

Recommendations to Improve the State's Accountability System from Teach Plus CO 2023-2024 Policy Fellows

Introduction:

We believe that teacher, parent/guardian, and student voices should be elevated in how quality schools are evaluated at the state level. This is why our research focused on student, parents/guardians, and teacher feedback on the role of education in Colorado and how this research might impact how the state measures school quality. Colorado schools are evaluated based on five indicators as outlined by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA):

1. Student achievement on state standardized assessments
2. Student growth on state standardized assessments
3. English language proficiency
4. High school graduation rates
5. State chosen indicator which is chronic absenteeism in Colorado

Methodology

Our research was prompted by three questions aimed at understanding stakeholder perspective on the purpose of education and the role of schools:

1. What do students, parents/ guardians, and teachers see as the purpose of education and the responsibilities of schools and educators?
2. What role do students, parents/guardians, and teachers believe schools and teachers should play in helping them achieve success?
3. What skills do students, parents/guardians, and teachers see as most important for schools to teach?

We hosted a series of focus groups of students, families, and educators across the front range in order to collect qualitative data through our discussions, as well as allowing participants to expand on their responses in a written survey.

Findings

1. Engaging students and preparing them for the future, and contributing to society are the primary purposes of education.
2. Cultivating the holistic development of the child, building a safe environment, fostering student development, and creating effective student supports and structures are the most essential roles and responsibilities of schools and teachers.
3. Critical thinking, SEL, core subjects, and cultural competency are the important skills participants want schools to prioritize.

Recommendations

1. Conduct more research to answer the following questions:
 - *What life readiness skills should schools teach to students?*
 - *How can schools best prepare students to better contribute to their communities?*
2. Change Colorado's 5th indicator from *chronic absenteeism* to *whole-child development*.
3. Schools should diversify their models of curriculum instruction to better integrate critical thinking, SEL, core subjects, and cultural competencies. Districts should empower decision making that is responsive to the needs of the school community.

Conclusion

The findings reveal a collective vision for education that transcends traditional academic achievement metrics, highlighting the need for schools to foster holistic development of students. This study lays the groundwork for future research and education policy development in Colorado.