

Discussion Notes: Accountability Breakout Session
Stakeholder Session #1 | April 28, 2016

I. Overview

Alissa Peltzman, former Vice President of State Policy and Implementation Support at Achieve, Inc., led morning and afternoon breakout sessions on the potential impacts and opportunities of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with respect to school and district accountability in Pennsylvania. Approximately 50 stakeholders participated in the sessions.

Ms. Peltzman began the breakout sessions with brief overviews of key elements of the new law, including requirements that statewide accountability systems “meaningfully differentiate” schools using:

- Academic proficiency on annual state assessments
- Graduation rates for high school
- English Language Proficiency
- Growth or another statewide academic indicator for K-8 schools
- Not less than one other state-set indicator of school quality or student success
- 95 percent assessment participation rate

Next, participants introduced themselves and outlined their hopes for Pennsylvania’s accountability system moving forward. Common themes included increasing the reliability and validity of measures; equity and cultural competence as critical components of success; adding measures that reduce emphasis on testing and promote a broad curriculum; eliminating measures that may trigger unintended consequences; and reducing stakes, including for students, teachers, and schools.

2. Discussion Points

For the breakout exercise, participants were asked to provide feedback in five key areas:

1. What challenges or barriers stand in the way of moving toward the ideal accountability system?
2. Within the current system, what should be maintained? What should be expanded?
3. Transparency is critical to continuous improvement, therefore...
4. The most important indicator to add is...
5. What should the system drive? What’s a critical performance goal?

Common themes are detailed below, with the most frequently-mentioned appearing in *italics*.

What challenges or barriers stand in the way of moving toward the ideal accountability system?

Data

- Results aren’t delivered on a realistic timeline for purposes of improving student achievement
- Misuse of data
- Variations in school structure and configuration that don’t mesh with one-size-fits-all system

- Different learning styles
- *Snapshot data*

State issues/policy

- Clarifying the purpose of accountability prior to designing the system
- Lack of support from the state
- *Unrealistic mandates/expectations; rigid system; lack of flexibility; reliance on testing*
- *Staff shortages; funding issues*
- *Policy is driven by interests of adults rather than children; adult beliefs about what kids can do*
- Lack of holistic approach
- Political landscape (both national and state)
- Lack of agreement on what follows accountability determination (“then, what?”)
- Reform fatigue; too many mandates

Within schools factors

- Administrator perceptions
- *Barriers to cooperation among departments (district or state?); silo effect; lack of shared values and collaborative partnership*
- Police in schools

Out-of-school factors

- Parental engagement
- Insufficient attention to pre-K

Other

- Behavioral health and wellness
- Financial incentives to systems that see kids as “broken”
- Perceptions; labelling of schools; drive to boil performance down to a grade
- *Changing school or district culture; fear of change*
- *Lack of culturally diverse thinking; racism*
- Lack of knowledge regarding children with extreme life circumstances, how it impacts learning and behavior
- *Willingness to accept less for certain children*
- Low expectations for high school students; certain high schools do not view career and tech centers as partners for academic achievement
- Insufficient attention to postsecondary
- Too many societal traditions entrenched in the distant past
- Too many “weight bearing walls”
- Lack of school librarians

Within the current system, what should be maintained? What should be expanded?

- *Focus on growth*
- Project-based assessment results

- *Diversity aspirations; implicit bias test*
- Develop/embed training on using test scores
- Faster turnaround of test results
- Expand measures
- *Include data from other assessments: NOCTI, ASVAB, AP, IB, SAT)*
- *Incentivize high quality early learning*
- Subgroup performance
- Strong oversight of LEAs regarding students with disabilities
- Expand flexibility and provide additional resources
- Descriptive information about schools (number of students, disaggregated; number of teachers; teacher absences; level of poverty); further delineate poverty data
- *Department professional development*
- Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) with focus on authentic observation
- Peer review for teachers
- *Equitable/proportional representation of subgroup populations in advanced programs (AP, GIEP, IB)*
- School climate
- Community engagement
- *Collaboration and communication between districts and county children and youth agencies to ensure school stability (and support) for foster youth; alignment with other community supports; expand transition services, mental and health services*
- Both 4- and 5-year graduation rate
- Indicators should be used as a screen for more nuanced diagnostic of support needs
- Highly qualified teachers in the arts
- SLO for the arts

Transparency is critical to continuous improvement, therefore...

