ac·count·a·bil·i·ty [*uh*-koun-t*uh*-**bil**-i-tee]

–noun

1. the state of being accountable, liable, or answerable.
2. *Education.* a policy of holding schools and teachers accountable for students' academic progress by linking such progress with funding for salaries, maintenance, etc.

This is the second in a series of articles published in 2010 that address excellence in education as it relates to the School City of Hobart.

The Accountability Factor: Committed Educators for Student Success

by Peggy Buffington, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools, School City of Hobart

Have you ever experienced looking up a word in the dictionary only to find that it is defined using the root word? As noted above, "accountability" means accountable. It goes on to list liable and answerable. Interestingly enough, in the case of "accountability," it has a second meaning specifically for education: a policy holding schools and teachers accountable for students' academic progress… Many, like the dictionary, suggest that teachers are responsible for student success. Shared accountability for student success must exist and literally include everyone: classroom teachers as well as administrators, students as well as parents, and business owners as well as lawmakers. However, holding all of these people accountable for their part in the educational process is not easy. In school districts across the country, teachers are reminded to concentrate and work on the things they can control. This is exactly what they do everyday. When one ponders continuous school improvement measures that educators pursue, it is quite daunting! Let's take a look at the A, B, Cs of School Improvement and Accountability in Figure 1 generated from the School City of Hobart. Committed educators are definitely the accountability factor for student success!

Why do educators immerse themselves with initiatives like the ones in Figure 1? No Child Left Behind (NCLB)? Sure, there is that constant voice in a teacher's head reminding him or her of the consequences of failure under this act. However, it is the accountability that educators feel, and always have felt, to children that drive them to do whatever they can to make a difference and help their students be successful.

Figure 1

The A, B, Cs of School Improvement and Accountability

21st Century Skills
6+1 Writing
Advanced Placement
Assessment
Building Academic Vocabulary
Career Pathways
Classroom Instruction That Works
Community Based Learning
Connected Community
Data Driven Instruction
Differentiated Instruction
District Wide Strategies
Early Learning
Educator Preparation
Engaging Environments
Equity
Family Involvement
Flexible Schedules
Healthy Kids
Individual Education Plan
Inquiry Based
Lifeskills
Literacy and LLI
NCA
NWEA
Odyssey
Problem Based/Project Based Learning
Professional Learning Communities
Professional Development
Project Lead the Way
RAZ Kids
READ 180
Reading and Writing Workshops
Respectful Behavior
Response to Intervention
Rigorous Curriculum
Safety
Service Learning
School/Community Connection
Standards
Technology and Learning
Test Scores
Vocational/Career and Technical Education

It is amazing to reflect on the practice of teachers in the School City of Hobart all in the name of providing the absolute best for students. The School City of Hobart's Strategic Plan addresses seven standards from AdvancEd/NCA, which include the following: 1. Vision and Purpose; 2. Governance and Leadership; 3. Teaching and Learning; 4. Documenting and Using Results; 5. Resources and Support Systems; 6. Stakeholder Communication and Relationships; and 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement. Our educators consistently challenge themselves in standard 3–Teaching and Learning and 4–Documenting and Using Results.

Specifically, teachers in Hobart break these standards into A. Rigorous Curriculum and Research-based Strategies, B. Data Driven Decision Making, C. Technology Tools and D. Reflective Practices. As we look closely at each one of these areas, it is evident that teachers are accountable to their students in every way.

A. Rigorous Curriculum and Research-based Strategies

The School City Hobart is in constant pursuit of curriculum that is rigorous, engaging, and supports higher student achievement. This article will highlight Reading and Writing Workshops and Project Lead the Way BioMedical Sciences.

The Teachers College Reading & Writing Project, from Columbia University in New York, helps teachers act as mentors and coaches for students who are learning to be powerful and independent readers and writers.

