



Evaluating the Educational Outcomes of your Local Schools

**A PROPOSAL FOR
PARENT AND CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT
2nd Edition**

CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

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INTRODUCTION

From the earliest beginnings, Americans have cherished high hopes that their public schools would pave the way to a better life for the nation and for its people. They have been guided by the belief that education promotes the general welfare and encourages progress. The citizens of Michigan have affirmed this belief by establishing public schools throughout the state supported by general taxation. They decreed in the state constitution that public schools are to be open and free of charge to every child. Parents are required to send their children to school.

In laying out this framework for public education, the people sought to guarantee educational opportunity for every child. It was assumed that enlightened self-interest would prompt the public to seize the opportunity as a means to fulfill personal goals and advance as far as abilities and effort would allow. But in the last quarter of a century, systematic studies and surveys of educational attainment have shown that access to schooling does not necessarily guarantee satisfactory results in student learning. About twenty years ago, the Coleman Report (a nationwide survey commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare) revealed startling evidence of disparities of achievement between children of different races and economic status. Another landmark study by the College Board investigated test scores of college bound students. In the report "On Further Examination" it was concluded that the 14-year decline of SAT test scores from 1964 through 1967 represented a real decline in the academic performance of students.

More recently, the National Commission on Excellence in Education looked into the quality of teaching and learning in the public schools and colleges. In its report, "A Nation at Risk," the Commission found that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." The Commission warned that individuals who do not obtain the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential for modern day living will be disenfranchised from material rewards that accompany competence and lose the chance to participate fully in our national life. The Commission recommended that a number of things should be done to restore excellence.

This manual, first issued in 1979, is addressed to parents, whose role is pivotal in the education of their children, and to other interested citizens. Educational opportunity and individual responsibility go hand in hand. The parent, the student, and the teacher must all participate fully in the educational process if the greatest amount of learning is to be achieved.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT THIS MANUAL IS ABOUT

This manual is written for parents and other interested persons who are concerned with improving the effectiveness of their schools by concentrating on the product--your child's learning and educational growth and the effectiveness of your child's school. When parents keep their eyes on educational results, they may ask their child to demonstrate how well he or she can read. They may ask the teacher how well their child is doing in reading. But parents do not find out about their child's learning progress by asking questions such as these: How much money does the school spend? What is the class size? Does the teacher have a master's degree?

In pursuing educational progress, parents and citizens ought to give attention to education outcomes--in other words, actual student learning and growth. What is student learning? As used in this manual, student learning is defined as the ability to use the tools of language and numerical reasoning that are necessary for a person to know, to be aware, and to exercise judgment. The basic mission of the schools is to provide formal training in skills to enable the acquisition of knowledge essential to critical thinking in today's world. There are many other important aspects of personal growth such as the development of self-confidence, curiosity, and creativity. These socially desirable personal qualities contribute to learning, and parents should actively encourage these attributes. But they should not be considered a substitute for academic competence. No matter how "well rounded" your child may be, his or her future prospects will be diminished by the lack of a solid foundation for learning.

This manual is organized into 9 chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of evaluating education by looking at the outcomes. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal with who is responsible for student learning and how to pursue an outcomes approach without getting sidetracked. Chapter 5 describes the democratic processes through which citizens hold their schools accountable for educational progress. Chapter 6 suggests that parents and other citizens should insist that their local schools define local educational objectives and provide the public with information about progress toward achieving those objectives. Chapters 7 and 8 provide information about what kinds of measures of student performance are available and how to make use of student testing. The final chapter sets forth some characteristics that effective schools are known to possess. Each chapter is followed by exercises to accustom users to the educational outcomes approach. Refer to the answer sheet located on page 33.

Today, teaching and learning are no longer regarded as the mystical processes they once were. Substantial advances in technology have been made, and much more is known about how children learn and the relative effectiveness of teaching methods. For parents and citizens who wish to delve deeper into the subject, a bibliography is included.

CHAPTER 2

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENT LEARNING AT SCHOOL?

When you ask the question, "How good a job is the school doing for my child or for a specific student?" it is particularly important to keep in mind the respective responsibilities for accomplishing learning at school. Many persons contribute in different ways to the learning progress of the student. But the main contributors are: (1) the student, (2) the teacher, and (3) the parents. In your opinion, who is primarily responsible for the following aspects involved in encouraging learning at school:

Exercise I

Who is Responsible for Various Aspects of Student Learning?

Circle the answer that best describes who is responsible: S for Student, T for Teacher, and P for Parent(s).

- | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|
| 1. | Putting forth the necessary effort to learn. | S | T | P |
| 2. | Identifying the student's weaknesses in the performance of school work and providing corrective measures. | S | T | P |
| 3. | Emphasizing the value of a good education by becoming personally involved in the educational experiences of the student in and out of school. | S | T | P |
| 4. | Observing school rules concerning personal behavior. | S | T | P |
| 5. | Maintaining a positive attitude toward progress in student learning and letting students know that progress is expected. | S | T | P |
| 6. | Establishing a structure for daily living to ensure that the student is physically and mentally prepared to take full advantage of school opportunities. | S | T | P |
| 7. | Choosing teaching methods considered to be most likely to facilitate student learning. | S | T | P |

(See answer sheet at end of manual.)

Learning requires the cooperative effort of all: teachers must teach skillfully and purposefully; parents must support and prepare their children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities at school; and students must put forth the personal effort necessary for learning to take place.

What should the school staff expect from the parents? Parents have a primary obligation to demonstrate a commitment to the educational development of their child. One way parents may help is by reinforcing attitudes that are important for school success--self-esteem, motivation, and self-discipline. Another way is by seeing to it that the child's everyday life is organized to take full advantage of school opportunities. Common sense suggests that a child allowed to skip school, to stay up late at night, to watch TV endlessly, is ill-prepared to do his or her best in school. Obvi-

ously, both the parents and the school contribute to the educational development of the child. Seldom can either do it alone.

Exercise 2

What is Your Educational Involvement Quotient? An Exercise in Self-Appraisal for Parents

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. Do you make sure your child gets to school every day, on time, and ready to participate in class instruction? | [] | [] |
| 2. In the last year, have you talked with a teacher about how your child is doing in school? | [] | [] |
| 3. On the basis of school reports, do you know whether or not your child is doing satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or superior work in school? | [] | [] |
| 4. Do you ask your child to bring home samples of school work or to show you what he/she has achieved at school? | [] | [] |
| 5. On week days, do you require your child to be home and/or in bed at a certain time? | [] | [] |
| 6. Do you place any limits on the amount of time your child spends viewing TV? | [] | [] |
| 7. Do you help your child understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior at home and in school? | [] | [] |
| 8. Do you encourage your child to use part of his/her out-of-school time in ways that will give personal satisfaction from accomplishing something worthwhile. | [] | [] |
| 9. Do you check regularly on whether or not your child has completed homework assignments? | [] | [] |
| 10. Have you shown interest in your child's learning by reading to your child? | [] | [] |

(See answer sheet at end of manual.)

What should be expected of the teacher and the schools? You should not expect the teacher to assume the parent's responsibility--your responsibility for child rearing. Schools were not established for this purpose. Moreover, schools probably cannot basically alter the things that the child associates with family and home. Nor can the teacher "make Johnny learn." Learning is an act accomplished by the learner, and ultimately the responsibility for learning and the consequences for not learning rest with Johnny. But the teachers and the schools should be expected to provide a program of instruction that will provide each student with an opportunity to achieve a level of proficiency in reading, writing, and computing necessary for functioning in the adult world. The schools also ought to be expected to provide further opportunity for each student to progress in educational achievement as far as effort and ability will allow.

Exercise 3

What Should Be Expected of the Teacher?

