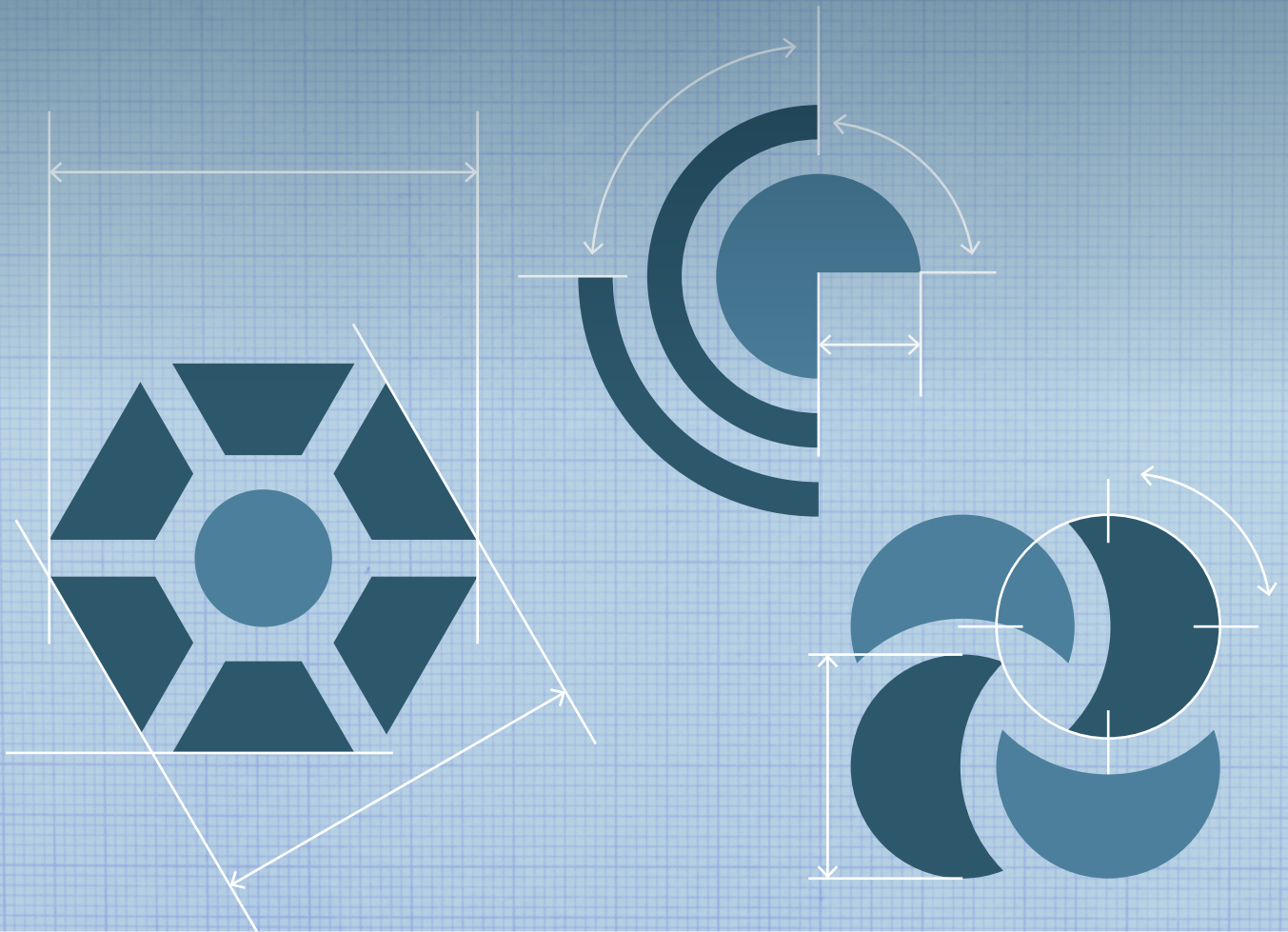


School Performance Frameworks: Lessons, Cases, and Purposeful Design

Full Report



Bonnie O'Keefe, Brandon Lewis, Jennifer O'Neal Schiess, and Jason Weeby

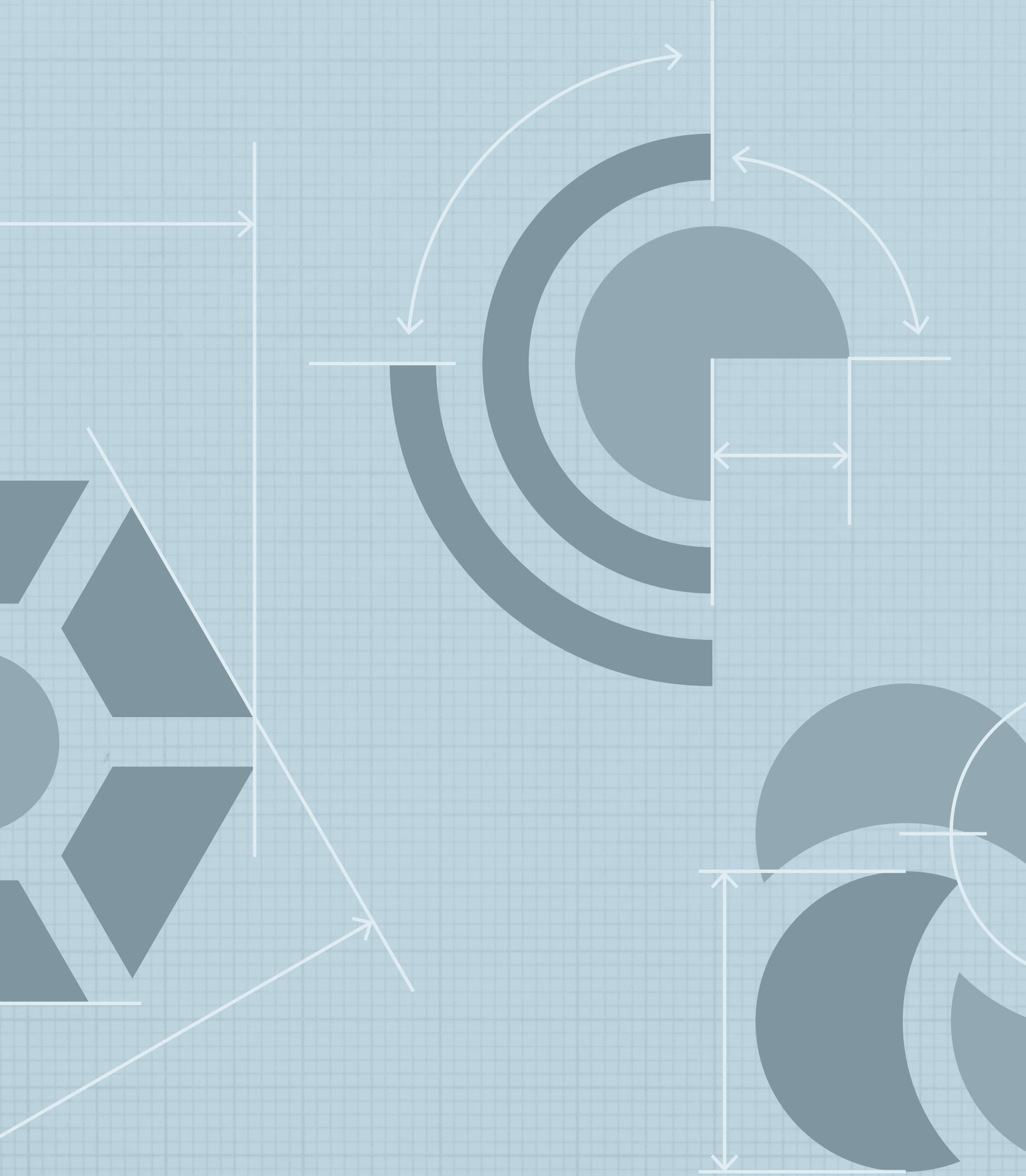


Table of Contents

Click on each title below to jump directly to the corresponding section.

Introduction	4
Background and Research	9
Defining Use Cases	13
Case 1: System Management and Accountability	15
Case 2: School Continuous Improvement	17
Case 3: Family and Community Information	18
Applying Use Cases to Existing SPFs	20
Lessons from Existing SPFs	30
SPF Planning Guide	41
Detailed SPF Profiles	45
Chicago Public Schools — School Quality Rating Policy	46
DC Public Charter School Board — Performance Management Framework	52
New York City Department of Education, School Quality Reports	59
New Orleans, Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) School Performance Scores	65
Denver Public Schools (DPS), School Performance Framework (SPF)	72
Endnotes	78
Acknowledgments	83
About the Authors	85

For key takeaways from this report and additional resources, visit www.SchoolPerformanceFrameworks.org

Introduction

School performance frameworks (SPFs) are action-oriented information tools that provide information on school performance and quality across a variety of measures. SPFs have evolved as a solution for local communities to make sense of an array of student, school, and system performance data, and to support transparent and equitable decisions. SPFs can be especially useful to communities grappling with various autonomous public school structures, school accountability systems, broader school choice, and ambitious school improvement goals.

SPFs are often talked about as report cards or progress reports, but they are more than that. What sets an SPF apart from other data systems is the fact that it is explicitly designed to inform action that can lead to greater student achievement — but the actions an SPF might support, and the design choices behind them, vary considerably. Some, but not all, SPFs include a composite rating or score of school performance such as a letter grade or tier. Others present a range of data as a “dashboard” that may include growth and performance results from standardized tests, indicators of achievement gaps, indicators of school climate and environment, and other factors of particular interest to different stakeholders.

Different local users might need an SPF for different purposes. Key user groups include system leaders, school leaders, families, educators, and community members at large, and their needs and preferences may diverge significantly. System leaders, school leaders, and families should have shared information at their disposal and a shared understanding of what defines a high-quality school. Transparency and equal access to information are hallmarks of an equitable system. But because system leaders are generally the people designing and operating SPFs, many SPFs focus on district leaders' needs, and could be more transparent or useful to the public. Over time, some SPFs have evolved to be more intentionally school- and public-facing.

In order to optimize an SPF for a particular goal or purpose, leaders may need to make tradeoffs. System leaders should understand those tradeoffs and make intentional design choices that reflect their goals. Too often, system leaders learn late in the process that results from an SPF are being used in unanticipated ways. In particular, the level of detail and kinds of data school leaders need in order to inform ongoing decisions diverges from the higher level of detail and focus on outcomes that system leaders and families prefer. Creating a tool that can serve school leaders alongside families and system leaders requires some creative thinking, and could require separate, but aligned, ways of looking at performance data.

As SPFs have grown in use and popularity at the local level, the research base supporting them has remained thin, and is now largely outdated. There has been surprisingly little written about the various long-standing SPFs, how they have evolved over time, how they compare with each other, and the lessons they offer for other communities.

In recent years, much of the conversation around how to assess school performance has focused on states' Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reporting and accountability systems, and the pros and cons of various metrics, methods, or rating schemes that states might use. Conversations about state accountability systems are valuable, but creating and applying an SPF at the local level entails different goals and considerations than a statewide system required by federal law.

Creating a tool that can serve school leaders alongside families and system leaders requires some creative thinking, and could require separate, but aligned, ways of looking at performance data.

In an ideal scenario, local SPFs add nuance and a focus on local priorities and context to a state rating and accountability system — state accountability systems and local SPFs should not confuse families or present opposing narratives. They also are designed to support different actions at a local level than a state system, and may have a higher level of local credibility.

Now is the right time to learn from existing SPFs that have been in place at a local level over multiple years, and draw lessons to build stronger systems designed for the conditions and strategic questions school systems face today.

This report is intended primarily for local policymakers and leaders in school systems considering a new SPF or revising an old one. We hope that this will be an informative and relevant deep dive on a topic that is top of mind for many system leaders. Other readers, including state educational leaders, advocates, parents, or anyone interested in how school systems define school performance and quality, may find this report useful.

This report can be read top to bottom, or by jumping around to sections that are of most interest. The report is organized as follows:

- **Background and Research:** An overview of key context and research shaping the way SPFs are used today
- **Defining Use Cases:** An explanation of primary use cases that shape SPFs' form and function, and form the backbone of our analysis. “Use case” is a term borrowed from the world of technology and software design.¹ Designers create use cases to describe in detail how a system or product might be used — we argue that leaders designing SPFs would benefit from a similar mindset:



System Management and Accountability: System leaders (school districts, states, charter school authorizers) can use SPFs to help make system management and accountability decisions about school expansion, recognition, renewal, sanction, investigation, and closure. SPFs can help identify struggling schools in need of support and exemplar schools worth replicating.



School Continuous Improvement: An SPF can help school leaders identify and address areas for improvement, and make strategic choices in day-to-day management. This is separate from system-wide continuous improvement, and is primarily meant to serve school leaders. SPFs intended to support school continuous improvement use data to help school leaders make decisions about action plans, interventions, and resource allocation in order to improve student performance and school quality on an ongoing basis.



Family and Community Information: Families and community members can use SPFs to understand their school's performance, navigate the school choice process, and advocate for improvement. Cities with a high degree of school choice often turn to an SPF to provide reliable, clear, public-facing information about school performance. This information can be the linchpin of a school choice system that empowers families and levels the informational playing field of the school choice process.

- **Applying Use Cases to Existing SPFs:** Brief summaries of five established, locally focused SPFs and how their intentions and design serves each use case. These SPFs are not necessarily exemplars. Each has different strengths and weaknesses, and levels of alignment to the three use cases. System leaders with different goals can learn different things from each of these SPFs:
 1. Washington, D.C.: Public Charter School Board, Performance Management Framework
 2. New York City: NYC Department of Education, School Quality Reports
 3. Chicago: Chicago Public Schools, School Quality Rating Policy
 4. Denver: Denver Public Schools, School Performance Framework
 5. New Orleans: Louisiana Department of Education and Orleans Parish School Board, Louisiana School Performance Scores
- **Lessons From Existing SPFs:** Based on analyses of the five systems above, answers to some of the questions local leaders may have about how to design, use, and sustain an SPF, what lessons can be learned from the established SPFs above, and how SPFs should align with local needs and goals for student and school success.

- **SPF Planning Guide:** Takeaway considerations for local leaders considering an SPF, including a three-step process toward SPF creation.
- **Detailed SPF Profiles:** Full profiles and analyses of the five featured SPFs, including metrics, methods, evolution, design considerations, and detailed explanation of alignment with the three primary use cases.

Building a Continuously Improving System of Schools

Many communities that create SPFs do so as part of larger improvement strategies. All five of the SPFs highlighted in this report are also featured in “Eight Cities,” a 2018 Bellwether publication at www.EightCities.org that tells the story of urban school systems that have seen student outcomes improve at a faster pace than other urban school systems. An SPF is one of seven strategic pillars Eight Cities’ authors identify as key to improvement:

1. A **performance framework** applies to all public schools
2. **School-level autonomy** around staffing, budgetary, and instructional decisions
3. A **performance contract** between schools and an oversight body that monitors performance
4. One or more **school quality oversight bodies** that make opening and closing decisions based on school quality, community need, and family demand
5. An office or organization focused on **expanding, replicating, and incubating** new schools
6. A **talent strategy** for teachers and principals
7. A **unified enrollment** system across all public schools

Leaders in each city in the report created a unique approach to implementing these strategic pillars catered to their local context, yet they often began their efforts with the creation of an SPF. SPFs created a common definition for school performance that enabled the implementation of other strategic pillars such as expanding, replicating, and incubating new schools. For more on the featured cities and their improvement stories, visit www.EightCities.org.

