

TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY CONFERENCE
POST-CONFERENCE REPORT

Over the past year alone, a certain term has achieved a remarkable level of popularity. Dozens of newspaper articles and editorials, political speeches and policy statements have heralded the start of the “era of accountability.” The meaning of this trend is clear: America is increasingly demanding that educators be held accountable for the performance of our public schools.

Accountability has by now reached near-ubiquitous status in the dialogue over education improvement. Not only has the concept gone so far as to infiltrate the race for the presidency, but it is an idea that both major party candidates use as part of their education platforms. “Investment without accountability is a waste of money,” Democratic contender Al Gore noted in a major policy address – signifying a notable shift in his party’s platform via the acknowledgement that money alone will not fix our schools. Meanwhile, his rival, Republican George W. Bush, has repeatedly called for increased accountability at all levels of education and is a supporter of performance pay for teachers.

In addition, over the past few years accountability has become more than a topic for political fodder. Governors and state legislators are turning to accountability with increasing frequency as part of school improvement and spending bills. In Florida, the state house passed a law last year requiring the state school board to define and implement accountability within two years. Moreover, the legislation obliges school districts to base at least part of all employees’ pay on actual measures of performance. Additional states, such as Georgia and Delaware, have recently passed accountability legislation, as well, and many more are in the process of debating the issue. Interest in accountability cuts across politics and geography as states of every hue hold talks on how to improve education.

There are also a number of individual districts that are already experimenting with educator accountability. By far the most talked-about system is in Denver, where the Denver Classroom Teachers Association and Denver Public Schools reached a landmark agreement to implement a multi-year pilot program. Cincinnati has also been in the news recently for its revolutionary new salary schedule, an offshoot of “knowledge- and skills-based pay.” From Dallas to Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Douglas County to the local Colonial School District, accountability has become more than a buzzword.

So what exactly does “accountability” mean and what is it for? The answer is that there *is* no single answer; accountability differs in definition from one state to another, from one district to the next and from one teacher or administrator to his or her colleague. The central question before us, therefore, is who will define accountability? Our challenge is to bring together all the key parties – teachers and their unions, school board members, superintendents, principals, members of the business community and parents – to collaboratively create an accountability system that improves education, is fair to educators and credible to the general public.

We firmly believe that the current political moment holds great potential for collaboration on education improvement. The promise of accountability is in its focus on student learning. Accountability for accountability’s sake is not in anyone’s best interest; nor should accountability be subject to fiat from the top down. On the contrary, it can be the catalyst for an

indispensable dialogue about a new quid-pro-quo: “If we educators are to be held accountable for what students learn, then our school systems must be organized in certain ways and equipped with the funds and tools we need to do our jobs well.” Thus, accountability can be the lever to provide teachers with key resources – such as access to continual professional development – and the power to play active roles in education decision-making. That is why we believe that the participation of teachers and administrators and their union leaders is imperative in designing fair and effective systems of accountability for educators.

When we began planning for the Conference on Teacher Accountability, we attempted to sketch the rough outlines of a definition of accountability – one that could be filled in by the educators and community and business leaders who are most knowledgeable and most touched by the issues of education on a daily basis. We know that accountability must be credible and fair. We know that one size does not fit all, that different districts have different needs. And we know that the best way to develop a system of accountability is through sharing of national and local resources and partnerships among the key constituencies in education and the public.

We therefore brought together many leading education professionals and academics to commence our local dialogue among teachers and their union leaders, school board members and businesspeople. Almost 300 participants at our May 16 conference heard from a diverse group of speakers:

- Union leaders from Denver and Seattle who are working with school districts to pioneer teacher accountability systems.
- Charles Kerchner, the noted author of *United Mind Workers*, who argues that teacher unions should be at the forefront of major education reform.
- Statistician William Sanders, who has received nationwide attention for his powerful studies demonstrating the relationship between quality teaching and student success.
- Anita Summers and David Crawford of the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, who designed the multivariate teacher accountability system being implemented locally at the Colonial School District.
- Speakers from the Pennsylvania State Education Association, which represents most of the state’s teachers, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

The challenges, ideas, issues and concerns on which they focused – and which are summarized below – adeptly set the stage for our future efforts on accountability.

