Accountability under ESSA Design Competition
Thomas B. Fordham Institute

I am an 18-year public educator who staunchly supported public education until a dinner conversation with my fifth grade son made me aware that the K-12 accountability system was not promoting learning, but creating test takers. I asked my son what he did at school that day and he nonchalantly responded, "I took a pretest for the pretest that we take before the benchmark and then the real test is in 29 days. Oh, and then we take a posttest." I was shocked at how well he connected all the testing dots.

In that moment at the dinner table, I realized the accountability system meant more than the learning process and my son was mastering the art of test taking. When standardized testing occurs, teaching and learning doesn't because students aren't allowed to ask questions and teachers aren't allowed to engage with students. The art of teaching is diminished when accountability systems solely or primarily rely on standardized tests. Diane Ravitch estimated at least nine weeks of each school year were devoted to testing when she taught kindergarten.

In 2014, I started looking for solutions by studying what other localities and states were doing. After a careful analysis of each state's accountability systems including rating systems, methods used for reporting, differences in descriptions and indicators, online accessibility, emphasis of particular data, ability to drill down data, and the use of graphics; a perfect accountability system does not exist. However, there are examples of measures that improve upon the model required by NCLB. And with the recent passage of ESSA, all states have the opportunity to adjust their accountability systems, be innovative, and potentially take leaps towards education equity. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute's design competition will further these conversations and hopefully initiate new ones.

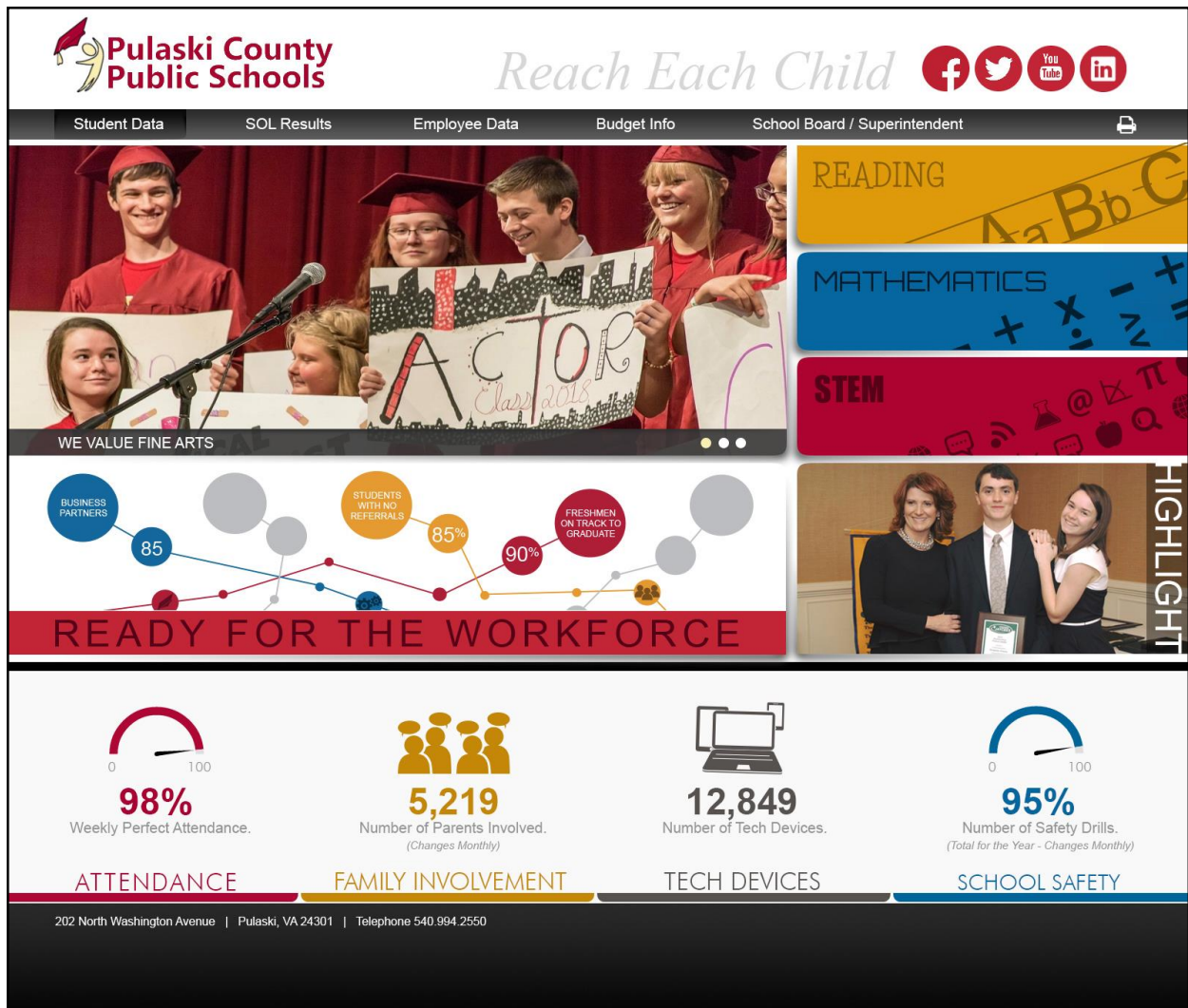### *Mission of ESSA: Advance Equity in Public Education*

