

Chapter Eight

Measuring Progress

When the Center for School Change requested proposals for school improvement projects, guidelines were clear. The Center was looking for projects that could show — over a period of time — increases in three areas:

- measurable improvements in students' academic skills;
- curriculum that involves students in study of local history and community issues; and
- more extensive local use of school buildings, equipment and expertise of educators.

With those goals in mind, the Center asked grant sites to use a variety of measures including standardized tests, performance assessments, logs and surveys — *whatever worked* — to gauge progress.

Measuring progress was sometimes an unpopular requirement. After all, folks involved in school change projects tended to be working as hard and fast as they could to keep up with innovations in curriculum and day-to-day classroom tasks. Tests and surveys took time away from good work teachers and students preferred to be doing, and sometimes it was difficult to find an instrument that measured a specific goal.

"Isn't it enough," some asked, "that we can see improvements in the ways our students are working?"

Why We Measure

From a school change standpoint, there are two basic reasons to measure progress toward goals. First, assessment helps projects be accountable. Second, good measures provide a means of establishing guidelines for further improvement.

Beyond meeting the requirements of funders, school change planners must consider the needs of students, parents and the communities in which the projects are taking place. Periodic assessment helps answer the questions: "What have students learned?" and "Is this program worthwhile?"

At the same time, results from a variety of measures can help planners guide and redirect programs. If wonderful plans do not produce good results for children, programs need to be adjusted. On the other hand, if something works very well, teachers need to understand why so they can continue and build upon the work.

Start with Goals

Center for School Change sites confirm that effective measures do not come about after the fact. They are based on carefully designed project goals and built into school improvement plans.

Early in the planning process, CSC sites were encouraged to gather hopes and dreams. They were asked to look ahead five years and consider:

- What will be different for students?
- What will be different for teachers?
- What will be different for parents and community members?

Answers varied with circumstances and locations, but in many places these questions helped planners develop concrete goals that guided their planning. By considering what the results of their work might be, planners were able to picture the indicators that would be measures of their success.

Well-written goals go beyond abstract statements. While "More students will work with adults in the community," is an admirable idea, a more effective goal is "There will be a 20 percent increase in the number of students who take part

Recommended Reading

Succeeding with Standards: Linking Curriculum, Assessment and Action Planning, Judy F. Carr and Douglas E. Harris, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Va., 2001.

in job shadowing experiences."

In order to promote purposeful change, goals should be specific, achievable and measurable.

Finally, *a few* may be more important than *a bunch* when it comes to setting goals. While it is helpful to create different kinds of goals, both academic and nonacademic, the experience of Center for School Change sites has been that goals are most likely to be nurtured, measured and achieved when planners focus on a few at a time.

In order to promote purposeful change, goals should be:

- ▶ specific
- ▶ achievable
- ▶ measurable

Defining Measures

The best kinds of measures are designed with several questions in mind:

- What information is needed?
- Who is going to use the information gathered?
- How will the information be used?

For the Center for School Change and its sites, *what* included results from standardized tests, information related to students' performances on skills such as speaking or writing, portfolios, exhibitions and surveys of students, parents and teachers. Some schools monitored use of school buildings or kept logs of volunteer hours. In most cases, preliminary information was gathered, and measures were repeated on an annual basis.

Who included Center for School Change staff members, independent evaluators and local planners.

How varied from user to user. CSC staff members referred to results in reports and articles. Evaluators used results as evidence of the effectiveness of Center for School Change work. And grant sites passed information along to parents, administrators and school board members. Some sites used results to support the need for programs or to prompt revisions in the ways they carried out their work.

A Mix of Measures

Determining the kinds of measures to use may not be a simple task.