Project staff developers have worked in Hobart schools for many years to provide collaborative coaching for all the teachers across the schools in several classrooms called lab-sites. In each lab-site, the staff developer works with students and teachers so that participating teachers can learn the structures, methods, and expectations for a rigorous workshop. Teachers and staff developers co-author literacy curriculum (or "units of study"). Between staff developer visits, teachers continue and extend the work, supported by the Project's sequence of conference days and leadership groups, all of which are aligned with the work teachers develop in their classrooms. *Teachers in grades K-6 spent many summer days working on "units of study."*

Project Lead the Way (PLTW)

The PLTW Biomedical Program prepares students to take advantage of tremendous career opportunities. The three-tiered curriculum, activities, projects, and problems, give students the necessary critical thinking skills and real-world scenarios to be successful. *Teachers of this curriculum spend every summer learning and refining the curriculum for their students.*

The third course of the PTLW Biomedical program introduces students to the design and development of various medical interventions. Medical practice includes a wide range of interventions to treat disease and maintain health. Student projects investigate the methods and means that extend and improve quality of life, including: gene therapy, pharmacology, surgery, prosthetics, and supportive care. Students study such devices as vascular stints, cochlear implants, and prosthetic limbs. They review rehabilitation, the history of organ transplants and gene therapy, and read current scientific literature to be aware of cutting-edge developments. The class is engaged in bacterial labs, along with gel electrophoresis, and suturing. In addition to covering the key understanding of interventions, students can also be expected to incorporate program requirements, including proper design and execution of all experiments, using the Internet effectively, and completing proper scientific documentation.

The Reading and Writing Workshop and Project Lead the Way are wonderful examples of how Hobart teachers are committed to learning and offering their students the best in research-based practices and curriculum offerings.

B. Data Driven Decision-Making

A Hobart teacher sums up how entrenched students are with data: "We interpret and use the data from NWEA testing to drive our instruction. We use our weekly grade level data meetings to facilitate this. Standard-based report cards help us keep track of student mastery. Teachers also chart student growth and refer children who are not making adequate gains for extra help through the Response to Intervention (RtI) process. Our teachers individualize instruction based on our NWEA data. I believe our teachers feel they are held accountable for student growth, as all teachers should be."

1) What is NWEA?

Teachers in the School City of Hobart began using Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) testing, called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), in the 2000-2001 school year. This testing permits teachers to test fall, winter, and spring in Reading, Language Usage, and Math. This assessment is a key tool for measuring student growth in the Hobart schools. Because the testing is computerized, the results are instant. Teachers are given many reports that dissect the tests in goal areas as they relate to Indiana Standards. Students make goals, and teachers provide flexible groups and seminars to assist students in meeting their personal goals.

2) NWEA Scores by District and School in Language, Reading, and Math

a. NWEA can calculate Percentage of Growth Target Achieved by a group. This is calculated by total student growth for the group and by dividing it by the sum of the students' RIT range norms. A group that achieves 110% of its target would have growth that exceeds its collective RIT range growth norm by 10%. A group that achieves 85% of its target would have growth that falls short of its RIT range norm by 15%. An example of 5th grade math in Figure 2 shows every quartile exceeding the growth target, with the group performing at 24.5% above its target goal.

Figure 2

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	School City of Hobart					
2	Fall 2008-Spring 2009					
3						
4		Mathematics				
5						
6	School	(All)				
7	Gender	(All)				
8	Ethnicity	(All)				
9	TestName	(All)				
10	Test Goals Match	(All)				
11						
12	Grade	Quartile	Count	Avg Growth	Avg Growth Index	% of Targe
31	5	Low	37	9.6	1.9	125.1%
32		Mid Low	64	9.5	1.5	118.9%
33		Mid High	86	10.0	2.4	131.5%
34		High	63	8.3	1.4	120.3%
35	5 Total		250	9.4	1.8	124.5%
36						
37	Grand Total		981	12.3	1.9	118.6%

If we disaggregate by school, as shown in Figure 3, we can determine performance and probe deeper for higher levels of achievement and potential instructional practices that are being used. For example, Liberty Elementary's 5th grade classes achieved 217.6% of its targeted growth, exceeding the goal by 117.6%.

