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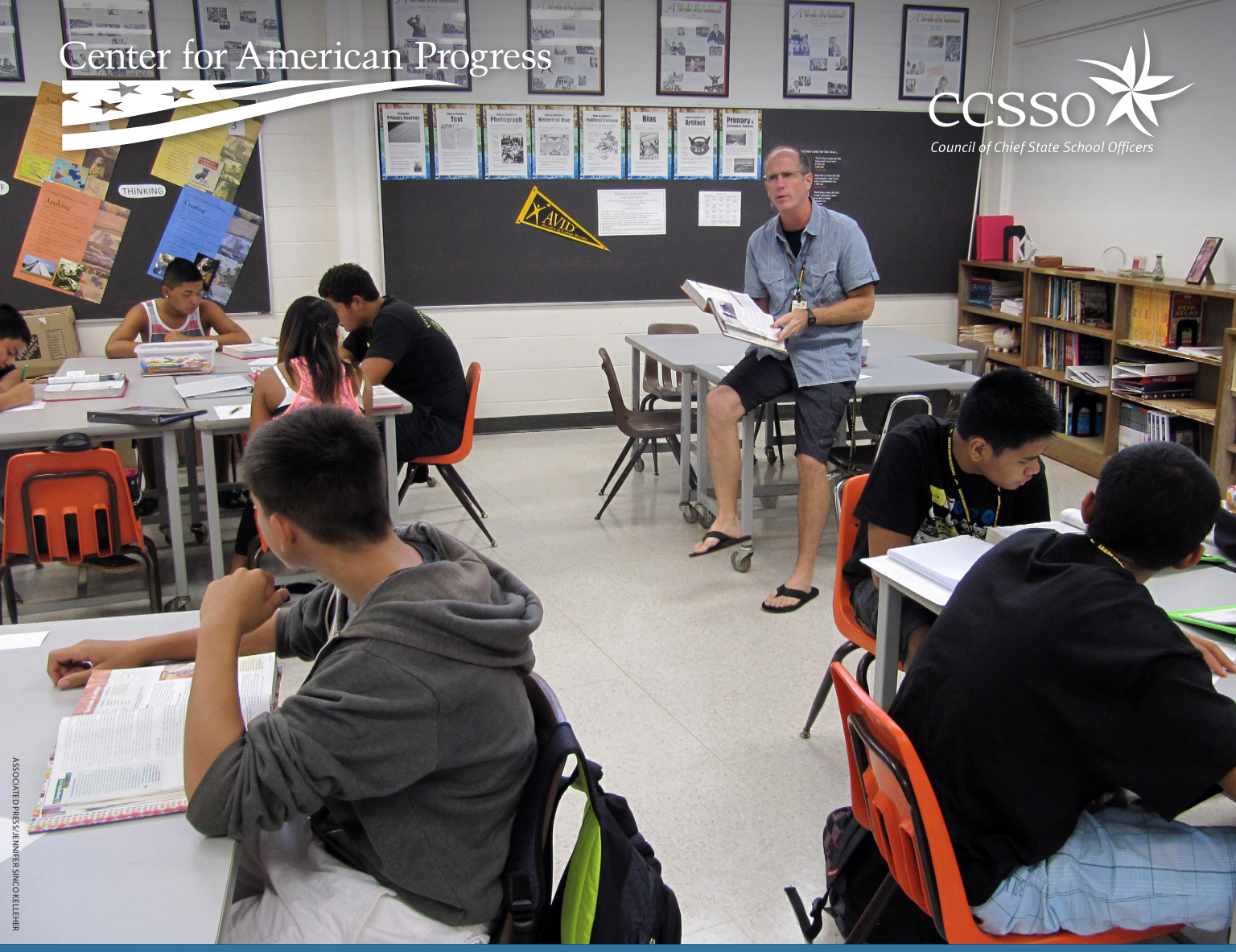

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Next-Generation Accountability Systems

An Overview of Current State Policies and Practices

Center for American Progress and the Council of Chief State School Officers October 2014

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Introduction and summary

Over the past six years, there has been a significant shift in education. States recognized that students were not being taught at levels that adequately prepared them for college and careers and stepped up to develop and implement more rigorous standards. As part of this transition, states have also committed to better supports for educators to adapt to the new standards, better assessments to measure student learning, and better accountability systems to understand where schools are struggling and how to help them improve.

Accountability systems provide the underlying structure for school and district support and improvement. State systems should hold all stakeholders accountable for student success, starting with the state and ending with the teacher in the classroom. States, districts, and schools should provide the support and resources necessary to improve achievement for all students, including at-risk students. Accountability systems should include strategies and systems for development of the teaching profession. These systems must recognize success while also enforcing consequences and providing support to the schools and districts most in need of improvement.[1] States are moving forward on all of these fronts.

However, as educators and states were making progress, Congress remained stagnant, failing to revise and reauthorize the federal education accountability law, known as No Child Left Behind, or NCLB.[2] Frustrated by this inaction, state leaders came together in 2011 to put forth a proposal that modeled the next-generation accountability systems.[3] Building on the positive aspects of NCLB, the Council of Chief State School Officers, or CCSSO, released a vision for the future of accountability systems.[4] This vision described an accountability system that is grounded in college- and career-readiness standards, collects a broader array of data to more accurately understand school and district performance, and uses those data to better support schools and districts, with an emphasis on the lowest performing.

Since then, states have built upon these principles to advance accountability systems. Some states have taken advantage of the opportunity to request flexibility from specific provisions of NCLB from the U.S. Department of Education. States can receive flexibility from a few of NCLB's outdated requirements by adopting reforms in three key areas: college- and career-readiness standards and assessments, systems of differentiated accountability and support, and teacher and principal evaluation.[5]

In order to illustrate the variety of innovative approaches to accountability that states are exploring, this report provides examples of next-generation accountability concepts implemented by states. While this study provides an overview of the landscape, it is not fully representative of the variety of state approaches to accountability. In reviewing the work of the states and drawing upon the thinking in both CCSSO's 2011 proposal and "Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm" by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit, and Linda Pittenger, we found that current reforms fell into five broad categories, which we describe in detail in each section of this report:

- **Measuring progress toward college and career readiness**
  Many states are rethinking mechanisms for measuring progress based on assessments and are including additional measures of college and career readiness such as the percentage of high school graduates who require remediation coursework in college.

- **Diagnosing and responding to challenges via school-based quality improvement**
  Many states and districts are using a broad array of quality indicators, such as parent volunteer hours and attendance data, to measure school success and develop school-improvement plans, as well as making use of third-party experts to assist them in this work.

- **State systems of support and intervention**
  States and districts are rethinking the way they support struggling schools. Some of the most prevalent strategies include school support teams, pairing high-growth schools with low-performing schools, networks of low-performing schools, engaging external providers, and recovery school districts.

- **Resource accountability**
  Some states and districts are focusing more intently on the connections between resource allocation and outcomes, and several have tried to aggressively tackle inequitable school funding with new state funding formulas. Others are working to increase transparency and accountability for how funds are being spent to ensure that high-need students are receiving adequate support.

- **Professional accountability**
  Most states have adopted new systems for evaluating and supporting teachers and leaders. However, some states are leveraging these new evaluation systems to create more robust on-site embedded professional development systems and developing school leaders, such as principals, to effectively carry out teacher-evaluation systems and instructional leadership. In addition, a number of states are also rethinking other aspects of the teaching profession, including teacher licensure, teacher-preparation program approval and accreditation, and selection, retention, and tenure.

It is essential to note that the trends and state examples that follow are provided to illustrate patterns of reform across the 50 states, but that the individual state reforms we have highlighted may or may not have resulted in successful improvement of student outcomes. At the same time, through our review of the landscape, we have identified some barriers that states, districts, and schools must tackle in order to move this work forward. These barriers are complex and interconnected: They include transitioning to new assessments, developing richer measures of student and school success, staffing school improvement teams, creating resource accountability systems, and strengthening the teaching profession.

Policymakers developing accountability reforms should give considerable thought to system coherence across all five areas, rather than targeting one area in isolation. These systems should also be designed for continuous improvement, with a clear connection between design features and improved student achievement.[6]

As we look beyond No Child Left Behind, our understanding of innovation at the state level will inform and shape the conversation around accountability systems moving forward.

