



HOW CAN WE  
**MEASURE**  
SCHOOL  
PERFORMANCE?

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public education in New Orleans, and across the state of Louisiana, is once again facing a dynamic evolution. As the Recovery School District (RSD) and Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) charter schools prepare to unify under the OPSB's governance, the OPSB faces the challenge of designing an accountability system that will ensure high performance among schools across the city while adhering to state and national accountability frameworks, and protecting the autonomy of individual charters and Charter Management Organizations (CMOs). Meanwhile, the state is considering the best course of action for revising Louisiana's accountability standards to comply with new federal regulations, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Nationally, there are dozens of established indicators of school performance and thousands of possible combinations of those indicators to create an accountability framework. How do policy makers decide which variables are most important? This relates to measurement modeling - that is, how to incorporate all pieces of the puzzle into a comparable, cross-school report or formula. To help explore a range of best-practice accountability models, the Cowen Institute undertook a comprehensive review of school performance frameworks and accountability measures from school districts and education departments across the U.S. and Europe.

In addition to assessing both academic proficiency and academic growth, communities draw upon a number of quantitative non-cognitive measures of school performance and student well-being. As ESSA requires the inclusion of at least one non-cognitive measure in accountability models, it would be valuable for Orleans Parish and the state of Louisiana to draw upon proven-effective existing models and methods of assessment rather than work to create a unique system from scratch. This report includes descriptions of several such measures and identifies the potential benefit of including these non-academic indicators in accountability frameworks.

One new measure being developed for inclusion in accountability models is a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) survey for students, designed and validated for the California Core District's proposed performance framework. Also, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) has recently piloted a school climate survey for students and teachers publicly available on their site. Incorporating existing measures such as these could have a number of advantages. First, it would allow us to adopt and pilot previously tested and validated quantitative measures of these variables. As the amount of time and expertise required to design and validate a new quantitative measure is substantial, this would greatly reduce the amount of resources we would need to put towards such an endeavor. Furthermore, employing a standardized non-cognitive measure that is in use in other communities would permit comparison between our schools in New Orleans and national schools. We have an opportunity to incorporate indicators that would put Orleans Parish in a position to evaluate, collaborate, and improve key aspects of our public education system alongside other communities nationwide.

The report also presents other accountability measures used nationally and provides suggestions for alternative models of scoring and reporting school performance.

## WHAT IS SCHOOL PERFORMANCE?

When we hear the word 'accountability' in education, it is typically referring to the process of evaluating school performance and how well schools adhere to key local, state, and national regulations. Currently in New Orleans, and in many other school districts around the country, a school's performance is primarily measured by how well students achieve certain academic markers and how well schools adhere to local, state, and national regulations. However, as we will discuss in this report, the approach to accountability is beginning to shift both here and across the U.S.

## AIMS OF THIS BRIEF

Orleans Parish is standing at a pivotal moment in its educational history. Education leaders are working to design a system of evaluation among schools across the city while adhering to state and national accountability frameworks, and protecting the autonomy of charters.

This brief presents an overview of school performance frameworks and accountability measures from school districts and education departments across the U.S. and Europe. By examining the ways in which other communities hold their schools accountable, we gained insight into a variety of innovative practices and measurement tools. While not all measures are applicable in our own community or with our unique school governance structure, we were able to identify a number of employed and tested practices of accountability that could inform the development of our new system. We concluded that accountability is not a one-size-fits-all model and that there are many ways to approach this issue.

With this report, we aim to contribute a valuable resource outlining possible measures for accountability and school performance in Orleans Parish and statewide that can be used by policymakers, educators, researchers and families. Orleans Parish, and the state of Louisiana, are focused on improving public education and moving our state from a decent model to an excellent system. We hope that a comprehensive summary of existing accountability models will offer insight into the innovative and effective alternatives being used by national school districts to help us move towards this goal.



# HISTORY OF SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE U.S.

The concept of school accountability, or how well schools are performing and how they are held responsible for results, has a long and dynamic history in the U.S. For the purpose of this report, we'll focus specifically on the most relevant recent legislation from the 20th and 21st century. The policies outlined below have had the most immediate impact on current local and national regulations surrounding school performance.<sup>1</sup>

## Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Passed in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reframed the relationship between the federal government and K-12 public education in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Under the act's first statutory section known as Title I, the federal government pledged \$1 billion a year in aid to districts to assist with the cost of educating economically disadvantaged students. The act was the first of its kind to focus specifically on closing the **achievement gap** between students and also placed an emphasis on standards-based testing. While the law has been reauthorized and modified many times in past several decades, ESEA continues to serve as the backbone to modern, federal K-12 education policy.<sup>3</sup>

**Achievement Gap:** Refers to the persistent observed disparity of performance on test scores between low-income and ethnic minority students and their White peers.

**Proficiency:** In education, proficiency determinations are based on some form of standards or measurement system. Proficiency levels change in direct relation to the scales, standards, tests, and calculation methods used to evaluate and determine achievement. In other words, proficiency can vary greatly from state to state.