Figure 3

	A	B	D	E	F
1	School City of Hobart				
2	Fall 2008-Spring 2009				
3					
4		Mathematics			
5					
6	School	LIBERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL			
7	Gender	(All)			
8	Ethnicity	(All)			
9	TestName	(All)			
10	Test Goals Match	(All)			
11					
12	Grade	Quartile	Avg Growth	Avg Growth Index	% of Target
30					
31	5	Low	13.0	5.8	180.6%
32		Mid Low	21.1	13.0	260.3%
33		Mid High	16.6	9.1	220.3%
34		High	13.8	6.9	200.0%
35	5 Total		16.0	8.7	217.6%

Figure 4

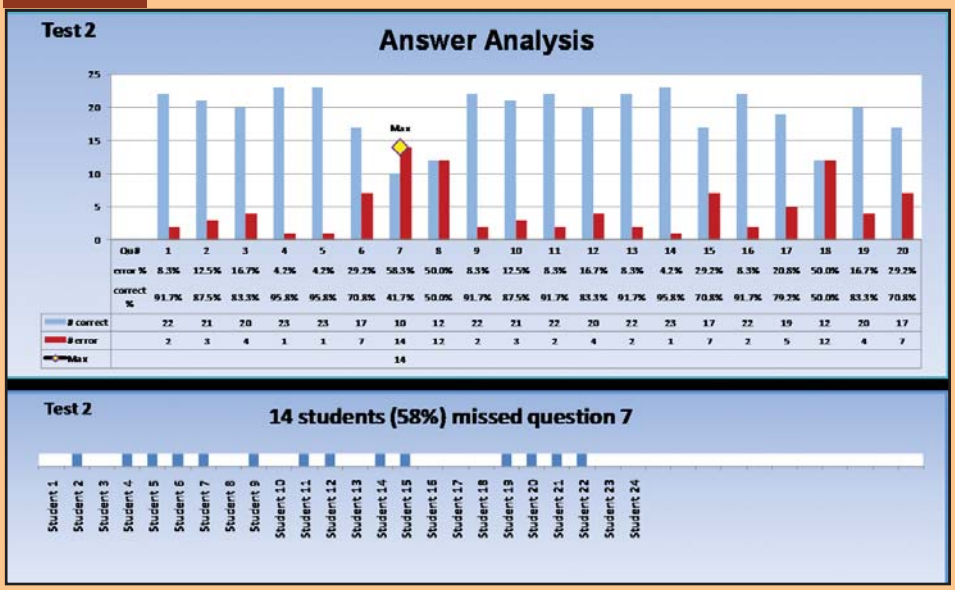
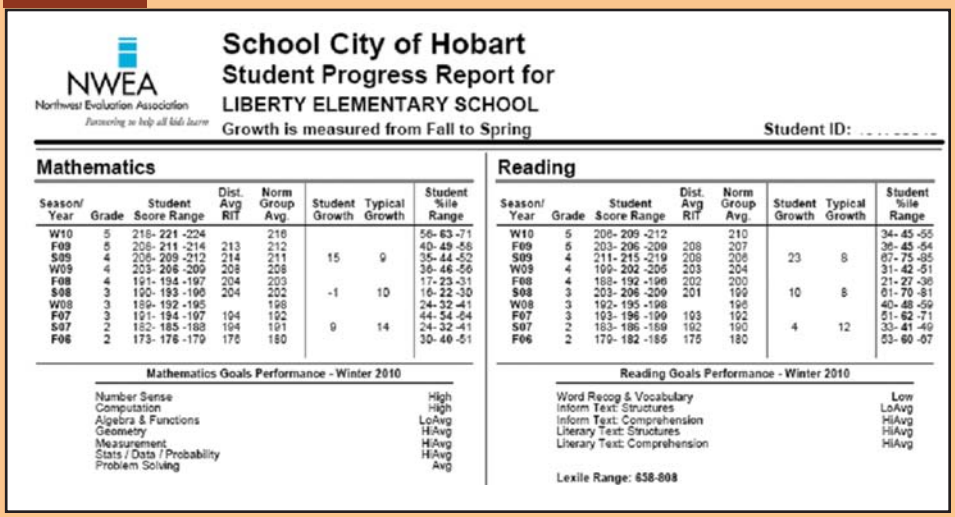


Figure 5



How did they do that?