Background

When President Lyndon B. Johnson enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, in 1965 as part of his War on Poverty program, resource accountability was at the heart of the law. Title I of ESEA provided additional funding for low-income students and created some checks to ensure that states and districts spent the federal funds appropriately.[7] Since its initial passage, ESEA has been reauthorized seven times.[8] The 1994 reauthorization—called the Improving America's Schools Act, or IASA—required states to develop content standards and assessments aligned to them. IASA also required that the standards apply to all students, as prior to IASA, states could have separate, less-challenging standards for low-income students.[9]

Enacted in 2001, No Child Left Behind is the most recent reauthorization of ESEA.[10] NCLB builds on the standards and assessments work of IASA by requiring states to test their students regularly. Critically, individual schools, districts, and states must publicly report test results, both in aggregate and for specific student subgroups. NCLB also went further than earlier laws by putting teeth into the federal requirements around standards and assessments: For the first time, the federal government required states and districts to monitor the achievement of all students and to take action in low-performing schools—or risk losing federal funding.[11]

However, although NCLB technically expired in 2007, Congress has yet to revise or reauthorize the act.[12] In response to this inaction, state leaders released a vision of next-generation accountability systems in CCSSO's report titled "Principles and Processes for Next-Generation Accountability Systems,"[13] outlining nine key components of an effective accountability system. These principles provide a framework for states to maintain the positive aspects of NCLB, while moving beyond the 2001 act to build and implement more thoughtful and nuanced systems of accountability that support the goal of ensuring all students are ready for college and careers.

Recognizing states' strong desire to advance past the limitations of NCLB, the Obama administration took advantage of an authority that exists in ESEA that allows states to apply for waivers from some of the more restrictive requirements of NCLB. States received flexibility in a number of areas, including student-achievement goals, interventions and supports for struggling schools, and highly qualified teacher provisions. In exchange for ESEA flexibility, states submitted proposals for improvements in three key areas:

- Adoption and implementation of college- and career-readiness standards and assessments that measure student achievement and growth
- Development and implementation of a differentiated accountability system that both recognizes high-achieving, high-growth schools and supports chronically low-achieving schools based on assessments and graduation rates
- Efforts to improve teacher quality by implementing teacher and principal evaluation based on multiple measures of effectiveness and support systems

Since February 2012, 43 states and the District of Columbia have received ESEA waivers and started implementing their alternative accountability plans.[14]

Measuring progress toward college and career readiness

Assessment results and graduation rates remain at the core of current accountability systems. However, as described below, many states are moving to more sophisticated assessments that are better aligned to college- and career-readiness expectations, while also developing and using other measures of student and school success. States are using assessment results in more sophisticated ways and are defining completion in ways that go beyond cohort graduation rates.

Use of assessments aligned to college and career readiness

In response to concerns that existing assessment systems were not aligned with the knowledge and skills needed for students to be successful in college and careers, and that, at best, the systems were incomplete indicators of student performance, states began developing new assessments that better measure student performance based on more rigorous standards.

In this vein, many states joined one of two state-led testing consortia working to develop new assessments that are better aligned to college- and career-readiness standards in mathematics and English language arts.[15] States can choose between the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC. While the two consortia are developing tests that are similar in content and cost, Smarter Balanced is an adaptive assessment—a computer-based test that adapts to the student's ability level.[16] The assessments being developed by these two consortia aim to move beyond traditional multiple-choice tests by using performance tasks to assess students' critical thinking, problem solving, and writing skills. Because these assessments rely on more open-ended questions, such as writing prompts or complex math problems, students will be better able to demonstrate their knowledge. These tests will give students, parents, and teachers more detailed information about their students' knowledge and skills.

Many of the states choosing not to participate in one of these consortia efforts are still moving toward assessments that are more aligned to college- and career-readiness expectations, such as Virginia's Standards of Learning.[17] For all states transitioning to new assessments, the data from these tests will become part of the states' accountability systems.[18]

Use of performance-based assessments

Some states are also seeking to incorporate locally developed annual student performance assessments into their accountability systems. Within these systems, states will still administer standardized assessments to serve as validating measures for locally chosen assessments of student outcomes; the state tests serve the purpose of ensuring that the local measures set a rigorous bar for student achievement.

Systemic use of performance assessments is relatively new, and many of these assessments are still being developed. Their development and validation are more resource intensive than standardized assessments, but a number of states feel that such investments are worthwhile if they can provide a more complete picture of students as learners and can increase educators' assessment and data literacy in the process.[19]

New Hampshire is currently in the process of developing a pilot accountability system for districts in which they can propose a locally designed Performance Assessment of Competency Education, or PACE, system to the state. PACE pilots will have to provide measurable student outcomes aligned with district goals and state priorities, including state-adopted standards and competencies. The assessment and accountability system proposed by the districts would be required to include annual determinations of student achievement and growth through locally designed and state-validated systems of performance assessments or college-readiness assessments.[20]

The new system would also require external validation of the performance assessments through the new Smarter Balanced statewide summative assessments in grades 4, 8, and 11. New Hampshire is supporting its districts' development of PACE models by concurrently developing common statewide performance tasks and necessary processes, tools, and protocols for validating high-quality local performance tasks aligned with state standards. The state is also organizing professional development institutes and regional support

networks, as well as developing a district peer-review and auditing process. New Hampshire will begin a minipilot of this system in a very small number of school districts during the 2014–15 school year.[21]

Similarly, high school diplomas in Maine are awarded based on demonstrations of proficiency in the Maine Learning Results academic standards and Guiding Principles, which describe a vision for what every Maine high school graduate should be able to do.[22] The awarding of high school diplomas must take into account "in addition to any local course work and accumulation of credits, a broad spectrum of learning experiences that may include internships, portfolios, long-term capstone projects" and other "appropriate learning experiences that provide opportunities to demonstrate proficiency."[23]

New Hampshire and Maine, along with several other states, are involved in CCSSO's Innovation Lab Network—an effort to build a shared performance assessment bank and use local performance assessments as part of statewide accountability systems.[24]

Use of new indicators of college and career readiness

Under NCLB, states were required to measure progress based on assessment scores that determined the percentage of students meeting the state's definition of proficiency. Recognizing the limitations of this method, states have designed more sophisticated approaches to defining student progress in state assessments. One major change is that states have moved to adding growth measures of student progress—as opposed to relying solely on absolute proficiency levels—in order to provide a more accurate portrait of the amount of progress made by schools and districts.[25]

States are also incorporating new measures of academic performance to measure school and district success in order to determine a rating or grading system for schools. While all states continue to use four-year cohort graduation rates in their accountability systems, many states are now also incorporating measures of college and career readiness such as SAT or ACT performance, or actual measures of post-graduation success such as enrollment in college or college-completion rates. Other states are including graduation portfolios that require high school students to demonstrate they have attained the skills and knowledge necessary for graduation.

While states are moving forward with new measures of college and career readiness, they are also focused on closing achievement gaps in these outcomes. States with ESEA waivers are required to publicly identify focus schools—those with the greatest achievement gaps—and support those schools to improve student achievement and narrow the gaps.[26] In developing their annual goals and rating systems for school and districts, some states have put additional emphasis on closing their achievement gaps or prioritizing the achievement of key subgroups.

Illinois, for example, includes results from English language proficiency exams in its new accountability system, thereby increasing school accountability for the performance of English learners.[27]

In New Mexico, each school receives a grade, A through F, based on an index that includes student achievement and growth, graduation rate, attendance, and college- and career-readiness indicators, including opportunities for high school students to access college-level coursework through Advanced Placement, or AP, courses. The state places extra focus on the growth of the lowest-performing students by giving schools twice as much credit for the growth of the bottom achievement quartile than for growth of the school overall.[28]

Oregon redesigned its new accountability system for schools and districts to emphasize growth over absolute achievement. Aligned to Oregon's Achievement Compacts—annual partnership agreements between the state and each school district that define key measures of student success and sets targets for achievement—the Oregon accountability system incorporates multiple measures. These include academic achievement, academic growth, subgroup growth, and—for high schools—graduation rates and subgroup graduation rates.[29]

In Georgia, college readiness is measured and included in their school rating system known as the College and Career Ready Performance Index, or CCRPI. One college readiness indicator measures the percentage of high school graduates entering a two- or four-year college who do not require remediation or learning support courses. Another measures student performance on the ACT, SAT, AP, or International Baccalaureate, or IB, assessments. College readiness is also measured by the percent of graduates earning course credit in dual enrollment, AP, or IB courses.[30]

Louisiana's graduation index varies the points awarded to schools based on the rigor of the work completed by students. A high school diploma completed in four years earns the school 100 points; a GED only earns the school 25 points, while a fifth-year high school graduate earns the school 75 points. On the more rigorous end, a school will earn 150 points if a student scores high marks on a college-level assessment such as an AP exam.[31]

New Jersey uses several factors beyond graduation rates in determining college- and career-readiness. As part of each school's accountability rating, the state factors in the remediation rates for students enrolled in New Jersey's postsecondary institutions, as well as the rates of students enrolled in postsecondary education within 6 months and 18 months of graduation. The state includes additional indicators of college- and career-readiness, including participation and performance on the SAT and AP exams and the percent of students who pass an industry certification exam.[32]

