



Recalibrating Accountability and Assessment: Successful Innovative Local Systems Supported by the State

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Abstract

Top-down, test-based accountability systems have failed to deliver meaningful improvement or equity in public education. Locally driven models that are grounded in community priorities and supported by the state offer a more effective path forward. Authentic assessment and reciprocal accountability can replace compliance with continuous improvement and deliver the schools families actually want.

Recalibrating Accountability and Assessment: Successful Innovative Local Systems Supported by the State

Executive Summary

The current political and policy climate—as indicated by federal upheaval, rigid adherence to unsuccessful paradigms and systems in the face of declining trust in institutions, and stalled innovation— offers a prime opportunity to recalibrate accountability and assessment in public education. Our existing systems confuse compliance for improvement, and standardized measurement for authentic learning. The dominant model across the nation: a single, state-driven assessment pipeline imposed yearly on every student, has prioritized comparability over utility, ranking over relevance, and examination over student support. The current system has failed to deliver the promised outcomes, particularly for traditionally marginalized students, and has instead narrowed curriculum options and undermined local ownership.

We propose a shift. A shift from accountability to the state; a shift towards accountability to students, families, and communities. By surfacing what communities actually want schools to deliver through democratic, inclusive design and then building assessments and data infrastructures that reflect those priorities, the traditional flow of power and responsibility is effectively reversed—with positive outcomes. Examples from New York, Chicago, Kentucky, and others show this is not theoretical. Performance-based assessment systems are already working on the ground, producing deeper learning and stronger public trust.

This is a call for more accurate and honest equity in our education system. When accountability systems reflect the lived aspirations of the people they're meant to serve—and when assessment becomes a tool for learning rather than sorting—states can meet their civil rights obligations with greater legitimacy and impact. Policy changes will be required, including regulatory flexibility from the federal government, technical and financial support from states, and a willingness to move from command-and-control to a governance model built on reciprocal responsibility and shared purpose.

Ultimately, we argue that accountability and assessment systems should not be designed to satisfy a central authority —they should be designed to make learning better, more relevant, and more just for the students sitting in classrooms right now.

Introduction: Uncertainty Breeds Reaction—Is There a Better Response?

The Trump Administration’s commitment to enforcing the state testing requirements and accountability provisions of ESSA is currently an open question. In the face of these uncertainties, the defunding of education research, the downsizing and promises to eliminate the DOE, and the overall theme of throwing it all back to states with the only federal oversight in service of the Administration’s “anti-DEI” agenda, state accountability systems may be at a crossroads.

This state of flux has prompted handwringing among those who view large scale standardized state assessments administered to every student every year as an absolute necessity as measures of school quality, individual academic achievement, schools in need of intervention, and the degree to which schools are serving the needs of marginalized subgroups.

Rather than viewing Trump Administration chaos and absence of clarity on programmatic ESSA enforcement as a threat to state accountability systems, perhaps states and districts should view the current moment as an opportunity to pursue superior frameworks for accounting for school quality, assessing student learning in a rapidly evolving technological environment, supporting (rather than just stigmatizing) marginalized subgroups, and identifying the need for targeted improvement. The purpose of this brief is to explore possibilities for improving accountability systems and assessment of learning that are superior to the fallback position of the large-scale state-wide standardized assessment.

We will examine successful local accountability and assessment systems that differ from the pattern and examine how states can empower and support those systems rather than monitor in a way that produces perverse incentives. To do this, we also will examine the current compliance-based approach to accountability and governance in education, where a third party, typically the State Education Agency, assesses and measures student performance in core content areas and ranks schools based on performance on an annual administration of the test. This model of accountability has been the “ring that rules them all” in this nation since 2002. We will explore an alternative governance approach that is not solely driven from federal to state to local levels.

Crises should not go to waste. This brief seeks to help enable states and districts to capitalize on the opportunity to rethink accountability that is more robust and multi-varied and assessment that is more authentic and learner-centered: getting the schools and education parents and kids need and want.

Accountability and Assessment at the Local Level

What Do We Mean by Accountability? What Is Its Purpose?

The modern idea of school accountability can be traced back to the political movement spurred by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. The narrative held that American education was in decline, schools were failing our students and communities, and federal and state levers of power were needed to hold districts and schools accountable for those failures. The principal mechanism to hold districts and schools accountable for student performance was performance on standardized tests, largely in the core subjects of literacy and mathematics. A further level of

accountability, in an understandable response to deep systemic inequities, demanded that districts and schools be held accountable for the performance of students who were members of identifiable marginalized and historically underserved subgroups on these exams. Accountability measures, consequences, and enforcement were driven by federal policy punishing failure and incentivizing state action as an improvement strategy.

Under this framework, accountability runs almost exclusively from the school and local level upwards towards state and federal authority. The 25-year outcome of this strategy has been at best mixed, at worst an abject failure. We could, however, answer basic definitional questions about accountability in a very different, and ultimately more productive way. Who should be accountable to whom? And for what? In truth, it is the consumers/users of the public system of education — students, parents, and local communities — that must demand that the education providers — districts, schools and teachers — account for the quality and accessibility of their services. Accountability is better thought of as having a downward direction towards the ultimate local actor — the individual student sitting in the classroom. Furthermore, education providers are not merely accountable to education consumers for adequately imparting the basic content knowledge as measured by state tests. There are a whole host of things that students and parents want and need from schools that are not captured in that particular accountability metric.

Ultimately the purpose of any accountability system is to make sure that the education providers “do their job” and have information about how they can do their job better. The aim is to drive improvement and student learning and well-being. In order to successfully accomplish those goals, we suggest that accountability systems need recalibration to lean more heavily into holding the schools accountable to students and parents rather than to higher and larger levels of government.

How Do We Best Get Meaningful Accountability?

The initial exercise in any meaningful accountability framework should be a determination of what communities actually want their schools to accomplish on behalf of their children. Democratic process to determine the meaningful measures the government should use to assess school quality and drive improvement is essential. We highlight some examples of successful undertakings of this endeavor in places as varied as Kentucky and Chicago. Ultimately, governance processes that place accountability closer to where learning occurs and engage those most impacted get greater educator and public buy-in and better meet individual student needs.

After engaging in a process to gauge stakeholder sentiment about the key outcomes to which schools and districts should be held accountable, local and state education leaders should endeavor to design data collection systems and public interfacing dashboards that operationalize those community sentiments. Indicators of school quality can range a gamut of inputs and outcomes: e.g., quality of curriculum, experience of staff, art and music programs, number of books read, school leadership, success with ELLs, academic progress, results of school climate surveys, safety, student post-graduate success and placement, out of school time and availability of enrichment opportunities.