For each of the items listed below, make a check in the appropriate column to the right to indicate whether you believe that the statement expresses an important responsibility of the teacher or is not of major importance.

	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not of Major Importance</u>
1. Except for unavoidable circumstances such as illness, the teacher should be expected to be on duty at the school during the defined working hours.	[]	[]
2. The teacher should be expected to identify his/her students by name and to know something about them.	[]	[]
3. The teacher should strive to know the needs of each pupil and to provide instruction appropriate to meet those needs.	[]	[]
4. The teacher should care about his/her students and maintain high expectations for their educational growth and development.	[]	[]
5. The teacher should be expected to become close personal friends with all the other teachers and the principal.	[]	[]
6. The teacher should be expected to maintain a level of professional competence in the subject matter taught.	[]	[]
7. The teacher should be expected to spell out clearly the rules of acceptable behavior in the classroom and apply the rules consistently.	[]	[]
8. The teacher should assign homework as appropriate to provide students with the opportunity to obtain practice necessary to master a skill.	[]	[]
9. The teacher should be expected to make advanced preparation for classes, to administer tests, to grade papers, and to provide opportunity for students to demonstrate what they have learned.	[]	[]
10. The teacher should inform the parent and pupil of learning expectations, and should periodically report progress in terms of those expectations.	[]	[]

(See answer sheet at end of manual.)

What should be expected of the student? Even in the best of schools and with the most attentive parents, students can fail for want of individual effort to learn. In recent years, much effort has gone into the extension of educational opportunities to all children and youth in all circumstances of life. But without the realization of student responsibility to take advantage of opportunities, little progress can be made. Exercise 4 illustrates that for each "right" there is a responsibility and that the student plays a crucial role in obtaining a good education.

Exercise 4

The Right to an Education and the Responsibility for Learning
or
What Should be Expected of Students?

Directions: After reading columns 1 and 2, check the appropriate box below to indicate whether the items generally describe the right to an education or the student's responsibility for learning.

Column 1

Column 2

A student should expect to:

A student should expect to:

1. Attend school regularly.
2. Arrive on time at the class.
3. Work at improving reading and writing skills.
4. Practice computational skills.
5. Observe the rules of behavior and accept the consequences for violating rules.
6. Assume individual responsibility for making an effort to learn.
7. Be prepared to participate in classroom discussions and activities.
8. Complete homework assignments.
9. Develop an ability to ask meaningful questions.
10. Develop an appreciation of the world of ideas.

1. Be able to attend a public school without charge.
2. Be assigned to a place, class, or grade at school.
3. Be given instruction designed to develop ability to understand and use language effectively.
4. Be offered problems in numerical reasoning designed to promote understanding in solving mathematical problems.
5. Be provided with a clear understanding of the schools guidelines defining the parameters of acceptable behavior.
6. Be challenged to achieve and be recognized appropriately for achievement.
7. Be encouraged to express individual opinions and views in an effective and responsible manner.
8. Be provided with homework carefully and reasonably designed to perfect skills and to enrich the course.
9. Be provided with classroom experiences which encourage intellectual curiosity.
10. Be offered competent instruction in the subject matter.

Student right to an education. []
Student responsibility for learning. []

Student right to an education. []
Student responsibility for learning. []

Chapter 3

ON DISTINGUISHING OUTCOMES FROM INPUTS

For many years, schools have been judged largely on the basis of the inputs, particularly the financial resources available to the school district. For example, school districts have been given a “good” rating for having a relatively high expenditure per pupil, for paying higher than average salaries, or for hiring more employees per pupil relative to other schools. Sometimes appeals for increased public support are accompanied by a promise that the additional money will improve educational quality per se, without spelling out what specific educational results are to be accomplished. Frequently parents and citizens are encouraged to evaluate their schools by checking off a list of input items somewhat like checking off items on a grocery list. Even the organizations that survey schools for the purpose of accreditation have leaned heavily on the inputs in their standards for evaluating the schools.

In fact, the emphasis on inputs has been so overwhelming that it is often difficult for parents and citizens to see that there is another way to look at the schools. It is relatively easy to get information about the inputs, and the temptation is to take the course of least resistance. In contrast, outcome data have not been as readily available, and such data may be more difficult to interpret. Inputs alone will not tell you how well your school is performing its job. There is no guarantee that additional money, equipment, or other inputs will necessarily produce better outcomes--i.e., increased student learning.

If inputs do not satisfactorily account for the disparities in the achievement level of students at one school as compared with another, a leading question is--what does make a difference? Student attitudes toward education are powerfully influenced by parents and the home environment. But the quality of schooling also has an impact upon student performances. Differences in the quality of schooling may be a factor where the achievement of the entire group of students appears to be below comparable groups. In such cases, parents and citizens should ask their school officials why this is so. This is a difficult question and the answer is frequently not readily apparent. Parents ought not to be put off by easy answers and should persist in asking that educational progress and growth be given highest priority.

For a focus on outcomes, it is important for citizens and parents to be able to recognize the difference between input and outcome measures. The following exercise illustrates differences in judging a school on the basis of outcome and input measures.

Exercise 5

An Exercise in Distinguishing Outcomes from Inputs

For each of the items below, check the appropriate box to the right to indicate your opinion as to whether the item is a measure of the outcome (results of schooling) or a measure of the input (that which is invested into the school).

	<u>Outcomes</u>	<u>Inputs</u>
1. The general fund expenditure per pupil at Michville School District is \$3,110.	[]	[]
2. Maria got one A, two B's, and two C's on her report card and was promoted to the 8th grade.	[]	[]
3. Michville's new school building is equipped with a number of teaching devices to aid in instruction.	[]	[]
4. Eighty-one percent of the students in the 2nd grade at Michville showed that they could tell time by reading accurately a clock face.	[]	[]
5. The pupils in Mr. Wojtowicz' class scored a big gain in spelling proficiency as measured by tests given at the beginning and at the end of the year.	[]	[]
6. The average pupil-teacher ratio of Michville elementary school is 22:1 (an average of 22 pupils for each teacher).	[]	[]
7. The 7th graders in Michville school district showed that they had mastered computing with whole numbers but had not mastered computing with fractions.	[]	[]
8. Otto's score on a standardized achievement test in mathematics indicates that he did better than 55% of all the other 7th graders who took the test.	[]	[]

(See answer sheet at end of manual.)

Chapter 4

SOME OBSTACLES TO LAYMEM IN PURSUING AN OUTCOMES APPROACH

In pursuing an outcomes approach, the layman ought not to feel intimidated about speaking on questions about education. Most laymen have had some direct experience in the classroom at least as students and, therefore, have some familiarity with schooling. moreover, some citizens have developed specialized knowledge in certain subject matters because of their jobs. Finally, the citizen, as both the owner of the public school system and the consumer of its services, has both the responsibility and the right to evaluate the product.

The greatest asset that citizens can bring to the quest for improved outcomes is a practical outlook. There are some practical considerations which may help avoid pitfalls. Strive to maintain a sturdy independence and an objective view. Resist distractions of fads and fashions that periodically sweep across the educational landscape. Avoid use of educational jargon; instead, ask that ideas be expressed in clear, direct language. where technical words are necessary, ask for the definition of such terms.

Above all, do not be afraid to raise questions, seek advice, and listen to a variety of opinions from educators, teachers, and scholars in the field. As James D. Koerner explains in his book, "Who Controls Education, A Guide for Laymen," citizens need to realize how quickly the limits of knowledge are reached on any fundamental question that can be asked about education. Opinions vary widely on the question of what is the best way to advance student learning. So the citizen should learn to be skeptical about easy solutions and simple cures.

