

Operation Public Education

A New System of Accountability



University of Pennsylvania
Revised: September 2002

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In order to provide all of Pennsylvania's children with the opportunity to achieve at high levels, the state must implement a new system of accountability for our schools – one that is both fair to educators and credible to the taxpaying public. *Operation Public Education's* accountability system is the result of two years of work with teachers, administrators and school board members from Pennsylvania and across the nation. Elements in this bill are inspired by best practices in North Carolina; Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; Rochester, New York; and Coventry, Rhode Island. By building on the experience of other states, *OPE* offers an accountability system that is even better than the sum of these parts.

As part of a comprehensive approach to school reform that includes adequate and equitable school funding, *Operation Public Education's* accountability provisions provide a blueprint to give all of our children the high-quality education that they deserve and the state requires. *OPE's* accountability provisions are unique in several respects. First, they are comprehensive and systemic – addressing the roles and responsibilities of all the major education stakeholders. Second, they focus in all cases both on how educators carry out their responsibilities and on the results they achieve with students. And third, they bolster the Pennsylvania Department of Education and its Intermediate Units, so that schools and districts that are not succeeding with their children can receive help.

Highlights of the *Operation Public Education* accountability legislation are summarized below.

Value-Added Assessment

States have dramatically increased the number and types of standardized tests administered to students, but there has been only limited discussion of their purpose, strengths, and weaknesses. Testing is undeniably important; without it, there is no consistent way to measure learning. Yet the information that comes from most standardized tests fails to tell us enough about the quality of our schools.

Schools are often judged based on their students' absolute test scores. The problem with this approach is that absolute test scores are overwhelmingly linked to students' family income: wealthy school districts tend to have high scores and districts that serve low-income students tend to have low scores. Unless we believe that only rich schools are good schools, and that good schools are necessarily rich schools, we need an approach that evaluates schools based on how their academic programs impact their students.

Unlike every other way of looking at test results, value-added assessment solves this problem by allowing us to separate the contributions of the teacher and school from those of the student and family. As a result, value-added finally provides a fair way to measure the impact of teaching on student learning.

Value-added looks at the individual child over time to see whether he or she is moving forward. It works no matter where the student starts the year – on grade, below grade, or above grade level. And because demographic and socio-economic factors remain largely the same over

time, value-added is fair regardless of a child's background. This is extremely important, since it means that schools and educators will be treated fairly regardless of the students they serve.

Value-added is a complex statistical system but the idea behind it is quite simple. In concept, value-added uses all of a student's prior test scores to create an *expected* score for the student in her current grade, and then compares that score to her *actual* score. If the two scores are similar, we can say that she has achieved *one year's worth of growth over the course of that year* relative to the rest of the students in the state.

In practice, the value-added methodology works by using all student achievement data available for each student to estimate the impact of districts, schools, and classrooms on student learning. The system considers a student's past and current scores in all subjects simultaneously, adding data from subsequent years as soon as it is available. Value-added even includes partial or incomplete records to ensure that data from all students are included in the estimation process.

Value-added can help schools make important decisions about the best ways to help children achieve at high levels and can serve as the cornerstone of accountability. The system has been in place in Tennessee since the early 1990s and is used in over 100 other school districts throughout the country. Extensive pilots are also underway in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

OPE's accountability legislation calls for high-quality annual testing, which is necessary for value-added. The new federal education law, "No Child Left Behind," already requires tests in grades 3-8 and at least one time in high school. *OPE's* accountability system calls for additional testing in second grade and in all four years of high school. In the primary grades, the tests will be in English-language arts, math, science, and social studies; in high school, students will be tested using subject-specific exams for the courses they have taken. In this way and in the school accountability provisions discussed below, the *OPE* system and No Child Left Behind are perfect complements.

Wherever tests are used, they must be aligned with the state standards and local curriculum; measure higher-order thinking skills; and include open-ended questions in addition to multiple choice. Using high-quality tests is imperative for accountability: If the tests are to have consequences for students and educators, then teachers must be able to teach to them with confidence.

The annual state tests must then be scored in a way that tells us whether students are exceeding the standards, achieving the standards, approaching the standards, or falling far below the standards. Finally, *OPE* calls for value-added statistical analysis providing annual classroom, school, and district reports that put the data directly into the hands of educators.

Teacher Evaluation

What goes on in the classroom is the key to increasing student achievement. An accountability system must therefore foster quality instruction by evaluating teachers on their knowledge and skills and on the learning that takes place in their classroom. *OPE's* accountability system creates a balance between inputs (how the teacher teaches) and outputs (whether the children are learning). As one of the nation's foremost teachers' union leaders says: "Teachers will only do well when their students do well."

