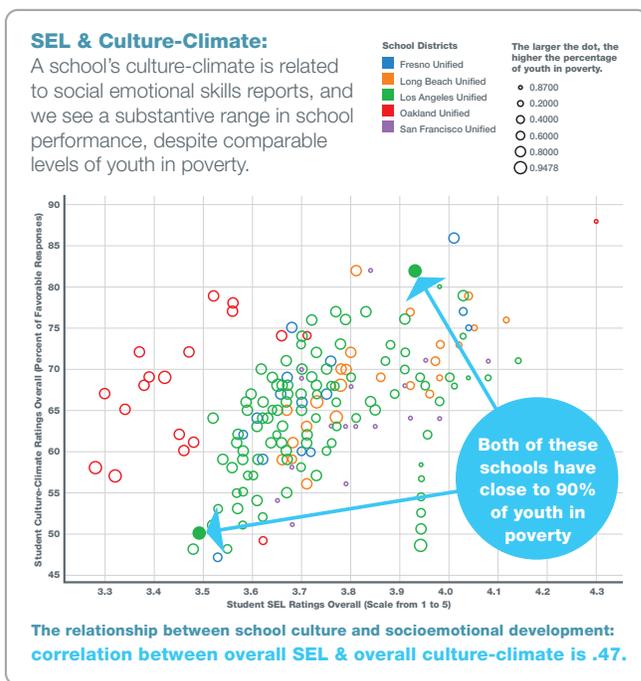
on academic achievement – like math performance for example. Importantly, all indicators in the School Quality Index were carefully selected to ensure that the chosen indicators are (a) changeable through school

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efforts and also (b) predictive of later life successes (CORE districts, 2015). While many researchers have pointed out that measuring skills of a more intangible nature could lead to more biases and inaccuracies, the CORE districts believe that stable and fair measures can in fact be constructed and even relied on in new accountability frameworks. They plan on releasing their research and survey instruments to the public at some point in 2016. With the nation's ongoing discussion about the future of school accountability practices, they are encouraging other districts to make use of their surveys and experiences as we look to redefine what success means in our school communities (Blad, 2015).

The Coming of Employability Skills in Adult Ed

In keeping with "a decade known for its emphasis on accountability of federal programs," the accountability movement really began to ratchet up pressure on the adult education industry in the early 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Within two shorts years of passing GPRA, pressure on adult education programs magnified as they lacked data or evidence to validate their effectiveness. All publicly funded adult education programs were even threatened with integration into the general system of workforce development at one point in the mid-1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In response, state adult education directors turned to the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) to develop a system to house and collect national program-level data on adult education outcomes.

Established between 1997 and 1998, the National Reporting System (NRS) was created to fill this void. When the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was passed in 1998, reporting to the NRS became mandatory under Title II for adult education (U.S. Department of

Education, 2015). Under the 2014 Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA), new NRS reporting requirements are currently slated to go into effect on July 1, 2016. Any programs that receive funding from either federal or state governments are required to track five core outcomes identified by WIOA – as depicted below. Of these five indicators, one (educational gains) is collected during the program and the other four are "follow-up measures" to be collected after students have left the program, creating a data-collection challenge for many adult ed programs around the country. All of the outcomes identified below are clearly defined in the NRS' Implementation Guidelines (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Summary of NRS Measures and Definitions

Topic	Measures	Categories or Definitions
C O R E	**O U T C O M E**	**M E A S U R E S**
Educational Gains	Educational gains	Educational functioning levels in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and functional areas
Follow-Up Measures	Entered employment	Learners who obtain a job by the end of the first quarter after the exit quarter
	Retained employment	Learners who obtain a job and remain employed in the third quarter after program exit
	Receipt of secondary school diploma or GED	Learners who obtain a GED, secondary school diploma, or recognized equivalent after exit
	Placement in postsecondary education or training	Learners enrolling after exit in a postsecondary educational or occupational skills program building on prior services or training received

When one looks at WIOA, there are a couple of themes that stand out. The first is impossible to miss: Job-driv-

