

**Engaging Around State Report Cards:
*How to Use Stakeholder Input to Create
Actionable Tools for Improvement***

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

Engaging Around State Report Cards:

How to Use Stakeholder Input to Create Actionable Tools for Improvement

COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Carey Wright (Mississippi), President

Carissa Moffatt Miller, Executive Director

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Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
Phone (202) 336-7000
Fax (202) 408-8072
www.ccsso.org



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State Report Cards: Why Engage Stakeholders?

Now that states have turned from the development to the implementation of their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plans, they need to produce an annual report documenting state, district, and school progress against their ESSA goals.

These state report cards—which must be designed and published in alignment with ESSA as soon as possible after the end of the school year—are intended to promote transparency, build awareness, and keep the public informed about the state’s progress. Every state has had a state report card for years. ESSA ushered in several new requirements: minimum reporting of selected data and information on areas including academic achievement, teacher qualifications, and per-pupil expenditures (*see Appendix E for details*). Report cards must also meet certain process requirements, such as being developed in consultation with parents and being widely accessible to the public (*see Figure 1 for more*).

Fig 1. Report Card Process Requirements

- Developed in consultation with parents
- Concise, in a language that parents can understand
- Understandable and uniform format
- Widely accessible to the public
- On a single web page

Source: ESEA section 1111(h)(1)(B)

Requirements aside, ESSA offers states a unique opportunity to take a renewed look at their report cards, which can go far beyond just informing the public; they can **help drive improvement by informing the actions of stakeholders**. States should approach their report cards as an opportunity to encourage users to take steps that ultimately will lead to improved outcomes for students and families. This means selecting data elements that will spur users to take action and designing the report card in a way that helps users understand it.

The best way to do this is to engage stakeholders in the report card development process. Stakeholder engagement is required by ESSA, which directs states to consult with parents, at a minimum, when developing report cards.¹

Roles that stakeholders can—and should—play in report card development include:²

- Generating technical and user requirements
- Giving feedback on design and content development
- Testing report card prototypes

Fig 2. Report card stakeholder groups can include:

- Families
- Educators
- Local policy leaders (school board, mayor, superintendent)
- Community and business leaders and partners
- State policy leaders (state board members, legislators, governor, SEA leaders)

A more detailed list of potential stakeholder groups can be found in Appendix B.

¹ ESEA section 1111(h)(1)(B)(ii)

² CCSSO, *Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards* (2017)

- Participating in continuous improvement efforts following the initial report card launch

Different stakeholders will look for different information from report cards. For this reason, states should seek to engage a variety of stakeholder groups (such as those in Figure 2).

This guide gives special attention to engaging parents and families, the primary users of school-level report cards, but many of the engagement strategies included in this document are broadly applicable to all stakeholders.

This guide illustrates how states can best leverage stakeholder input in the development of their report cards and highlights best practices from four states that have already begun this work. The guide is meant to be used in concert with CCSSO’s [Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards](#), which outlines the entire report card development process.

Stakeholder Engagement in Practice: An Overview

This guide builds on previous resources published by CCSSO about stakeholder engagement, including [Let’s Get This Conversation Started](#), [Let’s Keep This Conversation Going](#), and [Let’s Continue This Conversation](#). These documents articulate the following 10 key principles that can be applied to any stakeholder engagement effort.



The table below includes questions for consideration and things to remember when applying these principles to report card development, with links to in-depth guidance and examples in the section that follows.

Principles	Questions to Consider	Things to Remember	See More
1. Clarify your goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the report card fit into your state’s theory of action? How can it serve your strategic plan? • What do you want stakeholders to know after reviewing the report card? • What actions would you like them to take? • How can stakeholders be involved in defining your goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content and design should be driven by the report card’s primary users—in particular, parents. Design should emphasize usability, accessibility, and simplicity. • To capture stakeholder insights, states should plan opportunities for feedback at each phase of report card development. 	<p>Guidance</p> <p>State example: Oregon</p>

Principles	Questions to Consider	Things to Remember	See More
2. Work with partner organizations to identify and engage with your stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are your historically underrepresented parents and other stakeholders? Which organizations work directly with these stakeholders? How can you partner with these organizations to collect feedback on the report cards? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States should seek to engage parents that represent their student body in multiple locations across the state. Parents and other stakeholders may be more inclined to share feedback in sessions led by a trusted community group and held at a neutral location outside of work hours. 	<p>Guidance</p> <p>State example: DC</p>
3. Speak to your audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What knowledge, experiences, and priorities do your stakeholders bring? What concerns might they raise about the report cards? What’s the minimum context they need? Which details can be saved for hyperlinks or appendices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some stakeholders won’t know the reasoning behind proposed data elements. Give context. At the same time, parents don’t want every last detail. Tell them what’s important for them and their children. For some stakeholders, building trust is a first step. 	<p>Guidance</p>
4. Use multiple vehicles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can you reach your stakeholders where they are? Where do your stakeholders get their information? What meetings do they already attend? How can you make your meetings inviting for families from diverse backgrounds? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a combination of vehicles—including community forums, listservs, social media, direct mail, and radio—will help you reach the widest audience. Families may need certain accommodations to participate in meetings, such as child care, translation services, and transportation. 	<p>Guidance</p>
5. Identify your best ambassadors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which individuals are trusted by key stakeholders and can serve as ambassadors? How can ambassadors help you reach more stakeholders and collect feedback on your behalf? Who can champion report cards to your stakeholders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing toolkits with talking points, slides, and FAQs can help states reach more stakeholders without spending more resources. Trusted community members can also get buy-in from potential users. 	<p>Guidance</p> <p>State example: Louisiana</p>

