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**Professional Capital as Accountability**

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to clarify and spells out the responsibilities of policy makers to create the conditions for an effective accountability system that produces substantial improvements in student learning, strengthens the teaching profession, and provides transparency of results to the public. The authors point out that U.S. policy makers will need to make a major shift from a heavy reliance on external accountability and superficial structural solutions (e.g., professional standards of practice) to investing in and building the professional capital of all teachers and leaders throughout the system. The article draws key lessons from highly effective school systems in the United States and internationally to argue that the priority for policy makers should be to lead with creating the conditions for internal accountability, that is, the collective responsibility within the teaching

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profession for the continuous improvement and success of all students. This approach is based on the development and circulation of professional capital that consists of three components: individual human capital, social capital (where teachers learn from each other), and decisional capital (developing judgment and expertise over time). In this new professional accountability model, the external accountability that reassures the public that the system is performing in line with societal expectations continues to be an important role of educational systems, but it is nurtured and sustained by the development of strong internal accountability.

**Keywords:** professional capital; accountability; teachers; professional standards.

### **El capital profesional como modelo de responsabilidad educativa**

**Resumen:** Este artículo pretende aclarar y detallar las responsabilidades de los que actúan en la política educativa para crear las condiciones de un sistema de responsabilidad educativa efectiva que producir mejoras sustanciales en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, fortalecer la profesión docente, y ofrecer transparencia de los resultados al público. Los autores señalan que los responsables políticos de los Estados Unidos tendrán que hacer un gran cambio de una fuerte dependencia de sistemas de responsabilidad educativa externa y soluciones estructurales superficiales (por ejemplo, estándares de prácticas profesionales) para invertir en la construcción de capital profesional para todos los docentes y directores de el sistema. Este artículo se basa lecciones clave de los sistemas escolares más eficaces en los Estados Unidos y a nivel internacional para argumentar que la prioridad para los responsables políticos debería ser orientar la generación de condiciones para una rendición de cuentas interna, es decir, la responsabilidad colectiva de la profesión docente para una mejora continua y el éxito de todos los estudiantes. Este enfoque se basa en el desarrollo y la circulación del capital profesional que consta de tres componentes: el capital humano individual, capital social (donde los profesores aprenden unos de otros), y el capital decisional (desarrollando el juicio y experiencia con el tiempo). En este nuevo modelo de responsabilidad profesional, un sistema de responsabilidad educativa externa que tranquiliza a la opinión pública que el sistema está funcionando en línea con las expectativas de la sociedad sigue siendo un importante papel de los sistemas educativos, pero se nutre y sustenta en el desarrollo de una fuerte responsabilidad interna.

**Palabras clave:** capital profesional; rendición de cuentas; profesores; estándares profesionales.

### **Modelo de capital profissional de responsabilidade educacional**

**Resumo:** O presente artigo tem como objetivo esclarecer e detalhar as responsabilidades dos decisores de políticas educacionais para criar as condições de um sistema de responsabilização educacional eficaz que produza melhorias substanciais nos aprendizagens dos alunos, fortalecer a profissão docente e prover transparência ao público. Os autores sugerem que os formuladores de políticas nos Estados- Unidos terão que fazer uma grande mudança para deixar a forte dependência de sistemas de responsabilização educacional externos e de soluções estruturais superficiais (por exemplo, padrões de prática profissional) para investir na construção do capital profissional para todos os docentes e diretores do sistema. Este artigo aponta a lições-chave dos sistemas de ensino mais eficazes nos Estados Unidos e internacionalmente para argumentar que a prioridade para os decisores políticos deverão orientar-se para a criação de condições para a prestação de contas interna, ou seja, a responsabilidade coletiva se baseia na profissão docente para a melhoria contínua e sucesso de todos os alunos. Esta abordagem baseia-se no desenvolvimento e circulação de capital profissional que consiste em três componentes: o capital humano individual, o capital social (onde os professores aprendem uns com os outros), e equidade decisional (desenvolvimento de julgamento e experiência ao longo do tempo). Neste novo modelo de responsabilidade profissional, continua usando um sistema de responsabilidade

educacional externo para garantir ao público que o sistema está operando em linha com as expectativas da sociedade mas nutre e sustenta o desenvolvimento de uma forte responsabilização interna.

**Palavras-chave:** capital profissional; responsabilidade educacional; professores; padrões de qualidade.

## Introduction

When it comes to improving the teaching profession policy makers face a huge dilemma. As Jal Mehta (2013) concludes in *The Allure of Order* politicians are trying to do at the back end with external accountability what they should have done at the front end with capacity building. But they are where they are and back end accountability with its favorite tools—carrots and sticks—can only make matters worse.