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en investments are no longer optional. The five outcomes above highlight this change. If you previously ran a literacy program that taught adults in the countryside how to read, you would now have a hard time receiving government funding under WIOA unless you could demonstrate that this program led to improved employment prospects for the graduates. The new legislation also strongly emphasizes the importance of career pathways. References to employability skills like problem solving, communication, or leadership have also grown. Another theme is a renewed focus on creating cross-sector partnerships. Adult ed programs work with populations that face a diverse set of needs, including childcare, transportation, English skills, and general employability skills to name some. WIOA's answer to programs overburdened with needy populations is to establish community linkages and partnerships to help ease the load. Working with American Job Centers, local workforce boards, community-based organizations, or any other public or private social service provider is recommended. Lastly, the importance of using technology to augment instruction received more attention than it had in the past. In the end, WIOA seeks to only fund programs that find jobs for their graduates.

How Accountability Became Ubiquitous

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education held over 250 events and made direct contact with over 4,000 educators to solicit feedback on the new accountability landscape (U.S. Department of Education, n. d.). While some states had been successful in keeping up with the evolution of the accountability system, educators in other states expressed some concerns. One common concern was that teachers and principals should have been given more time to learn the new legislation before being expected to be held accountable by these laws. But the U.S. Department of Education's response was blunt: "There will be no pause or moratorium in rollout of standards… or in accountability for districts and states, because the need for these changes is too urgent. High standards already exist for our students in the real world of college and careers; our education systems must raise the bar rapidly to ensure that our young people will succeed" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

One of the amazing things about the accountability movement is how it was able to infect nearly every industry, private and public, on earth in the 1990s. And its adoption by the world was swift. Who was talking about accountability in 1980? Let alone 1990? But these days, even private businesses are facing increasing pressures to "prove" that their products work. And the American government isn't alone in facing increased calls for accountability. Even in international governance, accountability has staked a claim. The United Nations (U.N.) and all of its departments and agencies, for example, are held accountable by the U.N.'s Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). And when was OIOS founded? 1994. The General Assembly, a collection of all the world's governments, granted OIOS the authority to audit, investigate, inspect, and evaluate U.N. entities to build "a culture of accountability and transparency, and improved programme performance" (U.N. OIOS, 2016). Nowadays, who isn't talking about accountability?

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The Crowning of the Information Age

Clearly the accountability movement was greatly strengthened in the early 1990s. The key question we want to answer here is: why? Our answer is simple: Google. Well, not Google exactly, but what Google stands for as a company when it comes to how people can consume and share information on the World Wide Web. In *How Google Works*, Google heavyweights Eric Schmidt and Jonathan Rosenberg (2014) suggest that the power of the Internet lies in how simplified accessing, storing, and sharing knowledge has become. Information has become "free, copious, and ubiquitous," while 21st-century devices have made global connectivity into a continuous and automatic aspect of modern life (Schmidt & Rosenberg, 2014). Thanks to Google, learning almost anything is only a Google search away. And this information is cheaper than ever before. Information gives consumers the power to hold companies accountable for what they have done. But these days, the Internet can even hold companies accountable for what they plan on doing. Right now, for example, consumers all over the world are voicing extreme displeasure at Apple's recent announcement that they will be doing away with traditional headphone jacks on the new iPhone. So if you own a nice fancy pair of earphones, they won't be compatible with new iPhones. You can rest assured that Apple has already gone through intensive efforts to collect all of that negative feedback to better understand the views of their customers. To give a more concrete example of the Internet's ability to hold organizations accountable, let's picture an early morning stop at Starbucks.