New Jersey will also use individual student data as part of an early warning system to help educators identify struggling students who are not on track for college and career readiness as early on as possible. The state will track a variety of research-based indicators, including attendance, growth, and credit accumulation, to determine when students get off track—and then help them get back on track. New Jersey is combining data from the National Student Clearinghouse with longitudinal data from the state's student-level data system to build a profile of a typical 2011 high school graduate enrolled in postsecondary education within four months of graduating high school. The profile includes state assessment scores, SAT scores, AP scores, and 12th-grade attendance data. In 2015, New Jersey will be able to create a profile of high school students who successfully completed postsecondary education. High schools can use these profiles to set their own specific goals for proficiency levels in all tested grade levels, SAT scores, and attendance trends.[33]

Minnesota uses a multiple-measure rating in their accountability system for schools, which places closing the achievement gap by cutting the disparity between current proficiency rates and 100 percent within six years at the center of the measure. A significant component of the rating is the achievement gap between the growth of a specific student group—which can include low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities—and that of higher-performing groups statewide.[34]

As part of its accountability reporting system, North Carolina reports on the implementation of a statewide high school graduation project. While this is no longer a graduation requirement as of 2009, many districts continue to require their students to complete a high school graduation project, and school report cards note whether or not a high school participates. The North Carolina graduation project consists of four components: a research paper, a product, a portfolio, and an oral presentation in a student's final year of high school. This project provides students the opportunity to connect content knowledge, acquired skills, and work habits to real world situations and issues.[35]

In Rhode Island, a high school diploma is contingent upon successful completion of at least two performance-based diploma assessments decided by the district. These assessments may include graduation portfolios, exhibitions, comprehensive course assessments—50 percent of which must be performance-based and include evaluation of knowledge application—or a certificate of initial mastery. Districts are charged with developing the performance-based diploma assessments, which must include demonstrations of both core content proficiency and applied learning skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and research.[36] A panel evaluates the student's performance using a state-approved rubric.[37]

In 2011, Wisconsin replaced the Adequate Yearly Progress system with a multiple-measure accountability index comprising student achievement, student growth, closing achievement gaps, and an indicator of being on track for graduation and postsecondary readiness as measured by graduation rates, attendance rates, and ACT participation and performance, as applicable.[38]

Diagnosing and responding to challenges via school-based quality improvement

NCLB required districts to create school-improvement plans based on data from schools that did not make adequate yearly progress for two subsequent years. There is a growing effort in many districts and schools to focus on school-quality improvement processes that go beyond test scores and look at other quantitative and qualitative data to diagnose problems and develop improvement strategies. By providing a holistic assessment of a school's strengths and weaknesses, a school-quality improvement process plays a key role in a comprehensive accountability system.

A school-quality improvement process may include the following elements: an inspection team with educational expertise in school practice and diagnostic inquiry, a peer review to provide multiple perspectives, and robust quantitative and qualitative data analysis.[39] This sort of human-capital-intensive approach can be costly. As a result, some districts and schools can only provide it on a cyclical basis or have to limit its use to schools with low performance. Below are some examples of new approaches to school-quality improvement.

Use of an inspectorate model

An inspectorate model uses a team of educational experts to review a school's data and practices in order to improve performance. The inspection team often spends several days observing teachers in the classroom, watching principals interact with staff, and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. At the end of their inspection, the team produces an individualized and comprehensive evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provides suggestions for how it can improve. While other countries, such as England, use regular inspections as a fundamental part of their accountability system,[40] states in the United States often use this strategy only after a school has been deemed poor performing. But inspections can also be used as a proactive school-improvement strategy. Most

schools are already subject to an accreditation process, which often resembles an inspection. Reforming the process might offer a cost-effective mechanism for implementing school-quality reviews or inspectorates across the country.

Kentucky uses a robust process of diagnostic review for schools that are struggling the most. While all schools and districts must complete a comprehensive improvement plan, these schools work collaboratively with parents, students, and community members to complete a more robust needs assessment. Using an online platform to collect qualitative and quantitative data about the school, the data are synthesized into causes and contributing factors, translated into needs, and then prioritized. Goals, objectives, strategies, and activities are developed to address the priority needs. In addition to district resources and supports, the state provides cross-functional teams with representation from all areas of the state education agency to review the submissions from all school districts and assess weaknesses that could become obstacles to successful completion of the plans. The teams assess levels of implementation and recommend appropriate and targeted interventions specifically designed to address the identified concerns.[41]

In addition to their diagnostic review for the lowest-performing schools, Kentucky also established a program-review system to assess the quality of programs in arts and humanities, writing, and practical living and career studies.[42] Program reviews are conducted internally at the school level three times a year by staff, parents, students, and relevant community members. An annual external review at the district level is then conducted at the end of each school year, whereby district review teams are able to request and review internal reports prepared by schools throughout the year.[43]

Missouri has a strong school accreditation process that is entirely aligned with the state's accountability system. For all schools, this includes measures of academic achievement and growth, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, attendance, and graduation. Based on the scores in each of these areas, schools are either accredited with distinction, accredited, provisionally accredited, or unaccredited. Missouri Department of Education staff members, teachers or principals from local school districts, or representatives from higher education institutions conduct on-site reviews of schools that are provisionally accredited or unaccredited.[44] After the state finishes its review, it uses the rating to determine individualized supports and, if necessary, interventions at the school and district level.[45] The lower the rating, the more prescriptive the intervention. At all levels, the state uses the quantitative and qualitative data gained from the review to help target its supports.

Ohio conducts School Improvement Diagnostic Reviews, or SIDRs, for schools identified as underperforming based on testing data. To conduct the SIDRs, an external team of experienced and skilled reviewers follow a standard protocol for collecting evidence in order to diagnose a school's strengths and weaknesses. SIDR teams are responsible for making prioritized recommendations that are presented to the school several weeks later in a diagnostic report.[46]

Rhode Island uses an in-depth diagnostic screening process for schools that analyzes student performance overall and by subgroup, school culture and climate data, educator-evaluation outcomes, and an analysis of district spending. This screening then guides the selection of an intervention model and creates specific areas in which districts are held accountable for improving school performance. District leadership will oversee this process through quarterly performance reviews with the Rhode Island Department of Education.[47]

Modeled on the school inspection process in Great Britain and Hong Kong, New York City public schools developed a quality-review system as part of its Children First reform program, which paired greater autonomy with greater accountability for schools. Quality reviews involve two- or three-day school visits by experienced educators to each New York City public school.[48] While external evaluators were initially responsible for all quality reviews, New York City changed the process in 2010 to allow support networks to have a greater role in conducting reviews for new and high-performing schools.[49] Schools in New York City choose their own network: Some are run by district personnel and others by nonprofit organizations that provide support in a range of areas, from managing school budgets to analyzing student data to providing professional development.

For under-performing schools, an external evaluator visits classrooms, speaks with school leaders, and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement. A quality-review rating is then given to each school, along with a report that is published on the state's website. This is one of four options permitted by the state to support underperforming schools. Other state-approved options include a curriculum audit, assignment of a joint-intervention team, or use of a distinguished educator.[50]

Use of peer educators

Inspection teams and peer educators look similar from the outside: groups of education experts observing classrooms, interviewing the principal, or analyzing school data. But while inspectors are often employed by the state or district to evaluate schools full time, peer educators are often teachers who are still in the classroom. As a result, peer educators are likely to be closer to the day-to-day work of teachers and may have a different perspective from a state team.[51] The experience of observing and evaluating schools also serves as a professional development opportunity for peer educators. In a profession sometimes stymied by closed classroom doors, peer educators actually open doors between schools to develop a broader learning community. States are using peer educators in different ways, a few of which are described below.

As noted above, New Hampshire is working to implement a locally designed performance assessment system. In order to ensure that those assessments meet key technical requirements established by the state, New Hampshire plans to use a district peer-review audit process. Peer-review teams of external practitioners will review evidence that the district submits and will also collect additional data and provide feedback according to common criteria during site visits to the district. According to current designs, the peer-review process will be used solely to provide formative feedback about these performance assessments to districts during the first two years. By the third year, the audits will become integral to the approval process for districts seeking to implement a PACE model for accountability purposes. Over time, the state hopes to increase the number of participating districts.[52]

New York state uses a program of distinguished educators to support low-performing schools and districts. The commissioner of education appoints highly effective educators to assist schools and districts whose prior intervention efforts have failed. Whether in a district or school, these educators conduct a holistic intensive review from the physical structure and daily operations to high-level teaching and meaningful learning. They analyze all available data and develop an action plan based on their findings.[53]

Use of data to create a culture of continuous improvement

As described earlier, states are using measures beyond test scores and graduation rates in their accountability systems in order to provide a grade or rating for the school's performance. While that is important, some states are using the data as more than just a factor in an accountability formula; they are also reporting and analyzing the data to develop a more detailed and nuanced picture of school performance for principals and teachers, as well as parents and students, in order to build a culture of continuous improvement. These measures might include: assessments of college- and career-readiness skills such as AP or IB tests; student participation such as postsecondary transition data; and school climate data such as student, parent, and teacher surveys. Ideally, a school report card would incorporate many, if not all, of these measures. Some states are using these data in quality-review efforts described above to drive continuous improvement, while others use it to inform decisions about how to intervene in low-performing schools.