Schools and districts can then use the information in these accountability dashboards to target improvement in relevant areas. If a school has a higher than normal absentee rate, a push can be

made to hire more counselors and provide home visits; if the school's science curriculum is documented to be of less than high quality, efforts and resources can be targeted to develop richer and more engaging content; if the community is dissatisfied with certain elements of school leadership, coaching can be employed and if necessary leadership team changes can be implemented; and yes, if students are having trouble with understanding fractions as demonstrated by academic assessments, the necessity for different teaching protocols would be indicated.

In reversing the flow of how accountability is conceived, the role for standardized testing instruments should also be recalibrated. Rather than using instruments for comparative, ranking and sorting purposes that are not targeted to serve an individual student's learning needs, external tests should primarily be used for their learning utility. Basic competencies should be checked and information made available to teachers, students and parents without scores being used as the mechanism for rating schools — the accountability is to the consumer of education not the larger government body. Tests should be used to screen for specific learning issues. Outside norm-referenced tests of basics may have a role, but if the role is greater than delivering a narrow set of indicators of competencies, we've lost our way.

Some may ask, shouldn't the public be able to know how a school or district is doing "in comparison" to other schools and districts? And thus don't we need common measures? Locally developed accountability mechanisms responsive to their communities will have a whole host of common indicators. The goal is to improve an individual school or district in ways tailored to that community. Private schools that administer standardized instruments like the ERB use that data to see how their curriculum and pedagogy are performing and inform and improve their own practices, not to publicly compare their scores to another private school. Why should public schools operate under a different philosophy of accountability?

As demonstrated below, state governments can monitor and support local accountability systems in a way that averts the damage of simply ranking based on test scores and is directed towards facilitating improvement and student learning.

How Do We Navigate Accountability and Student Assessment?

Assessment of student learning and school accountability are two different evaluative tools in the education realm that have very different purposes. Unfortunately, over the last 25 years, the two tools have been conflated to the detriment of both. We have discussed a productive vision for accountability systems that hold education providers at various levels (state, district, school and classroom) accountable to students, parents and communities. The purpose of such an accountability system is to ensure that the school system meets individual and community needs and has the information upon which to engage in systemic and granular improvement on a variety of fronts important for well-being and development. Making summative assessment results the sole or principal accountability measure is an excessively narrow vision of accountability and skews assessment in a way that is detrimental to teaching and learning.

Assessment of student learning is part of that accountability system; but accountability is not the primary purpose of assessment. Assessments must be part of the learning process. Quality assessment spurs learning by providing useful, timely, actionable feedback to students and teachers and by highlighting to students the content knowledge and skills they have to master in

order to become proficient in a discipline or course of study. The exercise must be about individual student progress rather than one comparing schools or students.

Ideally assessments are authentic to the discipline (science assessments that involve exploration through the scientific method, history assessments that call for the interpretation of factual knowledge, math assessments that ask students to use numeric and logical concepts to solve problems) and to real world applications. The assessments that are best for facilitating learning are frequently more difficult to reduce to digestible data in an accountability system relying on statistical demonstrations. Performance-based assessments and other complex demonstrations of skills and knowledge, however, can provide accountability to communities when they are subject to public scrutiny through public demonstrations.

Assessment is an evaluation of student learning; a good accountability framework is larger than that. It captures a variety of inputs and outcomes valued by the community. The goal of this paper is to encourage policy solutions and innovations that will productively recalibrate accountability **and** develop and implement assessment systems that best facilitate student learning.

Different Systems of Accountability and Assessment

There are several examples from around the country that are worth highlighting in the quest to move towards more stakeholder-responsive, student-centered systems of accountability and assessment. If we are to use this period of flexibility to recalibrate what has not produced a particularly humane, excellent or just educational system, these models can serve as reference points and blueprints for local and state innovation. **See the case studies following the conclusion of the paper for implementation examples.**

Building Strong, Balanced and Meaningful Accountability and Assessment Systems

Relationship of Local Accountability with State Oversight

The Role of Large-Scale Testing

The original intent of ESSA was to retain the annual standardized testing requirements from NCLB and to move the federal accountability responsibility to the States. The State was to still submit an accountability plan to the Education Department for review. In the statute, local educational agencies may apply for subgrants for local accountability plans. However, when USED regulations and practice are taken into consideration, the requirement of rigorously comparable annual state assessments of all children, 3-8 and once in high school for Reading and Math, as well as required Science assessments in grade spans is a central expectation for approval by USED. This largely limits innovative designs in accountability across states beyond the current centrally controlled model.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) reports that almost all states currently utilize large scale single state assessments.¹ Many of these are written independently of local curriculum and that schools and districts are ranked primarily based on the results of these external instruments. As this model was the result of the rise of the Standards-based movement 30 years ago, the assessments have been focused more on assessing the breadth of the standards vs. the depth of learning. The emergence of through-year systems of assessment was partially due to a desire to make greater connections between classroom instruction and summative state tests; however, the reliability of the linkages between the two and thus the predictive power of these tests remain in question.² For this reason, changes in curriculum and local assessment continue to march to the beat of the state summative assessment in terms of breadth over depth and the need for broad comparability statewide vs. local need. The result is that many students across the nation sit in school classrooms, working on electronic learning systems like iReady, Khan Academy, and Imagine Learning in core content areas and do not have the time or opportunity for broader, deeper, more authentic learning experiences, or to spend greater quality time in other domains of learning. Although integrated High Quality Instructional Materials tied to through year assessments do attempt in some cases to simulate deeper instruction, they lack the deeper formative interaction that can only be provided by a well-trained, experienced teacher.

Since ESSA was signed into law, there have been numerous calls to find ways to change the pernicious effects of large scale state assessment use on the greater system, even going so far as to change from a single design approach to recommendations that states provide a theory of action for a proposed accountability system, allowing for creative solutions to state specific problems.³ Efforts to raise up local accountability measures beyond Reading, Math, and Science, often tied to community developed Portraits of a Graduate, however, have largely been relegated to lesser importance **due to** the federal state mandated test results and resulting school designations. Others have recommended moving to a sampling of individual student testing approaches, like that used by NAEP, where inferences regarding school performance may still be considered valid.⁴ Others, still, express concern regarding the impact of public reporting of test results on student achievement and performance itself, recommending rather a system where individual student test data be held strictly for internal purposes.⁵

How Assessment Innovation was addressed under ESSA

As noted earlier, innovation has been limited under the ESSA era due, in part, to the expectations of single state tests in core academic areas with rigid comparability requirements for these state assessments. Although ESSA includes two sections that were meant to spur and incentivize innovation, the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA), and the Competitive Grants for State Assessment (CGSA), the results since ESSA was authorized in 2015

¹ [50 STATE Comparison: Grades Three through Eight Assessments for Achievement and Growth](#). (ECS, 2024)

² [Progress Report on Testing Innovation: The Limitations of Through Year Assessments](#) (Olsen, 2023) Future Ed; See also [Through Year Assessments: Ten Key Considerations](#) (Center for Assessment, 2023)

³ [Accountability as a Roadblock to Assessment Reform](#). (Marion, 2021)

⁴ [Is the School Assessment and Accountability Era Over?](#) (Perie, 2023) WestEd.