Let's imagine that after waiting in a long line I order latte with extra whipped cream. As I wait, I begin to notice that several people who ordered after me are actually receiving their orders first. After a while, my name is finally called. If I then discover that my order was wrong I might get annoyed or upset. Maybe I would even yell at the poor Starbucks barista who may or may not have done anything wrong to mess up my particular order. Thirty years ago I would have walked out of Starbucks and that would be that. Or maybe a colleague or friend would have to listen to me vent about my bad Starbucks experience. But this isn't 30 years ago. It's today, and the information age has arrived. Today I would have numerous options online to voice my complaints with Starbucks, fairly or unfairly. I could use Twitter, Yelp!, Facebook, or any number of Internet-based social media platforms. And hundreds, if not thousands, of people could immediately see my complaints. The worst case scenario for Starbucks would be for something like this to go viral, being viewed not only coast to coast within the United States, but across the world within minutes of happening. Yet, even with thousands of different interactions with customers each day, Starbucks seems to have figured out a way to avoid negative publicity. We believe that Starbucks has been operating well ahead of the accountability movement for quite some time. Just look at the About page on their website!

At the top, where one expects their mission statement to be, is a message in large lettering that reads "It happens millions of times each week – a customer receives a drink from a Starbucks barista – but each interaction is unique" (Starbucks, 2016). It's that last part that is interesting: "each interaction is unique." Think about what they are saying. They value their customers so much that they give each one of them the unique service that best suits their needs. While most people would argue that Starbucks' mission is merely to sell coffee, any employee or Starbucks aficionado under-

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stands that their business relies on customer service just as much as selling coffee. In *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg tells a fascinating story about how Starbucks made it all work.

Starbucks wanted their employees to maintain the best standards possible when interacting with customers at all times, regardless of how a particular customer was acting. Initially, they tried to strengthen the resolve of their employees to provide consistent customer service by incentivizing them with things like a free gym memberships and willpower courses after work (Duhigg, 2014). But this didn't work. Not when Starbucks was adding over 1,500 new employees every week. As Starbucks continued to examine the cases where their employees lost their cool, they picked up on a pattern. Most people, most of the time, are capable of providing excellent service to their thirsty customers. But add in an angry customer or two on a day that one is struggling with a personal life crisis, and people begin to falter. Starbucks found that if they could give their employees a set of strategies to handle their most tense moments, they were much more likely to hold their composure under pressure. With this end in mind, Starbucks created their LATTE system for customer service. Drawing on behavioral science, they found that Starbucks employees could withstand even the roughest customer confrontations, or series of confrontations, if they were prepared to deal with them in a systematic fashion. That was what the LATTE system was for: L for listen to the customer; A for acknowledge their complaint; T for take action by solving the problem; T for thank them; and E for explain why the error occurred. The LATTE system was a success on all accounts: employee turnover has decreased, customer satisfaction has improved, and profits continue to

hit the billions (Duhigg, 2014). Going into all this detail about Starbucks may seem like a tangent. And it is to an extent. But we all know beyond any doubt that Starbucks leads a successful business in today's globalized world, and much of their success came as the information age took off. It is Starbucks' industry-leading customer service, not superior coffee, that established its nearly ubiquitous presence in American culture.

Employment contracts for Starbucks' baristas are well known for their emphasis on customer service (Duhigg, 2014). Performance clauses like this are increasingly becoming mainstream in many industries, education included. But accountability shouldn't be about critiquing and judging quality. It should be about learning; about using benchmarks to feed into a process of continuous development and improvement. Companies like Starbucks and Google understand this, and their employees work in relaxed environments without constant fear over being appraised. This is why *Forbes* has rated both Google and Starbucks among the best companies to work for. Schmidt and Rosenberg's (2014) insight about the Internet's ability to share knowledge so effortlessly is exactly why the accountability movement was born in the 1990s. It feeds off the information age. But the information age is about more than just the access of knowledge. It is also revolutionizing the ways we create and share new knowledge.

Technology and Science:
A Tag Team in the Big Data Movement

Recent advances in technology and science have facilitated the crowning of the information age. For one, technology makes the collection, storage, and organization of data possible on scales that were hardly imaginable before. We can now collect data

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through personal handheld devices like tablets and smart phones or even from wearable technologies by measuring things like one's heartbeat variability, body movements, or body temperature. Often times, the users of such technology aren't even consciously aware that such data is being regularly collected and reported. That data can then be stored in the cloud, a type of virtual storage space which can be accessed by various actors at any time from almost anywhere in the world. Different actors can access customizable iterations or views of the data from the cloud based on their individual needs. While most of us are aware of the technological advances that make the "Big Data" push possible, we are less aware of the scientific advances that contributed to its rise.