Priority: Design an accountability system that promotes a competency-based, growth-for-all expectation.

States have an opportunity and challenge as they create new accountability systems to greatly improve upon the NCLB model. To initiate creative thinking, states need to start with a blank page, not build upon their current accountability models. This includes starting with a blank page for the predominant sign of accountability systems – school report cards. Current state accountability models and school report cards need an overhaul. Some states, (i.e. Ohio, Illinois, Arizona, Florida, and the District of Columbia) don't need to completely toss their school report cards and systems. The intent by which they were designed could be adapted to accommodate an accountability model that promotes equity in education.

A competency-based accountability model focuses on multiple measures of student growth at multiple points in the year. Utilizing a dashboard with the ability and expectation to continuously report and update promotes a continuous growth model.

Dashboard: An online dashboard provides states with a tool that reports multiple data points with the ability to drill down for additional information. Therefore, providing stakeholders with real-time data to support student learning and stakeholder engagement. As required by ESSA, states will issue annual school report cards. The report cards will resemble the dashboard and be anti-climatic since the dashboard is an online reporting system that is accessible and updated 24/7.

A dashboard is a web-based platform designed to share information and data in a visually compelling manner. This allows states to bring attention to important information beyond standardized test scores. A dashboard is updated regularly and aids in the facilitation of a meaningful two-way "conversation" with all stakeholders that encourages transparency, engagement, and ownership in the educational process. All data points on a dashboard can be "clicked on" to access more detailed information and the ability to drilldown for data specific to a subgroup or grade level. The dashboard also provides the ability to review previous data by days, weeks, months, and years.

Dashboard Example: Designed for a school system, not a state accountability system. Each data point is a link to a secondary page for more information and the ability to drilldown. For this example, state assessments are noted across the top tab and located on a secondary page.

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PUBLIC SCHOOL REPORT CARDS

State | District | School | Live Chat

Oak Grove Elementary School

Oak Grove District
www.oakgroveelementaryschool.edu
info@oakgroveelementaryschool.edu

4560 Oak Grove Court
Oak Grove, GA 12345

Tel: 123.456.7890
Fax: 123.654.0987

Principal: **John Johnson**
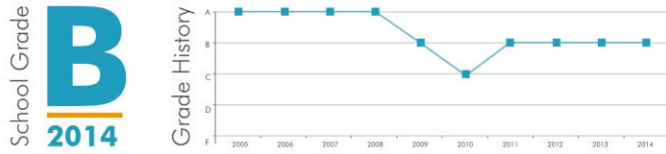License #: **A1234590**
Years at School: **5**

jjohnson@oakgroveelementaryschool.edu
123.456.7890

Specialty Programs offered at Oak Grove Elementary School include 1-1 iPad Iniative, Community Green House, PTA, Physical Education, Music and Art.