⁵ [A Research Report / The Effects of High-Stakes Testing on Student Motivation and Learning](#) (Berliner, 2003) ASCD

from these two programs have been underwhelming. USED has gone so far as to loosen expectations for the use of IADA and has prioritized linking IADA and CGSA together so that there can be funding to support IADA applications. However, since 2015, only seven states have sought approval under IADA, and, of those, two states have withdrawn, and only one state, Massachusetts, has moved to substantially scale their proposed innovative assessment in a single content area, Science. Although there have been numerous CGSA applications and awards since 2015, none have resulted in a fully developed new or innovative state assessment system.

Approaches to Spur Future Assessment and Accountability Innovation

What could seriously incentivize states and local schools and districts to take the next step to develop, pilot, and implement new assessment and accountability models and systems that are truly innovative and fit for these times? Federal leaders should take this moment to research what has proven to support the emergence of significant innovation over the last several cycles of ESEA authorization. Meanwhile, state and local leaders should carefully consider where the opportunities for innovation actually exist in their state environments and communities. With a lessening of federal system mandates, as well as a long, steady declining trust in government entities, systems that rely on the top-down leadership and governance on the part of State Chiefs and State Education Agencies may be ill-prepared to build the kind of momentum necessary for deep changes to the system. More fundamentally, there needs to be a greater understanding that innovation largely occurs closest to where it is most needed, when students, educators, and families with their communities recognize that the current educational infrastructure is not serving their needs. This requires a new look at both how public schooling is governed and held accountable. Placing greater emphasis on innovating the ways communities hold both students and teachers accountable for learning and reciprocally how families and schools hold district leadership and communities accountable for providing the resources necessary for improvement is essential to spur meaningful change.

As referenced earlier, the current approach to state accountability under ESSA is rooted in a compliance-based approach, where there is a relationship between an entity, like a school, and a third-party governance body,” typically the State Education Agency, to whom the school is obliged to explain and justify its performance against defined measures. In response, the SEA can pose questions, pass judgement, and the school may face consequences.⁶ Among a number of concerns with this form of accountability is how it can essentially wrest control of decision making regarding learning materials and practices from those closest to instruction and lift it away to the state capital, resulting in a lessening of ownership on the part of those responsible for the learning process, students, educators, and parents.⁷

What if there were systems and processes that could bring accountability back to where it is centered relationally between students, educators, families, and the community? Could such alternative approaches result in greater ownership and more responsive and resilient improvement efforts? One such alternative approach is based on the “agora,” from the Greek construct of an open community-based space where ideas can be shared and common cause can

⁶ “Analysing and Assessing Accountability: A Conceptual Framework” Bovens, Mark (2007) In: European Law Journal 13.4, pp. 447 —468.

⁷ [Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change](#). Coburn, Cynthia (2003)

be found.⁸ The agora model acknowledges that there are peer-to-peer drivers that motivate our actions besides complying with orders from a superior — drivers such as social norms, common purpose, and mutual trust. Agora spaces allow members to hold themselves (and each other) accountable for “doing what’s best” in ways that are deeply rooted in “collaboration, shared responsibility, mutual trust, and student-centeredness.”⁹

Agora-like accountability already pervades the informal spaces we inhabit (for example, we are most likely to meet our deadline for a work project if we share purpose and sympathy with the team members who are waiting on us). In future policy discussions in the US, could we consider such alternative models of governance as starting places for innovation in accountability systems? Might research into these methods provide us with a new and reinvigorated system of learning in our country, like it has in other nations? Any innovative accountability systems developed under this model might invariably use metrics for a variety of inputs and outcomes, including those that bear on equity concerns and the quality of schooling for marginalized communities, given that the communities will have a voice in the agora to determine concerns important to them. Civil rights issues can be better addressed than through top-down measures that box performance into narrow considerations that are not necessarily beneficial for the community being judged.

In this time of transition in terms of policy, practice, and technological advances, considering new models of assessment and accountability already underway in states and networks noted in this paper as well as promising innovative approaches we have posed and others that may emerge can give us all a new-found sense of the opportunity and limitless possibility upon which this country was founded. It will also give us the energy necessary for productive change of a public schooling system that has been largely intact for over a century. Creating the infrastructure to support new designs and implementation trials through policy change, thoughtfully applied resource incentives, and the provision of technical supports is essential to bring opportunity to reality, resulting in a new and vastly improved system of learning for all students.

⁸ [Accountability and its Metaphors: From Forum to Agora and Bazaar](#). O'Kelly, C., & Dubnick, M. (2014)

⁹ [Reimagining accountability through educational leadership: Applying the metaphors of “ agora ” and “ bazaar ”](#) Kim, Tayeon. October 2022 Educational Management Administration & Leadership 52(117): DOI:10.1177/17411432221132100

Recommendations

We recommend the following regulatory or statutory changes to ESSA and related funding streams:

1. Changes in federal statute, regulation, and application by USED that innovation in assessment is closely connected to the need for innovations in accountability models. Specifically, this relates to
 - a. the ESSA requirements of single state assessments in core content areas annually for every student as the primary method of ranking and holding schools accountable.
 - b. Tied to this requirement is the tight application of comparability of assessments across localities of student learning.
 - c. If a state proposes an alternative approach to these core elements of accountability, then it should have a sound theory of action to support the change. That theory must inform all stakeholders as to how the quality of educational offerings will be improved and measured. The theory of action must preserve the **civil rights intent** behind ESEA, with a plan for realizing the goal of identification and remedying the inequities and quality deficits that remain prevalent in education systems. By broadening accountability measures to include a variety of inputs and outcomes that bear on equity concerns and the quality of schooling for marginalized communities, and reforming assessments so they foster deeper learning and address cultural competencies in way large scale standardized instruments do not, different approaches can actually better address the underlying civil rights goals of ESEA.
 - d. Incentivizing trials of such innovative systems should be a priority at both the federal and state levels.
2. Establish an on-going connection between IADA and CGSA in the statute. As this may take time to accomplish, continue to do so under USED regulatory or other authority. There are costs associated with innovating both assessment and accountability, whether you start as a pilot or are intent on scaling across a state. Anticipating and supporting these costs will go a long way towards incentivizing the development and implementation of new systems.
3. State Support for Local Assessment and Accountability systems. This could include:
 - a. Developing a pilot network of districts and schools that will implement effective performance-based learning and assessment models and take part in intensive research, development, and implementation processes focused on scaling assessment and accountability systems statewide.
 - b. Supporting shared communities of practice.
 - c. Creating banks of performance tasks and assessments using models developed by local education agencies (LEAs).
 - d. Facilitating professional development opportunities, including demonstrations of effective teaching and performance-based assessment practices by pilot network members.

