



Recommendations from the CCSSO Accountability Advisory Committee

A Vision for Improved Education Accountability Systems

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has a vision of improved education accountability systems. CCSSO recently convened a broad-based group of education leaders in an Accountability Advisory Committee to develop recommendations for states as they continue to advance systems of college and career ready accountability and supports. The Accountability Advisory Committee considered current promising practices as well as new ideas beyond established systems. The committee's recommendations for improving accountability systems are summarized below.

The committee was guided by the perspective that the time is right to revisit the established architecture of top-down, standardized, state accountability systems, based primarily on end-of-year summative achievement test scores. The Committee recommends that next generation accountability systems should reflect the following principles:

- A broader set of outcomes to more authentically reflect the breadth and depth of readiness for college, career, and citizenship;
- Autonomy by states and districts to define some of the outcomes for which they will be held accountable;
- Flexible testing approaches at the point of student readiness; and
- Continuous improvement by design and evaluation with a clearly articulated link between design features and improved student achievement.

These principles form the foundation of the Accountability Advisory Committee's recommendations. A rationale supporting these recommendations is provided along with specific recommendations for policy and practice.

Background

As states continue to lead efforts to transform our education systems so that all students graduate from high school ready for success in college and career, we must ensure that state systems of accountability and supports are best designed to support that transformation.

In 2011, CCSSO released a set of principles (endorsed by 44 states and the District of Columbia) to guide state leadership in raising the bar toward college- and career-ready (CCR) systems of accountability and supports, and called on Congress and the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to support this state leadership through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or ESEA waivers. Articulated in CCSSO's *Roadmap for Next-Generation State Accountability Principles*¹, the principles emphasized, among other elements, a focus on college and career readiness and a call for inclusion of differentiated performance indicators to inform support. In addition, CCSSO's principles committed all states to processes of innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement in CCR accountability and supports. To further state leadership on the support systems as they relate to accountability, CCSSO (with support from EducationCounsel) established the CCSSO Working Group on Supports and Interventions to deepen its work on several of the principles focused on diagnostic review and supports and interventions. The working group released a resource paper in 2013 *From the Bottom Up: Recommendations for Strengthening Statewide Systems of Supports in Underperforming Schools* with additional guidance on using information from accountability determinations to inform effective supports and interventions.

State education leaders had a vision for the future of accountability, and in the absence of legislative action to reauthorize ESEA, in the fall of 2011 USED launched an initiative to give states the flexibility required to achieve that vision. Overwhelmingly, states applied for and were granted waivers for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). As of October 1, 2013, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico were approved. These waivers give states the opportunity to develop and implement new systems of accountability aligned to CCSSO's principles, moving beyond NCLB, to allow for more thoughtful and effective systems of accountability anchored in college and career readiness.

Subsequently, CCSSO (with support from the Center for Assessment and EducationCounsel) established the Accountability Advisory Committee focused on the future of accountability with representatives from the CCSSO Innovation Lab Network (ILN) states. The work of this committee was premised on the notion that this is a critical moment in state transition. States are in the midst of implementing new CCR systems of accountability and supports; states are transitioning to CCR assessments (aligned to the Common Core State Standards [CCSS] or other CCR state standards) that raise the expectations for student outcomes; and underlying both of these, states are focusing on the kinds of shifts in teaching and learning that are needed to promote CCR outcomes for all students. To inform this work, the committee was designed to take a step back – reflecting on the core goals and role of accountability – in order to then step forward toward the next generation of accountability systems.

The summary of discussions and priority areas identified below broadly affirm CCSSO's prior accountability principles, build on these principles, and seek to extend and improve systems in a

¹ www.ccsso.org/Resources/Publications/Roadmap_for_Next-Generation_State_Accountability_Principles.html

manner consistent with the proposed vision. This has implications for states' continued leadership, as well as for ESEA waivers and waiver renewals.

Goals

Education accountability designs must be guided by the goals of the accountability system. These goal statements, which make explicit the intended outcomes, also serve as a foundation for the evaluation of the validity of the accountability system.