Andrea Giunta and Brad Jupp, Denver Classroom Teachers Association

A courageous experiment is taking place in Denver, Colorado. A union local is orchestrating a school system reform and piloting a pay-for-performance program. Two of the leaders of this effort came to share their story.

Ms. Giunta began by setting the stage and giving the historical perspective on what led the DCTA to launch these initiatives. Denver has 66,000 students, 4,300 teachers and 7,800 total employees. Seventy-five percent of its students receive free or reduced lunch, 60 percent are

Hispanic, 30 percent African-American, 25 percent white and 5 percent Asian and Native American.

In a state with no collective bargaining law, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) earned the right to represent its teachers in the late 1960s and began to explore site-based decision-making in 1985. In 1996, the DCTA joined the Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN). With this came a new sense that union leadership could and should become a powerful agent in school reform.

The basic interests of this small urban local became two-fold: 1) to see schools improve and students learn, and 2) to improve wages, benefits and working conditions for its members. Initiatives came into focus when this union organization recognized that it could play a significant role in bringing about the right kind of change if it believed that its basic interests – students’ learning, school improvement and teachers’ working conditions were intrinsically connected: “We will neither be a part of a culture of refusal, nor a culture of accommodation. We strive for being partners in a collaborative effort to improve teaching and learning in Denver.”

In 1999, the DCTA passed a landmark collective bargaining agreement, in which the union committed to:

- maintaining and improving site-based management;
- establishing a central committee called the Education Initiatives Panel to direct school improvement efforts;
- promoting the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and certification; and
- launching a pay-for-performance pilot program.

The University of Colorado also became a partner in the union’s strategic planning process and served as an important resource.

Mr. Jupp continued the presentation by describing the details of the performance pay pilot. He explained that the pilot was based on a desire to test out the “heretical” notion that you could pay teachers based on the performance of their students. This idea was one that the Denver public believed in and never stopped asking for during the years when the Board of Education was struggling with compensation issues.

The design was established at the bargaining table using the traditional collective bargaining methods. It was agreed that base salary and experience increments would not be affected. The money would be paid out in the form of bonuses.

In this the first year of the pilot, the teachers in the designated schools who have volunteered to participate are receiving \$500 bonuses. An additional \$1,000 will be earned by achieving two established classroom performance objectives by the end of the school year.

In the second year, teachers will have the opportunity to earn two \$750 bonuses for achieving their two objectives.

Most schools are doing individual awards; however, group awards are an option as long as all members of the designated group are in agreement about participation and objectives. The target objectives are established mutually between the principal and the teacher. Test scores are an important element of the system, but not the only one. With the help of their union

representative, teachers are using graphs to chart their classroom test data and looking for patterns in achievement or gaps in learning.

Mr. Jupp offered some advice to others who might be considering a similar kind of system. He stressed that data is extremely important and must be annual. Each student must have his or her own identification number in the system for tracking purposes year-to-year and school-to-school. If this is not the case, it is nearly impossible to measure student progress over time. Teachers must also have identification numbers which correlate to their students. In addition, the pilot should be a separate appendix to the labor agreement and be negotiated on a different schedule from other contract items. Lastly, outside professionals should be hired to oversee and evaluate the program to ensure its integrity.

He closed by sharing seven challenges or “heresies” for educators to consider:

- Can union locals begin to understand that student achievement, teacher quality and school improvement are as fundamental as working conditions, wages and benefits, and begin to organize around it?
- Can we as educators eliminate the rhetoric of helplessness?
- You cannot substitute collaboration for school improvement.
- Don’t wait for higher education to do the work for you.
- Merge student achievement data with new levels of inquiry. This will lead to looking at how teachers use their time.
- Stabilize the political field. School reform efforts should always be longer than an elected official’s term of office.
- If we believe our policy is good, we need to hold it accountable as well. It needs to be openly, rigorously and regularly evaluated.

The overall feeling among those involved so far is one of a positive shift in focus towards student achievement. The length of the pilot has been changed to four years from three to allow for deeper ongoing study.

Roger Erskine, Seattle Education Association and Teachers Union Reform Network

The Seattle story is one of collaboration. It is about a union organization that began to see its role as being a creator of better schools, as an organization of “quarterbacks rather than defensive linemen.” The belief that schools should be solid neighborhood assets instead of liabilities is the cornerstone of the 10-year reform described here. Mr. Erskine, as head of the union during this period, led the way.