Principles	Questions to Consider	Things to Remember	See More
6. Ask for input before decisions are made, and use it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What questions do you need stakeholders to answer? • How will you report back to them on how you used their feedback? How will you address feedback that you did not incorporate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make materials available in advance, and give enough time to respond. • Build trust by showing how the state revised its report card using stakeholder feedback. 	Guidance
7. Keep your materials simple and brief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which materials does each type of stakeholder most (and least) need to review? • Which community partners can review your materials to ensure they're accessible for a broad audience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are likely most interested in school-level report cards. • Leave enough time to have materials reviewed, translated, and made accessible for people with disabilities. 	Guidance
8. Communicate early and often.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How frequently will you give progress updates? • What existing vehicles (newsletters, etc.) can you leverage to provide these updates? • What other opportunities do you have to communicate with your stakeholders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of each phase, states should assess whether they're using the right communication vehicles with the right frequency. • With each round of input, publish a summary. 	Guidance
9. Keep your team informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do all agency staff need to know about report cards? • Which agency staff spend the most time in schools? • Which agency staff can serve as ambassadors to external stakeholders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEAs should provide all internal staff with basic information about the report cards so there is a common understanding and message. • States should share any outreach materials and more detailed information with externally facing staff members in case they receive questions. 	Guidance
10. Turn these new connections into long-term relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which stakeholders have you recently connected with who could help with future implementation efforts? • Who do you still need to reach? • What long-term role can these stakeholders play? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders can inform efforts to continuously improve report cards after the 2018 launch. 	Guidance State example: Michigan

Report Card Engagement: From Start to Finish

Part I. Getting Started

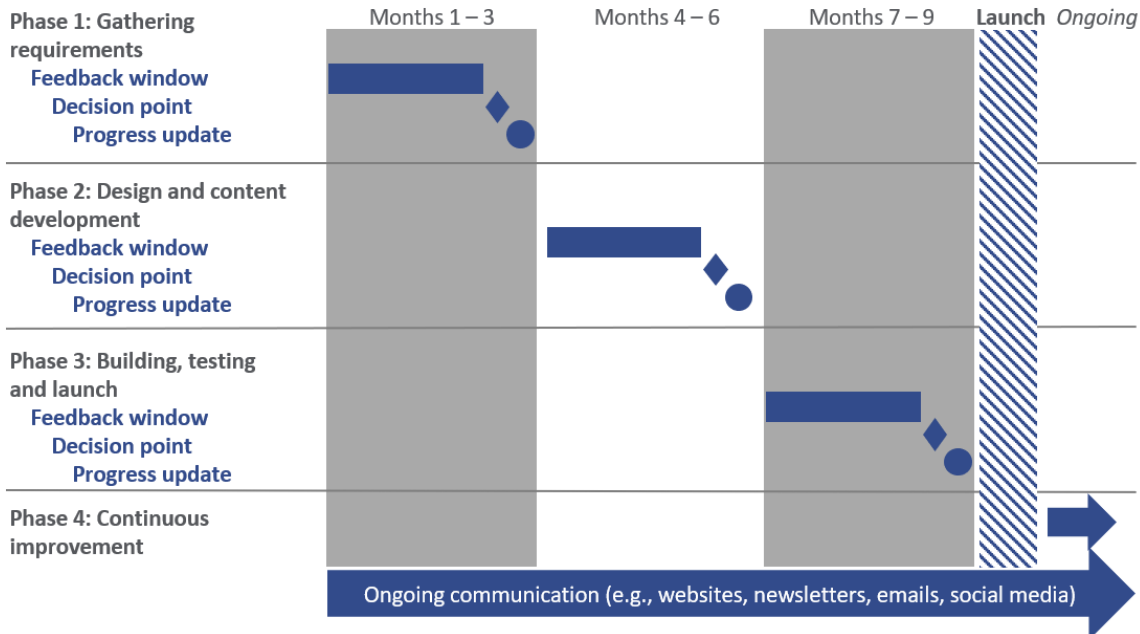
1. Clarify your goals.

Before engaging stakeholders, states need an engagement plan with clear goals that will guide their choice of engagement activities. These goals should be driven by what states want their report card to accomplish. Keep in mind that communicating the data elements and descriptions required by ESSA is the floor, not the ceiling, for what a report card can do. States can use the questions in this document to guide their thinking about who the report cards are for and what they want these stakeholders to know, think, or do after reviewing them.

Perhaps a state wants its report card to generate momentum for the state’s strategic education priorities by giving parents specific questions to ask school staff. Perhaps a state would like to promote cross-district collaboration by allowing districts to select an optional measure that showcases local strengths to others seeking best practices in that area. Whatever the case may be, clarifying the report card’s primary users and uses is the first step to ensuring that the report card eventually gets used.