CCSSO's 2011 *Roadmap for Next Generation State Accountability Systems* proposes four goals for education accountability systems, which are summarized below:

- I. Articulate expectations in order to align actions and decisions toward ensuring all students are ready for college and career.
- II. Differentiate the performance of schools and districts in meaningful ways so that those in need of improvement receive appropriate supports and interventions, and those excelling can be recognized as models of excellence.
- III. Provide transparent, timely reporting of actionable data on performance results so that stakeholders at all levels can take appropriate action.
- IV. Foster a commitment to innovation and improvement.

The Accountability Advisory Committee upholds these goals and extends them by offering the following areas of emphasis:

1. **Readiness:** A central goal of education systems is to improve student achievement such that all students graduate ready for college and career, but the committee encourages states to broaden their view of CCR knowledge, skills, and dispositions. College, career, and civic readiness must encompass not only mastery of rigorous content knowledge, but also the ability to apply knowledge through higher-order skills and underlying learner-ready dispositions. The CCSS and other college and career readiness standards represent a "core" of the knowledge and skills needed for CCR, and can be implemented in a manner that has the biggest possible impact on student mastery of CCR knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Still, states should go beyond the CCSS and assessments to more broadly define and measure the full range of desired CCR skills and dispositions.
2. **Academic Achievement and Growth:** Accountability systems should promote not only district and school performance improvement, but also individual student achievement and growth, which can be supported through the provision of timely, actionable information by which stakeholders can make decisions regarding instructional practice.
3. **Equity:** Accountability systems should incentivize improved academic achievement for all students, including — and especially — students at risk. This focus on equity is not in conflict with efforts to promote gains for high performing students.
4. **Effectiveness:** Accountability system designs should encourage and not impede the kinds of shifts toward personalized or performance-based teaching and learning necessary to achieving CCR outcomes for all students. Considerations should also include the

provision of support, incentives, and targeted information to build capacity to help leaders and educators improve.

Design Recommendations and Rationale

While the current goals for next generation accountability systems are largely upheld, the movement toward more student-centered, personalized learning environments suggests new considerations for the design and evaluation of accountability systems toward meeting these goals. Therefore, the committee suggests that next generation accountability systems meet the stated goals through the following design recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Accountability systems should include a broad range of indicators that better capture the full construct of college, career, and civic readiness.

Explanation: In an accountability system that prioritizes college, career, and civic readiness, it is important to include indicators that a student is prepared for post-secondary transition or is ‘on-track’ to meet this expectation. There are numerous potential indicators for this category, particularly when one considers that readiness is a multi-faceted dimension that goes beyond academic performance and includes such characteristics as cognitive strategies, academic behaviors, and contextual skills (Conley, 2005). A framework for conceptualizing this construct developed by the ILN is presented below (CCSSO, 2013).

<p style="text-align: center;">Knowledge</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mastery of rigorous content and the facile application or transfer of what has been learned to complex and novel situations</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The capacities and strategies that enable students to learn and engage in higher order thinking, meaningful interaction planning for the future</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dispositions</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Socio-emotional skills or behaviors that associate with success in college, career and citizenship</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Core State Standards • Career & Technical Education • Other Content Areas & Essential Literacies • Global Competence • Applied Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Problem solving • Working collaboratively • Communicating effectively • Metacognition & self-awareness • Study skills & learning how to learn • Time/goal management • Creativity & innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency (Self-efficacy) • Initiative • Resilience • Adaptability • Leadership • Ethical behavior & civic responsibility • Social awareness & empathy • Self-control

Because it is often challenging to obtain reliable measures that are not easily corrupted (e.g., engagement measured via self-reports), some of these elements may not be suitable as factors that contribute to high-stakes outcomes. However, it remains important to promote and track these indicators in the system. States may consider new assessment models for school and district accountability, such as matrix sampling, that provide information on system performance for a fuller range of CCR knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Such models could leverage the

use of performance assessments or other measures of skills and dispositions that are deployed locally to support student learning, without tying such measures to high-stakes accountability at the individual student level, and without increasing the assessment burden.

Rationale: Systems can better incentivize and measure the goal of readiness by including a broader range of indicators that extend beyond K-12 and more authentically reflect the range of attributes and skills that are valued. Naturally, this will provide information to help teachers and leaders identify and address strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the measures will serve as a clear signal to students and others (e.g., leaders and parents) about the nature of performance that is expected. By both signaling intent and providing a broader range of indicators against multiple dimensions of CCR, accountability systems can incentivize the development of strategies to support these outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Districts or schools should have flexibility to establish at least some priority outcomes for which they will be held accountable.