Sorting out the role of accountability in large education systems is a complex challenge. We approach this topic by considering what we know at the overall system level, as well as what we and others have been learning at the level of school, district, and system implementation. The evidence is clear that current systems of external accountability in the U.S. are not producing increased student performance. It is also the case that most other countries that are more successful have a different approach in which accountability is much more tied to developing capacity and self and group responsibility at the level of implementation.

Several studies of successful educational systems have compared the U.S. with Ontario (on the grounds that Ontario has some basic similarities to the U.S. compared for example to Finland, or South Korea), as well as with other countries. OECD's *Strong performers and successful reformers* (2011a), McKinsey's *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better* (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010), NCEE's *Standing on the shoulders of giants* (Tucker, 2011), Fullan (2011), and Hargreaves and Shirley's (2012) *Global Fourth Way* all show that the U.S. leans more heavily on external accountability as a lever for improvement. In the more successful systems there is greater emphasis on building the individual, and especially collective capacity of educators essential for increased performance as it relates to what we will call 'internal' as well as 'external' accountability. Our goal in this paper is to unpack how accountability works in more successful school systems.

With this paper, we are joining the conversation spurred by the overall accountability paper developed by Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, and Pittenger (2014), also known as the 51<sup>st</sup> state paper. Darling-Hammond and her colleagues proposed a three-legged framework for strengthening accountability: meaningful learning, resource accountability, and professional capacity. Here we spell out the responsibilities of system leaders to create the conditions for accountability to be effective at all levels. In particular we take the 'professional capacity' component and re-cast it as *professional capital* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The reason for this reframing is that the emphasis on professional capacity can sometimes be used to justify or explain focusing on training people to meet externally defined reform requirements, and on implementing professional standards and licensure policies as a chief priority. The idea and strategy of professional capital includes the issues of individual standards and certification but redirects attention to the policy directions that emphasize developing individual and group actions that support accountability within the profession as well as functioning to provide transparency to the public.

One other important matter: our intent is to write from a standpoint of understanding and advising U.S. *policy makers*. We want the formulations presented here to be judged on whether they satisfactorily address policy makers and the public to whom they are accountable, without sacrificing

the quest for genuine improvement of learning and performance and the right and necessity of fully engaging the teaching profession and its associated organizations in this quest.

Our main question is what should be done to increase *accountability in the profession and of the profession*. When considering how to improve the quality of the teaching force, even the most well intentioned policy makers tend to start with, and focus on *structural elements* (professional standards of practice), and *individualistic expressions of these elements* (such as high quality preparation, induction and professional development) that are most obviously amenable to regulation and public explanation. Our argument is that policy makers must go beyond these matters, and additionally focus on and invest in conditions essential for increasing ‘internal accountability,’ that is a collective commitment and responsibility to improve student learning and strengthen the teaching profession.

## Internal Accountability

Simply stated, accountability is taking responsibility for one’s actions. At the core of accountability in educational systems is student learning. As City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) argue, “the real accountability system is in the tasks that students are asked to do.” Constantly improving and refining instructional practice so that students can engage in deep learning tasks is perhaps the single most important responsibility of the teaching profession and educational systems as a whole. In this sense accountability as defined here is not limited to mere gains in test scores but on deeper and more meaningful learning for all students.

Internal accountability occurs when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). External accountability is when system leaders reassure the public through transparency, monitoring and selective intervention that their system is performing in line with societal expectations and requirements. The priority for policy makers, we argue, should be to lead with creating the conditions for internal accountability, because they are more effective in achieving greater overall accountability, including external accountability. Policy makers also have direct responsibilities to address external accountability, but this latter function will be far more effective if they get the internal part right.

Existing research on school and system effectiveness and improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Leana & Pil, 2006; Marzano, 2003; Zavadsky, 2009) and our own work with educational systems in the U.S. and internationally (Fullan, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012) suggest that internal accountability must *precede* external accountability if lasting improvement in student achievement is the goal.

Richard Elmore and colleagues (2004) conducted a series of intensive case studies of individual schools, some that failed to improve, and some that improved their performance. Relative to the former, schools that failed to improve were not able to achieve instructional coherence, despite being in systems with strong external accountability. A minority of schools did develop internal coherence together and showed progress on student achievement. The main feature of successful schools was that they built a collaborative culture that combined individual responsibility, collective expectations, and corrective action—that is, internal accountability. Transparent data on instructional practices, and student achievement were a feature of these cultures. As these cultures developed, they were also able to more effectively engage the external assessment system. Highlighting the fundamental role of internal accountability on school improvement, Elmore, Ableman, Even, Kenyon, and Marshall (2004) point out:

It seems unlikely to us that schools operating in the default mode—where all questions of accountability related to student learning are essentially questions of

individual teacher responsibility—will be capable of responding to strong obtrusive accountability systems in ways that lead to systematic deliberate improvement of instruction and student learning. The idea that a school will improve, and therefore, the overall performance of its students, implies a capacity for collective deliberation and action that schools in our sample did not exhibit. Where virtually all decisions about accountability are made by individual teachers, based on their individual conceptions of what they and their students can do, it seems unlikely that these decisions will somehow aggregate into overall improvement for the school. (p. 197)

At the level of the micro-dynamics of school improvement, Elmore draws the same conclusion we do at the system-level: investing in the conditions that develop internal accountability is more important than beefing up external accountability.

