

Citizens' Voice Forum

November 6, 2003

Fall Mountain HS

Final Report - November 2003



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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

On the eve of Thursday November 6, 2003 168 members of the Fall Mountain community assembled at Fall Mountain HS to address two questions:

- 1. What are the results we expect from our schools?*
- 2. What are the components or building blocks that are necessary to be in place to achieve these results?*

This Forum was in response to the work of our Best School Leadership Team over the last three years, and to the increasing pressure for accountability following the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. To “account” for means to count or measure or evaluate in some way. This necessitates knowing what one wants to count or measure.

The Federal and State Governments have made it clear what they value and want to measure; that is test scores on the Language Arts and Mathematics state test, in addition to Attendance (K-8) and Graduation rate (9-12). That is all they are counting or measuring in order to define “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP). Parents, educators, and many others feel that, while test scores are indeed important, education is more than such limited criteria.. But what are those more comprehensive criteria? We have never been pressed to identify just what those are. If education is more than test scores, then what?

Our purpose in hosting the Forum was to:

1. gain a sense of what it is that the community expects as results from our schools so that we may define “success” and measure it;
2. raise the level of awareness of the building blocks necessary to achieve those results and that the responsibility is borne by the whole community, not just the schools; and
3. raise the issues of results and building blocks at a time when the budget is being developed.

Participation was important in numbers, but also in the variety of views held by those participants. Great effort was made to encourage participation from a diversity of individuals that represent the diversity of views within our community. Parents of private school students, home-schoolers, senior citizens, citizens without children in our schools, conservatives, liberals... all could be found among the participants. We are a district of five towns organized into three attendance areas K-8, which feed into one regional high school – Fall Mountain. We wanted the participants to represent the great diversity of views held by our citizens.

Organization of the Forum began with a decision by the administrative team, and then requesting support of the school board. That was granted. A general press release about the Forum along with a tri-fold brochure was mailed to all residents with mailing addresses. Each of the three AA has a Site Based Council composed of representatives of the various constituencies in that attendance area. Each Site Based Council was challenged to bring out a certain number of individuals representing their community. This involved volunteers writing personal invitations to a certain number of residents. A week following this personal appeal mailing, the letter writers were encouraged to follow-up with a phone call. While this was going on posters were placed in all the obvious places, and during the final week preceding the Forum large breadboard posters were set up in front of each of the three middle schools and at the entrance to Fall Mountain Regional High School.

The atmosphere of the Forum was refreshingly positive. It had been made clear that we were here to talk about quality, and not money issues. The participants followed that rule and in each small group it was reported that participants were civil and positive and cooperative.

After an initial 15 minute introduction, the crowd divided into groups as indicated by the number on their name tags. The large turnout necessitated the creation of a fifth group which was created with only moments of delay. The groups reported to their assigned rooms and CVF facilitators were there to greet them and get started. For most groups, if not all, they began with introductions around the room to allow all to have a sense of the variety of participants and then the questions were addressed.

The timeline was, roughly: 15 minutes general introduction; 5 minutes for all to move to the designated rooms; 5-10 minutes for introductions in the rooms; 30 minute brainstorm for Question 1; five minute break; 30 min brainstorm Question 2; five minute reassembly; and a final 10 minute report out.

A head count revealed 168 people in attendance. Of these 147 residents signed in, and 131 evaluations were received. Although there is some question about uniformity in the way people signed in (some didn't check all categories that applied), the following is the breakdown as indicated on the sign-in sheets:

Total head count	168
Participants signed in	147
Evaluations received	131
Parents	100
Grandparents	12
Business People	26
Elected Officials	8
Educators	45
Students	2
Home schooling parents	2

From the sign-in sheets, participation by town was as follows (five people did not indicate a town):

Acworth	20
Alstead	27
Charlestown	34
Langdon	6
Walpole	54

Data collection in the rooms differed. Three rooms used one strategy and the other two rooms used another strategy. This was unfortunate as it made it more difficult to consolidate the data in a final report. All five rooms collected the answers to question #1, (results), in the same fashion and prioritized the top 10 results in each room. That was not a problem. When it came to question #2, two of the facilitators chose to collect and prioritize the building blocks separately under each “result” – one result at a time. This led to building blocks being reported for only three of the top ten results in one room and four of the top ten results in the other room.