## Improving America's Schools Act

In the 1980s, waves of education reform movements swept the nation with the hopes of improving public education.<sup>4</sup> These initiatives ranged from raising high school requirements to lengthening the school day to encouraging more autonomy among schools at the state level. This increased attention on improving schools' standards is now referred to as the 'standards reform movement' and laid the groundwork for future legislation on education policy.

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) was included in a reauthorization of ESEA.<sup>5</sup> This marked a formal federal focus on standards-based reform by inserting provisions related to standards into Title I-A. Under this legislation, states were required to develop or adopt performance standards and assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics for students in grades 3-8. This act was a major step towards the formal system of standardized testing that is prevalent in U.S. public education today.<sup>6</sup>

## No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a 2002 update of ESEA, marked a further expansion of the federal government's role in promoting the standards-based achievement markers and test-based accountability for schools that was laid out under the IASA.<sup>7</sup> Under the NCLB law, states were still required to test students in reading and math in grades 3 through 8, and once in high school. A single, statewide accountability system had to be appointed to all districts and local education agencies (LEAs) in each state. In the key subject areas, schools were required by the legislation to demonstrate that they were making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on standardized measures. The academic standards on each test needed to include three assessment thresholds: basic, proficient, and advanced. The standards had to be the same for all students and schools were required to bring all students to **'proficiency'** in these key subject areas. This level of direct federal involvement in teaching and learning outcomes marked a shift in federal education policy from a focus on input into schools (i.e. professional development, funding for low-income families, class-size reduction) to output from schools (i.e. student test scores). Furthermore, it provided an avenue for nation-wide comparison of school performance in the designated outcome areas.

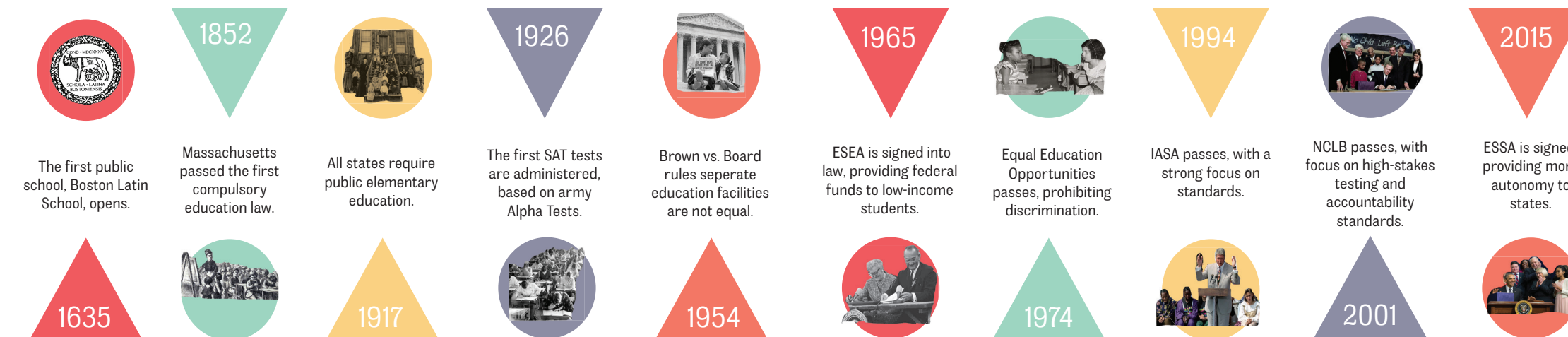
NCLB's focus on academic proficiency was met with criticism from many educators, administrators, parents, education unions, and policy-makers around the U.S. Many argued that due to the high correlation between poverty rates and academic performance, high-poverty schools were being unfairly penalized under new legislation.<sup>8</sup> Largely in response to these criticisms, in 2005, the USDOE began allowing states to apply for waivers to some of the key performance requirements of this national legislation.<sup>9</sup>

## Every Student Succeeds Act

In December 2015, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), bringing changes to federal accountability requirements for state systems.<sup>10</sup> In effect, ESSA rolls back much of the federally mandated standards for school accountability and provides more freedom for state autonomy. However, there are still requirements that all states must adhere to under this new legislation. States are allowed to choose their own goals and measures. However, each state must address academic proficiency, English Language proficiency, and graduation rates. Furthermore, **student growth** (or progress) will be given more weight in how schools are assessed. Schools will receive higher scores for helping advance students who are behind grade level, regardless of the students' overall scores on state accountability measures. Schools must include at least one non-academic indicator of school performance. The plan, as it currently stands, also includes long-term indicators to judge improvement over time, such as ACT scores and graduation rates.

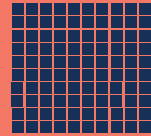
While all school districts in the nation must adhere to federal education policies, there remains a notable degree of autonomy at the state, district, and local level. Local school boards, for example, are often responsible for creating curriculums, establishing hiring policies, and managing resources, all of which have a large impact on the quality of students' educational experiences.

**Student Growth:** Measuring the amount of academic progress a student makes between two points in time.



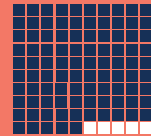
## HOW DOES LOUISIANA CURRENTLY MEASURE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE?