Next, states should develop a plan that defines when and for what purpose they’ll engage stakeholders. Begin with key decision points, then outline a **feedback window** before each one and a target date for providing progress updates afterward (see Figure 3). States shouldn’t wait to engage stakeholders until they have a report card template or a list of data elements to propose; they should engage stakeholders from the first phase of the development process to capture opinions on the report card’s high-level requirements.

Fig 3. Report Card Engagement Process



States can choose engagement activities for each window based on the specific level of feedback they need. Where surveys may be better for collecting uniform, easy-to-analyze responses from a large number of people, focus groups may help states probe for detailed answers to open-ended questions.³ (See Appendix C for a table of engagement activities with advantages and drawbacks for each.) Plans should also outline the vehicles states will use to keep stakeholders informed throughout development based on how their target stakeholders prefer to receive information. For example, parents generally prefer email and text, though some continue to want direct mail.⁴

Oregon partnered with multiple organizations to target its goals for redesign

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) decided its new report card should both serve as a continuous improvement tool and provide families with “meaningful and actionable”⁵ information about their schools and districts. To determine what families find meaningful and actionable, ODE planned to begin its three-phase development process (design and development; incorporating feedback and production; professional learning and promotion) with an online survey in English and Spanish and a series of focus groups with parents and family members around the state.

Acknowledging that it is “rare ... for parents of students who are historically underserved to have access to ... such discussions,”⁶ ODE made a special effort to recruit focus group members who were parents of children of color, children with disabilities, migrant children, and rural children. ODE partnered with community organizations, including Black Parent Initiative, NAACP, Migrant Parent Association, and Siletz Tribe, to contact families and prepare sessions where they would feel safe to share openly.

Between September and October 2017, ODE facilitated 11 focus groups of between 9 and 13 parents each, including three in Spanish with simultaneous translation. Facilitators showed parents three sample report cards and used the following questions to guide discussion.

- a) What is important to you to know about your school?
- b) What does a parent- and family-friendly report card look like?
- c) How can we ensure the report card is valuable to you?

ODE collected parents’ verbal and written responses and analyzed them alongside parent responses to its [survey](#), then published a [report](#) summarizing the emergent themes. The report proposed strategies for additional engagement once the state develops prototypes for the two tools it plans to create: an at-a-glance printable report card and an online dashboard with additional measures.

2. Work with partner organizations to identify and engage with your stakeholders.

Remember that families are the primary users of school-level report cards, and different subgroups will have different wants and needs. Each state should ask itself whether the families it plans to engage are truly representative of the diversity of its student body, and if not, determine which other subgroups to

³ CCSSO, [Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards](#) (2017)

⁴ CCSSO, Learning Heroes, and National PTA, [Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents](#) (2016)

⁵ Oregon Department of Education, [Parent & Family Feedback Report](#) (n.d.): 4, accessed February 15, 2018

⁶ Oregon Department of Education, [Parent & Family Feedback Report](#) (n.d.): 2, accessed February 15, 2018

loop in. Use existing networks to reach out to families, and form partnerships to broaden the net. Ask partner organizations to lead engagement activities to help families feel more comfortable participating.

Reaching historically underrepresented and hard-to-reach families

States are encouraged to ensure that report card engagement includes parents who are traditionally underrepresented or hard to reach.⁷ Engaging such parents in the report card process is especially important because they may want or need different information about schools and districts given their unique circumstances.

Who are they? Depending on the state, historically underrepresented and hard-to-reach families may include those of:

- Low-income students
- Students of color
- Students with various disabilities
- English learners
- Migrant students
- Rural students
- Military-connected students
- Justice system-involved students
- Students experiencing homelessness or foster care
- Students with trauma histories
- Others (see Appendix B for more)

Why are they underrepresented or hard-to-reach? Some of these families face extra barriers to participation, such as distance from or lack of transportation to traditional meeting venues, lack of language access, or lack of accessibility for people with disabilities. Others may feel unwelcome or mistrustful due to historical exclusion or negative experiences with schooling or government. Still others may come from places with different cultural norms for parent involvement in policymaking.

How can states engage them? Using partner organizations, ambassadors, and existing outlets to reach parents where they are is especially important for these populations.

- The [National PTA](#) recommends making connections with service agencies and groups, libraries and recreation centers, and civic and religious organizations that serve your target populations. Ask these organizations for help setting up small-group meetings with parents from similar backgrounds.
- [Partners for Each and Every Child](#) recommends taking advantage of existing meetings like advisory nights, parent-teacher conferences, and student events to which parents are invited.
- [UnidosUS](#) (formerly NCLR) suggests distributing information through businesses, clinics, other community organizations, newspapers, and radio stations that cater to your target groups.

Use as many vehicles as possible to reach the greatest number of parents.