The Ontario Reform Strategy, which one of us has helped design and monitor as a policy advisor, offers an illustrative example of the importance of internal accountability preceding external accountability system-wide. The Canadian province of Ontario with 4900 schools in 72 districts serving some 2 million students started in 2004 to invest in building capacity and internal accountability at the school and district levels. The initial impulse for the reform came from leadership at the top of the education system—the premier of the province and the Deputy Minister of Education—through the establishment of a small number of ambitious goals related to improvements in literacy, numeracy and high school retention. However, the major investments focused on strengthening the collective capacity of teachers, school principals, and district leaders to create the conditions for improved instructional practice and student achievement (Glaze, Mattingley, & Andrews, 2013).

There was little overt external accountability in the early stages of the Ontario Reform Strategy. External accountability measures were gradually introduced in the form of assessment results in Grade 3 and 6 in literacy, numeracy, and in high school retention numbers, transparency of data, and a school turnaround support-focused policy called Ontario Focused Intervention Program (OFIP) for schools that were underperforming. This system has yielded positive and measurable results in literacy that has improved dramatically across the 4,000 elementary schools, and in high school graduation rates that have climbed from 68% to 83% across the 900 high schools. The number of OFIP schools, originally at over 800, has been reduced to 69 schools even after the criteria to identify a school as in need of intervention had widened to include many more schools (Glaze et al., 2013; Mourshed et al., 2010).

An evaluation of the reform strategy in 10 of Ontario's 72 school districts that concentrated particularly on the special education aspects of the reform, pointed to significant narrowing of the achievement gap in writing scores for students with learning disabilities (Hargreaves & Braun, 2012). Concerns were expressed among teachers who were surveyed about some of the deleterious consequences of standardized testing in Grades 3 and 6—that the tests came at the end of the year at a point that was too late to serve a diagnostic function; that they were not sufficiently differentiated in order to match differentiated instruction strategies; and that principals in some schools placed undue emphasis on “bubble kids” near the baseline for proficiency rather than on students who struggled the most with literacy. Perhaps predictably, administrators who were surveyed at school and system level were more supportive of the standardized assessments. The most intriguing finding though was that special education resource teachers whose role was moving increasingly to providing in-class support, welcomed the presence of transparent objective data as a way of drawing the attention of regular classroom teachers to the fact and the finding that students with learning disabilities could, with the right support, register valid and viable gains in measurable student achievement. Together, these findings point to the need to review the nature and form of

high stakes assessments—more differentiated, more just-in-time and more directed at the needs of all students, perhaps—but also to the value of having transparent data that concentrates everyone’s attention on supporting all students’ success along with diagnostic data and collaborative professional responsibility for all students’ learning, development and success.

A similar approach to whole system improvement can be found in U.S. districts that have been awarded the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education, granted to urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement while reducing achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, and income. In her in-depth study of five such districts, Zavadsky (2009) finds that, while diverse in context and strategies, these districts have addressed the challenge of improving student performance system-wide following remarkably similar approaches: investing in, growing and circulating the professional capital of schools (what they term building capacity) to improve instructional practice by fostering teacher collaboration and collective accountability, while setting high instructional targets, attracting and developing talent, aligning resources to key improvement priorities, constantly monitoring progress, and providing timely targeted supports when needed.

The solid and mounting evidence on the fundamental impact of internal accountability on the effectiveness and improvement of schools and school systems contrasts sharply with the scarce or null evidence that external accountability, by itself, or as the prime driver, can bring about lasting and sustained improvements in student and school performance. There is, indeed, a growing realization that external accountability is not an effective driver of school and system effectiveness. At best, external accountability does not get its intended results. At worst, it produces undesirable and sometimes unconscionable consequences such as the cheating scandal in Atlanta (Huffington Post, 2011).