To the citizen, one of the most frustrating aspects about the field of education is to discover that teachers do not hold the same opinion about the effectiveness of one teaching method over another. It is difficult to be certain that any educational method has directly contributed to or produced increased student learning. Thus methods and procedures should not be regarded as absolute truths. What this means to those interested in progress towards improving educational results is that there must be continuing effort to monitor and measure how well educational strategies are proving out. In other words, the focus should be on outcomes as such, rather than any methods that are presumed to produce results.

Citizens may face one further obstacle. They may encounter some uneasiness, if not resistance, to questions about educational outcomes. Citizens may hear many reasons why they should not use outcomes as a means to evaluate the performance of schools or students. Citizens who wish to do some homework in considering arguments for and against the outcomes approach may find the following exercise helpful.

Exercise 6

Some Propositions for Debate on Issues Relating to Citizens Judging Their Schools on the Basis of Student Outcomes

1. Leave education to the educators.

Citizens do not have the necessary knowledge to make judgments about the educational outcomes of their schools. They will misinterpret data on the status of student achievement.

The schools belong to the people, and the citizens have a right and an obligation to inquire into the effectiveness of their schools, including the results. The withholding of public information may have more serious consequences than its misinterpretation.

2. Postpone to the future.

Citizens should suspend judgments about the outcomes of schooling until more is known about the art of learning, teaching, and measuring the results of student learning.

Indefinite postponement may jeopardize the future of the current generation of students.

3. Nothing can be done.

Schools are merely a reflection of society, and the outcomes are primarily influenced by the prevailing strengths and weaknesses of society at large.

A central purpose of schools is to contribute to the growth and educational development of the individual student, and therefore schools should serve as an active, rather than a passive, agent.

4. School outcomes are determined on the basis of social class.

Schools serve different classes of people, and the outcomes of schooling are largely determined by the class of people served.

In a democratic society, public schools are expected to provide an equal opportunity for students to advance as far as ability and effort will carry them.

5. Academic competence is not the primary purpose of schooling.

Judgments ought not to be made on the basis of measuring student academic skills because important outcomes such as personal adjustment and creativity are difficult to measure.

While socially desirable personal attributes are important and often are a by-product of a good school, youths are basically dependent upon the school for the acquisition of academic competence.

6. There is no commonly accepted core curriculum for schools.

Citizens ought not make judgments about student outcomes because different schools teach different things.

Mastery in the basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics) and a grounding in such fields of knowledge as science, government, history, and geography, have long been recognized as core subjects.

Chapter 5

SCHOOL POLICIES AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY OR HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THINGS THAT MATTER

Citizens should remind themselves from time to time that the public schools belong to the people. As a local unit of government, the school district has always had a built-in system for reporting back to the public. The basic way schools are held accountable is through elected members of the local school board.

The Elected Board of Education. The elected school board is directly responsible to voters for establishing school policies within the framework of state law. The school board appoints the school superintendent, who is responsible for administration. This set-up is supposed to assure citizen control over school policy, but it does not always work out that way. In some instances, the school board has become unduly involved with the housekeeping details of running the school district instead of focusing attention on important policy matters. Examples of important policy are: adopting the school budget; providing for personnel policies; deciding what the schools intend to accomplish; approving the courses of study; and establishing rules governing academic, professional, and student matters.

When the school board fails to provide adequate guidance for operation of the school district, the professional staff may fill in the void by establishing policy. The judgments and recommendations of professional educators are, of course, an indispensable input into the policymaking process, but only the elected school board has the authority and responsibility to speak on behalf of the people. Therefore, it is important for citizens to encourage the members of their local school board to establish improvement of student learning as the top priority.

Some priority items are set forth by the State Board of Education in its report "Blueprint for Action," wherein it is recommended that school boards adopt a long range (3-to-5 year) school improvement plan.

The School Budget. One of the most important policy actions of the school board is the adoption of the annual school budget, which sets forth the program for the ensuing year. The school budget is the main instrument by which the school board holds the administration accountable for carrying out the authorized program. Unfortunately, the school budget is frequently not used to its fullest potential as a tool for purposeful management. Citizens and parents should see that it is.

The school budget provides the opportunity to establish priorities, to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, and to decide on future action. For example, does the evidence indicate sufficient resources are being directed to remedial reading programs, junior high math, and senior high science programs? School budgets should contain supplemental information about the effectiveness of programs rather than be restricted solely to setting forth revenues and appropriations.

Citizen concern. Communities that have good schools are usually composed of people who care about their schools and are willing to rally support or to champion change in the cause of quality education. People make a difference, and this may explain why some rural schools produce high achievements despite limited financial resources. Likewise, some inner city schools backed by a cadre of dedicated parents may excel far beyond the level of adjacent schools.

Exercise 7, below, provides some suggestions to get started.

Exercise 7

Get to Know Your Schools A Project for Parents and Citizens

Express your concerns to the school board

The members of your school board are elected to represent citizen interests in the schools. But unless parents and citizens effectively express their concerns and desires, school board members have difficulty knowing your wishes. Contact a member of your school board and discuss your concerns. Below are several sample questions that you may wish to ask in order to better inform yourself about your own school district.

- What priorities does the current school budget establish in the allocation of money to improve student learning?
- Has your school district established specific educational objectives and outlined a course of action to reach them?
- How does the school measure progress toward achieving educational objectives?
- Has your local board of education or superintendent of schools developed a long range plan of action for improving student learning and raising academic standards, as recommended by the State Board of Education in its 1984 report, "A Blueprint for Action"?

Chapter 6

THE PUBLICIS STAKE IN EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND MEASUREMENTS

Judging the-outcomes of a school system is complicated, but as one educational specialist pointed out, it is possible to determine whether or not 4th grade students can meet specified reading standards. And it is possible to find out whether or not students have met predetermined proficiency standards. - Much work needs to be done in this area. For example, a survey by the Michigan Commission on High Schools recently found that about three-quarters of the schools in Michigan have no competency testing program to determine whether or not a student is prepared to pass to a higher grade level or to graduate from high school.

Parents, students, and citizens have a substantial stake in the establishment of educational standards and in having a system of measurement that will produce accurate and dependable data on student learning. Standards are a useful tool for marshalling effort to accomplish an end. Directing the schools without such tools is like flying an aircraft by the seat of the pants. The course of direction can be a matter of uncertainty when the plane is not equipped with instruments upon which to make course corrections.

Educational Standards and objectives. Parents and citizens should look to their own schools for standards and objectives by which the outcomes of their schools can be judged. Look to see whether or not your school board has adopted policies that describe what the schools intend to accomplish over a given period of time, or targets for achievement by groups of students. If objectives are sufficiently specific, one of the best ways to tell how well your school district is progressing is to determine whether the educational objectives are being attained.

An educational objective should be stated in sufficiently definite terms to be useful as a practical guideline for action. Education of each child to his/her fullest capacity might be good educational philosophy, but fullest capacity is not easy to measure while the ability to write, read, and do mathematical problems is.

The development and use of educational objectives establishing standards of performance can provide many benefits for use as operating policy. Students will know what is expected of them, the teacher has a target at which to aim, and parents can find out how well their child has accomplished the objectives. The use of educational objectives should not prevent schools from developing objectives which recognize differing rates of progress of students and which anticipate more rapid progress from those who have demonstrated advanced learning ability or other special skills.

Educational objectives can also be of value to the planning and delivery of instruction. For example, objectives can be used to determine what a child should know at each grade level in order to perform successfully at a higher grade level. It is important to start in the lower grades in establishing objectives and proficiency standards and to ascertain that they are met. If learning difficulties are not corrected until the student reaches advanced grades, class progress may be held back by students who are not prepared to handle the work and possibly not willing to catch up.