The rapid advancement of scientific methods since the 1950s, as well as the digitalization of those methods, means that data analysis can be almost an automatic process if the necessary infrastructure exists. The best way to illustrate this case is by taking you back 100 years ago, to 1916 – not to discuss World War I of course. In those days, if you were a scientist, all the information that you could use was located physically in front of you. Literally *physically* in front of you, be it scientific literature in the form of journals or books, or data stored in tabular form in some type of book or binder. If you were trying to analyze that data, you would have had to do so by hand – you didn't even have a calculator! To say the least, the life of a modern data scientist is a little easier.

For one, if we want to follow some research topic that we just became aware of, thanks to resources like Google Scholar, finding credible sources could hardly be an easier and more time-efficient process. Comput-

er databases can now store and organize vast amounts of data, reducing the modern mad scientist to a human entering a few lines of code to analyze massive piles of data. And the best part is, we don't even have to know what we are looking for anymore! Educational data mining has blossomed under the information age. This allows us to search for unknown relationships among variables in a database with considerable ease. This is what a data scientist means when they "mine" a dataset. But data mining is only one of the recent scientific advances that can be applied in the educational realm. Methods like Cognitive Diagnostic Testing, which involves creating cognitive assessments to provide relevant and timely information to educators about their students' cognitive development, or structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques, which analyze networks of data to minimize the measurement error associated with unobservable variables, have been and continue to be developed and applied to educational contexts. These are just a couple of the data analytical methods that have revolutionized our ability to ask and answer the right questions.

It is exciting to think of the way that technological and scientific progress will continue to push the boundaries of data use in schools in the coming years. Just imagine classrooms outfitted with infrared cameras mounted to the ceilings, just sitting there and documenting all the objects that students interact with while recording their every conversation. Some of these objects could even interact with the students in various ways, all the while recording these interactions and making note of how its interaction with each learner changes over time. Imagine a type of camera that is capable of capturing every child's facial expression and social interaction – all day every day. Or what about a thermal camera? Recent

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evidence shows that our emotions affect our body temperature. Positive healthy emotions have been associated with body warmth while negative emotions have been related to cooler body temperatures (Clark, 2014). Wearable technologies like Fitbit can even track things like heart rates or the time in between meals (Herold, 2016). And none of this even mentions the innovative ways that kids are starting to routinely interact with technology on a daily basis. Web-connected mobile devices, for example, have become hugely popular in education for their ability to generate individualized learning plans based on a learner's current level and ability. And as technology continues to improve, we will be able to integrate all of these data-collecting devices into the school's cloud, allowing for real-time data reporting and the creation of data-rich profiles for each learner. As technology continues to progress, our ability to collect high-quality data in unobtrusive ways will only grow. You can bet that accountability advocates will be increasingly focused on how to harness rich data sources as transformative tools in the lives of our students.

The Wave of the Future

Today, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories voluntarily adhere to the Common Core State Standards adopted in 2010. These standards specifically emphasize the importance of college- and career-readiness in education (Common Core State Standards, 2016; Pimentel, 2010). This momentum reflects a broader trend in the accountability movement: an increased emphasis on college and workforce preparation. This shift is reflected in federal legislation for both K-12 and adult education in recent years.

The 2014 Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) established five core outcomes related to post-secondary education and employment criteria as the essential measures of success in adult education, while ESSA created a similar shift in the K-12 market recently as well. With close to 100 mentions of employment, ESSA directly places postsecondary transitions as a key part of K-12 education (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The decentralization of standards and assessment policies has left a void that college and career readiness indicators could potentially fill. After all, demand for adaptive career assessment platforms like Naviance and Kudder are only gaining traction in the education world. Career assessment platforms like these begin with identifying a student's potential career based on their skills and interests and then presents this information to the interested parties, including counselors, parents, and the students themselves, in a digestible format. For example, some of them generate a "career map," which can help students visualize potential trajectories of their professional lives.