### ELEMENTARY: K-6



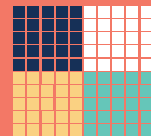
100% Tests

### MIDDLE: K-8



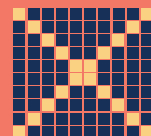
95% Tests  
5% HS credits earned by end of freshman year.

### HS: 9-12



25% ACT / WorkKeys;  
25% EOC;  
25% Grad Rate;  
25% Diploma Quality

### COMBINATION



(K-8 SPS x # of Students)  
+  
(HS SPS x # of Students)

## SCORING

100-150 points

A

85-99.9 points

B

70-84.9 points

C

50-69.9 points

D

Below 50

F

## CURRENT MODELS IN NEW ORLEANS

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) serves as the ultimate authority in holding all Louisiana schools accountable, whether they are currently under the OPSB or the RSD.<sup>11</sup> Charter schools in the RSD and OPSB have an agreement with the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) known as the Charter School Performance Compact (CSPC), which includes requirements for academic performance, financial responsibility, enrollment, special education provisions, and reporting requirements. The state is currently reworking its accountability model to comply with the requirements laid out by ESSA. As such, much of the information regarding current accountability standards in Louisiana is likely to change in the near future.

In Louisiana, schools are held accountable through a scoring system known as school performance scores (SPS), which measures academic tests, graduation rates, diploma strength, and progress. There are variations between high schools, middle schools, and K-8 schools, highlighted in the graphic on the left. Schools can also earn up to 10 progress points for previously non-proficient students who exceeded their previous scores. Currently, schools are assessed on a 150 point scale. Schools are then assigned a letter grade from A-F based on their cumulative score.



## IMPROVING THE CURRENT MODELS

For the past several decades, a pedagogical focus on standards-based academic testing has guided and shaped federal K-12 accountability legislation. In the 21st century, we are witnessing a shift away from this rigid model towards a more holistic approach to assessing school performance. National and international policy makers are beginning to test and implement alternative models of accountability.

Acknowledging the limitations of a model built solely on standards based assessments, ESSA has mandated an expansion of accountability measures to include student growth, progress of key subgroups such as English Language learners, and non-cognitive indicators of school performance. Many school districts both nationally and internationally were already including these kinds of non-academic indicators of school performance into their accountability frameworks.

While the current models of school performance employed by the RSD and the OPSB in Orleans Parish are more comprehensive than many across the nation, they are limited by their primary focus on academic testing and academic performance.

Beyond academic testing, there are number of ways different states, school districts, and countries approach the question of: “how well are our schools preparing our children for the future?” In the next section, we identify many of the key variables used to measure school performance and discuss why these variables matter to students’ academic development and well-being.

## APPROACHES TO ACCOUNTABILITY

U  
S



VS



E  
U

States have control over measures but adhere to national guidelines.



Countries have control over measures and guidelines, working towards EU standards.

Most states measure school performance quantitatively with scores or grades.



Most countries measure performance qualitatively, with written reports rather than scores.

Performance is mostly based on academic measures and student test scores.



Performance is based on test scores, teacher interviews, parent interviews, and observation.

Schools administer tests to students to generate scores.



Former teachers are trained to visit schools and observe instruction, interview stakeholders, and collect documents.

Schools often receive feedback in a score or grade.



Schools receive feedback in a report or in a meeting with school officials.

Scores are calculated annually in most states.



Performance is measured every three years in most countries.

# ACADEMIC MEASURES

## Academic Proficiency:

Academic proficiency has been a cornerstone of all school performance frameworks, both nationally and abroad, for decades. As a primary goal of public education is to ensure that all students are achieving academically, it is key that we have measurable academic outcomes in place to monitor teaching and learning. While standardized tests have well-documented limitations, they are still a valuable quantifiable indicator of key aspects of academic achievement and can be compared, unbiasedly, across large populations of students. When referring to proficiency in the U.S., this typically fits within the framework of students achieving the state-established standard for proficiency on key math and ELA standardized tests.<sup>13</sup>

## Academic Growth:

As standardized tests became prolific indicators of school performance in public schools across the nation over the past two decades, their limitations have been widely reported in empirical research.<sup>15</sup> For example, proficiency tests measure students' performance at a given point in time and are related to students' personal background, favoring students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those who perform well in formal testing settings. While proficiency and mastery are important, when testing only for proficiency, we run the risk of overlooking growth and progress among all students. This is particularly true for schools that serve populations with large percentages of economically disadvantaged students.<sup>16</sup> As a result, federal and state legislation has begun to shift towards incorporating measures of progress or student growth to schools' performance measures. Under the new ESSA legislation, measures of growth and progress will be required in all states. Measuring growth allows students' scores to be compared to their previous performance rather than a standard, allowing for improvement to factor into schools' performance scores. By incorporating this aspect, we can consider the progress that is being made by all students and educators, not just those who achieve proficiency in a given subject.