The problems that faced Seattle in 1990 were numerous, according to Mr. Erskine. Student test scores were abysmal, the dropout rate was 25 percent, high teacher turnover required 300 new teachers a year and the central administration was using 20 percent of the budget.

A stakeholder committee including the administration and the union was formed to address the problems of the central administration. This committee, after examining the current system,

eliminated 160 positions, saving the district \$8 million. All employees who lost their jobs as a result were given free career and placement counseling and found other positions.

Concurrently, focus was aimed at teacher quality. Seniority was eliminated, and a mentoring program was established for new teachers. Hiring was shifted to individual schools. The district implemented an evaluation system where the principal reviews student test results and sets annual performance goals with each teacher. Principals and other administrators are evaluated by survey. Professional development is now a top priority. All professional development has to meet three criteria. It must be site sensitive, mission embedded and continuous.

Giving the schools back to their communities, in this case, required significant decentralization – “moving from a school system to a system of schools.” This meant that the power of the union had to be willing to shift as well. Site-based decision-making is now the mode.

Soon after, the “Trust Agreement” for Seattle schools was created. The agreement focused on eliminating “toxic work environments” and replacing them with “collaborative learning environments.”

New funding formulas were established to bring more money into the schools with the greatest needs. In some cases, funds were taken from one school and given to another. Receiving schools decide how the money is to be spent.

The business community is also playing a key role in funding these reforms. They were included in every step of the planning, and are invited to visit schools on a regular basis to monitor progress and maintain close ties to the classroom.

The results of the Seattle initiatives are impressive: test scores have gone up every year for the last 4 years, attendance is up, discipline cases are down, staff attendance is up and enrollment has increased.

Mr. Erskine summarized lessons that can be derived from his experience in Seattle:

- Collaboration works!
- When you ask the business community for support – and listen – they will support you.
- When funders come to schools and see the reforms working, they give more money. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation just gave Seattle Public Schools \$25.8 million.
- Community schools need to be turned back to their communities.
- Give it time. If you are looking for a quick fix, you will be disappointed.
- Principals’ roles need to be examined. Does the principal function as a building manager or instructional leader?
- Put as much as you can into your teacher contracts.
- School boards should not micro-manage.
- Celebrate your successes frequently and publicly.

In the simplest terms, in order to begin the process of improvement in a school system, one must build an academic achievement plan that is driven by data, then budget to it, staff to it and align professional development to it. Unions can call the plays to make schools better places for children to learn and teachers to teach.

William Sanders, Educational Value-Added Assessment Services (EVAAS)

Dr. William Sanders, the renowned architect of the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, took conferees to a new degree of understanding of data-driven inquiry with his powerful focus on the impact of teaching on levels of student achievement.

Dr. Sanders described his accidental start on the journey to find a statistical link between teacher skill and student performance. In the early 1980s, Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander was seeking a fair way to establish a merit pay system for teachers. Conventional wisdom at the time was that it was impossible to do. Sanders decided to prove them wrong. Three years and three million test records later, he had developed a mixed-model methodology that proves the supreme influence of teacher quality on student performance.

It took several more years before Sanders' work was actually incorporated into a school system reform, but it is now seen as the cornerstone of the reforms occurring in Tennessee's public schools.

The value-added concept works under two key assumptions. First is that the educational community is not responsible for all of the problems that children bring with them to the classroom everyday. Second, though, it *is* responsible for taking each student each year and helping him or her make academic progress regardless of the level – high, low or average – at which they start in September.

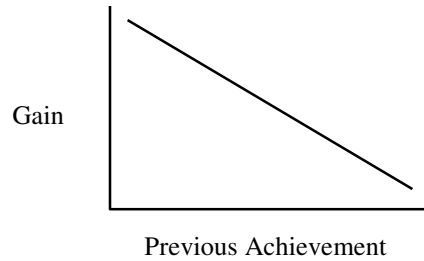
While other statistical models have chosen to control for variables such as socio-economics, race or gender, in Dr. Sanders' model each student acts as his or her own statistical control and is only measured against him- or herself each year.

When comparing test data, Dr. Sanders prefers not to debate the value of using “norm-referenced” versus “criterion-referenced” assessments. He believes that his statistical methods hold up using any variety and combination of standardized tests. Tests must be given to all students every year, and the “scales of measure must be highly correlated with curricular objectives.” If they are not, it is impossible to use the data to determine teacher effectiveness or real student achievement.