⁷ CCSSO, [Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards](#) (2017)

Part II. Engagement Best Practices

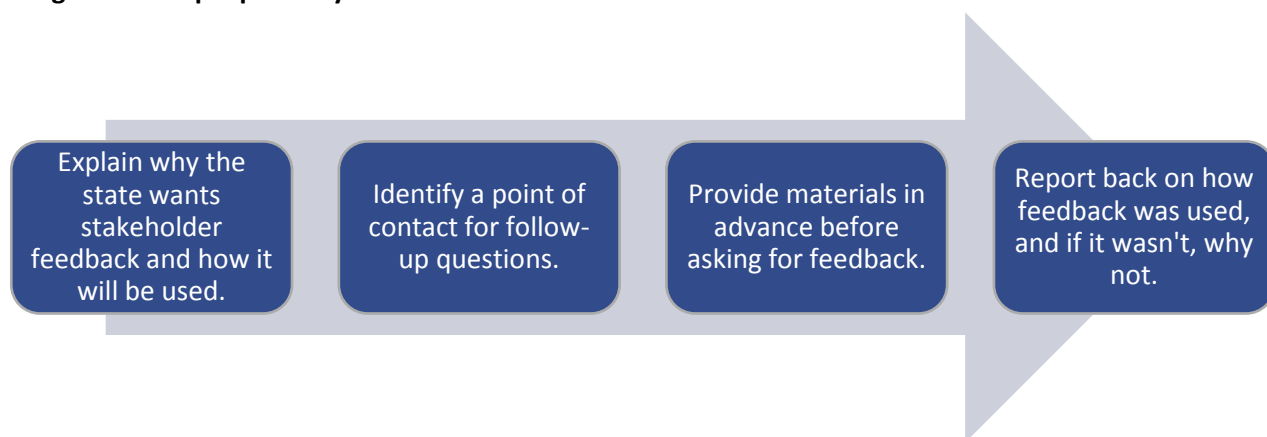
3. Speak to your audience.

Stakeholders will approach report cards with different knowledge and priorities, and states should tailor their messages accordingly. Most parents, for example, will be less interested in learning about the details of ESSA than in learning what report cards can do for them and their child.

- For families, **frame the report cards** as a tool that can help them make decisions for their children by giving them information on a school’s performance to compare against their expectations—both academic and non-academic.
- **Give enough context** to help parents understand proposed data elements and the key decision points to come, **but save detailed information** for links or appendices that they can access if they want more detail.
- **Anticipate concerns** parents may raise and prepare for questions in advance. For example, some parents may not know the purpose of disaggregating data by subgroup and misunderstand it to imply that certain subgroups are less capable.⁸ Be explicit that the reason for disaggregated data is to ensure that additional support goes to students who need it.

Note that stakeholders will also come with different prior experiences around civic engagement, some of which were less than positive. Part of each states’ responsibility should be to build trust, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Sample pathway to build trust



⁸ CCSSO, Learning Heroes, and National PTA, [Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents](#) (n.d.)

4. Use multiple vehicles.

States should consider their stakeholders when selecting methods for reaching out to them. Different people get information in different ways; simply posting information on the state’s website won’t reach all target audiences. **Cast a wide net and work to meet stakeholders where they already are.** A few ways to do this could include:

- Getting on the agenda of upcoming meetings or forums in the community
- Asking newsletters, listservs, and schools to distribute information
- Using social media and encouraging parents and organizations to post information there too
- Requesting partner organizations’ help with dissemination and recruitment
- Using all available methods, from radio PSAs to direct mail, to share important information

When scheduling meetings, **remove barriers** to stakeholders’ attendance. Hold meetings in multiple locations around the state that represent students’ diverse backgrounds and income levels. Choose neutral sites in the community, not government buildings, to make meetings more inviting. Avoid scheduling meetings during work hours. Provide child care, food, translation, and interpretation to increase the likelihood that busy or non-English-speaking parents can attend and fully participate. At the end of any meeting or survey, ask participants to provide their contact information and preferred method of communication. For important meetings, livestream or record and post the meeting online for those unable to attend.

District of Columbia used partners and multiple vehicles to reach diverse parents

Between September 2017 and January 2018, DC’s Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) engaged nearly 1,900 parents and community members to learn about their priorities for the new state report card. At least 9 percent had children with IEPs, and at least 6 percent preferred languages other than English.

Many of these families engaged through in-person feedback sessions facilitated by schools and community-based organizations. OSSE created a [toolkit](#) to help these groups host sessions and collect feedback. In some cases, OSSE even made grants to parent and direct service organizations for outreach to specific family subgroups, including minority language, special education, and at-risk subgroups.

OSSE also reached parents through a partnership with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE), an organization that led canvassing efforts in several areas of DC where low-income students live. Canvassers stood outside of community centers like grocery stores, schools, libraries, recreation centers, and large apartment complexes to ask families to complete a brief survey. PAVE also surveyed parents at convenings of its six Parent Leaders in Education Boards around the District.

OSSE summarized initial feedback from the sessions, canvassing, and its online survey in a public [report](#), addressing all topics raised by at least 5 percent of respondents. For parent-requested data that are currently unavailable or too burdensome for schools to report, OSSE looked for comparable data or discussed ways to collect it in the future. OSSE detailed how its proposal incorporated the parent feedback in a [presentation](#) to the state Board of Education in January 2018.

5. Identify your best ambassadors.

States can **reach additional stakeholders without additional resources by engaging trusted community members as ambassadors** to distribute information and collect feedback. For example, states could provide a PowerPoint and FAQs for principals to present at parent nights with a link to an online survey. Also, when report cards are finally launched, ambassadors can build interest and buy-in for report cards among stakeholders.