The development of specific educational objectives often requires expert knowledge about the learning processes as well as subject matter content. It is therefore best that such objectives be developed (subject to approval of the local school board) by those who are trained to do the job--teachers, educational specialists, and scholars. However, the system should be open so that the public has an opportunity to review the objectives and to make suggestions.

Essential Skills. Much work has been done in Michigan on the development of educational objectives for use in measuring the educational progress of students. The State Department of Education, for example, has developed definitions of minimum levels of competence for use in testing student attainment. Examples of some of these performance objectives are:

By the end of the 3rd grade, learners will demonstrate their ability to apply phonetics, spelling patterns, word parts or context as aids in identifying new words.

By the end of the 6th grade, learners will exhibit the ability to identify the motives of characters in reading selections.

By the end of the 9th grade, learners will be able to use graphs, charts, tables, maps, simple instructions, forms, etc.

For more than fifteen years, the State Department of Education has been administering tests to children in all the public schools to find out how well students are doing in attaining minimum performance objectives in reading and mathematics. In addition, many school districts have also provided for periodic measurement of student progress.

Advanced Learning. Some people believe that the concentration on minimum standards may have had a leveling influence on student achievement because students capable of advanced work were not sufficiently challenged. In observing a decline in the standards of excellence, the National Commission on Excellence in Education strongly recommended that schools, colleges, and universities must adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and also set higher expectations for academic performance. A plan aimed at raising standards and providing for a more rigorous academic climate was adopted by the Michigan State Board of Education in 1984. Parents and citizens may wish to request a copy of "Better Education for Michigan Citizens: A Blueprint for Action."

Exercise 8

The Use of Educational Standards and Objectives

Read each of the statements below and mark a check in the appropriate column to the right to indicate that you agree or disagree with the statement.

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>
1. When minimum standards of performance are established for school work, students, teachers, and parents know what is expected.	[]	[]
2. Educational standards and objectives can be developed to take into consideration differing rates of learning and growth of students.	[]	[]
3. To be of practical value, an educational objective should be stated in terms of accomplishing a particular result rather than favoring a general belief.	[]	[]
4. All students should be promoted automatically to a higher grade regardless of ability to do school work at the higher grade level.	[]	[]
5. The early detection and correction of a child's learning difficulties is important to successful advancement in school work.	[]	[]
6. Children from different cultural backgrounds should not be expected to meet minimum standards.	[]	[]

(See answer sheet at end of manual.)

Chapter 7

TESTING AND MEASURING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Periodic testing and measuring of student performance serves several purposes. It can tell you where students are in the attainment of an objective in relation to where they ought to be and, conversely, it may tell you something about the quality of the educational objectives themselves. It can serve as a guide for instruction, and for evaluating educational programs.

Measurements are derived by making comparisons. For example, the fact that Johnny has a temperature of 104 degrees is significant only if you know what the normal temperature is supposed to be, and how high it can climb before Johnny's condition is considered critical.

Teacher-made Tests. The testing of student learning is not new. Literally millions of teacher-made tests are administered to students each year. Grades may range from A for excellence to F for failure. Teacher-made tests and observations can be useful in checking the progress of a class or an individual student. Teacher-made tests are also important to providing instruction. For example, by giving a test prior to instruction and a test after instruction, the teacher can find out what has been learned in relation to what has been taught. This is helpful in planning further instruction.

Although teacher-made tests are important to providing instruction, parents and the public also have an interest in the use of system-wide testing which can yield additional measurements about the status of student learning. Some people oppose the use of system-wide testing because they fear that unfavorable comparisons will be made between school districts, schools, classrooms, teachers, and pupils; and that test results will be misinterpreted. In fact, a few would actually abolish such tests, preferring instead to rely entirely on teacher-made tests and observations.

Tests Acquired from Outside Sources. Schools also purchase or acquire tests from outside sources. Sometimes outside tests are criticized by those who feel that such tests may have a cultural bias. According to this view, children from minority families may be at a disadvantage because they have not been exposed to broad cultural experiences that may prompt some test takers to give correct answers to various questions. Because of this concern, much work has been undertaken to make sure that tests do not unfairly discriminate against minorities. Many school districts carefully screen tests to make sure that there is no bias.

The public should keep in mind that the main purpose of testing is to help students overcome difficulties that may interfere with their educational growth. While there is room for further improvement in the technology of measurement and testing, parents and citizens should be wary of arguments against system-wide measurement of student learning, because this may represent the only outside source of information about student learning. The best way for schools to counter misinterpretation of test results is to provide for a good system of test analysis and for reporting the results to the public. The interpretation of test scores is often complicated, but understandable public reporting can and is being produced today.

Standardized Tests. Standardized tests are made up by persons who specialize in the construction and interpretation of tests. The content of the test is supposed to reflect the content of instructional materials used in the public schools. Before a publisher puts a test on the market, it is field tested on a representative sample of students to make sure that the test is a good measuring instrument. Does the test measure what it purports to measure? Does the test measure in an accurate way time after time?

There are many kinds of standardized tests. Two types in common use are called aptitude and achievement tests. Examples of aptitude tests are the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) and the American College Tests (ACT), which are used to predict academic success in college. Many colleges and universities expect high school students to take these tests prior to entry. Over a million students participate each year. The U.S. Department of Defense also administers an aptitude test to over a million students each year. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) results help young people make career choices and help the Armed Forces to place enlistees in appropriate training for various occupations.

Standardized achievement tests, widely used by the schools, are designed to measure achievement in academic skills and knowledge. When a student takes a standardized achievement test, the resulting “raw” score may show only how many questions were answered correctly. The raw scores are then converted into standard scores that are more meaningful. Standard scores give an estimate of how well a particular student performed as compared with all other students who took the test.

Two of the most common types of ratings of student performance are called percentile rankings and grade equivalents. A percentile rank score is based on norms (averages). For example, if Johnny ranks in the 63rd percentile, that means that Johnny got more answers correct than 63 percent of the students who took the test. When a test score is expressed as a grade equivalent, the test score may show that Mary is performing at the third-grade, fourth-month level. If Mary is a second grader, the parents know her performance on this test was better than expected for second graders. However such results should not be interpreted to mean that Mary should be in the third grade because the test does not purport to measure what third graders are expected to know.

Parents should remember that one test alone is not a sufficient measure of your child’s progress. To obtain a balanced picture, the school should have accumulated a variety of evidence about student performance including the results of teacher-made tests and school grades.

Objective-Referenced Tests. Another type of achievement test is called an objective-referenced test because the performance of a student is measured in terms of achieving an educational objective. That is, objective-referenced tests are constructed by first determining what Johnny should have learned (an educational objective), and then developing questions that will enable Johnny to show whether or not he has learned it.

You may not be able to tell the difference between an objective-referenced and a norm-referenced test solely by looking at the questions. The questions may look

similar and, indeed, often appear in the form of multiple choice questions. Below is a sample of a question that might be asked on an object-referenced test for fourth graders in Michigan.

“Playing with matches is a foolish thing to do.” The opposite of foolish is:
[] hot; [] stupid; [] wise; [] simple.”

Michigan Education Assessment Program Tests (MEAP). In 1969, Michigan became one of the first states to administer objective-referenced tests to students in the public schools. The testing program is given to students in the 4th, 7th, and 10th grades. The purpose is to ascertain the status of education in the basic skills and to derive information useful to policymakers, teachers, students, parents, and the general public. The program has had a powerful influence in focusing attention on student learning.

The MEAP tests are designed to show whether or not a student can demonstrate that he or she has learned what each student is expected to know. State tests in reading and mathematics are administered each fall to students in the 4th, 7th, and 10th grades. The test is composed of a number of performance objectives. If a student can correctly answer at least two out of three questions provided for each performance objective, then the student is considered to have mastered the basic skill as measured by the questions. In other words, the student has attained the minimum standard.