Report Card Legend: ? Questions | Historical Data | Audio | TRANSLATE Select Language | Print PDF

▼ Navigate the Report Card

Grade History

School Grade **B** 2014

Grade History

How did Oak Grove earn a B for 2014? (View Details)

Compare Oak Grove with **District**
Compare Oak Grove with **State**
Compare Oak Grove with **Nation**

Ten Components of School Grade

Select image for more information

PROFICIENCY

English/Language Arts
59.22% of students are ready
Student Breakdown ▶

Math
55.33% of students are ready
Student Breakdown ▶

Science
48.33% of students are ready
Student Breakdown ▶

Social Studies
59.00% of students are ready
Student Breakdown ▶

GROWTH/IMPROVEMENT *(Among the lowest performing 25% of students)*

English/Language Arts
62.59% showed growth
Student Breakdown ▶

Math
62.17% showed growth
Student Breakdown ▶

English/Language Arts
57.00% of lowest performing students making growth
Student Breakdown ▶

Math
57.00% of lowest performing students making growth
Student Breakdown ▶

GRADUATION RATE & COLLEGE/CAREER READY

Graduation Rate *(High School Only)*
64.42% of Oak Grove high students earned a diploma in 4 years
Student Breakdown ▶

College/Career Ready *(High School Only)*
62.12% of Oak Grove high students are ready
Student Breakdown ▶

% of students tested 97% (View Data)

HOW DOES YOUR CHILD COMPARE TO OTHERS?

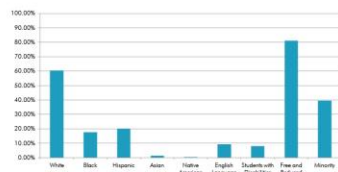Enter Student's ID: _____ at Oak Grove Elementary School. submit

Breakdown of Math, Skill Level & Understanding

Grade 3 view data | **Grade 4** view data | **Grade 5** view data

Demographic Data

Student Subgroup	Number	Percent
White	545	60.56%
Black	159	17.67%
Hispanic	180	20.00%
Asian	13	1.44%
Native American	3	0.33%
English Language Learners	83	9.22%
Students with Disabilities	71	7.89%
Free and Reduced Lunch	731	81.22%
Minority	355	39.44%
Total (All Students)	900	100.00%

(Percent of students in the school that fall into each subgroup.)

Process Measures

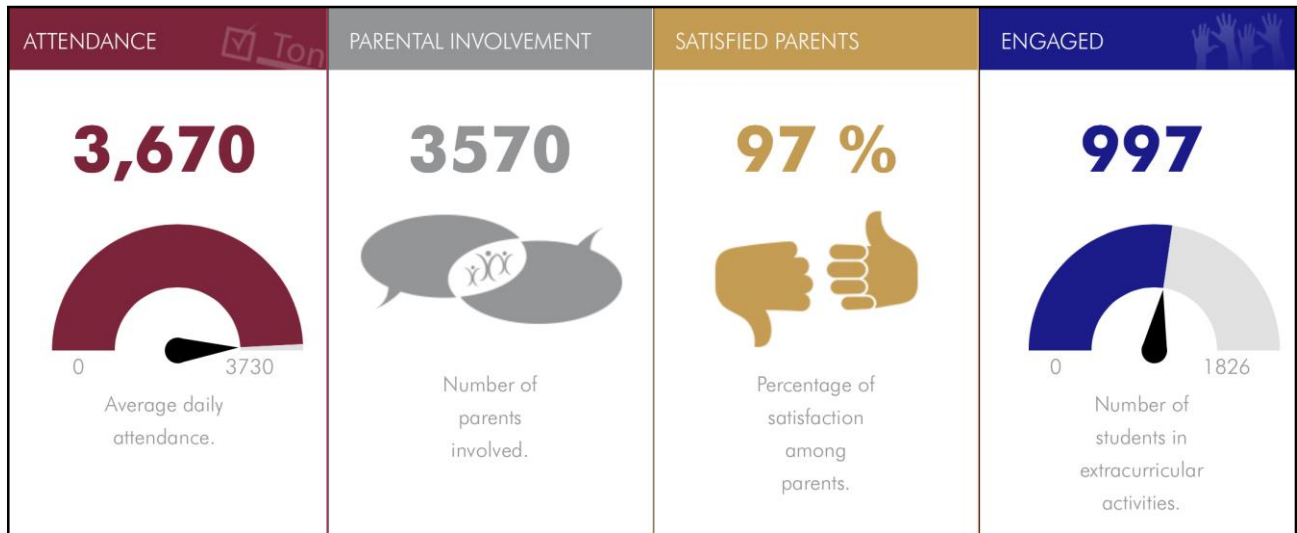*In addition to measuring outcomes, we measure student processes.*