Background and Research

SPFs are a relatively new tool in many places and well established in others. Several of the local SPFs in use today were developed, in part, as a reaction to the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) school ratings. NCLB established national requirements for standards-based accountability and relied primarily on state assessment proficiency in math and reading to measure school performance. Local SPFs arose in part as a supplement, or in some cases an alternative, to NCLB ratings. Local systems could be more responsive to local goals, and incorporate other measures of school performance such as student growth metrics and more qualitative measures of school environments.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), replaced NCLB and required revisions to state report cards. Most states chose to pursue a wider range of metrics than what was allowable under NCLB.²

In parallel to these state and federal developments, a growing school choice movement³ and increased adoption of school governance structures emphasizing accountability and autonomy⁴ means that more communities want clear standards for local school accountability and public-facing information about school performance.⁵

The theory of action behind SPFs has direct ties to research on data-driven decision-making in education.⁶ This research suggests that effective use of data — about students, achievement, and schools — is associated with stronger outcomes, but only when the users of data are able to make sense of it.⁷ Raw scores or spreadsheets are not sufficient to analyze and synthesize outcomes data and provide a strong basis for important decisions like what schools to open or close, what school to choose for your child, or what programs to implement in a school building. SPFs aim to provide a clear, reliable framework at a school level for understanding school performance, and making strong data-informed decisions.

The most directly relevant research focused specifically on SPFs comes from the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). CRPE’s “Apples to Apples” (2016) project focused on SPFs spanning charter and district schools.⁸ The report explains how leaders can navigate process and buy-in considerations when collaborating to create a tool that serves multiple kinds of schools, recommends SPF metrics be aligned to clear goals, and advises a gradual, measured implementation plan. Beyond CRPE’s work, information on best practices in process, policy, and goals for local SPFs is scant.

SPFs are first and foremost a tool that supports policies and practices that can drive improved outcomes for students at the family, school, and/or systems level. The relationship between SPFs and student outcomes is indirect, and a clear causal link between the SPF tool and improved student achievement is elusive. Although it was not part of our selection process, all the systems highlighted in this report have seen improved student outcomes in years that coincide with the SPF, along with other consequential reforms.⁹ But direct impacts on student achievement is likely the wrong measure of success for an SPF — rather, SPFs should be measured on their ability to reliably and effectively support system leaders, families, and/or school leaders in making a variety of important decisions that in turn directly affect students.

An adjacent body of research focuses on the impact of state-level performance ratings and accountability more generally, especially under NCLB. For example, early research on school accountability found positive benefits for students in states with strong accountability systems, where strength is defined as the application of clear consequences for schools based on student achievement.¹⁰

SPFs are first and foremost a tool that supports policies and practices that can drive improved outcomes for students at the family, school, and/or systems level.

Other studies have found that reporting data alone is not enough to drive school improvement. Schools needed the additional motivation of consequential interventions to prompt action and improve results.^{11,12}

Another body of relevant research focuses specifically on families' understanding of and interaction with school data. If data about school performance is presented to families in different ways, they will behave differently when choosing a school.¹³ Researchers found that when schools were organized on a website by academic performance instead of alphabetically, parents were more likely to choose schools with higher academic performance.

But even in places where SPFs are designed to be more family-friendly, it is unclear how many families are aware of or use these kinds of data sources and reports. Student report cards and discussions with other families, teachers, and principals tend to be parents' primary sources of information for how their student and school are doing.¹⁴ State or district report card websites can be invaluable additional sources of information for families, if they are designed and disseminated with families' needs in mind. Even in cities like New Orleans with a high level of school choice and without traditional neighborhood schools,¹⁵ local organizations report that families have mixed understanding and awareness of school performance grades and what they mean.¹⁶

Families often face substantial barriers to accessing or using school quality reports, especially if they do not have easy internet access or primarily speak a language other than English.¹⁷ In discussions with advocacy groups working directly with families, many thought that where SPFs existed, they were at best inadequate to family needs, and at worst, intentionally obscured information for families.

We found several examples in our research of school report card websites that were filled with jargon and only available in English. Family surveys and focus groups conducted by Learning Heroes and the National PTA indicate that terminology that is commonplace among education insiders may mislead families.¹⁸ For example, a parent might think that "student growth" means growth in school enrollment, rather than academic improvement, or "climate" means whether the school has air conditioning, rather than indicators like suspension/expulsion or student and teacher satisfaction.¹⁹

An SPF provides an opportunity for communities to define what matters to them.

Without an SPF, school quality tends to be defined by word of mouth, high-level test scores, and/or measures like neighborhood income. An SPF provides an opportunity for communities to define what matters to them. Third-party data sources created by nonprofits or businesses may step in to fill the void when a district is unwilling or unable to meet family needs for information, but their information may not be the most comprehensive, unbiased, or up-to-date.

This underlines the importance of purposeful consideration of different use cases for SPFs. If an SPF is meant primarily to serve families, it should be designed with their needs in mind. If an SPF is designed to serve school leaders first, the design will likely be different. In other words, the form of an SPF should directly follow from its function, and the users on the receiving end of SPF results should directly shape that form.

Defining Use Cases

We have identified three primary purposes for which SPFs can be used and designed:



System Management
and Accountability



School Continuous
Improvement



Family and Community
Information

The concept of a “use case” is adopted from the world of technology and software design. A use case provides a structured way for designers to envision how their product will be put to use and align design decisions to end users’ needs.²⁰ In the case of SPF design, system leaders would benefit from early considerations of what goals and users they hope to serve, and what use cases they want to prioritize for their SPFs.

SPFs exist in a broader school ecosystem that includes other supports and sources of data — not every SPF needs to serve all use cases in the same way, or to the same degree, especially if there are other supports available.

Each of these use cases involves different users and priorities for what an SPF could include or accomplish. SPFs exist in a broader school ecosystem that includes other supports and sources of data — not every SPF needs to serve all use cases in the same way, or to the same degree, especially if there are other supports available. But leaders should be clear and intentional about which use cases they are trying to serve, or not.

The most common use case is System Management and Accountability; however, the other two purposes also exist in the field. SPFs designed for use as a School Continuous Improvement tool are the least common. And while none of the systems we examined was initially designed primarily to provide Family and Community Information, in several cases, over time several SPFs recognized families as a user group and adjusted some aspects of their systems in response.

Across these three use cases, any successful SPF needs to start from a similar foundation of resources and information:

- **Reliable, comparable data.** Data on key school and student success metrics across all schools in the system should be collected on a regular basis. Where such data do not yet exist, the system needs the authority and ability to collect them.
- **Resources, in terms of budget, time, and staff capacity.** Given the important decisions that SPFs drive and inform, system leaders must adequately support both the creation of an SPF and its implementation to ensure a high degree of quality.
- **Stakeholder alignment.** An SPF needs alignment (or the potential for alignment) among key stakeholders on the purpose and goals for the system to be successful. A technically “perfect” system that lacks buy-in from key stakeholders will not gain the trust of potential users, undermining its ability to support key decisions and its durability over time. Building buy-in requires authentic engagement across the users and stakeholders for a system, especially school leaders and families.

- **Intentional Communication.** At its core, an SPF is itself a tool for communicating information about schools to stakeholders. In order for it to be successful, system leaders must consider how those stakeholders will receive information both about the SPF and from it. Absent a strong communications strategy, an SPF risks losing credibility and impact with critical audiences.

The use cases below explain the users, goals, and activities that should drive an effective SPF within each case. We then apply the use cases as an analytical tool for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of different SPFs with different goals in mind. These use cases were created by our team based on a synthesis of available SPF-related literature, interviews with SPF leaders and experts in the field, and prior work at Bellwether on components of effective and equitable school accountability systems.



System Management and Accountability

USERS

System leaders, such as authorizers, school board members, or superintendents, making decisions around school management and system-wide strategies.

GOALS

System leaders may have a variety of short-term goals that an SPF could support, including:

- Identifying schools in need of intervention or intensive supports
- Identifying and rewarding high-performing schools, identifying and disseminating best practices
- Making decisions around school expansion, replication, or closure
- Designing system-wide improvement strategies and allocating resources appropriately and equitably in line with those strategies

All these decisions should be made on a fair, consistent, and transparent basis, consistent with long-term goals and the overarching strategy for the system. If system leaders have a clear sense of performance across schools, then system resources and management decisions will be aligned to goals and priorities for student outcomes, ideally resulting in a system with higher-performing schools, a greater number of high-quality seats for students, and improved student outcomes across student subgroups.

ACTIVITIES

She most important activities in creating an SPF to serve system leader goals are:

- 1. Select valid and reliable metrics** that align with long-term system goals for students.
 - a. **Use growth/progress measures** as well as overall measures of student outcomes.
 - b. **Disaggregate student data** to identify and monitor performance gaps and growth trajectories, especially for historically underserved student subgroups.
- 2. Combine weight and benchmark metrics** in order to reflect the relative priority of each metric and **produce differentiated results** among schools that reflects their relative performance.
 - a. Create a system that can account for **programmatic differences** across schools (e.g., grade levels, innovation plans).
- 3. Present data** in clear and understandable ways that answer questions system leaders may have about school performance.
- 4. Design and implement clear policies and processes** for how results will inform system decisions — what will the system leadership do with this information? What will it mean when a school is performing well, or not performing well, on the SPF metrics?
- 5. Monitor performance** on a regular basis, with more intensive monitoring for lower-performing schools or schools where data flag potential problems.
- 6. Communicate** decision-making priorities, processes, and standards clearly to school leaders and community members on a proactive, ongoing basis.



School Continuous Improvement

USERS

School leaders (e.g., principals, academic leaders) and supporting system staff (e.g., specialized district support staff).

GOALS

School leaders want reliable and clear data that can inform and support continuous improvement in their schools' operations, culture, and student outcomes. Their uses for an SPF might include:

- Understanding how their school is performing against district/system expectations and goals
- Diagnosing key strengths and weaknesses across a variety of outcomes and flagging leading indicators of potential problems for early action
- Guiding school resource allocations, staffing plans, and programmatic decision-making

In contrast to the system management use case, school-level continuous improvement is not focused on relative performance across schools. Depending on the school and the system, school leaders might have different levels of control over things like staffing and budget. In cases where school leaders have relatively high autonomy, a granular and reliable understanding of their school's performance is even more important.

Information from an SPF oriented toward school continuous improvement should enhance school leaders' ability to diagnose and address problems and use data to drive improvement in their buildings. If that occurs, in the longer term, schools should meet or exceed system expectations for student outcomes, and achieve a high-functioning school environment for students and staff alike.

ACTIVITIES

The key activities in creating an SPF to serve school continuous improvement are:

- 1. Select an array of valid and reliable metrics**, including **long-term outcomes** for students; **interim, diagnostic, or benchmark** results; and **leading indicators** of success, which are all actionable at the school level.
 - a. Consider differentiated metrics **aligned with program goals** (e.g., early learning measures for a PreK-3 school).
 - b. **Disaggregate student data** to identify and monitor performance gaps and growth trajectories, especially for historically underserved student subgroups.
- 2. Benchmark school metrics** against appropriate and useful comparisons or research-based goals.
- 3. Engage school leadership teams** as key stakeholders in the design process.
- 4. Flag strengths and weaknesses** on an ongoing basis.
- 5. Share data with school leaders** in usable, clear formats that fit their needs.
- 6. Incorporate results** into school continuous improvement processes, planning, and decision-making throughout the year.
- 7. Train school leadership teams** in how to use the tool effectively and link it to day-to-day decisions.
- 8. Communicate data and ongoing action plans** to staff, families, and community members.



Family and Community Information

USERS

Families and community members

GOALS

An SPF serving family and community needs should provide an equitable and transparent opportunity for families from different backgrounds to understand how their schools are performing, make choices for their children, and advocate for change. Families and community members could have several goals for SPF information, including:

- Reliable, relevant, and useful information to inform school choices, where those options exist

- Data to understand their schools' performance in order to place their students' current performance in context (e.g., interpret report cards and test scores, advocate for services or programmatic changes at the school or system level)
- Information that can help them effectively engage with the school system, advocate for community priorities, and choose elected leaders

If families and community members have this kind of information from an SPF, system leaders may be more responsive to community priorities, families and students will experience higher levels of satisfaction and engagement with schools, and demand will rise for higher-performing schools and systems.

ACTIVITIES

The key activities in creating an SPF to serve families and community members are:

- 1. Engage families and community members** to understand their questions and priorities and shape system design around the users.
- 2. Select metrics** that align with system priorities, in addition to information families and community members most want to know:
 - a. How are students **performing**?
 - b. How are students **progressing**?
 - c. What is the **experience of families and students** at the school?
 - d. What **programs or amenities** does the school offer?
- 3. Translate performance** on those metrics, in subcategories of performance and on performance overall, using relevant comparisons and/or easy-to-understand graphs, labels, or ratings.
 - a. Present the **most important information** up front, at a glance.
 - b. **Allow for deeper dives** to understand what each rating and metric means.
- 4. Actively communicate results** to families and community members in a variety of accessible ways.
 - a. Present data to families in a manner that is **accessible and free of jargon**. Use accessible language and provide high-quality multilingual translations, context, and definitions.
 - b. Provide families with **multiple opportunities** to access, understand, and use the data, and discuss it with teachers, school leaders, and system leaders.
 - c. **Reach families** where they are through outreach and engagement online and in person — don't rely on families to find your SPF on their own.

Applying Use Cases to Existing SPFs

The five systems we chose to examine represent a spectrum of SPF approaches in terms of who controls the SPF, the SPF's explicit and implicit goals, the users it serves, metrics and ratings, and communications strategies. The aim of this analysis is not to rate or grade these five systems against one another, or present any of the five as exemplars. Rather, it is to provide real-world examples of how SPFs today operate relative to their intended purposes as well as other potential purposes and how SPFs in the future might learn from these experiences.

This section provides summary information about each of the five SPFs as relates to each of the three use cases. For more information, detailed profiles begin on page 28. Analyses are based on scans of publicly available documentation, policies, and displays of SPF data current as of the 2018-19 school year; interviews with system leaders in each community; interviews with local advocates and former SPF leaders; and local media and external reports about each system.

Key SPF Information

City	SPF Creator	SPF Name	# of Schools Included	Types of Schools Included
Chicago, IL	Chicago Public Schools	School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP)	644	All district-run, charter, and contract schools in Chicago
Washington, DC	DC Public Charter School Board	Performance Management Framework (PMF)	123	All DC public charter schools
New York, NY	New York City Department of Education	School Quality Reports	1,800	All district-run schools and district-authorized charter schools
New Orleans, LA	Louisiana Department of Education and NOLA Public Schools	School Performance Scores	85	All schools in New Orleans, almost all of which are public charter schools. The system also applies statewide
Denver, CO	Denver Public Schools	School Performance Framework (SPF)	162	All district-run schools, including innovation schools and all district-authorized public charter schools

These five SPFs serve systems ranging from the country’s largest school district (New York City) to the country’s only school system that is nearly all charter schools (New Orleans). Some apply to all schools in the city or state; others apply to a subset of schools based on authorizers and management. One SPF is a state ESSA system adapted for use at the local level.

In terms of metrics and ratings, some SPFs were quite straightforward. For example, Louisiana’s ratings for elementary schools are based 75% on state test performance, and 25% on state test growth. Other systems, such as Denver and New York City, use a wide array of growth and performance metrics derived from student assessments alongside school environment measures such as student

survey results, attendance, achievement gap closure, and ratings from on-site reviews. All but one system (New York City) assigns a summative rating or grade to schools. As the summaries below explain, these differences in design are driven in large part by differences in city context, goals, and priorities.

Chicago Public Schools – School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP)

The SQRP is a five-point rating system that applies to all CPS schools including public charter schools. The current iteration of the SQRP has been in place since 2013.

