

Education Performance Map™ Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of the map?

The map is intended to help people brainstorm, focus, communicate, build consensus around and execute their education improvement efforts.

Who should use the map?

The map is designed to be used by anyone who believes it can help them be more successful – parents, teachers, students, superintendents, school boards, teacher unions, community groups, foundations and any other organization working to improve educational performance.

What is the philosophy behind the map?

The basic philosophy behind the map is very simple and is indicated by the orange boxes on the map itself. The first idea is that the results achieved by students are driven by both the performance of the student and the performance of the school – hence the inclusion of first two big orange boxes. This means that improving results requires simultaneously improving the effectiveness of both our schools and of the students who attend those schools. As the boxes underneath these two big orange boxes indicate, this means providing students and schools with the skills, motivation and resources they need to perform well (that's the job of the rest of us).

The second idea is that, in evaluating student results, you have to take costs into account – hence the inclusion of the third big orange box, Educational Costs. While it is tempting to focus solely on the results schools achieve, fairness and financial practicality require that the costs of producing those results are part of the discussion.

Is this the only way the map could have been done? Is it perfect? Is it complete?

The map is neither perfect nor complete, and it could have been done in multiple ways. Indeed, each parent, teacher, student, school board member, researcher, administrator, academic, and other interested person could draw their own version of this map. The difficult part is coming up with a map that works from multiple perspectives (allowing people from different groups to work together) and is still simple and small enough to be usable (the perfect version of this map is probably 20 feet wide by 15 feet high!).

This map provides a comparatively simple approach to breaking down the factors that drive educational performance. It blends this structure with a body of ideas that balances the need to take multiple perspectives into account (parents, students, teachers, administrators, etc.) with the need to provide basic, practical, straight-talking ideas that everyone can understand and employ. It has been designed with the help of multiple stakeholders, but most extensively with parents, teachers, researchers and administrators.

It is important to keep in mind that no map will provide a silver bullet. Maps simply provide a discussion starter and common language that can help people work together. The real value comes from the ideas that maps help people generate – ideas about what's most important and the most practical ways to get things done.

Where are parents, school boards, districts, administrators and community groups on the map?

As explained earlier (in the question regarding the philosophy behind the map's structure), the map takes the viewpoint that it is ultimately the effectiveness of students and schools that drives student performance. Because of this, students and teachers are the only people explicitly included in the structure of the map. This is not intended to diminish the role that parents, school boards, districts, administrators and community groups play in driving success. Rather, it is intended to highlight the idea that the efforts of these groups matter specifically because they ultimately help both students and schools be more effective.

It is very important to keep in mind that, just because these groups are not specifically mentioned in the structure of the map, that doesn't mean they don't have vital roles to play. In fact, the action level of the map (the unboxed detailed items at the bottom) is a listing of many of the things all or any of these groups can do to help the effectiveness of students and schools. Notice that at this level of the map there is no assignment of responsibility – that is, none of the actions are assigned to a particular group or groups. That's because, for the vast majority of these actions, several groups have responsibility and can play a role.

In the end, the challenge for parents, school boards, districts, administrators and community groups is to define how they intend to improve the effectiveness of students and schools. The bottom level of the map provides a good starting point for these discussions by highlighting possible actions each group might take and how those actions will ultimately improve the performance of students and schools. In a perfect world, the groups will work collaboratively to combine efforts in some areas and work individually on others to make the most needed improvements.

How will people use this map?

Superintendents: Superintendents use the map primarily as a planning and communication framework. Using the map as a discussion guide, they work with staffs and school boards to build a consensus around their districts' most pressing needs. The map serves as a checklist that helps them consider the broad range of potential priorities, providing a shared language and touchstone that helps conversations progress more clearly and efficiently. There has been a desire on the part of some superintendents to overlay performance metrics (both quantitative and qualitative) onto this map at all levels – effectively to use the map as a performance management or scorecarding framework (not surprisingly, some parents have brought this up as well).

Principals: Principals use the map in ways very similar to superintendents. The main difference is that principals are likely to use the maps in the development of school plans rather than district plans, and that the discussions would involve school-level staff rather than school boards and district level staff. The other difference may be the degree to which principals consider the cost section of the map. Principals with substantial cost authority and accountability would likely tend to consider this section heavily; those with little say in this area probably would not.

Parents: Parents can vary in their reaction to the map. Some parents can be intimidated by the amount of information or may not believe the map addresses a problem they are trying to solve. On the other hand, some parents immediately set out to read the entire map, top to bottom. Believing it provides insights into what highly-effective parents know, they often request copies for friends and family. Some start circling the things they and their schools are currently focusing on to improve their kids' performance. Overall, it is important to remember that the map may not fit a need (or at least fit a need well) for all people.

Teacher Unions: Teacher unions have begun to use the map to facilitate conversations among their memberships regarding what types of improvements would have the most impact on student achievement. Using the map as a survey instrument and as a discussion framework is helping the unions achieve a consensus of opinion that in turn drives the union's platforms and initiatives.