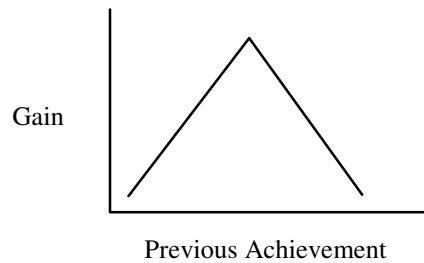
Knowing what only an individual student achieves from year to year reveals nothing about the quality of teaching. But if a record is kept for every student, it is possible to see patterns of achievement that are linked to teacher performance. As Dr. Sanders explained, it is then possible to make comparisons within grade levels, schools, districts and the entire state.

Dr. Sanders presented several graphs to illustrate how one might use the test data of a particular classroom to determine patterns in the achievement of groups of students.

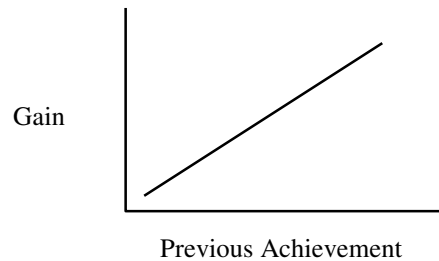
Shed Pattern - Pattern of achievement that indicates that the teacher is teaching to the lower achievers in the class and producing no gains for the higher achievers:



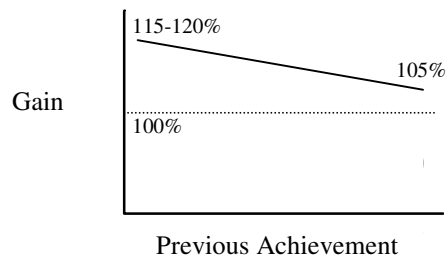
Tee Pee - Pattern indicates that the teacher is teaching to the middle range of students, at the expense of both low- and high-achievers:



Reverse Shed - Pattern indicates that the teacher is teaching to the high end, leaving the average and lower achievers further behind, a pattern often found in higher-income suburban districts:



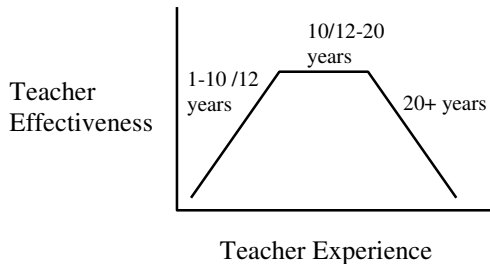
Sustained Growth - Considered by Dr. Sanders to be the ideal pattern. Each child gains at least one year's worth of growth regardless of where he or she starts, and the gap decreases:



The most startling of Dr. Sanders' original findings came when he charted schools across the state by their average value-added scores over three years. Schools with the highest value-added scores crossed boundaries of race, class, building size and location, as did schools with the lowest scores. Even some of the wealthier suburban schools who were considered among the best in their communities were, in fact, not adding much value at all, but simply dealing with very able kids to begin with. These were termed "slide and glide" schools.

Similar analysis of the data showed that African-American students were routinely given the weakest teachers. Also, early high-achieving African-American students were suffering from being placed in classes with shed patterns that favored the lower achieving students, a process which over time ensures that the performance of gifted young students will deteriorate.

Dr. Sanders shared another interesting chart illustrating teacher effectiveness (as measured by his data) across years of experience:



The chart shows a pattern of increasing effectiveness in the first 10-12 years of teaching, a leveling off over the next 10 years and then a steady decline in effectiveness thereafter. While this kind of pattern is not unique to the teaching profession, Sanders made the point that the damage being done to children is significant if they end up with several ineffective teachers in a row.

The most poignant illustration of the accumulated impact of teacher effectiveness was revealed through a study done by Sanders' wife, June Rivers. Dr. Rivers, the Assistant Manager of Value-Added Assessment and Research at EVAAS, used the value-added data to study the likelihood of a student identified in the bottom quartile of his or her fourth grade class passing the Tennessee high-stakes exam given in ninth grade on the first try. Her analysis revealed the following:

- A bottom-quartile fourth grader with a highly effective teacher sequence (three or more highly effective teachers over the following four years) had a 60 percent chance of passing the exam on the first try in the beginning of 9th grade.
- A student with an average teacher sequence had a 30 percent chance of passing the first time.
- A student with a poor teacher sequence had a 15 percent chance of passing on the first try.