Elementary/middle school ratings emphasize academic growth, closing gaps for priority student groups such as English learners, test performance, and attendance. High school ratings emphasize graduation and postsecondary readiness and outcomes.



System Management and Accountability

The SQRP was primarily designed to serve system management purposes. Highly rated schools have more local governance power and autonomy under the oversight of local school councils; low-rated schools are subject to more intensive intervention and support. Through the district’s charter accountability policy, charter schools with poor academic performance may be at risk of revocation. The stability of the SQRP and the clarity of its system management are assets in terms of credibility for informing important decisions. However, despite the emphasis on growth in the ratings, correlations between SQRP ratings, school demographics, and school segregation have generated some criticism and prompted CPS to plan an upcoming equity review of the SQRP.²¹



School Continuous Improvement

The SQRP is not designed or intended to serve as a continuous improvement tool for school leaders. SQRP metrics do not differentiate between diagnostic metrics and key outcomes, and many metrics, especially at the high school level, are only

available after the end of the year. But CPS has taken steps in recent years to help school leaders better use their SQRP results to inform school-level action, and prioritize areas for improvement.

As the state of Illinois debuts its new ratings under ESSA, conflicts between SQRP ratings and state ratings have already emerged and may send mixed messages to school leaders.



Family and Community Information

Currently, SQRP serves as a tool to help families navigate school options. Over time, the district has added more family-facing resources and integrated SQRP ratings into different family tools. CPS' online school profiles stand out positively for readability and clear design choices meant to address families' priorities,²² but there are still places where family-friendly communication falls short.²³ For example, the ratings scale is not intuitive (1+, 1, 2+, 2, and 3), and in recent debates over SQRP changes, parent input was highlighted as a missing element.²⁴

DC Public Charter School Board – Performance Management Framework (PMF)

The PMF is a three-tiered system that applies to all public charter schools in the District of Columbia. It was created by D.C.'s sole charter school authorizer, the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB).

Elementary/middle school ratings emphasize growth and achievement on state tests, with extra weight for third-grade reading and eighth-grade math. High school ratings are also based on growth and achievement on state tests, plus postsecondary readiness metrics such as college acceptance rates. Nonacademic metrics for all grades include attendance and reenrollment. The system also includes additional untiered, stand-alone measures for early grades that align with schools' charter agreements. These untiered measures do not factor into the overall score or tier for the school.



System Management and Accountability

The PMF was primarily designed to support DC PCSB's decisions as a charter school authorizer. Tier 1 schools are encouraged to expand and are subject to less monitoring; Tier 3 schools are subject to a high-stakes review process and additional monitoring, and may have their charters revoked. The relationship between the PMF results and charter renewal decisions varies by school: Many schools have made PMF results central to their charter goals, but other schools have unique individual charter goals.

Much like CPS, there are concerns within the charter school sector that the PMF correlates too closely with school demographics, despite the emphasis on growth metrics, and may disadvantage schools serving high populations of at-risk students. As a result, DC PCSB is considering adjustments, especially the emphasis on third- and eighth-grade performance metrics, in the near future. DC PCSB reviews all the components of the PMF every year and makes adjustments to address concerns raised by school leaders, families, and others.



School Continuous Improvement

DC PCSB believes school-level improvement decisions are not part of its role as an authorizer, and DC PCSB does not have authority to mandate that schools administer assessments or collect and report data beyond what the state requires. The PMF is not designed or intended to serve as a continuous improvement tool for schools, but it does provide information about school performance to school leaders that could lay the foundation for other improvement efforts and direct school leaders to focus on outcomes that are important for students. Ultimately, school leaders can align their goals and improvement plans to the PMF metrics, or not.



Family and Community Information

The three tiers of the PMF provide families with a simple way to differentiate among D.C. public charter schools. PMF reports for each school are available in individual PDFs on the PCSB website and DC PCSB produces a guide in multiple languages that explains the PMF and school results to families. Nevertheless, public-facing PMF reports could be substantially improved for a family audience that wants to know more than a tier rating: Reports are not written in parent-friendly language and may be difficult for families to interpret or compare.

MySchoolDC, D.C.'s unified enrollment system across public charter schools and district schools, links to the PMF results, but now emphasizes new ESSA-aligned STAR ratings created by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. STAR ratings apply across charter and district-run schools. Currently, DC PCSB is considering how the PMF may evolve as the new STAR rating system across D.C.'s different kinds of public schools plays more of a public-facing role.

New York City – School Quality Reports

New York City's school quality reports debuted under Mayor Michael Bloomberg as an accountability-focused school ratings system. More recently under Mayor Bill de Blasio, system leaders have significantly revised the reports to eliminate a summative rating, and integrate academic outcomes with observational and survey-based metrics. Schools are rated on seven dimensions of the city's "Framework for Great Schools" — one rating is based on student academic achievement, the others draw from site reviews and school surveys. Metrics include test performance, progress, student postsecondary outcomes, and student experience (in the form of student surveys).



System Management and Accountability

The system was originally designed for this purpose under the leadership of Mayor Michael Bloomberg; it has moved away from this use case in its current iteration under the leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio. It is unclear how these reports currently influence system management action citywide; practices may differ in different parts of the district.



School Continuous Improvement

This is the primary use case for this SPF. Detailed reports are aimed at school leaders, benchmarking performance against city averages and demographically similar schools. Additional resources for school leaders provide guidance on how to translate school quality report data into local improvement plans. Despite this emphasis, the sheer volume of metrics and the annual or longer turnaround on most measures may make it difficult for school leaders to prioritize areas for attention and change, and translate SPF data into timely action.



Family and Community Information

School quality reports were not originally designed with families in mind, but New York City has made some recent changes to make the reports more family-friendly. Online school quality snapshots present ratings and data in a more simplified format, available in multiple languages. But the system is still complex, even in a simplified format, and may not clearly communicate relative school performance and strengths to families. Results are also not integrated with enrollment and school choice processes, which may mean relatively few families use these reports in practice.

New Orleans – Louisiana School Performance Scores

The state of Louisiana has rated schools since 1999, and introduced letter grades in 2011, with significant revisions in 2013 and 2018. Ratings are fairly simple. A to F grades are based on only two metrics at the elementary level: achievement on state tests as measured by an assessment index (75%), and state test growth (25%). The introduction of growth was one of the biggest changes in the 2013 revision. Unlike some other systems, Louisiana includes scores on science and social studies assessments in addition to English and math. From 2005 to 2017, school performance scores played a key role in charter school expansion and closure decisions made while the city schools were mostly under the control of the state-run Recovery School District. Beginning in 2018, control of New Orleans' schools transitioned back to the locally elected Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Now known as NOLA Public Schools, the school district continues to use the state SPF to make local school management and charter authorizing decisions.



System Management and Accountability

Louisiana’s school performance scores play a role in system management at the state and local level, including NOLA Public Schools’ charter school authorizing and oversight process. At the state level, schools rated D or F for three consecutive years are identified for comprehensive school improvement under ESSA. At the local level, highly rated schools are eligible for longer charter renewal timelines, while persistently low-rated schools are ineligible for renewal and may be subject to early charter revocation. A high proportion of schools in New Orleans score at the lower end of the scale, with C or D grades. To differentiate among lower-rated schools and make renewal decisions, NOLA Public Schools created additional standards and policies on top of the state performance scores that emphasize school progress and growth over time.



School Continuous Improvement

School performance scores are not designed or intended to serve as a continuous improvement tool at a school level: They focus on high-level student outcomes. The SPF signals how a school is performing relative to outcomes goals, but it does not provide the type of data school leaders would use to assess specific causes of high-level outcomes or to make detailed instructional or operational decisions. However, this system is unique in that the state sees educators as a primary audience. State leaders want to clearly convey the importance of every student’s mastery of grade-level content aligned to college and career readiness via the school performance scores. This is the only SPF in our analysis that emphasized educator audiences in this way.



Family and Community Information

Clarity on school performance for families is another rationale for the simplicity of A to F grades and the choice to include a small number of metrics in the Louisiana SPF. When NOLA Public Schools, under the leadership of OPSB, considered how and if to use the state scores locally, it found that families and local stakeholders were familiar with the A-F grades, and valued stability in how schools were graded. School performance scores are part of school profiles on EnrollNOLA, the unified enrollment system for charter schools in New Orleans. The family- and community-facing school information website, LouisianaSchools.com, stands out for readability and clear design choices meant to address families’ priorities as well as ESSA requirements. The school district is in the process of designing local school profiles that include SPF scores along with other data.

Denver – School Performance Framework

Denver’s SPF debuted in 2008 to measure school performance across the district, particularly as the district shifted to include more charter schools, innovation schools, and autonomous neighborhood schools. Denver uses a five-point color-coded rating system based on state test score growth and performance, student and family satisfaction surveys, attendance, and postsecondary readiness in high schools. A separate academic gaps score for historically underserved student groups interacts with the ratings — a school cannot earn the highest ratings if its academic gap performance is substandard. DPS has just begun a process to “Reimagine the SPF,” which will be led by a Quality Schools Committee composed of DPS stakeholders including school leaders, teachers, and family and community members.²⁵



System Management and Accountability

Denver’s SPF was primarily designed for system management, and differentiated services and interventions based on the SPF scores are baked into many aspects of central office operations. School ratings play a significant role in decisions about school closure, restart, levels of school autonomy, and charter school renewal. But policies, processes, and methodologies around the ratings are complex, and are not easily understood or fully transparent to the public. In some cases, changes in the system have made results fluctuate, damaging the public’s perception of the SPF and its use for consequential decisions about schools’ futures.



School Continuous Improvement

The SPF is intended in part to serve as an improvement tool that individual school leaders may use to inform and shape local school improvement plans. DPS sees the SPF ratings as a tool to drive school leaders’ attention to key metrics such as early literacy or academic gaps among student subgroups. According to DPS leaders, some critical feedback from school leaders over the years indicated that the SPF may be too complex, and the data in it not timely enough, to serve day-to-day continuous improvement purposes.²⁶



Family and Community Information

The Denver SPF was always aimed to serve as a tool for public transparency about school performance, and it has made changes over the years to better serve this use case. Early on, parent advocacy groups prompted district officials to make changes to the system to make it easier for families to understand, including the introduction of the color-coding system to help parents distinguish between ratings. DPS has a unified enrollment system and produces an annual Enrollment Guide for families with ratings from the SPF. DPS includes these ratings to help parents differentiate among school options during the school selection process. Parents can also view this information online, using the district's online school finder.

As mentioned above, questions about the rating methodologies and changes to the SPF over the years may have damaged public perception of the SPF's credibility, and made it less comparable over time.

Lessons From Existing SPF^s

The lessons that follow are aimed primarily at system leaders looking to design or adopt their own SPFs, or change an existing system, with an emphasis on cross-cutting themes and takeaways from the five SPFs in our analysis. These five SPFs each have strengths, weaknesses, moments of transition, and ongoing challenges to address moving forward. These real-world test cases provide insight that local leaders interested in developing or revising SPFs should consider as they seek answers to some key questions, such as.

Why might a system need an SPF?

To support school-level autonomy and accountability

If a system is shifting its governance style to focus on school-level autonomy and accountability, an SPF primarily focused on system management and accountability could be useful. In Chicago, legislation that brought about mayoral control over schools also mandated the creation of a local SPF, which the city uses to determine a school's level of autonomy under the oversight of a local school council. In D.C., as the charter sector grew, the DC PCSB recognized the need for a common tool across schools to guide authorizer decisions.

To support data-informed school improvement

If a system has a goal of improving all schools through data-informed action, an SPF focused on school continuous improvement may be a useful tool for school leaders. Only one of the SPFs in our analysis, New York City, was primarily focused on school continuous improvement — although when the SPF began, it was more focused on accountability. Today, New York City’s SPF aims for a comprehensive framework that includes extensive academic and environmental metrics, and is flexible enough to be relevant and functional across 1,800 different schools. Refining the system to serve this purpose, and implementing it with fidelity, is an ongoing process. New York has created alternative views of its SPF for family, school leader, and system leader audiences, with different levels of detail and areas of emphasis.

In these examples, there is a key tension for SPFs that aim to support school continuous improvement: School leaders need much more granular, frequent data to support ongoing decisions than families or system leaders tend to prefer. This use case may be less compatible with the other two. But a community might consider parallel or adjacent data tools linked to a public-facing SPF that provide school leaders with the information they want. For example, Chicago’s SPF is not primarily designed for day-to-day school action, but school leaders get their annual SPF results broken down into a student-level roster; this enables them to look at the data in a different way.

To support families’ choices and empowerment

Family- and community-focused SPFs tend to emerge where there is a relatively high degree of choice and parents need a clear and common basis on which to compare schools. For instance, Louisiana’s new family-facing school finder was noted as an exemplar of usability and clarity in Data Quality Campaign’s national scan of state school report card websites.²⁷ Additionally, the local school board plans to debut local report cards that include state data alongside other school information. This is extremely important in a choice-driven school system like New Orleans.

Beyond informing the process of choosing a school, family- and community-facing information can be a valuable asset in school improvement. If families and community members are better informed about school performance and quality, they can also be more empowered to engage with school improvement processes and advocate for community priorities with school and system leaders.

What if a state already has a school rating system — is that enough?

Regardless of the use case(s) that may prompt local leaders to consider developing an SPF, any SPF should be additive, not redundant or in conflict with state accountability and rating systems where they exist. Locally developed SPFs have the opportunity to provide a more nuanced picture of school performance that reflects local goals and community priorities. Local leaders also have greater on-the-ground responsibility and decision-making power than state leaders, which changes the scope and purpose of a local SPF. Local SPFs should aim to clarify, not confuse the understanding of school performance among stakeholders, including the school community and family and community members.

Local SPFs should aim to clarify, not confuse the understanding of school performance among stakeholders, including the school community and family and community members.

Many of the SPFs profiled in this work originated during No Child Left Behind, as a response to federally mandated school ratings leaders felt were too blunt, and not relevant to local goals and context. These same systems are now grappling with whether and how their longstanding local systems should adapt to new state-designed ratings and reports under ESSA. ESSA state ratings tend to include a wider variety of data elements, such as academic growth on state tests, attendance, or school environment surveys. With this wider array of measures in state systems, local leaders must consider what purposes additional information will serve. Even so, all of the local system leaders we interviewed felt that their local SPF remained relevant even with a new state system.

Developing and implementing a high-quality SPF requires significant investment of time and resources, and local leaders should be certain that a new SPF is necessary. In a state with an existing rating or report card system, adapting the state accountability ratings might serve certain use cases well and could streamline the process of SPF creation. For example, in New Orleans NOLA Public Schools

uses state performance scores as a local school performance framework to guide decisions including whether a school is eligible for charter renewal. Local leaders considered creating their own SPF several years ago, but in the course of community outreach, they found that many parents and stakeholders were familiar with the state system and felt it was credible. Although there are some drawbacks, NOLA Public Schools has been able to adapt the state SPF to local needs.

In determining whether and how to design and implement a local SPF, local leaders should evaluate existing state rating and reporting systems and consider:

- The extent to which state systems reflect local goals and priorities
- The level of adaptation necessary to serve the goals local leaders would have for an SPF

Should an SPF aim to serve all three use cases? How can an SPF serve more than one user group effectively?

An SPF does not necessarily need to serve all three use cases, and it is unlikely that any SPF would be able to completely meet the needs of system leaders, school leaders, and family/community members at the same time. Several system leaders described trying to “do it all” as deeply problematic for system design.

