# Next Generation Accountability: Creating Performance Frameworks for Student Success

*This issue brief will explore how policymakers can approach rethinking, redesigning, and rearchitecting next generation accountability systems.*

## The "Ask": Create Flexibility for Next Generation Accountability

**Background**

Next generation accountability systems can empower states, districts, communities, and schools with timely, relevant information and provide the capacity to analyze and continuously improve instruction and learning.

After 21 years of the current accountability framework in federal and state policy in the United States, there is growing recognition that it isn't working for our students, families, and communities to improve teaching and learning, nor preparing them for the future.

Accountability systems have been designed to rank and sort schools—identifying the lowest 5% performing schools in each state. Compliance-based accountability entails narrow, time-based metrics of student achievement, examining age-based cohorts of students with groups and subgroups, delayed use of data, and a one-size-fits-all approach.

Continuously improving education systems use evidence-based practices and performance frameworks to improve learning and monitor progress in real time. In response to ongoing feedback and data, they drive change to improve and evolve practice. Continuously improving systems evolve culture and structures to ensure that students get the supports they need in real time to support growth and success.

**Research on the Future of Education: Best Practices**

*How could states rethink next generation accountability to modernize schools and our education system to meet students' needs?*

State and federal policy leaders can study global best practices for the future of accountability to explore policy changes needed to modernize education in the United States.

***From Global Best Practices***

To summarize global best practices in accountability policy, the [Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommends](#) that policy should:
1. Encourage accountability systems that encourage outcomes, student experience, culture, and community engagement in creating performance frameworks.
2. Develop high-quality data systems to measure and report performance metrics, including student engagement, learning experiences, and student achievement, and promote data-driven approaches to improvement.
3. Prioritize quality of teaching, assessment, and learning in both formal and informal (work-based, community-based, digital) learning environments.
4. Foster partnerships between communities, parents, providers, institutions, and education systems in order to create high-performing schools.
5. Promote equity and inclusion by addressing inequity in school funding and resources as well as biases in assessment and teaching and learning practices.
6. Promote equitable access to resources, services, and opportunities across schools, especially for students most in need.
7. Ensure student assessment is used effectively to monitor and improve learning transparently, rather than solely to rank or compare schools.
8. Support teachers to use evidence-based practices, build assessment literacy, and become reflective practitioners based on the research on how students learn best.
9. Dedicate resources and strategies to increase student engagement and graduation, for example, increasing graduation rates through multiple pathways and extended learning opportunities.
10. Develop a culture of continuous improvement in schools, with communities, parents, students, educators, and leaders taking ownership of school outcomes through reciprocity.

According to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):
> *"In the past, education was about teaching people something. Now, it is about making sure that individuals develop a reliable compass and the navigation skills to find their own way through an increasingly uncertain, volatile and ambiguous world. It will often be the mistakes and failures, when properly understood, that create the context for learning and growth. Today, schools need to prepare students for more rapid economic and social change than ever before, for jobs*

*that have not yet been created, to use technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve social problems that we do not yet know will arise."*

## History of K-12 Accountability in United States

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was a major expansion of federal policy calling for accountability with requirements that states to conduct standardized testing of all public school students on state standards in English language arts, math, and science by grade-level annually to make determinations for ranking schools needing improvement. The federal law also required states, districts, and schools to be held accountable for disaggregating data based on demographic subgroups with the goal to evaluate student progress and provide additional resources for students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 provided states with permission to use multiple metrics in the design of their accountability systems for rating and judging schools. Accountability has focused on age- and grade-based standardized testing and ranking schools and students in relation to their peers with the use of cut scores. It hasn't resulted in significant improvements in teaching, learning, or school quality. While the NCLB "theory of action" was intended to improve public education, today there is little evidence this theory of change it is actually helping the students who need it most.

States have the ability to design their own accountability systems. As the United States continues to reform and update its education system, accountability remains a primary focus. The goal is to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have access to a high-quality education and are able to reach their full potential.

*How could future policy for accountability incentivize good practice and build trust with communities through rethinking benchmarks and goals that are in the best interests of students?*

There must be a major shift in accountability systems in the United States to empower students and families and drive continuous improvement on the most important outcomes. It is too late to continue waiting and tweaking the current industrial delivery model and top-down accountability model with more metrics that are comparable to the old system's metrics. Benchmarking to the past will continue to hold the current problems and conditions in place.

**Transforming Accountability in the United States: Accountability as Reciprocity with Performance Frameworks**

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### *Reciprocity as a Key to the Future of Accountability*

In <u>Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement</u>, the late Harvard Professor Richard Elmore explains: "Accountability must be a reciprocal process. For every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation. Likewise, for every investment you make in my skill and knowledge, I have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate some new increment in performance. This is the principle of reciprocity of accountability for capacity."