Explanation: Each state should establish rigorous statewide measures of CCR (such as through CCSS-aligned assessments), but should also provide latitude for district innovation to expand on those measures to include additional indicators of CCR skills or dispositions deemed important by the local community. While the state typically defines all the outcomes and measures in the accountability system, an alternate approach involves the state differentiating between outcomes and measures that must be standardized statewide versus those the districts will have flexibility to define and implement. An example of this distinction is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Example of Differentiated State and District Indicators.

Statewide Standardized Outcomes/ Indicators	District/ School Determined Indicators
<u>Outcome:</u> Achievement in core academic content areas	<u>Outcome:</u> Demonstration of problem solving, collaboration, and communication skills.
<u>Sample Indicators:</u> Percent of students meeting target performance level on state ELA, math, and science summative assessments	<u>Sample indicators:</u> District developed performance assessments, successful completion of capstone project/ activity, completion of selected courses or certifications

The state’s role, then, is to define the common and standard outcomes and provide criteria and guidance to support implementation for a range of additional valued outcomes. The state may even supply a ‘model system’ to help support districts. But this model is not proscriptive and ultimately the district assumes the role of working with schools to select the priority outcomes and methods of implementation.

Rationale: Schools may justifiably privilege additional outcomes or rely on different methods to achieve these outcomes. Consider that alternative schools, charter schools, magnet schools, etc., often have a distinct mission and focus area that should be addressed in accountability. This is not in conflict with a shared focus by all schools on performance and progress in core academic areas. Rather, this flexibility addresses additional valued outcomes that are difficult to standardize statewide.

Additionally, affording districts and schools the flexibility to develop and/or adopt indicators incentivizes districts and schools to innovate and develop promising approaches. For example, the very act of collaborating to develop and evaluate customized, rich performance measures increases the understanding of and emphasis on these outcomes in schools, which promotes the goals of achievement, equity, and effectiveness. Finally, permitting some customization in accountability produces more authentic information to evaluate and support schools.

Recommendation 3: Accountability systems should permit flexible testing approaches at the point of student readiness.

Explanation: The move to more flexible testing should be expressly and clearly permitted to support transitions in teaching and learning to more personalized, competency-based pathways. Whereas current accountability systems primarily produce a single, summative outcome at the end of the year to inform school classifications, improved systems should promote collecting information throughout the academic year to inform teaching and learning on an ongoing basis to support continuous improvement.

This principle is particularly important for implementation of Competency Based Pathway (CBP) models. CBP models are based on the concept that student progress should be defined by mastery of a clear set of expectations or essential competencies. Such competencies represent the essential outcomes important for students to advance toward readiness for college and careers. Each essential competency should be mastered before the next set is introduced and students should be permitted to progress when readiness is demonstrated. The CBP approach calls for flexibility for student advancement that is not hindered by seat time requirements and/or limited opportunities for assessment. This design principle is not viewed as incompatible with requirements for annual determinations of performance (in fact, some states already take an integrated approach), which can be accomplished by aggregating at a specific point in time (e.g., end of grade eight) a series of assessment components or modules administered flexibly at the point of readiness.

Moreover, this approach to assessment is not viewed as conflicting with state assessments currently in place or being developed in alignment with the CCSS, notably PARCC and Smarter Balanced. Rather, a CBP can be part of a comprehensive approach to assessment in which different information is collected over time and for different purposes.