- *The system needs to be clear and reflect improvement—more than a snapshot of achievement*
- PDE accountability system should hold parents/guardians accountable
- Publicly report where the money goes (i.e., how much of the school district money goes to student learning?)
- *Our system must meet the needs of all students*
- Be transparent about the number of students who fall into multiple, disaggregated groups
- Families and communities—voices and inputs—should be happening on all levels of the process
- Have one plan that includes all—the school performance profile and the state performance profile, regular education, and special education
- Federal and state policies and/or regulations have to be clear about allowable uses of funds
- Data needs to be accurate
- Information must be available to teachers to inform practice
- *Available to parents in a prompt manner, and in a way that they can understand; reporting of results should be swift; results should be easy to understand*

- What is put out or told must be responsive to community interests; what is told should include both what is known and what that means for action and actors
- Performance data needs to be presented with school (socioeconomic status) context
- There needs to be an explanation of what is being presented so it is about more than just praise or criticism; understanding the context (historical, legal, etc.) and the “why” is critical
- Let’s be transparent about how inequity drives disparities in opportunity
- Staff, parents and community need to share it and reflect on data to drive action
- Policymakers and administrators must commit to proactively engaging with parents, students, teachers, principals, and community members in creating and explaining accountability metrics; transparency means that parents needs to be notified of what school performance profile means
- Results should focus only on factors teachers and schools can control
- The system should be based on a truly multi-measured system, not a system billed as multi-measured that just utilizes one state assessment in multiple fashions

The most important indicator to add is...

For this portion of the exercise, more than 70 individual responses were organized into three key themes:

Growth over snapshot proficiency, to include:

- Measuring pre/post and distinguishing that from achievement
- Emphasizing formative data on performance, so educators and students get immediate feedback

Measures of school climate, to include:

- Predictable, structured routines that are consistently followed
- Educator and student satisfaction surveys
- Reconciliation of Gallup data – how the public feels about its own school versus all schools
- Discipline and suspensions
- Local community context – what is the community offering and how is that changing? What types of services and/or programs are offered?
- Variety of curricular options
- Responsiveness of referrals to other agencies—not the number of referrals, but how quickly action is taken
- Attitudes and behaviors
- Staff turnover/retention

Career Readiness, to include:

- Explicit connection to economic development
- Placement in a high demand job, military, credential or degree program within 6 months of high school graduation
- Number of graduates who earn an industry recognized credential (in a high demand area?)

- Number of graduates who have completed externships or pre-apprenticeship program (work-based learning)

What should the system drive? What's a critical performance goal?

Academic measures/goals

- *High school graduation*
- *Student achievement and success*
- *Student growth, including by subgroup*

Driving educational supports/practices

- Data-informed systems of support for local schools and communities
- Inclusive early childhood initiatives
- Quality instruction
- *Commitment to work collaboratively with other agencies and systems to do what is needed to achieve student success; agency involvement*
- Drive shared values/collaborative partnerships and full engagement
- To determine the highest priority schools (bottom five percent)
- The needs of our students are met 100 percent of the time
- Education justice
- Positive emotional skill building (beyond academics)
- Student holistic wellness; personalized, student offerings providing broad opportunities; healthy, safe environment conducive to learning (with understanding that achievement and growth will already be included)
- Every child is entitled to a first class education
- *Gender-responsive, race positive, culturally competent, trauma-informed practices*
- Closing the achievement gap for children involved with the child welfare system/ in foster care; the context (SES) of academic achievement
- Provide a system for teacher effectiveness which is fair and sustainable
- Benchmarked elementary reading levels
- Reward equity in serving vulnerable students effectively
- Opportunity and resources
- Students should be able to apply academic learning to a “problem,” “issue,” or “challenge” in their school, community, neighborhood
- Holistic approach to the arts, including of the arts programs, (making K-12 arts as a compliance measure as many districts interpret arts education differently)

Measures beyond K-12

- Lack of incarceration 5-10 years out compared to the rate of their parents
- Internationally competitive high school student achievement in math and English; prepared to succeed in competitive global marketplace
- Successfully transition into kindergarten from early childhood, especially children with disabilities