Until now, almost all teacher evaluations have been based solely on inputs. Attempts to evaluate teachers using the work of their students have failed in the past for two reasons: until value-added, there was no reasonable way to isolate the impact of teaching on student learning, and test scores alone do not paint a complete picture of what teachers contribute to the learning process. *OPE* addresses these valid criticisms by using value-added, which is fair to teachers because it looks only at their contribution to students' progress, and by pairing value-added with high-quality measures of a teacher's own knowledge and skills. A single test score should never be used as the sole measure of an educator, but the *OPE* system is unique because for the first time student-learning results are included as a major component of evaluation along with other key measures.

For the core subjects where annual standardized tests are given and value-added information is available, teachers will be responsible for their students making at least one year's worth of progress each year from the students' starting point. Value-added will be calculated using a running three-year average of the teacher's classes, and students will only count for as long as they have been in the class – so a student who is assigned to a particular teacher halfway through the year would be weighted less than a student who has been in the class since September. In subjects where tests are not given, teachers will develop empirical student-learning goals in coordination with their principal.

The input-based part of *OPE*'s teacher evaluation will be based on the work of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), which has designed one of the most respected standards-based evaluation tools in the nation. It uses principal observation and other tools to evaluate teachers based on their planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and completion of professional responsibilities. This portion of evaluation pays particular attention to standards-based instruction, the idea of value-added, and the use of data to make decisions – the skills that teachers need most in order for their students to succeed. In addition to encouraging methods of successful classroom instruction, the use of the ASCD observation system ensures a balance between inputs and outputs so that the test – however good – is not the sole measure of a teacher's contributions to student development.

Based on an equal weighting between value-added results and the ASCD scale, teachers will be classified as advanced, proficient, basic, or unsatisfactory. Teachers who are unsatisfactory in one or more areas will be placed in mandatory remediation and given the opportunity to improve their skills, as described below.

Teacher Career Ladders

In virtually every other profession, employees advance in their careers based on the quality of their work; teachers deserve the same opportunity. Unlike the current system of teacher compensation – which pays salaries only for teachers' years of service, graduate credits and degrees earned – the *OPE* system links compensation to job performance.

The career ladder consists of five rungs: *Novice*, *Apprentice*, *Career*, *Advanced* and *Distinguished*. Teachers climb the rungs by meeting one of the four ASCD qualifications – advanced, proficient, basic, or unsatisfactory – and, on the student-learning side, by three-year average value-added scores for their students of advanced (exceeding the expectations), proficient (meeting the expectations), or unsatisfactory (not reaching the expectations).

Teachers move up the rungs based on their evaluations:

- New teachers begin in the *Novice* category.
- To move into *Apprentice*, a teacher must achieve an ASCD rating of at least Basic and have value-added scores in the Proficient range. Over a period of up to six years in the *Novice* and *Apprentice* categories, teachers are able to hone their skills and, particularly in the first years, learn from a successful peer mentor.
- Teachers will advance to the *Career* stage as soon as they achieve a Proficient evaluation – by achieving Proficient on both the ASCD and value-added scales – and gain the appropriate credentials. Teachers can remain in this category throughout their tenure as long as they receive successful evaluations.
- Teachers can also go on to the *Advanced* stage if they are evaluated as Advanced on the ASCD scale and if they achieve an Advanced level of value-added, which means that their students are exceeding expectations.
- *Advanced* teachers can achieve *Distinguished* status if they receive certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (See “The OPE Career Ladder” diagram at the end of this document.)

Teachers at each stage of the career ladder will receive higher pay and increased leadership opportunities; salaries along each rung of the career ladder will continue to be negotiated locally through collective bargaining and additional pay within each rung of the career ladder will be based on years of experience. Teachers will also be evaluated less frequently as they move further up the ladder.

For teachers who are *Advanced* or *Distinguished* and subsequently receive lower evaluations, the teachers’ pay will not be decreased. Instead, they will remain on that step of the career ladder – receiving only cost of living adjustments as negotiated in the local contract – until they once again meet Advanced standards. Teachers can avail themselves of the traditional local grievance process for the ASCD portion of their evaluation; after examining the operation of the value-added system, the state’s new “Academic Achievement and Oversight Commission” (see below) will determine whether an appeals process for value-added results is required and, if so, how it would function.

Because the career ladder represents a significant departure from current teacher compensation, *OPE* includes a “grandfather clause” so that current teachers could opt out of its provisions (though they will still be subject to the new evaluation process). The career ladder automatically applies to all new teachers and to experienced teachers who would like the opportunity to advance more rapidly.

Professional Development & Peer Assistance and Review

Professional development – how we prepare and train teachers – is the indispensable link between educator accountability and student performance. In order to succeed with students, teachers and other educators must have the tools to improve. Schools need to provide their educators with access to the skills that will help them become better teachers.