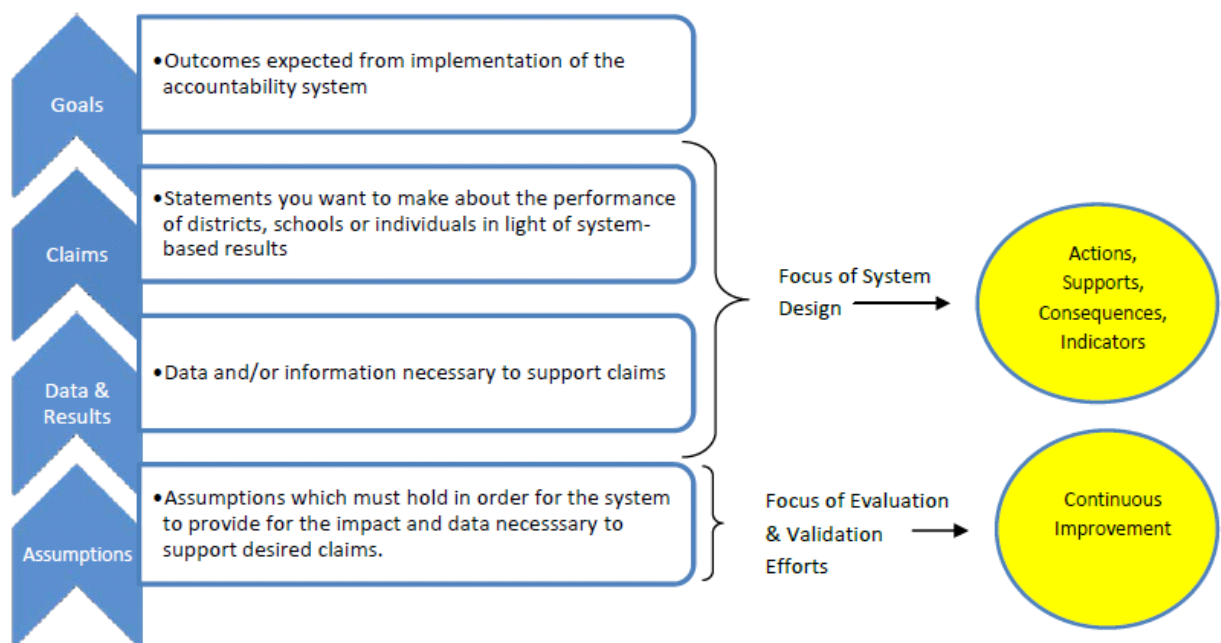
Rationale: The focus of this design principle is to promote practices that create more personalized instruction based on information collected through different approaches to assessment and build student agency in the learning process. Allowing flexible pacing permits students the time to get the focused support they need or aspire to higher levels of challenge. Additionally, more frequent and focused feedback improves the ability for teachers and students to concentrate efforts on the highest priority learning targets. This principle helps balance the attainment of academic achievement/growth and equity.

Recommendation 4: Accountability systems should be designed for continuous improvement, with a clear through-line between design features and improved student achievement.

Explanation: Accountability systems should not be designed to remain static, but should be designed with a clear theory of action (TOA) that explicates policymakers’ assumptions about how the accountability system will bring about desired changes, and therefore provides means for evaluating the system for the purpose of continuous improvement. The TOA should articulate how the goals of the accountability system and its underlying assumptions drive decisions around what data and information will be collected in order to assess progress toward those goals, as well as the delivery of supports and interventions. The TOA should also address who will be responsible for the actions and their implementation processes.

A high level overview of the components and connections that should be included in a TOA is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. High Level Elements of a Theory of Action.



Rationale: A TOA provides a basis for evaluating the extent to which accountability design decisions support the attainment of stated goals. In particular, the TOA explicates how the actions, consequences, and supports work together to build capacity and effectiveness. By including claims that are clear and potentially falsifiable, leaders can check that the system is functioning as intended and make improvements as necessary.

The TOA also helps ensure that multiple elements of the system are coherent. For example, it is important for states to have coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and among student, school, district, and educator accountability. The system should provide incentives that are consistent and mutually supportive. For example, if an educator evaluation disincentivizes collaborative practice, but the school accountability system relies on such collaboration for success, the system lacks coherence. By explicating assumptions about how change is thought to occur, the TOA can help ensure the system functions coherently.

Conclusion

The central proposal reflected in the recommendations described in this document is that the top-down, standardized, state accountability systems that characterized NCLB should be transformed. Next generation accountability systems should focus on a broader set of outcomes to better support post-secondary readiness and empower states, districts, and schools with the flexibility to construct and evaluate systems that will promote these outcomes. This vision document is meant to provide the initial information for continuous improvement and state leadership to ensure CCR outcomes for all students. Building on the leadership in these areas to date and with appropriate policy support and capacity, state leaders will continue to make progress in developing innovative and effective education accountability systems.

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Appendix A: Accountability Advisory Committee

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