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## The Accountability Movement Seeks To Motivate Educators To Produce Better Results

### Will It Succeed?

There is no question about it: The times they are a changing. "Whereas it was once sufficient to run an orderly, well-organized school with qualified teachers and up-to-date curriculum, it now appears as though results will be the universal yardstick of leadership," notes Larry Lashway in his latest book, *The New Standards and Accountability: Will Rewards and Sanctions Motivate America's Schools to Peak Performance?*

The nation's public schools are increasingly expected to produce results. Although most people heartily support the idea of having some means in place to assess whether schools are achieving their mission, agreement disappears quickly when discussion turns to what the outcomes of education should be. Different stakeholders and constituents hold widely disparate views.

As Lashway notes, multiple perspectives and clashing agendas abound when policymakers turn their attention to accountability, an issue that "has raised fundamental questions about school effectiveness, institutional reform, and human motivation."

In the course of researching and writing this groundbreaking book, Lashway—a teacher and administrator who has written several books and numerous other publications for the Clearinghouse on leadership issues—asked himself: "In a profession devoted to the long-term growth of hearts and minds, what could count as measurable results?" This question, in turn, stimulates a series of others, such as

- Who is accountable and to what extent? (Teachers? School leaders? Students? Parents?)
- Accountable to whom? (Students? Parents? State officials? Employers?)
- Accountable how?

- Accountable for how long? (Until accountability demands denying students diplomas or letting incompetent teachers go?)
- And, perhaps most important, How does human motivation enter into the accountability equation?

Lashway's insightful discussion of how human motivation is intimately tied to the ultimate success (or failure) of the accountability movement clearly sets this book apart from others. The book serves two complementary purposes.

On the one hand, Lashway succeeds masterfully in his goal of providing school and district leaders, teachers, policymakers, and others with a concise, conceptually clear overview of the literature on standards and accountability. On the other hand, woven throughout his sweeping analysis of the accountability movement and its five parts—standards, assessment, public reporting, incentives, and professional development—is a lucid explanation of what is known about human motivation.

Lashway draws from this knowledge about motivation as he seeks to find out "why all the human effort that goes into a typical school day so often fails to produce the results we want. Can we be sure that a standards-driven accountability system will stimulate student and teacher effort in a productive way?"

Specifically, Lashway discusses how school leaders can build motivational systems that support and enhance the higher standards expected of today's schools. He pays particular attention to the role of the principal in helping schools to successfully integrate new external standards with existing internal initiatives.

In chapter 1, Lashway presents a concise overview of some of the challenges and complexities inherent in the accountability movement. Chapter 2 explains three perspectives on human motivation—each illuminating dimensions ignored by the others—and then examines teachers' motivational structures.

Eight types of standards are discussed in chapter 3, where Lashway explores three questions relevant to practitioners: (1) How should standards be developed and/or chosen? (2) What instructional changes will the new standards require? And (3) What support systems must be in place for standards to have an impact?

Chapter 4 presents arguments for and against testing, provides a synthesis of basic assessment principles, and discusses the relationship between assessment and motivation. As Lashway notes, "The new system requires clear standards *and* a way of measuring whether those standards have been met." Such feedback can sometimes be painful, however: Although "virtually everyone takes for granted that testing should be a part of accountability... when the results strike close to home, many are ready to disregard the results as somehow inadmissible."

The focus in chapter 5 is on performance indicators. Lashway reviews various types of performance indicators and discusses how to collect, interpret, and present school-performance data in ways that are meaningful and informative. He also describes how to use data to improve schools and shows how public

reporting of data by schools may serve as "motivational fuel" that contributes to the school-improvement process.

Specific types of incentives and sanctions and their ability to strengthen behavior that leads to targeted outcomes among students, teachers, and schools are discussed in chapter 6. Among subjects covered are promotion policies and graduation incentives for students, monetary incentives for teachers, skill-based compensation, pay-for-performance plans, state takeovers, and school reconstitution. Wherever possible, Lashway spells out guidelines and models for appropriate use of these rewards and sanctions.

Chapter 7 looks at how principals can help their schools "find the balance between external and internal standards" and build capacity for improvement by supporting teacher learning. Lashway examines practice-based learning, learning communities, structuring a school for teacher learning, and strategies to free up time for professional development.

Lashway notes, "Only by respecting the human needs of students can schools become the kinds of institutions we want them to be. Even in an age of state mandates, school leaders must find a way to build autonomous communities of learning."

Chapter 8 summarizes the progress to date of standards-based accountability, points out questions still waiting for answers, and lists the challenges facing school leaders. The evidence, Lashway concludes, suggests that standards-based accountability has a future. "The fact policymakers have managed to get fifty state bureaucracies headed in approximately the same direction at the same time is an astonishing achievement, and it attests to the depth of the public's desire to make the system work."

This book is an essential resource for school and district leaders as they labor to make their organizations change with the times.

To order *The New Standards and Accountability*, see the form on page 4.

## **CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1--The Accountability Challenge

Chapter 2--Understanding Human Motivation

Chapter 3--Educational Standards

Chapter 4--Assessment

Chapter 5--Use of Performance Data: Indicators and School Report Cards

Chapter 6--Incentives: Motivating by Rewards and Sanctions

Chapter 7--Building Capacity for Improvement

Chapter 8--Conclusion: Unanswered Questions and Leadership Imperatives

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