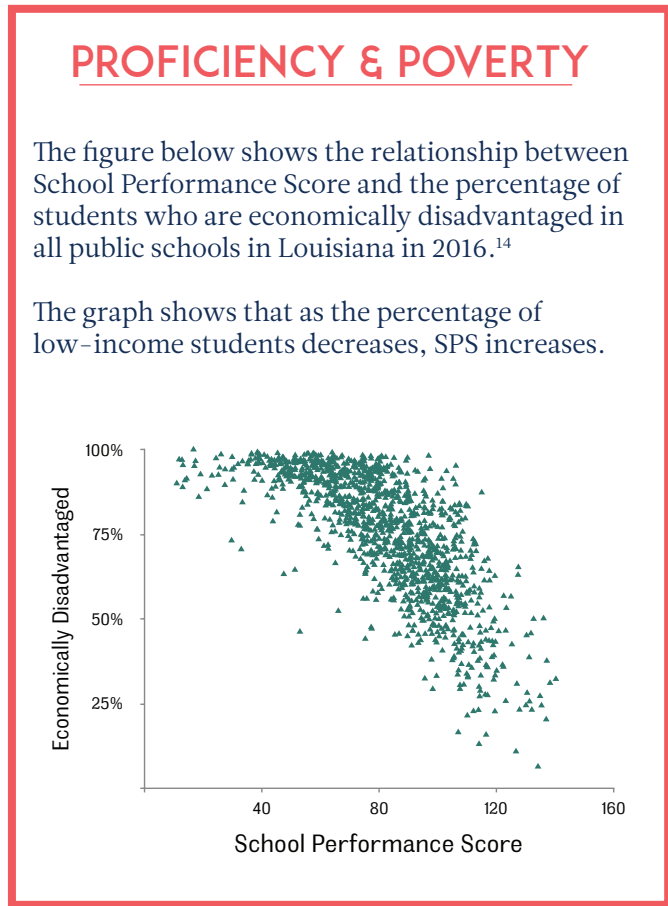
## Graduation Rates:

The inclusion of graduation rates in school accountability measures is mandated by ESSA, but also unanimously recognized as a best practice in all 50 states and internationally. A high school degree is an essential milestone on the road to college and career success, as well as an important indicator of a student's social and emotional well-being. In the U.S., graduation rates are measured by the percentage of a cohort of students who graduate from high school within a four-year period. In some states, including Louisiana, points are awarded based on the type of diploma obtained by students (i.e. honors).

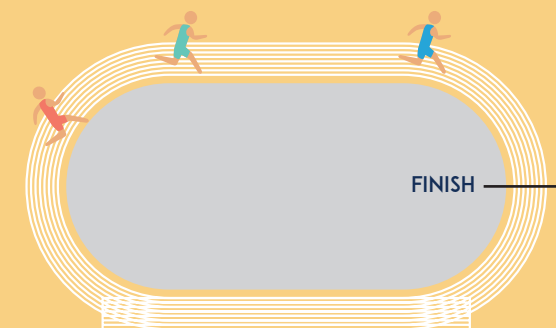
## Improvements for key sub-groups:

Under ESSA, all schools will be required to monitor improvement among English Language Learners (ELL). Many states are already including academic improvements among this subgroup in their accountability scoring framework. Progress often factors in the length of time the student has been enrolled in the school, as well as the academic improvements they've made towards proficiency over time.

In addition to ELL, some states consider improving performance among other key subgroups, including the lowest 25 percent of students, low-income students, and minority students.

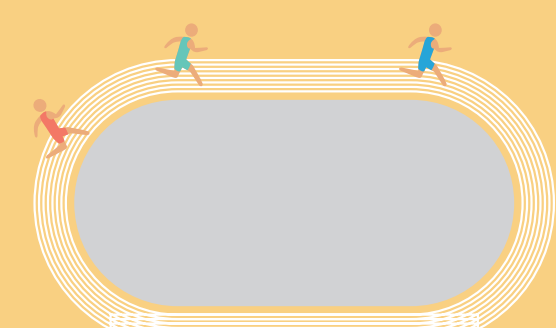


## PROFICIENCY



Starting from different places, who can reach the finish line in 10 seconds?

## GROWTH



Starting from different places, how far can each person run in 10 seconds? How does this compare to the last time they ran this race?



# SCHOOL CLIMATE

**School Climate:** A broad, multi-faceted construct that refers to the quality and character of school life. There are many different measures that often include norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes.

### Chronic Absenteeism:

Chronic absenteeism can be understood as missing school, without an excused reason, for an excessive number of days in given academic term. Research has shown a strong correlation between chronic absence and low student achievement. High rates of absenteeism often contribute to widening the achievement gap among low-income and some minority groups – with the impact showing up as early as kindergarten.<sup>17</sup> In addition, students who are frequently absent are more likely to drop out in middle and high school. On the whole, attendance is essential to improving student learning and academic success and as such, is a common indicator in school performance scores in districts nationally and internationally. Individual districts classify ‘chronic absenteeism’ in different terms. A common benchmark, however, is an attendance rate of at least 90 percent.