There are proposals to extend MEAP testing to areas beyond the basic skills. In 1986, pupils in the 4th, 7th, and 10th grades will be tested in science. It is believed by some that testing in the natural sciences, social sciences, writing, and advanced learning skills would better challenge students of high ability.

Selection of Tests. In selecting tests, a first consideration is to decide what needs to be measured. For example, a test in the basic skills of reading and mathematics may serve one purpose and a test in spelling or in writing skills may serve another purpose. A well designed school testing program provides for the careful selection of tests appropriate to the purpose for which they will be used.

Three common problems associated with testing programs are: (1) that the test does not fit the curriculum (course work)--or the reverse may be true, that the curriculum inadequately covers important skills or disciplines that the test is designed to measure; (2) that the data are insufficiently understood; and, (3) that the data from the tests are insufficiently used.

If parents and citizens have reason to believe that their school district does not have an effective testing program, they should urge their local school board to make this a matter of high priority. The selection and development of a student testing program should be done with considerable care by those responsible for the administration and use of testing. Parents and citizens may wish to suggest sources for outside expert advice on testing and evaluation. The following list is a good start:

1. The State Department of Education has consultants who can give information on testing in general;
2. The colleges of education at nearby universities may be willing to help;

3. Specialists on the staff of intermediate school districts may be consulted;
4. Specialists employed by some of the larger school districts may be available for answering questions;
5. Publishers of standardized tests provide information relating to their tests.

Exercise 9

A Quiz on the Testing of Student Performance in the Public Schools

Parents and citizens may wish to test their own understanding about the use and function of student testing in the schools. Read each item below and select the phrase that best expresses the concept by circling A, B, C, or O.

1. Teacher-made tests are used:
 - A. To check the progress of student learning in the classroom.
 - B. To compare the progress of one school district with another.
 - C. To report average test scores to the superintendent.
 - D. To help on deciding how many school holidays to schedule.
2. Standardized achievement tests are designed and constructed:
 - A. By computers.
 - B. By each classroom teacher.
 - C. By specialists in testing and expert teachers.
 - D. By the United States Department of Education.
3. Which of these is characteristic of a well designed school testing program?
 - A. Individual testing of selected students who experience difficulty in learning.
 - B. Limited use of standardized tests of achievement.
 - C. Periodic testing of all pupils.
 - D. Avoidance of comparisons.
4. To whom should the results of standardized tests be reported?
 - A. Only to the principal, the teachers, and school personnel.
 - B. Only to the parents at a teacher-parent conference.
 - C. Only to the individual pupil on a confidential basis.
 - D. To teachers, pupils, parents, and the public.

(See answer sheet at end of manual.)

Chapter 8

USE OF THE RESULTS OF STUDENT TESTING

There is, of course, no point in having a testing program unless the resulting information is put to a useful purpose.

Uses by Educators. Educators in Michigan have reported that test results are used frequently for evaluating curriculum, counseling students, diagnosing learning difficulties, consulting with parents, developing educational goals, grouping of students by ability, evaluating teaching, and grading students.

Uses by Parents. Parents can use test results to find out how well their child has mastered needed skills that are important for leading useful and satisfying lives. As parents know, children grow and develop at different rates. They have different likes and dislikes. They show talent for doing different kinds of things. Many parents are concerned with finding out what is right for their child. When parents ask about the progress of their child in school, they need factual information helpful in planning for the future. What are the child's areas of strength and of weakness?

All school districts in Michigan can provide test results from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program for the 4th, 7th, and 10th grades. Parents may obtain the results for their child from the school. Parents and citizens may obtain results of the state testing program by school, district-wide, and statewide. In addition, parents and citizens should ask for results of any other tests that may be administered in the school. Are tests given to find out whether or not students have met requirements for a high school diploma? What are the results of the SAT and ACT tests given to college-bound students? What vocational aptitude tests are given?

The availability of and the willingness to provide testing information are attributes of a good school. Some schools recognize the importance of involving parents in the educational planning for their child. One proven way to keep parents better informed is by scheduling parent-teacher conferences periodically. Uncertainty and misunderstanding about a student's progress in school can be reduced considerably by compiling comprehensive information about the student and sharing this information with the parents.

Uses to Evaluate the School or School Program. Parents and citizens are often interested in information that describes the overall effectiveness of the school or the school program. What information is available for showing the progress of students as a group? Some people believe that group test scores have greater value than test scores for individual students in judging the overall effectiveness of educational programs. Group scores show central tendencies as well as the spread of scores for all the students. Individual scores show the wide range of differences that distinguish individual students.

The following illustrations show how the results of tests can be used to develop information useful for making decisions. Parents in Dover, New Hampshire, became concerned about national reports on declines in writing skills and asked the school superintendent how well Dover students measured up to the rest of the nation. This led

to a district-wide study of the writing skills of the city's 9-, 13-, and 17-year old students using writing skills tests developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. By comparing local results with the results of the national sample of writing skills, it was found that the district had more good writers, fewer poor writers, and stronger middle range writers, in all three age groups. Dover school personnel attributed the relatively high standing of students to frequent writing assignments in classrooms.

The case of the California test scores in mathematics is another example. Over a period of seven or eight years, test scores for computational mathematics in the elementary schools of California declined steadily. While it is often difficult to determine the cause for such declines, further investigation led observers to believe that the adoption and use of the new math series of textbooks had contributed to the decline. This called for a re-evaluation of the textbooks and the methods of teaching of mathematics in the elementary grades.

On Comparing Test Results for Groups of Students. Comparisons of one school or school district with another, or one class with another, cause some people to worry about the possibility that unfair comparisons may be made and unfounded conclusions drawn. Some are particularly bothered when they see a list of average test scores by school district printed in the newspaper. But the information is published simply because newspaper editors think that people are interested in seeing how their school district compares.

Comparisons are a way that people handle information. One neighborhood is compared with another neighborhood; city services and tax rates are compared with other cities, etc. People are often told, "don't compare apples with oranges," and this is also true for making comparisons of test results. The more information that you have in making comparisons, the more confidence you can place in your conclusion. It is possible to make a judgment on too-thin evidence.

How Can Average Test Scores Be Compared? One way is to compare your district with itself. Did the students in the school district perform up to expectations in achieving an educational objective? Or, has your school district bettered itself over time? For example, how did the 5th graders score this year as compared with last year and five years ago? Is there evidence of progress? Another way is to compare your school district with the statewide or nationwide averages. Your school district may also be compared with other school districts that are similar.

These are very broad comparisons and further information is desirable to make the comparisons more meaningful. If the reading scores appear to be relatively low in your school or school district, what do the test results indicate is the problem? Did the students show a weakness in vocabulary, reading comprehension, or some other area that was measured? If the test results for mathematics were low, was it because the students did not know how to work with fractions? Was the study of fractions not included in the instruction for the 4th grade, and should it have been? A constructive use of test results is to find out where you stand and then to decide what, if anything, needs to be done about it.

The interpretation of test scores can be complicated. There are many different ways of scoring the results and many different kinds of yardsticks. It is altogether reasonable for parents and citizens to expect that test results be released with an understandable explanation of what they mean.

Exercise 10

Understanding and Using the Individual Student Report Michigan Educational Assessment Program

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program is a statewide testing program. It checks to see if students know some important skills in reading, mathematics, and other skills. All fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students take the assessment tests.

The skills a student is expected to know are called performance objectives. There are different performance objectives for each subject. Objectives that are similar are put into groups called skill areas.