The *OPE* accountability system calls for peer coaches drawn from the ranks of Advanced and Distinguished teachers. These experienced and highly successful educators will help new and struggling teachers improve in the classroom. Any teacher whose students are not making adequate value-added progress or who is not demonstrating the expected level of knowledge and skills will be assigned a mentor and will participate in mandatory remediation; teachers can also self-refer into remediation, as many have done to receive extra support where such systems are in place. Because every child deserves quality instruction, only teachers who complete remediation and receive a successful evaluation will be able to remain in the classroom.

Districts are currently required to submit a professional development plan to the state; *OPE* strengthens this policy to ensure that educators are engaging in ongoing training that is linked to the learning needs of their students. The legislation also provides a grant to school districts to purchase professional development services and to Intermediate Units to build capacity so that they can compete as professional development providers in a market-driven system.

Collaborative Professional Development: Small Group Incentives

A major flaw in our education system is the chronic isolation of teachers. This lack of collaboration means that best practices, skills, and ideas are not shared widely among educators. *OPE*'s accountability system breaks down the barriers among teachers by offering them incentives to work together to increase student learning.

Teachers within a particular discipline or who teach the same grade within a school can voluntarily form groups of five to 10 members each. The group will have to submit a plan and budget to the principal for approval. Success will be measured in one of two ways: either the teachers' students achieve significantly more than one year's worth of expected growth, measured through value-added, or the students achieve an average of one year's worth of growth *and* meet some other data-driven empirical student-learning goal. Groups that are successful with their students will receive a bonus. Bonuses will be paid directly from state funds so school districts do not have to strain their budgets and the number of eligible groups is not artificially limited by local financial constraints.

Administrator Evaluation

Accountability cannot be limited to teachers alone; all educators must share responsibility for student learning. *OPE*'s accountability system addresses the role of administrators as school or district instructional leaders by focusing on how they promote high standards for all students, use student learning data to make decisions, and create an environment for their staff centered around student achievement and continuous professional development.

Just as teachers will be held accountable for their own knowledge and skills and for the value-added gains of their students, administrators will have analogous input and output measures. Evaluation under the *OPE* system will include professional standards from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium – which mirror the ASCD's teacher standards and evaluate administrators on whether they are promoting a shared vision of learning, maintaining a school culture dedicated to student learning and staff development, effectively managing the learning environment, collaborating with the outside community, behaving ethically, and playing a role in the larger social and cultural context. On the student learning side, administrators will

be responsible for two sets of student achievement outputs: their students' value-added growth and whether they are making adequate yearly progress toward standards as defined by the federal government's new accountability law.

Administrators will also be compensated based on a career ladder that recognizes their skills and accomplishments. *OPE's* accountability system focuses in particular on the crucial role of the principal. Principals will begin as *Interns* with a mentor administrator, then progress to *Career* stage and, if they demonstrate excellence, reach *Distinguished* status.

School and District Accountability

Accountability must reflect both individual and shared responsibilities. In addition to new evaluation and compensation for teachers and administrators, *OPE's* accountability plan features school- and district-based measures of success accompanied by a system of support for under-performing schools and districts.

School and district performance will be based on two types of student learning output measures. First, all schools must achieve at least an average of one year's value-added growth for their students. Second, because it is not enough for students who are below grade level just to keep pace, schools must meet adequate yearly progress targets. This set of performance goals is designed to move all children up to established standards over a reasonable amount of time; they are the same as the "No Child Left Behind" targets, so schools will not have to meet different yearly progress goals to satisfy state and federal requirements. Beyond these output goals, schools and districts will be responsible for improving student attendance rates and, for high schools and school districts, increasing graduation rates and decreasing dropout rates.

Rewards for Successful Schools

Schools that demonstrate progress beyond the required levels will be eligible for school-wide performance rewards from the state. These grants will be based on the number of personnel in the school and administered by the principal with the advice of teachers and other staff members.

Help for Failing Schools and Districts

Schools and districts that do not meet their performance targets for two consecutive years will receive help from a regional assistance team. Members of the team will include teachers and administrators from other districts who are recognized for excellence and trained by the state to provide aid to struggling schools. Regional assistance teams will be formed by Intermediate Units. The teams will serve for a multi-year period and have access to state funds for additional professional development and other strategies, as well as the power to change curriculum and reassign personnel.

If a school continues to fail its students after regional assistance team intervention, it will face Empowerment status as currently defined by the state and may be reconstituted or closed, among other possibilities.

Student Accountability Standards

The standards movement is based on the principle that all children must achieve high standards by the time they graduate from school. The accountability provisions detailed above are intended to foster a school environment that makes this goal possible, but they are incomplete unless they link students' promotion and graduation to their ability to demonstrate initial mastery of core subject areas.