Trying to serve all stakeholders and use cases equally, without clear priorities, can lead to a muddled system. Rather than aiming to do everything at once, at the outset of an SPF process, leaders interested in an SPF should:

- Clearly understand their goals and the unmet needs the SPF will serve
- Map out and assess other systems currently serving the needs of each user group — for instance, existing data systems for school leaders, or resources for families choosing a school
- Differentiate between primary and secondary use cases the SPF will serve — or decide which use cases the SPF will not serve

Design choices should reflect the priority use cases.

Design choices should reflect the priority use cases. Where tradeoffs must be made, the defined priorities should drive decisions. For example, an SPF designed for systems management may require a detailed array of metrics on student and subgroup performance to help leaders assess schools against system goals. However, that may not be reflective of the kind of information families need or want. Where use cases are in conflict, leaders should prioritize their top use cases in design decisions. This is not to say that systems cannot serve more than one purpose, but conflicts will arise, and leaders may need to compromise.

Some combinations of SPF use cases may fit better together than others. Several of the systems we examined have system management uses as their primary purpose, and sharing information with families as a secondary use. Both system leaders and families share an interest in student progress over time and high-level student outcomes. In these cases, there is often a parent-facing view of information that displays ratings first, offers a deeper level of detail if desired, and may include information that is not part of the SPF — like programmatic offerings or information on the school environment. In these cases, customized communications strategies can leverage the same or similar underlying data, but differentiate how those data are presented.

The most difficult use case to integrate with others is school continuous improvement. The level of detail and types of diagnostic and outcome data a school leader needs to create an effective action plan and drive decision-making is much different from the higher-level outcomes-focused metrics that are most actionable for system leaders and parents. The only SPF we examined that placed school continuous improvement as a primary use case was New York City, and it is unclear how usable that system is for school leaders in practice. New York City's SPF does not have an overall rating, and it measures schools across seven dimensions, only one of which is academics. The breadth and depth of data included even in the simplest version of the New York City school quality reports is unlikely to be easy for parents to digest, or point to clear action steps for system leaders.

The “owner” of an SPF can shape design and uses. For example, the DC Public Charter School Board and the Orleans Parish School Board are clear that as authorizers they do not carry out improvement actions at the school level, and thus their SPFs are designed to focus on student outcomes and growth, not detailed diagnostic measures school leaders might use to develop, implement,

and track improvement plans. Chicago, Denver, and New York City's SPF include many kinds of schools, so these SPFs have different oversight and management implications for different schools.

Use case priorities can also shift over time. Leaders in Chicago recently adapted their system into a more family-friendly online format, after realizing that families increasingly wanted to use and understand their system-focused SPF. D.C. is considering whether the charter school PMF should still attempt to be family-facing if the state system, called the STAR rating, is more closely aligned to that use case.

One critical thing for system leaders to bear in mind is that user needs will not disappear just because the SPF is not designed to serve them. And as a practical matter, anything a school system does to measure and assess school performance should be transparent and accessible to the public.

If leaders want to design an SPF that serves more than one user group, there are a few key considerations:

- 1. Engage all stakeholders proactively and authentically.** Engagement should align with users' different roles and priorities in the system. This step is key to understanding different needs and identifying potential tensions or conflicts early. Stakeholder engagement should not come late in the process, after key decisions have already been made, but should provide authentic opportunity for actionable input.²⁸
- 2. Anchor the system and metrics in common, coherent goals for students.** Different user groups may be more or less interested in certain kinds of metrics and benchmarks. An SPF designed to serve multiple users may need to compromise, or allow for displays of data that are customized for different users, but there should be coherence across the use cases such that parents, school leaders, and system leaders receive the same messages about schools' relative and absolute levels of performance.
- 3. Translate SPF results for different audiences.** A single PDF report will not serve multiple user groups well. The most successfully communicated multiuser SPFs design different views of data specialized for families, schools, and system leaders. Systems can be even more transparent by releasing easily analyzable data to external researchers and organizations, which could bring about new insights.

4. Support action. SPFs are not solely informational — they should be used to drive action among users. If an SPF is meant to support parent choice, families will need more resources, such as a well-functioning enrollment system and one-on-one support and counseling in order to understand their choices. If an SPF is meant for school leaders to use in improvement, those leaders will need coaching and professional development to use information effectively in their day-to-day and long-term strategies.

What are the pros and cons of a summative rating in an SPF?

The considerations for whether or not to include a summative rating in an SPF are different from that of a state-level accountability system, because local SPFs tend to have different goals and theories of change than a state system.

The question of whether an SPF should have a summative rating provoked strong reactions among system leaders and advocates we spoke with on this topic. Proponents, including leaders of the four systems we profile that include a summative rating, feel that a clear rating is essential for a transparent family-facing SPF, and for clear links to system leader decision-making — differentiating between high- and low-performing schools across a variety of metrics. Advocates for parents usually agreed that parents find a summative rating helpful in using an SPF, especially for school choice decisions.

On the other hand, system leaders who are not in favor of a summative school rating describe summative ratings as often misleading, distracting families from digging deeper into their own priorities for different school quality indicators, and encouraging school leaders to take an overly narrow and prescriptive view of improvement, especially around test scores. And if state accountability systems already include a rating, it will be difficult for a new local system to enter the public conversation without causing confusion.

Differing views on the pros and cons of summative ratings come down to SPF values, goals, and implementation decisions, so there is not one absolutely right answer. An SPF with a summative rating is not automatically clear — for example, Chicago’s categories of 1+, 1, 2+, 2, and 3 do not communicate much at a glance.

Differing views on the pros and cons of summative ratings come down to SPF values, goals, and implementation decisions, so there is not one absolutely right answer.

And confusion about the methods and business rules that go into a summative rating can obscure meaning and reduce credibility, as is currently the case in Denver. An SPF without a summative rating will need to work harder to guide family audiences through the data, and ensure that the policies and processes of considering SPF performance in system decisions are clear.

What does it mean to align metrics and methods to system goals?

Across the three use cases, aligning metrics and methods to system goals is critical. A logical and effective SPF should clearly link up with long-term goals for students across schools. The five systems we examined provided various examples of that principle in practice.

In Chicago, system leaders wanted to emphasize academic growth. So the city adopted an assessment in grades 3-8, the NWEA MAP, which measures growth and performance across grade levels, and weighted a substantial proportion of their elementary/middle school ratings on growth percentiles and performance among priority groups. They also wanted to communicate the importance of school culture and climate, so a school climate survey makes up a small percentage of school ratings across the system.

Louisiana's system heavily weights achievement on state assessments in large part because state leaders want educators to focus on helping every student master grade-level content. Using an assessment index that credits improvement at each level of achievement instead of a proficiency percentage also helps encourage growth across the full performance spectrum — with a “percent proficient” measure, educators may have incentives to focus most on students closest to the proficiency bar. The choice to weight assessment performance at 75% of schools' scores comes with potential tradeoffs: A rating based heavily on assessment performance instead of growth is likely to penalize schools whose students come in below grade level, including schools serving high proportions of at-risk students. But it also serves to unify system and school leaders around a clear goal.

What is the right number of metrics or indicators in an SPF?

There is no perfect number of metrics or indicators in an SPF — like almost every other design consideration, the right choice depends upon the definition of success and use cases in mind. But there are some tradeoffs to consider.

It may be tempting to include every important data point available in the SPF. However, too many metrics can create confusion around what is most important, especially for family and community user groups. Including a large number of metrics can dilute the importance of measures most closely aligned to top-level goals in any summative rating. Weighting methodologies can compensate for this to a certain extent, but even then including a large number of metrics that contributes very little to a summative rating raises questions about what matters most and where to focus.

Including a large number of metrics can dilute the importance of measures most closely aligned to top-level goals in any summative rating.

In addition, as leaders consider metrics to include, ensuring that metrics contribute unique information to the system is important. If two or more metrics are closely correlated with one another, they can interact and skew SPF results when combined. When considering a long list of potential metrics, assessing the extent to which any one metric adds new information to the overall system can be one criterion for narrowing the list.

On the other hand, too few metrics can paint an imbalanced and limited picture of what school success looks like, especially if SPFs focus narrowly on just a few ways of measuring academic success. This was the case with NCLB ratings, which spurred the creation of several long-standing local SPFs.

System leaders should look for compromise solutions that bring nuance to an SPF without sacrificing clarity. For example, subgroup performance and/or achievement gap measures in an SPF bakes equity into the definition of a “high-performing” school. But including subgroups in every metric of an SPF would automatically multiply the total number of metrics eight-fold or more. SPFs we examined took some creative approaches to this topic: Chicago places additional weight on academic growth and performance for a few priority student groups, such as English learners and special education students. In Denver, in addition to the overall score, each school receives a separate academic gaps score intended to measure how well schools are driving growth among historically underserved student groups. Schools with large achievement gaps are ineligible for the top school rating.

How do I know my system is ready for an SPF? How long will the process of creating one take?

Certain inputs and resources are critical for an SPF, such as reliable data sources, a clear vision for system goals, and buy-in (or potential for buy-in) across key stakeholders. As discussed above, the needs and intended uses for the SPF should be clear at the outset.

Leaders should also consider the practical side of SPF creation — do you have the staff capacity and expertise to lead this process? Once the SPF is created, do you have the resources to create communications tools or reports and support users to understand the system and its goals?

One mistake several system leaders of current SPFs highlighted was getting too caught up in the metrics stage of the process. A leader could spend years debating the pros and cons of different growth metrics or ways to measure achievement gaps, especially if the goals and vision for the SPF are unclear.

Creating or substantially revising an SPF will take at least one school year once all the prerequisite pieces are in place, and may take longer than that. System leaders should set realistic benchmarks and deadlines and agree on key decision roles in advance in order to keep the process moving forward.

What can I do to ensure my SPF is sustainable and durable over time?

One of the most important qualities to ensure a sustainable and durable SPF is stability. The key metrics in an SPF should stay relatively constant over time. New metrics or methods should only be introduced after extensive consideration and engagement. Results should not fluctuate wildly without reason, and the actions taken based on the SPF should be clear and consistent. Chicago leaders credit the stability of their SPF since 2013 with creating strong credibility among different stakeholders and user groups, especially school principals. In contrast, Denver's changes in methods and additional metrics have had some unforeseen

One of the most important qualities to ensure a sustainable and durable SPF is stability.

impacts on the distribution of school performance across the ratings, which could reduce the credibility of the ratings.

Public support for an SPF can help improve durability. If parents and community members value the SPF and see it as a credible and useful tool, they won't want to see it eliminated. Offering community members ways to provide input early in the SPF process can foster a sense of ownership and show that the SPF is responsive to community priorities.

There is a balance between stability and responsible cycles of improvement and evaluation. There should be consistent cycles of analysis and evaluation after the SPF goes into effect to make sure that it is functioning as intended, and to identify areas for improvement or additional user supports. Changing an SPF already in place should be a deliberate process — especially if the SPF results are tied to decisions like school closure. In Louisiana, after the state adopted higher standards and assessments resulting in lower levels of mastery across the state, it continued to rate schools, but the state limited the distribution of ratings for several years.²⁹ This meant that schools and state leaders had time to see how scores would shift under a new system, while maintaining an incentive to improve.

SPFs, like many other high-profile initiatives in education, are subject to changes in leadership. For example, New York City's system underwent a wholesale overhaul after a mayoral and chancellor transition. Even SPFs mandated by state law, like Chicago's and Louisiana's, could be substantially changed in the future by new leadership. In New Orleans, when school oversight transitioned from state control under the Recovery School District back to the local school board (OPSB), the school board kept the state SPF as part of its system, but took a fresh look at how growth and progress factored into authorizer decisions. A leader looking to create an SPF that withstands leadership changes should focus particularly on stakeholder engagement and buy-in. If multiple stakeholders in a system see the value, validity, and relevance of an SPF, it will be significantly less likely to fall victim to politics or backlash.

SPF Planning Guide

The lessons learned from the research, analysis, and discussion above, as well as the examples provided by five longstanding, local SPFs, point to some key action recommendations for local leaders considering an SPF. These recommendations span the full lifecycle of an SPF, from the initial decision to create this tool, to the ongoing work of implementing, communicating, and refining the tool over time.





Understand the Landscape, Set Goals and Priorities

STAGE 1

1 Engage stakeholders to understand what information they need about school performance, and what information they already have.

- Assess data systems and resources focused on school performance available to different users at a state or local level.
- Evaluate whether those tools are meeting local needs.
 - Is this information coherent and sufficient to drive action?
 - Is information available transparently, accessibly, and equitably to those who most need it?

2 Define clear goals and priorities for an SPF.

- Discuss what uses and users an SPF would serve. System leaders? School leaders? Families and community members? Other stakeholders?
 - Align use cases to system strategic goals.
 - Decide which users and uses will be primary, and which will be secondary, based on system goals and user needs established during engagement.
- Set goals, outputs, and outcomes against which the SPF's success will be evaluated.

3 Gather inputs and resources.

- Assess the time, information, authority, and capacity within the system to create an SPF – identify where additional capacity or resources may be needed.
- Map out available data and places where new or improved data may be needed.

4 Make a decision as to whether to pursue a new or substantially revised SPF.

- Facilitate stakeholder alignment on the need for an SPF, the primary goals and audiences, and the intended uses.
- Communicate that decision, the rationale behind it, and the process for design to user groups.



Design and Decision-Making

1 Build the SPF, learning from lessons, examples, and information about SPFs with similar goals and use cases.

- Choose valid and reliable metrics that align with system priorities and user needs.
- Design benchmarks, weights, or tiers to differentiate school performance, with primary and secondary user groups in mind.
- Decide whether and how to assign a summative score to schools.

2 Model potential choices, and consider tradeoffs.

- Use real-world system data to test whether and how the SPF works as intended, and anticipate potential problems and weaknesses.
- Where conflicts or questions arise, make decisions based on previously set goals and priorities.

3 Create differentiated reports, tools, and resources to serve intended audiences.

4 Engage and take feedback from intended user groups at key decision points.

- Differentiate engagement strategies based on users' key concerns and needs.
- Consider equity and inclusivity — the loudest voice in an argument may not be the most representative or critically important.
- Communicate process and decision points along the way to the public and to each user group, considering their needs and engagement with the system.



Implementation, Evaluation, and Ongoing Sustainability

1 Pilot the completed SPF with users, and set a timeline for full implementation.

- Weight the value of advance knowledge and predictability for school leaders, families, and other community members against potential advantages of having the SPF up and running more quickly.

2 Evaluate the completed SPF against intended impacts, with feedback from users.

- Integrate an evaluation plan, key goals, and metrics into the launch process.
- Align evaluation goals and indicators with intended use cases.
- Monitor for unintended consequences or unanticipated uses of the SPF, including equity implications of SPF results and uses (e.g. disproportionate effects on certain subgroups of students).

3 Establish review processes and cycles to reassess the system at regular intervals and enable responsiveness to shifts in users' needs, local conditions, and system priorities.

- Ensure the SPF remains useful and relevant and that policies tied to the SPF make sense.
- Avoid sudden, unintended shifts in SPF results, and carefully model any proposed changes or additions to the system.
- Communicate needed changes clearly to stakeholders, including the rationale for and impact of changes.

4 Integrate the SPF into action, with clear and documented processes and policies.

- Document action steps that can or will be taken based on SPF results, including clear policies for how SPF results will be factored into decisions.
- Support user groups with guidance, outreach, and communications tools to promote understanding and transparency regarding how SPF results will be used.



Detailed SPF Profiles

Chicago Public Schools

School Quality Rating Policy

Schools and Enrollment

Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) applies to 644 schools enrolling over 360,000 students.³⁰ Of those, 517 schools are district-run, 121 are public charter schools authorized by CPS, nine are contract schools.