Every objective is measured by three test questions. If a student answers two or three of the questions correctly, he or she passes the objective. And, if a student passes more than 75% of the objectives, he or she is performing at an acceptable level overall.

What Parents Can Find Out From Their Child's Individual Student Report

The report---

- Compares what the student should know with what he or she does know;
- Tells which objectives have been learned and which have not been learned;
- Tells whether or not the student is performing at an acceptable level in the skill area tested.

How Can Parents Help Their Child By Using The Student Report?

- Write down the objectives which your child did not attain.
- Ask the teacher to define what problems must be overcome.
- Ask the teacher for instructional materials for home use.
- Ask if your child needs extra help, and if so, where to get it.

Illustration 1

HOW TO READ THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT REPORT ISSUED BY MEAP

The example given here for Grade 10 MATHEMATICS shows how to read your child's report. Large capital letters are used to help you find the important sections. Further information is available from your school or from MEAP.

Section A, the heading of the report, identifies by name, the student, teacher, school district, and school. The student's age and the school year is also recorded. Sections B, C, D, E, and F are subheadings for the various columns of data arrayed below.

Section B gives the objective code which matches the objectives to the State Department's Minimal Performance Objectives for Mathematics.

Section C gives the brief description of the mathematics objectives grouped by the mathematics skill area to which they belong.

Section D entitled "Item Numbers and Responses" tells how the student responded to numbered test items (whether the student gave a correct or an incorrect answer to each question). A plus (+) sign means that the student got the correct answer. Where the student gave an incorrect answer or failed to respond to a question, symbols other than the (+) sign are used.

Where a letter (A,B,C, or D) occurs after the test item number, the letter identifies which incorrect answer the student provided. Where the student failed to respond, an asterisk (*) indicates that the student skipped the item; and a blank space indicates that the student did not reach that item in the test.

Section E entitled "Number Correct" (No. Corr.) shows the number of items answered correctly for each mathematics objective.

Section F entitled "Objective Attainment" (Obj Att?) tells whether or not the student attained the objective by answering at least two out of three items correctly. 1ly.0 means yes; 'IN' means no; and 0 means that the student did not progress far enough through the test to be reported.

Section G at the bottom of the page gives an overall summary of the student's performance on the test. It shows how many objectives the entire test covered and how many objectives the student attained. In this specific case, the student attained 27 out of 28 objectives.

Illustration 1

<u>EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM--INDIVIDUAL STUDENT REPORT--GRADE 10 MATHEMATICS</u>				
Student: SMITH HOWARD P.		Student No:		
Teacher: HEMFORD HOWARD		Section: 0		SPECIAL CODES
District: MICHVILLE		Age: 16-00		FEEDER: 0003
School: MID-CITY HIGH		School Year: 1985-86		RESEARCH: 02
Obj Code	Skill Areas and Objectives	Item Numbers and Responses	No. Corr.	Obj Att?
<u>WHOLE NUMBERS</u>				
46-5	Division: Computation	109 + 110 + 111 +	3	Y
47-2	Division: Word Problems	112 + 113 + 114 +	3	Y
<u>DECIMALS</u>				
66-2	Convert Fractions to Decimals	94 + 95 + 96 +	3	Y
67-1	Order Set of Decimals	169 + 170 + 171 +	3	Y
74-7	Decimal x Decimal	118 + 119 + 120 +	3	Y
75-3	Multiplication: Word Problems	130 + 131 + 132 +	3	Y
77-2	Decimal + Whole Number	142 + 143 + 144 +	3	Y
77-3	Decimal + Decimal	121 + 122 + 123 +	3	Y
<u>FRACTIONS</u>				
82-2	Find Larger: A/B or C/D	115 + 116 + 117 +	3	Y
83-3	Convert Mixed to Common	154 + 155 + 156 +	3	Y
87-3	A/B + C/O, B ≠ D	145 + 146 + 147 +	3	Y
88-2	Addition: Word Problems	166 + 167 + 168 +	3	Y
92-4	A/B - C/D, B ≠ D	106 + 107 + 108 +	3	Y
92-6	Subtraction: Mixed Number	133 + 134 + 135 +	3	Y
97-2	A/B x C/D; B,D < 10	127 + 128 + 129 +	3	Y
97-5	Whole Number x Mixed Number	151 + 152 + 153 +	3	Y
<u>RATIO, PROPORTION & PERCENT</u>				
105-4	Convert Fraction, Decimal, %	88 M 89 M 90 +	1	N
106-1	Percent: Word Problems	148 + 149 + 150 +	3	Y
<u>METRIC MEASUREMENT</u>				
124-2	Measure and Compute Area	157 + 158 + 159 +	3	Y
130-1	Volume: Word Problems	97 + 98 + 99 +	3	Y
<u>NON-METRIC MEASUREMENT</u>				
146-1	Angle Measurement	163 + 164 + 165 +	3	Y
149-1	Time Conversion	103 + 104 + 105 +	3	Y
154-2	Money: Word Problems	160 + 161 + 162 +	3	Y
<u>GEOMETRY</u>				
167-2	Parts of a Circle	100 + 101 + 102 +	3	Y
<u>PROBABILITY & STATISTICS</u>				
172-1	Probability of Simple Event	139 + 140 + 141 +	3	Y
173-1	Mean of a Set of Numbers	124 + 125 + 126 +	3	Y
<u>EQUATIONS, EXPRESSIONS, GRAPHS</u>				
180-7	Evaluate Common Algebraic Expr	136 + 137 + 138 +	3	Y
182-5	Read Coordinate System	91 + 92 + 93 +	3	Y
<u>CORRELATED OBJECTIVES</u>				
47-1	Whole Number: Division Estimate	175+ 176 + 177 +	3	Y
65-1	Decimals: Rounding	181 A 182 C 183 C	0	N
73-2	Decimals: Estimate Product	193 + 194 195	1	0
74-1	Decimal x 10, 100, 1000	190 D 191 B 192 C	0	N
104-2	Proportion: Word Problem	178 D 179 0 180 A	0	N
104-3	Proportion: Scale Drawing	184 B 185 B 186 C	0	N
124-1	Metric Measurement: Area	187 C 188 C 189 A	0	N
149-2	Find Time Interval	172 + 173 + 174 +	3	
Summary of Student Performance				
		CORE	CORRELATED	
Total Objectives:		28	7	
Objectives Attained:		27	2	
Category of Achievement:		4		

SOURCE: MEAP HANDBOOK.

UNDERSTANDING AND USING STATEWIDE COMPARISONS

Michigan Educational Assessment Program

The Michigan State Department of Education aggregates MEAP test scores to produce a statewide summary and also a summary for each school and school district as a whole. Summary reports for your school district and for each school in your district are returned to your superintendent of schools. The principal also receives a copy of the school summary. These summaries of MEAP tests contain a “proportions report” which shows the percentage of students who attained the objectives by answering correctly at least two out of three questions to measure achievement of the educational objective.

The level of achievement for each student is described in terms of categories ranging from Category 4 (highest) to Category 1 (lowest). Students who attained 3/4 or more of all the objectives in the test are placed in Category 4. See table below for definition of other categories. The proportion (percent) of students in each category may be arrayed for each school district. For example, in the Maple Tree School District, 70% of all the 4th graders have attained sufficient objectives to be counted in Category 4; 20% in Category 3; 7% in Category 2; and 3% in Category 1. This type of report is called the Proportions Report.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Percent of Students by Standard of Attainment</u>
4	Attained 3/4 or more on all the objectives in the test
3	Attained 1/2 to 3/4 of all the objectives in the test
2	Attained 1/4 to 1/2 of all the objectives in the test
1	Attained less than 1/4 of all the objectives in the test

Parents and citizens may obtain copies of the Proportions Reports through their local school district or from the State Department of Education. Be sure to specify the type of summary you wish: statewide, school district, or school summaries.

