

An explanation of outcome-based education

In a move proponents believe will spur major changes in school organization and practices, a number of school districts and states are drafting new outcome-based student performance plans that call on pupils to do more than sit through required courses or pass a minimum competency test. While differing in terminology and specific strategies, the new plans share the idea that the education system must reorganize around some essential, far-reaching outcomes that all students need to attain to be successful after graduation. Moreover, they call on students to demonstrate their mastery of these major outcomes, not merely put in "seat time."

A unit of credit has nothing to do with what a kid can demonstrate," says Bill Spady, director of the International Center on Outcome-Based Restructuring in Eagle, Colo. With different outcomes expected of different students and different standards for performance, too many students have graduated without the skills they need, experts say.

A key tenet of the new way of thinking is that, rather than having all students take a series of courses in lockstep, anticipating that they'll be educated at the end of the sequence, schools must reorganize all their practices to support student attainment of significant outcomes. Although that may not appear to be especially new, such a shift would mark a major move away from a system in which the accretion of Carnegie Units passes for mastery and schools lack the flexibility to restructure their programs to help all students attain valued outcomes. In traditionally organized schools, "outcomes are compromised: time is what is fixed and determined," says Spady. "We're trying to turn that around."

Although educators and policymakers are approaching the issue from different angles, there is growing evidence of interest in better defining the outcomes all students should attain.

As part of a national effort to describe what students ought to know and be able to do and to what level of proficiency they should be able to demonstrate it, professional groups in nearly every subject area are drafting outcome statements (they use the term "standards"). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics issued its standards several years ago, and groups in science, English/language arts, history, civics, geography, theater, and other subjects are expected to follow suit over the next few years. The proponents hope, standards will help to push the education system away from a curriculum of minimal expectations.

At least 30 states have identified essential student outcomes, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education. Although the scope and terminology of their plans differ, state outcome plans are frequently linked to state assessment programs or curriculum frameworks.

and they attempt to provide a focus for curriculum assessment, and instruction at the local level. While nearly all states continue to require that students attain Carnegie Units to graduate, Pennsylvania this year became the first state to drop that requirement in favor of a plan that will force students to demonstrate their attainment of desired outcomes.

A scattering of districts and schools around the nation have attempted to restructure their programs to better prepare students to exhibit valued outcomes. At Littleton High School in Littleton, Colo., for example, graduation requirements are defined not in terms of completing required courses but by students' ability to demonstrate proficiency on 19 different outcomes in such areas as communication, mathematics, ethics, and personal health. The school has embarked on a major effort to develop assessment tools, design curriculum, and coordinate the efforts of all teachers to support student outcomes toward the graduation process.

Although the push to articulate what students ought to know and be able to demonstrate at the culmination of their schooling is not new, the types of outcomes currently being drafted differ in important ways from those in the past.

In contrast to a decade or two ago, when district and state curriculum plans often listed hundreds or thousands of discrete behavioral objectives, students were to demonstrate the outcome plans now being tried are more likely to be broader in scope and to better reflect goals involving critical thinking or the ability to solve complex problems, several experts note.

The outcomes being drafted in Pennsylvania "jump the level of expectations at least a couple of notches" from satisfaction with minimum competency according to Robert Feir, former executive director of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education. For example, a draft outcome in the Pennsylvania plan regarding citizenship calls on students to be able to "take and defend positions on contemporary issues confronting the United States and other nations, conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations." Such outcomes, proponents say, call on students to synthesize their knowledge and skills, not merely regurgitate discrete facts.

Another feature of some of the new outcome plans is their recognition that schools are being asked to produce graduates who can do far more than apply the quadratic formula or recall who won at Waterloo. Instead of, merely paying lip service to the broader mission of schools, some outcome based plans explicitly address society's expectation that young people should understand the importance of ethical conduct or make good decisions about personal behaviors. Virginia, for example, has drafted an outcome on "personal well-being and accomplishment," calling for "a responsible individual who has a good sense of his/her abilities and needs, and uses that knowledge consistently to make choices likely to lead to a healthy, productive and fulfilling life." Such an individual, the draft states, would be able to avoid behaviors that contribute to illness or accidents, manage personal needs without ignoring the needs and the rights of others, and implement personal, educational, and career plans, among other capabilities.

Others believe that reorganizing around outcomes will help to raise expectations for all students. By establishing common outcomes and standards, educators are hoping "that average" and "below-average" students will be getting the same kind of opportunities that only "above-average" kids got before," says Vito Ferrara, director of curriculum and instruction for a regional service unit in Pennsylvania and chair of the Pennsylvania ASCD's curriculum committee. A survey of affiliate members found them supporting the Board's plan, and the affiliate is offering seminars to help educators prepare for it, he adds.

Although the idea of restructuring school programs around new student outcomes has gained currency, some critics see drawbacks.