In processing the results we found some disagreement as to whether some comments were “Results” or “Building Blocks/Components.” In retrospect, it would have been good to define these before hand. For the purposes of this report the definitions below were applied, and there were a few “Results” that needed to be reclassified as “Building Blocks.”

A problem with definitions

In question #1 “*What are the results we expect from our schools?*” the “results we expect” could be a final quality of the student, or of the school .. Or both? Or something else ... produced by the school experience, perhaps. Maybe the RESULT we expect from our schools can also be a BUILDING BLOCK?

Our thinking: Schools exist for the students, and it is their qualities that results concern, so we considered “Result” to be “a quality produced in the student by the school experience.”

A Building Block or Component we considered to be “conditions that should exist that cause the results expected.”

Below are the flip chart results sorted by votes for each room.

Results:

Room 21 A Facilitator: Sue Auerbach	27 people	Votes
What are the RESULTS we expect from our schools?		
Responsible members of community-informed voters; sense of civic responsibility; good parents/think beyond self		41
Graduates who are literate and numerate		31
Graduates who are respectful and tolerant of others differences		26
Independent thinkers - generate own ideas		22
Able to apply math and science every day		20
Well-rounded - multiple interests, mentally and physically fit		14
Enjoy learning, become life-long learners		13
Need to understand mechanics of English		13
Understanding personal finance		13
Feel valued and needed		13
Responsible for own actions- Understand consequences		11
Sense of own power to effect (sic) world around them		11
Students who can apply processes learned in school to real world		9
Confidence in problem solving - participants		9
Students who are employable here and elsewhere		9
Life long physically fit		9
Understanding of classic - Literature, culture		8
Students who can work together		8
Graduates who think creatively		7
Understand government and history so can participate		7
Go to college or trade school when graduate		6
Students should see that there is more than one solution		6
Understand history so can look to future		6
Students who have pride in self		5
Grad technology savvy		5
Leadership capabilities		4
Test results at or above average		4
Want all students to graduate		0

Room 21 A Facilitator: Sue Auerbach	27 people	
What are the BUILDING BLOCKS or components necessary to achieve these results?		Votes
Get students involved - empower their participation		29
Volunteer/internship opportunities to get students in comm. W/business, charitable org.		27
Partnerships w/parents and teachers all ages - intergenerational		23
Cooperative effort/planning w/schools and communities, find ways to get people involved		20
Breadth and depth of classes		15
Adult positive role models with these qualities into classrooms		15
Quantifiable objectives, measurable outcomes, assigned accountability		14
Staff need to continue learning – professional development important		14
Discipline in classroom so everyone gets heard		14
Access to computer training and equipment		14
Use arts for communication and expression		13
Need to offer opportunity to students not academically inclined so they become literate and numerate		13
Curriculum ties academics to real world situation/knowledge		11
Create stronger community in school. Kids work in groups. Kids with same group over time.		10
Sports program that teachers working together, respect, etc.		10
Alternate program for at-risk and non-motivated students		9
Parental support services		8
Inspired staff		8
Provide interdisciplinary opportunities for teachers		8
Open-ended problem solving opportunities		8
Students need interdisciplinary curriculum		8
Enough staff		7
Students need more time to be inspired & integrate info and experiences		7
Virtual or actual experiences with other cultures		7
Opportunities for students to be challenged or get extra help		7
Qualified teacher - certified		6
Active student government		6
Look at new model of accountability that provides more freedom to teachers		5
Curriculum based on structure experience		5
Students should be challenged		4
Breadth and depth of extracurricular activities		3
Staff have time to get together & learn about new approaches/info		3
Time for staff to work together		2
Teens have support systems		0
Opportunity for parents to be involved in HS		0