Figure 4 shows how Liberty's teachers use item analyses with quizzes to determine those students who have mastery and those who do not. Teachers gather small groups of students by item and reteach concepts for mastery, achieving more than double targeted growth.

3) Individual Student Performance Report in Figure 5

a. Student growth is compared to typical growth and is easily monitored.

b. Goal performance areas are identified and NWEA's DesCartes: A Continuum of Learning is used to target instructional level objectives.

4) Noteworthy Comparison to the ISTEP Benchmark

a. *Does passing ISTEP+ indicate academic success?*

b. Consider the mathematics RIT scores of two grade 2 students in a school district where the defined spring performance standard was 186 (the bar for passing the ISTEP cut score).

c. One student grew 15 RIT points from the previous fall and obtained a spring score of 176.

d. The second student grew 2 RIT points and obtained a spring score of 188.

e. If the sole consideration for student success is a status standard of 186 (in order to pass a cut score determined by ISTEP+), only the second student is considered successful. The first student, with seven times the growth and nearly twice the growth typical for a 2nd grade student, is considered "not meeting" the standard.

f. It is clear that we need to include an emphasis on student growth and progress towards an established standard if we want to know how effective we are in helping students learn.

NWEA provides growth data. Growth models measure student progress by tracking achievement scores of the same students from one year to the next to determine whether

student achievement has increased. By comparing data for the same students over time, progress—or lack thereof—can be measured more precisely. This can give school leaders and the public clear, more actionable information on school performance and student achievement. Growth models provide information on student performance and the performance of the school as a whole, which goes beyond any single point in time. Growth models measure a school's ability to facilitate continuous academic progress in moving toward achievement targets. We applaud the State of Indiana in its decision to move to a growth model.

C. Technology Tools

The School City of Hobart is always exploring technology tools that help to personalize the learning experience for every student, whether at school or home. Of course, our district website hosts teacher web pages, as well as the parental portal for student progress. Our students and staff at the School City of Hobart have been immersed in a world of high-tech tools in order to keep up with modern trends and experience learning in new and exciting ways. From tablets and projectors to student response systems, classrooms are using the latest in educational technology to meet the standards of the high-tech world.

1) Compass Learning Odyssey is our new web-based program that offers activities to support students as they work through instructional content. Online materials differ for each student at each grade level. Elementary and middle school offers unique **learning paths based on NWEA scores**. Teachers also prepare lessons and tutorials for students. The activities consist of lesson extensions for remediation. At the high school level, Compass Learning Odyssey is used for credit recovery.

Figure 6

What is available to students at school and home?

Students have access to Brain Buzzers, LA extensions, Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Thematic Projects. The curriculum that is offered to a child is at his/her grade level. As a child completes assignments, the program monitors the progress and adjust levels according to the student's needs. Figure 6 shows a screen capture of a student's curriculum once the student logs in. It is the student's very own backpack filled with learning opportunities.

2) Tablets and responders are very popular in all of the Hobart schools. The tablets are mobile devices that allow teachers to move around their rooms freely, while still controlling their computers. Additionally, the Interactive Workspace software that accompanies the tablets provide access to engaging and interactive tools that assist in learning. The responders are a favorite with students. These handheld devices allow students to actively respond to a teacher's questions or even take entire quizzes with instant feedback on what has been learned to gauge student comprehension.

3) Perhaps the most popular high-tech tools are the wireless laptops.

The new wireless technology, incorporated into each building, supports approximately 2,300 laptops across the district, providing all students with access anywhere, anytime. The laptops are used in many different ways, including Internet research, media production, and much more. They also give students the ability to access the wide variety of software offered at Hobart, including Odyssey Compass Learning, Read 180, and RAZ Kids.

Teachers have crossed the digital divide and use technology tools with their students. What do students have to say about it?