While students will be tested each year as described above, under the *OPE* plan they will have to achieve proficiency on standards-based tests in grades four and eight – known as gateway years – in order to move to the next grade. By focusing on these gateway years, the system recognizes that children progress at different developmental rates. Between fourth and fifth grades and eighth and ninth grades lie major crossroads where it is appropriate to make sure that children are ready to move ahead and, where necessary, provide extra help to prepare them. The final gateway will be the 10th grade exams; proficiency on these tests will be required for high-school graduation. In all cases, students will have the opportunity to retake the tests if they do not pass the first time. The legislation requires schools to provide extra instruction to children who are not yet proficient – making it more likely that they will achieve the academic standards and move ahead with their peers.

Student accountability standards are the only way to ensure that children graduate with the skills to succeed in college or in the workplace, but their implementation must not be rushed. Student accountability will be phased in year-by-year from the lower grades up, so that the system will take full effect within one student-generation of passage.

Innovation Grants

Just as increased student achievement will require new collaboration within schools and districts, so will it demand continuous innovations to improve standard educational practices. The state must encourage new and more effective strategies for public schools; *OPE*'s accountability system provides grants to encourage such entrepreneurship among educators at the local level through three types of Innovation Grants:

- *Union-District Collaboration:* A central principle of successful school reform is collaboration between school districts and the unions that represent their teachers. Schools will never be able to meet the challenge of the standards movement if school boards, administrators and teachers are in constant conflict. Under the *OPE* legislation, school districts that agree to a plan for shared responsibility between the district and the union to increase student achievement will be eligible for a grant.
- *Teaching-Learning Centers:* As discussed above, continuous professional development is imperative for teachers and administrators to develop the skills to educate all of their students. The *OPE* legislation funds schools or districts that create teaching-learning centers to build the capacity for professional development at the local level. These centers would become the focal points of collaboration and staff training and could serve as models for the rest of the state.
- *School Reorganization:* The way schools operate has remained largely the same for the past century despite momentous shifts in the skills children need in order to succeed once they graduate. The *OPE* legislation will provide grants for schools that adopt innovative

proposals to implement fundamental structural changes. Applications must be based on evidence that the reforms significantly impact student achievement.

The state will award grants on a competitive basis and successful approaches could be replicated as best-practice models.

Local Accountability Alternatives

Pennsylvania's accountability system must balance the need for consistency with the state's strong tradition of local control. *OPE's* accountability legislation makes it possible for local districts to create limited alternatives to the models described here. As long as districts adhere to the core characteristics of educator evaluation and compensation, new teacher mentoring, and remediation, they will have the right to develop local versions of these programs and submit them to the state for approval.

Strengthening the Department of Education and Other Oversight

OPE's accountability legislation creates an Office of Accountability within the Department of Education and an independent Academic Achievement and Oversight Commission. The Office of Accountability will be responsible for approving local professional development plans, Innovation Grants, and alternative accountability models, as well as overseeing the creation of additional state tests and the introduction of value-added. The Commission will be made up of 23 appointed members, led by the chairman of the State Board of Education's Council of Basic Education, and have oversight over all accountability provisions in the legislation. Among the Commission's responsibilities will be to contract with outside evaluators to ensure regular and timely empirical evaluations of the accountability system and its implementation.

Implementation

Implementation is just as important as legislation in creating a new accountability system for Pennsylvania. The legislation contains a multi-year implementation schedule, making strong state oversight particularly important. Because of the data requirements to ensure accuracy and fairness in value-added assessment, it will take three years before value-added results can be used as part of teacher and administrator evaluation. The *OPE* legislation therefore enacts its accountability provision in stages: first, data collection for use in professional development and instructional decision-making; second, accountability at the school and district levels; and, third, accountability for individual educators. This implementation schedule will allow the state to ensure that appropriate support and training systems are in place by the time full accountability takes effect.

Appendix: The OPE Career Ladder

Teachers move up the career ladder based on their evaluation ratings. The evaluation is made up of two equally weighted parts: 1) observation scored according to the Danielson Framework developed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and 2) the value-added achievement results of their students. ASCD places teachers in one of four categories -- advanced, proficient, basic or unsatisfactory -- based on observations of their planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and completion of professional responsibilities. Teachers who are Advanced on the ASCD scale can move up further if they are recognized by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. On the value-added side, teachers are rated advanced if a three-year running average shows that their students exceed expectation for a year's worth of growth from wherever they started, proficient if their students perform at expected levels, and unsatisfactory if their students do not achieve minimum growth expectations. Teachers may remain in each of the Novice and Apprentice rungs of the career ladder for no longer than three years; they may serve as a Career, Advanced or Distinguished teacher as long as their evaluations continue to place them on that rung.

<u>ASCD</u>		<u>Value-Added</u>		Career Ladder Rung
Advanced & NBPTS	+	Advanced	→	Distinguished
Advanced	+	Advanced	→	Advanced
Proficient	+	Proficient	→	Career
Basic	+	Proficient	→	Apprentice
				Novice