In Pennsylvania, for example, the state Board of Education's process to establish student outcomes has been temporarily derailed by state legislators. Legislators were responding, in part, to concerns that some of the 58 outcomes drafted by the board strayed too far from academics and too far into affective outcomes and values. A leader of a group critical of the outcomes asserted in Education Week that "it is not, in parents' say, the business of the state to be assessing and reneighboring the values and attitudes of students. It is the business of the state to fill children's heads with the cognitive knowledge they need."

While admitting that affective outcomes may be harder to teach, proponents of the new outcomes plans insist they are properly a part of the curriculum. Further, they say that the new outcomes plans don't downplay academics—just place them in a different context. "The curriculum has to be more practical," says Brickley, "I don't think we can justify kids taking three years of social studies, for example, and not being able to demonstrate their ability to use that knowledge in meaningful ways."

Accountability and assessment concerns also are being raised about the new outcome-based plans, particularly with regard to values and affective outcomes. Some parents and policy-makers, for example, worry that it will be difficult to assess whether students have mastered broadly framed outcomes. Educators at Littleton High School consider this a major design challenge and are exploring a range of ways to assess student growth, including exhibitions and on-demand writing tasks. This year, the schools developed a plan that describes specific skills underlying the broader outcomes, demonstration tasks, testing conditions, and performance standards. Students will be required to demonstrate proficiency in all 19 outcomes and excellence in any two of them in order to graduate.

Even those supporting the move to reorganize schools around valuable student outcomes have reservations about some of the approaches being tried. Spady, for example, argues that many local and state plans simply derive outcomes from the content of the current curriculum. Moreover, he considers it a mistake to frame outcomes subject area—a tactic being employed by the projects to set national standards.

Educators committed to restructuring around outcomes say the benefits outweigh any disadvantages, however. Westberg believes that students are responding to the higher expectations held for them. "I'm seeing students much more involved in their own education," he says. "They're being asked to demonstrate, to perform at a higher level, on more complex tasks" than ever before.

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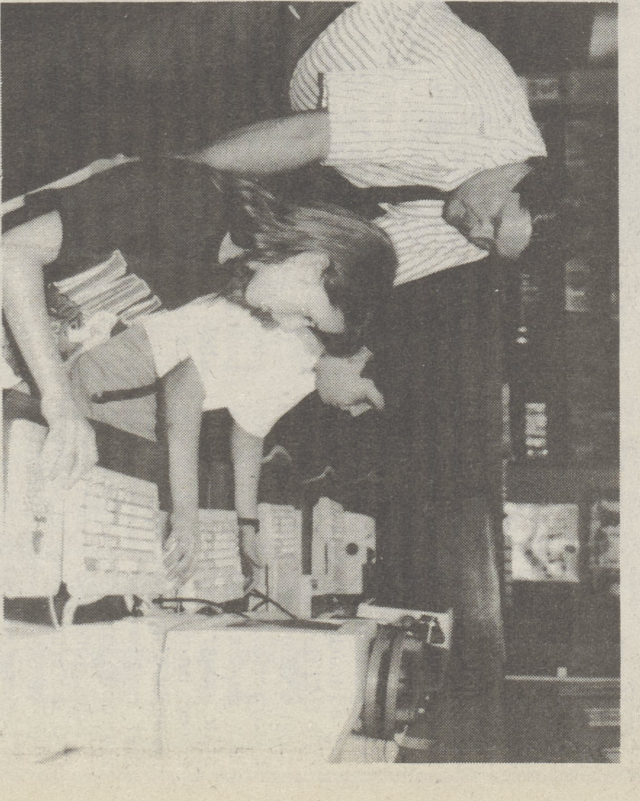
1993-1994 DALLAS SCHOOL DISTRICT CALENDAR SUMMARY	
PROGRESS REPORTS	REPORT CARDS
DECEMBER 11	NOVEMBER 19
FEBRUARY 25	FEBRUARY 4
MAY 10	APRIL 15
	JUNE 15
	JUNE 22
EARLY DISMISSAL DATES	PARENT CONFERENCES
JANUARY 17	NOVEMBER 15
APRIL 12	APRIL 18
GRADUATION DAY	SECONDARY - NOVEMBER 22
JUNE 15	APRIL 20
FIRST SEMESTER	SECOND SEMESTER
OCT 11	TEACHER'S IN-SERVICE
NOV 25-29	THANKSGIVING VACATION
NOV 30	CLASSES RESUME
DEC 23-JAN 2	HOLIDAY VACATION
JAN 3	CLASSES RESUME
	MEMORIAL DAY

District's computers get upgraded

In an effort to keep the Dallas School District's computer offerings at the front of current technology, advancements, various computer upgrades have been made in each of the District's buildings.

In the Senior High School, two more computers are scheduled for the word processing lab. In addition, each English classroom will have one computer networked to the word processing lab. These will be used for word processing, classroom writing instruction/evaluation, teacher management of written assignments, and desktop publishing.

Dallas Middle School has added six networked computers to the six science rooms. Coupled with the use of the Jostens Integrated Science Curriculum, and Research Capabilities, the new



hooked directly to the main computer in the lab. At the Dallas Elementary school there will be 22 classrooms receiving computers, each networked to the main computer in the lab.