Louisiana engaged parent-facing groups to gather feedback and support launch

One of Louisiana Department of Education's (LDOE's) top goals for its new report card was to help parents make better choices for their children by supporting richer conversations about school performance.⁹ Recognizing this would take more than just a user-friendly report card, LDOE developed a strategy for report card feedback and rollout that empowered trusted groups to engage parents in ongoing discussions about report card information that have extended well beyond the release date.

One key group is the New-Orleans nonprofit [EdNavigator](#), which employs parent to help families navigate their school options. Early in the report card development process, LDOE asked EdNavigator to host parent focus groups to collect feedback on proposed metrics and design. Now that LDOE has rolled out its report card, [School Finder](#), EdNavigator is assembling mailings to New Orleans families with School Finder links and information. EdNavigator is also working with area businesses on family orientations that reference the site.

LDOE has also engaged other parent-facing groups to support conversations with parents around the report cards. For example, it worked with the state principals' association to put on a series of webinars about School Finder. Then it empowered principals to lead "parent night" discussions about School Finder data by offering a presentation template that principals could populate with images from their schools' profiles. In addition, LDOE provided flyers to Realtors and pediatricians to use in the conversations they often have with parents about their children's school options and experiences.

6. Ask for input before decisions are made, and use it.

In addition to planning feedback activities before each decision point, states should prepare to use their stakeholders' time effectively by **identifying specific questions they need answered** during each development phase. Don't ask for feedback or input on decisions that have already been made—present those decisions as non-negotiables, and ask for input on issues that are still up for discussion. Some

⁹ CCSSO, [A School Finder to Empower: Case Study of Louisiana's New School Report Card](#) (2018)

questions you could ask during different points in the development of the state report card could include the following.¹⁰

<p>During the initial report card development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you use school report cards? • What kind of information would you want to see on a school report card? • How would you like to receive the report card? (e.g., direct mail, email, the backpack channel, in-person during parent/teacher conference) • Do you want to see a static .pdf report or engage with interactive features? • Would you rather see a collection of different kinds of data on your child’s school? Or do you want an overall rating, like a number or letter grade so that you could easily rank schools across the state? Or do you want a combination of the two?
<p>During the design and content development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do families prefer to search for their child’s school by typing in the name of the school, selecting the district and then the school from lists, entering their address, selecting from a map, or another method? • How might families prefer to “drill down” from higher-level to more detailed data? • Do educators want to be able to compare their school’s performance data with that of schools with similar demographics for benchmarking purposes?
<p>During user testing and launch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this information easy to understand? What is confusing to you? What would make this easier to understand? • Is there any information about the school that you would like to know that is not provided?

¹⁰ Adapted from: CCSSO, Learning Heroes, and National PTA, [Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents](#) (n.d.); CCSSO, [Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards](#) (2017)

States shouldn't wait until they have a sample report card to engage stakeholders, but if a state wants to give families something to react to early on, consider providing a bank of data elements, another state's report card, or this [model school report card](#) created by Learning Heroes and developers from Tembo. Use the sample parent focus group protocol in Appendix D to guide discussion.

Also, be prepared to **explain which questions or issues are *not* up for discussion**, and why. Perhaps a particular data element is legally

mandated, was decided upon at a prior phase, or won't be discussed until a future stage. Whatever the case, let stakeholders know at the outset to avoid frustration or confusion. (For example, see Figure 5.)

Fig. 5. DC's "Guardrails for the Engagement Process"

- Our primary audience for the report card is parents and families, and we will prioritize their needs, but we know other groups will use it and need to be engaged.
- We must balance the needs of users of the information and the effort required of schools to produce it.
- Some data points are required by law or by the accountability framework, so we can't exclude them from the report card.
- We need to launch in 2018, but this isn't a one-time effort; we will continue to refine the look and feel and metrics over time.

Source: [DC OSSE, 2018](#)

7. Keep your materials simple and brief.

States are likely to generate many materials over the course of report card development, including various potential templates (or "wireframes") for state-, district-, and school-level report cards. Some states are also creating an "at-a-glance" report to supplement drill-downs with a high-level summary. When deciding which of these materials to put in front of stakeholders for a particular engagement activity, states should consider what their audience really needs to see. **To avoid overwhelming people, differentiate the presentation for each audience, providing only the most relevant materials.** For instance, parents will likely be most interested in school-level report cards, and they may prefer seeing their schools compared to district and state averages over national ones.¹¹

For all materials, **ensure the writing and design are accessible for a broad audience** using the guidelines in Figure 6. If posted online, the materials should also be viewable on mobile devices for parents who mainly access the internet with

Fig. 6. Accessibility Guidelines

- Write for an eighth grade reading level. (Data Quality Campaign recommends using the [Hemingway app site](#) to measure reading level in [Show Me the Data 2017: States Can Improve Report Cards This Year](#))
- Use less text and more visuals.
- Avoid education jargon and acronyms.
- Provide simple definitions where jargon can't be avoided.
- Ensure materials are culturally competent.
- Translate materials into other languages.
- Make materials accessible for persons with disabilities.

Sources: [CCSSO, 2016](#); [DQC, 2018](#)

¹¹ CCSSO, Learning Heroes, and National PTA, [Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents](#) (n.d.)

their phones. A good way to check the relevance, cultural competence, and accessibility of materials is to get feedback from partner organizations that work closely with specific stakeholder groups. Even better, pilot-test language to ensure comprehension across multiple stakeholder groups. (For example, parents are more likely to understand “learning environment” than “school climate.”)

