



Reforms of the size and scale to which Race to the Top States have committed, require unprecedented planning, oversight and problem solving to implement. Although many factors influence the outcomes of these reform efforts, performance management is a key structural element in realizing *sustainable reforms* that are durable and adaptive, and persistently focused on improved student growth in the face of changing conditions.

The Reform Support Network (RSN) has prepared a series of four briefs to examine how Race to the Top States are pursuing performance management of their key education reforms. At the RSN's request, leaders from four States—Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Tennessee—agreed to describe early, promising work that embodies the basic elements of performance management. This brief—the fourth in the series—profiles how these States are ensuring that the State education agency (SEA), school districts and schools implementing reforms are accountable for results.

What is performance management?

Performance management is a systemic approach to ensure quality and progress toward organizational goals by aligning structures, processes and routines through a set of reinforcing activities that enable an agency to methodically and routinely monitor the connection between the work underway and the outcomes sought.

This brief addresses “accountability for results,” the fourth of four elements of performance management described in the *Sustainability Rubric*, created by the Reform Support Network to support SEAs endeavoring to improve their performance management practices.¹ The rubric offers a template through which SEAs can identify key elements of sustainability and assess strengths and weaknesses to address in their sustainability planning.

¹The rubric's three categories are system capacity, performance management, and context for sustaining reform. Within the category of performance management are four elements: clarity of outcomes and theory of action, alignment of resources, collection and use of data, and accountability for results.

What is accountability for results? It means making decisions to continue, improve or end practices based on data; implementing incentives tied to performance; and engaging and communicating results with internal and external stakeholders. Using the rubric, SEAs can gauge how well they are answering key questions related to clarifying expected outcomes for student improvement:

- Do the data on performance and implementation quality have real consequences for the SEA and the individuals and teams who work there?
- Do the data on performance and implementation quality have real consequences for local educational agencies and other partners who are accountable for this work?
- Do stakeholder groups and the public understand and support the implications of current performance for their work? Does the SEA hold itself accountable for receiving and implementing their feedback on performance?

States simultaneously engaged in many interconnected reforms have an interest in efficiency rooted in the intent to connect, streamline, simplify and ensure that the time and effort expended with limited resources are having the intended impact. In this way, the four elements of performance management work best when fit tightly together. Clarifying outcomes, reallocating resources and using data have greater impact when States also enact accountability measures to recognize and reward success and end work that fails to meet goals.

This brief will describe how the four States interviewed for this series of performance management briefs— Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Tennessee— are holding programs and people accountable for advancing reforms that improve student achievement and ending those that do not.

Delaware Bases Accountability on Performance Evaluation Data

The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) holds school districts accountable for progress on the State's Race to the Top reforms. "We're looking not only at

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what you are doing, what you said you would do, but is it moving the needle now for kids," explained Sarah Kerr, who until recently served as Delaware's chief performance officer.

Delaware's approach to accountability is based on the outcomes of statewide and district-specific performance measures. In part because Delaware grants school districts substantial flexibility in allocating resources, DDOE instituted data-driven **mid-year** and **end-of-year** (when student assessment results become available) performance evaluations. At the year-end evaluation, districts identify and analyze gaps between anticipated and actual performance. The district's superintendent, leadership team, one school board member and one union representative usually attend the year-end evaluation. "It's really their chance to be before us in this way, which is new, and there's value in that," said Susan Haberstroh, associate secretary, education supports and innovative practices.

DDOE is willing to enforce real consequences when school districts do not follow through on the commitments made. One school district had stated in its Race to the Top Success Plan that it would develop incentives to attract and retain highly effective teachers and leaders to serve in its high-needs schools. DDOE found, during its monitoring and performance evaluation, that the school district's progress toward this goal was inadequate. When the district subsequently indicated that it would not develop a plan to achieve this goal, DDOE decided to withhold part of the district's Race to the Top funding.

Despite the rigor of the State's approach to accountability, districts are beginning to see the accountability routine as supportive, Haberstroh

observed. “There’s an appreciation that the department is paying close attention,” she said. “We actually had one district come in and say they are going to use this kind of routine with their schools.”

Hawaii Employs Stock-Take Sessions and the AcFin for Accountability

Hawaii has made a concerted effort to employ its strategic plan as an accountability tool for the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE), its staff members and the complex areas and schools. Within the HIDOE, six assistant superintendents each take responsibility for one of the plan’s **six strategies**. The State Board of Education holds the assistant superintendents responsible for successful implementation of the plan and progress toward the goals, by reviewing at their quarterly meetings a scorecard that tracks implementation progress. The State superintendent holds “stock-take” sessions with assistant superintendents every other week to ensure regular and timely analysis of progress toward goals.

The deputy superintendent uses a similar process to take stock of progress in each of the State’s 15 complex areas,² meeting with the 15 complex area superintendents three times a year. Together, they compare the assessments of progress made by the area superintendents with data gathered by the HIDOE’s strategic data fellows, which include formative data they have gathered as well as end-of-year results. This collaborative analysis provides an accountability mechanism for area superintendents, who understand that they are accountable for their judgments about progress and will need evidence to back up their assessments.