SPF Origins

CPS is a mayorally controlled district, meaning the mayor appoints members of the school board, who approve the CEO of the school district. The same state law that established mayoral control in 1995 also requires CPS to monitor the performance of all schools.³¹ The SQRP fulfills this requirement.

Years Operational

The current iteration of the SQRP has been in use by the Department of School Quality Measurement and Research since the 2013-14 school year.³² Prior iterations of CPS' performance management system did not apply to charter schools.

Purpose

CPS uses the SQRP to measure annual school performance across the district, magnet, and public charter schools it oversees and authorizes. SQRP results guide decision-making processes around school actions, system strategy, and turnarounds; determine the level of interventions and school oversight, particularly the level of control given to local school councils; and affect charter renewal decisions.

Communication

CPS communicates the results of the SQRP in four ways: direct principal notification, direct local school council notification, the CPS website, and online school progress reports. In addition to SQRP reports, principals receive a roster report with the performance of each individual student on applicable SQRP metrics.

**Metrics, Weights,
and Ratings**

CPS uses different metrics depending on schools’ grade levels. Sixty percent of elementary and middle schools’ ratings derive from student performance and growth on NWEA MAP reading and math assessments (MAP is an adaptive, interim assessment that CPS administers three times a year in addition to Illinois state tests), with an emphasis on growth and closing gaps for low-performing student groups. The remaining 40% is based on student attendance, qualitative survey data, growth in English language proficiency among English learners, and a data quality measure. High school scores come from a wider variety of data sources, with an emphasis on college readiness metrics such as the SAT, graduation, college/career credentials, and college enrollment rates.³³

SQRP Metrics and Weights

Elementary/Middle Schools		High Schools	
Metric	Weight	Metric	Weight
Student growth on NWEA MAP	25%	Student growth on PSAT/SAT	20%
Student attendance	20%	Growth of priority groups on SAT	10%
Growth of priority groups on NWEA MAP	10%	Student attainment on SAT	10%
% of students making national average growth on NWEA	10%	Student attendance	10%
5Essentials Survey	10%	Freshman On-Track rate	10%
Student attainment on NWEA MAP (Grade 3-8)	10%	4-year cohort graduation rate	10%
Student attainment on NWEA MAP (Grade 2)	5%	Early college/career credentials	5%
ELL language development growth	5%	1-year dropout rate	5%
Data quality	5%	College enrollment	5%
		College persistence	5%
		5Essentials Survey	5%
		Data quality	5%

For each of the metrics a school can earn between one and five points. Metric scores are then weighted and averaged, with test score growth receiving the heaviest weight and therefore greatest influence on the summative score. The weighted average, which also falls between one and five points, is then used to determine a school’s school quality rating and accountability status as explained in the chart below.³⁴ There are some cases where a school may qualify for a higher rating than the full array of metrics would yield if the school’s MAP or PSAT/SAT scores are particularly high.³⁵ The CPS CEO also has the authority to grant a one-time, one-year extension to a level 1 or 1+ school that experiences a leadership change or other significant event that affects school performance.³⁶

Overall Score	School Quality Rating	Accountability Status
4.0 or more	Level 1+	Good Standing
Between 3.5 and 3.9	Level 1	Good Standing
Between 3.0 and 3.4	Level 2+	Good Standing
Between 2.0 and 2.9	Level 2	Provisional Support
Less than 2.0	Level 3	Intensive Support



System Management and Accountability

The SQRP was primarily designed to serve system management purposes. Higher-rated district-run schools get more building-level autonomy, while lower-rated schools get more monitoring and intervention, and may be at risk of closure. Charter schools have a slightly different relation to the ratings, but performance on the SQRP is a clear factor in charter renewal and expansion decisions. Jeff Broom, CPS’ director of school quality measurement and research, described the SQRP as a system of reciprocal accountability that measures the progress of schools and the system as a whole. CPS has published a detailed SQRP handbook and a rating calculator tool, which make clear the purposes of the system and the relationship between ratings and school governance actions, metrics, and methods. The SQRP has been relatively stable since the city overhauled its SPF approach in 2013-14,

which CPS officials believe has resulted in a high degree of credibility and trust from school leaders and community members around the ratings and the ways the central office uses them.³⁷

Metrics in the SQRP align with system priorities and long-term goals, reflected in the district's five-year strategic plan.³⁸ The SQRP heavily rewards growth in elementary and middle schools. The assessment CPS uses, MAP, can measure student growth across grade levels, which can be especially useful when students are performing far above or below grade level. CPS' decision to use MAP also insulated the rating system from instability as the state made changes in its assessment.³⁹ In high schools, the SQRP clearly emphasizes postsecondary readiness, with six metrics explicitly related to college readiness, enrollment, and persistence, in addition to more common high school metrics like graduation and ninth-grade credit accumulation.

CPS officials describe a research-driven process for assessing and adopting valid and reliable metrics for the SQRP, guided by an external advisory group of researchers and experts. For example, the 5Essentials survey, a measure of school environment and culture, and the Freshman On-Track measure, a measure of freshman course performance, were both developed at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

In terms of equity in the ratings, CPS officials say the system has come a long way from pre-2013 SPF iterations that closely correlated with racial and economic demographics in schools. An emphasis on growth metrics in elementary and middle schools allows schools serving students behind grade level to demonstrate progress. High school metrics are less reliant on growth, and therefore, more closely correlated with incoming student status and demographics. Officials say that they still have further to go to ensure that ratings fully reflect performance differences among schools, rather than demographic differences. CPS recently hired a chief equity officer, who will be working with the SQRP team to audit the system from an equity perspective.



School Continuous Improvement

The SQRP is not designed or intended to serve as a continuous improvement tool for schools: It does not differentiate between diagnostic metrics and key outcomes, and many metrics, especially at the high school level, are only available after the end of the year. A few are on multiyear time lag (e.g., college attendance and persistence). But CPS has taken steps in recent years to help school leaders better use their SQRP results to inform school-level action, and prioritize areas for improvement. For example, CPS gives principals a roster report of every student's performance on the measures that apply to the SQRP, such as assessment growth and attendance. This way, school leaders get a much more fine-grained perspective on the trends among their students.

Another way in which the SQRP communicates priorities to school leaders is in its metrics. Both high school and elementary school ratings include a category for "growth of priority groups," which CPS defines as English learners, students with an individualized education program (IEP), and African-American and Latino students. By placing extra weight on growth among the lowest-performing student groups, CPS rewards schools doing the most to close achievement gaps for traditionally underserved students.

But in a broader context, school leaders are on the receiving end of mixed messages from the state and district leaders about what student outcomes matter most, and where they should spend their time. The state of Illinois recently introduced a new accountability system under ESSA using different metrics. CPS' system does not use the state test as a factor in elementary SQRP scores, but Illinois' accountability system for elementary schools is heavily based on state test results. This year when the state system rolled out, some of CPS' top-rated schools were marked among the states' lowest performers.⁴⁰ CPS officials served as advisers to the state as they created the new system, but there are no current plans to align the SQRP with the state or adopt the state test as an SQRP measure.⁴¹



Family and Community Information

The SQRP was not originally designed with families in mind, but as CPS has introduced more public charter school and intra-district school choice options for families, the district has increasingly recognized the need for transparent, shared information across schools. CPS' online school profiles stand out for readability and clear design choices meant to address families' priorities.⁴² The overall school rating is at the top of the profile. Information about the size of the school, leadership, programmatic offerings, and transportation is also accessible. If families choose to dive deeper, growth is at the top of the school progress report, in line with the weight it has in the system.

Eight language translations are integrated into CPS' school progress reports, so that parents reading in a language other than English see the same information. CPS also offers information about the SQRP in parent-friendly formats, such as an explainer video in English and Spanish. Many key terms for metrics have definitions and links to more resources available with a click in the school progress report.

There are some places where family-friendly communication falls short. CPS schools are graded on a five-point scale, but the labels for that scale are not 1-5. Instead, they are 1+, 1, 2+, 2, 3. In other places on the school progress report, a five-point scale has different meanings, such as Far Above Average, Above Average, Average, Below Average, or Far Below Average in the category of student growth.⁴³ The proliferation of scales and rating meanings within the SQRP could make the system confusing for a non-specialized audience.

DC Public Charter School Board

Performance Management Framework

Schools and Enrollment

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) is the public charter school authorizer for the District of Columbia. The members of the board are nominated by D.C.'s mayor and approved by the D.C. City Council. DC PCSB authorizes 123 public charter schools enrolling 43,000 students, just under half of the district's total public school enrollment. D.C.'s charter sector is somewhat unique in that it includes 3- and 4-year-old preschool students as well as adult students. The Performance Management Framework (PMF) applies to all D.C. public charter schools.

SPF Origins

Prior to the PMF, DC PCSB evaluated each charter school on the different, individual goals captured in its charter. The board sought a more transparent, consistent way to measure and manage performance across the sector, identify high- and low-performing schools, and encourage all schools to improve student outcomes.

Years Operational

DC PCSB first piloted the PMF internally in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years; in 2010-11 DC PCSB worked to revise components of the system and released results in fall 2011 with data collected in the previous year.⁴⁴ Adult, alternative, and early childhood frameworks came later.

Purpose DC PCSB uses the PMF as a tool to set consistent performance standards, and communicate school performance to schools and families. The board uses the PMF results as a factor in charter expansion, renewal, or closure decisions.⁴⁵ Families can use individual school reports to find out how their school is performing or guide school selection.⁴⁶

Communication PMF results are available to the public as static school quality reports on the DC PCSB website and in small on-the-go guides.⁴⁷

Metrics, Weights, and Ratings The PMF assigns schools a rating based on a three-tiered system. The PMF uses different metrics depending upon the grade levels a school serves. Metrics emphasize student growth and achievement on state tests, and key “gateway” measures that correlate to longer-term outcomes for students, such as third-grade reading and ninth-grade credit accumulation. Public charter schools in D.C. have a variety of grade configurations, and accordingly, there are eight grade configurations under the PreK-8 PMF. There are also specialized PMFs for schools serving early learners (without students in grades 3 and 4), adult learners, and alternative schools.

Each metric is worth a different number of potential points on a 100-point scale. Each metric has a floor and a target. The floor is the minimum value for a metric that will earn any points for a school. The target is the maximum value for the metric, which will earn the school full points. Schools between the floor and the target will earn incrementally more points. Performance above the target does not earn any additional points. Floors and targets are adjusted biannually for some metrics, while others are static. Schools are then identified as Tier 1 (65-100 points), Tier 2 (35-64 points), or Tier 3 (0-34 points).⁴⁸

Elementary/Middle Schools (Without PreK Grades)		High Schools	
Metric	Weight	Metric	Weight
Student progress (median growth percentile – ELA and math)	40%	Student progress (median growth percentile – ELA and Math)	15%
Student achievement (proficiency)	30%	Student achievement (proficiency)	20%
Gateway (proficiency on 3rd-grade reading and 8th-grade math)	10%	Gateway (9th-grade on track, 4- or 5-year graduation rate, PSAT/SAT proficiency, college acceptance rate, AP/IB passage rate, rate of students earning college credit)	42.5%
School environment (attendance and reenrollment)	20%	School environment (attendance and reenrollment)	22.5%



System Management and Accountability

The PMF was created primarily as a consistent, transparent tool for authorizer decision-making. PMF Tiers may encourage expansion, or trigger a high-stakes review process that leads to closure ahead of regular charter renewal timelines. Tier 1 schools are encouraged to expand and replicate. Tier 2 schools may be subject to closer monitoring and review.⁴⁹ Schools with Tier 3 ratings may be subject to accelerated charter revocation (closure) based on the results of a more in-depth, high-stakes review. Schools scoring in Tier 3 for multiple years in a row, schools earning 0-20 points on the PMF scale, or schools in Tier 3 that appear to be declining in performance from one year to the next are at higher risk of charter revocation.

PMF tiers are not the only factor that could put a charter school at risk of closure, which complicates the relationship between the PMF and consequences for schools. Schools are held to the terms and goals of their individual charters, on a five-year review cycle. At the encouragement of the PCSB, many schools have adopted the PMF as a central part of their charter goals, while other schools have unique, individual charter goals that do not link to the PMF. Schools have the option to adopt the PMF as part of their charter goals and maintain additional goals that reflect their unique mission.

One part of the high-stakes review process is a Qualitative Site Review (QSR). The QSR includes meetings with school leaders, unannounced school visits focused on classroom observation, and reviews of school board meetings and parent interactions.⁵⁰ A QSR is part of periodic charter renewal procedures, but if a school earns Tier 3 status on the PMF, a QSR will take place the following school year. QSR results, PMF data, and other qualitative and quantitative data on school performance and operations are all part of a charter review and renewal process.

The PMF emphasizes academic outcomes and growth, which make up approximately 80% of the elementary/middle and high school PMFs. Annual growth and outcomes in key “gateway” grades and subjects such as third-grade reading are more heavily weighted. Recent analysis from DC PCSB has found that these measures are highly correlated with school demographics and thus are not the best measures of school quality.⁵¹ As a result, DC PCSB is planning to either phase out these “gateway” measures, or determine a way to improve them.

Because many students and families choose to enroll in a charter school rather than a neighborhood school or another option, the PMF uses reenrollment as a proxy measure for student and family satisfaction. Attendance is another measure of student and family engagement, and students’ opportunity to learn. In line with its goals as an authorizer (instead of a school district central office), DC PCSB intentionally does not include measures of school culture or environment beyond reenrollment rates and attendance, because it sees its role and authority as focused on outcomes.

The PMF model is more complicated for specialized schools. The PMF goes further than some other SPFs to recognize programmatic differences among schools by creating specialized performance frameworks for schools serving younger students, adults, and/or other specialized populations. Since the debut of early childhood, adult, and alternative PMFs, DC PCSB has debated ways to assess and tier these schools in comparable ways to schools serving students in grades 3-12, especially because outcomes metrics for younger and older students are often less standardized, and DC PCSB does not have the authority to mandate additional assessments beyond those required by law without schools' consent (currently, the District of Columbia requires tests in grades 3-8 and once in high school).

Some advocates and some charter school leaders say the PMF results correlate too closely with school demographics, and disadvantage schools serving high numbers of at-risk students.⁵² None of the metrics in the PMF is disaggregated by student subgroup. The PMF includes and places substantial weight on median growth percentile, which is less closely correlated to race, ethnicity, and income than overall achievement measures like proficiency. But it includes proficiency and other metrics that may tip the balance away from measuring schools' impact on their students. To correct this issue, the PMF could do more to control for student population and adapt to schools' differing models and missions, but this could also negatively impact the consistency and comparability of the PMF ratings for the authorizer's purposes.



School Continuous Improvement

As mentioned earlier, DC PCSB does not see the PMF as a tool for school continuous improvement, but it does encourage schools to use it as a part of their official charter goals around student outcomes. Schools can choose to align their goals, action plans, and management decisions to the PMF, or hold it at arm's length. To the extent that not focusing on the PMF metrics results in poor performance on those metrics, doing so may negatively affect their chances of expansion or charter renewal. Most of the actions around the PMF are aimed at the lowest-performing Tier 3 schools and some low-performing Tier 2 schools, while Tier 1 and higher-level Tier 2 schools receive fewer on-site visits and may apply for expansion.

The overall number of PMF metrics and their weights are relatively straightforward. The method for schools to earn points in the system based on each metric is somewhat more complicated, but it provides context against which school leaders can benchmark their performance.⁵³ Each metric has a floor and a target. The floor is the minimum value for a metric that will earn any points for a school. The target is the maximum value for the metric that will earn the school full points. Schools between the floor and the target will earn incrementally more points. Performance above the target does not earn any additional points. For example, the floor for median growth percentile in grades 4-8 math is 30, and the target is 70. This metric is worth 20 possible points. Schools start earning points at 30, and points earned rise between 30 and 70. DC PCSB chose this method because it allows them to combine metrics measured on different scales and check scoring ranges against the distribution of school performance.

