Inspire

The Assessment of Expected Student Outcomes

by: Dr. Erin Wilcox

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Expected student outcomes (ESOs) are "What the school intentionally targets for all students to know, believe, understand, and/or be able to do in academic and non-academic areas after their tenure in the school. Outcomes are based on the mission and philosophy of the school." (Definition from the *Inspire* Manual) These statements declare the school's commitment or promise to parents that they will accomplish these outcomes in the lives of students. Parents consider the cost, which is significant, and they entrust their most valuable possession, their child, to the school in exchange for a future promise, or at least the school's best attempt to accomplish these things in the life of their student. Even if parents don't specifically ask for an accounting year by year of how the outcomes are coming along, it is incumbent on the school to ascertain how they are doing and adjust decisions, programs, and instruction to better attain these outcomes in the life of each student.

The first white paper on Expected Student Outcomes explained the concept and gave several examples of ESOs. The *Inspire* protocol assumes that schools will establish ESOs to help guide their overall direction and decision making. These are included in three of the six domains and in four of the standards. (See 1.1, 1.4, 9.3, 14.2, and Standard 7. Occasionally the phrase is shortened to "student outcomes" rather than "expected student outcomes.")

As schools move from establishing and educating their communities about their ESOs, the next step is to determine how well they are doing on accomplishing them.

Inspire indicator 1.4 states:
> The school **assesses its academic and non-academic expected student outcomes** and uses results to drive decisions throughout operations and programs.

This document will provide some principles regarding assessment of ESOs and additional examples of how schools assess their outcomes.

Principles:

1) <u>Begin with the end in mind.</u> Backward design is a well-established principle throughout curriculum planning and is applicable in this area as well. When designing the assessment, keep it as close to the target behavior as possible. If it is difficult to measure the actual behavior, like "understanding" or "pursues lifelong learning," then choose two or three more concrete behaviors that can be measured and ask how those would be demonstrated. Determine what would indicate growth in that area and write competencies for those more measurable activities.

2) <u>There are many ways to measure outcomes</u>, include:
   a. Objective means, like test scores. Those work well for academic achievement.
   b. Counting works well for behaviors for which the goal is to see increase over time, or how many times students choose something voluntarily.
   c. Journaling or reflections work well for concepts like "understands responsibility to the needy" or "lives according to biblical principles." In those cases, it is best to use the journaling or reflection as a response to a chapel speaker, teaching in class, or experience in the community. Over time, the student's reflection should show growth in that area.
   d. Rubrics can be combined with reflections to assess if the target outcome is being met.
   e. Finally, perception data, like surveys, complete the picture for some of the outcomes. Since many outcomes are non-academic, they fall into the "soft skills category," and schools must look for creative ways to assess them.

3) <u>Using examples or anecdotes about how a few students have excelled is not a valid way of measuring outcomes.</u> Just because a school has a Division 1 athlete or a student accepted to an Ivy League school does not validate their athletic or academic program. Outcomes assessments must measure all the students and indicate how they are doing on the target behaviors. Even if the score is lower than desired, the school's response to those results could be, "While only 55% of the middle school students met our criteria for *Values self and others* in our recent analysis, we will be targeting this as a focus in next year's chapel and homeroom time." Too often schools share one or two examples of how a single student was kind as proof that they met this outcome. Individual student examples or even an example of a small group of students are not as important as gathering data on the entire group so that the school can determine if more work needs to be done in a particular area.

4) <u>Compare results over time with a focus on improvement.</u> For assessments and interventions in general, the ultimate purpose is program improvement. While reporting to parents and the board is an intermediate and valid goal, that is not as important as being able to improve the outcome in students' lives. Schools may need to start small and gather data on a few assessments per grade, but always keep in mind the bigger purpose of program improvement. The middle school example in the previous point would lead the school to a greater emphasis or different type of program on appreciation for the way God has created each one in His image, and how that understanding leads students to treat one another with respect. Inherent in that would be appreciation for others' differences and less relational aggression. Another example might be a high school that assesses the outcome *Demonstrates godly leadership* in its leadership program. The school might realize that student government or other leadership positions are all elected on popularity resulting in difficulties with spiritual maturity and teamwork. Once they assess their leadership outcomes, students, parents, and teachers may lay out a plan over time to change some of the qualifications, recommendations, and selection processes for how a student becomes a leader and then is trained to serve. That is an example of how assessment of an outcome and resulting improvement plan could greatly impact school culture and the lives of the students for good. Those results and the ensuing plan become powerful over time as the cycle of improvement can show that the intervention was successful. Or if not, the intervention can be adjusted to better meet the needs identified through the ongoing assessment of the outcomes.

5) <u>There is no one right way to meet this indicator.</u> However, there are some characteristics or descriptors that the visiting team may look for when thinking about what effective ESO assessment looks like.
   a. Does the school have documentation or a plan that explains its approach to assessing its outcomes, reporting on those to various stakeholders, and using those results to inform improvement efforts? While there is no preferred format, a written plan that the visiting team can review would indicate intentionality and the ability to build on the results from year to year.
   b. Is there evidence that the assessments are being given, results are shared with leadership, and program improvement is occurring? In other words, is the plan being implemented?
   c. Finally, is the plan reviewed and revised so that the accomplishment of the ESOs continues to improve? A school may need to scale back and only assess a few items in each grade, each year. Adjusting the plan so that it is manageable and can be maintained is a huge part of its being successful and sustainable.