- e. Supporting rubric design and standard setting by LEAs to develop systems of assessment and accountability. This includes sponsoring rubric creation, conducting inter-rater reliability exercises to ensure commonality of scoring, and engaging in an iterative process of setting benchmarks for various competencies and content and skill mastery.
 - f. Partnering with universities and research institutions to study and support practice and performance-based assessments and their use for the purposes of accountability.
 - g. Developing, together with LEAs and their communities, criteria for competence and mastery in core areas that secondary school graduates statewide must attain and that will be effectively demonstrated through performance-based assessments.
 - h. Developing a “system of systems” model that will achieve vertical coherence between local and state systems through the implementation of a governance structure that supports state-and-local co-creation of an accountability system. (KY model)
4. Inspectorates as quality and equity control.¹⁰ A robust system of school inspections/quality reviews by experienced and qualified education professionals is a method by which state and local authorities can ensure school quality, provide accountability data for stakeholders in school systems, and undertake a process of improvement. The practice of school inspections is well-established across many European countries. They are the standard in England.¹¹ The New York City DOE under Mayor Bloomberg undertook quality reviews that were important instruments of school improvement until discontinued. They are used by many large charter school networks like Achievement First and Uncommon Schools. In Colorado, they are used extensively by the Student-Centered Accountability Program (S-CAP), a collaborative, grassroots network improvement community originally driven by a diverse group of school district leaders representing 30 rural districts throughout the state.

Several states are now engaging in the process, notably Maryland. The Maryland effort, launched in the 2023 –24 school year, plans to visit every public school in coming years, including 150 this academic year. Maryland school visits include classroom observations, an interview with the school principal, and focus groups with other school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. The visit results in a published report with detailed findings, including ratings and recommendations on curriculum and instruction, student support, and educator support.

¹⁰ Erik W. Robelen, *The Full Measure of a School*, *Education Next*, Spring 2025 <https://www.educationnext.org/full-measure-of-a-school-student-test-scores-tell-only-part-of-the-story/>

¹¹ According to U.S. Education Analyst Craig Jerald, “[T]he English example suggests that inspections offer a way to make much more nuanced judgments about school performance, provide richer information to parents and the public, [and] offer better formative feedback to schools,” They “leverage expert judgment rather than relying solely on spreadsheet formulas.”

5. Local development of multifaceted accountability metrics. Districts have the power to identify and create actionable accountability metrics and data sources that inform school improvement along communities' desired lines. Districts can create "local report cards" that "measure what matters" by:
 - a. Creating and implementing a stakeholder engagement and input process whereby the relevant local community voice and help determine the desired metrics of public information through which schools will be held accountable.
 - b. Creating data gathering systems and public interfacing information that reflect the local process of determining accountability measures so that parents, administrators, educators and students have actionable metrics upon which to engage in systemic improvement.

Conclusion

The definition of insanity is making the same mistake over and over again. Whatever the causes of or the politics behind the potential freedom that may be available to state and localities to recalibrate and rethink accountability and assessment, not taking advantage of the opportunity would qualify as insanity. Rather than reflexively doubling down on large-scale testing and rigid accountability metrics, SEAs and LEAs can create processes for and devise ways to support accountability and assessment systems that better serve students, parents and communities. By breaking out of the pattern of accountability being conceived as something owed the state, and finding ways to hold education systems accountable to students, parents and communities for the metrics that they value, we could move the needle forward to genuine education — rather than just a push for test score — improvement. We have presented some models from around the country (and there are undoubtedly others) that could be drawn upon by states and districts in enacting their own accountability and assessment reforms. We have suggested actions the federal and state governments can take to foster the necessary innovation, improve education for all students including members of disadvantaged and minoritized groups, and break the patterns of the last 25 years. We hope that policy makers will take advantage of the present opportunity and truly reassess the existing paradigm, recalibrate accountability systems to measure what matters in service of school improvement, and reinvent assessment to focus on authentic and meaningful student learning.

CASE STUDY | An Assessment System Built from the Ground Up: Performance Assessment in New York



Introduction

The New York Performance Standards Consortium (NYPSC) is a network of 38 middle and high schools serving over 30,000 students centered on a system of graduation level performance assessments with accompanying teacher professional development, quality control and measurement through common rubrics infrastructure. The NYPSC was founded over two decades ago on the belief that there was a better way to assess student learning than dependence upon standardized testing. Instead of basing a student's future on a one-day (or two- or three-day) test, an assessment system should reflect a fuller picture of what students know and can do. The Consortium's system is based on

in-depth literacy, mathematical problem-solving, application of the scientific method, social studies research, a span of mediums for exhibiting learning, and a chance for students to have a voice and proud ownership of their work.

The system was developed by local educators using flexibility afforded the schools by the NY State Education Department (NYSED) through an initial five-year variance from state summative Regents exam requirements. The NYSED subsequently extended the variance on multiple occasions in response to the demonstrated success of the Consortium schools.

Purpose

In the Consortium's performance assessment system, assessment tasks *grow out of* the work of the classroom. They are *not imposed on* curriculum, a process that inevitably leads to teaching-to-the-test. Tasks become possibilities for assessment only after students and teachers have studied the material, discussed and debated it, and subjected it to their questions and writing. Out of this engagement and the relationships it develops in the classroom, both teacher and student become the creators of the task and take ownership of it.

Relationship of Performance Assessment and Instruction

Consortium schools' literacy-based culture focuses on extensive reading, writing, and discussion across content areas in every grade, building towards the graduation-level performance-based assessment tasks, known as PBATs. All Consortium students prepare PBAT papers and oral presentations:

- Analytic essays on literature
- Social studies research papers
- Lab reports of original science experiments or engineering designs
- Narratives of the process and solution of mathematical problem solving
- Individual schools also add tasks in the arts, art criticism, World Language, internship, or other areas.

Samples of student work can be found [here](#).

Assessment Quality and Reliability Considerations

Graduation-level PBATs are evaluated by external assessors using Consortium rubrics for both writing and oral presentations. In addition, a series of interim assessments, roundtables, classroom argumentation based on content and evidence, creative and first-person writing, and hands-on projects all prepare students for their final PBATs.

Consortium teachers commit to the many layers of work and collaboration required to support performance assessment. They design challenging curricula and tasks, respond to student interests and needs, develop and revise rubrics, and participate in Consortium and school-based professional development. Collaboration is extensive, from observing each other's classrooms, to serving as external evaluators, sharing curriculum, and evaluating each other's assignments and student work at bi-annual moderation studies.