8. Communicate early and often.

After selecting mechanisms for keeping stakeholders informed throughout the report card development process, states should **develop a timeline** for regularly using these mechanisms to summarize feedback, provide updates, request input, communicate important decisions, and broadcast next steps. As states pass key milestones in the report card development process, they should revisit their timeline to make sure they’re using the right vehicles with the appropriate frequency. A communications advisory group can be a helpful source of feedback. However, states should resist the temptation to communicate when they don’t have anything new to say.

Part III. Sustaining Engagement

9. Keep your team informed.

Engagement shouldn't be limited to external stakeholders. State agency staff are an important stakeholder group that can not only provide feedback, but also serve as ambassadors if kept informed of key messages, materials, and engagement activities. **Provide all internal staff with basic information about the report cards, and give externally facing staff additional details and outreach materials.**

Regularly update senior agency leaders and staff who spend the most time in schools. Keep staff messages consistent by designating a single office to coordinate external outreach.

10. Turn these new connections into long-term relationships.

Engaging stakeholders shouldn't be limited to the pre-launch phases of development. States can follow the 2018 report card launch with engagement that not only drives continuous improvement of the report card, but also helps transition new stakeholder connections into long-term relationships that support the state's ongoing implementation and reform efforts. **Think of ways that stakeholders can remain engaged**, such as through long-term advisory groups, so they can continue to see how their input is used to inform and improve the state's efforts.

Michigan continues to engage parents after its dashboard launch

Michigan began its report card process by acknowledging that development of a "usable transparency dashboard" needs to be an iterative process. So, the state conceived a three-phase effort that *starts* with the launch of its new suite of reports and continues for two more years of refinement.¹²

In January 2018, Michigan Department of Education (MDE) released the first version of the online [Parent Dashboard](#). Since then, MDE has continued to collect parent input in various ways to inform future versions of the site. One way is directly through the site, where parents and other users can complete a brief [survey](#) with their suggestions for improvement. To increase traffic to the site, MDE released a toolkit with a [flyer](#), email and social media [text](#), a one-page [handout](#), detailed [FAQs](#), and even a website [badge](#) that links to the site that schools, districts, and other organizations can use or adapt. In addition, MDE created a dedicated email address for parent feedback and provides a response within 48 hours. MDE will also continue to collect parent input through focus groups and usability testing.

The next phase of development will involve adding school-reported "Points of Pride" by fall 2018. To help principals introduce the Parent Dashboard and preview the "Points of Pride," MDE created a customizable PowerPoint presentation [template](#) with talking points. The presentation encourages parents to share their feedback via the online survey or dedicated email address.

¹² Michigan State Board of Education, [State Board of Education Policy on Michigan's Transparency Dashboard](#) (2017)

Appendices

A. Stakeholder Engagement and Report Card Resources

- [*A School Finder to Empower: Case Study of Louisiana’s New School Report Card*](#), CCSSO
- [*A State Guide to Building Online School Report Cards*](#), CCSSO, Collaborative, DQC, ExcelinEd, Learning Heroes, and National PTA
- [*Building a Parent-Driven School Report Card*](#), DC Office of the State Superintendent for Education
- [*Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards*](#), CCSSO
- [*Framework for Meaningful Parent Engagement Under ESSA*](#), CCSSO, Learning Heroes, and National PTA
- [*Frequently Asked Questions: Oregon’s Report Card Redesign*](#), Oregon Department of Education
- [*Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents*](#), CCSSO, Learning Heroes, and National PTA
- [*Let’s Get this Conversation Started*](#), CCSSO
- [*Let’s Continue this Conversation*](#), CCSSO
- [*Let’s Keep this Conversation Going*](#), CCSSO
- [*Meaningful Local Engagement Under ESSA: A Handbook for LEA and School Leaders*](#), CCSSO and Partners for Each and Every Child
- [*Michigan’s New Parent Dashboard for School Transparency: Facts for School and Community Leaders*](#), Michigan Department of Education
- [*Oregon Department of Education Report Card Redesign Survey*](#), Oregon Department of Education
- [*Parent and Community Engagement Toolkit*](#), DC Office of the State Superintendent for Education
- [*Parent and Family Feedback Report*](#), Oregon Department of Education
- [*Preliminary Report Card Content and Public Engagement Responses*](#), DC Office of the State Superintendent for Education
- [*Show Me the Data 2017: States Can Improve Report Cards This Year*](#), DQC
- [*State Board of Education Policy on Michigan’s Transparency Dashboard*](#), Michigan Department of Education

B. Stakeholder Groups and Selected Actions They Can Take with Report Cards

Adapted from: [Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards](#), CCSSO; [Let's Get this Conversation Started](#), CCSSO; [Meaningful Local Engagement Under ESSA: A Handbook for LEA and School Leaders](#), CCSSO and Partners for Each and Every Child