### Suspensions / Expulsions:

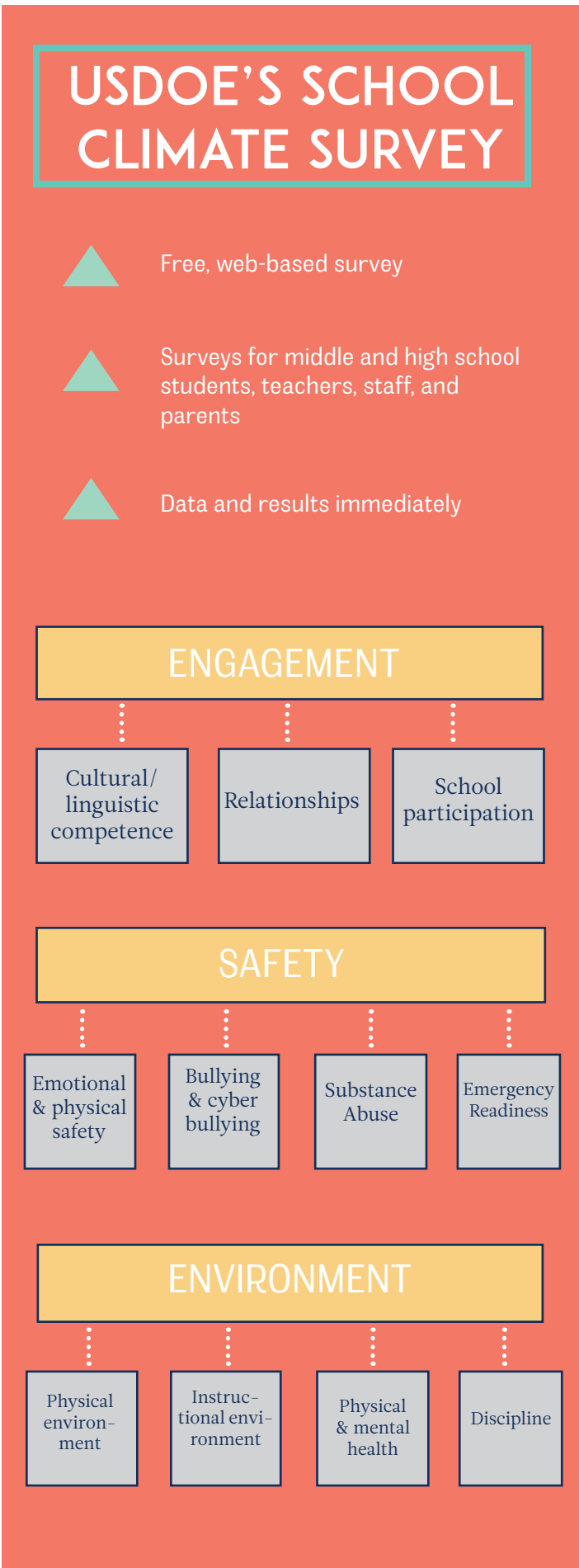
Removing children and young people from school and from the educational environment can be extremely detrimental to their academic career and their personal well-being. On a national level, overly harsh school discipline policies can affect all students and they have a disproportionate impact on students of color. Research shows that African American, Latino and Native American students, in particular, are far more likely to be suspended and expelled than their white peers, even when accused of similar behavior.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, students with disabilities too often have their education interrupted by out-of-school suspensions, sometimes at twice the rate of their peers, according to the UCLA Civil Rights Project.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, some states have begun including rates of suspensions and expulsions into accountability measures as an incentive for the development and implementation of alternative disciplinary procedures.

### School Climate Survey:

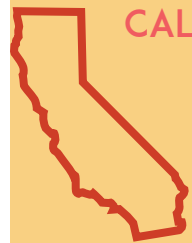
School climate is a broad concept and can include many variables ranging from student safety, to bullying, to physical environment, to students’ mental health. A number of states already conduct school climate surveys; some to include in accountability measures, other to gauge the atmosphere of their school to give direction for improvement. Though up until recently, there has not been a national measure of school climate for schools and districts in the U.S.

However, the USDOE has recently created a number of school climate measures including surveys for students and teachers. The ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) are a suite of survey instruments for schools, school districts, and states by the USDOE’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).<sup>20</sup> Through the EDSCLS, schools nationwide will have access to survey instruments and a survey platform that will allow for the collection and reporting of school climate data across stakeholders at the local level. The surveys can be used to produce school-, district-, and state-level scores on various indicators of school climate from the perspectives of students, teachers and staff, and parents / guardians. The survey platform is downloadable free of charge and provides user-friendly school climate reports. Following completion, the platform can produce reports showing aggregate group results for subgroups of student or stakeholder populations. While these measures have been produced and validated by the USDOE and can serve the ESSA requirement of a non-cognitive indicator, the school climate survey itself is not mandated by ESSA legislation.

The USDOE’s school climate measure includes three overarching categories: engagement, safety, and environment. Each category has a number of variables contained within, all represented in the adjacent graphic. A link to the complete, free version of survey is included in the footnotes.



# SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING



## CALIFORNIA'S CORE DISTRICT'S FOUR KEY AREAS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING<sup>21</sup>

1

### GROWTH MINDSET

The belief that one's abilities can grow with effort. Students with a growth mindset see effort as necessary for success, embrace challenges, learn from criticism, and persist in the face of setbacks.