Significance

The Consortium remains unique not only because it is **the only network of schools in the nation that has put into practice an authentic assessment option other than standardized testing**. It also supports a pedagogy in which curriculum and instruction drive the assessment, not the reverse. It is unique because it values inquiry-teaching and learning, promotes student voice, fosters depth over coverage, and promotes school cultures built on professional communities.

Accountability

Through its locally developed inquiry and assessment system, the Consortium also functions as an effective accountability system for its school communities. Student work and presentations are subject to public scrutiny. Scoring rubrics are common across schools and thus valid comparisons can be drawn among the work in member schools. The Consortium's work is also subject to external monitoring through a panel of experts and academics, the Performance Assessment Review Board. The Center for Inquiry, in addition to leading professional development across schools and disciplines, maintains a calendar for PBATs and assists in the coordination of external evaluators of the PBATs. The success of the Consortium model has also been documented through a study of Consortium school graduates who matriculate to the CUNY System, comparing their grades and other success metrics with those of socioeconomically comparable graduates of standard Regents-based high schools. Accountability to the school community, to the academic community, and to the larger public is enabled through these external evaluative mechanisms.

CASE STUDY | Actionable, Genuine Accountability: Chicago's CIDT Model

Introduction

Beginning in 2019, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) embarked on an ambitious process to redesign the District's accountability system. In April 2023, CPS adopted a new policy for evaluating school performance, built from the ground up using stakeholder feedback, advice, and participation.



Throughout this initiative, the District engaged over 20,000 stakeholders and formed a diverse advisory group to reimagine our approach to accountability. This new approach replaced the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), ending school rankings from CPS, and promoting equity and excellence in Chicago schools.

Purpose

The Accountability Redesign initiative resulted in the development of a new policy and system for analyzing school practices and student outcomes. This new system, known as Continuous Improvement and Data Transparency (CIDT), shifts focus away from punitive measurements of school quality to a holistic understanding of student learning and wellbeing. This means focusing not only on academic success but also fostering an environment that supports students' growth and wellbeing. It replaces the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) and improves on many aspects of its predecessor by being built from the ground up using stakeholder feedback, advice and participation.

Accountability for Continuous Improvement and the Role of Assessments

The framework of the new approach can be found [here](#). This approach to accountability prioritizes the whole child, enhancing teaching and learning environments to support every aspect of a student's development. It has led to the development of [school dashboards](#) that focus on the following areas:

- Daily Learning Experiences
- Adult Capacity and Continuous Learning
- Inclusive and Collaborative School and Community
- Evidence of Student Learning and Well-being

The CIDT school quality metrics dashboard based on inputs and outcomes is now available for all schools in the system. Chicago has also developed and implemented high quality common curriculum that is available to all schools in all subject areas known as Skyline. If schools do not use Skyline they must demonstrate that their preferred curriculum is of high quality. The Skyline curriculum comes with embedded interim, unit and summative course assessments. Many of the embedded tasks and assessments are performance-based and are designed with the intent to foster deeper learning. The embedded classroom and performance-based assessments were developed with extensive educator input.

CASE STUDY | New Mexico's Journey to Transform the State's Learning System to Ensure Its Cultural and Linguistic Relevance to All of New Mexico's Students



Introduction

In January, 2019, Governor Lujan Grisham signed two executive orders to move away from the PARCC, the large-scale state assessment system in place for accountability purposes, and ordered the NM Public Education Department (NMPED) to develop new policies and practices regarding testing, school accountability, and teacher evaluation. This action was in large part a reaction to the landmark Martinez and Yazzie v. State of New Mexico education lawsuit, where

in July 2018, the first Judicial District Court of New Mexico ruled that the state was violating the right of students to a sufficient and uniform education—particularly those students of low-income, of color, those who are English learners, and students with disabilities. That suit was the result of a sustained grassroots, community-based effort to hold the state accountable for student success. The court also issued a number of directives, including charging New Mexico to take immediate steps to “ensure teaching is tailored to the unique cultural and linguistic needs of students, including English-language learners and indigenous communities.”

Purpose

Then Education Secretary Ryan Stewart and the NMPED team and their partners quickly recognized that the Governor’s directives and the court findings was the result of a system that was disenfranchising many of New Mexico’s youth and threatened the native languages, ethnic traditions, and heritage of New Mexico. This realization has resulted in a cascading number of changes in New Mexico’s public education system.

In 2020, responding to an RFP by the Walton Family Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Secretary Ryan applied for the first of a series of grants to support the creation of a network of districts and schools across New Mexico committed to establishing community co-created Portraits of a Graduate and individual student capstones tied to community cultural and local business opportunities. To support this work, the grant also identified the need for two communities of practice, one for district and school leaders and another for teachers so that educators would have the training and expertise necessary to move to new forms of student assessment. This resulted in a series of grant awards over several years from the two foundations, and the emergence of a network of districts, schools, communities, and educators engaged in developing and implementing community-based Portraits of a Graduate, student capstones that are culturally and career connected to opportunities for students in New Mexico’s cities and communities, and a growing cohort of educators ready to support the emergence of a new system.¹²

Meanwhile, the New Mexico Legislature enacted several statutes and funding opportunities in response to the Martinez Yazzie lawsuit. In June, 2023, the NMPED announced \$11.4 million in awards to 47 NM School Districts to serve as “Innovation Zones” designed to transform the traditional high school education model, while improving the experience and academic outcomes for local communities.¹³ The intent of these awards was to build on the prototype Portraits of a Graduate and capstone assessments developed by the Gates/Walton grants and to further integrate CTE and career pathway efforts with core academic instruction. The Innovation Zone awards have served to grow the scale of the pilot efforts across additional NM districts and schools.

Impact on State Accountability and Graduation Requirements

The passing of House Bill 171 (HB171) in the 2024 New Mexico legislative session amended current law to update New Mexico’s high school graduation requirements related to

¹² NMPED Grant Application, 2020 to the Invitational Grant Program: Innovations in Assessment and New Measures. An Initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation

¹³ PED Announces “Innovation Zones” in New Mexico High Schools. NMPED, 2023

assessments. Students are **no longer required** to complete demonstrations of competency (DOCs) in core academic subjects (i.e., mathematics, reading and language arts, writing, social studies, and science) to receive a high school diploma, although they are still required to pass a slate of requisite academic courses.

Despite HB 171 removing the state's requirement for students to demonstrate competency in the five core subject areas, districts or charter schools may exercise their local authority to require local demonstrations of competency (e.g., portfolios, capstones, end-of-course exams). In certain instances, students can earn credit for core academic course work through specific work-based learning experiences where the core content is a required element of the experience.¹⁴

Although NMPED still requires their current state assessments in ELA and Math in grades 3-10 as well as the ASR Science Assessments in grade spans in order to comply with federal accountability requirements, the alternatives named in HB 171 provide different pathways for students to graduate High School in New Mexico.

