

States' Continued Commitment to Next-Generation Accountability Systems

Overview

In June 2011, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), on behalf of the states, committed to further states' proactive leadership in promoting college- and career-readiness for all students by supporting states to establish next-generation state accountability systems. The ultimate goal of these systems is to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education. Over the past four years, states have made significant progress in advancing accountability by creating new systems that better measure school and district performance. State leaders have moved away from the one-size-fits all approach mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to develop nuanced systems that are a more honest assessment of school and district performance. State, district, and school leaders have used the data collected through these new systems to better target supports and interventions to support struggling schools, districts and students.

Today, states face uncertainty on the future of NCLB. CCSSO and its member states are strongly urging Congress to reauthorize the outdated federal law to provide more stability and give states the additional flexibility they need to improve achievement for all kids. If Congress does not reauthorize NCLB this year, states recognize a new Administration will take office soon and could apply their own approach to NCLB and accountability. Regardless of this uncertainty at the federal level, state education leaders remain firmly committed to state accountability systems that support educators, parents and students by providing useful information that leads to improved outcomes for all students. As states continue to lead on this important issue, CCSSO, on behalf of the states, reaffirms our commitment to these underlying beliefs about accountability systems:

- Equity remains at the core of accountability with the primary goal of these systems being to identify opportunity and achievement gaps and work to close them.
- The information collected about schools and districts is only as good as how it is used; data used for purposes of accountability must be timely, actionable and accessible and must be shared in a meaningful way with those who are impacted, including educators, parents and students.
- Schools and districts that are struggling the most require the most significant support and interventions.
- States must continue to reflect on the measures used for school and district performance and the supports offered to schools and districts. All states should allow room for accountability systems to evolve as our understanding of what works effectively evolves.

In 2011, CCSSO, on behalf of the states, released a vision for accountability as laid out in nine accountability principles (the Principles). These Principles were intended to serve as the framework for advancing state accountability systems beyond the limitations of NCLB. At the time, 44 states and D.C. committed to using these Principles to inform the design and implementation of new accountability systems, which the vast majority of states have now accomplished. While our understanding of effective practices in accountability evolves, these Principles continue to serve as an important framework for our vision for accountability systems. States remain committed to these Principles and will continue to design and implement systems that align to this framework. In doing so, it is critical to strike the balance

between holding onto the fundamental purpose of accountability to ensure equity while allowing for flexibility in how we accomplish that goal.

The Principles start at the beginning, with a focus on setting goals, and move through the key considerations for a state in developing an accountability system, including the supports and interventions that can be provided to schools and districts. They are:

Next-Generation Accountability Principles

- **Alignment of performance goals to college- and career-ready standards.** The performance goals of each state’s accountability system will be aligned with college- and career-readiness standards, to promote continuous growth for every student toward that performance level and beyond. This means that each state’s accountability system must set annual performance benchmarks at levels that will ensure each student graduates from high school with both the rigorous content knowledge and high-order skills necessary for success in college and career. The benchmarks must reflect the commitment of continuous improvement for all schools and students to meet and exceed those expectations.
 - *State Example: North Dakota* Over the past four years, North Dakota has transitioned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards (the Common Core State Standards) to help to ensure its students are prepared for college and careers. This past year, the state moved to a new assessment, Smarter Balanced, aligned to those standards. North Dakota will now use data from its college- and career-ready assessment to set performance goals for its students and will use this more meaningful data to support schools and districts to prepare all students to meet these goals.
- **Annual determinations for each school and district.** Each system will make annual accountability determinations for all publicly funded schools and districts. The determinations must set a high bar for achievement and improvement for all students; make valid, reliable, and meaningful distinctions regarding the performance levels of schools and districts; and address both the current performance of the school or district and the extent to which that performance is improving.
 - *State Example: Wisconsin* Since 2011-12 Wisconsin has used a comprehensive accountability index to replace the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) system required under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This accountability index combines outcomes from four priority areas -- student achievement, student growth, closing gaps, and on-track to graduation and postsecondary readiness -- to provide a more comprehensive measurement of district and school progress toward college- and career-readiness. The index also incorporates target-based student engagement indicators which include test participation, absenteeism, and dropout rates. Based on this robust set of information, overall accountability scores classify schools in a five-level rating continuum: significantly exceeds expectations, exceeds expectations, meets expectations, meets few expectations, or fails to meet expectations. Results from this system inform state and local improvement planning and interventions.

