

Defining 'Accountability'

How can school boards create a positive culture that is accountable to the public? Understanding evaluation and creating a process for setting and achieving goals through policy can help, according to Nicole Bowman. Bowman is a University of Wisconsin-Madison fellow specializing in educational leadership and policy analysis. She is also a leadership consultant.

The evaluation cycle

Bowman pointed out that evaluation completes the "accountability circle." Based on research and data, the board develops policies to be implemented by administrators and completes the cycle by providing evaluation. "Many boards need help with understanding the evaluation process and need to develop a set of guiding questions to ask," Bowman explained.

According to Bowman, boards need to learn how to hold systems accountable through policy. She presented a model to help "demystify" accountability.

"If your district is looking to find a way to create a shared responsibility for school improvement, the School and Community Based Evaluation Process Model (SCBEP) can help," said Bowman.

The model includes the following components:

1. Identify educational needs and goals
 - a. What issues are defined by our community (keeping in mind our subgroups)?
 - b. What is our experience?
 - c. What does our data say?
2. Develop educational policies
 - a. What are our educational values?



Nicole Bowman, a University of Wisconsin fellow who is a leadership consultant, said evaluation is often missing from the accountability "circle."

- b. How do educational data, polices and programs meet or miss our needs?
- c. How do we communicate and negotiate with key stakeholders?
3. Implement educational policies
 - a. What is the process for carrying out our values?
 - b. How does our organization monitor implementation?
4. Policy accountability
 - a. Does our organization use data to make daily decisions?
 - b. Is there internal and external accountability?
5. Replication and dissemination

Bowman stressed the need for good data to learn the diverse needs of the students. According to Bowman, "It is important to be looking at race, gender, students with disabilities, poverty." She pointed out that boards need to use

the sub-data on these groups in their schools to create improvement. "You have to have good data to develop good educational goals. The evaluation needs to be youth centered," she emphasized.

Bowman suggested boards use multiple assessments. "It is important to have three sets of data on hand to be grounded in knowing what is going on in your district," she said. For example, "proficient" at the national level may not be the same as at the state level. She stressed that data is critical to improving student achievement.

Once a board understands the unique needs of all of the students in a district, it creates accountability by setting educational policies. The board also creates the system or procedures that can transform a policy from paper to implementation.

"You are all experts—you know your kids. 'Washington' has never been in your district," concluded Bowman. ■