While some floors and targets remain static, DC PCSB recalculates many floors and targets on a biannual basis, which includes data analysis, research, and stakeholder engagement. This was previously an annual process, but the frequent resetting meant that schools did not always have a clear sense of how their goals for the year ahead would translate on the PMF.⁵⁴

DC PCSB uses a “task force” structure to engage school leaders in PMF design decisions. Task forces informed the development of specialized PMFs, including the early childhood PMF and the adult education PMF. Today, the DC PCSB continues to convene regular task force meetings to engage school leaders. Any affected school leader may attend, discuss, and vote on proposed changes to the PMF for that group of schools. Agendas, meeting notes, and voting results are all publicly posted.⁵⁵ Ultimately these task forces are advisory bodies, but feedback from schools is taken seriously in the design process. This lesson was hard-earned. One of the earliest iterations of the PMF was created without much input and engagement from schools; that version was never implemented and heavily revised following school leader pushback, as the board realized it could not effectively incentivize school improvement without buy-in on the framework.⁵⁶



Family and Community Information

Families may look to the PMF tier ratings as an indicator of school quality, but the system is not primarily designed to communicate with parents and community members.

At a high level, the three-tiered system of the PMF is easy to understand, and is presented to families and community members in multiple lists and formats on the DC PCSB website. Families who want a deeper look at the data can consult individual school quality reports available on DC PCSB's website. School quality reports are only available in English, with an array of points, floors, targets, and percentages with minimal definitions and context. The school quality reports refer to the PMF technical guide for more information, an even denser document. PMF results are linked alongside qualitative site reviews and state equity reports, without explanation of the differences between these data sources. To provide an alternative view of PMF information, DC PCSB has created and released a parent guide in multiple languages that highlights the tier and other relevant information about each school to assist families in the school choice process. Additionally, a high-level PMF overview document, with an explanation of the tiers, metrics, and purpose behind the PMF, is available on the DC PCSB website.⁵⁷

Other data sources for information on D.C. schools are meant to be more parent-friendly. DC PCSB played a lead role in the creation of MySchoolDC, the district's unified enrollment system for families to compare and find schools, but the PMF plays a minor role in school profiles on the site. PMF reports now have an out-of-the-way link at the bottom of a school's profile. New ESSA-aligned STAR ratings, which apply across charter and district schools, are prominently displayed in search results and at the top of each profile.⁵⁸ Families may also be confused by differences between the PCSB PMF Tiers and the new STAR ratings, which were created and implemented by the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education. It is possible that as STAR ratings become more established, the PMF will become less of a parent- and community-facing system.

New York City Department of Education, School Quality Reports

Schools and Enrollment

The New York City (NYC) public school system is the nation's largest school district, enrolling over 1.1 million students in 1,800 schools.⁵⁹ NYC school quality reports are controlled by the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE), and apply to all schools in the system, including charter schools authorized by the district, the state, and the State University of New York. NYC is a mayorally controlled school district, and the mayor appoints a chancellor.

SPF Origins

From 2007 to 2013 NYC had a local SPF created by former Mayor Mike Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein. This framework assigned an A to F overall grade to each school. Beginning in 2014, changes to the system brought together school results and progress data with results from on-site quality reviews, increased the weight of student survey results, eliminated overall grades, and introduced a family-friendly version of the report.

Years Operational

Since 2014 in its current form.

Purpose The primary purpose of the NYC School Quality Reports currently is to provide school leaders and district superintendents with consistent data about student and school performance to drive school improvement.⁶⁰ In recent years, the school quality reports were used to identify schools in need of targeted support for the renewal schools turnaround program, but the department announced the end of the program in 2019.⁶¹ As the system has evolved, parents and families have become another audience for the school quality reports.

Communication The NYC DOE publishes three online school quality reports:⁶²

- School Quality Snapshot: shorter report designed for families and the general public that highlights key aspects of school performance
- School Quality Guide: detailed report that is designed for school leaders to identify areas for school improvement
- School Quality Dashboard: multiyear, detailed school data that is designed to be densely packed so that multiple years of data can be viewed on one page

Metrics, Weights, and Ratings NYC School Quality Reports do not have summative ratings for schools. They rate schools on a four-point scale of Excellent to Needs Improvement on seven elements. These elements correspond to the NYC DOE’s “Framework for Great Schools,” which was adopted at the same time the quality reports shifted.⁶³ There are a large number of metrics in NYC’s system. For example, there are 20 metrics that go into a student achievement rating for an elementary school. Metrics vary by grade level, including early childhood, elementary/middle school, and high school iterations. The primary student achievement data sources for elementary/middle school ratings are growth and performance on state tests, including gap closure. Metrics for high school student achievement include graduation, college and career readiness, progress toward graduation, performance on state end-of-course exams, and closing graduation achievement gaps. Additional qualitative ratings are based on periodic structured on-site quality reviews and annual school survey results.⁶⁴ Because of the volume and variation in metrics, individual metrics contribute to the overall rating in each element category in different ways.

Element	Description and Source of Rating
Student Achievement	This rating looks at students' performance and growth in reading, math, and high school end-of-course exams, including gap closure, as well as graduation rates, graduation gaps, college and career readiness, and postsecondary enrollment.
Rigorous Instruction	This rating looks at how well curriculum and instruction are designed to engage students and foster critical thinking skills, and are aligned with state standards. This rating combines results from the Quality Review and NYC School Survey.
Collaborative Teachers	This rating looks at how well teachers participate in opportunities to develop, grow, and contribute to the continuous improvement of the school community. This section rating combines results from the Quality Review and NYC School Survey.
Supportive Environment	This rating looks at how well the school establishes a culture where students feel safe, challenged to grow, and supported to meet high expectations. This rating takes into account Quality Review, the NYC School Survey, and moving students with special needs to less restrictive environments, as well as chronic absenteeism.
Effective School Leadership	This rating looks at how well school leadership inspires the school community with a clear instructional vision and effectively distributes leadership to realize this vision. This rating combines results from the Quality Review and NYC School Survey.
Strong Family-Community Ties	This rating looks at how well the school forms effective partnerships with families and outside organizations to improve the school. This rating combines results from the Quality Review and NYC School Survey.
Trust	This rating looks at whether relationships between school leaders, teachers, students, and families are based on trust and respect. The rating is based on NYC School Survey responses.



System Management and Accountability

When the NYC DOE first created a local SPF in 2005 under the administration of Mayor Mike Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein, the SPF had a clear system accountability purpose. Schools were graded on an A to F scale, primarily based on state assessment results. Schools with low ratings were subject to increasing interventions, the most severe of which was closure. At the same time, a subset of schools was selected into an “Autonomy Zone,” where principals had more building-level autonomy as long as they met performance targets aligned to the SPF.⁶⁵

Beginning in 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio and his first Chancellor Carmen Fariña brought a much different perspective to the school quality reports, and made changes which they believed would offer greater depth of information about school quality. Schools no longer receive summative grades, and redesigned quality reports merge together academic achievement results like test scores and graduation with more qualitative results of student and teacher surveys and periodic on-site instructional quality reviews. On-site reviews existed prior to the SPF, but they had previously been handled separately from the school grades.⁶⁶

The data on the reports are detailed and disaggregated, and the sub-scores for each of the seven elements give leaders common information and a framework to differentiate schools. Academic achievement metrics are the most detailed and have the most emphasis in the framework. The six other elements within the framework draw mostly from just two data sources: school quality reviews, which are not conducted annually in every school, and student surveys. As a result, the reports likely do not provide a full and reliable picture of some of the more complex constructs the framework aims to measure, such as strong family-community ties.

At the moment it is unclear how the quality reports factor into system decisions such as closure, intervention, or improvement strategies. For example, school quality reports played a role in the selection of low-performing schools for the “Renewal Schools” program, a school turnaround effort that has since been disbanded. It is possible that NYC’s superintendents, who manage 46 subdistricts of schools within the NYC DOE,⁶⁷ use the reports differently in activities such as principal management or school oversight.



School Continuous Improvement

In their current form, NYC’s school quality reports primarily support school continuous improvement. When new reports were first released, district materials described the overall grades as “oversimplified and inaccurate,” and said new reports would “allow schools to identify and address specific strengths and weaknesses.”⁶⁸ The Framework for Great Schools, which underpins the design and metrics in the school quality reports, was inspired by research on essential elements of high-performing schools conducted by the Chicago Consortium on School Research (the 5Essentials survey, an element in Chicago’s SPF, came out of the same body of work).⁶⁹

School quality reports offer principals a large array of quantitative and qualitative data, and several ways in which to view and engage with the data.⁷⁰ For example, in the online school quality guides, academic achievement data is graphed against other schools in the system on the basis of performance and impact (growth). Academic achievement metrics are compared against demographically similar schools, the city average, and the district average. Principals can also compare their qualitative performance on survey and site visit measures against city and district averages, and look at performance trends over time. These reports are available publicly through the NYC DOE online “Infohub,” and are linked in each school site.

Data on the school quality reports are in-depth, comprehensive, and disaggregated, providing a wealth of data that a principal might find useful. But there could be greater differentiation between diagnostic indicators and outcomes than the Framework for Great Schools and reports provide. Principals (and other district staff) must decide how to prioritize and use the data they see in the quality reports for each school. Additional resources on “Applying the Framework for Great Schools” aim to help school leaders navigate the complexity of the framework, and translate it into action plans for their school.⁷¹ This involves deep study of the elements of the framework, a needs assessment and goal-setting process, and ongoing cycles of planning, implementation, and evaluation aligned to the framework.

Although the framework is meant to inform continuous improvement, most metrics are available annually, which limits the time around which schools can take action. Some metrics, such as the results of on-site reviews, are assessed on a multiyear basis, which does not allow for timely feedback and improvement.



Family and Community Information

NYC has made progress in communicating its new SPF to parents, but there is still a long way to go. School quality reports are now available online, in translatable, dynamic, and cellphone-friendly formats, which is a step forward from PDF reports in the past. On the parent- and community-facing website schools.nyc.gov, quality reports are described as “an overall picture of quality for my school.” Staff from the school quality team have used focus groups of parents to inform redesign of the reports and make them more accessible.

But even the most simplified version of the reports is complex. There are eight tabs of information, separate quality reports for PreK grades and other grade levels in the same school, and no explanation of how individual metrics contribute to the ratings schools receive in each subarea. Indications of whether a school is improving or declining in performance is available in a different report that is less parent friendly.

Other information parents may want, such as school hours, transit, etc., are in the NYC DOE’s school finder, schools.nyc.gov/find-a-school, which links to the school quality guide. However, parents going to the NYC DOE website looking for school enrollment information would not see any links to the school quality reports or snapshots, which are housed in a different part of the website and not referenced in the enrollment information.⁷²

New Orleans

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) School Performance Scores

Schools and Enrollment

Approximately 49,000 students attend 85 public schools in New Orleans.⁷³ Nearly all of these schools are public charter schools, making New Orleans unique in the nation. Schools in New Orleans are overseen by the Orleans Parish School Board, and the district as a whole is now known as NOLA Public Schools.

SPF Origins

From 2005-2017, the state-run Recovery School District (RSD) authorized and operated most schools in New Orleans in the period of time following Hurricane Katrina. During that time, the state rating system played a critical local role in evaluating school performance, and the state school performance scores operated much like a local SPF. Control over schools transitioned back to the locally elected school board beginning in 2017, but NOLA Public Schools continues to use the state performance scores and grades as a key piece of its school accountability approach.⁷⁴

Years Operational

Louisiana has issued school performance scores since 1999; letter grades began in 2011. Recent major revisions occurred in 2013 and 2018, with the passage of ESSA.

Purpose School performance scores are part of Louisiana’s plan to identify and intervene in low-performing schools under ESSA.⁷⁵ All traditional public schools, charter schools, and publicly funded early learning providers receive ratings. However, state-level school performance scores predate ESSA. Scores are used to communicate school performance to school leaders and incentivize changes in behavior that improve student outcomes,⁷⁶ communicate school performance with families and the public,⁷⁷ and inform local decisions. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), which oversees NOLA Public Schools, uses school performance scores as a key factor in the charter school oversight and renewal processes.

Communication School performance scores are reported and shared with the public through the Louisiana School Finder interactive website.⁷⁸ The Louisiana School Finder also provides program data and information about subgroup performance, the teacher workforce, and school discipline and attendance, but these data are not factored into a school’s performance score. LDOE and NOLA Public Schools also offer detailed, downloadable tables of school performance scores on their respective websites. Schools rated D or F by the state receive more intensive annual monitoring, and F schools are not eligible for a charter renewal. Schools with higher letter grades are eligible for extended charter terms of up to 10 years before another renewal cycle.⁷⁹

Metrics, Weights, and Ratings Louisiana’s rating system has very few metrics compared to other systems in this report, and solely assesses student outcomes without additional school quality or environment measures. This is intentional, to align with the states’ goals and emphasis on meeting high standards. Schools accumulate points based on student academic performance on each metric in the system. Schools earn a score and a letter grade equivalent for each key component of the school’s performance rating. Points are weighted and combined to determine a school’s overall school performance score and A-F letter grade.

The state chose to use an assessment performance index, which includes all students’ scores, rather than a simple proficiency or mastery rate. The index credits schools for student improvement across achievement levels, not just the overall percentage of students above the proficiency line.

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
Metric	Weight	Metric	Weight		Weight
State assessment performance (ELA, math, science, social studies), as measured by a performance index	75%	State assessment performance (ELA, math, science, social studies), as measured by a performance index	70%	Mastery of key skills (ELA, algebra, geometry, US history, biology) + ELA & math growth	25%
Student assessment progress	25%	Student assessment progress	25%	ACT/Workkeys	25%
		Credit accumulation	5%	4-year graduation rate	25%
				Strength of diploma index ⁸⁰	25%



System Management and Accountability

The Louisiana school performance scores support several system management and accountability purposes at the state and local level. According to Jill Zimmerman, director of accountability policy at the Louisiana State Department of Education, ratings “should accurately reflect the quality of schools and charter operators, so that districts can make decisions around school expansion, replication, closure, and renewal.”⁸¹ Within the state’s ESSA plan, schools receiving a D or F score for three consecutive years or that have graduation rates below 67% are identified for comprehensive intervention. The state’s accountability system incorporates other factors beyond the school performance scores, notably identification of targeted improvement schools based on subgroup achievement, and the possibility of state intervention via the Recovery School District. However, this analysis focuses narrowly on the SPF itself.

When the state-controlled Recovery School District oversaw most schools in New Orleans, it made decisions to open, expand, and close schools based on these scores. NOLA Public Schools continues to use state scores in a similar way — offering highly rated schools more growth potential, and intervening in low-rated schools. Schools with three consecutive D ratings may have their charter revoked; schools with F ratings are ineligible for charter renewal and may have their charter revoked early.

During the transition back to local control, NOLA Public Schools evaluated whether and how to use the state SPF. In community conversations, NOLA Public Schools leaders found that many community members understood the SPF results and found them credible. “Many stakeholders were already deeply familiar with and invested in the state letter grades,” said Dina Hasiotis, senior school support and improvement officer for OPSB/NOLA Public Schools, and retaining them created a sense of stability during a big governance transition.⁸² Using the state system gives the district less control over the data and metrics. For example, as the state changes its grading business rules this year, the local system may need to adjust. But, says Hasiotis, “the state has a lot of expertise and capacity when it comes to working with the data and ensuring rigor and reliability in the SPF,” and therefore NOLA Public Schools does not need to invest as much in building this capacity internally.

