The Value of Expected Student Outcomes

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With REACH 2.1, schools and visiting teams will notice a more focused emphasis on having *expected student outcomes (ESOs)* and using them throughout the school. Is this just a case of adopting some educational jargon, or is there an actual reason behind this increased emphasis?

This article will explain the history, logic, and practical application of having well-defined ESOs.

About 20 years ago Ken Smitherman, then president of ACSI, started talking about ESOs and wrote about the concept in *Christian School Comment*. For many, this was the first time they had heard the phrase.
> Those engaged in leading and providing Christian education spend a great amount of time and energy thinking through and seeking God's guidance in developing the **expected student outcomes** they want to achieve through the formal and informal curricular programs of their schools. These men and women are painting a target—clearly articulating what a Christian school education should accomplish and then putting in place the strategies and programs aimed at that target—simultaneously helping you train up your child in the way that he or she should go (Proverbs 22:6).

Some Christian educators reacted negatively to ESOs because they associated them with outcomes-based education, which was seen as rather reductionist in nature. Some had fears regarding who might be in control of determining the outcomes. This definition from ERIC yields some insight as to why many educators may have had that reaction.
> The effort, often by a state or local education agency, to organize all the features of schooling (including aims, curriculum, instruction, and assessment) so as to produce specifically delineated results (often including noncognitive as well as cognitive results) and generally with the expectation that all students will demonstrate such results (1999).

However, that is not how President Smitherman was using the concept. He was reacting to a great many schools that had not really defined what they were trying to accomplish in the lives of students. Many had adopted certain Christian textbooks and were using the tables of contents in place of a well-thought-out, school-developed curriculum. Others were using secular textbooks and just assuming that Christian teachers were making the connection for students to a biblical worldview even though they had not identified specific goals other than performing one to two grade levels ahead of their public school counterparts on standardized tests. He noticed that those who seemed to be doing the best job of a truly Christian education had identified distinctively Christian schoolwide goals and objectives that they wanted to accomplish in the lives of their students regardless of what subject they were teaching or instructional activities and materials they were using. Most schools included some goals related to the students' spiritual formation, development, or maturity. In fact, it was those academic and nonacademic "outcomes" that were the driving force for choosing and designing the strategies and programs. In many cases, faculty hiring, budget allocations, and program development also hinged on the accomplishment of those goals and objectives. Those outcomes were so important that they characterized the school. New families knew the school would do everything in its power, with the resources entrusted to it, to accomplish those outcomes in the lives of their children—and they were willing to pay to see that happen.

Does research support the importance of schoolwide outcomes as an integrative element? While there is not a lot of research strictly on ESOs, the work in some related areas certainly supports them. For example, *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins and McTighe 1998) helps explain why this is so important. Also related is the research on the effect of posting instructional objectives; it underscores the importance of knowing where you are going so that you can focus and coordinate efforts regarding instruction and materials.

Communicating these goals is critical so that students have increased knowledge of what it is they are learning and why. (Jackson 2009) They become more actively engaged and more reflective on their learning. Researchers on assessment recognize that our overfocus on standardized achievement testing leaves us out of balance on emphasizing the outcomes that really matter. Many of them call for us to be clear on our desired outcomes and to develop other types of assessments because otherwise we "reinforce the incorrect impression that we can reflect the very complex student characteristics we seek to develop in a single set of paper-and-pencil test items yielding a single score" (Stiggins 1985).

In a recent article in *Christian School Education*, Steve Dill, Senior Vice President for ACSI, discussed how a focus on flourishing schools and school improvement affects student learning. He sums up the value of ESOs as follows:

> If you aim for nothing, you will hit it every time. To develop meaningful student outcomes, we must prioritize both process and content.… Exemplary schools must strive to have regularly reviewed, well-written student outcomes as well as faculty who will commit to the outcomes, develop ongoing assessments of student progress, and use assessment results to drive decisions about curriculum, programs, and school culture. Written outcomes are not a box to be checked—they are meaningful statements of student expectations that drive the decisions of an exemplary school (2016).

In my research I found that many ACSI schools had ESOs, but the schools were not mature yet in their assessments of them. Those that had well-developed ESOs were more clearly focused on what educators often call the intangibles of a Christian education, even though those intangibles are more difficult to assess. As a result, teachers were more likely to include specific activities in their teaching targeting the desired traits. They were included more intentionally in lesson plans and in class discussions. Increasingly, schools are looking for ways to assess these so that they know they are being accomplished (Wilcox 2011).

Morrison Academy (Taiwan) collects feedback on how well its alumni feel it has done on meeting its goals in the lives of its graduates, but the school also uses data from other benchmarks such as specific projects, in-class assessments, information about service, public speaking, standardized testing, and surveys from current students. The analysis from this data informs the administration and board regarding necessary school improvement initiatives and ongoing changes in the student population (Basnett 2016). (See the chart that accompanies Morrison's ESOs below.)

Schools that have clearly defined outcomes and assessments of those outcomes can more easily identify students who are falling behind on key concepts. Instead of just giving them a poor grade and moving them on, teachers can reteach individual students or fill in the gaps with the entire class and make sure that all students have the skills needed for success at the next level (Hitchcock 2016).