Stakeholder Groups	Subgroups	Actions
State policy leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State board members Legislators Governor State education chief SEA leaders State licensing body Health and mental health agencies Other youth development and adult learning agencies Other before- and after-school service agencies Early childhood education agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate and rally for state goals for student performance and equity. Evaluate progress to meet these state goals and celebrate progress that is made. Identify bright spots, emerging trends, and patterns, such as gaps among student groups. Highlight areas needing improvement or targeted resources. Build public capacity to use education data.
Researchers		
Higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including teacher preparation programs 	
Local policy leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School board Mayor Superintendent Charter school leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate progress to meet state and local goals. Identify bright spots and emerging trends, and develop the means to learn from and share information with districts experiencing success with student groups of concern. Prioritize local resources. Inform community supports and partnerships. Illuminate and address equity issues. Mobilize community to improve education. Understand how a district is performing within the state and among districts with similar demographics, and establish connections. Plan school improvement efforts. Help families contact and engage with the school.
District staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEA staff Specific LEAs (rural, urban, etc.) ELL administrators 	
Business, community, and faith leaders		
Indian tribes		
Community partners		
Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students Parents, including historically underrepresented and hard-to-reach groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-income 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parents of color ○ Parents with disabilities ○ Parents of students with disabilities ○ English learners ○ LGBTQ parents and parents of LGBTQ students ○ Migrant parents ○ Military-connected parents ○ Native American parents ○ Rural parents ○ Parents of justice system-involved students ○ Parents of students with trauma histories ○ Parents or guardians of students experiencing homelessness or foster care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan school improvement efforts. ● Help families contact and engage with the school.
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers ● Principals ● Specialized instructional support personnel ● Paraprofessionals 	

C. Engagement Activities

Source: *Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards*, CCSSO

Mechanism	Benefits	Challenges	Considerations
Formal advisory group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members can be selected to represent the range of priority users Advisory group members can serve as ambassadors, champions for the work Flexibility to design working meetings to maximize feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipating need to make decisions at a point of authority, even if the advisory group has not weighed in Ensuring that members adequately represent the range of users Making sure all participants understand their role and responsibilities and the ultimate goal of the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What norms/protocol will be used to make decisions when there are conflicts in feedback, priorities? How can the advisory group be clear about the <i>primary</i> users and their <i>priority</i> actions in order to focus discussion and inform decisions and priorities? How will the role of the advisory group shift through phases of the development and continuous improvement process? What is the responsibility of participants to communicate directly with their constituencies?
Town halls (including online town halls)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likelihood of communicating priority messages Potential to engage a broad set of stakeholders in one setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring diverse participation Difficult to collect detailed feedback Making sure all interested participants are aware of these meetings Making sure these meetings are accessible to all who want to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can partnerships and other efforts to build relationships increase parent, family and community participation? Who are the right messengers? How can the state record and share the town hall? Can the state host a “virtual” town hall for those who cannot travel? How can the state partner with an organization to host the meeting and encourage more individuals to attend? How can the state collect contact information from participants at these meetings and then inform participants about how their feedback was used?

<p>Presentations at existing meetings, including those hosted by community organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built-in audiences, often those who need to be champions • Ability to segment messages and ask for feedback by audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time limitations • Gaining focus and attention of participants if multiple topics in addition to the report card are being discussed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. How can states expand existing meeting participation beyond the “usual suspects” to include families and others from under-engaged groups?
<p>Focus groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback can be tailored and precise with open-ended questions, follow-ups to press for understanding • Small groups of participants can surface areas of agreement and disagreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting the timing right on forming a focus group to answer near-term needs for the development process • Recruiting participants who reflect the priority users • Finding a third-party facilitator so participants can feel comfortable sharing feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can focus groups be utilized prior to the data and design/content phases (e.g., sharing existing reports)? • What partnerships are needed to recruit a strong set of participants? • How can you make sure focus groups include individuals who represent your state’s population?
<p>Websites and online surveys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to reach stakeholders in a uniform, transparent way • Additional information can be shared through the website and email correspondence with survey link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring target audiences view website, respond to survey • Inability to press for understanding • Survey respondents are sometimes limited to certain demographics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What existing websites, surveys, or email lists could be used to glean feedback and reinforce messages? • How will survey results be shared and with whom? • How can you partner with groups, especially community-based organizations, to ensure good participation among diverse populations? • How can you make the survey available in multiple languages? • Can you ask for demographic information to track who is responding to the survey and which audiences you may need to target further?

<p>1:1 interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depth of discussion can uncover important insights • Talking to one individual may illuminate information that would not be shared in a group, such as disconnects between what is on a report card and the message a family member receives from a teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights may not be generalizable • Resource- and time-intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there particular questions that require deeper conversations? • How can you identify individuals who will give you deeper insights necessary to move the work forward?
<p>User testing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observing how users actually interact with the data, design and content, and functionality • Ability to precisely target users through services that specialize in user testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Resource- and time-intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What high-priority questions should be asked to test site usability or particular reporting concepts? • How can you make sure you are testing among users with different needs, such as those with limited English proficiency, limited literacy skills, or disabilities?
<p>Embedding questions in a live report card</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended questions, such as a “Notice anything confusing?” comment box, can uncover important issues that may not otherwise get raised 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will ongoing advisory or governance groups for the report card address information coming through this mechanism?

D. Parent Focus Group Protocol

Source: [*Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards*](#), CCSSO

This is a sample. If it is helpful, we encourage you to adapt it to reflect your state’s context and needs.

