

# Performance Measurement in Education

Performance measures in school authority and school plans and results reports provide information on achievement of outcomes on key aspects of the education system. This information is an essential part of accountability that enables the organization to:

- Assess and report on progress, what is working well and what needs improvement.
- Determine priorities for improvement and set improvement targets.
- Make program and budget decisions to maintain good performance and improve performance in areas requiring improvement.

Measures typically provide quantifiable information on key aspects of education. This information is generated quantitatively through tests, surveys, and data analysis or through qualitative means, such as observation, interviews and portfolio reviews. Whether quantitative or qualitative, measures demonstrate observable change. To be meaningful, measures information is obtained regularly (e.g. annually) and is normally expressed in percentages, ratios or numbers in relation to a total.

## Types of Performance Measures

- **Outcome measures:** These provide information on progress toward desired results in key areas – effectiveness of programs, impacts on clients.
- **Intermediate outcome measures:** For some desired outcomes, results may not be known for several years. In such instances, it is useful to measure intermediate steps – milestones or landmarks – toward the desired outcome.

The measures in school authority and school plans and in results reports focus on outcomes and constitute the core set of measures for assessing and reporting on progress and achievement.

Other types of measures, listed below, are important for managing resources, providing programs and services, and reporting contextual information:

- **Output measures:** Information on number of clients served and types of services provided.

- **Process measures:** Information on activity and efficiency. These measures indicate demand for services and cost per unit of providing service.
- **Input measures:** Information on resources allocated to programs, such as funding, personnel, and equipment. These measures provide information on cost or numbers of staff involved in providing programs and services.

## Characteristics of Good Performance Measures

Good performance measures provide information that is:

- Understandable – clear and sufficient to provide an understanding of the organization or system to staff, community and government
- Valid – meaningful and credible (sound, defensible)
- Relevant and appropriate – timely, related to important aspects
- Reliable – unbiased, error-free and verifiable
- Comparable – show change over time and/or among similar organizations
- Discrete – provides information in distinct, non-overlapping categories
- Empowering – useful for decision making, promote improvement
- Practical – can be reliably assessed with reasonable effort

## References

Alberta Treasury, *Measuring Performance: A Reference Guide*, September 1996. On the internet at <http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/measuring> and select "Other Alberta performance measurement documents."

Alberta Auditor General, *Government Accountability*, February 1997. On the internet at <http://www.oag.ab.ca> and select "The Reading Room."