

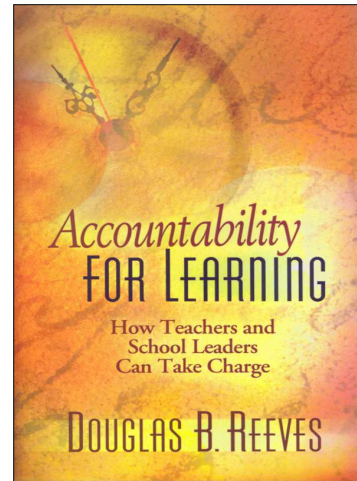
Study Guide for:

# Accountability for Learning

How Teachers and School Leaders Can Take Charge

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(ASCD)



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## Suggestions for effective book studies:

1. Set the dates with specified readings well in advance.
2. Ensure that participants have a personal copy of the book.
3. Provide the book study guide before starting to read the book.
4. Select a location that allows for the participants to be able to spread out books and writing materials.
5. Provide a comfortable meeting place with plenty of light.
6. Beverages and snacks are always welcome.
7. The role of the facilitator is to ask open-ended questions and stimulate discussion, not to lecture. Consider changing the role of facilitator and being very clear about norms for participants and facilitators.

Advanced Learning Press provides study guides to complement your comprehensive professional development plan. These guides represent the author's suggested questions and activities to lead to full comprehension and implementation of the ideas in the publication. Focused group discussion leads to individual reflection as well as having the group develop common understandings and language regarding the book's content. For additional insights or questions, please email the author at [info@MakingStandardsWork.com](mailto:info@MakingStandardsWork.com). You will receive a response within two business days.

This guide and other study guides are available as a free download at <http://www.MakingStandardsWork.com/ResourceCtr/index.php>

## **Chapter 1: The “A-Word”: Why People Hate Accountability and What You Can Do About It**

1. Does the term “accountability” have a negative connotation in your school or district? What does that term mean to you and your colleagues? Who is accountable?
2. Describe the concept of “student-centered accountability.” Compare and contrast this concept with the accountability practices of your district or state.
3. How is student-centered accountability more accurate than most current practices in accountability?
4. How is the focus on the improvement of teaching and learning more constructive than the publication of test scores?
5. Why is student-centered accountability better for the morale of faculty and staff members?
6. How can teachers be leaders in student-centered accountability? Why should teachers be leaders?

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## **Chapter 2: Accountability Essentials: Identifying and Measuring Teaching Practices**

1. The concepts of holistic accountability have been described in *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations* and *Holistic Accountability: Serving Students, Schools, and Community*. How does this book differ from those? Why is that difference critical?
2. How does a focus on the antecedents of excellence benefit all teachers? Why should teachers document their practices and efforts despite the current burdens of testing and paperwork?
3. Why should teachers and school leaders track indicators such as those listed in this chapter? Reflect on your own practices and those of your colleagues. To what extent do the listed indicators occur in your classroom, school, or district?

4. How does holistic accountability represent a framework for decision-making rather than a mechanism for micromanagement? How does the systematic application of holistic accountability benefit teachers? What is the alternative to holistic accountability?

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### ***Chapter 3: The Accountable Teacher***

Note: Please refer to the excellent discussion questions in the book following each case study. These questions focus on a synthesis of all three schools.

1. Compare and contrast the three buildings described in these case studies. What similarities do you see? What differences exist?
2. Review the commonalities of the three schools. Which of those characteristics are present in your building or district? How did those characteristics come into being?
3. What characteristics of the three schools are currently missing from your school or district? Which of those characteristics can you put into practice with your current know-how and procedures? Plan the actions necessary to put those practices in place. Which of those characteristics that do not exist would require changes in belief and values? How could you begin to implement those changes?
4. How can your school or district support you in adopting the characteristics of the three case study schools?

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### ***Chapter 4: Teacher Empowerment: Bottom-Up Accountability***

1. Why is it not safe to stop with the assumption that if good test scores exist then good teaching must be present?
2. Ingersoll and Smith write, “. . . the roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within schools and districts.” Are these “roots” present in your school or district? How can these issues be constructively addressed in order to attract talented, experienced teachers to the buildings with the highest needs?