Room 22 Facilitator: Judy Warnier-Wilke	32 people	
What are the RESULTS we expect from our schools?		Votes
Instill passion for learning		26
Able to make a good decision about my life, aware of outcomes		26
Every child trained to their highest potential		25
Literacy, reading, speaking & technology		25
Students socially, culturally aware and responsible		23
Accountability for teachers		19
Students prepared to go on to what they wish to do		19
Excited about learning combined with passion & the desire to know more		17
Kids understand health risks		15
Students do well in state test NHEIAP		14
Ability to assess and solve problems		11
Compassion and respect for others		10
Each had at least one memorable teacher- learned, connected		10
All kids make it to graduation		9
All students open-minded and inquisitive		7
Every student has a voice and their ideas for improvement acted upon		7
Life skills- so can apply for loan, balance checkbook, etc.		7
Students have the ability to teach themselves		5
Students see how to use community resources to study the world		5
Responsibility about own behavior		3
Ability to make decisions		3
Music, arts, and theater learned		3
Enjoyable experience- had a darn good time		3
Students who go here want to come back & be proud of school and community		1
Students feel that they are all treated fairly		1
Excited at choices that lie ahead		0

Room 22 Facilitator: Judy Warnier-Wilke	32 people	
What are the BUILDING BLOCKS or components necessary to achieve these results?		Votes
Sufficient financial support		37
Small class size		33
Teaching to individual student abilities and interests (IEPs)		26
Smaller schools		25
Parental support and participation		22
Tools- library, internet access, buildings		20
Value students time- manage the acting up better		20
Parental support and participation		18
More hands-on learning		17

Teachers passionate about learning	17
Early learning and support for parents to prepare kids	17
Evaluation for teachers	16
Enrichment opportunities for all	15
Service to community built-in	15
Children doing well can receive encouragement	15
Options for students besides public schools-charter schools	14
Identify and reward success	13
Alternatives for those who don't fit the mold so they can reach their potential	13
Include students in some decision making and ownership for own education	10
All to be role models to match what we expect of students (all staff)	10
Cultural events, exposure to ___ not familiar to us, here & elsewhere	10
Stress the importance of ethics and integrity	10
Volunteerism between community and school	9
Employ professional teachers and treat them as such	9
Teaching to all abilities	9
Learning choices offered to students within the school day	8
Parents held responsible for kids behavior	8
Extracurricular activities, arts, sports, etc.	8
Parents respect and listen to teachers	7
Better system of parent/teacher meetings (more frequency during the year)	7
More discipline	7
Good communication among everyone	6
Before/after school homework help	6
Not just teach to test	6
Breath of exposure	6
Checks-know if kids reaching potential, measure results	5
Programs sustainable- keep them going & plan for that	5
Internship/practice opportunities	5
People treated without favoritism	5
Encourage lifelong learning for adults	4
Engaging whole community so all know what's going on/ give input	4
Students, teachers, staff building community	4
Good communication by teachers	3
Consistent messages to kids for all youth stakeholders	3
Children are known by adults in school	3
Non-academic options	3
Devise 2 systems- liberal arts or teaching pre-college	3
Teachers more involved in community-build rapport	3
Study and prep in outside/natural world	3
Students have proper guidance in making choices	3
Schools help with growth of child's personal assets	3
Teachers responsible for how they treat children	2
Access too team sports and activities	2

Expanded mentoring, especially 1:1	1
Decent transportation system for all	1
Dress for school- spirit, belonging	1
Communication between parent and teachers	1
Outside of the box by everyone	1
Reconsider calendar year to accommodate needs, time	1
School understands, meets, child's expectations	1
Calendar reconsideration	0
All professionals show respect to students	0
Use resources here	0

Room 24 Facilitator: Ginny Carter

33 people

What are the RESULTS we expect from our schools?	Votes
We should instill a joy for learning	39
Graduating students that are self-reliant	36
Have programs for under and over achievers	34
Make sure schools keep up with technology, also libraries, textbooks, alternative learning...on line, etc. resources	30
Teach children to accept the consequences of their own actions	27
Teach students to accept other's ideas without having to agree with them ...*tolerance and respect	26
Students should be able to contribute and function in society but should also have the skills to adapt to societal changes	21
Responsible and informed citizenship	20
3Rs before leaving high school (hopefully before leaving jr. high) accountability by all parties	19
Teachers who can connect with kids of different learning styles	14
Have our children be well rounded by exposing them to extracurricular activities	13
Teach better communication skills and interactions sp they're better prepared to meet people they encounter in the community	13
Help all students develop to their full potential	13
School work together with the family to teach children	12
Make possible critical thinking	11
Teach life skills	10
Have an understanding of local government and community	9
Strike a healthy balance between sports, academics, and arts (an opportunity)	9
Plant the seeds for the desire for higher learning- start at an early age	9
High School and Jr. High students participating to a greater degree in school government and making suggestions about their previous school experience	8
Students well prepared fro choices after high school	7
Include parents when teachers change their teaching methods	7
Teacher students independent learning skills so they can look for their own answers (find answers via resources....learn learning skills)	7
"Personal Financial" course offered at high school	6
Safe while in school	4
Promote healthy lifestyles (ex: smoking, drugs, sex education)	4
Students can pursue their interests in depth, more detail	3
Individuals who can function with and without computers and calculators....*the basics	3
Have our children test above the median	3
Teach children to have less of a sense of entitlement, appreciate their education and the cost and sacrifices involved	3
Students should be exposed to lots of course choices	2

