

COMMUNITY TRUST

Elevating Community Trust As the First Principle of Accountability

By Pam Moran and Karen Perry · Published October 2026

WHAT DOES THE CURRENT SYSTEM ASSUME ABOUT COMMUNITY TRUST?

That trust is a byproduct of transparency: publish test scores in reading and math, and public confidence will follow. The paper argues the opposite. Trust is the precondition for accountability that works.

THE KEY POINTS IN BRIEF

- **Trust is the foundation, not a byproduct.** Three decades of test-based accountability made gaps more visible, yet confidence in public schools eroded: falling enrollment, youth disengagement, declining educator morale, community alienation.
- **Why it hasn't worked.** The measures don't reflect what communities value, and punitive, externally driven judgments shut out the very people most affected by what happens in their schools.
- **Three commitments build trust.** (1) Educators and communities define the outcomes that matter. (2) Credible evidence of learning is broadened (performance tasks, portfolios, capstones) with common safeguards kept and no high-stakes judgment resting on a single score. (3) Community participation is built into shared governance.
- **Judge by action, not words.** Nine indicators separate real commitment from symbolic engagement, such as publishing who participated, what was heard, and what changed as a result.
- **The goal is mutual assent.** Accountability that stakeholders understand, agree to, and help shape builds public trust rather than merely demanding it.

READ THE FULL PAPER

eduaccountability.org/community-trust.html

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

If you're a parent or caregiver

- Does what my school reports tell me what I actually care about (belonging, growth, readiness), or only reading and math scores?
- When was I last asked for input before a decision was made, and did I ever see what changed?
- Can I understand the data my school shares, and do I know who to ask about it?

If you're a student

- Does a score show what I can really do? What work of mine would show it better?
- Do I have a say in how my learning is measured and shared?
- When I say something isn't working, who listens, and do I ever see something change?

If you're an educator

- Do the measures I'm held to reflect what my community values and what I believe in?
- Do families and I interpret evidence together, or do they only receive results?
- What would a strong performance task look like in my classroom, and do I have the time and support to do it well?

If you're a policy maker

- Who defined success in our system, and who was missing from that table?
- Does any high-stakes judgment still rest on a single score?
- Do we publish who participated, what we heard, and what changed, and then follow through?