### **A New Model of Professional Accountability**

The first step on the new road to accountability is for policy makers to place their emphasis on the development of *the collective capacity of the profession* and its *responsibility for continuous improvement and for the success of all students*. We call this the *professional capital of teachers*, which consists of human capital (the quality of the individual), social capital (the quality of the group), and decisional capital (the development of expertise and professional judgment of individuals and groups to make more and more effective decisions over time) (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). There are twin pillars to this solution. First, the focus must be on creating the conditions for *social learning* (Pentland, 2014). Groups with commitments to a compelling moral purpose and to each other (rather than merely teams which are collections of people drawn together to perform particular tasks) act in more responsible and accountable ways than any external force can make them do. By contrast, virtually every policy maker thinks almost exclusively of professional learning as *individual* learning. Leverage for change comes when you ‘use the group to change the group’. In order to improve faster and more deeply, investment in collective development is the key. For this reason, policies and corresponding strategies must invest in purposeful group learning and development.

Second, for people to become more internally accountable and responsible, a developmental or growth approach is critical. Without this disposition, policymakers get stuck in back-end accountability. When actions are based on developmental and growth-oriented principles for building collective responsibility, such as investing in professional trust, joint work, and peer-based feedback, the improvement work accelerates, because it is the group that is driving it (although we will see in the next section how external accountability can guide, assess and influence the direction).

Thus, the first order of business is for policy makers to invest in internal accountability. What does this mean in practical and strategic terms? The work must be inspired and animated by a compelling and inclusive vision for change that uplifts the public and the profession and that is focused on a small number of ambitious goals. This does not necessarily mean calling on or calling in new resources but on redirecting existing resources from the external accountability tools of testing and evaluation systems that rely on costly instrumentation, individual evaluation and transient intervention towards providing incentives for schools to develop collaborative cultures, for networks of schools and districts to learn from and assist one another, for community-school development strategies, and so on.

The success of a new accountability framework relies on the creation of systems that invest in and build the professional capital of teachers and school leaders to make sound decisions in classrooms and schools based on their best collective and individual professional judgment. Crucial to this endeavor is nurturing and sustaining a professional culture of continuous improvement, collective responsibility and shared leadership in and across schools, districts, and States.

To guide the new model of professional accountability proposed here we include the following five components, distilled from key lessons from educational systems in North America and abroad that have successfully raised the bar and closed the gap of student performance and yielded high returns in many areas of achievement and development including child wellbeing:

1. Vision and focus
2. Collective capacity and responsibility
3. Leadership development
4. Growth-oriented assessment
5. System coherence and cohesion

### **Vision and Focus**

Building professional capital across educational systems requires creating an inspiring and inclusive vision that raises the importance of and sets the direction for education and with teachers in a way that resonates with and inspires a majority of educators, school and system leaders, and society as a whole to pursue it. The Ministry of Education in Singapore (2014), for example, (the highest performing country on most international assessments in the world), urges its teachers to believe in their students, believe in themselves, believe in each other (collective responsibility) and believe in something bigger than themselves (their contribution to the future of the whole society).

Setting a small number of ambitious goals, giving first priority to the enhancement of professional practice, and making the learning of all students a shared responsibility of everyone across the system are crucial elements of such a vision. In the North American systems described earlier, this vision is summarized in what one of us has called the moral imperative: all students learning at high levels (Fullan, 2011). Goals, standards and even targets can be set if done in a shared manner. We have seen these practices work effectively not only in educational systems (Fullan, 2010; Glaze et al., 2013; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Zavadsky, 2009) but also in high performing organizations of all kinds in the work of one of us on uplifting leadership (Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, 2014). For instance, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets lifted itself from being the worst performing district in England over a ten year period, to then topping the national averages, in part by the borough's schools setting ambitious targets for improvement together that were more ambitious than the targets given to them by the Government (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Outside education, Cricket Australia, the national sporting organization of Australia, established a vision to become Australia's most popular sport by setting and reviewing shared targets for participation in

cricket viewing and playing which included schools, poor rural communities, visible ethnic minority groups, girls and women, and so on (Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, 2014).

The vision and resulting goals also have to be accompanied by clear, appealing, and evidence-based definitions of effective pedagogy, collaboration and leadership. This has been an essential component of every improved North American system we have described here. In our role as Advisers to the Premier and Minister of Education of Ontario, two of us will face this challenge in bringing its inspiring new vision to life in order to achieve the key goals of excellence (including performance in math, and arts and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills), equity (including indigenous communities and special needs populations), wellbeing (which will require sharper definition and also measurement) and public confidence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

There should be strong support for each high expectation. Inviting the participation of teachers and school leaders to shape, lead, and, over time, review and renew the overall vision and standards of practice will increase the likelihood of ownership, a better solution, and sustainability. The allocation and alignment of policies and resources to support the achievement of the inclusive and inspiring vision and to bring the vision to life in practice has been a central component of the approaches followed by the successful US districts studied by Zavadsky (2009), and by the system studies we identified earlier (Glaze et al., 2013; Mourshed et al., 2010; OECD, 2010; Tucker, 2010).