State and nationally normed tests do a relatively good job when it comes to comparing students'

Features of Effective Academic Assessment Programs

A Center for School Change report, supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Education and issued in December 2000, lists several features critical to effective academic assessment. Included are:

- ▶ **Clear Goals** — Clear, explicit measurable learning goals, outcomes or standards, along with a curriculum designed to help students reach the goals.
- ▶ **Outcomes Understood** — Teachers, parents, students and community members understand and support the expected outcomes and goals. Students and parents have examples of what is required, and have opportunities to work with teachers toward improving students' performance.
- ▶ **Multiple Measures** — The school uses many methods of assessment, not just standardized multiple choice tests.
- ▶ **Assessment Is Part of an Integrated Approach to School Improvement** — Assessment is used not just for ranking or sorting, but to modify instruction and suggest areas for staff development.
- ▶ **Language Proficiency** — Assessment takes students' language proficiency into account to assure that the system actually measures what students know.
- ▶ **All Students Are Assessed** — The school reports on the academic growth of all of its students.
- ▶ **Outside People Help Judge Student Work** — Assessment may include community experts, parents or others willing to review students' work.
- ▶ **Assessment Measures Graduates** — Attitudes of people who have graduated from the school are valued.
- ▶ **Assessment Committee Includes a Variety of People** — Parents, educators, community members and — in secondary schools — students can help plan and monitor the assessment system.

From *What Should We Do? A Practical Guide to Assessment and Accountability in Schools*, Joe Nathan and Nicola Johnson, Center for School Change, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, December 2000. To obtain a copy, call the CSC office at 612-626-1834 or visit the Web site, www.centerforschoolchange.org.

progress in reading, language, math and social studies skills with that of other students of a similar age. In order to demonstrate students' abilities in core subject areas, standardized tests can be a valuable part of an assessment program.

CSC project planners often pointed out, however, that multiple choice standardized tests do not measure the kinds of skills students learn when working in groups or spending time out in the community. Beyond that, standardized tests may not indicate a student's ability to put knowledge to practical use. For those reasons, many sites developed assessments that required students to perform tasks rather than pick out test answers. In some cases, schools recruited community members to help teachers and other staff members judge the quality of students' work based on a predetermined set of guidelines.

While creating and evaluating performance assessments requires more staff time than monitoring standardized tests, the results indicate how well students are able to apply their knowledge and skills. For that reason, the Center for School Change asked sites to use both standardized and performance assessments to monitor students' progress.

Baseline Data

Once measures have been designed, it is important to collect baseline data — either before a project starts or very shortly after it begins. Without preliminary information, there is no basis for comparison and no way to prove that a project is meeting its goals.

Assign Tasks

It takes more than good intentions to ensure effective evaluation. In addition to selecting measures, be sure to give someone responsibility for purchasing tests, setting up schedules and distributing surveys. Without someone in charge, measurement and evaluation tasks may be lost in the scramble to keep up with daily work. Sample evaluation plans are included on pages 155 – 156.

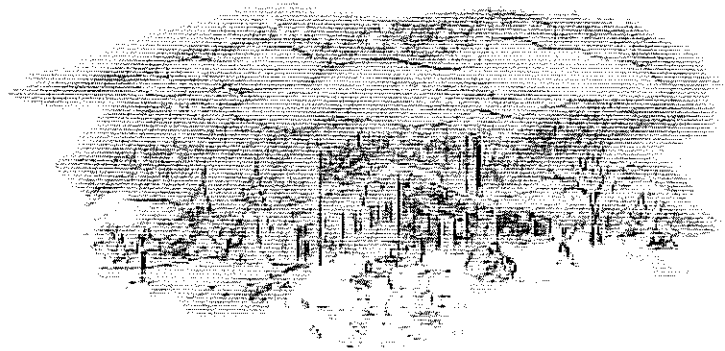
Survey Samples

In addition to an assessment plan, this chapter includes surveys used by Phase II CSC sites to

Elements of Performance Assessments:

- ▶ A student's active creation of a response that results in a performance or product that may be observed; and
- ▶ Tasks that represent *real world* kinds of problems or issues.

measure attitudes of students, parents, teachers and administrators. These surveys (pages 157 – 165) document items such as the school's interaction with the community, students' sense of safety and types of parent involvement. Another survey (pages 102 – 103) was created by teachers and community members from International Falls, along with Allison Anfinson of the Center for Reducing Rural Violence, to measure student behavior. Like all other materials in this book, the surveys may be copied and modified to meet readers' needs.