Kentucky has one of the richest sets of measurements for school performance. The state divides the measures into three categories: next-generation learners, next-generation instruction and support, and next-generation professionals. Next-generation learners include overall achievement, achievement of a new subgroup of historically underserved students, student growth, college- and career-readiness, and graduation rates. Next-generation instruction and support includes program reviews in arts and humanities, career studies, writing, K-3 reviews, and world language programs. Next-generation professionals include the percent of teachers and principals rated highly on the state's evaluation system. Kentucky is the only state to use teacher effectiveness as part of its evaluation of school and district performance.[54]

In an annual budget review process, New Mexico examines the rate at which students matriculate from third grade, register for ninth grade on-track for college and careers, and graduate from high school. If any student subgroups are significantly behind at these checkpoints, this triggers district intervention. [55]

In its evaluations, Wisconsin includes a student-engagement indicator, which exists outside the state's accountability index, but moderates a school's or district's accountability score by deducting points if designated goal thresholds are not met. Those goals include test participation, absenteeism, and dropout rates.[56]

School functioning and climate data

States and districts are also working to understand students' and stakeholders' broader experience with school, including school safety and parent engagement. School climate data can be gathered from student, parent, and teacher surveys and can include social-emotional learning and supports and opportunity-to-learn indicators such as school discipline and attendance data.

While not currently employed statewide, the California Office to Reform Education, or CORE, ESEA flexibility waiver includes the School Quality Improvement System for accountability that contains a School Quality Improvement Index as its key feature. The School Quality Improvement Index comprises weighted measures within three domains. The first domain equals 60 percent of the index and includes academic measures such as achievement and growth data, graduation rates, and persistence rates in grades 8 through 10. The second domain equals 20 percent of the index and includes social and emotional measures such as suspension and expulsion data, chronic absenteeism, and noncognitive skills. The third domain equals 20 percent of the index and measures school and district climate and culture by gauging the perceptions of students, staff, and parents; special education identification; and English learner entry and exit status.[57]

According to New Mexico's ESEA flexibility waiver, school ratings include an Opportunity to Learn measure. Half of this measure is comprised of a classroom survey that asks students whether the school fosters an environment that facilitates learning, while the other half is based off of attendance records for all students. The state also offers bonus points to schools for strong student and parent engagement in areas such as sports, fine arts, leadership for students, and mentoring and tutoring for parents.[58]

Oklahoma's accountability system uses parent and community engagement and school culture indicators as part of its school rating system. Schools can earn bonus points for high scores on a school climate survey, as well as high parent and community volunteer hours.[59]

Developing state systems of support and intervention

Intervention in the lowest-performing schools is an area of renewed focus for states. The track record for most school-turnaround efforts is uneven at best, so states are creating innovative ways to review and support all schools—struggling or not. The most common strategies include school support teams, pairing high-growth schools with low-performing schools, networks of low-performing schools, engaging external providers, and recovery school districts. While most states focus on low-performing schools, some states are also building district capacity for school improvement and then holding districts accountable for their schools' results.

Use of school support teams

In order to support low-performing schools, some states deploy teams of education experts to analyze the school's data, evaluate their instructional practices, and devise an action plan to improve the school.

As part of its new accountability system, California has created the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, or CCEE. The CCEE is designed to mobilize expertise in the state in order to help districts improve the quality of teaching and school leadership and meet the needs of special populations such as English language learners, special education students, and students at risk of dropping out. It will offer particularly intense assistance to districts or schools that are struggling to meet the goals established in the Local Control Accountability Program, but its services will be available to schools and districts upon request. The CCEE will sponsor a system of review by expert educators and peers to help build a learning system within the state in order to stimulate the transfer of knowledge and best practices, while also encouraging innovation, experimentation, evaluation, and adaptation. The CCEE is designed to strengthen the state's capacity to assist schools and districts that need help but also to validate and share information about effectiveness across practices.[60]

Massachusetts requires superintendents with priority schools in their district to develop a redesign plan to assess district-level capacity to support priority schools, provide an intervention plan for each school, and set measurable annual goals to reach before exiting priority status. The District and School Assistance Centers' teams work with low-performing districts and schools to provide a range of planning and instructional supports to help them successfully implement their plans. Their services include:[61]

- District-level strategic planning
- Supporting school leaders in implementing major policy initiatives such as the new educator evaluation system
- Assisting districts in developing effective standards-based curricula
- Coaching principals and lead teachers on understanding and using student growth data

The District and School Transformation division in North Carolina supports the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools and 10 percent of districts. The state team conducts a comprehensive needs assessment of the school, works with the principal to develop a plan, and provides a school transformation coach to work with the school staff to implement the plan. North Carolina also has a system of three interlocking state and regional roundtables of expert educators that monitor current initiatives underway in districts, identify common needs, coordinate technical assistance, and target resources to the greatest needs.[62]

Pairing high-growth schools with low-performing schools

Drawing on international examples such as Shanghai's strategy of pairing successful schools with low-performing ones, some states match their low-performing schools with high-performing or high-growth schools.[63] Under the same rationale as peer educators, lower-performing schools may learn best from other schools—especially those with similar demographics that have achieved high growth.

While some states use school-partnership strategies as part of a larger accountability process, the California Office to Reform Education districts' waiver is unique because it describes school partnerships as the bedrock of their intervention

strategy. CORE districts will share their data with an agreed-upon third party such as the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University. The third party will identify struggling schools and match them with a demographically similar high-performing school—a CORE "School of Distinction"—as an ongoing partner for improvement. Low-performing schools will use their school-quality review process to focus their work with the School of Distinction coaching team and target areas for reform and intervention.[64]

In Massachusetts, the state department of education designates schools that are high achieving, high growth, and have narrowed proficiency gaps as Commendation schools. Since 2012, as many as 5 percent of schools statewide fall into the Commendation school category. These Commendation schools may serve as demonstration sites, and depending on funding availability, they may be eligible for promising practice grants to encourage their involvement in networking activities. Commendation schools will also have the opportunity to partner with lower-performing schools that share similar demographic and performance profiles to share best practices.[65]

Tennessee identifies the highest performing 5 percent of schools and the most improved 5 percent and will create a competitive grant program for these schools to share best practices. The state will ask these Reward schools to serve as ambassadors to other schools by analyzing and sharing their best practices with neighboring schools, hosting visiting staff or conducting school visits to other schools, and creating mentorship opportunities between their staff and neighboring schools' staff.[66]

Creation of a network of low-performing schools

By developing networks of low-performing schools, teachers and leaders can brainstorm solutions to common problems and share resources. Through these networks, states can also target technical assistance and additional resources to these schools.

Colorado recently issued a request for proposals to districts with turnaround schools, inviting them to participate in a turnaround network. Members of the network agree to a consistent and robust planning and goal-setting process; common performance measures and monitoring; cross school and district learning facilitated by the state education department; flexibilities aligned to their improve-

ment strategies; and alignment of all available resources around the turnaround strategy. The state has several districts that are interested and expects the network to be in place within the next couple months.[67]

Connecticut's commissioner of education created the Commissioner's Network, which includes 25 of the state's lowest-performing schools. The commissioner selects schools for inclusion in the network and partners with local stakeholders to turn the school around. The network provides schools with additional resources, as well as a platform to share and learn effective practices from other schools in the network.[68]

Delaware created a network for their priority schools, which will receive technical assistance, additional funding, and targeted interventions. In exchange for these resources, districts also renegotiate collective-bargaining agreements in order to provide more operating flexibilities to participating schools. The expectation is that the added autonomy, along with the special state supports, will lead to a better environment for academic growth.[69]

Engagement with external providers and technology

While many states have engaged external providers in turnaround work, a number of states such as Virginia have made it easier for districts to work with third-party organizations with turnaround expertise. Illinois vets lead partners for school turnaround, and districts must select a lead partner in order to be eligible for turnaround funds. Indiana conducts a similar pre-approval process, and the state uses external partners when intervening directly in schools.[70]

Other noteworthy examples include New Jersey's Regional Achievement Centers, or RACs, which are state-level technical-assistance providers designed to provide capacity building at the school and district levels.[71] New Jersey has leveraged Title I money, requiring priority schools to use their funds to create certain coaching positions and implement the state's model curriculum and assessments. They are also funding the RACs with Title I dollars.