While Sanders does not personally promote his value-added assessments as part of an accountability system, he feels strongly that schools need to be aware of the effectiveness of their teachers and the patterns developing in individual classes or among groups of students. Using this type of data as a means of helping weaker teachers to improve, reinforcing better teachers and helping to ensure consistent progress for all students is a powerful step in improving schools.

Charles Kerchner, Claremont Graduate University

Dr. Kerchner, whose book *United Mind Workers* is generally regarded as the premiere guidebook to union reform and empowerment, presented his thoughts on how teachers' unions can lead the change process in schools.

The discussion of incentives to enter the teaching profession (sign-on bonuses, tax breaks, etc.) or rewards for performance once there (merit pay, performance-based bonuses) is not a new one, Dr. Kerchner explained. These two types of systems, however, present a paradox – the “get tough” versus the “get generous” approach that is difficult to reconcile. Good unionism and good public policy, however, are beginning to see that it must be about dealing with this paradox to promote positive change. Fairness becomes the balancing term that helps to manage the paradox.

Dr. Kerchner illustrated his points about quality organizations, using his chart entitled “The Diamond of Quality.” This chart depicts a diamond-shaped core symbolizing standards and indicators. Around this core are lines of intersect representing rewards and incentives, professional development, peer review and induction. Schools must create and analyze data on student quality and build their teacher evaluation and compensation systems around it. Without this connection, tying incentives to student outcomes is meaningless, Dr. Kerchner said.

For a more complete description and elaboration of Dr. Kerchner’s presentation on unionism and incentives, please see the accompanying paper entitled “Paying Mind-Workers: What is the Incentive to Teach?” by Charles Kerchner and Cynthia Lopez Elwell. It has been copied on three-ring paper and can be included in Dr. Kerchner’s section of the conference binder.

Ted Hershberg, Professor of Public Policy and History and Director of the Center for Greater Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania

During the luncheon, Dr. Hershberg described the development of the standards movement across the country and how it led him to a focus on accountability.

Dr. Hershberg reported that the good news is that 49 out of 50 states have adopted standards. The bad news is that too many of these states have simply put standards and high-stakes tests into place without changing classroom instruction. The implicit assumption, therefore, is that simply “raising the bar” will be enough to get better results.

Recent testing initiatives in this region show that students who are given standardized tests such as the PSSA and the New Standards Reference Exam, which tests for both content and concept knowledge as well as practical application and problem-solving, score well on content facts and concepts, but poorly on problem-solving and application. Why do students in one of the strongest areas of the country score poorly on these types of tests? The answer is that classroom practice does not focus on problem-solving – the most important skill in the New Economy.

Schools that institute high standards and testing regimes must first look at pedagogy. Educators need to be willing to examine what they do in their classrooms and in their district management. The world in which most of us were raised is gone; the industrial economy that allowed students of any socio-economic background to graduate from high school and earn a middle-class wage is gone as well. What has replaced it is a world that favors only the top fifth of our society – those who have the income and the access to higher education and technology. Schools and teaching need to change accordingly. All students need to be held to high standards and all students need to be taught to be problem solvers, analytical thinkers, effective team members and independent learners.

Through no fault of their own, teachers have not been trained in this type of pedagogy. Graduate schools of education are not leading the way and will likely be too slow to change if

half of the nation's teacher corps is going to be retiring in the next 10 years, as many studies predict. Therefore, two enormous challenges emerge: training the entire K-12 teacher corps and finding a way to pay for it.

New costs to cover this massive professional development will require significant increases in the proportion of our budgets spent for professional development. The increase from an average of .05 percent to 1.5 percent up to 10 percent across the board will mean approximately \$1.5 billion in Pennsylvania alone.

All districts will need to rethink their current spending priorities, but getting this additional funding will require convincing the public and the legislature to move off of current school funding formulas. We need to be able to offer a credible system of accountability in return for this added investment. Simply asking for more money will not be enough.