Sample Evaluation Overview

Purpose: Measures will indicate: satisfaction of parents, students and teachers; kinds of parent involvement; sense of community involvement; academic measures.

Task	When	Who Does	Who Compiles	Who Analyzes and Reports
Surveys of Parents	Baseline – first fall Annual in May	All parents	Parent or community volunteer	Principal, advisory committee
Surveys of Students	Baseline – first fall Annual in May	All students	Parent or community volunteer	Principal, advisory committee
Surveys of Teachers	Baseline – first fall Annual in May	All teachers	Parent or community volunteer	Principal, advisory committee
Interviews of Five Community Contacts	Annual in May	Advisory com. member	Advisory committee member	Principal, advisory committee
Volunteer Sign-In Log	Continuous	All volunteers	Parent or community volunteer	Principal, advisory committee, parents' group
Academic Measures	Annually	Students	Outside source	Principal, advisory committee, teachers

- MCAs (Minnesota Comprehensive Achievement tests) to grades 3 and 5, as scheduled
- ITBS to grades 2 – 5, fall
- Writing samples to prompts in grades 3 – 5, September and May
- Student portfolios – all grades, continuous

Plan will be reviewed by principal, advisory committee and teachers each year. Last updated May 1, 2002.

Administrator Survey

Name of Project _____ Date _____

Please answer the questions below. Elaborate where appropriate.

1. Do you feel safe and respected when you are in the school?
2. What indication do you have that students are valuable resources in the community?
3. In what ways are school staff members valuable resources in the community?
4. In what ways are parents and community members involved in educating students outside the classroom?
5. How are parents and community members involved in educating students within the classroom?
6. In what ways does the community make use of school facilities?
7. How do you encourage and continue to support innovations in local schools?
8. How do educators, parents, students and other community members work together to strengthen the community and increase student achievement?
9. Do you feel that this school helps students to use the community as a place to learn?
10. What aspects of the school do you especially like?
11. If you could make changes to improve this school, what would they be?

Teacher Survey

Please circle one response for questions 1–7, and write brief answers for questions 8–10.

1. Parents and community members are involved in educating students in my classroom.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. Parents help their children with school projects outside school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3. Community members volunteer time and resources outside the classroom to help educate students.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. Administrators encourage and continue to support innovations in our school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. I feel I have the support of colleagues.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. I enjoy teaching in our school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

7. Educators, parents, students, and other community members work together to strengthen our community and increase student achievement.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Please respond to 8–10 on the back of this sheet or on a separate piece of paper.

8. How do parents and community members use the school and school staff as resources?

9. What do you do to help yourself become a better teacher?

10. If you could make improvements in your school, what would they be?

Parent Survey

Please circle one response for questions 1–6, and write brief answers for questions 7–10.

1. Parents are encouraged to take part in educating students in the classroom.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. I am involved with my child's education.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Please indicate the ways you participate. Mark all that apply.

- Attending workshops, using materials provided by the school
- Conferences, phone calls, visiting or exchanging notes with teachers
- Volunteer work in the school or classroom
- Helping with homework or doing family activities which support learning
- Participation in PTA/PTO or school committees
- Through support of other activities such as music lessons, sports, scouting
- Other (please describe)

3. Community members volunteer time and resources in and outside the classroom to help educate students.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. Administrators encourage and continue to support innovations in our school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. I am enthusiastic about this school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. Parents, educators, students, and other community members work together as a team to strengthen our community and increase student achievement.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Please respond to 7–10 on the back of this sheet or on a separate piece of paper.