"I love the new technology. It really helps save time and more people participate. People say what they really think on the clickers."–7th grade student

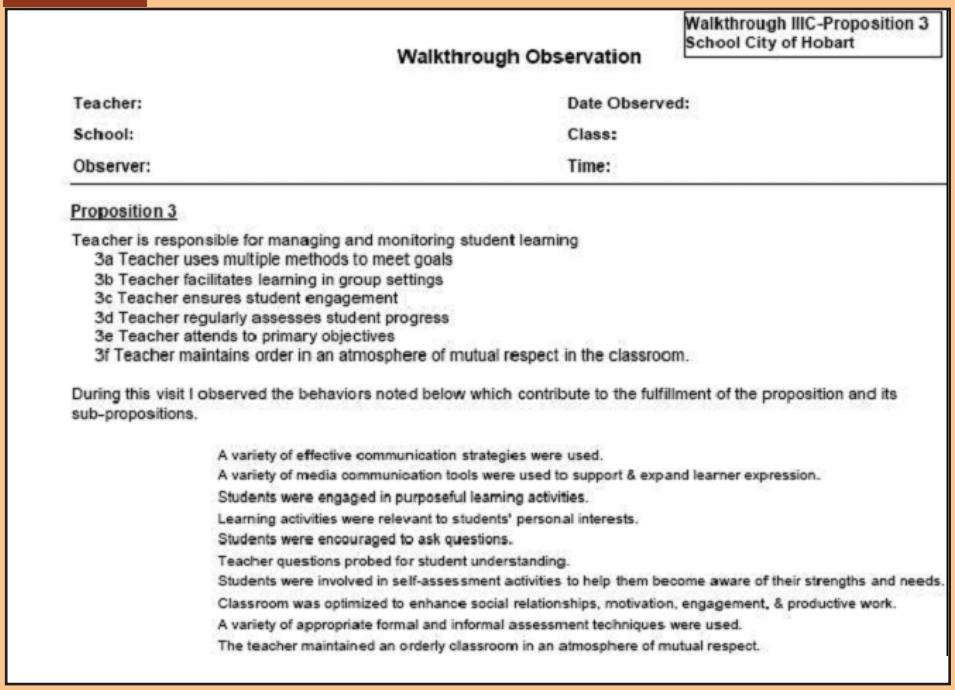
"I actually like that the schools are becoming up-to-date. My favorite is the responders, because we can say if we understand the subject or not."–7th grade student

D. Reflective Practices

Evaluation is a tool that all stakeholders see as a component to teacher accountability.

In the School City of Hobart, we participate in interest-based bargaining with the Hobart Teachers Association (HTA), working for win-win solutions for everyone. The HTA recognized, along with the administration, that the teacher evaluation instrument was antiquated and not sufficient for assisting teachers to be reflective and be the best they could be. We wanted a tool that encompassed the National Board Certification Standards. The standards include Five Core Propositions that form the foundation for what all accomplished teachers should know and be able to do and provide a reference that helps educators to link teaching standards to teaching practice. They include the following:

Figure 7



Walkthrough IIIC-Proposition 3
School City of Hobart

Walkthrough Observation

Teacher: Date Observed:

School: Class:

Observer: Time:

Proposition 3

Teacher is responsible for managing and monitoring student learning
- 3a Teacher uses multiple methods to meet goals
- 3b Teacher facilitates learning in group settings
- 3c Teacher ensures student engagement
- 3d Teacher regularly assesses student progress
- 3e Teacher attends to primary objectives
- 3f Teacher maintains order in an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom.

During this visit I observed the behaviors noted below which contribute to the fulfillment of the proposition and its sub-propositions.

A variety of effective communication strategies were used.
A variety of media communication tools were used to support & expand learner expression.
Students were engaged in purposeful learning activities.
Learning activities were relevant to students' personal interests.
Students were encouraged to ask questions.
Teacher questions probed for student understanding.
Students were involved in self-assessment activities to help them become aware of their strengths and needs.
Classroom was optimized to enhance social relationships, motivation, engagement, & productive work.
A variety of appropriate formal and informal assessment techniques were used.
The teacher maintained an orderly classroom in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Figure 8