creativity | collaboration | responsibility | family engagement

Dashboard Example: *Designed for the My School Info Challenge facilitated by the Foundation for Excellence in Education. This submission received the public vote award for the "Best Summary."*
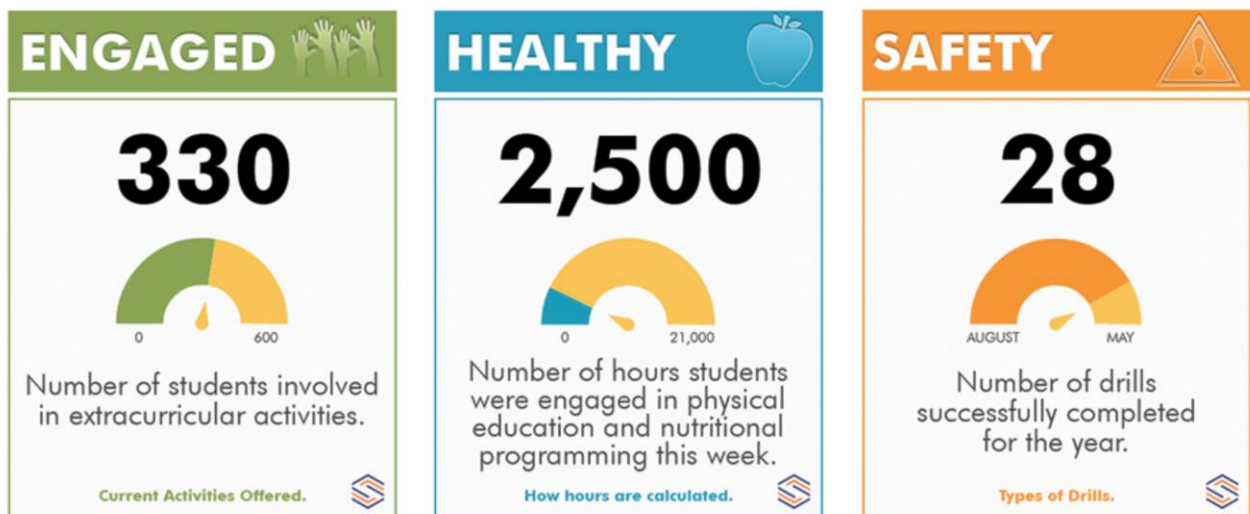
Each data point is a link to a secondary page for more information and the ability to drilldown. This also includes the ability for a parent to enter their child's student id number (assigned by the state) and see his/her results.

This contest required grading schools A-F.

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The dashboard will include "Measure Up" components. These are simple tools (gauges) that make it easy for the public to consume key information. The data can be presented as a number, total number count, or percentage. To keep the data points meaningful, they should be reported in daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly averages. For example: Instead of reporting last year's average daily attendance, report the percentage of students achieving perfect attendance last week. This makes attendance data relevant and provides a call to action for students/families. The secondary pages provide drill down capabilities and simply state the importance of each point being reported. They can also feature Local Education Agencies (LEA) representatives (students, graduates, parents, staff) in a video or photo/quote about the significance of the data point and its potential impact on student achievement.

Measure Up Examples: *"Parental Involvement" is based on the number of parents attending a school-sponsored event during a month. The "Satisfied Parents" measure is based upon annual survey results. The number of students "Engaged" is based upon participation in extracurricular activities each season.*

Measure Up Examples: *These examples promote three of the five Whole Child tenets: engaged, healthy, and safe.*

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Students are much more than test scores and schools are much more than ratings. There are many types of data that support student learning and if demonstrated in a clear, easily accessible format, data can empower stakeholders in understanding and supporting student achievement and school quality. The use of a dashboard provides actionable information that is child-centered, timely, and focuses on a better understanding or the school.