In reviewing studies referencing ESOs and observing schools that have used them as a guiding and integrative document throughout the school, a common theme surfaces. Schools and colleges benefit from identifying what a school's specific mission is and, more precisely, what that means in the lives of the students. In some cases, schools find that they try to do too much; establishing ESOs has helped them set or limit priorities. In other situations, schools had not identified what they were good at or could hope to achieve with their students and were at a loss when trying to communicate the value of their education to prospective students or parents. Identifying their distinctive goals, or ESOs, helped them in marketing who they are.

Schools with clearly identified ESOs have a guiding set of priorities or clear distinctives for their program that they communicate and use for decision making and which can be used in curriculum and instructional

planning. It seems to be this intentional shared focus on a set of priorities, and following that up with assessment and accountability, that gives schoolwide outcomes the best chance of being accomplished.

As schools work toward a good set of ESOs, some want to know if there is an approved ACSI set of ESOs that they should consider. The answer is no. ESOs are unique to each school. They should reflect the character values, spiritual aspirations, cultural norms, academic goals, and other particular characteristics of the school. Part of the benefit of developing ESOs is the collaboration of faculty, staff, administration, and possibly parents and students in order to define the school's distinctives. ESOs can be thought of as statements that operationalize the mission, core values, and the ends of the governing body in a way that will translate into instructional activities, strategies, curriculum, and even decisions that affect hiring, resources, and training. Good examples include character traits that are more general as well as competencies that are more measurable so that teachers can determine how to work them into lessons and assessments. Too often there has been a disconnect between the foundational statements (rhetoric) and the daily grind of lesson plans, assessments, and operational decisions (reality). What do you want your students to come out of your school knowing, believing, and doing? If they are well-articulated, ESOs will effectively guide your school and give clear focus on the results that are most important to your school community.

Expected Student Outcomes - REACH 2.1		where the ESO wording is used			
Indicator	how it relates to ESOs	in the indicator only	in all levels of the rubric	at the "compliance" level	at the "exceeds compliance" level
1.2	established, collaboratively reviewed regularly		✓		
2.8	financed	✓			
3.9	help for special needs to accomplish	✓			
4.9	leadership supports faculty/staff through evaluation to accomplish	✓			
5.2	curriculum is aligned to	✓			
5.5	assessments measure (or are aligned to)		✓		
5.6	assessments target the ESOs			✓	✓
5.8	instructional resources support	✓			
5.9	regular communication about accomplishment of ESOs	✓			
5.11	input to selection of instructional and information resources			✓	✓
5.13	instructional technology competencies improvement achievement of	✓			
7.1	ESOs include character, Christlike values, and spiritual formation and assessment (Level 4)		✓		
7.8	spiritual development of students is assessed	✓		✓	✓
8.2	CSIP has academic and non academic	✓		✓	
8.4	CSIP is connected to ESOs		✓		

The following are four examples of school-developed ESOs.

Christian Academy in Japan
Student Objectives

Responsible Learners who
1. Understand Bible stories, the plan of salvation, and a Christian worldview
2. Understand subject content and skills
3. Integrate content and skills from different subjects
4. Value learning
5. Use appropriate learning strategies

Discerning Thinkers who
1. Use a biblical perspective
2. Solve problems
3. Organize and use information to support conclusions
4. Make creative products and presentations

Productive Collaborators who
1. Respect themselves and others as being created in God's image
2. Work effectively with others

Effective Communicators who
1. Communicate through writing, speaking, reading, listening, graphs and charts, and the arts
2. Integrate different forms of communication

Faithful Caretakers who
1. Serve God and others, and care for God's creation
2. Value and maintain physical, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual health

Colorado Springs Christian Schools, Colorado Springs, CO
CSCS Schoolwide Learning Outcomes

The vision of Colorado Springs Christian educators is that a maturing CSCS student:

1) Understands and commits to a personal relationship with Christ and pursues ongoing spiritual development
• understands the gospel, salvation, and how to present that to others
• understands and practices spiritual disciplines such as devotions, personal Bible study, and prayer
• understands and pursues spiritual maturity and a deepening dependence upon the Holy Spirit
• is involved in a local church
• commits to a personal relationship with Christ

2) Understands and articulates a biblical worldview and operates from that perspective in the world
• develops, articulates, and defends a biblical worldview
• demonstrates application and relevance of a biblical worldview to daily decision making
• knows and is able to articulate differences between Christianity and other worldviews
• knows how to dialog effectively with those who hold other worldviews
• is able to defend one's faith

3) Is academically prepared in all areas (reading, writing, listening, speaking, science, math, social studies, languages, Bible, technology and the arts)
• is a creative and critical thinker who can apply learning to solve real-world problems
• utilizes technology responsibly and effectively
• can appropriately access and use various types of information resources
• appreciates and/or participates in the arts and literature

• demonstrates the academic competence that is required for next level of academic pursuit
• is well prepared for standardized academic testing
• communicates effectively in both verbal and written forms
• can communicate in at least one additional language
• knows the Bible in concept and through memorization

