

Student-Centered Accountability Project



**Presented for Approval and Support
to the**

Colorado State Board of Education

May 14, 2015

Student-Centered Accountability Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

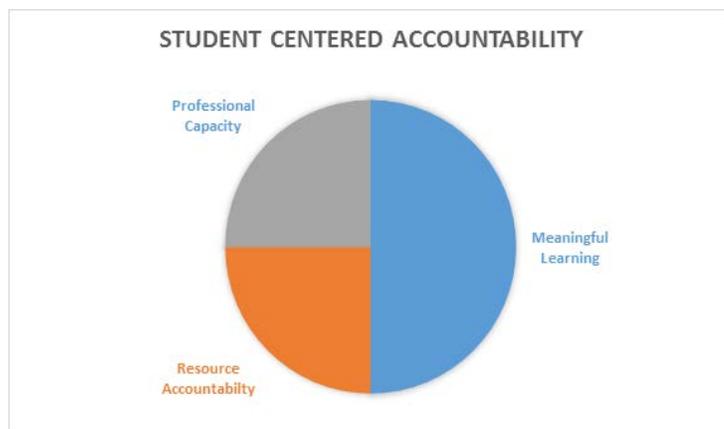
The core of accountability in educational systems is student learning. Colorado statute intends that the statewide accountability system, “focuses the attention of educators, parents, students, and other members of the community on maximizing every student’s progress toward post-secondary and workforce readiness and post-graduation success.”¹ A group of diversely unified rural districts believes the current Colorado accountability system has fallen short of this intended purpose to improve student learning in our small schools. We believe we can do better for students.

With the transitional hold on state accreditation, the partnering districts seek to capitalize on this opportunity to strengthen accountability for student learning by expanding measures used to determine student achievement and growth, adding research-based measures of continuous improvement, while maintaining systematic transparency and participation for local and state stakeholders. The partnering districts have designed the *Student-Centered Accountability Project* to strengthen accountability and position students at the center of accountability.

Our steadfast commitment to keep students at the center of our accountability system begins by understanding all we have learned about the impacts of the current system on students. Currently, the accountability system in Colorado relies solely on one external accountability measure. Although it offers transparency, this over-reliance on a single external measure does little to motivate or cause growth. “The solid and mounting evidence on the fundamental impact of *internal* accountability on the effectiveness and improvement of schools and school systems contrasts sharply with the scarce or null evidence that *external* accountability, by itself, or as the prime driver, can bring about lasting and sustained improvements in students and school performance. There is, indeed, a growing realization that *external* accountability is not an effective driver of school and system effectiveness.”² With this knowledge, our goal is to create and test a new accountability system that will provide for internal accountability, augmenting and strengthening the system we currently have. Possessing internal accountability is the “main feature of successful schools.”³ The partnering districts involved in the *Student -Centered Accountability Project*

are committed to increasing our accountability by adding the integral layer of internal accountability.

These additional measures of internal accountability, based on a collective body of research of best practices for accountability that promotes student and system improvement include but are not limited to Resource Accountability, comprised of Parents and Community,



¹ C.R.S. 22-11-1002 (1)(a)(2009) Legislative declaration

² Fullan, Rincoin-Gallardo, Hargreaves, Professional Capital as Accountability, EPAA, 2015, p. 3

³ Fullan, Rincoin-Gallardo, Hargreaves, Professional Capital as Accountability, EPAA, 2015, p. 4



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Facilities, and Finance; as well as Professional Capacity, including Curriculum, Instructional Practices, and Professional Growth. By adding these internal measures, we commit to ensuring continuous improvement and increased success. The included visual provides a model of the external and internal measures that will be used to strengthen accountability in the *Student-Centered Accountability Project*.

External Measures: Meaningful Learning

In a 2014 Resolution, the Vermont State Board claims accountability systems should be “designed to ensure continuous improvement in student performance, instruction and leadership, so that all students are able to develop high levels of skill and capability across essential domains. To achieve these goals, educators need to make use of diverse indicators of student learning and strengths, in order to comprehensively assess student progress and adjust their practice to continuously improve learning. They also need to document the opportunities schools provide to further the goals of equity and growth...a standardized test is an incomplete picture of learning; without additional measures, a single test is inadequate to capture a year’s worth of learning and growth.”⁴

The Student-Centered Accountability Project agrees with the Vermont State Board of Education assertion that measures beyond annual state testing must be used in effective accountability systems. Rather than relying on a single measure, partnering districts in the project would also weigh local assessment results to provide more comprehensive evidences of student learning.

Internal Measures: Resource Accountability and Professional Capacity

“The evidence is clear that current systems of external accountability in the U.S. are not producing increased student performance. It is also the case that most other countries that are more successful have a different approach in which accountability is much more tied to developing capacity and self and group responsibility at the level of implementation.”⁵ *The Student-Centered Accountability Project* asserts internal accountability must PRECEDE external accountability if lasting improvement in student achievement is the goal. For this reason, a notable characteristic of the project is the addition of the measures within a school or district that establish the conditions for high levels of student learning. The systems’ use of allocated resources and collective responsibility for continuous improvement would be internal measures to be assessed, monitored, and integrated into the accountability project of partner districts.

Initial Approval and Direction for Project

It is the intent of the partnering districts at the May 14, 2015 Colorado State Board meeting to provide preliminary information about the *Student Centered Accountability Project* to the State Board of Education secure endorsement of the timeline and receive any further direction to the project. Districts in the Rural Innovation Alliance have purposefully developed a project proposal that will provide a more meaningful accountability system for the partner districts. A detailed timeline for implementation of the *Student-Centered Accountability Project* is outlined in the full proposal. The full proposal also includes further research supporting the project, guiding principles, and plans for evaluating the effectiveness of the project.

⁴ Vermont State Board of Education, Statement and Resolution on Assessment and Accountability, 2014

⁵ Fullan, Rincoin-Gallardo, Hargreaves, Professional Capital as Accountability, EPAA, 2015, p. 15



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The partner districts of the *Student-Centered Accountability Project* are eager to collaborate further through the project. “One of the ways that teachers improve is by learning from other teachers. Schools improve when they learn from other schools. Isolation is the enemy of all improvement.”⁶ The Colorado State Board of Education’s endorsement of this collaborative work to strengthen accountability for student learning is an essential and critical step for the project.

⁶ Hargreaves, Introduction p. xx, Shalberg, Finnish Lessons