Performance Assessment Relationship to the Learning Process

Future Focused Education FFE, a state-wide educational intermediary organization, has worked with the NM legislature and NMPED to implement the various initiatives across NM's districts and schools. This includes the New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative, where, in partnership with the NMPED, Future Focused Education is working to create new graduation pathways in schools and communities that offer students a more expansive learning and assessment system anchored by capstones that celebrate and honor their cultural and linguistic strengths, allowing students to take ownership of their learning, build strong identities, and see a rich future. These capstones matter, as they address the following concerns:

- **Retention:** Capstones will retain students in school by giving them meaningful experiences that give them a chance to apply their learning in real life scenarios and help identify what they want to do in their future.
- **Evidence of Learning:** Capstones give communities the evidence that students have the skills and knowledge described in graduate profiles which are a reflection of a community's hope for the future.
- **College and Career:** Students build the skills they will need to be successful in college or a career (finishing what you start, communicating, collaborating, etc.)
- **Grow Your Own:** Students appreciate the local wisdom in their own community and give employers and community organizations a chance to grow their own talent.
- **Equity:** Focusing on a student's language, culture and values and appreciating who they are and where they come from is a remedy to the concerns raised in Martinez-Yazzie.¹⁵

Assessment Quality and Reliability Considerations

As part of the Gates/Walton Grant implementation, NMPED and FFE developed a series of guidance documents to support districts and schools in the format and expectations of locally developed Portraits of a Graduate and capstone assessments. This includes calibration studies

¹⁴ [High School Graduation Requirements Guidance](#), HB 171. NMPED, 2024

¹⁵ [New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative](#). NM Legislature, 2024

of learning through Capstones. FFE tested these guardrails through the Youth Participatory Action Research Project, where paid student interns practiced capstone development and demonstrations, as well as uplifted student voice and experience with assessment through community-based research and interviews with New Mexican youth.

FFE also has captured and documented examples of student Capstones and local school processes to share with other districts through the on-going communities of practice. This includes an AI enabled database of student projects that also serves as a teacher development tool to help build technical assistance capacity across the state. Notable are the Zuni High School Capstones, for their depth and deep cultural significance.¹⁶

Current Status and Significance

While the extensive work over the last five years was begun in response to the Martinez Yazzie lawsuit, it has begun to reach deeply into assessment and accountability practices at both the state and local levels in New Mexico. However, both the courts and leaders in the state agree that the reach has not been deep enough in terms of meeting the needs of students and communities. In an additional court filing in April, 2025, the 1st Judicial Court found that the State of New Mexico and PED remain out of compliance with the prior court orders from 2018 and 2019 and continue to violate the constitutional rights of at-risk students to a sufficient and uniform education. These findings are in part due to continued poor attendance and other student success measures for New Mexico youth state-wide, despite an increase in both resources and programs to address the poor performance. As a remedy, the court ordered NMPED to lead the development of a comprehensive plan with specified deadlines for progress and finalization to address the violations. The Court Order, anchored in Plaintiffs' request for a multifaceted, equity driven, and detailed accountability framework rooted in metrics well beyond standardized test scores, created a nine-point remedy plan to meet the constitutional standard and determine the quality of education in New Mexico. The Order provides that:

1. A multicultural and multilingual framework must be created with which districts and schools provide a culturally and linguistically responsive education that supports the assets of at-risk students.
2. A transparent, cohesive, and accountable system of delivering special education supports and services must be created so that students with disabilities receive an inclusive, integrated, and equitable education.
3. A system of curriculum, instructional programs, and assessment from preschool through secondary school must be created that is culturally and linguistically responsive.
4. A system must be created of training, recruitment, placement, evaluation, and retention of a sufficient number of high-quality teachers, administrators, and support professionals who are well-prepared and adequately supported.
5. A system of technology must be created that provides all at-risk students and their teachers access to broadband services and a dedicated digital device both in school and at home.

¹⁶ [Capstones Better Prepare Native Students for College and Careers](#). Maizano, Miquel, (2022). Future Focused Education

6. An adequately staffed system must be created of culturally and linguistically responsive and high-quality student and family support services.
7. An equitable finance system must be created that provides sufficient, recurring and predictable funding to school districts and tribal communities that prioritizes and targets the needs of at-risk students.
8. An accountability and enforcement system that tracks local district expenditure of state and federal funds must be created to ensure these funds are spent in schools on at-risk students.
9. The PED must fill all vacancies and increase its current capacity with high quality, culturally competent staff.

Included in the findings was the statement,

“Creating this comprehensive plan requires the coordinated effort among educational leaders, State and Tribal government officials, education experts and advocates, and other participants in the State’s educational system, and of course, the PED.”

Efforts are underway at this time by both the NM Legislature and the NMPED to respond to the findings of the Court.¹⁷ Readers should stay tuned to the next steps taken by the State of New Mexico in its attempts to address the educational needs of New Mexico’s youth

CASE STUDY | Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment: A Proof of Concept for a different approach to Assessment and Accountability

Introduction

The Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA) is a group of Massachusetts public school districts who have banded together through their shared intentions to pursue a different approach to assessment and accountability. MCIEA’s work is organized into two strands, using performance assessments to assess student learning, and collecting a broader range of school quality metrics to assess school performance. MCIEA’s goal is to establish a proof-of-concept model that challenges the existing statewide assessment and accountability system.



History

The Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA) was formed in 2016 as a self-governing partnership that grew to eight Massachusetts public school districts and their local teacher unions, collectively representing almost 90,000 students (making up nearly 10% of the state’s students), 183 schools, and 6,600 teachers. A unique aspect of this

¹⁷ [Policy Brief: Martinez-Yazzie Motion Update](#). Hathaway, Jessica and Sena, John. (2025). Legislative Education Study Committee

consortium is that the governing board is made up of the superintendents and local teacher union presidents of member districts. Originally, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) provided facilitation, coordination, and technical support to member districts. In subsequent years, there has been a change of partners, and currently the Center for Education Policy (CEP) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is the primary partner, providing coordination, technical assistance, professional development, and coaching, while maintaining the Consortium's website, including its data dashboard.

Since its formation, MCIEA has added twenty-plus affiliate MA districts through its sibling organization, the Education Commonwealth Project (ECP), which was formed with the goal of spreading MCIEA tools and resources on a free and open-source basis to other MA school districts. Full MCIEA members have committed to two major aspects of work —assessing student learning through instructionally relevant, teacher-created classroom performance assessments, and capturing school quality via a multiple measures data dashboard for each consortium school. Affiliated ECP districts may choose one or the other of these two areas of collaborative work or participate in both.

In the early years, the Consortium, in concert with its partners, provided significant professional opportunities for teachers to build their capacity to create and implement instructionally relevant performance assessments integrated with their classroom curricula and launched the creation of an online, open source, sortable task bank of teacher-generated, curriculum-embedded, and standards-based performance assessments. As well, they conducted a study of early learning (K-2) performance assessment portfolio creation, scoring, and use.