2

### SELF-EFFICACY

The belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and environment.

3

### SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, delaying gratification, and working towards personal and academic goals.

4

### SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community supports.

Across the country, an increasing number of schools and districts have begun focusing on the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for students' academic performances and personal well-being. With ESSA's requirement for a non-academic indicator of school performance, several school districts have moved to develop valid measures of SEL among students as a component of school accountability. SEL aims to enhance a student's ability to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily challenges. There are five competencies of SEL that have available curriculums and are measurable by a number of validated survey instruments.<sup>22</sup> These competencies are: 1) self awareness; 2) self-management; 3) responsible decision making; 4) social awareness; and 5) relationship skills.

The benefits of SEL across a range of outcomes is well documented in academic literature and research. A recent meta-analysis of 213 academic studies including 270,000 students found that students who participated in established, evidence-based SEL programs improved their academic gains by 11 percent compared to students who did not participate in an SEL program.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, research found statistically significant associations between SEL in kindergarten and key outcomes in adulthood including education, employment, criminal activity, and mental health.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the economic impact of SEL has recently been measured by scientists at Columbia University, who concluded that for every \$1 invested in SEL, there was an \$11 return.<sup>25</sup>

Recognizing the importance of SEL in the personal and academic development of students, California's CORE Education District, a consortium of nine public school districts serving over 1,000,000 students, decided to formally incorporate self-administered SEL surveys into school accountability scores. Since 2011, the district has been collaborating with academic researchers to design, pilot, and validate a comprehensive, youth-centered, validated measure of social and emotional competencies for public school students in grades 5-12. The survey assesses four key areas of SE competency listed in the graphic on the left.<sup>26</sup>

While California's non-cognitive measure of school accountability is still in the pilot phase, preliminary analyses of the SEL measures demonstrate strong internal reliability for the scales, as well as statistically significant correlations between socio-emotional skills and both academic performance and student behavior.<sup>27</sup> These tests are preliminary but promising: California's measures of SEL are working and they demonstrate a strong association with important academic and behavioral aspects of education.

## WHY IS VALIDATION IMPORTANT?

When discussing questionnaires and surveys, the word validation has a very specific meaning. After a new survey is designed, it is crucial for that survey to be tested and piloted to ensure that it is appropriate for the target sample. How well the survey performs statistically is called reliability. How appropriate the survey is for a specific context or population is called validity. These are two very different things, though they are often mistakenly assumed to be interchangeable.

There are a few key things to know about validity. For one, it's not something that can be established or reached, like a threshold. Rather, it's something that can be continually built.

In survey design, validity is built in many different ways. Researchers hold focus groups with respondents to field ideas and topics for questions and wording; pre-tests are administered to determine with questions work and which ones don't; the survey is administered along with other similar or associated measures to see if the results are significantly related. A proper pre-testing period often takes months or up to a year.

Without properly validating a survey, researchers and stakeholders have no way of knowing if the results mean what they claim to mean. In other words, the test loses its credibility and means nothing. Relying upon unvalidated surveys can have serious real-world consequences, especially when discussing well-being, education, mental health, and other outcomes.<sup>28</sup>



# BUILDING A MODEL

There are dozens of established indicators of school performance and thousands of possible combinations of those indicators that can be used to create an accountability framework. How do policy makers decide which variables are most important? How can a school's non-academic qualities factor into the school's value in a meaningful way? Is it fair to compare schools with high levels of low-income students with high-resource schools? All of these questions relate to measurement modeling - that is, how to incorporate all pieces of the puzzle into a comparable, cross-school report or formula.

In the United States, school scoring is a widely employed practice and nearly every state has a system for ranking their public schools. Currently in Louisiana and 13 other states, schools are assigned a letter grade from A-F. Similar practices, such as a 1-5 scale or a green-to-red color scheme are used in other states. Meanwhile, others include a list of qualitative categories reflecting performance scores, ranging from 'Not Meeting Expectations' to 'Exceeding Expectations' (Wyoming) or from 'Focus' to 'Commended' (Rhode Island).

Employing a quantitative formula, school districts gather all indicators of school performance, ranging from standardized test scores to percentage of suspensions to parent surveys, and weigh them based on a predetermined algorithm. Schools are then ranked in comparison to each other based on the district's scoring formula.

