

Tool II: Guiding Questions Regarding Accountability and Continuous Improvement System Values

Establishing or clarifying your values prior to designing an accountability and continuous improvement system can serve as a guidepost as you make the countless decisions related to design and implementation. Below you will find guiding questions to help you along the path.

I. Establishing your state or district values related to accountability and continuous improvement

- What are your existing values, and how those are reflected in your current system of accountability and continuous improvement?
- For whom is your current system working? In which ways? For whom is your system not working, and why?
- Have you engaged multiple stakeholders to understand what they value in an accountability and continuous improvement system?

Sample questions for stakeholder groups

- What does it mean for children to be successful? For which of these factors are schools responsible? How do you want to be informed about the progress of schools?

Stakeholders

- ☐ Students
- ☐ Parents/guardians
- ☐ Teachers and unions
- ☐ School and district leaders
- ☐ Community groups
- ☐ Service providers
- ☐ Early education
- ☐ Higher education
- ☐ Business leaders

- Have you considered a range of methods for engaging stakeholders?

Methods

- ☐ Community meetings
 - ☐ Identifying connectors within each stakeholder group to conduct outreach
 - ☐ Formal/informal sessions
 - ☐ Community organizing groups' networks
 - ☐ Social media
 - ☐ Paper/online surveys
 - ☐ Focus groups
- What feedback did you receive from these stakeholders?
 - How, when, and with whom will you share feedback?

II. Guiding questions for system values

(for more information about the CORE Districts' values see p. 6 in the case study)

The values undergirding the CORE Districts' accountability and continuous improvement system offer one example that states and districts may draw upon. Below are some questions for states and districts to consider if you are considering adopting some of the same values that the CORE Districts have embraced.

Eliminating disparities and disproportionality

- How can we effectively balance confidentiality with ensuring that all students are counted? (e.g., the CORE Districts use a minimum of 20 students for each subgroup.)
- How can we measure performance and growth across all of our indicators?
- What are the consequences of relative weightings of performance versus growth for subgroups of students?
- How can we communicate and maintain urgency around acting to reduce disparity and disproportionality?
- Do we have a range of stakeholders involved in decision-making to ensure that we are considering potential unintended consequences of our system?
- [For states] What can we do to support districts to ensure that they act on data findings related to disparities and disproportionality among student groups?

Building Collective Ownership

- How can we obtain input from stakeholders about barriers to collaboration?
- How can we leverage the structures we have in place to support peer learning among schools (e.g., teacher and leader professional development efforts and grants)?
- Through which avenues can we ensure teacher collaboration time to review student work and monitor student progress, in order for all teachers in a school to feel invested in each student's success?

- How can we incentivize collaboration? As an example, when a high-performing school supports a low-performing school in a collaboration that yields improvements, are there opportunities to “give credit” to the high-performing school (e.g., through a stipend, public recognition, etc.)?
- Will an assessment of teachers’, principals’, and district leaders’ professional learning needs offer a complement to student data in order to drive decisions about capacity-building investments and services at the state level?

Data-driven continuous improvement

- Are there opportunities to model continuous improvement and data-driven decision-making at all levels, from the classroom to the state?
- How do the system’s weightings encourage (or discourage) data-driven action? For example, are indicators with lower weightings less likely to be prioritized by districts? If so, how can we encourage data-driven action on those indicators?
- How can we encourage schools to continue to improve even if they are considered “above average”?
- How can structures support continuous improvement? For example, can we support Plan-Do-Study-Act continuous improvement cycles through professional development, grants, or other incentives?
- What resources can we provide to support data analysis by school leaders and educators?

Balancing system coherence with district autonomy

- Do small pilots that are ultimately disseminated, if successful, provide an effective avenue for innovation? See the Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority (ESSA, Sec. 1204), as an example.
- What are the aspects of the system that must be the same for each district across the state in order to “meaningfully differentiate” schools (per ESSA), and which can be customized for each district’s local context?
- Where are there opportunities for us to offer a menu of options, rather than prescribing a single approach?
- Which opportunities exist for the state to outline outcomes and districts to determine the means to achieve those outcomes? As an example, the CORE Districts leadership agreed on common social-emotional measures, but districts determine which interventions to use to build students’ social-emotional skills.