Florida is implementing an eight-step problem-solving model that is intended to help schools get at the causes of low performance and develop strategies for improvement. The state is in the process of developing an online school-improvement plan that will integrate all required plans for priority schools.[72]

Use of recovery school districts

Louisiana, Michigan, and Tennessee created recovery school districts, which are "separate entities focused on creating conditions to support aggressive turnaround in schools that have long resisted more incremental change efforts."[73]

In 2003, Louisiana was the first state to adopt this school-intervention model. Managed by the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Recovery School District, or RSD, is a state agency that manages low-performing schools that gained control of most of the schools in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.[74] According to the 2003 legislation, which created the RSD, the state can take over failing schools—defined as any school that earns an F letter grade in a single year.[75] In other states, intervention in low-performing schools can mean tightly controlled guidance for school improvement, but the RSD takes its approach from the charter sector, which prioritizes choice for parents, autonomy for school leaders, and accountability for results.[76] While the RSD initially included traditional public schools, as of the start of the 2014–15 school year, the RSD will be the first all-charter school district.

Michigan's Education Achievement Authority, or EAA, has the ability to take over schools that have been in the bottom 5 percent for academic achievement for at least three years in a row.[77] Similar to Tennessee's example below, Michigan's EAA can manage the school itself or convert it into a charter school. The EAA currently has 12 direct-run schools and three charter schools.[78] EAA uses a student-centered, competency-based instruction model, which organizes students by instructional level rather than age and grade level.

Modeled after Louisiana's RSD, Tennessee created a statewide Achievement School District, or ASD, to intervene in the 35 lowest-performing schools in the state. The ASD employs two primary intervention strategies to dramatically increase student achievement: convert the school into a charter school or replace the district in directly managing daily operations of the school. When the ASD manages the schools, they focus on a few key levers of turnaround. First, the ASD hires key staff, such as principal and lead teachers, at least six months in advance and runs a robust induction program for them. They also provide school leaders with significant autonomy over personnel, budget, schedule, and program. All existing staff must reapply for a position with the ASD. The ASD maintains tight control over assessment, professional development, and performance management.

Building district capacity for school support

In addition to focusing improvement efforts on low-performing schools, some states are also building district capacity for school improvement and then holding districts accountable for their schools' results.

Recognizing that schools within respective districts are interdependent, and that achievement challenges are not isolated to a single campus within a district, Arkansas takes a coherent approach to working with districts to support struggling schools. Arkansas believes that some challenges are under the control of the school, while others may be influenced by district-level factors that are not easily mitigated within the school without district intervention and support. The Arkansas Department of Education therefore engages district leadership in diagnostic analysis of low-performing schools and needs assessment in partnership with school leadership. Where improvement efforts are successful, districts will have increased flexibility in their use of funds, as well as greater responsibility for achieving outcomes.[79]

Connecticut formed the Alliance District program, a unique and targeted investment in Connecticut's 30 lowest-performing districts. Alliance Districts are eligible for funding to support district strategies to dramatically increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps by pursuing bold and innovative reforms. Alliance Districts have their own tiered intervention and support plans leveraging increased Title I flexibility. The Alliance Districts work with the commissioner of education, who approves their plans and reviews district progress and performance relative to those plans and subsequent annual amendments, in the context of the district's overall strategy to improve academic achievement. The state Turnaround and Performance Offices also work to ensure that districts have the resources they need for successful interventions.[80]

Illinois has enhanced its current statewide system of support, or SSOS, to concentrate support and assistance at the district level to build district capacity to improve student outcomes in the state's lowest-performing schools. One of the foundational principles of SSOS is that the people working within the system focus on increasing the capacity of school districts to assume, with confidence, greater responsibility for the continuous improvement of instruction and student achievement within their schools. For districts that have priority schools, the Illinois State Board of Education will assign a district assistance team through the Illinois Center for School Improvement. The team will include a turnaround specialist; school coaches with

expertise in working with English language learners, low-income students, racial and ethnic minority students, or students with disabilities depending on the identified need; and content specialists whose skillsets align with the needs identified via a comprehensive audit. District assistance teams are required to utilize evidence-based strategies that support school turnaround. The Illinois Center for School Improvement will provide ongoing training and professional development for district assistance teams and ensure that school districts with the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools receive high-quality support and assistance.[81]

In Massachusetts, districts are "only as strong as their weakest school" and are therefore rated at the same level as their lowest-performing school.[82] The state sees district accountability and state assistance as closely linked. The highest-performing districts with successful schools across-the-board receive autonomy and flexibility from the state. All other districts receive more resources, support, and guidance from the state in accordance with their need.

Rather than requiring state-determined achievement goals for all districts, Oregon empowers districts to develop their own outcome goals that are targeted at driving student performance in a way that is most appropriate for each respective district. As part of its comprehensive accountability system, the state enters into annual partnership agreements with each of the 197 school districts to establish shared responsibility between the state and the district for setting ambitious goals aimed at ensuring that students are making the progress needed in all key outcomes to reach the state's performance goals. These partnership agreements, which Oregon calls Achievement Compacts, are intended to drive two-way accountability—state and district—in setting and achieving the goals. While districts are held accountable for results, they have flexibility and room for creativity in how to reach those goals.[83]

In Tennessee, the state converted their Field Service Centers—regional offices focused on compliance and monitoring—to Centers of Regional Excellence, or CORE, which provide professional development and support to districts. Typically staffed with district leader from that region, CORE provides a range of services, from data analysis support to math education professional development. The initiative's aim is to eliminate the capacity gap between districts by ensuring a base level of capacity to all districts, especially small rural districts with limited staff. The CORE office is held accountable, and the state evaluates the CORE director and team based on their districts' academic performance. At the same time, districts are allowed to set their own progress targets. In exchange, the state then holds the district responsible for reaching their targets.[84]

Use of triggers and criteria for intervention

As described above, states are required to identify both focus and priority schools as targets for intervention under ESEA flexibility. The 10 percent of schools with the largest within-school achievement gaps or with the lowest overall achievement subgroups in the state must be identified as focus schools. The schools in the bottom 5 percent of performance in terms of overall student achievement or graduation rate must be identified as priority schools. The state must also identify any Title I high school with a graduation rate less than 60 percent as either a focus or priority school. States must also establish a system of accountability and intervention to serve the other 85 percent of schools.

The required criteria for identifying focus and priority schools are currently limited to test scores and graduation rates. But these restrictions have not prevented states from going beyond test scores and graduation rates in other areas such as informing school improvement efforts, teacher evaluation ratings, and new school grading systems, often on an A through F scale. As described above, most states have also widened their scope of data collection beyond assessment to measures of college- and career-readiness, school climate, and student engagement such as attendance or noncognitive skills. Some states are not only using these data to grade a school's performance but are also using them to develop early warning systems to identify struggling students and schools.

For example, in its ESEA flexibility waiver, the California Office to Reform Education outlines a process for directing resources such as formative tasks, remediation, and professional development for teachers toward students in any school that falls below trigger thresholds, including performance on the 10th grade California High School Exit Exam, regardless of whether they are a priority or focus school.[85]

In addition to identifying schools with the largest achievement gaps, Mississippi identifies schools where the lowest-performing 25 percent of students are at the bottom of the statewide achievement threshold. These schools will receive a state-appointed support specialist who visits at least twice per month and must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment.[86]

In its ESEA flexibility waiver, New Mexico includes Strategic Schools, a category of schools above the required priority and focus threshold, as an additional group of schools for support and intervention. It views these schools as at risk for falling into a lower status and requires locally determined interventions to address identified low performance among student groups.[87]

Tennessee has created both achievement-gap and gap-closure targets, making it impossible for a school or district to avoid identification for improvement unless it is making progress for all groups of students. If a single subgroup is not making progress on a majority of its measures, the district must implement an aggressive corrective plan.[88]

Resource accountability

States are broadly engaged in efforts to focus attention on the use of resources. Some states have adopted new school finance policies to ensure that schools and districts serving high-need students receive the resources they need. For instance, a weighted student-funding model provides more dollars for programs to support students with greater needs such as students who are low income, English language learners, or in special education. In addition, some states are implementing mechanisms for holding districts or schools accountable for how they spend funds, including increasing transparency related to school spending.

Ensuring sufficient and fair funding

States use different methods to ensure equitable funding for all students—including additional resources for students with greater needs.

A number of years ago, Maine adopted a new Essential Programs and Services school-funding model that used school enrollment and demographic data to establish the amount of funding each district would need to ensure that all students, including high-need students, achieve the state's learning results standards. State funding for school districts flows through a formula that calculates a school district's ability to support its schools' essential programs as defined by the state formula, with the effect that greater state resources flow to the state's poorer communities.