Schools engage in an accountability process through their **Academic and Financial Plans**, known as AcFins, developed annually by schools and complex areas. Established by HIDOE, AcFin templates incorporate the goals from the Hawaii strategic plan. The State also populates the AcFin with strategies and outcomes

² Complex areas are administrative units managed by an area superintendent and composed of two to four high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools

outlined in the **strategic plan** that all schools are required to implement. The State then measures school progress against the implementation of the strategies and achievement of the goals and outcomes. HIDOE is currently considering how to integrate incentives for performance. In future years, Hawaii will provide rewards as part of this accountability process by giving “high fliers” greater flexibility in the way they establish strategies, goals and outcomes.

Massachusetts Employs Data and Stock-Takes to Drive Accountability

The commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) holds staff accountable for the implementation of priority reforms. ESE staff regularly produce data-rich memos for the commissioner that track the progress of each key project, and follow the delivery of the memos with a one to two-hour stock-take session with the commissioner. The memos and stock-takes ensure a regular flow of information to the commissioner regarding progress. “He doesn’t go two months without finding out something about our projects,” said Matthew Deninger, policy and planning manager for the delivery unit, which oversees ESE’s performance management. “He’s getting information on something almost every week.”

Frequent and rigorous scrutiny of projects allows for nimble responses to problems, especially when projects are not having their intended impact, Deninger observed. Through the status memos and stock-takes, Deninger recalled, ESE discovered that they were succeeding in providing supports to turn around a clear majority of their lowest performing elementary and high schools, but that their success did not extend to middle schools. ESE also knew from formal evaluations that the few middle schools that were having success had set up tiered systems of support for their students. With these two pieces of information in mind, and with the support of the districts, ESE established a Middle Grades Tiered Support program. ESE organized a group of proven partners with experience in turnaround (specifically,

social/emotional/health interventions and tiered instruction) to do a baseline study at each of the middle schools and then, based on the unique needs identified in the baseline studies, to provide on-the-ground assistance in implementing the Middle Grades Tiered Support program in a way that was specifically tailored to each school. As a result, more middle schools have adopted the Middle Grades Tiered Support, which has begun to positively influence student outcomes in these schools, according to Deninger.

Tennessee Holds District and State Initiatives Accountable for Results

Tennessee has sought to keep its Race to the Top-funded initiatives accountable for results by demonstrating that the State will recognize those that are performing well but will not hesitate to modify or end those that are not. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) recently examined the leading and lagging performance indicators of its First to the Top initiatives and discontinued some work based on that evidence, said Meghan Curran, the State's First to the Top director. For example, the State awarded grants with Race to the Top funds to four districts to launch residency programs to prepare teachers or principals. One of the four districts recently asked permission to reorganize its program. In reviewing the request, TDOE looked at teacher retention statistics and the results of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Survey. Holding the district accountable for its results, TDOE withheld the final year of funding for the residency program after it "assessed the limited evidence that was available for these metrics and determined that it was not compelling enough progress to feel confident that the program could reorganize in the last year and still demonstrate results," Curran said.

Similarly, TDOE is holding alternative certification programs accountable. Tennessee expanded its alternative teacher certification program with Race to the Top funds and included the program in a statewide report card, also developed with grant funds, which

made public measures of the effectiveness of Tennessee's teacher preparation programs. The results for the State's alternative certification program were mixed, according to Curran. While TDOE did not drop the alternative certification program altogether, the agency "is taking steps to study the structure and practices of the program, both in terms of recruitment and training," Curran reported, to determine next steps. TDOE held off from recruiting its next class of fellows, and is currently exploring whether to redesign the program or redirect funds toward higher performing initiatives.

Conclusion

This brief, the last in a series of four outlining the elements of performance management, has looked at the measures taken by Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Tennessee to ensure that the SEA, school districts and schools implementing reforms are accountable for results. Each State's ability to hold its programs at all levels accountable for reform springs from a commitment to all four elements of performance management: clarity of outcomes the State hopes to achieve and an articulated theory of action tied to its goals; alignment of the resources of people, time, technology and money to support priority reforms; and establishment of strong routines for collecting and analyzing data to evaluate progress and make mid-course corrections.

Briefs one, two and three in this series looked at the other elements of performance management—clarity of outcomes and theory of action, alignment of resources, and collection and use of data—through the experiences of Delaware, Hawaii, Tennessee and Massachusetts.

For Race to the Top States to produce sustainable improvement in student achievement, State education agencies and local educational agencies are making the commitment to improve student outcomes in ways that will live well beyond any single program or source of funding. In doing so, the education agency's

role is evolving from monitoring- and compliance-centric to include leadership in support of statewide goals for improved student outcomes.

Each State's ability to drive change depends on the capacity of its performance management system to guide its work and measure progress. Effective performance management requires commitment to all four elements. In order to accept responsibility

and accountability for results, schools, districts and individuals must have clarity about purposes and outcomes and the work needed to accomplish them, must have some autonomy to align resources in support of the work, and must have access to data about their performance and the time and space to analyze the data to make course corrections.

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