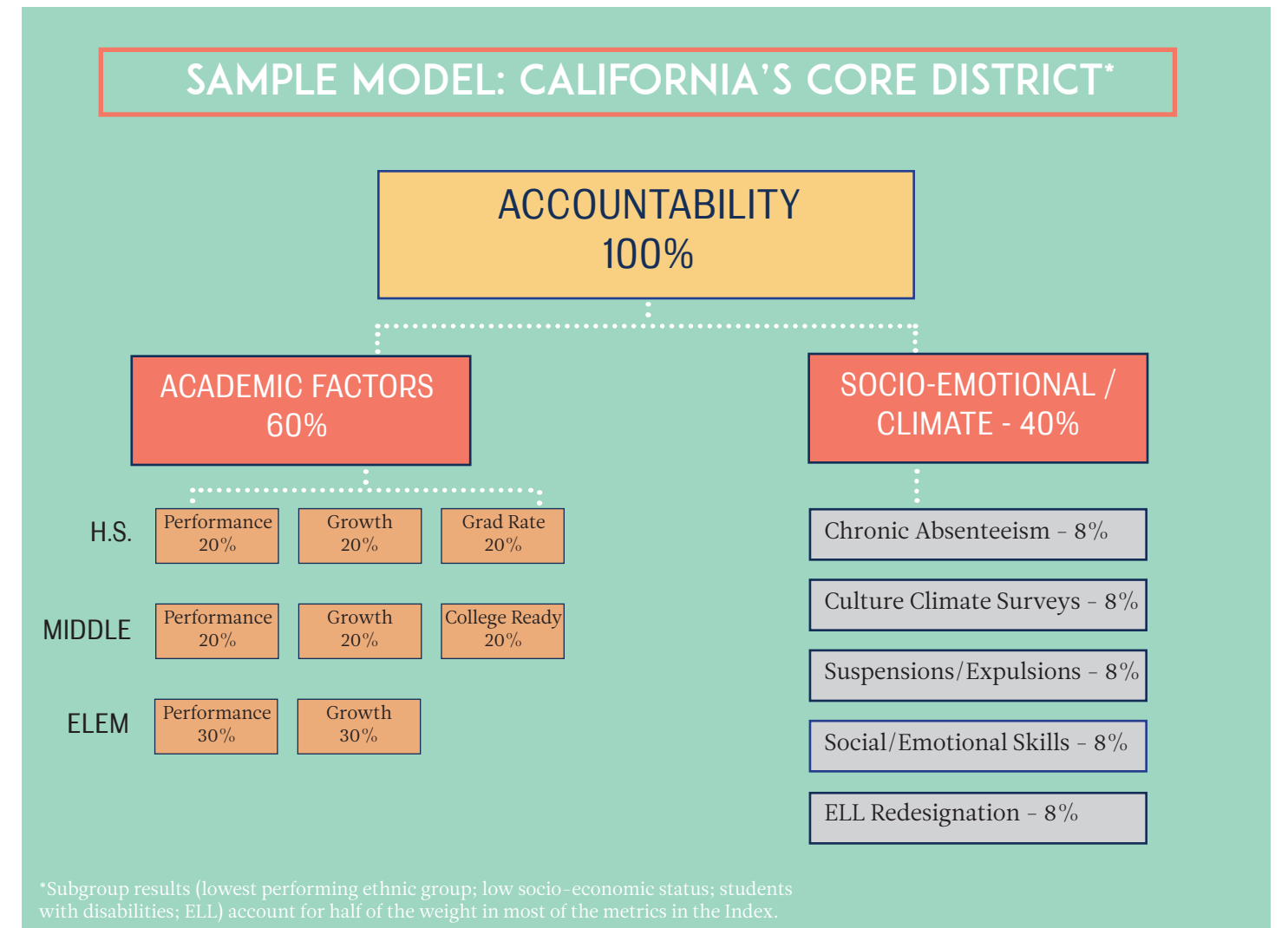
Outside of the US, however, school performance is measured differently. Rather, it isn't measured at all. In Europe, the most common accountability practice is an external school review, typically performed by trained former educators under contract by a governing body.<sup>29</sup> In-person evaluations in European countries typically take place for 2-3 days in each school. During that time, evaluators interview staff members, perform classroom observation, and review school activities, premises, and internal documents. The data collected during these reviews is compiled along with academic measures from students including test scores, graduation rates, along with student surveys and parent surveys. Then, performance reports are calculated in dialogical meetings between evaluators and school leaders. In many countries, schools are permitted to submit comments, critiques, or rebuttals to the relevant authorities following the release of the report.

All schools also receive recommendations in their final report. Recommendations are then followed up with actions:

- 1. Remedial Actions:** Schools are presented with a list of shortcomings and provided with a timeline to address the problematic areas. Some schools are required to submit a plan for addressing the problematic areas, while in other countries, a follow-up visit is scheduled for the future.
- 2. Disciplinary Actions:** In the event of a serious infraction, disciplinary actions can be targeted at individual staff member or at the school as a whole.
- 3. Profile-Raising Actions:** Procedures and practices for recognition, dissemination, and promotion of best practices. Information is collected and redistributed to heads of other schools to highlight best practice models.

While the U.S. may not have the resources to employ an interactive model like this on a wide scale, it is worth noting that school accountability does not always necessitate numerical, quantifiable measures of performance. In Europe, schools are not given a letter grade or a numeric score. Rather, quantitative aspects such as a test scores are carefully considered alongside a number of other qualitative and environmental factors. In their opinion, this creates a more holistic picture of a school's performance and provides applicable and specific feedback for each individual school.