While not implemented statewide, Baltimore City Public Schools recently implemented Fair Student Funding, a weighted student-funding system whereby each school receives its share of the total through a per-pupil formula that allocates a base level of funding for each student and supplements this with weights for students in particular categories and circumstances.[89] Baltimore's funding system allows principals to make key financial decisions for their schools. The results that principals are then expected to achieve are specific and transparent based on the categories used to justify funding requests.[90]

California recently adopted the Local Control Funding Formula, or LCFF, which provides a base grant for each district equivalent to $7,643 per student based on average daily attendance, with an extra 20 percent boost for each disadvantaged student and additional funding for those who attend schools where at least 55 percent of students are low income, English language learners, or in foster care. Districts must spend these additional funds on services for targeted students. Along with additional funds, California districts are required to develop, adopt, and annually update a three-year local control and accountability plan that includes identifying goals and measuring progress for student subgroups across multiple performance indicators. County superintendents review these plans to ensure alignment between projected spending, services, and goals.[91]

In New Jersey, the Abbott school equity and finance court decisions, starting with the state Supreme Court landmark ruling in 1985, remain central to how the state funds its urban and suburban schools. This series of rulings required schools in the 31 poorest communities—often called the Abbott districts—to receive additional funding to ensure those high-need students were provided a "thorough and efficient" system of education, as guaranteed by the state constitution.[92] For those districts, the *Abbott* decisions led to universal preschool, a substantial school construction and renovation program, and additional programs and funding.[93] As a result, New Jersey now uses an adequacy model to calculate the necessary state aid to school districts. The School Funding Reform Act, or SFRA—the current legislation behind the funding formula—assigns every school district an adequacy budget, or the amount a district needs to educate each student. The budget takes into account the district's number of low-income, special-education, and English-learner students. The formula then calculates the district's "fair share," which is the amount a district can contribute to their adequacy budget through local property taxes. The fair share is then subtracted from the adequacy budget, resulting in the final state equalization aid.[94]

As part of a slate of reforms to transfer more autonomy to schools and principals, New York City public schools are transitioning to a weighted student-funding system. The largest funding stream in New York City's school budget are Fair Student Funding dollars, which are used by schools to cover basic instructional needs and are allocated to each school based on the number of students enrolled at that school and their level of need.[95] New York uses 26 different student-need categories, including English language learners, special education, and low-income students.[96] Principals have complete control over all money allocated to schools through Fair Student Funding.

Former Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland (D) proposed the Ohio Evidence-Based Model, or OEBM, which connected a reform plan anchored in research-based programs that result in academic success with the appropriate funding to run them. For example, OEBM funded universal, full-day kindergarten at the same level as other grades. Recognizing the central importance of teachers and the challenge that low-income districts face in recruiting high-quality teachers, OEBM also provided additional funding for teacher compensation using the Ohio Instructional Quality Index, which factored in the wealth of a community, the poverty of students residing in the district, and the educational attainment of the adult population within the district. Because research has shown that small class sizes are beneficial in kindergarten through third grade , OEBM reduced class sizes for those grades. While this model is no longer in effect, we have included it in this study since it is one of few examples of resource accountability tied to the provision of specific services rather than specific dollars.[97]

Encouraging financial efficiency

Some states are using incentives or accountability mechanisms to promote consideration of the impact and efficiency of funding decisions.

New Mexico requires schools to monitor the return on investment for interventions in underperforming schools and to shift strategies if they are not seeing results. The state conducts annual monitoring through the budgeting process and also works to identify and replicate interventions that are showing strong effectiveness.[98] New Mexico also created one of the first funding formulas weighted based on student needs in the country in 1974. This formula separated student funding from property tax values and allocated dollars based on a set of identified student needs, providing additional resources to high-need students such as English language learners and students with special needs.[99]

New York recently began offering district management efficiency grants—a program that, according to the grant language, "rewards school districts that have implemented innovative strategies to improve the overall efficiency of school district management, while maintaining or improving student achievement."[100] Districts in the state can apply for the grant by creating a plan for cost savings in their districts. Twelve districts received the grants in 2013, after identifying more than $9 million in cost savings.[101]

Since 2003, Virginia has been conducting district-level fiscal analysis in order to "realize cost savings in non-instructional areas in order to redirect those funds toward classroom activities."[102] Outside consultants conduct the analysis for the districts, and both the state and the district share the costs. Since the program began, more than 30 districts in Virginia have gone through the program with more than $40 million in estimated savings.[103]

Professional accountability for teachers and leaders

In the past two decades, research has shown that students who receive high-quality teaching learn more. In fact, the effectiveness of a teacher is the single most powerful in-school variable for students.[104]

States have responded to this research by focusing on teacher effectiveness. They are developing and implementing policies that set high expectations for teaching practice, provide support to help teachers reach those standards, and hold teachers accountable for meeting that high bar. From teacher preparation and licensure to teacher evaluation and tenure, there has been a sea change in policy as it relates to the education profession. For example, in December 2012, a task-force of chief state school officers released a report titled "Our Responsibility, Our Promise,"[105] outlining strategies for examining and transforming how we prepare teachers and principals so that they can provide instruction and organize learning environments to help students reach heightened expectations. Twenty-five states have agreed to advance the recommendations included in the report to improve teacher preparation.[106]

Recognizing the need for effective school and district leadership, states are increasingly supporting principal and other school leader development as critical to school improvement.

Approval and accreditation of teacher-preparation programs

States are focusing on teacher preparation as a key leverage point to raise teacher effectiveness—through raising the selectivity of the programs, encouraging robust clinical training, providing programs better data about their graduates, and ultimately using those data to improve programs.

Delaware is moving to create a more selective and rigorous teacher-preparation sector. Under a recent law, teacher candidates must now have a 3.0 GPA or pass an academic skills test to enter a teacher-preparation program. Before graduating from the program, candidates must pass a more challenging test of content knowledge and must demonstrate teaching effectiveness through a performance assessment. Delaware also underscored the importance of clinical training by requiring an ongoing residency that requires working with a cooperating teacher and a range of teaching experiences such as participating in parent-teacher conferences and teaching students while being observed.

Louisiana started aligning teacher preparation with the needs of K-12 schools in the mid-1990s. The state formed the Blue Ribbon Commission for Educational Excellence, a task force of 36 members—including state, business, university, K-12, and community leaders—that was charged with recommending improvements to university-based teacher-training programs in the state to help raise the quality of Louisiana's teacher workforce. In 2006, teacher-training institutions received the first report that linked graduates of their programs to student achievement. As data about teacher preparation emerged, programs were rated on a five-point scale, with one being the most effective and five the least effective. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education created a policy to require those teacher-preparation organizations with scores of four or five to enter what is termed "programmatic intervention," which required organizations to develop and implement plans to address the weaknesses in program content.[107]

Massachusetts overhauled their regulations for educator preparation in 2012 and approved new standards for teachers and administrators that mirror the standards for effective practice embedded in the educator evaluation rubric. The new program review process focuses more on output measures in the classroom, such as employer data and program-completer effectiveness. In addition, the state raised standards for entry into the profession by requiring a series of assessments of academic skills, subject matter, and performance assessment for teacher entry and licensing. To encourage teacher preparation graduates to teach in high-need fields, the state has provided tuition incentives for academically successful students in high-need fields to become teachers.

In early 2014, both New Mexico and Texas piloted a model to evaluate teacher-preparation programs designed by the National Council on Teacher Quality. Unlike national accreditation, this inspectorate process—operated by the Tribal Group from Britain—evaluates the quality of training. Inspectors look specifically at selectivity, content knowledge, and clinical practice. At the end of a four-day review, inspectors will present their findings to provide institutions and the states information on the effectiveness of programs so they can decide whether to continue approval to operate.

Rhode Island is also collecting data from teacher-evaluation systems and reporting the data back to the institutions where teachers were trained. It will be using these data to inform approval of teacher-preparation programs in the state.

In 2013, Tennessee provided feedback information to educator preparation providers that included value-added scores of individual program completers disaggregated by the types of students in each completer's classroom. This policy change allowed programs to assess the effectiveness of individual programs and licensure tracks within an institution of higher education or alternative prep program. In addition, the state provided training modules for pre-service teachers and faculty to understand the value-added system and reports.

Raising the bar for teacher licensure

Some states are reimagining licensure as a meaningful signal of teacher effectiveness rather than as a measure of teaching experience and educational attainment.

In April, Georgia adopted a new, tiered licensure model that was phased in starting in July.[108] Before starting their student teaching, prospective teachers from a university or alternative certification program will earn a preservice certificate by passing a more rigorous content-knowledge exam and a subject-specific performance assessment, as well as a background check and ethics test. The induction certificate for new teachers will last three years, during which time the teacher must be rated proficient or exemplary on two out of three evaluations. The professional certificate is a five-year renewable license. To renew, a teacher must earn a proficient or exemplary rating on their evaluation for four out of five years. The expectation is that every teacher will earn a professional certificate.