MCIEA also spent significant time working with district stakeholders (e.g. students, educators, system leaders, families, and community members) to create a consortium-wide school quality framework. Identifying or creating measures aligned with that framework, the team designed a state-of-the-art data dashboard to visualize these new indicators.

Purpose and Intent

The Consortium's stated purpose is to "create a fair and effective accountability system that offers a dynamic picture of student learning and school quality." MCIEA seeks to increase achievement for all students, close prevailing opportunity gaps among subgroups, and prepare all young people for college, career, and life, using an assessment and accountability model that better reflects what the community wants to know about the quality of schools and the learning experiences of students. The creation of MCIEA was in large part a reaction to the excesses and limitations of the current MA accountability system, in which the rating of schools is based predominantly on large scale state test scores via the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Two growing concerns in the commonwealth have been how MCAS performance appears linked directly to family income and the demographics of a participating district, and how the test's focus on breadth, rather than depth, of student learning narrows the curriculum and promotes teaching to the test at the expense of more dynamic, experiential learning. Most importantly, these negative impacts on teaching, learning, and assessment are most felt within districts that serve the highest percentages of low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. In a letter sent by the MCIEA to the MA Board of Education, the Governing Board stated that, "the present MA accountability system is "undemocratic, inaccurate, and inequitable." For this reason, MCIEA seeks to be a self-

governing network of districts established and funded by the Massachusetts State Legislature in order to model a different approach to schools and districts outside the network, and in so doing, leverage positive change in the state's assessment and accountability system.

Performance Assessment and Student Learning

The consortium provides training and technical supports for teachers to become experts and leaders in creating high quality performance assessments by accessing a year-long professional learning Performance Assessment Institute that engages educators in a performance assessment design cycle. Typically, educators participate in a two-day summer retreat, a full year Community of Practice, and a summative community event and celebration at the end of the school year. Throughout the year, educators construct curriculum-embedded performance tasks with school-based teams and use protocols to assess the quality of draft tasks (i.e. alignment, rigor, equity, authenticity, agency, and accessibility). As data emerges after initial test runs, participants make task revisions, continue to field test enhanced tasks, and learn how to score student work reliably in order to make consistent proficiency determinations. Ideally, each lead team in a school is then empowered and supported, with the assistance of Institute staff, to build performance assessment literacy for their entire school faculty.

Two years ago, the consortium launched a pilot with four, now five, member schools to test the creation and implementation of Performance Assessment Portfolios, evaluating the degree of alignment to state standards and interrater reliability. An independent evaluation of the pilot's progress was undertaken after the first year, and results and recommendations were used to strengthen the portfolio process in the second year. The passage of the statewide referendum Question 2 in November 2024, which eliminated passing the state's standardized tests, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) as a high school graduation requirement, opens up new opportunities. In the coming year, the consortium will both continue to work K-12 and emphasize collaborating with MCIEA and affiliate high schools to use performance assessment capstones and portfolios as a means to assess readiness to graduate.

School Quality Measures and Accountability

At the consortium's outset, students, parents/guardians, educators, and community members within each consortium district were recruited to participate in focus groups to identify what is most important to know about their schools. This feedback, in addition to reviews of scholarly research and national polling, informed the creation of the MCIEA School Quality Measures framework with five categories, and over 30 unique data measures:

1. Teachers and Leadership
2. School Culture
3. Resources
4. Academic Learning
5. Community and Wellbeing

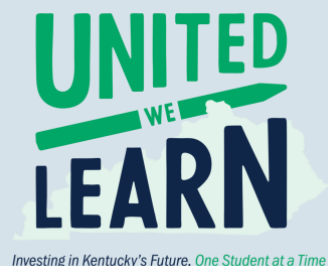
This multiple measures school quality data dashboard, which each MCIEA district school has, can be found on the [MCIEA website](#) and provides easy access to all constituencies to track the progress of member schools, both in the aggregate and by subgroups (race, gender, disability, language).

MCIEA schools are still subject to the Massachusetts assessment and accountability requirements, as overseen by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which includes the requirement for students to take the MCAS examination. Despite state oversight, member districts utilize ongoing teams of educators, and in some schools inclusion of parents and students, to review the School Quality Measures for school improvement purposes. The Consortium has not historically sought to maintain comparable data across member districts or schools, nor has it sought to compare performance with non-member educational institutions, as the overall goal of the school quality data dashboards is to drive school improvement rather than compare, rank, and sort.

CASE STUDY | United We Learn: Kentucky's Journey towards a new System of Accountability and Assessment

Introduction

The Kentucky Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education, together with a diverse group of concerned citizens and stakeholders, has established a vision for the future of education, built around three big ideas: creating more vibrant learning experiences for every student, encouraging innovation in schools – especially when it comes to assessment, and creating a bold new future for Kentucky's schools through collaboration with local communities.



History

In 2021, the KY Department of Education (KDE) undertook a large-scale survey of KY voices to identify what is working and what is not working in public education in the Commonwealth. This survey was followed by a series of listening sessions across the state by KDE, to further hear from students, educators, parents, community members and business voices as to what should be addressed in a system revision. That Spring, KDE formed an 80-person coalition, the Kentucky Coalition for Advancing Education, or KCAE, to review the data. The KCAE undertook a five-week design sprint, focusing on the following **four design habits**, which have become a hallmark of the United We Learn work across the KY Commonwealth at both state and local levels:

- **Inclusion** that invites student and community leaders into real decision-making roles.
- **Empathy** that accounts for the needs and concerns of diverse voices in the community.
- **Co-creation** that leads to better-designed policies and more sustainable implementation.
- **Reciprocity** that deepens trust between administrators, educators, and the broader community.

The KCAE was then charged to draft the “UNITED WE LEARN: Hearing Kentucky's Voices on the Future of Education” Report, based on the data that had been collected utilizing an inclusive design process, identifying the critical issues needing to be addressed to modernize public education in KY.

In that same year, KDE released an RFP to recruit KY Districts to become “Local Laboratories of Learning,” or L3 Districts, to advance more vibrant learning practices and experiences for their learners and to also develop local accountability systems to better connect their innovative programs with community needs. To better support the L3 Districts, KDE also established a Community of Practice of L3 Leaders, to share their learnings. By 2024, KDE had named 18 L3 districts, working together to build and improve local accountability efforts.