What is reciprocal accountability? Reciprocal accountability is the practice of mutual responsibility within a system. It is based on the idea that everyone involved in a given relationship must take responsibility for their roles and actions. This means that all parties must be accountable to each other for outcomes and goals, as well as their individual actions. The goal is to create an environment with transparent information where each party works together to achieve success.

There is a path forward on accountability to drive improved results with new performance frameworks for results-based, reciprocal accountability. These are aligned to new definitions of success and methods for quality assurance.

Quality assurance for schools is the process of systematically evaluating measures of performance, ensuring benchmarks and metrics are met, and measuring performance goals with results. Quality assurance requires a performance framework with metrics to ensure that schools are accountable to students, parents, and other stakeholders, and to ensure that students have access to a high-quality education.

On the path forward, let's summarize the action steps that states could consider:
1) Examine the purpose of education for human flourishing,
2) Redefine student success through a Profile of a Graduate,
3) Engage students, parents, and community members, including employers, in co-design of new performance metrics,
4) Shift the role of accountability to be shared responsibility as bottom-up, rather than top-down from the federal government.
5) Enable new accountability models with reciprocal accountability with performance frameworks, results-based outcomes for transparent reporting and responsiveness to student needs.

We need to innovate in education toward new delivery models that are personalized and competency-based, to create a more flexible student-centered system that ensures learners have pathways to meaningful credentials and graduate prepared for future prosperity. This requires addressing and re-architecting the most significant policy barriers to a new purpose and addressing the twenty-year old policies around accountability that hold the components and conditions of today's inequitable education systems in place. There is urgency to advance policy to enable and support responsiveness to student, family, and local needs.

## Rethinking Accountability: Examples

### California

*Using Dashboards with Multiple Metrics*

California's School Dashboard is an example of establishing a balance in state and local roles in monitoring different school performance measures. In this system, districts monitor four local indicators to determine if they have met, not met, or not met for two or more years. This information is gathered into a local dashboard, allowing district leaders to focus their efforts on evaluating and building school-level performance and capacity. Additionally, six state indicators make up performance categories the state monitors as common measures of student performance outcomes. This approach allows the state to monitor the progress on the six indicators as they are reported through a statewide dashboard, in order to identify schools for comprehensive and targeted support.

### Colorado

*Allowing Flexibility for Local Accountability Pilots*

Colorado created enabling legislation for local accountability pilots with investments to support districts in rethinking accountability.

The vision of this project is to:
- Ensure public school students are growing and achieving desired outcomes;
- Use assessments that have value to key stakeholders;
- Inform public education stakeholders of the success of the school system;
- Provide relevant information for continuous improvement for the school system and students.

The long-term vision is sustained focus on accountability. The state requires local accountability key indicators and standards. The local entity identifies, develops, and analyzes high-quality, relevant measures and reporting. It builds capacity to improve use of high-quality data and continuous improvement practices. It also aims to

strengthen local and regional partnerships, build capacity through professional development, and community learning. It builds on local values and vision.

According to the Colorado Department of Education, the local accountability system grant program provides grant money to local education providers that adopt local accountability systems to supplement the state accountability system. A local education provider may use grant money to work with one or more accountability system partners, which may be public or private institutions of higher education or private nonprofit entities. A local education provider that adopts a local accountability system may submit to the department a supplemental performance report that includes information collected through the local accountability system. The local education provider may also use an alternative format for the type of performance plan that the local education provider is required to implement. The department convenes the local education providers that implement local accountability systems to share information and best practices.

## Vermont

### Creating Accountability for Continuous Improvement in Vermont

In Vermont, the state has created a performance measurement framework with multiple measures to create a comprehensive picture of education performance. The results are used to inform school and district improvement plans and to identify the greatest areas of need in terms of student outcomes. In addition, the framework helps to inform decisions about state and federal investments in education in Vermont. It is viewed as helpful for individual schools, districts and the entire state.

Vermont's state plan uses an accountability framework where school performance is measured using multiple indicators aligned to five priority areas: safe, healthy schools; high-quality staffing; investment priorities; academic proficiency; and personalization. These are aligned to Vermont's Education Quality Standards, a series of policy guidelines requiring all schools to provide educational opportunities which are substantially equal in quality, ensure continuous improvement in student performance, and annually report to the community. Vermont adopted a comprehensive approach to statewide education policies that include proficiency-based graduation requirements, personalized learning plans, local systems of assessments, accountability for continuous improvement, and flexible pathways to graduation. For coherence, Vermont's Education Quality Standards are aligned to its proficiency-based graduation pathway using a comprehensive definition of student success.

For each of the five measures, the Vermont Agency of Education provides a series of guiding accountability questions and proposed reporting measures. The Agency uses a rating system from "near target" to "on target" to weigh each measure against the state's five core priorities.

**Annual Snapshot: Multiple Measures** — VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION

In Vermont, one way that we look at education quality is by examining numerical data displayed through an Annual Snapshot. These data have been selected by the Agency to represent common data collected across all Vermont public schools that address some, but not all, aspects of the Education Quality Standards. Each of these measures is evaluated by a specific method of calculation and from reliable data sources.