The Louisiana system is intentionally simple, with an A to F rating, elementary and middle schools focused primarily on state test performance across four subject areas, and a smaller weighting toward student growth. The addition of a student growth component in 2013 was an important development for the SPF. At the high school level there are four equally weighted categories: state test performance/growth, college entrance exams, graduation rates, and a strength of diploma index, which is based on the share of students graduating with additional credentials such as AP/IB credits or early college course completion. State leaders in Louisiana have decided that a relatively simple system with high standards for top scores is more likely to drive action from educators and from system leaders. An SPF at a state level also has different considerations than a local SPF — it must meet the requirements of federal law, and function across a wide variety of school and district contexts.

Among the five SPFs we examined, this is the only one weighting performance more heavily than growth. It also does not include any specific measures focused on student subgroup performance or achievement gaps, although the state does measure subgroup gaps in other aspects of its accountability system outside of the SPF. This design is intended to focus school leaders on clear goals that should motivate them to make changes in instructional programs where needed, but system leaders recognize that the scores themselves are not designed to provide a roadmap for what changes should be made. This focus on clear “goalposts” aligns with one of the Louisiana Department of Education’s guiding beliefs: “Louisiana has worked hard to raise expectations for students, and as a result, students are performing at higher levels than ever before.”⁸³

The system’s 25% growth measure reflects a compromise between state leaders, who perceive a growth measure as less motivating relative to state goals for proficiency for all students, and charter advocates, who sought a 50/50 growth/proficiency weight in the system.

In an SPF heavily weighted toward achievement, students’ incoming skills might drive scores. A system like this could disadvantage schools serving students who enter below grade level, and put schools at risk of closure based on their population rather than the quality of their instruction. At the state level, this risk is mitigated by using a performance index rather than a proficiency percentage. A performance index allows schools to improve their scores as students move closer to proficiency over time, encouraging a focus on students across the performance spectrum.

Additionally, NOLA Public Schools weighs growth more heavily in charter revocation and renewal decisions — a D or F rating initiates a process that involves more review, site visits, and data collection, and that may lead to revocation. Importantly, OPSB uses two years of school performance data when making charter revocation and renewal decisions to bring stability to the process. Because many New Orleans schools fall into the C or D categories in the state SPF, OPSB considers growth rates as a way to differentiate among the low-performing, but not F-rated schools. Within D-rated schools, OPSB breaks performance into quartiles based on growth metrics; D-rated schools in the top quartile for growth are treated differently than D-rated schools with low growth rates.



School Continuous Improvement

Louisiana’s school performance scores are not meant to diagnose schools’ challenges, and it does not measure any leading indicators or environmental measures of success. The state’s expectation is that schools use their scores to set goals and focus on rigorous and effective instruction. “We expect school leaders should focus on what the scores are measuring, which is primarily mastery, and work on getting their students there,” said Zimmerman.

Similarly, as an all-charter school district, NOLA Public Schools is focused on authorizer-level actions. System-wide continuous improvement is a district priority, but school improvement plans and day-to-day decisions are made and implemented by school operators. If schools appear to be on a downward trajectory in the SPF, or consistently score poorly, local district leaders will meet with the school leadership to discuss improvement plans and provide additional expertise in some cases. According to Hasiotis, “we are continuing to explore what our support function looks like as a nontraditional district.”

Louisiana also thinks about another user group for its SPF that other systems did not explicitly emphasize: educators. Zimmerman described communicating with educators as the state’s top priority for their system, particularly communicating the importance of rigorous instruction aligned to state standards. In this way, school performance scores may be operating as a different kind of school improvement tool that focuses on motivating classroom teachers more than principals.



Family and Community Information

The Louisiana Department of Education is heavily invested in communicating school data to parents. LouisianaSchools.com is a recently redesigned parent-facing website that allows parents to search for schools, see performance scores, access key programmatic information and deeper data, and make comparisons between schools. This same site also includes ratings and profiles for all publicly funded early childhood education programs. A review by the Data Quality Campaign describes Louisiana’s approach as a “one-stop shop.”⁸⁴

The parent-facing report card website includes data that goes beyond the scores, including subgroup data, teacher data, and discipline/attendance data. Many of these data elements are federally required under ESSA, but it is interesting that parents are shown a wider array of data than schools are graded on.

School performance scores are also integrated into EnrollNOLA, the unified enrollment system for New Orleans. School profiles on EnrollNOLA include the grade and performance score for each school, along with when it is up for renewal, and a link to the school’s profile on LouisianaSchools.com.

NOLA Public Schools publishes a parent guide with SPF grades and additional data, and a local school performance profile will soon be available to the public. This profile will include school environment and student experience information that the state SPF does not capture.

Even though New Orleans is one of the most parent-choice-centered school districts in the country, and parent-facing resources are exemplary in some ways, there is still progress to be made in communicating and translating school information for parents. For example, EdNavigator, a New Orleans-based organization that partners with businesses to guide parents through their school choices, has found deep demand for help interpreting information about schools as it relates to their child.

Denver Public Schools, School Performance Framework (SPF)

Schools and Enrollment

Over 92,000 students attend 207 schools in Denver, including district-managed schools, innovation schools, and charter schools authorized by DPS.

SPF Origins

The Denver SPF launched in 2008. The superintendent and school board intended to use the SPF results to measure and understand the performance of all schools in the district's portfolio consistently, including traditional, charter, and innovation schools. The SPF is not required by state law and is separate from the state ESSA system.

Years Operational

The Denver SPF has been in use since 2008.⁸⁵

Purpose

DPS uses its SPF to monitor school progress, support struggling schools, and hold schools and district leaders accountable for school performance. The SPF applies to all district-run schools, innovation schools (district-run schools with increased flexibility and autonomy), charter schools, and alternative schools. Additionally, the SPF is a tool that helps students and families understand how their school is performing, and families may use SPF ratings during the school choice process.⁸⁶

Communication

Each year, DPS releases new SPF ratings on its website in a static format. The district publishes a two-page version of the school rating called the School Summary Report, which includes a rating for each of the six categories in the SPF as well as a longer, more detailed report called the School Detail Report that explains the points earned on each metric in greater depth.⁸⁷ School profiles on DPS’ school finder also incorporate high-level results from the SPF.⁸⁸

Metrics, Weights, and Ratings

Denver uses a color-coded rating system to show how schools are performing. The points accumulation and rating assignment methodology is not clearly explained on the DPS website, and according to interviews with former district officials, methodology can change substantially year to year. Depending on available data, different schools within the same grade span have different possible point totals in each of the indicator subcategories, and in the total ratings. The percentage of points a school earns out of the points possible on each indicator determines a rating: Distinguished (blue), Meets Expectations (green), Accredited on Watch (yellow), Accredited on Priority Watch (orange), Accredited on Probation (red).

Schools are evaluated on the following indicators; metrics vary by grade level served, and some “bonus” points for specialized program offerings are possible:

Indicators
Student Progress — Growth (state assessments, early literacy assessments, English learner assessments)
Student Achievement — Status (state assessments)
Family and Student Engagement and Satisfaction (based on schools’ annual surveys)
High School Postsecondary Readiness — Status (graduation and remediation rates)
High School Postsecondary Readiness — Growth (improvement on graduation and remediation rates)
Academic Gaps (performance and growth of historically underserved student groups including English language learners, students with disabilities, students in poverty, students of color)



System Management and Accountability

The SPF was primarily designed to serve system management and accountability purposes. Schools rated highly in the SPF are rewarded financially with an additional \$100 per pupil. Schools that receive low ratings get additional monitoring and intervention, and may be at risk of restart. The SPF is considered as part of innovation school applications and renewals. Denver offers a common school performance framework that applies across all schools, including charter schools. For charter schools, performance on the SPF is a significant factor in charter renewal and expansion decisions. According to Jennifer Holladay, director of school development and support at DPS, “a large percentage of the district’s decision to renew a charter or close a school is based on the school’s performance on the SPF.”⁸⁹

Over the course of more than 10 years, the SPF has become closely enmeshed with many of DPS’ oversight and accountability processes. The inner workings and business rules of the Denver system are not publicly available, making it difficult to understand the relationship between ratings, school governance actions, metrics, and methods.

The SPF awards points to schools based on various metrics. The points are added to determine the school’s rating in one of five color categories: Blue (Distinguished), Green (Meets Expectations), Yellow (Accredited on Watch), Orange (Accredited on Priority Watch), and Red (Accredited on Probation). DPS officials use SPF performance and ratings to determine the level of central office support and intervention each school receives. DPS uses a Tiered Support Framework to target resources and assistance to struggling schools.

DPS sorts metrics into six indicator categories, with an emphasis on academic growth. Like many districts, Denver has adjusted and added metrics to its system over time, but some recent additions may have negatively impacted the reliability and credibility of the SPF for system management and accountability purposes. In 2017, DPS added a new metric measuring early literacy gains. This metric was in line with research around the importance of early literacy, but it was not fully aligned to the rigor or reliability of state assessments. That year, a record number of Denver schools earned the district’s top ratings: blue and green.⁹⁰ District

leaders publicly acknowledged that methods used to calculate school scores resulted in overstating literacy gains and inflated academic performance scores, but DPS did not issue corrected SPF data.⁹¹

The “academic gaps indicator” has also been the subject of recent controversy. This indicator, introduced in 2016, aims to shine a light on educational disparities by measuring how traditionally underserved students scored on tests compared to set benchmarks and how those results compare to students not identified as traditionally underserved. When DPS introduced gaps indicators, it implemented a new policy in which schools scoring poorly on this indicator could not earn the district’s top SPF scores. In response, teachers, parents, and community leaders have argued that the indicator is merely a measure of school demographics, and that it disadvantages schools with large populations of traditionally underserved students.⁹²



School Continuous Improvement

The SPF is not designed to serve as a day-to-day continuous improvement tool for schools, but the district does use the SPF to communicate priorities to school leaders through its metrics. As mentioned earlier, many school building leaders have a high degree of autonomy in Denver and this autonomy applies to the SPF as well. School leaders can use the data in the SPF to inform their day-to-day school planning and instruction, or not. Most of the actions tied to the SPF are aimed at schools with lower ratings in danger of closure or restart. Schools with higher ratings have less incentive to aim for continuous improvement, absent a desire for expansion.

One metric the district uses to drive continuous improvement, particularly among top-performing schools, is the “Academic Gaps” indicator. Schools that perform poorly on this indicator cannot receive the SPF’s top ratings. According to public advocacy organization A+ Colorado, in 2018, “20 schools that earned sufficient points overall to be Green had their rating lowered to Yellow because they did not meet expectations on the Academic Gaps indicator.”⁹³ By placing this extra emphasis on the achievement gap between student groups, DPS sends a clear message to school leaders that they should focus on closing gaps among student subgroups.

Differences between the state and district systems may create confusion among school leaders about which student groups to focus on and which student outcomes matter the most. The district excludes students who leave or join a school midyear from its performance data, because of high within-district student mobility. The state data includes all students who take the state test regardless of when they become a student at the school, while the district does not. As a result, the district and state publish different sets of school assessment performance. There are no current plans to align the SPF assessment metrics with the state.



Family and Community Information

The SPF was always intended to serve as an informational tool for families as well as district and school leaders. Changes over time have helped bring the SPF closer to this goal. Early advocacy from parent groups led the district to make significant changes to the data and ratings so families could understand them more easily, including the introduction of color-coded ratings that are core to the system today.

Since then, district leaders have made attempts to improve the readability and design of public-facing SPF information. For parents, the district provides a School Summary Report with information about the school's rating. The overall rating is at the top of the profile alongside trend data over time. For each of the six indicator categories in the SPF, DPS provides a color-coded sub-rating and a summary of the points earned in each category. The district places an additional emphasis on equity by including a breakdown of how each school performs for four historically underserved groups.

The SPF is available in a total of 10 languages, so that parents reading in a language other than English also have access to school quality information. DPS also offers information about the SPF in explainer videos.

As in other districts, district leaders in Denver struggle to balance parent priorities around school information and systemic use considerations. Denver parents have requested more information about school culture, diversity, and other environmental metrics. But adding these metrics may further complicate an already complicated system, and stray from the focus on student outcomes that defines DPS' accountability system for schools.

District leaders have additional work left to make the SPF more transparent to families and community leaders. DPS does not provide easily available public information about the methods used to translate data into school tiers or determine points earned on each indicator, and changes in the system over time. Recent controversies, like the destabilizing effect of adding the early literacy indicator, have only strengthened calls for the SPF to be more transparent about how scores are calculated, and why and how those calculations shift over time.

Endnotes

- 1 E. Larson and R. Larson, "Use Cases: What Every Project Manager Should Know" (presentation, PMI® Global Congress 2004–North America, Anaheim, CA) (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2004).
- 2 "ExcelinEd Identifies Key Trends in New Analysis of ESSA State Plans," ExcelinEd, December 1, 2017, <https://www.excelined.org/news/just-released-50-state-essa-plan-landscape-analysis/>.
- 3 "Types of School Choice," EdChoice, <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/>; Kevin Hesla, Jamison White, and Adam Gerstenfeld, "A Growing Movement: America's Largest Charter Public School Communities," thirteenth edition, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, January 2019, https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-03/rd1_napcs_enrollment_share_report%2003112019.pdf.
- 4 Lynne Graziano, Jason Weeby, Tanya Paperny, and Sara Mead, "Eight Cities," Bellwether Education Partners, October 2018, <https://www.eightcities.org/blog/introduction>.
- 5 Sarah Yatsko et al., "Apples to Apples: Common School Performance Frameworks as a Tool for Choice and Accountability," CRPE, October 2016, <https://www.crpe.org/publications/common-school-performance-frameworks>; "Core Performance Framework and Guidance," National Association of Charter School Authorizers, March 2013, <https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CorePerformanceFrameworkAndGuidance.pdf>.
- 6 E.g., Julie Marsh, John Pane, and Laura Hamilton, "Making Sense of Data-Driven Decision Making in Education," RAND, 2006, https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP170.html; Brian Gill, Brandon Coffee-Borden, and Kristin Hallgren, "A Conceptual Framework for Data-Driven Decision Making," *Mathematica*, 2014, <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/a-conceptual-framework-for-data-driven-decision-making>.
- 7 E.g., "Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making," IES What Works Clearinghouse, 2009, p. 45, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/dddm_pg_092909.pdf#page=45; Council of the Great City Schools, "School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools," 2015, <https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/SIG%20Report%202015.pdf>; Marisa de la Torre et al., "Turning Around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago," UChicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2013, <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/Turnaround%20Report%20-%20Long%20Version%20FINAL.pdf>.
- 8 Yatsko et al., "Apples to Apples: Common School Performance Frameworks as a Tool for Choice and Accountability," <https://www.crpe.org/publications/common-school-performance-frameworks>.
- 9 Graziano, Weeby, Paperny, and Mead, "Eight Cities," Bellwether Education Partners, <https://www.eightcities.org/>.
- 10 Martin Carnoy and Susanna Loeb, "Does External Accountability Affect Student Outcomes? A Cross-State Analysis," in R. Elmore and S. Fuhrman, eds., *Redesigning Accountability Systems* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004), <https://cepa.stanford.edu/content/does-external-accountability-affect-student-outcomes-cross-state-analysis>.
- 11 Eric Hanushek and Margaret Raymond, "School Accountability and Student Performance," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Regional Economic Development 2, no. 1 (2006): pp. 51–61, <http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%2BRaymond%202006%20RegEconDevelopment%202%28%29.pdf>.
- 12 Thomas Ahn and Jacob Vigdor, "The Impact of No Child Left Behind's Accountability Sanctions on School Performance: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from North Carolina," NBER Working Paper No. 20511, September 2014, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20511>.
- 13 Steven Glazerman, "Shopping for Schools: Mapping Choice Architecture in the Education Marketplace," working paper 59 (Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, December 2017), <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/shopping-for-schools-mapping-choice-architecture-in-the-education-marketplace>; David Houston and Jeffrey Henig, "The Effects of Student Growth Data on School District Choice," EdWorkingPaper: 19–87, Annenberg Institute at Brown University, June 2019, <http://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai19-87>.
- 14 Interviews: Bibb Hubbard, Learning Heroes, March 2019; Tim Daly and Ariela Rozman, EdNavigator, March 2019; Paige Kowalski, Data Quality Campaign, April 2019; Colleen Dippel, Families Empowered, March 2019.
- 15 Graziano, Weeby, Paperny, and Mead, "Eight Cities," Bellwether Education Partners, <https://www.eightcities.org/blog/neworleans-louisiana>.