Exercise 11

Questions about How Your School District Compares with Statewide Test Results for MEAP

Illustration 2

STATEWIDE SUMMARY				
GRADE 7				
PROPORTIONS REPORT				
MATHEMATICS				
CATEGORY OF ACHIEVEMENT	1985	1984	1983	1980
4	66.2%	65.7%	63.8%	58.7%
3	24.8	25.6	26.8	27.9
2	7.4	7.4	7.9	10.7
1	1.5	1.4	1.5	2.7
Number of Pupils	111833	117500	128192	131136
READING				
CATEGORY OF ACHIEVEMENT	1985	1984	1983	1980
4	80.3%	80.8%	80.2%	76.7%
3	11.7	11.6	11.7	12.4
2	6.4	6.2	6.5	8.5
1	1.5	1.4	1.6	2.4
Number of Pupils	111980	117666	128375	131136

The illustration to the right is a facsimile of the proportions summary of statewide results for all 7th graders who took the test in the fall of 1985. By obtaining a proportions summary for your local school district, parents may ask the following questions:

- (1) How does my school district compare with the statewide results?
- (2) What percent of students have attained the minimum level of achievement (Class 4)?
- (3) How does the proportion of students attaining a satisfactory level of achievement this year compare with previous years?
- (4) What use does my school district make of the annual MEAP testing results? Are they released to parents accompanied with an explanation? Are they used at parent-teacher conferences?

SOURCE: MEAP HANDBOOK.

CHAPTER 9
IN LOOKING ABOUT YOU
SOME CLUES FROM SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

What if . . .

Your school is not able to provide adequate descriptive information about the progress of student learning?

What if . . .

You have difficulty finding clearly stated educational objectives or educational standards?

What if . . .

Your school does not seem to have an organized system to evaluate periodically the effectiveness of the educational program?

THEN WHAT?

It is possible that your school is doing a better job than you may believe. But in the absence of positive information, it is quite possible that the reverse may be true. So parents and citizens would be well advised to take a closer look at the schools. What seems to make a difference in the quality of the outcomes? The following suggestions taken from reports of successful schools point to things that seem to make a difference (see also the bibliography at the end of this report).

High Standards and High Expectations. The importance of high standards and the expectation that students will achieve them has been highlighted in many studies of successful schools. It appears to be particularly important for inner-city grade school children (see “Inner-City Children Can be Taught to Read”) and for college-bound students (see “Guidelines for Improving SAT Scores”).

Emphasis on the Basic Skills. The historic emphasis on a thorough grounding in reading, writing and arithmetic appears to be considerably more significant to the educational progress of the student than alleged by some theorists. In fact, students in some Michigan schools which have emphasized the acquisition of basic skills have consistently scored high on system-wide testing. School principals in successful schools speak to the importance of a good grounding in punctuation, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and practice in writing.

Academic Vigor. A strong academic program tends to stimulate high level effort across the board from the faculty and from all of the students. There is evidence that students who come from schools with stable or rising SAT test scores take more courses in academic subjects than those coming from schools with serious declines.

Emphasis on Academic Courses. In many schools, the academic program has been diluted by the expansion of elective courses which students may take as an alterna-

tive to basic subjects. Elective courses clothed with flashy titles suggest a form of light entertainment. Undoubtedly, some students are lured away from basic subjects of greater substance and value.

The State Board of Education has strongly recommended that local school officials take steps to strengthen academic offerings (see “Blueprint for Action”). Local school boards are asked to review course requirements and, if necessary, upgrade the requirements for high school graduation to meet the following minimums:

- Four years of communication skills including reading, grammar, literature, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking.
- Two years of mathematics including at least one course covering algebraic concepts.
- Two years of science including both biological and physical science.
- Three years of social studies including government, history, economics, cultural and ethnic studies, geography, law-related studies, and critical thinking.
- Two years or more in one or a combination of the following: foreign language, fine arts or the performing arts, vocational education, or the practical arts.
- One year of health and/or physical education.
- One-half year of “hands-on” computer education.

For college-bound students, the local school board should require one additional year of mathematics, one additional year of science, and at least two years of a foreign language.

Parents and citizens should look over the list of courses offered by the local school and find out what courses are required for a high school diploma. How many years of basic English and mathematics are required of all students? Does your school board have a plan to implement the recommendations of the State Board of Education?

Importance of Classroom Teaching. On-site observations of classroom teaching and learning in successful schools point to some important considerations. In comparing successful and unsuccessful inner-city schools’ reading programs, it was found that successful schools had these factors in common: strong leadership, high expectations, good atmosphere, strong emphasis on reading, additional reading personnel, use of phonics, individualization, and careful evaluation of pupil progress.

In classroom observations summarized in a report issued by Michigan State University, “Schools Can Make a Difference,” high expectation to achieve was considered to be the most important factor. Other important considerations were: the amount of teacher time spent providing direct classroom instruction to students, teacher behavior demonstrating a commitment to getting the job done, use of games as a teaching tool, flexible grouping of children based on mastery of curricula materials, and appro-

priate reinforcement practices (that is, giving appropriate recognition for a “correct” answer).

In “Blueprint for Action,” the State Board of Education emphasized that the more time spent on an academic task, the higher the likelihood of success in student learning. The Board recommended that local school boards adopt a standard for senior high schools to provide for a minimum of six classes per class day and a class period of 50 minutes in duration. In addition, middle schools and junior high schools should provide for a six-clock-hour instructional day. The Board also suggested that the school year should be increased from 190 to 200 days.

Other recommendations in “Blueprint for Action” are: reducing absenteeism and dropouts, better school discipline, and the regular assignment of meaningful homework. Parents and citizens should inquire what their local schools are doing in response to these recommendations by the State Board.

A Positive Learning Environment. How much effective instruction goes on in a classroom is, of course, dependent upon many factors, not the least of which are the maintenance of an orderly learning environment, adequate planning and preparation by a competent teacher, and homework assignments completed by the students so that classroom time can be spent productively and, perhaps, even creatively. And, it should be remembered that what goes on in the classroom may also be influenced by the quality of leadership of the principal, the effort of the students, and the interest of the parents.

In conclusion, parents and citizens should remember that the main thrust of the outcomes approach is to call for the achievement of purposeful educational ends. Schools are for learning and the measure of an effective school program is the development of a student’s intellectual skill so that the student can constructively apply what has been learned and use it throughout his/her adult life. Individual opportunity continues to be a philosophical ideal of the American education system. And the effort and resolve of each individual responsible for contributing to the learning process is essential for real progress.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The following publications are selected for their particular interest to parents and citizens seeking to improve the educational outcomes of your schools. Where indicated, publications may be purchased. Some of these publications may also be available at your local library.

Chapter 1 WHAT THIS MANUAL IS ABOUT

U.S. Bureau of Census, Education in the United States: 1940-1983, a Special Demographic Analysis by Dave M. O'Neill and Peter Sepielli, 1985, 53pp. Price \$2.25 payable to: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Refer to GPO Stock No.: S/N 003024-06355-7. See particularly Chapter 3 which describes educational achievements including national trends in test scores. The report also gives data on educational attainment of the population.

The National Committee for Citizens in Education specializes in issuing publications of interest to parents and citizens. Order NCCE catalog, 410 Wilde Lake Village Green, Columbia, MD 21044.

Chapter 2 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENT LEARNING AT SCHOOL

The State Department has published several guides for parents suggesting useful home-centered activities designed to help your child's growth in learning. Inquiries should be sent to: Michigan Educational Assessment Program, Department of Education, Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909. The titles are:

A Guide for Parents: Calendar of Reading, Writing and Mathematical Skills for Grades K - 3.