### **Collective Capacity and Responsibility**

Collaboration focused on the improvement of teaching and learning is one of the highest-yielding strategies to boost student, school and system performance. The research on the power of collaborative cultures to get results has been accumulating over 40 years. It points to the power of social capital—the agency and impact of strong and effective groups—to improve student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Elmore, 2007; Hord, 1997; Huberman, 1995; Leana & Pil, 2006; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Little, 1982, 2002; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Wilson, 1994).

The social capital strategy consists of simultaneously building individual and collective efficacy and creating links of lateral accountability that push and pull team members to get better at their practice. Furthermore, effective collaboration nurtures the kind of professional culture needed to create and sustain over time the professional capital of teachers and school leaders across the system (Elmore et al., 2004; Little, 1982; Wilson, 1994). In these cultures, responsibility for the success of all students is shared among all teachers and schools in a community. One of us recently asked a number of individuals working in these collaborative cultures the following question: in your school or the schools you know, how do teachers or administrators talk about accountability (Fullan, in press)? Here are some of the responses:

Accountability is now primarily described as accountability for student learning. It is less about some test result and more about accepting ownership of the moral imperative of having every student learn. Teachers talk about “monitoring” differently. As they engage in greater sharing of the work, they talk about being accountable as people in the school community who know what they are doing, and who look to see what is changing for students as a result. And as they continue to de-privatize teaching they talk about their principal and peers coming into their classrooms and expecting to see the work [of agreed upon practices] reflected in their teaching, their classroom walls, and student work.

Teachers and administrators talk about accountability by de-privatizing their practice. If everyone knows what the other teacher or administrator is working on and how

they are working on it with students, it becomes a lot easier to talk about accountability. When everyone has an understanding of accountability, creating clear goals and steps to reach those goals, it makes it easier for everyone to talk and work in accountable environments.

We are moving to defining accountability as responsibility. My district has been engaged in some important work that speaks to intrinsic motivation, efficacy, perseverance etc and accountability is seen as doing what is best for students... working together to tackle any challenge, and being motivated by our commitment as opposed to some external direction.

These expressions are indicators of internal accountability at work. They are more powerful in impact—because are built into the day-to-day culture—than any external accountability system could be.

From a policy perspective effective teacher collaboration can be stimulated in a number of ways, which include:

- Creating incentives for schools and districts to establish flexible structures within the school day and year that allocate time for teachers and leaders to participate in collegial planning, job-embedded professional learning opportunities, and collaboration focused on analyzing evidence of student learning and developing focused strategies for improvement. Remember that U.S. teachers and students start school very early long before 8 am—no skinny lattes on the way to the office for them—so funneling most collaboration into after-class time is often more of an inexpensive solution than an effective one.
- Providing continuous professional learning opportunities for networks of educators focused on developing the practice of teaching and leadership through extended institutes, collective inquiry, action research to solve complex problems of practice, and coaching. Collaborative inquiry into practice and how to improve it should be supported and expected as a continuous, real-time professional practice, not an occasional one appended to a few school days.
- Facilitating exchanges between schools that tap into the existing professional capital of high performing schools to assist schools in a similar context that struggle to improve.
- Providing resources for pedagogy-focused innovation and collaboration between and among teachers and school leaders.
- Creating venues for teachers and leaders across the system to identify institutional processes and practices that constrain their improvement work and to devise solutions to remove or diminish those constraints.
- Making exemplary practice in pedagogy, collaboration and leadership widely visible across the system in professional learning sessions, newsletters, public speeches, and easily accessible as well as interactive online formats.
- Redirecting the planning of curriculum units of study from being the responsibility of consultants in state or district central office towards enabling teachers working across schools to develop more curriculum together—investing in their own professional capital and especially social capital as they create high quality curriculum units of study together. This also means creating curriculum space and resource support from teachers to do this kind of work together—for instance, through place-based educational materials in isolated and impoverished rural communities that increase students' engagement in their learning.

## **Leadership Development**

A system-wide strategy that develops and values leadership capital of all kinds and at all levels is necessary to stimulate and create the conditions for a new professional culture of school and system improvement (Fullan, 2001; Glaze et al., 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano & Waters, 2006). Such a strategy would include:

- Creating high quality and sustained professional learning opportunities for principals and district leaders. These would be aimed at building their individual and collective knowledge, skill and expertise to: a) participate as learners in the professional learning of teachers; b) create conditions, cultures and routines for effective teacher collaboration; c) provide effective feedback and stimulate its use; d) manage complexity while maintaining focus on the school's key priorities; and e) expand their influence, assistance and responsibility beyond their own schools just as teachers are expected to expand their influence, assistance and responsibility beyond their own classes.
- Creating incentives for outstanding students, teachers, principals, districts and their schools to provide support to schools with similar demographics that struggle to improve, including release time to visit and host leaders and staff of the school(s) being supported.
- Developing multiple channels of communication and consultation with students, teachers and school leaders to bring the key priorities of the system to their attention and to invite their input and advice on specific policy problems and initiatives.
- Creating platforms and incentives for students, teachers and school leaders to drive, rather than simply implement, and to innovate in and improve teaching and learning in schools and across the system.