3. How is the myth of “bad teaching yields good test scores” dangerous? How can a systematic documentation of teacher practices counter this argument?
  4. One element of teacher leadership in accountability is observation. Describe this element and its importance to effective accountability systems. To what extent do teachers in your school or district systematically observe their implementation of specific techniques with the objective of improving effective practice? How could you implement the practice of systematic observation?
  5. Why is it important that reflection not stop with the analytical task of reviewing one’s own observations? Why is it challenging to listen to and compare notes with colleagues? What conditions are necessary to facilitate collaborative reflection?
  6. Synthesis is another element of teacher leadership in accountability. Why is it important for teachers to synthesize their observations and reflections?
  7. “So what?” The question sounds shockingly abrupt but it characterizes the final element of teacher leadership in accountability. How does this question capture the essence of teacher-led accountability?
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## ***Chapter 5: A View from the District***

1. Leadership can support accountability for learning through specific practices and actions. One such action is described as catching teachers doing something right. To what extent does that practice occur currently in your school or district? What might this practice look like?
2. Providing focus is an important function of leadership. Part of improving focus can be the creation of a “not to do” list. Why can that list be as important as a to do list? What initiatives have been added in your school or district? Which initiatives have been removed?
3. Why is it important for leaders to redefine strategic planning “as a continuous process of leadership decisions based on information related to student achievement”? How is strategic planning defined in your school and district?
4. How does the creation of a holistic accountability system counter potentially harmful practices designed to simply improve test scores?

5. The examination of school-based indicators that reflect teaching behaviors, leadership decisions, and curriculum policies can allow a school or district to identify their own “antecedents to excellence.” Such an examination occurred in Norfolk Public Schools and led to the identification of nine characteristics that distinguished schools with the highest academic gains. Describe those nine characteristics and use them to evaluate your school or district. To what extent are those practices present? What steps would need to be taken in order to implement those practices?
6. What is the implication for your practice if urban school districts are able to see dramatic improvements in student achievement as the result of using a holistic accountability system?
7. Why does holistic accountability impact equity?

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## ***Chapter 6: The Policymaker’s Perspective***

1. Local school boards maintain tremendous influence over the operation of their respective districts, despite the perceptions of interference from No Child Left Behind legislation. One such area of influence is in teacher quality. What issues face a school board as it considers how to influence the quality of teachers in the schools?
2. It has been stated that the most important role of a board in strategic planning is focus. What are the benefits of a narrowly focused board? What evidence would you see if a school board is committed to effective strategic planning? Examine your own board’s practices. Do you see evidence of a commitment to effective strategic planning?
3. Why is it important for school boards to devote more attention to the creation of a constructive evaluation process? Review the sample Multidimensional Leadership Assessment Matrix available at [www.MakingStandardsWork.com](http://www.MakingStandardsWork.com). How might those dimensions improve leadership evaluation?
4. The “why” should precede the “how.” Why is this lesson important for boards to remember as they communicate with stakeholders?
5. There are numerous misconceptions about the No Child Left Behind act. What myths and misconceptions currently circulate in your school district? How are those misconceptions harmful?

6. Why does No Child Left Behind focus extensively on teacher quality? What is your state's definition of "highly qualified" and how many teachers in your district meet that definition?
7. State and local systems retain some of the most important decision-making authority in education. In what areas does this authority exist?
8. There are several guidelines provided for state policymakers in this chapter. How do those guidelines support accountability for learning? Are any of those guidelines present in your district or state currently?

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### ***Chapter 7: Putting It All Together: Standards, Assessment, and Accountability***

1. Describe the two ways to evaluate student performance. What are the implications for student success when we accept the logic of the bell curve?
2. Why is it difficult to implement standards with consistency? In light of the reasons described in this section, how could your school become more consistent in implementing its academic standards?
3. Describe the characteristics of standards-based evaluation. Examine the evaluation practices of your school or district in light of those characteristics. Are the practices of your school standards-based or norm-referenced?

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\$23.95 - Quantity discounts are available

**Additional publications available from the Center for Performance Assessment:**

- *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations*
- *Holistic Accountability: Serving Students, Schools and Community*
- *101 Questions & Answers about Standards, Assessment, and Accountability*
- *101 More Questions & Answers about Standards, Assessment, and Accountability*
- *Making Standards Work: How to Implement Standards-Based Assessments in the Classroom, School, and District*
- *Performance Assessment Series: Elementary School Edition*
- *Performance Assessment Series: Middle School Edition*
- *Power Standards: Identifying the Standards that Matter the Most*
- *“Unwrapping” the Standards: A Simple Process to Make Standards Manageable*

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**About the study guide author:**

This study guide was prepared by Tony Flach. Tony is a Professional Development Associate for the Center for Performance Assessment.