In 2022, in response to the report and the vision statement that resulted, KDE established a new diverse stakeholder group, the Kentucky United We Learn (KUWL) Council, to address the issues identified in the report and to work with the KBE and KDE to build a new Accountability and Assessment system for KY. This Council was funded in part by a CGSA grant meant to consider an innovative approach to Accountability and Assessment that could better support student-centered, competency-based learning in the Commonwealth. To provide further guidance and leadership to districts and educators, in 2022, the Kentucky Board of Education, or KBE, endorsed the Kentucky Portrait of a Learner, and encouraged each KY school district to either adopt the state version, or to develop one of their own at the community level. Of the total of 171 Kentucky County and Independent School Districts in Kentucky, 140 have subsequently developed their own Portrait through community input by the end of School year 2024-2025.

Purpose

In their deliberations, KUWL Council members recognized that to bring to fruition their bold new ideas of vibrant learning for all learners, increased innovation in schools, a transformed assessment and accountability system, and an overall deeper collaboration with KY communities would require reaching beyond incremental improvements to the existing system. In response, they declared a formal goal of reaching a moonshot,

“To build a prosperous Kentucky, we will launch an accountability system that is meaningful and useful to all our learners.”

Current Status

Through its on-going inclusive deliberations, KDE developed a series of three prototypes and then, later, four frameworks of a new, emerging system. At each step along the way, these prototypes and frameworks were deliberated with the KUWL Council, the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee, the School Curriculum Assessment Advisory Committee or SCAAC, and the KBE. The KUWL Council also modeled learning from the field by structuring multiple presentations by the L3 districts to share their innovations and learning to inform the new system’s design. In 2025, Framework 2.0 was taken to a new series of Town Halls by Commissioner Fletcher and his staff for review and input, resulting in a revised Framework 3.0. KDE then returned to both the KUWL Council and KBE, where Framework 3.0 was further tuned to become Framework 4.0. This system design is currently being workshopped with members of the KY Legislature for review and consideration for possible inclusion in KY statute in 2026.

Relationship of Assessment and Accountability to Instruction

At the Field level, working with the University of Kentucky Center for Next Generation Leadership program, or UK Next Gen, and regional educational cooperative staff, the KDE is creating a Local Accountability Implementation Toolkit to support districts to realize the promise and expectations of their Portraits of a Learner through vibrant learning experiences within their schools. Learning from the experiences of the L3 districts, the toolkit includes a continuum of Portrait of a Learner implementation within school classrooms, K-12 and spans to the creation of a local accountability system. This includes a focus on developing and utilizing instructionally relevant performance assessments across core content areas and student-centered portfolio development and demonstrations.

The KDE Division of Innovation, again in concert with UK Next Gen and regional educational coop support, are assisting districts beyond the Local Laboratories of Learning to create Local Accountability systems that in many cases include multi-metric dashboards for communicating progress within their local communities. As districts employ inclusive design habits of inclusion, empathy, co-creation, and reciprocity in their work with students, families, educators, and business leaders, these dashboards serve to create greater access to areas of both identified need and emerging areas of growth in student learning for community members. Here is an example from one of the L3 districts, [the Fleming County Measures of Quality dashboard](#).

State and Local Accountability and Assessment Expectations in a new Kentucky System

As found in [Framework 4.0](#), the KDE envisions a new system to include a smaller footprint of state assessments, the use of formative interim assessments in every school, and the building of robust and reciprocal local accountability systems, with collaborative district and third party consultative supports.

Framework 4.0 includes a through-year formative assessment system aligned to state Spring summative assessments in Reading and Math, as required by federal statute. Districts may choose to use the state system or select another system that has shown to be aligned to the Kentucky State Standards. It also includes the federally required ASR Science Assessment, which, however, is not included in school accountability calculations. At the local level, Kentucky districts may utilize the state's assessments in writing and social studies, or develop their own, competency-based assessments for this purpose.

Significance

As the Prototypes and Frameworks have developed, KDE and the KBE have sought to prioritize how the system will improve the learning experience for KY students. While Federal ESSA testing requirements continue to be a part of the system, the rising focus on local accountability that is responsive to local needs and concerns remains paramount.

An Evolving System

SEA leaders recognize that there will be a continued need to support student-centered practices in classrooms across the Commonwealth, and that this need may go beyond what can be accomplished by the KDE innovation team and their partners with the resources of the time limited 2022 CGSA grant. Commissioner Fletcher is already considering a renewed focus on High School transformation to find ways to raise foundation and other resources to continue to

help grow this work across KY schools over time and is actively retooling the KUWL Council to support these efforts.

About the Authors



Harry Feder

FairTest

Executive Director

Harry Feder is FairTest's Executive Director as of August 2022. He came to FairTest after a long career in public education in New York City, as a social studies teacher at The Beacon School from 2008-2022 and at the Urban Academy Laboratory High School from 2000-2008. As a teacher Harry developed and taught secondary school courses in a variety of areas including United States History, Russian History and Culture, Criminal Justice, the Economic Development of New York City and World War II. As an academic leader of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, Harry is a deeply experienced practitioner and teacher/educator of performance-based assessments.

Harry also brings a wealth of education research, policy and advocacy experience to FairTest. He was a Visiting Scholar at Teachers College, Columbia University in 2017-18 traveling to schools across the county, researching and writing on the importance and status of high school education in preparing students for readiness as democratic citizens. He was an Adjunct Professor at Brooklyn College for Social Studies Teaching. Harry served as counsel to the Consortium in its successful fight to maintain its schools' waiver from the New York State Regents Exams so it could maintain and develop its system of Performance Based Assessments. In the 2000's Harry served on the Board and as Board Chair of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the national network of schools founded by TedSizer and Deborah Meier.



Paul Leather

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Partner, Education Policy and State and National Relationships

Paul Leather is the Partner for Policy and Local and State Partnerships for the Center of Innovation in Education, C!E, and directs the Interstate Learning Community for the Center for Innovation in Education, C!E, in collaboration with the State Performance Assessment Learning Community sponsored by LPI.

Paul's background and experience in Education, Counseling, and Administration in New Hampshire and Nationally spans four decades. Among his roles, he has served as the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Education in New Hampshire, as well as the NH State Director of the Division of Career Technology and Adult Learning, overseeing numerous statewide initiatives and programs. In 1997, Mr. Leather began a journey to create a NH state model for competency-based education. This effort resulted in the development and implementation of the NH student mastery system now central to NH's High School graduation system. More recently, he led the development of a first-in-the-nation next generation

educational assessment and accountability model, “Performance Assessment of Competency Education,” PACE, first approved as a pilot program by the US Department of Education in March 2015. Later this effort formed the foundation of NH’s Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority approval.

In leading the C!E sponsored Interstate Learning Community, Mr. Leather has supported SEAs, intermediary organizations, and local districts across fifteen states as they develop innovative assessment and accountability systems. Mr. Leather has also worked as part of the C!E team to support states, districts, and schools to implement inclusive design processes to address community inclusion, empathic listening to community need, reciprocal expectations of local and state concerns, and the co-creation of multi-level systems design.