**Academic Proficiency**
1. Content Standard Performance
   A. English Language Arts
   B. Mathematics
   C. Science
   D. Physical Education
2. English Language Proficiency
3. Graduation Rate
4. Career and College Ready
   A. Assessments
   B. Post-Secondary Outcomes

Note: All of the Academic Proficiency items are also used to satisfy federal requirements under ESSA.

**Personalization**
1. Student Participation in Flexible Pathways
3. Flexible Pathways Offerings
2. Personalized Learning Plans

**High Quality Staffing**
1. Licensed Teachers
2. Education Staff Stability
3. Staff Satisfaction
   A. Professional Development
   B. Evaluation

**Safe, Healthy Schools**
1. Disciplinary Exclusion
2. School Climate
   A. Student Survey
   B. Staff Survey

**Investment Priorities**
1. EQS Staffing Ratios
2. Per Student Expenditures
3. Return on Investment

http://education.vermont.gov/vermont-schools/education-laws/essa

Vermont's rating system encourages a culture of continuous improvement. School leaders and educators receive guidance on how they can move closer to achieving the outcomes target for their school and students. Vermont's school rating system uses this performance framework to offer an easy-to-understand, more nuanced picture of quality, and stands in contrast to models of accountability that rely on a single, summative rating of school performance.

**New Zealand**

*Highlighting International Best Practices in Accountability with Reciprocity*

With a population of four million people, New Zealand might represent the scale of a single small state in the United States. Its focused approach to education system transformation and accountability offers a global best practice to study.

New Zealand has a distinctly different accountability system than the United States. New Zealand is one country that provides reciprocal accountability through shared responsibility. It is one recognized by global education experts as

having evolved to better support a building a world-class education system for the future by sharing responsibility and engaging in reciprocity with communities. For accountability, schools use a results-based outcomes framework, setting metrics with communities, families, students, and stakeholders through local boards. In evaluating school quality, there is a balanced score card of performance metrics through outcomes-based models. The accountability and measurement quality are enforced by a different government entity, the Education Review Office, with an accreditation process like a charter authorizer, rather than by a national testing program. National curriculum frameworks and the learning goals, as requirements, are set at the National Ministry of Education. There is currently little use of large-scale, high-stakes summative testing, except in the final three years of secondary school. The quality of a learner record (transcript) or high school credential has separate oversight responsibilities by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, which also monitors the consistency and moderation of performance assessments through sampling. New Zealand's system of education accountability is based around the frameworks set by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Education Review Office (ERO). The implementation of accountability, however, is ultimately local control. At the local level, there is locally-driven reciprocal accountability between each school, their educators, leaders, members of the community, families, and students.

The goal is a world-class K-12 education. The student has a learner record communicating mastery of competency development, it requires evidence of student work, and provides local communities with shared responsibility for educational excellence. Finally, this happens in the context of examining purposeful policies to drive human flourishing that shape the entire context for society in New Zealand.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

The main purpose of this issue brief is to explore and reflect on best practices for the future of accountability and make policy recommendations.

The current accountability system is not driving the needed changes for a better K-12 education system for our youth and society. States need to take new approaches to change policy and rethink the purpose of accountability, what is possible for performance frameworks and results, who is accountable, for what, and how accountability will drive a modern vision of high-quality learning for all.

**Policy Recommendations:**
- Create flexibility and enabling policy to allow for new accountability systems with room for prototyping, piloting and incubating next generation accountability models.
- Rethink measurement systems to more effectively evaluate school quality through performance frameworks and new metrics.
- Engage states and communities to design new reciprocal accountability systems with permission to re-examine the purpose of schooling and rethink accountability.
- Allow for a learning agenda with research and development (R&D) to plan, develop, and pilot next generation accountability models.
- Be flexible to allow for new metrics, frameworks, and concepts for quality assurance in evaluation.
- Launch investments to build capacity to modernize accountability and evaluate school quality using reciprocal accountability and results-based performance frameworks.
- Focus on accountability that provides coherence for education systems at all levels, emphasizing learning and continuous improvement, aligning to learning sciences research, advancing student-centered learning, and building trust.

## Conclusion

Measurable, meaningful results-based outcomes can drive all aspects of school performance and continuous improvement. It goes beyond traditional measures, such as test scores, to collect data on a variety of important inputs including metrics and indicators of school quality identified by students, families, and communities as critical for learning and student success.

## Contact Information

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## About the Aurora Institute

The Aurora Institute's mission is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all. Aurora is shaping the future of teaching and learning through its work in policy advocacy, research, field-building, and convening. With a national and global view of education innovation, we work on systems change in K-12 education, promote best practices, examine policy barriers, and make recommendations for change to yield improved outcomes for students. Aurora envisions a world in which all people are empowered to attain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to achieve success, contribute to their communities, and advance society.