## **Growth Oriented Assessment**

In the new accountability framework, assessment is used primarily for learning and growth. Once again, growth here is not narrowly defined as increases in test scores, but as the development of increased capacity to develop, test and refine increasingly sophisticated and deeper learning tasks for students. In this new framework, teachers and leaders learn to effectively provide, take and, most importantly, use feedback. Assessment and feedback take place in an atmosphere of trust and a culture that supports learning. Turning growth-oriented assessment and feedback into a collective responsibility of teachers and school leaders solves the current "span of control" issue, whereby principals are solely responsible for the performance appraisal of dozens of teachers in the course of a year, a guarantee for formulaic superficiality. Collaborative cultures where growth-oriented assessment and feedback are a regular practice of teachers and leaders offer a more effective and sustainable solution to the improvement of the teaching profession.

Key strategies to stimulate and sustain growth-oriented assessment and the culture that nurtures it have been outlined elsewhere (Hargreaves & Braun, 2013; Tucker, 2014) and include:

- Repositioning the role of tests by: a) reducing the number and frequency of math and language tests and administering at selected grades; b) removing from these tests the high-stakes for schools, teachers or students; c) using multiple sources of data on student and school performance to identify and develop focused support strategies for schools that struggle to improve; d) developing and using indicators to identify whether or not improvements have been achieved in relation to agreed starting points or baselines; e) moving data systems and collection from the end of the year after students have already been taught, to during the school year where the data can provide teachers with feedback that will help their own students and enable them to improve their own practice; f)

developing a limited number of high quality high stakes tests that cover the whole core curriculum, which students will take only a few times in their school career.

- Incorporating multiple sources of evidence on student learning and teacher practice as key inputs for teacher collaboration and performance reviews.
- Defining what effective growth-oriented assessment looks like, identifying exemplary practices, and diffusing them across the system in public speeches, newsletters, easy-to-access and interactive online sites, etc.
- Providing sustained high quality professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders to learn and continuously practice how to provide, take and use effective feedback.

These practices are already characteristic of many high performing educational systems around the world and importantly, also represent exemplary practice in business and sports, which use a wide range of data, in real time, combined with collective inquiry and effective combination with good professional judgment to improve practice (Hargreaves & Braun, 2013; Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, 2014).

### **System Coherence and Cohesion**

System coherence is about developing shared mindsets. System cohesion is about developing focus and a shared depth of understanding about the nature of the work (Fullan, 2010). Walk into any classroom or school in a highly coherent and cohesive system, and people will be able to articulate effortlessly what they are doing in their classrooms and the school as a whole, how their actions connect to the wider system priorities, and what supports are in place for them to advance those priorities. The big picture is not just the prerogative a few high-level leaders in the school or district office; it is the property of everyone. In a highly coherent and cohesive system, you will also hear genuine excitement about learning and teaching and a sense of shared accomplishment. Key strategies to develop system coherence and cohesion include:

- Fostering ongoing two-way communication and consultation across the system to communicate key priorities and developments to teachers and school leaders; to invite their input and advice on policy challenges, directions and initiatives; and to foster their leadership as drivers rather than merely implementers of improvement work in schools and across the system.
- Creating venues for representatives from all levels of the system to discuss progress, identify those practices and policies that constrain the efforts of schools and principals to focus on their improvement work, and make decisions to reduce distractions and overload.
- Creating a system-wide learning system aimed at investing in, building, deepening and circulating professional capital. This agency, ideally led by people with deep and extensive classroom and school leadership expertise, would share research and best practices, document and disseminate what is working in schools, and stimulate learning networks where districts, schools, principals and teachers learn from and assist one another.

The five elements just described form the core of establishing the conditions conducive to internal accountability. When such conditions are embraced and reinforced with transparency across the system, they create the 'push and pull' dynamics of highly effective and internally accountable systems. It is demanding work for the self and the group. Much of the work of accountability gets built in or embedded in everyday practice. Once system leaders understand the nature of internal accountability or personal, professional and collective responsibility (Sahlberg, 2011), and lead with it, they are then in a better position to frame external accountability as an effective force.