Context for Parents: Before you begin to engage parents in a conversation, set the context for why you are asking questions and how you plan to use their feedback.

Introduction: Every year, our state generates school-level report cards to illustrate performance. Our state is committed to sharing information with parents in a timely and easy-to-use manner. We want your feedback on how to improve our state’s report card.

In addition to our state’s commitment, in late 2015, Congress passed a new education law known as the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA. This law replaces No Child Left Behind and gives states more control and power over their school systems. The goal of ESSA is to make sure that every student in the state has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. It calls for much of the same work that schools are already doing, such as holding all students to high standards and using quality tests to better understand where students need to improve. ESSA also requires states to publicly share how every school and district in the state performs on an annual report card.

Opening Question: In the month of X, our state releases these report cards. Do you remember receiving this report card or information about it?

IF NO:

- Do you remember ever receiving information about the report card?
- What do you know—or have you heard—about the report card?

IF YES:

- How did you receive the report cards? When did you receive them?
- Were you given any information about how to read or use the report cards? If so, was this information useful?
- What was the first thing you did once you read the report card?
- What did you look for? Were you able to find it?
- Did reading the report card prompt you to think of additional questions? Did you know who to speak with to get those questions answered? If yes, did you reach out to anyone with those questions?
- Was there any information not in the report card that you wish had been included?
- After you first read the report card, did you return to it at a later time? If so, for what purpose?

Distribute a copy of the report card to each parent.

Framing: Please spend the next 7 minutes reviewing the report card individually. We will then have a group discussion.

- What are three things that stood out to you?
- What about the report card did you find most appealing? Why?
- What about the report card did you find most confusing? Why?
- Is the report card missing any information?
- Is there any irrelevant information displayed?
- Does the order of the information help, or does it make it more challenging to read the report card?
- Do the charts/graphics help you understand the data, or do they make it more challenging to read the report card?

Closing Discussion:

- Is there any other kind of information that you would want to see on the report card that we have not yet discussed?
- How would you like to receive the report card (i.e., direct mail, email, the backpack channel, in-person during parent/teacher conference)?
- Would you rather see different kinds of data collected on your child's school? Or an overall rating, like a number or letter grade, so that you could easily rank schools across the state? Or a combination of the two?
- How might our state better use our report card to call attention to schools, districts or regions that are making tremendous improvement and/or excelling? How might our state use the report card to call attention to critical equity gaps?

Closing Reminder: Before you adjourn, thank participants and remind them how you plan to use their feedback.

E. ESSA Public Reporting Requirements

Source: [*Communicating Performance: A Best Practices Resource for Developing State Report Cards*](#), CCSSO

Section 111(h)(1)(C) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires every state to “prepare and disseminate widely to the public” an annual report card. It directs states to ensure the report card is concise, presented in an understandable and user-friendly format, developed with parent input, and presented “to the extent practicable” in a language parents understand. The law prescribes a number of “minimum” requirements for data and descriptions that should be included in the state report card. Note: data elements that include “(cross-tabulation)” must be provided in a way that allows cross-tabulation at the state level by race/ethnicity, gender, English learner and not English learner, and students with and without disabilities.

Descriptions

- The state’s accountability system, including
 - minimum “n size” for student subgroups;
 - long-term goals and interim measures of progress for all students and each student group;
 - annual indicators; and
 - system for differentiating school performance, including the weights assigned to each indicator, the methodology for identifying a school as consistently underperforming for any group of students, and the methodology for identifying a school as needing comprehensive support and improvement.
- Names and number of schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and names and number of schools identified for targeted support and improvement
- Exit criteria for schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and for targeted support and improvement

Data Requirements

- Academic achievement of all students and each student group—including homeless, military dependent, and foster care students—for each assessment and at each level of achievement (cross-tabulation)
- Performance on the “other academic indicator” for elementary and middle schools and the four-year adjusted cohort high school graduation rate for all students, all student subgroups, and homeless and foster care students (cross-tabulation)
- Number and percentage of English learners attaining English language proficiency
- Performance on the “other indicator or indicators of school quality and student success” for all students and each student subgroup

- Progress toward meeting the state’s long-term goals and interim measures of progress for all students and each student group
- Percentage of students assessed and not assessed for all students and each student group (including racial and ethnic group, economically disadvantaged and not economically disadvantaged, students with and without disabilities, English learners, male and female, and migrant students) (cross-tabulation)
- For the state and each LEA, the measures of school quality, climate, and safety required by the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection, number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs, and the number and percentage of students enrolled in accelerated coursework to earn postsecondary credit and in dual or concurrent enrollment programs
- Teacher qualifications, disaggregated by high-poverty and low-poverty schools, including the number and percentage of inexperienced teachers, principals, and other school leaders; teachers teaching with emergency or provisional credentials; and teachers teaching outside of their subject or field of certification
- Per-pupil expenditures of federal, state, and local funds for each LEA and school, including personnel and non-personnel expenditures
- Number and percentage of students with severe cognitive disabilities who take the alternate assessment, by grade and subject
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results for mathematics and reading for 4th and 8th grades for the state and compared to the national averages
- Postsecondary enrollment cohort rate for each high school and, where available, for enrollment in public postsecondary institutions in the state, private postsecondary institutions in the state, or postsecondary institutions outside the state