Take a look at block scheduling and reevaluate	1
Better community communications	1
Have different teaching style so students can find someone to relate to...match students with teachers	0
Make inviting physical plants...environment encouraging learning	0

Room 24 Facilitator: Ginny Carter	33 people	
What are the BUILDING BLOCKS or components necessary to achieve these results?		Votes
Parental commitment		58
Sufficient funding		57
Early intervention- age 3 & up		48
Competent, enthusiastic, creative, dedicated educators		43
School voucher system		35
Community commitment		31
Resources		30
Compensated educators		21
Opportunities for teachers to learn new skills		16
Update the classrooms- physical plant		14
Requiring volunteering by the students		13
Remove obstacles (ie: disruptive students)		12
Restructured school year		12
Students take part in caring for their schools (ie: janitorial, landscaping, teaching younger students, preparing lunches)		9
Tutoring-grade level standards- no social promotions		9
Taking ownership for your part		7
Involved citizenry		5
Comprehensive inventory of available community resources		5
Set up mentoring program for new educators		3

Barbara and David Lobdell (in the following two rooms) followed a different procedure for answering question # 2. They took each result one at a time, starting with the highest priority result, and applied question #2 to each result individually. Only the top three and four “results” were therefore completed. The building blocks are listed in order of priority for each result.

Room 25 Facilitator: Barbara Lobdell	34 people	
What Are the RESULTS We Expect From Our Schools?		Vote
Graduates should have critical thinking skills and problem solving skills so they can intelligently make their own decisions and challenge conventional wisdom		4
Develop students who are independent learners and have a developed work ethic		3
Coordinated, comprehensive curriculum K-12 – a curriculum that meets the needs of ALL kinds of students/learners including ones that excel		3
A true sense of tolerance and acceptance including different types of students, levels of students, socio-economic levels, athletes vs. non-athletes		2
Appreciation of the arts and recognize that the arts are as important as the 3 R's		1
Students should be instilled with the joy of learning		1
Teaching children how to become active members in the community		1
Basics (reading, writing and math) at elementary level K-3. All students should be brought to grade level		1
Give students an understanding and appreciation of where we are, how we got here and where we are likely to go		1
Students should feel confident and know they have what it takes to make it in the world		
Graduates should be healthy and physically fit		

Room 25 Facilitator: Barbara Lobdell
Note: Building blocks are grouped under each of the top 3 results
What are the BUILDING BLOCKS or Components necessary to achieve the results?
Graduates should have critical thinking skills and problem solving skills so they can intelligently make their own decisions and
1. Highly qualified staff in subjects they are teaching
2. Reasonable class size to encourage open dialogue
3. Teachers should have access to appropriate materials and support from administrators
4. Provisions for real life projects (ecological, human resources, cultural, language arts) in a variety of settings for hands-on learning
5. Students should be treated with respect
6. Classes should be augmented by real, live people from the community who represent different views
7. School encourages and accepts diversity
8. Show interconnectedness of courses and that learning is integrated
9. Avoid true/false questions
10. Student government which interfaces with teachers and administration and is representative of the diverse student body
11. Apply Bloom's taxonomy
12. Students are given the opportunity to work together and cooperatively on team building activities
Develop students who are independent learners and have a developed work ethic
1. Make students responsible for their own learning by communicating clear expectations by having students participate in
2. Exciting and purposeful curriculum