## External Accountability

Most educational external accountability systems *start* with professional standards of practice. It's a tempting beginning: they are cheap to produce, look good on paper, and have famous consultants from all over the world more than willing to provide rubrics that give administrators illusions of instant professional control. This is the wrong way to drive change. These frameworks are useful as guideposts, but are not sufficient to cause improvement. In order to leverage accountability and achievement, the external system must additionally focus on and enable the development of other factors that are related to performance outcomes, namely, transparency, explicitness, precision, indicators and interventions that propel the system to greater accomplishments.

Transparency of results and practice is a *sine qua non* of accountable systems. Punitive accountability fails because it suppresses transparency as people hide what they are doing. But transparency—whether it is in visibly observed practice, in routine collaborative relationships, on data dashboards, or even in the twitter-sphere—can carry a lot of influence because it combines push (compelling people to take performance data into account), and pull (drawing people into an engaging improvement process). Transparency can also be used by the external system to circulate ideas, and stimulate mutual learning.

Explicitness, precision and linkage to results and impact go together. The external accountability system should appropriately be preoccupied by impact and results, and by the related question of what causes them. Solutions require clarity of outcome and process. So much is hidden in what organizations do that the external system, especially in public endeavors, must play a role in helping understand what is going on and with what value. Explicitness of practice as it links to outcomes is extremely valuable, not so that it can be prescribed, but so that there is *clarity* about what is going on.

The external system should primarily foster whole system improvement. If development and growth are the center of gravity of its approach to accountability the system can then appropriately intervene when there is crisis, and in the case of persistently low performance.

With strong internal accountability as the context we can now introduce the external accountability role of the system that includes:

- i. Establishing and promoting professional standards and practices including performance appraisal, undertaken by professionally respected peers and leaders in teams wherever possible and developing the expertise of teachers and teacher leaders so that they can undertake these responsibilities. With the robust judgments of respected leaders and peers, then getting rid of teachers who should not be in the profession will become a transparent collective responsibility.
- ii. Ongoing monitoring of the performance of the system including direct intervention with schools and districts in cases of persistent underperformance.
- iii. Insisting on reciprocal accountability that manages “up” as well as down so that systems are held accountable for providing the resources and supports that are essential in enabling schools and teachers to fulfill expectations (for example, “failing” schools should not be closed when they have been insufficiently resourced, or individual teachers should be evaluated in the context of whether they have been forced into different grade assignments every year or have experienced constant leadership instability).
- iv. Adopting and applying indicators of organizational health as a context for individual teacher and leader performance such as staff retention rates, leadership turnover rates, teacher absenteeism levels, numbers of crisis related incidents etc., in addition to outcome indicators of student performance and wellbeing. These would include measures of social capital in the teaching

profession such as extent of collaboration, levels of collegial trust etc. Outcome measures for students should also, as above, include multiple measures including wellbeing, students' sense of control over their own destiny (locus of control), levels of engagement in learning etc.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) lay out the elements of standards for teachers and leaders relative to preparation, licensure, retention, ongoing development, quality review processes and the like. But since standards are such poor drivers and policy makers gravitate to them all too easily because they appear obvious, easy and cheap, we evaluate their role here in relation to their developmental as well as their judgmental function. These standards should be used to screen candidates for the profession, support and sort beginning teachers, and help drive development through helping to increase expertise, such as investing in increasing the numbers of teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). They should not be used as the main driver of individual teacher quality or human capital and cannot be the chief force in building strong social capital among teachers in a collaborative profession. Instead, NBPTS strategies must be integrated with other practices that develop comprehensive professional capital of the teaching profession.

Paradoxically, performance appraisal is not a powerful way to increase performance (compared for example to collaborative cultures). Frameworks and tools of appraisal may be helpful, but it is not the tool per se that counts. It is *the attitude and philosophy that governs its use*. Have a developmental and internal accountability stance of collective professional responsibility and half the battle is won. As one of us has said elsewhere, *[external] accountability should be the small remainder that is left once responsibility has been subtracted* (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Now we come to the elephant that is still in the room. Any credible accountability system will have to have the capacity to remove teachers who should not be in the profession. Currently, however, teacher evaluation schemes have a 'scorched earth' orientation—establish tough, consequential evaluation for all to get at the few. This strategy, that employs repeated individual performance evaluations in relation to so-called value added measures of student achievement, is a technical, moral and legal nightmare. There are notorious cases of teachers who teach so few (tested) students that scores and associated judgments fluctuate wildly from year to year and of teachers whose performance is evaluated on the basis of students they don't actually teach (Pullin, 2013). These issues are not only unfair to teachers who are often judged unreasonably, and to students who are tested (rather than taught) pervasively in order to serve administrative purposes. They also undermine accountability by destroying its public credibility (Hargreaves & Braun, 2013). The strategy may win the odd battle but it loses the war and indeed perpetrates an unnecessary and unjustified war in the first place.