One union, having recently completed a survey of nearly 700 teachers, used the map as a way to not only record the individual opinions of the teachers, but also to depict and communicate a collective view of which improvements were most important. As one union leader explained, “The map provided a way for us to record and analyze the results of open-ended surveys with narrative responses. The challenge with this type of survey lies not only in reviewing a large number of free-form responses, but also in identifying and communicating consistency and inconsistency of opinion. The map was invaluable as a framework for normalizing, analyzing and communicating survey results.”

The union also used the map to facilitate workshops focused on setting union strategies and priorities. For one workshop, the first exercise on the first day was having participants (teacher representatives from fifteen separate schools) review the map and circle the three most pressing improvement areas (small blue-green boxes) from their own perspective – based on the specific needs of the students at their schools. As the workshop leader explains, “Having the participants review the map and circle their top priorities was a great way to start a workshop. First, it encouraged people to acknowledge and consider the full spectrum of what drives student achievement. This sparked people’s thinking about which improvements would be most powerful within their own schools. Second, making participants choose only three improvement areas forced them to utilize everything they knew about their students’ needs in choosing their own priorities. In many workshops, the tendency is to spend a lot of time and energy brainstorming things we might choose to do and a minority of time prioritizing among them. This workshop was better because it got us to the question of priority much more quickly. Third, reviewing people’s individual selections as a team provided early insight into the perspectives and rationale of the participants. This helped everyone understand and acknowledge where and why there might be differences in opinion throughout the remainder of the workshop. Finally, the map served as a backdrop and common language for the remainder of the workshop. During many of the discussions and exercises, people referred to parts of the map for generating ideas and clarifying perspectives.”

Has this concept been tested in the private sector?

Yes. The concept of breaking down the drivers of business performance in a similar manner was pioneered in the business sector. Deloitte Consulting developed a highly-successful business map called the Enterprise Value Map™ in 2001. One of the people who led the development of the business map and who has helped business leaders use it has provided advice in the development of the Education Performance Map.

Why would something that works in the business world work in education?

The worlds of education and business are different in important ways that cannot be overlooked. Accordingly, if you compare the structure and content of the business and education versions of the map, you will notice that there are extensive differences between the two. That said, some of the basic usage and design principles that have made the business map very successful should apply equally well within schools or any other organization. The central theme is the importance of getting groups of diverse, motivated, smart, highly-skilled, well-intentioned people working toward a shared goal, and that’s ultimately where maps are proving helpful.

Principle 1: Clarify what defines and drives success: The people working to improve the performance of a system or organization need to have a shared understanding of what defines and drives success. It doesn’t make sense to set out on an expedition without establishing a shared understanding of where you are, where you’re headed, and the nature of the terrain in between. The education map, like the business map, can help teams get clarity around what defines ultimate success, as well as what intermediate activities and accomplishments support ultimate goals. This shared understanding provides the foundation for establishing shared goals and resulting priorities.

Principle 2: Focus and align your efforts: To get a lot of smart, highly-skilled, well-intentioned people working toward shared goals and priorities, you must build a mutual understanding of what those goals and priorities are. Having the strongest rowers in the world in your boat won’t get you anywhere worthwhile if they aren’t rowing or are all rowing in different directions. The education map, like the business map, can help teams utilize their people in establishing clear goals and priorities, then help them communicate and get people working toward the same end.

Principle 3: Establish your language and culture: If you want to make the best use of diverse perspectives and knowledge, it helps to establish a shared language. In the business world, it is exceptionally hard to formulate good solutions when Finance speaks “quant,” HR speaks “people,” and IT speaks “tech.” The business map provides a constant, shared language that helps these groups work together much more effectively. The education map may hold the same promise for making good use of the diverse backgrounds of school board members, superintendents, unions, principals, teachers, parents and other education stakeholders.

How much does this map cost and who owns it?

The goal is for the map to be made available free or at cost to anyone who wants to use it in their educational performance improvement efforts. Accordingly, and because printing costs are high for smaller print volumes, we continuously work with groups to get sponsors for large print runs. At small quantities, maps are expensive to produce. A single 22”x34” map is usually \$20 or more per copy, but closer to \$1 each at quantities over 10,000 (depending on packaging and paper quality). Similarly, the smaller versions (11”x17” and 12”x18”) cost around \$3 at small quantities but drop to about \$1 at quantities over 1000.

Because the map is the result of a collective and collaborative effort across multiple groups, the map is expected to be owned and managed by an independent non-profit organization.

Who has been involved in the development and rollout of the map?

Parents, teachers, administrators, foundations, community members and researchers have provided expertise and guidance in the development and rollout of the map. The following people have all graciously donated their time, expertise and resources to the effort: Ken Benny (Mill Valley School District), Jeff Camp (Full Circle Fund), Greg Dickinson (Deloitte), Bruce Dickinson (Denver Classroom Teachers Assn.), Darius Meykadah (Copymat San Francisco), Malva Rabinowitz (Deloitte), Steve Seleznow (Gates Foundation), David Silver (Think College Now Elementary), Adam Urbanski (Rochester Teachers Assn), Caldwell Williams (GoalTenders), Steven Kirz, Avani and Faye Sahai, Elizabeth Treccase.

How can I get more information?

Please see our website at www.educationmap.org or send an email to info@educationmap.org.