A technical problem, a just solution: School quality measurement as a tool for social justice and equity

James Noonan, Ed.D.
Project Director for School Quality Measures
Center for Collaborative Education
Boston, MA, USA
@_jmnoonan

Jack Schneider, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Education
University of Massachusetts Lowell
Lowell, MA, USA
@Edu_Historian
“I don’t know what most white people in this country feel. I can only conclude what they feel by the state of their institutions.”

- James Baldwin, 1968

@_jmnoonan
In the United States*:

- 50 states
- 13,584 school districts
- 98,277 public schools
- 50,112,000 students

* Fall 2015, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)


@ _ jmnoonan
Negative Impact of Segregation

- Lower student achievement (Mickelson, 2007)
- Lower graduation rates (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Garces, 2008)
- Higher crime and incarceration rates (Billings, Deming, & Rockoff, 2013)
- Negative racial attitudes among White students (Kurlaender & Yun, 2005, 2007)

Percentage of Black & Latino/a students attending schools with 50% or more students of color, 1968 and 2009 (Dorsey 2013)
Meet Marcie

- 4 years old, White
- Eligible for public school
- Urban, racially and economically diverse district
- Lives in predominantly white neighborhood

@_jmnoonan
School Choice and School Assignment as a “Lottery”
Shortcomings of School Quality Measurement

• They fail to measure what matters most (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006; Schneider, 2017)

• They measure too much of what they shouldn’t (Koretz, 2017; Sirin, 2005)
A Vicious Cycle

- Flawed Measurement Systems
- Concentrated Advantage and Disadvantage
- Families’ Ideas About “Good” & “Bad” Schools
- Families’ Decisions About School Choice

@_jmnoonan
A New Measurement System

Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA)

• Founded in 2016
• Seven districts, collectively serving 1 in 10 students in Massachusetts
• Joint governance
• A proof of concept for a more fair and effective accountability system

Two strands: student learning and school quality

@_jmnoonan
“What makes a good school?”

• During 2016-2017 school year, 31 focus groups, 261 participants (teachers, students, family members, school leaders, and district administrators)

• Beginning with a draft framework developed through pilot focus groups and a review of empirical research:
  • What is essential to keep?
  • What is missing?
  • What does not make sense?
Final framework includes 34 unique measures, including administrative data, student surveys, teacher surveys, and performance assessment.

Several important affirmations and revisions emerging from focus groups (Famularo et al., 2018), including:

- Affirmation for “student-teacher relationships”
- Addition of “professional community”
- Addition of “cultural responsiveness”
- Addition of academic stress scale to “social and emotional health”
Data Collection

- Student surveys
  - 66 questions total, grades 4-12
  - 44 questions presented
  - translated into 9 languages
- Teacher surveys
  - 70 questions, all teachers
- Year One (2016-2017)
  - 25,963 student surveys
  - 5,552 teacher surveys
- Year Two (2017-2018)
  - 25,299 student surveys
  - 6,233 teacher surveys

@_ jmnoonan
Student Scales by District

- District A
- District B
- District C
- District D
- District E
- District F
The Promise of Better Information

- Challenge to dominant narratives about “good” and “bad”
- Goodness of fit
- Family and community engagement
Thank You

- MCIEA Governing Board and communities
- Center for Collaborative Education
- University of Massachusetts Lowell

Contact: jnoonan@ccebos.org