For the short term, there is funding being offered by the state – \$3 million in the coming fiscal year – for school districts interested in piloting accountability systems in which individual educators receive bonuses in return for increasing student achievement.

In the long term, the Center for Greater Philadelphia is working with a statewide coalition of diverse groups and constituencies interested in tax reform. Its centerpiece would be a quid-pro-quo in which educators would accept accountability in return for the shift in school funding from the local property tax to the statewide income tax with net new dollars targeted for professional development and incentive pay.

What will your role be? Embrace the change and take the lead in defining accountability in ways that are fair and credible. Dr. Hershberg asked the attendees to work with the Center on a series of post-conference activities, each designed to bring together the key stakeholders in a collaborative effort to create these definitions. Accountability should be viewed as a clean slate on which you have the opportunity to make your mark.

Anita Summers, Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, and David Crawford, Econsult

Moving to local experts, Dr. Summers presented her work on performance-based compensation (PBC) system design. Although Dr. Summers and Dr. Crawford were hired as consultants by the Colonial School District to develop the performance pay system that is currently in use in that district, their presentation focused on the broad range of issues confronting any PBC system.

The general objective of such systems is to develop and implement a plan that identifies and provides incentives for teachers who have contributed most to student learning. Dr. Summers described several rationales for this type of compensation plan:

- It makes sense to link the major dollars spent in any school budget to the major goals of education.
- We know that teachers are the most important influence on student learning.
- All elements of the system become focused on achievement.
- PBC promotes the professionalization of teaching.

- Market-type incentives are effective.

While there is much disagreement around the issue performance-based pay, Dr. Summers listed the areas where she believes there to be significant agreement, the first and most important being the establishment of student achievement as the dominant goal.

Major areas of disagreement include: the unit of measure for awards (teacher, group or building), absolute standards for awards versus relative standing and how to factor in socio-economic status and other external factors that influence a student's achievement.

Underlying the opposition to performance-based pay are many complicated factors related to how one views teaching as a profession, and what one expects from statistical analysis.

Dr. Summers also outlined the characteristics of what she believes is a good PBC plan:

- A significant portion of dollars should be used for individual awards.
- Evaluation should be on a relative basis.
- Student comparisons should be made on a value-added basis.
- SES data on students should be factored in.
- Standard statistical procedures should be followed.
- Non-academic areas need to produce portfolios of student work.
- Bonuses should be significant.
- Data should be used to evaluate program-wide goals across different subject areas.
- Appropriate infrastructures should be put in place to reflect the shared goals.

Finally, with market principals driving educational policy, PBC is viewed by many as a logical step in a process of redesigning schools for the future.

Dr. Crawford continued with more specific design strategies and advice for those thinking of employing such programs.

There are many decisions that need to be made while constructing an effective PBC system. Dr. Crawford enumerated a number of these choices:

- Objective versus subjective criteria
- Absolute performance and/or relative performance
- Group or individual awards
- Bonus awards or salary increments
- Budget allocation
- Number of awards
- Use of value-added or multiple regression models

Dr. Crawford suggested that districts think about their assessment needs and institute annual testing at every grade level. Saving money is not a reasonable goal for PBC programs; districts should only institute PBC if they wish to pay teachers better and more appropriately.

David Helfman, Pennsylvania State Education Association, and Brian Gallagher, Colonial Education Association

At this point in the program, Mr. Helfman and Mr. Gallagher were invited to share their views on the merit pay program recently instituted in the Colonial School District, which uses multivariate regression to predict student achievement and then ranks teachers based on their students' gains beyond the predicted level.

Mr. Helfman made it clear that PSEA is opposed to merit pay. The Colonial example is cited as a failure to design a system of incentives and implement it in a way that improves student performance. Instead, he said, a system is in place that has caused low morale and divisiveness among teachers. The process was not a collaborative one, and therefore, there was no "buy-in" by those most effected. Mr. Helfman countered Dr. Summers' notion that PBC systems enhance the professionalism of teaching. His fear is that good teachers will now be driven away from Colonial because the morale is so low. In other parts of the state, where high-stakes exams have been put in place for students, he warns that increased student dropout rates are not far behind.

Will PSEA ever embrace accountability? In Mr. Helfman's opinion, it is not likely as long as the systems are designed in the manner of Colonial.