- **Focus on student outcomes.** Initial accountability determinations will focus on student outcomes, including both status and growth toward college- and career-readiness, with students, subgroups, and/or schools performing below performance levels expected to make significant improvement toward being on track to college- and career-ready graduation. Initial accountability measures will include, but not be limited to, improved assessments in reading and math and accurate graduation rates. Accountability systems will also include measures based on each state’s goals and context, such as additional subjects beyond reading and math; additional college ready assessments and college credit accumulation; college entry, remediation, and persistence rates; career preparedness as measured by industry certifications and other measures; and reading proficiency in the early grades. States would have discretion to weigh measures and apply them conjunctively or on a compensatory basis, provided that the focus is on meaningful student outcomes.
 - **State Example: New Mexico** New Mexico’s accountability system includes measures of proficiency, as well as measures of growth, including a focus on growth for students in the lowest quartile. The state also goes beyond these traditional measures to incorporate other college- and career-readiness indicators. At the elementary school level, opportunity-to-learn indicators are incorporated, including attendance and classroom surveys. High schools receive credit when students participate in college entrance exams, and coursework leading to dual credit and vocational certification. Schools can also earn bonus points based on student and parent engagement. This range of factors helps to signal to educators the importance of each measure in preparing students for success after high school.
- **Continued Commitment to Disaggregation.** Each system will continue to support disaggregation of student data for accountability determinations and reporting (such as by race, ethnicity, poverty, disability, and limited English proficiency), to help identify and address significant achievement gaps and ensure that the needs of particular subgroups are not masked by aggregate student achievement. This includes particular attention to schools with the lowest performing subgroups and/or the greatest gaps in performance.
 - **State Example: Minnesota** Minnesota disaggregates and publicly reports performance data for all major subgroups of students and sets goals for improvement for every group. These targets are rigorous, and lower-performing student groups must progress at faster rates than their higher-performing counterparts in order to meet these goals. Performance toward meeting these goals is meaningfully incorporated into Minnesota’s accountability and recognition system. The use of disaggregated data allows the state to distinguish areas of need and the most applicable support. In addition, the Commissioner is committed to communicating clearly with district leaders about subgroup performance. She sends a letter and individual report to each district Superintendent in the state showing whether or not their district is on track toward the 2017 goal to reduce the achievement gap by 50 percent. The reports show district performance against the targets.

- **Reporting of timely, actionable and accessible data.** Data related to school and district performance will be reported in a manner that is timely, actionable and accessible—to improve teaching and learning and support policy improvements at all levels. This includes disaggregated reporting of student outcome data as well as available input data and data on returns on investment—to promote efficiency and effectiveness.

 - *State Example: Colorado* Colorado’s approach to education data is to report all available data in a way that makes the information transparent, understandable, accessible, and, above all, useful. The state is committed to public inquiry and transparent reporting and the notion that true accountability is public accountability. It has developed an interactive web-based portal, SchoolView.org, to provide unprecedented access to state education data. All of the performance data, achievement data, staff information, and school improvement plans are reported through this dynamic, interactive SchoolView system.

- **Deeper diagnostic reviews.** Student outcomes will be the cornerstone of accountability. Moreover, each accountability system will include, as appropriate, deeper analysis and diagnostic reviews of school and district performance, particularly for low-performing schools, to create a tighter link between initial accountability determinations and appropriate supports and interventions. States may classify schools and local educational agencies not simply on the length of underperformance, as under NCLB, but on both student outcomes and deeper analysis of the data, conditions, plans, and capacities in each school and district, leveraging accreditation and other processes at state discretion.

 - *State Example: Arkansas* Arkansas has modified its accountability system to include diagnostic reviews that lead to informed interventions. The state’s lowest performing schools and schools with the biggest achievement gaps go through a deep diagnostic review that includes stakeholder input on each individual school’s strengths and challenges, an analysis on leader effectiveness, and an analysis on teacher effectiveness. The lowest-performing schools use this diagnostic review to create a Three-year Priority Intervention Plan that focuses on building local capacity to address the challenges. Schools with the biggest gaps use the diagnostic review to create a Targeted Improvement Plan that aims to reduce the achievement gap by providing interventions that support teachers, leaders, and the community.

- **Building school and district capacity.** Each system will focus on building district and school capacity for significant and sustained improvement in student achievement toward college- and career-ready performance goals. This will require general systems of supports and interventions relevant to all schools and a continued focus on state capacity as well.