- 4** The fewest number of indicators used by a state to model performance.
- 26** The highest number of indicators used by a state to model performance.
- 11** The average number of indicators used by a state to measure performance.<sup>30</sup>







# TAKE-AWAYS



## Performance is More than Academic

The importance of accurately measuring academic performance in public education is paramount. It is crucial for all public education accountability frameworks to include appropriate measures of both academic proficiency and progress to ensure that all students are on-track to receive a high quality education and degree. However, focusing solely on standards-based academic testing when considering school performance can lead to misrepresentation of student/school performance, streamlining of course work around limited subjects, and undue focus on student outcomes rather than the myriad of personal, contextual, and environmental factors that contribute to students' academic knowledge, well-being, and individual growth.

In education policy, momentum is shifting away from an exclusively-academic measurement of success towards a more holistic assessment of school performance. National standards mandated by ESSA now include non-cognitive indicators of school performance. School districts across the country will be developing and implementing new systems of accountability to adhere to these standards.

## Consider the Context

When evaluating school performance, we should ensure that benchmark standards include truly comparable options. In Louisiana, that means considering socioeconomic factors when evaluating school performance, as well as the number of English Language learners and Special Education students present in the school. Statistical associations between economic disadvantage and poor academic performance are well documented nationally and internationally. As such, many countries have moved to consider this influential contextual factor when holistically evaluating school performance. Approaches vary, but this may involve conducting comparisons among schools with similar characteristics or controlling for key socioeconomic variables to reduce any confounding effect on scores.

## Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Public education in Orleans Parish is, once again, standing in a critical moment. As policymakers work to develop a reliable and innovative system of accountability, it would be valuable to draw upon proven-effective existing models and methods of assessment rather than work to create a unique system from scratch. This must involve key academic measures such as proficiency, progress, graduation rates, and college / career readiness. However, it also may include one or more of the growing number of existing non-academic measures in use around the country.

For example, when thinking about ways to incorporate non-cognitive abilities into school performance scores to meet ESSA requirements, incorporating the SEL survey from the new California Performance Framework and/or the USDOE's School Climate Survey has several advantages. First, it allows us to adopt and pilot previously tested and validated quantitative measures of SEL and school climate. As the amount of time and expertise required to design and validated a new quantitative measure is substantial, this would greatly reduce the amount resources we would need to put towards such an endeavor. Furthermore, employing a standardized non-cognitive measure that is in use in other communities would permit comparison between our schools in New Orleans and national schools. Other communities, including in California, Delaware and Denver, are also considering adopting similar SEL measures in their school performance frameworks. The USDOE School Climate Survey will soon have national benchmark statistics publicly available for comparative use. We have an opportunity to incorporate indicators that would put Orleans Parish in a position to evaluate, collaborate, and improve key aspects of our public education system alongside other communities.

## Ensuring Objectivity: The Value of External Evaluators

When surveying students and teachers in schools, it is important to ensure objectivity. Throughout Europe, nearly all schools are subject to external evaluations on a regular basis, performed by trained evaluators from the national level. All evaluators are required to have an education degree and have undergone a formal training session prior to commencing the review. Reviews vary from country to country, but they typically involve classroom observations, student and staff surveying, and review of facilities, financial, and regulatory documents.

While we may not advocate for such review processes here in Orleans Parish, we can ensure that objective, trained, third-party researchers conduct student and staff surveys on-site during the annual performance evaluation. This will ensure equitable administration across sites and also remove the possibility of bias in survey responses.

## Reporting

As we move ahead in our attempt to design a truly innovative and comprehensive model of school performance in Orleans Parish, we may want to consider alternative forms of performance reporting and dissemination. This could take many forms. For one, it could involve a data dashboard for all schools: a detailed website including data from all key indicators of school performance for every public school in the city. This would provide a valuable resource for parents as they consider schools and also for schools themselves as they work to improve key areas for growth. Also, Orleans Parish would stand out as a model of transparency in reporting and progressive scoring models.

Alternatively, we can consider the incorporation of qualitative assessments of school performance and

value. Following practices widespread throughout the EU, schools could be provided with a comprehensive report outlining their quantitative performance scores, feedback from key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students, as well as areas for continued success, growth, and improvement.

## Profile Raising Actions: Promoting Collaboration over Competition

In several countries in the EU, school performance reporting includes Profile Raising Actions, procedures and practices for recognition, dissemination, and promotion of best practices. Schools that are successful in maintaining high standards of performance are encouraged to share their information with heads of other schools to highlight the details leading to best practice models. In a school choice community, there is the possibility of a culture of competition among schools. Rather than deny this tendency, it would be pro-active to work to dispel it by promoting a sense of collaboration and community among schools across the city.

## Final Thoughts

Unfortunately, obtaining the Platonic ideal of school performance frameworks is beyond anyone's capabilities. The presented models and measures, while often comprehensive and ambitious, are of course limited in their ability to truly measure the value or performance of any school, any teacher, any school leader, or any student. When discussing the value of any school, it is vital to remember that the true value of a quality education cannot be reflected in any one score or captured by any one measure. However, we are standing in a window now to reframe how we approach accountability. By improving our academic measures and moving towards considering the non-academic conditions that help children thrive, we can embrace a broader and more nuanced definition of student and school success.

# FOOTNOTES

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