

Accountability -- should we be accountable? Without hesitation...without question YES!!!! But how do we measure the growth that needs to occur? Ask any master teacher and they will tell you -- I am accountable. By the minute, by the hour, by the day in my classroom, I am accountable. Take my class. Look at my student Paul. Paul is barely making the grade, in fact he is not meeting minimal mastery in my class. I am concerned about Paul. Concerned for his future and his welfare. Concerned that he seems to lack the skills necessary for success in college and beyond and yet...according to our current accountability system Paul is a ROCK STAR. He has passed every one of the high stakes tests given and has passed 80% of them with commended status. While he appears to be successful, is he prepared for life?

This would be one of my first concerns with the current accountability system. It fails to address the INDIVIDUAL needs of students. It looks at students in mass as numbers, not as individuals. Isn't student growth on an individual basis the true goal of education? We need a system that will challenge the Pauls of the classroom as well as students along any segment of the continuum, from those with minimal skills to those nearing genius level.

In addition, we need a system that will be diagnostic instead of punitive. It needs to determine WHERE students start and look at their growth over a year instead of expecting them to all meet a certain level of proficiency. As a master teacher I work daily with kids. I can see a student work hard, be diligent and come in for tutoring. I have tracked their growth and dedication and maybe even on some days seen sparks of brilliance from that student and then... their whole is measured by one test one day and they are told you are a failure? What are we saying? Is the end result the golden key? Is the passing score all that is important? Or is HOW we get to an answer and skills we obtain along the way more important? I know as a person I don't like being judged on one action and I would never look at my students on just one day. We need an accountability system that matches how we really live.

Thirdly, the Texas accountability system needs to be aligned with the federal system. In an already challenging public education system, we strive to meet all mandates. However, the NCLB legislation and the Texas accountability system are not the same. There are too many indicators on the Texas system and sometimes they are actually at conflict with the federal system. In addition, why does the ruling in Texas need to be SO stringent? Why are we so ready to put the red X of failure on our public schools? Why not give schools a chance to grow? Expecting turn around in one year-is that truly an obtaining goal?

I have a question for you: Can you name the enzyme responsible for the transcription and ultimate translation of deoxyribonucleic acid into a reliable non mutate polypeptide?

Um, no? As an 11th grader taking the Science TAKS test you would be asked such a question. The answer is RNY polymerase, by the way. My point? Why is our accountability system focusing on minute facts? Why not focus on skills young adults will need to be culturally, scientifically literate in the rapidly changing technologically advancing world? Skills that will allow them to adapt and evolve in new situations? Skills that will help them be viable in a global economy and work force for the next 50, 60 or 70 years. Development of a system that looks at skills and process is so much more important than spewing out facts.

Finally, give control to those who know the students best. Not Washington, DC, not Austin, Texas, but hometown Texas, USA. From the valley to the panhandle, we all know that variance that exists. Holding them all to the same standards and the same level of growth does not make sense. If we are going to be truly successful, start with the people that know. My Paul, my Chandler, my Malcolm, my Teghey, my Megan...my kids -- I know them better than anyone. I also know that all have been checked off the system-they passed every indicator, but are they prepared for life?

Step forward and make the change that is needed. Develop an accountability system that measures student success not achievement.

Thank you.