Mr. Gallagher recounted the bargaining process as one that began with an agreement to develop a bonus program and the forming of a special committee to design it. Because the committee was unable to come to consensus on group versus individual awards, the decision went to binding arbitration, and it was decided that the bonus program would be half group and half individual awards. Thus, a system was put in place that was unacceptable to many. The result has been a year of frustration, mistrust and anger in the district, Mr. Gallagher reported. Veteran teachers are beginning to ask themselves if they want to stay in the district, and students are observing the tension. Teachers are not as collaborative as they used to be.

Colonial continues to re-examine and redesign the system as they go, and Mr. Gallagher cautions that systems like this cannot be implemented and designed at the same time.

Mr. Gallagher also noted that teaching can only be defined in broad terms, and therefore accountability must also be defined broadly. To narrow the accountability system is to narrow the teaching that is produced by it.

Closing Session: Presenters' Panel – Questions & Answers

For a closing panel discussion, all of the day's speakers came forward and were joined by Rosalind Jones-Johnson of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and Tim Daniels of the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Dr. Daniels announced that \$3 million was being made available by the PDA for the funding of accountability programs in districts which are willing to pilot or implement systems. In the

fund's first year of existence, the \$1 million allotted was won by three school districts, including Colonial and Philadelphia.

Dr. Johnson began by making a statement about the state of Philadelphia public schools and the PFT's stance on accountability. She stated that the problems of inner-city schools were too great to consider accountability (as defined by the conference speakers) as a worthy or useful discussion at this time.

Open discussion and Q&A finished off the day. The passion of those on all sides of the issue became quite clear as the discussion turned into a debate – proof that we have a long way to go before consensus can be reached on this complex issue.

Conclusion

Educator accountability is not another school reform fad, and its spread is indeed inevitable as more and more states demand accountability in exchange for education dollars and seek to assure the public that schools are changing to meet the needs of today's learners and tomorrow's workers. Our challenge is to define it collaboratively and to use it to improve the quality of public education. Though the stumbling blocks are large, the opportunity to positively impact our schools is even larger.

The May 16 conference should be seen as a valuable prologue to the efforts that we must now begin locally. We learned a great deal from our distinguished speakers: that focus on student achievement is the key to meaningful school improvement; that teacher effectiveness is the most important variable to student success; that improving classroom pedagogy necessitates evaluating the organization of school systems and the resources available to teachers; and that a collaborative dialogue that takes all of our core constituencies' interests into account is the best means of forging a credible and fair system of accountability.

The task before us now is to apply this knowledge in our own school districts. To that end, the Center for Greater Philadelphia will sponsor an unprecedented initiative beginning this fall called the School Improvement Partnership. Several school districts will participate in a six-month collaborative process of skill building, learning and accountability program design. The end result will be that each team comes to consensus on an accountability system that meets its criteria. Each 12-person Collaborative Design Team will be made up of some of the district's teachers and their union leaders, school board members, members of the business community, principals and a parent, as well as the superintendent and curriculum director. The program is divided into three segments: *Building Relationships and New Modes of Collaboration*; *Best Practices*; and *Define and Design*. Facilitators and consultants with content-area expertise will assist in each stage. What each district chooses to do with its newly created system at the end of the program is its own decision. If it would like to move forward and pilot or implement the program, the Center will help support the endeavor.

Other members of the above-listed constituencies will simultaneously participate in one of two study groups: *Student Assessment* and *Educator Evaluation*. These groups will serve as crucial information-gatherers. They will have access to researchers and other experts and will be asked to collect and filter information for use by the Collaborative Design Teams during the Define and Design phase of the project.

This is a period of unprecedented opportunity to experiment with accountability and, together, to define it. We enter this crucial stage with some general principles to guide us. Our initial criteria are that any accountability system:

- Is fair to teachers and administrators
- Measures student learning – outputs rather than inputs
- Promotes a collaborative approach to professional development
- Changes the incentives sufficiently so that the large majority of teachers will master the new problem-solving pedagogy
- Commits the school district to support this form of professional development
- Is understandable and credible to the public

Our hope is that districts will add their own requirements to these, and that together we can lay the groundwork for meaningful educator accountability that improves the quality of education. To take a lesson from many of the conference presenters, our success will depend on our ability to focus on teaching and learning, and to responsibly concentrate our resources and knowledge to ensure that public school graduates are prepared for the world that awaits them.