 - *State Example: Oregon* Oregon has a long history of local control and, within this context, has learned time and again that the most effective and sustained change depends on local involvement. The state is committed to giving districts and schools ownership and supporting them in achieving their goals. For example, Oregon does not prescribe goals for each district but provides technical assistance and support in the goal setting exercise. Each district sets goals through the inclusive process and is held accountable for ensuring its schools are

equitably contributing to the district's overall goals. By allowing communities to engage in hard discussion and to land upon what they believe are ambitious but achievable goals specific to that community, Oregon believes it will drive meaningful improvement that is deeper, more widespread, and focused on outcomes. The Oregon Department of Education is supporting districts in developing improvement efforts framed by both leading and lagging indicators and are monitored throughout the year. These routines, both at the district and state level, provide opportunities to differentiate supports that are timely and responsive, as opposed to waiting solely for summative data to determine success.

- **Targeting lowest performing schools.** While states will develop accountability systems that hold all schools and districts accountable, significant interventions will be focused on at least the lowest performing five percent of schools and their districts, in addition to targeted interventions to address the lowest performing subgroups and/or schools with the greatest achievement gaps. States must have flexibility to craft interventions that are rigorous, systemic and context-specific in order to turn around the lowest performing schools on an urgent, ambitious, reasoned timeline, with constant evaluation, sustained investment and true results.
 - *State Example: Maryland* Maryland created The Breakthrough Center to respond to the need for rigorous supports and interventions and collaboration for its schools that are most in need. The Breakthrough Center aims to assist schools and districts as they navigate the school improvement process, provide resources and support to improve teaching and learning, and create communities of practice. The Breakthrough Center identifies the needs of schools and districts and assembles customized and strategic supports and interventions to address them.
- **Innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.** Each state's accountability system should drive innovation and itself be dynamic—promoting innovative accountability approaches with rigorous evaluation to drive continuous improvement over time. Each state needs to develop and implement plans for evaluation and improvements related to the system as a whole, core elements of the system, and the impact of the system on individual schools and districts.
 - *State Example: New Hampshire* Through close collaboration with local educators and district leaders, New Hampshire decided to explore an innovative approach to more fully engage local educators and to better integrate local and state/federal accountability by building a system that includes curriculum embedded performance assessments locally and Smarter Balanced at grade spans at the state level. Rather than relying solely on large scale state summative assessment data, the state is piloting an approach that relies on performance-based assessments administered throughout the year that are then combined to inform the state's accountability system. Local educators play a leading role in developing, administering and scoring the assessments and work together to use the data to inform their practice as well as the overall system. An added benefit is the creation and validity studies across districts and of local determinations. With the approval of the US Department of Education of a two year pilot of this effort, the state is excited to learn from this new approach and determine how this work can continue to improve and be used to support an increasing number of educators throughout the state.

Mississippi

Mississippi is aggressively pursuing the goal of creating a world-class education system that gives students the knowledge and skills that will allow them to be successful in college and the workforce and flourish as parents and citizens. With this goal as a guide, the state identified a number of objectives necessary to providing a high quality education to every student. These objectives include strong leadership at the school and district level; students completing high school prepared for postsecondary and career opportunities; establishing literacy and numeracy by the end of the third grade; high quality instruction for all students; and providing safe and supportive learning environments at all schools. Mississippi is implementing a number of strategies intended to achieve these objectives as well as meet Governor Phil Bryant's education goal: "every Mississippian will have the opportunity to actually learn from the best educational systems we can offer."

Mississippi has aligned its performance goals to college- and career-ready standards. Building on its transition to higher standards starting in 2010, Mississippi approved the 2014 Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards for English Language Arts as well as the 2014 Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Mathematics and has been working hard to implement the standards.

Mississippi has also made significant advances to its accountability system. In 2012, Mississippi took a new approach to making annual determinations for schools and districts by revising the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System (MSAS) into a new single statewide accountability system. This new system included an A-F accountability system comprised of two models: schools with a 12th grade and schools without a 12th grade. Moving beyond the limited NCLB parameters, both models focus on student outcomes by using reading and math points for proficiency, growth for all students, and growth for the lowest 25 percent of students as well as science proficiency. The accountability model for schools with a 12th grade also includes U.S. History proficiency and graduation rate. As the data becomes available, this model will also incorporate a college and career ready point and acceleration point which combines participation and performance. This system highlights Mississippi's determination to increase the

progress and performance of all students by including the growth for the lowest 25 percent.

Mississippi remains committed to disaggregating data by subgroup and using that information to inform how it targets its supports and interventions. Mississippi also increased its efforts to report timely, actionable, and accessible data. In 2012, Mississippi created the Office of Accountability Services to assist with accountability communications. Mississippi's Office of Accountability Services works with the state's communications office to provide information on the state's accountability system and reports. Through this effort, Mississippi works to be proactive in providing data to the public.