| 1546 | 70% | 29 | 95% | 74% |
| Average SAT Score | Students Enrolled in a CTE Course | IB Courses Offered | 2015 Graduation Rate | Salem Graduates Attend 2/4 Year College/University |

Measure Up Example: *This example incorporates multiple data points that support the goal of being college and career ready.*

Indicators of Academic Achievement:
- The state will develop a compendium of state-approved practices to measure student growth and success. There will be a process for LEAs to expand the compendium by submitting successfully used/proven models.
- States will keep their current standards in place. Standards will exist for all subjects and grades. A strategy for assessing student achievement and reporting them for each class will be in place. Strategies for assessing students are primarily teacher driven, i.e. listening, watching, asking, redirecting, and challenging. The dashboard will report student growth/achievement in math, reading/language arts, and science. All data points should not be measured, but reported. (Measured data points become part of the rating.)
- Learning labels should be eliminated. Learning should not be labeled proficient, advanced, etc. A competency-based model focuses on individual students and expects learning to occur for each student at his/her own pace.
- Subgroup performance for all data points will be provided.
- Achievement gaps of 5% or more will be identified.
- Groups of students will be compared as they move through a school instead of comparing grades from year to year. (See example on next page.)

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Breakdown of Math Performance

The following three charts depict the percentage of students demonstrating appropriate math skill levels as evidenced on their end-of-course (EOC) math tests. The subgroups used for a better understanding of Oak Grove High School's success and challenges include: white, black, Hispanic, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, students receiving free/reduced lunch, and all students. Highlighted percentages represent a disparity of more than 5% between all students and the subgroup.

GRADE 3 – 2012	2012	2013	2014
White	55%	54%	51%
Black	48%	42%	50%
Hispanic	42%	39%	48%
English Language Learners	43%	45%	58%
Students with Disabilities	20%	30%	**
Free & Reduced Lunch	41%	41%	41%
TOTAL FOR ALL STUDENTS	51%	49%	51%

** If the population is less than ten students, then the results are not reported. This is done to protect the identity of the students and their performance on EOCs.

GRADE 4 – 2013	2012	2013	2014
White	63%	61%	60%
Black	50%	48%	55%
Hispanic	61%	60%	59%
English Language Learners	55%	50%	56%
Students with Disabilities	22%	36%	33%
Free & Reduced Lunch	45%	44%	43%
TOTAL FOR ALL STUDENTS	60%	57%	59%

GRADE 5 – 2014	2012	2013	2014
White	65%	60%	60%
Black	59%	61%	58%
Hispanic	67%	64%	65%
English Language Learners	50%	**	45%
Students with Disabilities	**	20%	**
Free & Reduced Lunch	48%	48%	46%
TOTAL FOR ALL STUDENTS	64%	60%	61%

** If the population is less than ten students, then the results are not reported. This is done to protect the identity of the students and their performance on EOCs.

GRADE 3 – 2012

	2012	2013	2014
White	55%	54%	51%
Black	48%	42%	50%
Hispanic	42%	39%	48%
English Language Learners	43%	45%	58%
Students with Disabilities	20%	30%	**
Free & Reduced Lunch	41%	41%	41%
TOTAL FOR ALL STUDENTS	51%	49%	51%

** If the population is less than ten students, then the results are not reported. This is done to protect the identity of the students and their performance on EOCs.

Example: Demonstrating student growth as students move from grade to grade. What is the value-added during a students' school career (grades 3-5).

Indicators of Student Growth:
- Eliminate the status model by providing data as it is available. While the overall accreditation of a school will be decided at a given point, providing information as it is available is more helpful in communicating to and engaging stakeholders in the learning process.
- Reduce the importance of testing and the data provided by increasing the expectation and opportunity for states to pilot innovative assessments that capture multiple measures of student performance and growth.
- In addition to expectations considered proficient, accountability systems will include learning gains of all students and students by subgroup. Florida provides a good example of this.

Progress Toward English Language Proficiency:
- Progress towards English language proficiency will be a primary concern; therefore, being featured as a primary item on the dashboard. This not only promotes transparency, but ensures schools and LEAs where these students are struggling receives the right kind of support from the state.
- The progress towards English language proficiency will be a component of a school's rating (accredited or unaccredited).
- All teachers need to know how to best serve English language learners.