3. Strong base of reading, writing and mathematics
4. Dynamic teachers
5. Student input is valued
6. Community involvement at a young age where they can see results of what they have done and applied what they have l
7. Cooperative learning in the classroom
8. Strong system of compensatory, related services and special ed services
9. Variety of vocational and technical opportunities
10. Students should have a plan to develop goals (personal, educational and life goals)
11. Multi-disciplinary approach to evaluating student work
12. Linkages to local businesses and resources
Coordinated, comprehensive curriculum K-12 – a curriculum that meets the needs of All kinds of students/learners including o
1. Curriculum based on student needs
2. On-going evaluation of curriculum effectiveness and input from staff, parents, students and community
3. Appropriate professional development for staff
4. Consideration of outcomes: colleges, vocational, work place and see that needs are met
5. Teachers/educators need to have time to get together to discuss curriculum
6. Intra-school and intra-age linkages
7. Social and behavioral curriculum and value and respect for skills in those areas
8. Continual investigation of grants for programs that local system cannot pay for

MORE BB from Barbara Lobdell's group

Atmosphere where students can learn to the best of their ability and not be hindered by discipline problems
Multi-cultural curriculum that provides honest experience of world outside of Fall Mountain
Provide continuing and direct relevance between the curriculum and the world the student live in
Parent accountability with discipline, hygiene, health, social concerns
Accelerated programs K-8 in all curriculum areas
Adequate capacity of accelerated programs at high school level
Commitment to maintaining rigorous classes (from AP to classes for students with learning disabilities) even if there are budget cuts
Teachers and parents set high but achievable goals recognizing that there are high, average and low achievers
School needs to provide the appropriate core courses for students going on to two and four year colleges, vocational schools or the work place
Curriculum should not assume the responsibilities that parents should be taking. Parents should assume more responsibility for what they want th
Parents and students should be responsible for seeing that assignments are done at home, completed and brought back to school
Higher degree of parent/teacher communication
More parent involvement in schools
Increased technology both in equipment and how to use it at an earlier age
Communication between elementary schools and middle school and middle school and high school

Need to be more community oriented
Need to work with other community organizations to support our students
Curriculum that provides for peer mediation and peer tutoring. Student programs that empowers them in their citizenship.
Provide recreational programs for students

Room 26 Facilitator: David Lobdell	? people	
What are the RESULTS we expect from our schools?		Votes
Well rounded education including arts, agri, tech, etc		36
Challenging at all levels; Work for results		28
Create and environment where children want to go to school		27
Gain a love for learning		23
Everylevel student aware of what should be a good citizen (community service)		21
Students gain social and global awareness		17
Read on grade level or higher		15
Problem solving skills		15
Accept and encourage diversity		14
Schools should be facilitators of students become life long learners		14
Conducive to different learning styles		14
Foster creativity		14
Students accept responsibility for themselves		14
Appreciation and experience in/of the arts		13
Students have a level of self confidence and presence		11
Children MASTER the skills		10
100% graduation		9
Students good communicators		8
Students understand their own strengths and contribute those skills in a group		5
Team players		2
Average SAT (50%)		1

Room 26 Facilitator: David Lobdell	
Note: Building blocks are grouped under each of the top 3 results	
What are the BUILDING BLOCKS or components necessary to achieve these results?	Votes
Well rounded education...	36
diversity ofclasses eg. Arts, ag, tech	
choice witnin classes	
a core program	
need resources, money, space, human, tech, buildings, matereials	

support from stakeholders	
exceptional teachers (open minded)	
extra curricular activities	
individual learning plans for different styles/ and levels	
innovation and creativity	
community involvement students/citizens	
Challenging at all levels; Work for results (28)	28
more people in the classroom	
\$ (people supplies, etc)	
quality people	
teacher recognize need for planning	
teachers have time for planning	
teachers work as a team include planning	
continuity from grade to grade	
teacher willing to be flexible	
classroom environment	
build individual curriculum around indiv needs	
smaller class size	
lengthen school year	
routine tasks done by volunteers - not teachers	
educate community about mandated ed. Requirements	
more in-depth focus on topics	
Create and environment where children want to go to school (27)	27
start HS later	
teach/model mutual respect (teachers/students/parents)	
Safe environment support from parents	
communication with parents	
caring and friendly environment	
physically welcoming environment	
give student more ownership/participation	
administrators know the students	
Gain a love for learning (23)	23
good media center	
teachers as facilitators to make learning fun (discovery)	
parents encouraging/modeling learning	
Exposure to the bigger world	
Teachers demonstrate interest in learning themselves	