These additional computers will allow individual students in the classrooms to access research materials, as well as their own files for reading, math, keyboarding and writing programs. Teacher management of student work is also enhanced with the addition of the computers in the classrooms.

Parents wishing to obtain further information about how the Dallas School District's Computer Labs operate or how the classroom additions will be used for their children should contact Mr. Jack Wega, Computer Coordinator at 675-5201.

Laptop computers involve parents in child's reading

With funds from the Federally funded Chapter 1 budget, six laptop computers were purchased for the Dallas School District's Chapter 1 Reading program. The Handy Model 1800 computers with hard drives were loaded with special software designed to help students with their reading skills. Mrs. Sharon Hartshorne, Mrs. Rita Mundy, and Mr. Jack Wega, District Reading Specialists, selected programs geared to the various age levels, reading levels and reading needs of the District's Chapter 1 students. Six evening sessions for parent training in the use of the computers and programs were offered during the month of February. Ninety-four parents participated in these workshops under the direction of District Computer Coordinator Jack Wega.

Computers were sent home on a 2 day basis with parents and students working together on the programs. The machines are transported to and from school by the parents and are assigned to a rotating schedule. Participating parents and students have offered very positive comments about the program. The District hopes to add more software and computers in the future as funding becomes available.

Answers to frequently-asked questions about the budget

The 1993-1994 Dallas School District Budget presentation will not be an accounting issue but more a process of informing the community members as to the status of the school districts expenditures and what they are receiving from their investment in our educational system.

After several years of presenting budgets to the public, the district has developed a list of questions which would most likely be asked at a budget meeting. Our response to each question follows.

Question 1. Is our tax millage going up for 1993-94?
Answer 1. Preliminary budget calculations project no increase in millage for 1993-94. This will be the third consecutive year that the school district tax rate will remain at 158 mills.

Question 2. What programs or services will be reduced in the proposed budget?
Answer 2. Our proposed budget is intended to support the goals, objectives and priorities of our long range educational plan. The 1993-94 proposed budget

computers will allow Science students in grades 6-8 to view certain experiments previously unavailable to our classes. The Computer upgrades have been made in each of the District's buildings.

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does not reflect any curtailment in programs or services from the district's educational plan.

Question 3. Why does so much of the budget go for teachers' salaries and fringe benefits?
Answer 3. School districts are service oriented institutions, therefore, approximately 52% of the funds in the preliminary budget are allocated to teachers and professional support staff salaries and benefits serving regular instruction. Education is a labor-intensive organization and staffing projections provide a basis for budget allocations. In addition to the regular instruction costs are the salaries and benefits for special education. These special education expenditures are approximately 7% of the budget and when we break out the cost for special education programs, they reflect a higher per pupil cost than regular education costs.

Question 4. How much financial support in the proposed budget will be provided to Dallas School District from the state?
Answer 4. For 1993-94, Governor Casey has proposed a "freeze" on the amount of basic educational subsidy allocated to Dallas School District which is almost 4 million dollars. The Governor's proposal, however, does call for an increase in the special education funding from the state. The total financial support from the state is estimated to be 3.8 million dollars or 37% of the budgeted expenditures.

Question 5. How much is budgeted for extra-curricular activities?
Answer 5. The Student Activities section of the budget represents approximately 2% of the proposed expenditures of the district or \$327,000. This section of the budget not only covers expenditures for sports or athletics, but also salaries and costs associated with student council, band, drama, yearbook, newspaper and other activities that complement the regular educational programs.

Question 6. How much does the Dallas School District spend on textbooks?
Answer 6. Approximately \$115,000 was spent on textbooks for the 1992-93 school year and about the same amount is budgeted for the 1993-94 school year. In addition to the monies spent for textbook adoptions and replacements are correlating workbooks, audio-visual aids which amount to \$55,000 for 1993-94.

Question 7. What is the proposed cost for health care for employees of the district?
Answer 7. Health care costs are a major expenditure for the district projected to be about \$1,000,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. Our employees have the option of three medical plans: Blue Cross/Blue Shield, HMO/Ortho-eastern/Pennsylvania and Geisinger Health Plan. The projected increase for the plan to which the major segment of the employees are enrolled is 9%.

Question 8. What is the reason for a budgetary reserve and fund balance in the proposed budget?
Answer 8. According to the Manual of Accounting for Pennsylvania School Systems in addition to the appropriations which are made to the various programs, it is sound management practice to provide for operating contingencies through a budgetary reserve. Experience indicates that there are certain variables over which control is impossible regardless of the care with which a budget is prepared. Transfers from the budgetary reserve require authorization of the Board of School Directors. The balance in the budgetary reserve at the end of the budget year becomes a part of the total resources available for the next budget year.

The fund balance provides financial stability in uncertain economic times and changes in state funding. Any or all of the fund balance may be used for appropriations.

The Dallas School District proposed financial plan is the "window" that provides a clear view of what is happening in your district and how your educational dollars are being spent.