There is also an advanced certificate with two pathways within that category. The first is the advanced professional pathway for highly effective master teachers who have earned an exemplary evaluation rating and have an advanced degree or are National Board-certified. The second is a lead professional pathway for teachers who have earned an exemplary evaluation rating and who wish to take on roles primarily working with adult learners such as mentoring, induction, and clinical faculty.[109]

Massachusetts is creating a comprehensive system of supports and requirements for educator knowledge and skills, with high standards for entry implemented through a series of assessments of academic skills and subject matter for teacher entry and licensing. The state also implemented performance assessments for licensure for both teachers and administrators. At the same time, the state now requires induction programs offered by trained mentors for both beginning teachers and administrators to provide support.[110]

Use of selection, retention, and tenure

Some states are placing teacher—and principal—effectiveness at the center of new policies that encourage highly effective professionals to stay in the classroom, teach in subject areas with a shortage of teachers, and lead in high-need schools.

In Colorado, tenure is a right that can be earned and unearned. Teachers must receive three consecutive years of positive evaluations to earn tenure, which guarantees them an appeals process before they can be fired. Teachers will lose tenure if they receive two ineffective ratings in a row. At the same time, safeguards such as an appeals process ensure that tenure is not removed capriciously.

Delaware has leveraged its evaluation system to retain effective teachers and principals through the Delaware Talent Cooperative, which provides retention awards to highly effective teachers and leaders willing to work and stay in high-need schools.[111]

The District of Columbia Public Schools system, or DCPS, has a Leadership Initiative for Teachers, or LIFT, a five-stage career-ladder system that increases opportunities and responsibilities for excellent teachers, as well as offering salary increases. Teachers progress up the LIFT ladder by earning effective or highly effective ratings, and DCPS raises the bar required to progress each step on the ladder. LIFT has four goals:

1. Retain top performers in the classroom

2. Reward experience by requiring a minimum of six years of experience before teachers can reach the top level of expert teacher

3. Broaden recognition for highly effective and effective teachers

4. Increase career stability because once a teacher reaches a particular stage, they will not revert to a previous one

Massachusetts provides tuition incentives to academically successful teacher candidates who maintain a 3.0 GPA in college and commit to teaching in a high-need field for two years in Massachusetts public schools. The state also offers a scholarship program for qualified high school students who are interested in teaching. The program provides four-year tuition and fees scholarships.[112]

Supporting teaching effectiveness through better professional development

As nearly every state is overhauling its evaluation systems, states—and some districts—are working to connect the information gleaned from evaluation to professional development in order to help improve teacher and principal effectiveness.

Delaware is developing a cohesive teacher pipeline. The state requires and funds multiyear new-teacher induction, makes program completion a requirement for licensure advancement, and requires three years of support for new teachers. The state also provides funding for mentors for beginning teachers[113] and principals. Delaware has also leveraged its evaluation system to inform teacher and principal preparation and development through the new Evaluation Report System database.[114]

Beyond supports for new teachers, the state Department of Education also maintains ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers through a set of approved professional development groups. These groups include subject-matter networks such as the Delaware Reading Project, Writing Project, and Science Coalition. Outside of subject-area expertise, Delaware also supports groups in response to intervention and positive behavior supports. Following the state's

Common Core State Standards adoption, it also launched an initiative led by a group of effective teachers across the state to develop materials and supports for job-embedded professional development around the new standards.

Teachers in Massachusetts create and maintain individual professional development plans as a requirement for license renewal. During the summer, the state offers free professional development around high standards, instructional practices, and rigorous curriculum.[115] Teachers are also encouraged and enabled to participate in professional development opportunities throughout the year.[116]

North Carolina created an online module for teachers that guides educators through the evaluation process and provides detailed information on each of the evaluation standards and its indicators. The system automatically links educator evaluation with professional development by recommending customized professional development—both virtual and in-person—depending on observation and evaluation results. Teachers who receive ratings on specific standards that are below proficient must develop a professional-development plan that specifically addresses these areas. Principals will have access to an interface that allows them to track the professional development that their staff is pursuing.

As one of the few districts to focus on the role of principal supervisors, Denver Public Schools took steps to enhance the capacity of the central office to coach and support principals whose schools were underperforming in 2010.[117] The district regrouped 20 of its lowest-performing schools geographically into two clusters and appointed an instructional superintendent and a deputy instructional superintendent to supervise each cluster of schools. This effectively reduced the number of campuses and principals for which each supervisor was responsible to five, significantly lower than the typically assigned amount.

The district also developed the Denver School Leadership Framework, a shared definition of leadership practices that serve as the criteria for principal evaluation.[118] The framework comprises leadership expectations around culture, equity, instruction, and human resources. Additionally, there are expectations around strategic, organizational, and community leadership. Principals self-assess, set goals in these areas, and meet twice annually with their evaluators. During the mid-year meeting, principals and evaluators collaboratively agree on target areas and plan for professional growth. Each principal must have a professional growth

plan in which target areas and goals are identified and professional development plans are articulated. Additionally, principals are allowed to self-select into affinity groups of approximately 15 school leaders who have come together around a particular problem or practice.

DCPS developed an educator portal that provides individualized professional development for teachers based on the results of their IMPACT evaluation, DCPS' teacher evaluation system. DCPS also developed IMPACT for school leaders. In anticipation of that rollout, DCPS doubled the number of instructional superintendents in order to facilitate greater support for campus principals, including more observation and feedback, as well as opportunities for school clusters to meet more regularly for customized professional development. According to Hilary Darilek, the deputy chief of the DCPS Principal Effectiveness Team, "The goal was to move the superintendent role from a compliance-based position to one where the superintendent could observe and support principals and have a consistent and significant presence in schools."[119]

As a pilot district for a new teacher-leadership model, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, or CMS, in North Carolina created a teacher-leader support structure to assist principals with instructional leadership activities. Public Impact, an education policy think tank in Chapel Hill, is working with CMS to implement an opportunity culture across a subset of schools.[120] In this model, highly effective teachers assume formal leadership roles such as instructional facilitator. Teacher leaders can assist the principal in the observation process and provide coaching feedback to teachers.

CMS has focused principal professional development on coaching strategies needed to implement their teacher evaluation system. CMS has added district-level professional development focused on coaching and how to have conversations with teachers about changing practices. For example, principals are trained on how to differentiate their coaching strategies with teachers based on whether performance problems are the result of a lack of skill or a lack of will. Teachers who have performance deficits but a strong work ethic and desire to improve require a different coaching approach than teachers who have the requisite instructional knowledge but lack the motivation to do the work.

Challenges to implementing next-generation accountability

Based on our review of the landscape with respect to the movement of states and districts toward elements of what we have broadly called a next-generation accountability system, we have identified some barriers that states, districts, and schools must overcome. Federal, state, and local policymakers must work to support efforts to move beyond these challenges. Key challenges include transitioning to new assessments; developing, implementing, and validating richer measures of student and school success; implementing school-quality improvement systems; enforcing resource accountability; and strengthening the teaching profession.

Transitioning to new assessments

Students, parents, and teachers are understandably weary of the overemphasis on assessments—particularly low-quality assessments that can lead to drill and kill instruction methods. As states and districts move to implement more rigorous standards and assessments, there will inevitably be a rocky road during the transition period as curriculum, textbooks, and, most importantly, instruction are recalibrated to align with the new standards and assessments. There will likely be a drop in the number of students scoring on grade level as students, teachers, and systems adjust to the new standards. This can—and indeed has—led to political backlash against the new standards and the new assessments. Both CCSSO and the Center for American Progress have published recommendations for state and district leaders on how to convey the importance of the new standards and assessments and smooth the transition as they are merged into instruction.

In addition, innovation in assessment techniques, such as the efforts to develop performance-based assessments, can be expensive and may feel like more, not less, testing for students and parents. Ensuring that performance-based assessments are valid, reliable, and comparable across schools will also be challenging. Policymakers will need to invest in research and development efforts and support evaluations of their effectiveness.

Developing, implementing, and validating richer measures of student and school success

States are exploring new ways to assess learning outcomes for students and schools—assessments that go beyond the large-scale measures of achievement in math and English language arts used by states today. They are looking for ways to assess deeper learning outcomes through, for example, richer, performance-based assessments and tests of 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration, and higher-order thinking.

In this work, states face a host of barriers, not the least of which is that assessments of this type are still in development. Additionally, states, schools, and districts face the challenge of developing, implementing, and validating new assessments while also managing the implementation of the current suite of assessments required by state and federal law. As states begin relying on these new types of assessments, they will need to work with the U.S. Department of Education to have the flexibility to determine which assessments should be required as part of a state's comprehensive system and how to use these new measures for federal accountability purposes.