FORM/DOCUMENT	USE
Hobart Exemplars	"Distinguished" Criteria
Goal IA-Self-Directed Professional Growth Plan (PGP)	Teacher brings to conference completed & administrator receives a copy
Goal IB-Self-Assessment	Self-Reflection
Formative IIA Classroom Observation	Classroom Observation
Formative IIB Pre-Observation (only used for scheduled observations)	Pre-Observation
Formative IIC Post-Observation	Post-Observation/Teacher Reflection
Formative IID School & Community Contributions Log	Contributions Log
Walkthrough III A – E	Propositions 1 – 5
Summative IVA	Summative Evaluation
Summative IVB	Master Teacher Growth Program (MTGP) Evaluation Options

Five Core Propositions

Proposition 1: Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

Proposition 2: Teachers know their subjects and how to teach those subjects to students.

Proposition 3: Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

Proposition 4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

Proposition 5: Teachers are members of learning communities.

We created subpropositions to specifically define performance under each core proposition. See Figure 7 for a Walkthrough Observation that highlights subpropositions 3a-3f for Proposition 3 and behaviors that contribute to fulfillment of the proposition and subpropositions.

After two years of collaborating, designing, and tool refining, we piloted a new evaluation program in 2006. Today, we have an evaluation instrument that is comprehensive and paves the way for excellence in teaching. The School City of Hobart licensed *The Administrative Observer* software for use by its principals and other administrators to generate the documentation required with the new forms.

The instrument includes the following in Figure 8:

Definitions

Following a classroom observation, for each subproposition, the administrator will select one of the designations **Meets, Does Not Meet, or No Basis for Judgment (NBJ)** to indicate the extent to which the teaching behaviors observed meet the expectations of the district. It is important to note that NBJ is not a neutral indicator. Each proposition and subproposition expresses an important teaching behavior or set of behaviors that the district expects to be evident in its classrooms. Teachers should treat all subpropositions as performance responsibilities, with a basis for judgment being almost always apparent.

When each of the subpropositions has been considered, the administrator will select one of the descriptors in Figure 9 to summarize the extent to which the teacher has fulfilled one of the core propositions.

A critical component of a teacher evaluation is that principals are strong instructional leaders. The purpose of an evaluation is not to be punitive. It is to strengthen the teacher's practice, which ultimately leads to higher student achievement. The principals in Hobart are required to participate in teacher professional development. In the nar-

rative section of the teacher evaluation, the principal can make recommendations that enhance the teacher's performance, beacuse they know the research-based strategies that are being implemented. As one of our teachers commented, "My principal could come into my classroom and teach my lesson better than I could. I appreciate the feedback she gives me. She knows and understands great teaching."

Teacher evaluation in Hobart has been and currently is collaborative with teachers. By partnering with the HTA, the instrument was designed for the mutual benefit of all. Teachers have a sense of accomplishment as they reflect on their practice. They strive for distinction, which means our students have teachers who are aspiring for greatness with their craft.

In summary, it is important to note that educators are committed souls. They are committed to their students and to the A, B, Cs of school improvement. As we approach the end of every school year in the School City of Hobart, I invite our entire faculty (K-12) to the best day of school year, GRADUATION! We celebrate in full regalia the success of our students. It is on this day that all of us get a little teary eyed and share the rewards of the awesome responsibilitywe bear in helping to shape the lives of our children and their futures. We are accountable in every way.

Figure 9

Distinguished	A distinguished teacher consistently exhibits performance of an exemplary quality almost all of the time in all areas of role expectations. Performance is without flaw in almost every instance. Any identified weaknesses are minimal in number and minor in effect. Teachers of this caliber are self-directed and have a strong, positive impact upon students and the school environment.
Evident	A designation of "evident" describes a competent classroom teacher whose performance is predominantly without flaw with no grievous or profound errors of judgment within the classroom. Any identified weaknesses can be seen as areas for growth that can be attained by conscientious effort through cooperative planning with the building-level administrator.
Unsatisfactory	An unsatisfactory teacher does not meet the expectations or requirements of the district. This teacher shows documented weaknesses in one or more areas of performance, judgment, or integrity and requires the direct, formal intervention of an administrator and consulting teacher. Continued performance at this level would have a negative impact on students and the school environment.