The best bet in securing a system that is both developmental and robust is to work out the solution with teachers' organizations. We are finding that teachers and teacher unions and associations are strongly attracted to the professional capital framework. With professional capital underpinning teacher development it will be possible, indeed desirable from the perspective of the strong social capital of teachers as a whole, to have seriously ineffective teachers leave the profession (assuming development has been tried, and due process is followed). Indeed, at the school level, this is what conscientious colleagues working in a strong collaborative culture focused on student learning and development very often want.

But, if principals do not really know their teachers, don't understand their personal and professional lives, aren't curious about their classrooms, and have not taken the time to understand how their practice and performance has evolved over time; if the only time principals see their teachers is during formal evaluation events, then they will often misdiagnose poor practice and the reasons for it. They might take a lesson out of context—a disruptive class that was unsettled by their previous teacher perhaps. They might see failure to post standards on the wall as a professional flaw

without knowing that the teacher wants the point of that particular lesson—in social studies or drama perhaps—to unfold and be a surprise. An incoming principal may not know that an older teacher's performance has dipped because of illness or crises in their family, or because of having been turned inward and turned off by a rapid preceding succession of poor principals. Evaluate these teachers unfairly as ones who deserve professional exit, and the other staff will protect them and organize against you in trying to remove them. More than this, because you as a principal are perceived as being unfair by simply not knowing your teachers and their teaching well, they will also defend the more genuinely incompetent colleagues against whom your judgments are also directed. This is why internal accountability based on deep professional knowledge and collaboration is an indispensable platform for effective external accountability. This is why we have recast the role of the principal as 'lead learner', who participates with teachers in learning how to move the school forward (Fullan, 2014)—a school leadership practice that has the highest impact on student outcomes (Robinson, 2008).

Second, transparent ongoing monitoring of the performance of the system and its subparts is a key role for external accountability. There are many issues here because the educational goals and corresponding measures of student assessment are in flux (for most states) with the Common Core State Standards. We also recognize the value of quality reviews, especially if carried out with some peers on the review team. If we follow the primacy of internal accountability we will 'use the group to change the group' to do much of this work. Lateral assistance from other high performing schools will take precedence over sending transient top-down turnaround teams from central office. A case in point is the school-to-school assistance strategies in some of England's most rapidly improving urban districts (Fullan & Boyle, 2014).

Beyond this, states should have an intervention policy that in the first place intervenes to develop the capacity of the system, and only when necessary, as a last resort, employs more drastic measures like takeover. Crucial to the monitoring of performance is ensuring that measures reflect widely shared and valued outcomes in a valid, reliable, and accurate way; that multiple measures are used to capture the full range of what the school and school system value; and that indicators focus on whether or not improvements have been achieved relative to agreed starting points or baselines. Above all, transparency should be based on collaborative knowledge of teachers and teaching in regular (not just formalized) observation and ongoing, trusting professional relationships. High trust is associated with high performance; high threat is not (Daly, 2009).

### **Final Thoughts**

The OECD (2011b, p. 54) background report to the International Summit on the Teaching Profession concludes that reform efforts are doomed to fail unless teachers and their associations become involved in helping to shape and assess improvement policies and strategies. Higher performing systems, such as Alberta and Ontario have stronger engagement with their unions than do jurisdictions in the U.S. We recognize that once the conditions for back-end accountability become entrenched it is extremely difficult to undo them. Hence, our paper is intended to recommend a way forward from the current impasse.

Accountability is not just a matter of overseeing the present. It is essential to be 'accountable for the future'. Hargreaves, Boyle, and Harris (2014) in their study of how organizations (in sports, business, and education) raise performance identified key characteristics of *Uplifting leadership*. The first of these was 'dreaming with determination'. Accountability must also be forward looking. This can only be done effectively if the internal and external accountability systems work in tandem.

It should be clear that the system has a role in both internal and external accountability. Relative to the former, policy makers will need to make a major shift from superficial structural

solutions to investing in and leveraging internal accountability and building the professional capital of all teachers and leaders throughout the system. Once started, this is an investment that keeps on giving and, most of all, results in all levels of the system doing the work of day-to-day accountability. Furthermore, the more internal accountability takes hold, the more schools and districts will seek and use external input on how well they are doing (external accountability). This means that the specialized work of cultivating system success and intervening on a selective basis will be much more manageable and effective. Great accountability improves the present as it shapes the future. It invests in, grows and circulates professional capital throughout the system. Back-end accountability does not. Combine internal and external accountability as we have portrayed them, and you will get higher performance, greater self and group responsibility for results, and more commitment to sustaining and enhancing all students' learning, development and success.

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