Mississippi has also improved its strategy for supporting struggling schools. Upon identification, Priority and Focus schools complete a comprehensive needs assessment to assist in the development of school-specific action plans. The state then uses an integrated approach which assesses the implementation of turnaround principles and determines the support districts/schools need to meet their respective action plans through site visits, progress data, and progress reports. The state will also provide priority schools with monthly visits from an implementation specialist to support their action plans. Focus schools also receive a comprehensive needs assessment and support specialist to help implement school improvement plans. Struggling schools also receive technical assistance and opportunities to learn from high-performing and high-progress schools. All of these efforts are focused on building school and district capacity to continue to advance school improvement.

Mississippi has made significant changes over the past several years aimed at providing more nuanced information about school and district performance based on better measures, with the goal of better informing schools and districts of the supports available to improve student outcomes. While much work has been done, state leaders know there is more to do and Mississippi has shown great commitment in developing a world-class education system as they continue to provide schools and districts with innovative supports to drive an increase in performance and progress for all students.

Alabama

Alabama has developed a strong vision for preparing students across the state for success in college and careers. The state's strategic plan, PLAN 2020, defines how its system will be developed, how it will be measured, and what constitutes success. It is centered on four principle domains: Alabama's 2020 Learners, Alabama's 2020 Support Systems, Alabama's 2020 Professionals, and Alabama's 2020 Schools/Systems. Collectively, these four areas, and the indicators and strategies found in each, provide a comprehensive and child-centered approach to educational improvement through the year 2020.

A foundational component of PLAN 2020 is the transition to more rigorous standards, the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards. These standards set forth high expectations for students and the state builds its performance goals based on these expectations.

Recognizing the critical role of stakeholder involvement, in 2011 the state formed the Assessment and Accountability Task Force to help set the direction for these critical issues in the state. Initially through this task force and ongoing stakeholder engagement, the state developed an accountability system looking both at student performance as well as other indicators, such as attendance rates and graduation rates. The state's accountability system is intended to prompt all stakeholders to ask difficult questions about increasing academic achievement and raising instructional quality within Alabama's schools. The goal of the Alabama state department is to build the capacity at the district and school level to engage in continuous improvement practices that impact student achievement, close achievement gaps, promote student growth, and increase the number of graduates that are prepared for college and career.

As part of this effort, the state is committed to clearly sharing information based on its accountability measures with educators, parents, students and other stakeholders. It is producing annual measurable objective

reports that share results from these components and is using those to trigger recognition and support for schools and districts. In its ongoing effort to improve, Alabama is currently partnering with the Alabama Supercomputer Authority to develop a new state accountability reporting data system. Alabama's goal is to report all data in a way that makes the information transparent, understandable, accessible, and useful. Data that is currently available on www.alsde.edu will be enhanced to include all areas of the new accountability system. Users can disaggregate data in a myriad of ways using historical data. In addition, beginning summer 2015, redesigned report cards, starting with 2013-14 school year data, will be available annually on the reimaged website.

The state also made changes to the structure and process for providing differentiated support to schools and districts. The guiding principle is to work in partnership with districts and schools. While Alabama has had a long history of school improvement support, it has primarily been a predetermined set of actions for all school situations. The state is moving to create a more sustainable approach through this partnership with districts and schools to designing, supporting, and monitoring school improvement efforts. The state focused efforts by setting clear expectations at the school, district, regional, and SDE levels in order to coordinate efforts. It also increased emphasis on the use and review of school and district continuous improvement plans. The state is monitoring and supporting priority schools for implementation of the turnaround principles. Finally, the state is working on continuous improvement through ongoing reflection to monitor progress, including establishing benchmarks based on a full array of data. It is using a turnaround principle rubric as part of its annual reflection process to provide information on the level and impact of interventions implemented.

Moving Forward

Since the original release of the Principles, states have made significant advancements to move beyond the confines of NCLB. Whether through ESEA flexibility waivers, refinement of state accountability systems, or ongoing commitment to innovation, state leaders have created accountability systems that embody the Principles and give educators, parents, and students information to improve student performance. In the coming years, the federal landscape for accountability will change. CCSSO and its state members strongly support reauthorizing NCLB to create a long-term, stable federal policy that gives states additional flexibility and encourages states and schools to innovate, while at the same time holding us accountable for results. With this additional flexibility, it is clear states will create accountability systems that best meet the needs of all students, just as they have in recent years. If the law is not reauthorized during this Congress, states recognize a new administration will enter office soon and bring its own approach to a federal role for accountability. Regardless of what happens, state chiefs will continue to lead and remain firmly committed to strong accountability systems aligned to the Principles that support all students in meeting their goals for college and careers.



One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
voice: 202.336.7000 | fax: 202.408.8072