4) Develops moral integrity, demonstrated by righteous living and stewardship
• makes choices based on biblical principles
• respects life
• lives according to biblical standards in family and personal relationships
• is a wise steward in use of personal, financial, and natural resources
• is a responsible citizen in the local community and the world

5) Is able to relate well and work well with others, including other cultures, and respects the worth of every individual as made in God's image
• can explain being created in the image of God
• respects individual differences, valuing each person as God's creation
• is able to work together in groups
• can understand and appreciate people of different cultures

6) Is a lifelong learner, prepared for next stages, including intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, and emotional health
• pursues ongoing learning as it relates to next stages, including careers
• applies learning to healthy choices affecting lifestyle
• develops a love for learning
• recognizes the spiritual implications of acting upon one's learning

7) Is a servant leader, prepared and motivated for lifelong service and involvement in missions, and knows and applies spiritual giftedness
• can articulate the biblical mandate for service and missions, including responsibility to the poor and lost
• participates in service experiences
• understands missions from personal experience or from personal exposure to the message/impact of missions
• develops leadership skills
• understands and utilizes spiritual gifts
• identifies personal strengths and talents
• applies gifts in leadership/service
• works within the body of Christ according to the variety of gifts in the body

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California Crosspoint Middle/High School
Expected Schoolwide Learning Results

Students will become **faithful disciples of Christ** and
• have a personal knowledge of Christ as their Savior
• understand the Christian worldview of life
• exemplify Christ-like character, leading their lives according to biblical standards of virtue and ethics

Students will become **industrious** and
• work independently without need of supervision
• accept personal responsibility for their actions
• carry out tasks productively and efficiently

Students will become **leaders** and
• accept positions of leadership and influence to serve others readily
• manage projects and accomplish goals
• work well with people and foster good relationships

Students will become **scholars** and
   • have a broad base of knowledge and experiences to draw upon
   • think logically and critically to ascertain truth and solve problems
   • apply universal principles to an ever-changing world

Students will become **compassionate** and
   • care as much for others as for themselves
   • seek to improve the lives of those within their sphere of influence
   • understand others' viewpoints and perspectives on life

Morrison Academy, Taiwan
Vision for Our Learners
A Statement of Schoolwide Learning Expectations

The vision of the Morrison Academy educators is that a maturing Morrison student will,

As a spiritual discerner,
   • appreciate who God is and His provision for reconciliation through Jesus Christ
   • integrate biblical principles and values into life situations
   • accept his/her self-worth as God's creation

As an effective communicator,
   • read and write skillfully and purposefully
   • demonstrate competence in speaking and listening
   • contribute to groups collaboratively with interpersonal skills

As a rational and critical thinker,
   • analyze, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize concepts within various contexts
   • utilize appropriate problem-solving strategies
   • create original solutions for authentic and relevant problems
   • work with high standards

As a life-long learner,
   • maintain intellectual curiosity
   • utilize the scientific inquiry method
   • utilize technology appropriately

As a moral and ethical citizen,
   • make ethical decisions from a biblical perspective
   • show respect to persons of other ages, races, cultures, faiths, and values
   • demonstrate self-control in attitude and behavior

As a steward of quality of life,
   • use gifts and talents to serve others generously
   • maintain disciplined health and personal habits
   • cultivate and share artistic, musical, and academic abilities
   • take care of God's creation and provisions

Morrison's School Wide Appraisal Process

Morrison's professional learning community uses the School Wide Appraisal (SWA) process to routinely analyze a variety of assessment data to improve student learning and monitor alignment with the organization's position statements.

The following SWA surveys and assessments have been aligned with the organization's position statements. The SIP Coordinator manages the implementation of the SWA calendar, and monitors SWA benchmarks for each of the surveys and assessments.

Notice how various surveys and benchmark data have been aligned with the VFOL (*Vision for Our Learners*). Those are Morrison's ESOs. The administration maintains a dashboard of those measures and reports those periodically to the board, according to policy (included by permission from Morrison Academy).

	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			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	X	X
SWA Student	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TMF Survey	X			X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bible Literacy Test	X			X				X	X		X		X			
Budget %	X		X					X								
BWI Benchmarks	X									X	X	X	X	X	X	X
BWI in Unit Plans	X							X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Co-curricular				X		X		X								X
Computer Literacy								X					X	X		
Graduate Data		X						X			X			X		
Information Literacy								X							X	
Music/Art Enrollment		X	X					X								X
Parent Conference	X					X										
Parent Programs					X	X	X									
PD Hours Scheduled		X						X								
Presidential Fitness		X	X					X								X
Principal Referral															X	
SAT, ITBS, AP		X						X				X	X			
Science Project													X	X		
Service Projects				X	X	X	X									X
Service Reflections				X	X		X			X						X
Speech Rubric								X				X				
Staff Masters & turnover															X	
Summative MA Math								X					X			
Summative MA								X					X	X	X	
Summative MA								X					X	X	X	

Vision for Our Learners

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