A Guide for Parents: Calendar of Reading, Writing, Speaking-Listening, and Mathematical Skills for Grades 4 - 6.

Note: The above guides have been translated into the Spanish and Vietnamese languages. Inquire of the Grand Rapids Public Schools, 143 Bostwick, N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

The Michigan Reading Association publishes many materials of interest to parents in helping their child develop good reading habits. Address inquiries to: P.O. Box 7509, Grand Rapids, MI 49510.

Commission on Reading, National Academy of Education, Becoming a Nation of Readers, 147pp. Price \$4.50. Make check payable to the University of Illinois and send order to: Becoming A Nation of Readers, P.O. Box 2774, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820-8774. Superbly written, this book provides a careful and thorough synthesis of extensive findings on reading. The book also deals directly with the question on how parents can help their child to become a good reader.

Chapter 3 ON DISTINGUISHING OUTCOMES FROM INPUTS

Jesse Burkhead, T.G. Fox, and J.W. Holland, Input and Output in Large-City High Schools, Syracuse University Press, 1967, 110pp. This book lays out a theoretical framework and a methodology for examining the allocation of resources within large-city school systems and the resulting outputs of the schools. It is a technical work and should be available in major libraries.

Chapter 4 SOME OBSTACLES TO LAYMEN IN PURSUING AN OUTCOMES APPROACH

National Committee for Citizens in Education, Who Controls the Schools? 76pp. Considers the question who has power to decide how your child should be educated. Price \$3.50. Order: Suite 410, Wilde Lake Village Green, Columbia, MD 21044.

David S. Seeley, Education Through Partnership: Mediating Structures and Education, 1985. 306 pp., \$9.95 (paper). Explains how America's extraordinary public school system has worked itself into a state of paralysis, and shows how American society can begin to develop an effective and productive educational system for the future. Order from: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1150 Seventeenth St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Chapter 5
SCHOOL POLICIES AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY
or
HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THINGS THAT MATTER

The National Committee for Citizens in Education, The School Budget: It's Your Money; It's Your Business, 192pp. Price \$4.95 plus \$1 postage from Suite 410 Wilde Lake Village Green, Columbia, MD 21044. How to ask the right questions of school officials and how to act on the information you get to change budget priorities.

Marshall S. Smith and Stewart C. Purkey, School Reform: The District Policy Implications of the Effective Schools Literature. Price \$3.00 plus \$2 postage & handling from the Council for Basic Education, 725 Fifteenth St., NW, Washington, DC 20005. Provides a model for school improvement and four general recommendations to policy development.

Journal of Educational Communication, Special Issue, January-February 1976, "A Consumer's Guide to Quality Education." Of particular interest are the following articles: Donald L. Hymes, "Budget-making as a Means to Involve Citizenry" and Jean B. McGrew, "Management by Objectives ... Hottest Game in Town."

Chapter 6
THE PUBLICOS STAKE IN EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND MEASUREMENTS

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, A Report to the Nation and the U.S. Secretary of Education, April, 1983, 65pp. The Commission warned that the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. A copy of the report may be ordered from: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210 at about 10 cents per page for paper copy.

State Board of Education, Better Education for Michigan Citizens: A Blueprint for Action, January, 1984, 39pp. This is the State Board's plan to improve education in Michigan to achieve excellence as well as equality of opportunity. Specific recommendations are targeted to the local school boards, to state policymakers, and to colleges and universities. Order from: Michigan State Board of Education, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909.

Ian McNett, Charting a Course: A Guide to the Excellence Movement in Education, published by Council for Basic Education, 725 Fifteenth St., NW, Washington, DC 20005. 1981, 53pp. Price \$8.95 plus \$2 for postage and handling. A busy person's guide to specific recommendations from reports on excellence. Cites references with extensive quotations.

National Academy Press, High Schools and the Changing Workplace, the Employers' View, 1984, 37pp. This is a report of the panel on secondary school education sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering and Institute of Medicine. The purpose of this report is to define educational competencies that a high school graduate will need for success in the workplace after entry and throughout his or her career. Send inquiries to: National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20418.

Chapter 7
TESTING AND MEASURING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Henry S. Oyer, Parents Can Understand Testing, a parent's network publication of The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1980, 88pp. Price \$3.50 plus \$1 postage from The National Committee for Citizens in Education, Suite 410 Wilde Lake Village Green, Columbia, MD 21044. This highly recommended handbook is designed to help parents find intelligible answers to questions about testing. Describes types of tests and test scores, contains a list of questions for parents to ask and a glossary of terms.

Robert L. Ebel, The Uses of Standardized Testing, Fastback 93, 1977, 49pp. 75 cents. Order: Phi Delta Kappa, Inc., Eight and Union, Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47401. Discusses the value of standardized tests.

State Board of Education, Questions and Answers about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, 12pp. Written for citizens in Michigan, this gives an overall description of the statewide testing program in the public schools and tells how the results may be used. For a free copy write to: Supervisor, Michigan Educational Assessment Program, Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909.

Chapter 8
USE OF THE RESULTS OF STUDENT TESTING

State Department of Education Publications (Order from Michigan Educational Assessment Program, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909):

MEAP Statewide Summary Report. This contains a number of graphs showing test results over time.

Detail of the Statewide Summary of test scores for objectives in mathematics, reading, and health tests with proportions report. Single sheets for each grade:
GRADE 4, GRADE 7, and GRADE 10.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program Handbook. Describes the tests in greater detail and tells how to use test results. Appendices A through G give samples of test forms, instructions on how to read the forms, samples of test items, and a listing of resource materials.

Chapter 9
IN LOOKING ABOUT YOU
SOME CLUES FROM SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

There have been a number of case studies dealing with the question: What does make a difference in the academic outcomes on one school as compared with another school in similar circumstances? The following three studies approach this question by selecting and studying successful schools.

George Weber, Inner-City Children Can Be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools, Occasional Paper, No. 18, 1971, 35pp. Price \$2.00. Published by Council for Basic Education, 725 Fifteenth Street NW, Washington, DC 20005.

National Association of Secondary School Principals, Guidelines for Improving SAT Scores, 1978, 49pp. Inquiries to 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091. This is a survey of 34 high schools which had stable or rising average test scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in contrast to the general trend of decline of average test scores of students taking college entrance examinations.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program Handbook. (See listing in Chapter 8 above): APPENDIX D "Variables That Make a Difference." This contains a listing of eight characteristics that have been shown to be highly related to student achievement.

ANSWER SHEET FOR EXERCISES 1 THROUGH 11

Exercise 1--page 2

1-S; 2-T; 3-P; 4-S; 5-T and P; 6-P; 7-T.

Exercise 2--page 3

For each yes answer, give yourself one point. On a scale of 1-10, consider 9-10 points as good; 7-8 points as satisfactory. Six points and below may indicate an unsatisfactory level of educational involvement with your child.

Exercise 3--page 4

Item No. 5 might be considered “not of major importance”; all others are important.

Exercise 4--page 5

The appropriate check for Column I is “Student responsibility for learning” and for Column 2, Student right to an education.”

Exercise 5--page 7

Items 1, 3, and 6 are inputs; and items 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8 are outcomes.

Exercise 6--page 9

This is an exercise in exposition which calls for the use of persuasive reasoning.

Exercise 7--page 11

The answers would vary according to the school district.

Exercise 8--page 14

If you believe in the importance of academic learning, you would “agree” with items 1, 2, 3, and 5; and “disagree” with items 4 and 6.

Exercise 9--page 18

1-A; 2-C; 3-C; 4-D.

Exercise 10--page 21

The response would vary according to the individual student.

Exercise 11--page 25

The response would vary according to the school district.