In 2013, the Texas Senate adopted House Bill 5, which brought more flexibility to high school graduation and elevated the importance of Career and Technical Education (CTE). One key aspect of this reform was developing personal graduation plans (PGPs), which are basically a "career-mapping tool" created by the student to help balance their short-term desires with their long-term objectives (Miller, 2015). This tool also gives parents an overview of their child's current trajectory into the college or job markets. As Miller (2015) writes, "Texas House Bill 5 legislation emerged due to an overwhelming number of parents and employers in the state expressing concern about students' readiness for postsecondary studies and entry-level positions

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in the workforce beyond high school." Texas is not the only state in the push for realigning educational standards to include postsecondary readiness indicators. Twelve states joined together in 2011 to form the Innovation Lab Network to synergize their responses to recent calls for improving our students' college- and career-readiness (Ujifusa, 2015). The Innovation Lab Network is lobbying for the inclusion of strong pathways to postsecondary life in our accountability system for education.

A shift towards development of the whole child in education has serious implications for how schools are expected to operate. Miller (2015) further observes that Texas House Bill 5 included a provision that states "A principal of a high school shall designate a school counselor or school administrator to review personal graduation plan options with each student entering grade nine together with that student's parent or guardian" (Texas House Bill 5, 2013). SMRT researchers believe that the use of career advisors can play an essential role in modernizing education systems around the world and producing career-ready graduates. And this view resonates on a national stage. Although the American School Counselor Association (2015) recommends that the ideal counselor-student ratio is 1:250, the U.S. national average counselor ratio is almost double this number. As a result, the American Counsel-

ing Association (2013) and others have supported the reauthorization of federal bill HR 320, or the Student Support Act, which provides additional funding for putting more counselors inside school buildings nationwide (Miller, 2015; American Counseling Association, 2013).

The recent focus on college- and career-readiness standards are a good reflection of a national tidal wave that has already begun. That tidal wave is seeking to challenge the old paradigm that our schools should be narrowly focused on developing an academic skill set. Even the Obama Administration has expressed enthusiasm for the strong emphasis ESSA maintained on college- and career- readiness goals (Klein, 2016). The need to create self-aware and responsible workers is why social and emotional learning has gained traction within education in recent years. Momentum has been steady in asserting the importance of relying on data-driven practices as we prepare students for life in a competitive, modern economy. The pressures to develop the whole child are unlikely to subside any time soon, which is why schools are increasingly expected to provide, or at least facilitate, a wide variety of social services to help their learners. Educators can't answer these calls alone. Only a well-coordinated and thought-out community-wide response can give our youngest students hope to reach their full potential.

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Summary

By emphasizing the role of accountability as primarily supporting professional renewal, we can ease fears around its use as an evaluative tool.

Accountability mandates have touched nearly every aspect of government policy since the mid-1990s, especially in the education sector.

While the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) shook up reporting requirements for K-12 schools across the U.S., the Workforce Investment Act (WIOA) did the same in the adult education market.

ESSA decentralized the decision-making process and gave schools more flexibility in how they measure their success and progress by including one "nonacademic" measure in school performance reporting and also ended requirements of connecting teacher evaluation to standardized test scores.

WIOA has an intense focus on creating career-ready graduates; programs that receive public funding must now demonstrate that their students not only get jobs after program completion, but that they also keep them.

Accountability advocates owe the coming of the information age for the rapid uptake of evidence-based decision making around the world.

Learn More

For a comprehensive bibliography and other resources, please email us at **science@smrtsolutions.com**.

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The SMRT family of companies was conceived with the intent to create an enduring and expanding funding source for ongoing community and educational investments. For free public access to research materials and a complete listing of the bibliography used in the SMRT Research Series, visit **smrteducation.org**. We specialize in helping educational institutions implement the right blend of strategies to strengthen cognitive and non-cognitive skills across all age ranges, delivering research-driven solutions that are both scalable and affordable. Explore our approach, our solutions, and our team at **smrtsolutions.com**.