Implementing school-quality improvement systems

School-quality review systems will require a corps of professionals—whether they are third-party experts or peer educators—who are trained and qualified to offer support to schools. This will require new training programs and more robust career pathways for highly effective teachers to be put in place.

Enforcing resource accountability

Multiple barriers impede implementation of a strong resource accountability system. School finance is always an area fraught with peril for policymakers, and efforts to shift funding from one district or school to another invariably encounter rough political waters. Efforts to transform school financing systems through the adoption of weighted student-funding models, for example, must therefore be accompanied by a concurrent focus on transparency around school spending and increased accountability for results from the adults at the state, district, and school levels who actually spend the money.

Unfortunately, most data systems do not support a return on investment analysis to promote efficiency. Often, outcome data are not in the same system as spending data. Education accountability systems at the federal, state, and local level must ensure transparency, eliminate factors that mask disparities, such as the use of average teacher salaries district-wide instead of school-level salaries, and focus on using the funding in the most effective manner.

Strengthening the teaching profession

State policies around approving teacher-preparation programs lack rigor. As a result, there is a proliferation of poor quality teacher-preparation programs with low entry standards. Weak policies for licensure and tenure can also be barriers to ensuring that highly effective teachers enter and remain in the profession. State and district policies will need to change to allow for advancement opportunities for teachers.

Schools are not typically structured to support on-site, embedded professional development, and as a result, teachers often do not have sufficient time to engage in professional development, collaborate around instruction, or prepare for their classes. This will require rethinking school schedules, including the length of school days and years. States and districts also will need to dedicate resources to developing a corps of principals and teacher leaders to model good instruction and help with reviews of teacher practice.

System coherence

As described in this paper, many states have incorporated various aspects of the five broad categories of current movement in accountability reform: measuring progress toward college and career readiness; diagnosing and responding to challenges through school-based quality improvement; state systems of support and intervention; resource accountability; and professional accountability for teachers and leaders. Importantly, to ensure that these reforms actually lead to improved outcomes for students without creating unintended consequences or adverse incentives, states should implement accountability reforms with attention to how various aspects of the system work together to improve student outcomes.

The following descriptions provide examples of how states can tie together multiple components simultaneously in an effort to achieve greater system coherence.

As part of Kentucky's accountability system, the state is using a rich and varied set of measures for school performance, including the percentage of teachers and principals rated highly on the state's evaluation system. The state's Unbridled Learning accountability model[121] combines multiple system components, including measures of next-generation learners, next-generation instructional programs and support, and next-generation professionals. Kentucky uses this weighted combined score for accountability classifications—including distinguished, proficient, needs improvement and reward, priority, focus, and progressing—and reporting.

Under the next-generation learners component, which makes up 70 percent of combined score, the state relies on multiple measures of student learning. These include student achievement level, growth, performance gaps between subgroups, college and career readiness via ACT scores, and graduation rate.

Through the next-generation instructional programs and support component—which makes up 20 percent of the composite score—the state incorporates student performance in subjects other than English language arts and math through a multistep program review process.[122] Schools first self-assess evidence related to their curriculum, instruction, assessments, and teacher and leader development and monitoring. Districts then create a district improvement plan, leveraging the schools' self-reports, which they submit to the state for validation.

Lastly, under the next-generation professionals component—currently being piloted but eventually designed to count as 10 percent of the composite score—the state will incorporate teacher and principal effectiveness ratings into its district and school performance determinations. The state will also implement a series of strategies to support districts and schools in reaching their effectiveness targets such as supporting their use of data to acquire, professionally develop, retain, and equitably distribute effective teachers and leaders.[123] Kentucky is the only state that uses teacher effectiveness as part of its evaluation of school and district performance.

Kentucky also developed multiple strategies to enhance district- and school-based accountability and targeted intervention. All schools and districts must develop a rigorous diagnostic review process, both for priority and focus schools, as well as specific programs. As part of this review process, schools must solicit and incorporate community input. In addition to district resources and supports, the state also provides a cross-functional team to review improvement plans and give feedback on them. In their ESEA waiver, the state also identified 17 percent of all schools as either highest performing or fastest improving.[124] In addition to recognition and rewards, those schools will have the opportunity to partner with lower-performing schools to share their best practices.

Beyond more conventional state supports, Kentucky also evaluates its state's needs and responds to them. For example, Kentucky is partnering with the University of Louisville to provide targeted professional development for teachers regarding the needs of English language learners.[125] The state is also offering literacy support to special education teachers.

Massachusetts has prioritized district and school support, as well as professional accountability. The state provides a diverse range of support services to priority and focus schools. State teams assist both low-performing schools and low-performing districts, helping the latter to create infrastructure, processes, and capacity to better support their schools. The teams also build capacity at a school level by coaching principals and lead teachers on topics such as understanding and using student growth data.[126] In addition to state teams, the state also highlights high-performing and high-growth schools and leverages their experience to improve low-performing schools. The state matches these Commendation schools with lower-performing schools that share similar demographic and performance profiles.

In terms of professional accountability, Massachusetts has overhauled its teacher-preparation program approval process to focus on graduate effectiveness in the classroom. In addition, the state raised standards for entry into the profession by requiring a series of assessments of academic skills, subject matter, and performance assessment for teacher entry and licensing. To encourage teacher preparation graduates to teach in high-need fields, the state provided tuition incentives for academically successful students in high-need fields to become teachers. Massachusetts also developed a robust system of evaluation and support within the classroom. Districts base tenure decisions in part on teacher effectiveness data, which is also publicly reported at the school level.[127]

New Hampshire is advancing multiple components of accountability reform that are aligned to the state's vision for engaging all students in meaningful learning opportunities that achieve college- and career-readiness outcomes. The state raised the bar for all students by defining college and career-readiness to encompass the knowledge, skills, and work-study competencies that students need for postsecondary and lifelong success. Aligned with this definition, the state's approved ESEA waiver[128] detailed an accountability system based on multiple measures of student progress, including student achievement, growth, achievement gaps, and graduation rates.

The state also implemented a system of statewide networks on technical assistance, knowledge, and innovation to support districts in diagnosing and responding to challenges and promoting continuous improvement based on these outcome indicators. Furthermore, to promote more meaningful measures of student learning, the state is implementing Smarter Balanced assessments

statewide and is also providing leading districts the opportunity to propose locally designed systems of performance-based assessments as part of the PACE pilots described earlier in this paper.[129] The state intends to incorporate these broader assessment data as part of its accountability determinations for schools, districts, and—through the already statewide use of student learning objectives that will be tied to student competencies—for both student promotion and educator effectiveness determinations.

Lastly, to mitigate the increased capacity demands on both the state and its districts, the state is leading efforts designed to ensure high-quality implementation, including professional development institutes, regional scoring sessions, practitioner assessment experts, and a required peer-review process for auditing and adjusting system performance. Meanwhile, the state will not back away from rigorous interventions for low-performing schools and will continue to identify and provide support to priority and focus schools and districts as described in its ESEA waiver.

Conclusion

States are actively creating and implementing new ways to advance accountability systems that provide the resources necessary for system improvement while holding all stakeholders accountable for student success. Patterns across state accountability reforms can be categorized into five broad areas of movement:

- Measuring progress toward college and career readiness through multiple measures and more robust systems of assessment
- Measuring and supporting school-based quality improvement
- Rethinking state systems of support and intervention for struggling schools
- Promoting resource accountability
- Promoting professional accountability of teachers and leaders

While innovation in one or two of the above categories represents a desire to move beyond status quo, states should take care that their reforms do not create unintended consequences or adverse incentives for various stakeholders in the system. Rather, states should ensure that accountability reforms affect student outcomes in a positive direction by designing their system for coherence and continuous improvement in a way that does not mask gaps in progress by individual groups of students. States can achieve this by creating a theory of action that articulates how the goals of the accountability system drive key design decisions and which supports and interventions will be given at various system levels to provide capacity along the way.[130]

Methodology

In developing this overview of state action on accountability, we reviewed the work that states—and in some cases districts—are already doing to move their accountability systems forward. This report provides an overview of the landscape, but it is not fully inclusive of the variety of state approaches to accountability.

We did not detail the new grading systems in place or their treatment of subgroup performance, but we plan to do so in a separate paper. We focused primarily on states that received ESEA flexibility waivers, but we did not limit our sample to waiver states and included some district-level examples where state examples did not exist. We reviewed state flexibility plans to write this report, but we also relied on our own knowledge of work in the field.

This paper is the first in a series of work from the Center for American Progress on accountability. The Center for American Progress and the Council of Chief State School Officers partnered on this project in order to bring greater transparency and recognition to the innovative work being done at the state level.

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