The second section of this paper gives a few examples from schools on how they go about assessing their students' outcomes. The schools' plans have other components but for brevity, only one segment of their plan has been highlighted here. Approaches vary from school to school to make the point that plans can look different. What made these schools stand out is that they are currently working with their ESOs and learning from their assessment of them. Their programs are improving because they are intentionally collecting, reviewing, and using the results.

1) Some schools create assessments that relate both to curricular content and one or more outcomes (or a competency under that outcome). These assessments are embedded in the courses themselves and are measured by way of rubrics, completion, or counting (like service hours), or more thoughtful types of responses like journals, reflections, essays within an exam, or class discussions. Teachers then collect the data or summarize the students' responses and pass along the "achievement" of the outcomes to the division leader as part of a report on that outcome or competency. (Example: Colorado Springs Christian Schools)

2) Some schools have students write their own goals based on the student outcome statements, and these are communicated with teachers and parents through the school's reporting process. At the end of the term or year, students reflect on their growth directly related to the goal they selected and the target activities they participated in to see how they accomplished their objectives. To help students truly understand each area, the school focuses on one of the four outcomes per quarter in chapels, newsletters, homerooms, etc. They also keep them front and center through attractive nautical theme banners and clear "I can" statements, making them very personal. (Dalat School, Penang Malaysia)

3) Some schools focus on the outcomes as a whole school through a variety of activities (chapel, announcements, testimonials, homeroom activities, service requirements, extracurricular activities, etc.). Quarterly, the teachers and leaders meet and discuss the development of the outcomes in students' lives. They cite examples of how various grade levels demonstrated a particular outcome or lack thereof, by group and individual. Staff doing the

analysis discuss the outcome that the school was paying particular attention to as well as reviewing all the outcomes. Incorporated in this analysis was a focus on "things that seemed effective" and "ways in which we could encourage these outcomes more." (Example: Morrison Academy, Taiwan)

4) Some schools, including Morrison that was mentioned in the previous point, use various surveys to assess these outcomes on an individual level as well. Morrison's outcomes are called "A Vision for our Learners" or VFOL. The following chart provides an idea of how they have mapped or aligned the outcomes identified in their VFOL to the various surveys. When they analyze the surveys specifically for the outcomes, this gives them information about how certain demographic groups see themselves as meeting these goals. While they do not have names of these individual students, they have captured other demographic information about these students, parents, and faculty and this adds to the analysis they have done by group in part #3 above.

| | PURPOSE | CORE VALUES | | | | | | | | VISION | | | VFOL | | | |
	MK Needs	Know the Truth	Pursue	Whole Person	Great	Partner parents	Caring	Quality	Biblically	Impact World	Spiritual	Effective	Critical Thinker	Life-long Learner	Ethical Citizen	Steward of Life
Alumni Survey		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Athletes Survey	X							X				X			X	
ASP Staff Survey	X			X	X		X	X	X	X						
ASP Parent Survey	X			X	X		X	X	X	X						
ASP Student Survey	X			X	X			X	X	X						
Bible Survey		X		X	X			X	X		X					X
DAP				X				X				X		X	X	X
SWA Staff Survey	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SWA Board Survey	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SWA Parent Survey	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X	X	X	X
SWA Student	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
TMF Survey	X				X		X	X			X		X	X	X	X

5) The last example comes from a school that has combined several of the ideas above and added some additional features. They focus on one outcome per month, incorporating it into chapels, class discussions, etc. They ask teachers to choose a few for each class for the year that most naturally fit into the curriculum, like example #1, and they report on the instructional activities and assessments of those outcomes. They also have the students choose several of the outcomes each year to work on personally, like example #2. The student addresses that chosen outcome through their work such as a piece of writing or another project. Answering how that demonstrates the outcome is one of the reflection questions answered as they evaluate their work in the portfolio they keep. Even children in elementary school become adept at looking for ways these outcomes are demonstrated in their schoolwork and extracurricular activities. They share these portfolios and their evaluations in parent/teacher conferences. At the marking period, the teacher reviews the items in the portfolio, speaks with the student about their growth in their individual and class goals, and actually marks their progress on the report card in the soft skills area. Students do not get an academic grade on their outcomes' progress; however, along with the use of rubrics, students are assessed on selected ESOs such as *diligence* or *inquirer*. Because these are front and center in the students' minds, intentionally woven into the curriculum, reflected upon by both students and teachers, and sent home for parents, these outcomes are a hallmark of the school's program. (Metro Delhi International School, Delhi, India)

The key issue for the users of *Inspire* is **effectiveness**. Between the principles explained above and the examples cited, readers should have a better idea of how to effectively assess ESOs in their own school. ESOs are at the core of why our Christian schools exist. They can help schools be more effective in doing what they are called to do which is educate the next generate of Christ-followers.