MORE BB from David Lobdell's group

Willingness of principals to weed out dead wood	14
Foster curiosity and skills of inquiry	10
Ensure special help is available	7
Willingness of system to change	7
Have the books they need	6
Willingness of union to weed out dead wood	6
Students, schools, parents, etc understand life is not all dollars and cents	6
Teachers learn to grow themselves	6
Experiential education	5
Support is reciprocal on ll sides - parents/teachers/students	3
Accept local input and involvement	2
Schol district willingness to accept responsibility for actions	2

Processing the Results

This data was set up in an Excel spreadsheet where it could be analyzed and sorted. First, Every comment was coded for the room it was in and whether it was a Result or a Building Block. Those Results that were really Building Blocks were recoded as such. (A copy of the original raw results by room was kept for those interested)

Next, the data from all the rooms was combined in a spreadsheet. Many of the comments were very similar and some were even identical to comments made in other rooms. So to consolidate the data each was coded with a descriptor they shared in common. (It should be noted that three individuals attempted this consolidation separately and each used a slightly different strategy.) Descriptors for Results included three general categories often used to categorize results we want from schools: 1. What we want students TO KNOW (KNOWLEDGE), 2. What we want them to BE ABLE TO DO (SKILLS), and 3. What we want them TO BE LIKE.

All of the Results were then sorted by these three descriptors into three categories. Then each comment was coded again with another descriptor chosen to cluster them in categories, such as “attitude toward learning,” “well-rounded,” “citizenship,” or a particular skill set... and then comments with the same descriptors were combined as were their vote totals. Following this aggregation, the list was then sorted again by votes.

A similar process was followed to cluster and prioritize Building Blocks. Even though two of the rooms didn’t finish the exercise of identifying Building Blocks for all of their Results, they did complete the most essential Results, and the data is worth paying attention to.

The resulting chart is included below.

Results: Graduates who	Votes
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1. have a love of learning	158
2. are aware of what it means to be a good citizen and accept that responsibility	117
3. are well rounded	108
4. are respectful and tolerant of others	86
5. possess critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making skills	86
6. are responsible for their own actions	78
7. have mastered the basic life skills	73
8. are literate and numerate	56
9. are self-reliant	48
10. are self confident in their preparation for success	45
11. are good problem solvers	41
12. Independent learners with good work ethic	37
13. have an appreciation for the fine arts	31
14. can apply their learning to the real world	29
15. are well prepared for choices after graduation	29
16. are independent thinkers	23
17. are above average on state test	22

The Building Blocks needed to achieve the above results:

Building Blocks/Components we need include...	Votes
1. Sufficient resources	196
2. Coordinated and comprehensive curriculum K-12	137
3. Disciplined learning environment	73
4. high quality teachers	65
5. (personal attention)	64
6. Parental commitment	58
7. High expectations	53
8. Early intervention	48
9. Teaching to all abilities	43
10. Time for teachers to learn together	41
11. Quantifiable objectives, measurable outcomes, assigned accountability	40
12. Teacher accountability	39
13. Environment of tolerance and acceptance for all	38
14. School voucher system	35
15. Small class size	33
16. community commitment	32
17. Enrichment opportunities	30

Conclusion:

Without doubt others may process the data differently and draw different conclusions. For that reason the raw data has been retained and posted on the district web site. We can

only benefit from more legitimate analysis of this data. As with any data analysis there are many perspectives, interpretations, methods for processing, and a great need for critical thinking on the part of anyone reading this data.

It is our intent to use this data for further discussion and refining of a measurable definition of “success” for our students – our own Adequate Yearly Progress, one might call it. We consider this a good start in an effort that is really never ending... striving for improving quality.

Did we achieve our purpose with this forum? Yes. We...

1. Helped define “success” for us. What are the criteria that matter to the public.
2. Identified shared responsibilities between school, parent, teacher, and community as part of our Healthy Youth Initiative and Assets building.
3. Raised awareness of the shared responsibility for accountability of results and the challenge of measuring them.

Next step: For each off these Results we should ask: 1. What are we doing about it? and 2. How can this be measured?