7. How does your school encourage your child to learn about the local community?

8. Do you use the school and school staff members as resources? If so, how?

9. What aspects of your child's school or classroom do you especially like?

10. If you could make improvements in you child's school, what would they be?

Parent involvement questions are based on six types of parent involvement listed in *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, Joyce Epstein and others, Corwin Press, Inc., 1997.

Secondary Student Survey

Please circle one response for each statement.

1. I am happy with the quality of work I do in school.

Yes No Sometimes

2. The things I learn in school are useful to me.

Yes No Sometimes

3. My school provides learning experiences outside the school building.

Yes No

4. Community members volunteer time and resources to help me learn.

In the classroom? Yes No

Outside the classroom? Yes No

5. Parents volunteer time and resources to help me learn.

In the classroom? Yes No

Outside the classroom? Yes No

6. My school has helped me understand how to improve my community.

Yes No

7. I do things which help my school and/or community.

Often Occasionally Never

8. When I am an adult, I would like to live in this community or one similar to it.

Yes No Maybe

9. How do you feel about going to school? Please circle one response.

- I like school very much.
- I like school quite a bit.
- I like school a little.
- I don't like school very much.
- I hate school.

10. During the last 30 days, how often have you skipped or cut full days of school?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Never | 6 to 10 times |
| Once or twice | More than 10 times |
| 3 to 5 times | |

11. During the last 30 days, how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on a school bus?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Never | 6 to 10 times |
| Once or twice | More than 10 times |
| 3 to 5 times | |

12. How many students in your school

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|------|-------|------|
| Are friendly? | All | Most | Some | A few | None |
| Behave well in the hallways and lunchroom? | All | Most | Some | A few | None |
| Make fun of or threaten students of different races or backgrounds? | All | Most | Some | A few | None |

13. How many of your teachers

- | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|------|------|-------|------|
| Are interested in you as a person? | All | Most | Some | A few | None |
| Show respect for students? | All | Most | Some | A few | None |

Elementary Student Survey – Grades 3–6

Please circle one response for each statement in questions 1–10.

1. I am happy with the quality of work I do in school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. I feel safe in school.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3. I feel safe going to and from school (walking or on the bus).

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. When I have questions, I know it's OK to ask them.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. Sometimes my class learns outside our school building. We take trips or visit places in our town.

Yes No

6. People from the community come to our class to help us learn.

Yes No

7. Parents come to our class to help us learn.

Yes No

8. My school has helped me understand how to improve my community.

Yes No

9. I do things which help my school and community.

Yes No

10. How do you feel about going to school? Please circle one response.

- I like school very much.
- I like school quite a bit.
- I like school a little.
- I don't like school very much.
- I hate school.

11. How many students in your school

Are friendly?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
Behave well in the hallways and lunchroom?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
Make fun of other students?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
Behave well on the playground?	All	Most	Some	A few	None

Please write brief answers to the following questions.

12. What are the things you especially like about your school?

13. What would make your school a better place?

Elementary Student Survey – Grades K–2

Please circle one answer for each statement.

1. I am happy with the quality of work I do in school.

Yes No

2. I feel safe in school.

Yes No

3. I feel safe going to and from school (walking or on the bus).

Yes No

4. When I have questions, I know it's OK to ask them.

Yes No

5. Sometimes, my class learns outside our school building. We take trips or visit places in our town.

Yes No

6. People from the community come to our class to help us learn.

Yes No

7. Parents come to our class to help us learn.

Yes No

8. My school has helped me understand how to improve my community.

Yes No

9. I do things which help my school and community.

Yes

No

10. How do you feel about going to school? Please circle one response.

I like school very much.

I like school quite a bit.

I like school a little.

I don't like school very much.

I hate school.

11. How many students in your school

Are friendly?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
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Behave well in the hallways and lunchroom?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
--------------------------------------------	-----	------	------	-------	------

Make fun of other students?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
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Behave well on the playground?	All	Most	Some	A few	None
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