- 16 Interview, Tim Daly and Ariela Rozman, March 2019.
- 17 “Show Me the Data,” Data Quality Campaign, 2019, <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata/>.
- 18 Jacki Ball, Erica Felker, and Sarah Gross, “What Makes a Good ESSA Report Card?,” webinar, <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/Advocacy/lh-and-national-pta-what-makes-a-good-essa-report-card-webinar>.
- 19 Ball, Felker, and Gross, “What Makes a Good ESSA Report Card?,” <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/Advocacy/lh-and-national-pta-what-makes-a-good-essa-report-card-webinar>; Interviews: Daly and Rozman; Dippel.
- 20 Larson and Larson, 2004; “Conduct Research,” Design Methods for Education Policy, Bellwether Education Partners, 2018, <https://designforedpolicy.org/conduct-research>.
- 21 Adeshina Emmanuel, “Coming Soon: Not One, But Two Ratings for Every Chicago School,” Chalkbeat, October 19, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/chicago/2018/10/19/illinois-school-ratings/>; Interview: Jeff Broom and Bridget Lee, Chicago Public Schools, April 2019.
- 22 “Find a School,” Chicago Public Schools, https://cps.edu/Schools/Find_a_school/Pages/findaschool.aspx.
- 23 Interview: Vivian Lee, Kids First Chicago, May 2019.
- 24 Adeshina Emmanuel and Catherine Henderson, “Chicago School Board Approves New School Ratings Scale Despite Complaints and Confusion,” Chalkbeat, June 26, 2019, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/chicago/2019/06/26/sqrp-vote/>.
- 25 Email: Ericka Burns, Denver Public Schools, May 31, 2019.
- 26 Interview: Jennifer Holladay and Ericka Burns, Denver Public Schools, May 2019.
- 27 “Show Me the Data,” DQC, <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata/>.
- 28 For more information on best practices in user-centered design processes, see: Jason Weeby, “Creating More Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Education Policies with Human-Centered Design,” Bellwether Education Partners, February 27, 2018, <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/creating-more-effective-efficient-and-equitable-education-policies-human-centered-design>.
- 29 Email: Jill Zimmerman, Louisiana Public Schools, June 6, 2019.
- 30 “CPS Stats and Facts,” Chicago Public Schools, 2018-19, https://cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats_and_facts.aspx.
- 31 “School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Handbook,” Chicago Public Schools, October 19, 2018, https://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook_SY18-19.pdf.
- 32 Sarah Yatsko et al., “Apples to Apples: Common School Performance Frameworks as a Tool for Choice and Accountability,” CRPE, October 2016, <https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/cspf-report-full.pdf>.
- 33 “School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Handbook,” Chicago Public Schools, https://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook_SY18-19.pdf.
- 34 “School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Overview,” Chicago Public Schools, https://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRP_Overview.pdf.
- 35 “School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Handbook,” Chicago Public Schools, p. 16, https://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook_SY18-19.pdf.
- 36 “School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Handbook,” Chicago Public Schools, p. 16, https://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook_SY18-19.pdf.
- 37 CPS interview.
- 38 “Five-Year Vision, 2019–2024,” Chicago Public Schools, https://cps.edu/About_CPS/vision/Documents/Vision19_Booklet_English.pdf.
- 39 Lauren FitzPatrick, “Elementary Students Still Will ‘Double Test’ as CPS Keeps NWEA,” Chicago Sun-Times, April 3, 2017, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/elementary-students-still-will-double-test-as-cps-keeps-nwea/>.
- 40 Editorial board, “How’s Your School Doing? Depends on Which Report Card You Read,” Chicago Tribune, October 31, 2018, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/editorials/ct-edit-cps-illinois-student-ratings-20181031-story.html>.

- 41 Interview: Jeff Broom and Bridget Lee, Chicago Public Schools, April 2019.
- 42 "Find a School," Chicago Public Schools, https://cps.edu/Schools/Find_a_school/Pages/findaschool.aspx.
- 43 In this case, a parent might understandably assume that "average" refers to the CPS average; in fact it refers to the NWEA MAP national norm for an average school's growth or achievement.
- 44 "Public Charter School Board Launches New Performance Framework to Hold Schools Much More Accountable for Success," DC Public Charter School Board, September 1, 2009, <https://www.dcpccb.org/public-charter-school-board-launches-new-performance-framework-hold-schools-much-more-accountable>; "Public Charter School Board Delays Implementation of Charter School Evaluation," DC PCSB, October 19, 2010, <https://www.dcpccb.org/public-charter-school-board-delays-implementation-charter-school-evaluation>.
- 45 "2018–19 Performance Management Framework: Policy and Technical Guide," DC PCSB, November 2018, <https://dcpccb.egnyte.com/dl/sK7g1OPLmH/>.
- 46 "Performance Management Framework (PMF)," DC PCSB, <https://www.dcpccb.org/performance-management-framework-pmf>.
- 47 "School Quality Report," DC PCSB, <https://www.dcpccb.org/schoolquality>.
- 48 Schools with a Tier 1 status earn at least 65% of the possible points, Tier 2 earn 35% to 64.9% of the possible points, Tier 3 earn less than 35% of the possible points. Additional details on the floors and targets of each metric are in the DC PMF Technical Guide, p. 25 and 64.
- 49 "2018–19 Performance Management Framework: Policy and Technical Guide," DC PCSB, <https://dcpccb.egnyte.com/dl/sK7g1OPLmH/>.
- 50 "Qualitative Site Reviews," DC PCSB, <https://www.dcpccb.org/report/qualitative-school-reviews>.
- 51 Interview: Erin Kupferberg, DC PCSB, April 2019.
- 52 Interview: Josh Boots, EmpowerK12, May 2019.
- 53 "2018–19 Performance Management Framework: Policy and Technical Guide," DC PCSB, <https://dcpccb.egnyte.com/dl/sK7g1OPLmH/>.
- 54 Interview: Erin Kupferberg, DC PCSB, April 2019.
- 55 "High School Performance Management Framework (PMF) Task Force," DC PCSB, <https://www.dcpccb.org/high-school-performance-management-framework-pmf-task-force>.
- 56 Interview: Sara Mead, Bellwether Education Partners, former PCSB board member, April 2019.
- 57 "The Performance Management Framework Overview," DC PCSB, <http://www.dcpccb.org/sites/default/files/The%20Performance%20Management%20Framework%20Overview%20for%20web%202.12.16.pdf>.
- 58 "BASIS DC PCS," My School DC, <https://www.myschooldc.org/schools/profile/138/>.
- 59 "DOE Data at a Glance," New York City Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>.
- 60 Note that district superintendents in NYC oversee schools in discreet geographic, grade level, or specialized subareas; 46 superintendents report to the NYC schools chancellor.
- 61 "New York City's Renewal School Program: Lessons in School Turnaround," NYC Department of Education, <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5750973/Renewalreport-25feb2019.pdf>.
- 62 "School Quality," NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/school-quality>.
- 63 "The Framework for Great Schools," NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/vision-and-mission/framework-for-great-schools>.
- 64 Note that charter schools do not receive on-site quality reviews. Instead, they receive visit reports from their authorizers that are linked to the school quality report. The frequency of quality reviews depends upon school performance.
- 65 Graziano, Weeby, Paperny, and Mead, "New York City, New York," in "Eight Cities," Bellwether Education Partners, <https://www.eightcities.org/blog/newyorkcity-newyork>.

- 66 “Chancellor Fariña Announces More Students Are Graduating College and Career Ready as Part of First Annual ‘School Quality’ Reports Release,” NYC Department of Education, November 10, 2014, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/news/announcements/contentdetails/2014/11/10/chancellor-fari%C3%B1a-announces-more-students-are-graduating-college-and-career-ready-as-part-of-first-annual-school-quality-reports-release>.
- 67 “Superintendents,” NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/leadership/superintendents>.
- 68 “Chancellor Fariña Announces More Students Are Graduating College and Career Ready as Part of First Annual ‘School Quality’ Reports Release,” NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/news/announcements/contentdetails/2014/11/10/chancellor-fari%C3%B1a-announces-more-students-are-graduating-college-and-career-ready-as-part-of-first-annual-school-quality-reports-release>.
- 69 “The Framework for Great Schools,” NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/vision-and-mission/framework-for-great-schools>.
- 70 “Chancellor Fariña Announces More Students Are Graduating College and Career Ready as Part of First Annual ‘School Quality’ Reports Release,” NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/news/announcements/contentdetails/2014/11/10/chancellor-fari%C3%B1a-announces-more-students-are-graduating-college-and-career-ready-as-part-of-first-annual-school-quality-reports-release>.
- 71 “Vision for School Improvement,” NYC Department of Education, <https://www.weteachnyc.org/approach/vision/>.
- 72 “High School,” NYC Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/high-school>.
- 73 “New Orleans by the Numbers,” New Schools for New Orleans, <http://www.newschoolsforneworleans.org/system-at-a-glance/>.
- 74 Orleans Parish School Board, “Charter School Accountability Framework,” May 18, 2018, <https://nolapublicschools.com/families/parents-resources/school-accountability>
- 75 “Louisiana,” in “An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans,” Bellwether Education Partners, https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_ESSA_PlanReview_LA_Final.pdf.
- 76 Interview with Louisiana Department of Education, April 9, 2019.
- 77 “School and Early Childhood Program Performance,” Louisiana Department of Education, <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/measuringresults/school-and-center-performance>.
- 78 “Louisiana School Finder,” Louisiana Schools, <http://louisianaschools.com/>.
- 79 Orleans Parish School Board, “Charter School Accountability Framework,” 2018
- 80 Based on the share of students graduating with additional credentials such as AP/IB credits or early college course completion.
- 81 Interview: Jill Zimmerman, Louisiana Public Schools, May 2019.
- 82 Interview: Dina Hasiotis, Orleans Parish School Board, May 2019.
- 83 “ESSA School Performance Score Updates,” presentation, Louisiana Believes, <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/louisiana-believes/essa-regional-accountability-meeting-presentation.pdf?sfvrsn=4>.
- 84 “The Most Useful Report Cards Prioritize Design and Language,” Data Quality Campaign, April 2019, <https://2pido73em67o3eytaq1cp8au-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DQC-Show-Me-the-Data-Design-Language.pdf>.
- 85 Yatsko et al., “Apples to Apples: Common School Performance Frameworks,” CRPE, October 2016, <https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/cspf-report-full.pdf>.
- 86 “School Performance Framework,” Denver Public Schools, <http://spf.dpsk12.org/en/what-are-spf-ratings-used-for/>.
- 87 “Compare Districtwide Results,” Denver Public Schools, <http://spf.dpsk12.org/en/spf-ratings/>.
- 88 “School Finder,” Denver Public Schools, <https://dps.schoolmint.net/school-finder/home>.
- 89 Interview: Jennifer Holladay and Ericka Burns, Denver Public Schools, May 2019.

- 90 Melanie Asmar, "Record Number of Denver Schools Earn Top Ratings on Latest District Quality Scale," Chalkbeat, October 12, 2017, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2017/10/12/record-number-of-denver-schools-earn-top-ratings-on-latest-district-quality-scale/>.
- 91 Melanie Asmar, "Civil Rights and Community Groups: Adjust Inflated Denver Elementary School Ratings," Chalkbeat, December 14, 2017, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2017/12/14/civil-rights-and-community-groups-correct-inflated-denver-elementary-school-ratings/>.
- 92 Melanie Asmar, "Why Denver's School Rating System Is Coming Under Fire on Multiple Fronts," Chalkbeat, December 4, 2017, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2017/12/04/why-denvers-school-rating-system-is-coming-under-fire-on-multiple-fronts/>.
- 93 Lisa Berdie, "Denver's 2018 SPF: Recognizing Our Gaps," A+ Colorado, October 18, 2018, <http://apluscolorado.org/blog/denvers-2018-spf-recognizing-our-gaps/>.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the many people who shared their time, knowledge, and expertise to inform this paper, including SPF experts, advocates for families and educational data transparency, and local leaders and stakeholders within the five systems we profile. Thank you for additional review support to Steve Lecholop of San Antonio ISD, Sam Olivieri of Entangled Solutions, and Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger of the Data Quality Campaign.

Thank you to the people connected directly to the five SPF systems with whom we worked to better understand their SPFs:

- Bridget Lee, Jeff Broom, Emily Boulton, and Sarah Dixon at Chicago Public Schools
- Erin Kupferberg at the DC Public Charter School Board
- Jennifer Holladay and Ericka Burns, Denver Public Schools
- Jill Zimmerman, Louisiana Department of Education, and Dina Hasiotis, NOLA Public Schools
- Members of the School Quality team and the Office of Policy and Evaluation, New York City Department of Education

The following organizations mentioned in this brief are or were clients of Bellwether Education Partners: the Louisiana Department of Education, the Data Quality Campaign, and the DC Public Charter School Board. A full list of former clients is available on our website at BellwetherEducation.org.

Additional thanks to our Bellwether colleagues Andy Rotherham, Sara Mead, Chad Aldeman, Ashley LiBetti, Taylor Bard, Tanya Paperny, and Jeremy Knight, each of whom went the extra mile to aid this work in various ways; to Super Copy Editors; and to Five Line Creative for graphic design.

Many people played a part in this work, but the conclusions and content of the paper are the responsibility of the authors alone, as are any errors of fact or omission.

About the Authors



Bonnie O'Keefe

Bonnie O'Keefe is an associate partner at Bellwether Education Partners. She can be reached at Bonnie.OKeefe@bellwethereducation.org.



Brandon Lewis

Brandon Lewis is an analyst at Bellwether Education Partners. He can be reached at Brandon.Lewis@bellwethereducation.org.



Jennifer O'Neal Schiess

Jennifer O'Neal Schiess is a partner at Bellwether Education Partners. She can be reached at Jennifer.Schiess@bellwethereducation.org.



Jason Weeby

Jason Weeby is a former senior fellow at Bellwether Education Partners.

About Bellwether Education Partners



Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. We do this by helping education organizations accelerate their impact and by working to improve policy and practice.

Bellwether envisions a world in which race, ethnicity, and income no longer predict opportunities for students, and the American education system affords all individuals the ability to determine their own path and lead a productive and fulfilling life.

© 2019 Bellwether Education Partners



This report carries a Creative Commons license, which permits noncommercial re-use of content when proper attribution is provided. This means you are free to copy, display and distribute this work, or include content from this report in derivative works, under the following conditions:



Attribution. You must clearly attribute the work to Bellwether Education Partners, and provide a link back to the publication at <http://bellwethereducation.org/>.



Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes without explicit prior permission from Bellwether Education Partners.



Share Alike. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.

For the full legal code of this Creative Commons license, please visit www.creativecommons.org. If you have any questions about citing or reusing Bellwether Education Partners content, please contact us.