



# Next-Generation Accountability Systems

An Overview of Current State Policies and Practices

Center for American Progress and the Council of Chief State School Officers

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# Introduction and summary

Over the past six years, there has been a significant shift in education. States recognized that students were not being taught at levels that adequately prepared them for college and careers and stepped up to develop and implement more rigorous standards. As part of this transition, states have also committed to better supports for educators to adapt to the new standards, better assessments to measure student learning, and better accountability systems to understand where schools are struggling and how to help them improve.

Accountability systems provide the underlying structure for school and district support and improvement. State systems should hold all stakeholders accountable for student success, starting with the state and ending with the teacher in the classroom. States, districts, and schools should provide the support and resources necessary to improve achievement for all students, including at-risk students. Accountability systems should include strategies and systems for development of the teaching profession. These systems must recognize success while also enforcing consequences and providing support to the schools and districts most in need of improvement.<sup>1</sup> States are moving forward on all of these fronts.

However, as educators and states were making progress, Congress remained stagnant, failing to revise and reauthorize the federal education accountability law, known as No Child Left Behind, or NCLB.<sup>2</sup> Frustrated by this inaction, state leaders came together in 2011 to put forth a proposal that modeled the next-generation accountability systems.<sup>3</sup> Building on the positive aspects of NCLB, the Council of Chief State School Officers, or CCSSO, released a vision for the future of accountability systems.<sup>4</sup> This vision described an accountability system that is grounded in college- and career-readiness standards, collects a broader array of data to more accurately understand school and district performance, and uses those data to better support schools and districts, with an emphasis on the lowest performing.

Since then, states have built upon these principles to advance accountability systems. Some states have taken advantage of the opportunity to request flexibility from specific provisions of NCLB from the U.S. Department of Education. States can receive flexibility from a few of NCLB's outdated requirements by adopting reforms in three key areas: college- and career-readiness standards and assessments, systems of differentiated accountability and support, and teacher and principal evaluation.<sup>5</sup>

In order to illustrate the variety of innovative approaches to accountability that states are exploring, this report provides examples of next-generation accountability concepts implemented by states. While this study provides an overview of the landscape, it is not fully representative of the variety of state approaches to accountability. In reviewing the work of the states and drawing upon the thinking in both CCSSO's 2011 proposal and "Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm" by Linda Darling-Hammond, Gene Wilhoit, and Linda Pittenger, we found that current reforms fell into five broad categories, which we describe in detail in each section of this report:

- **Measuring progress toward college and career readiness**

Many states are rethinking mechanisms for measuring progress based on assessments and are including additional measures of college and career readiness such as the percentage of high school graduates who require remediation coursework in college.

- **Diagnosing and responding to challenges via school-based quality improvement**

Many states and districts are using a broad array of quality indicators, such as parent volunteer hours and attendance data, to measure school success and develop school-improvement plans, as well as making use of third-party experts to assist them in this work.

- **State systems of support and intervention**

States and districts are rethinking the way they support struggling schools. Some of the most prevalent strategies include school support teams, pairing high-growth schools with low-performing schools, networks of low-performing schools, engaging external providers, and recovery school districts.

- **Resource accountability**

Some states and districts are focusing more intently on the connections between resource allocation and outcomes, and several have tried to aggressively tackle inequitable school funding with new state funding formulas. Others are working to increase transparency and accountability for how funds are being spent to ensure that high-need students are receiving adequate support.

- **Professional accountability**

Most states have adopted new systems for evaluating and supporting teachers and leaders. However, some states are leveraging these new evaluation systems to create more robust on-site embedded professional development systems and developing school leaders, such as principals, to effectively carry out teacher-evaluation systems and instructional leadership. In addition, a number of states are also rethinking other aspects of the teaching profession, including teacher licensure, teacher-preparation program approval and accreditation, and selection, retention, and tenure.

It is essential to note that the trends and state examples that follow are provided to illustrate patterns of reform across the 50 states, but that the individual state reforms we have highlighted may or may not have resulted in successful improvement of student outcomes. At the same time, through our review of the landscape, we have identified some barriers that states, districts, and schools must tackle in order to move this work forward. These barriers are complex and interconnected: They include transitioning to new assessments, developing richer measures of student and school success, staffing school improvement teams, creating resource accountability systems, and strengthening the teaching profession.

Policymakers developing accountability reforms should give considerable thought to system coherence across all five areas, rather than targeting one area in isolation. These systems should also be designed for continuous improvement, with a clear connection between design features and improved student achievement.<sup>6</sup>

As we look beyond No Child Left Behind, our understanding of innovation at the state level will inform and shape the conversation around accountability systems moving forward.

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, non-profit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

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