

Importance of Accountability at the Schools Ed Schmidt

I recognize paternalism as an issue, and I know it is bound to creep into these relationships with the schools, but I would like to think that several things that we do help to minimize it. During our 05 and 07 trips, Henry and I have discussed from time to time ways to keep our visits professional and ways to minimize the "putting on the dog" by our hosts. As the slides illustrated, we are only partly successful in this effort. When visits take on the atmosphere of PR events, they are not necessarily just for us, as local officials are also sometimes there. In Kenya, for example, each MP has discretionary funds that s/he can distribute in his/her district. Schools are eligible for these funds, and it is important to principals to communicate their schools' needs to local politicians.

I do not think it would be responsible of us to give our and other people's money away without accountability. It seems to me that it must be there in any organized assistance situation. Your (Dale's) idea of reversing the roles in the situation only works for me if the donee here is a really impoverished area, say East St. Louis or Chicago's South Side in my own experience, and I can say that frankly, yes, I would expect accountability to be wanted there too and those who are accountable don't mind being held to it - except for the paperwork. An advantage to principals is that they can cite accountability to us as a reason to not respond to extraneous demands for use of TEAA funds.

In our conferences with principals, we note that TEAA grants funds mainly for books, lab equipment, and computers. We ask the principals, in conference with their teachers, to determine their greatest needs. They decide what they need and together we prepare a grant proposal. Sometimes I have questioned specific high-value lab items, and explanations have been given or adjustments have been made.

Our work as an NGO is only 4 years old, and my sense is that as we work with the schools my own sense of trust will increase, or not, with a particular principal, or individuals, within a school, so we might naturally move somewhat in the direction you suggest. I would, however, expect some form of accountability to remain in place.