Student Success/School Quality:

- ESSA requires state accountability systems to include not less than one indicator of student success or school quality. States should consider incorporating the five Whole Child tenets (healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged) into their reporting system. These would not be part of a school's rating; therefore, flexibility could be given to LEAs as to how to report data for five tenets in the form of a menu or state-approved data point.

Examples of Measuring School Quality:

- Illinois uses the 5Essentials Survey to survey students, teachers, and parents to assess individual school's effectiveness in effective leaders, collaborative teachers, ambitious instruction, supportive environment, and involved families. Illinois provides state-approved alternatives to this survey and the information is reported, but not part of a school rating system. (Illinois does not rate schools.) This method addresses multiple Whole Child tenets and supports a multiple measure approach to evaluating the quality of schools.
- Some states explicitly refer to postsecondary and career readiness in accountability laws and some states use indicators. Indicators used by various states include: decreased dropout rates, ACT/SAT results, ninth grade students on track to graduate, and enrollment in postsecondary options. Illinois reports the percentage of freshmen on track to graduate by combining multiple measures (link to example).
- A group of states administer Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments to measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and their careers.

Summative School Grades:

- ESSA implies a school rating/grade could be generated and requires a system to meaningfully differentiate schools in the state. Rating systems are not meaningful ways to differentiate schools. Rating systems are poor attempts to make over millions of data points collected during a student's K-12 career simple. Rating systems are mechanisms to eliminate conversations and do not acknowledge the process of learning. The mission of public education should not be simplified to a single number, percent, or letter only to be updated annually. Moreover, a rating system designates which functions of public education are more important than others. When we rate schools, the measures that are part of the rating will overshadow most, if not all of the measures that are not part of the rating.
- Currently there are over thirty different rating systems used by states. Five states do not include a rating system on their school report cards and three states only use the AYP rating.
- In order to broaden indicators to measure student growth and school quality, ratings need to be simplified. States should provide two ratings: accredited and unaccredited. There is a threshold in which a local education agency should not be in operation without significant state interventions and this should be clear to all stakeholders. By operating with an overarching two-rating accountability system, this allows a state to identify local education agencies that are not operating at a basic level. It also provides the accredited LEA's the flexibility to be innovative and responsive to their unique

needs. Moreover, it eliminates the focus on the assessment of measures included in a rating and gives schools that are setup for failure based upon their ZIP Codes an opportunity to breathe and receive state support as a partner in developing a system to promote equity in public education.

Low-Performing Subgroups:
- States and LEAs will have regularly ongoing conversations regarding all subgroup expectations and goals. These measures will be displayed on the dashboard. ESSA placed a significant amount of trust in LEAs and states to be innovative and implement tough strategies; this process must be transparent.
- Develop a compendium of proven strategies to make significant positive changes in low-performing schools. LEAs will contribute their successful strategies to the collection.

Next Steps:
- Before states design accountability systems, they need to ask some tough questions and listen to the answers. Instead of focusing on the accountability system and measures, start with a blank page and design the ideal public education system, then determine how to hold it accountable. Don't design a solution before fully understanding the problem. The "challenges and opportunities" are likely similar and different throughout each state.
- ESSA should have a significant, positive impact on state and local education agencies "new" accountability systems as ESSA grants them the flexibility to rethink accountability and better define the value public education should add to each student's life regardless of his/her ZIP Code. The spirit in which ESSA was created will quickly be forgotten if states do not pounce on the opportunity to make stakeholders aware of: 1) The current practices that are no longer required at the federal level. 2) Engage stakeholders in the process of redesigning accountability and redefining the value of public education. If people, lots of people, don't start talking about the big open door and start getting honest about making changes, then federal regulations may suddenly appear or worse, no regulations appear and your state's system looks no different for the next five years.

About Melany Stowe: @MelanyStowe
Mission: Children should learn without fear, have opportunities to embrace their passions, and never be limited by a ZIP Code.

- Reeves' and Jagger's Mom
- Director of Public Relations and Communications at The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research
- 18 years of experience in public education.
- Virginia ASCD Board of Directors
- 2013 ASCD Emerging Leader
- 2011 NSBA Top 20 to Watch
- 2009 Virginia CTE Program of the Year