Local Accountability

The Forgotten Element in Education Reform

Benjamin Forman
Charles DePascale
and Chris Domaleski

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Introduction

The old adage "what gets measured is what gets done" has become a common refrain in education circles. This is especially true in urban districts, which face intense pressure to raise test scores under high-stakes state and federal accountability structures. Many educators serving these communities lament that test-based accountability has had unintended effects, noting that courses and programs that are important to lifelong well-being have gone by the wayside as schools triage resources to increase performance on standardized tests used for accountability.[1]

The concerns urban educators raise are supported by a growing body of evidence which suggests that these tests alone cannot address the broad set of skills necessary for post-secondary success.[2] However, urban educators also recognize that state and federal accountability has brought much needed attention and urgency to school improvement; simply relaxing state and federal accountability is unlikely to lead to better outcomes, particularly for students of color, low-income students, and English learners.[3]

With the 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), Congress worked to achieve a more balanced approach to determining school performance by requiring states to include a "fifth indicator."[4] However, limitations within ESSA severely constrained what states could measure within this indicator and how much influence it could have in calculating school rankings.[5]

The set of measures Massachusetts uses to determine school performance may adequately signal situations that merit higher levels of state attention, but these measures alone will not help schools focus on a more complete set of high-quality educational experiences. There is room to improve the state accountability systems created under ESSA. However, there will always be significant limitations on what states can accomplish in a single, state-centric system designed to function uniformly across all schools and districts. States cannot and should not carry singular responsibility for accountability. It is incumbent on communities to use the authority local control affords them to develop a robust set of complementary indicators, and to make these additional learning outcomes a high priority.

Some urban districts are already moving in this direction, but so far they have been mostly the largest systems, such as Chicago and New York. The local approaches these systems have adopted to determine school quality largely mirror the state and federal approach (i.e., rating systems generated top-down by district offices that include few robust measures of student learning outcomes beyond standardized test scores).[6]

The promise of "local accountability" lies in its far bolder approach, which could do two things: 1) align K–12 instruction and learning with a wider set of core competencies, and 2) bridge gaps across youth-serving systems to ensure that learning is aligned and community resources flow toward strategic initiatives that are most likely to contribute to long-term outcomes.

While this more complete approach could provide real value in any community looking to ensure that its learning systems are seamless and continuously improving, local accountability offers a vital opportunity for Gateway Cities, where resources are extremely limited and disadvantaged students need a holistic set of learning opportunities and supports to reach their full potential in adulthood.

In many ways, Gateway Cities are already well-positioned to experiment with new forms of local accountability. Education leaders in these small-to-midsize urban districts have been thinking deeply about how to weave together the many institutions in their communities to create integrated systems, as documented in MassINC's 2013 report *The Gateway Cities Vision for Dynamic Community-Wide Learning Systems.*[7] Through the Working Cities Challenge, coordinated by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, many have built data-driven, cross-sector partnerships to accomplish shared goals.[8]

Early lessons can already be drawn from real examples of local accountability in Gateway Cities. These communities are home to many strong charter schools, which by design have more learning outcomes to report on and additional layers of accountability. Working with nonprofit partners, for example, Salem and Worcester recently developed highly visible strategic plans with detailed outcome measures. And through the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Educational Assessment (MCIEA), Lowell and Revere are developing new models for local education accountability.

This paper is the first in a series exploring how Gateway Cities can build on these examples to develop new models of local accountability that complement state and federal accountability and ensure that resources and attention flow to efforts that will have the most impact on long-term student outcomes. The pages that follow provide further context by looking at how policy developments have shifted responsibility for school performance back and forth between local, state, and federal authorities over time. Building on this history, we unpack the argument for local accountability at this juncture, and offer design principles and specific examples of measureable outcomes that communities may want to adopt in various domains.

We hope that this analysis will stimulate timely conversation about local accountability practices. In exchange for more re-sources, Massachusetts's landmark 1993 Education Reform Act called for greater accountability, creating a paradigm that spread throughout the US. Twenty-five years later it is widely accepted that the state's public schools require another significant infusion of resources; once again, leaders are intimating that with these additional dollars must come an even higher level of accountability. This paper, along with two companion pieces that will follow, make a compelling case that the locus of this additional accountability should fall at the community level.

I. How Responsibility for Providing Education Accountability Has Shifted Over Time

Over the past two decades—through a combination of state and federal laws—the practice of holding schools and school districts responsible for student learning has come to rely heavily on two related components: 1) a set of measures developed by states (with federal oversight) to categorize the performance of schools and school districts, and 2) a set of actions associated with these performance ratings, which range from providing additional resources and autonomies to complete state takeovers through receivership.

How do we define local accountability?

Education accountability is a term traditionally used to describe the process administered by states, under applicable federal law, to establish goals for student learning, indicators to identify how well schools and districts are performing relative to these goals, and the interventions that state education agencies will take when a school or district consistently underperforms.

While the term *local accountability* appears in many places, the concept has yet to be clearly defined. As a working definition, we use the term to refer to practices that give parents, educators, and community members information to track progress toward strategic objectives (broadly related to learning and youth development) and hold each other mutually accountable for delivering results in these areas.

One might debate whether the word "accountability" is useful in this context. Contrasted with the state and federal variant, which can at times be high-stakes and punitive, the local approach should lean toward a more collaborative and learning-driven posture. The advantage to retaining the word is it positions the work as a complement to the state and federal practice, and ensures that communities see the process as a solid commitment to achieving collaboratively agreed-upon goals. To be clear, we do not see local accountability as subordinate to federal and state systems. Rather, we urge the development of complementary and balanced systems that honor the core functions and roles of each level.

Over this series of three papers, we will build on this working definition and flesh out the concept of community-driven, local accountability from a variety of perspectives.

The evolution of this hybrid state/federal accountability system has involved a dramatic departure for many states, where, until recently, public education has been largely a local responsibility. In Massachusetts that change was prominently ushered in with the *Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993* (MERA). MERA gave school districts significantly more state education aid, and dramatically increased state oversight to ensure that these additional resources were spent well. To provide this accountability, the landmark law called for creating state curriculum frameworks (i.e., content standards) and state tests, the MCAS exams, to evaluate how well schools and school districts performed relative to these new state standards. Most important, MERA also required students to pass a state exit exam to ensure that those graduating had "demonstrated mastery of a common core of skills."[9]

While many educators experienced these changes as an enormous increase in state involvement in local education, in hindsight, it is notable that MERA left most responsibility for delivering student success in the hands of local decision makers, with one important caveat: The law shifted primary management responsibility for districts and schools from school committees to school superintendents and principals, most significantly, by explicitly assigning these professional administrators all responsibility for hiring school personnel. The law also expanded school authority by making principals administrative non-union workers, and requiring the establishment of School Councils to develop an annual strategic improvement plan for every school.[10]

Despite MERA's intention to empower school leaders and local communities in the Commonwealth, the locus of control has shifted dramatically from schools and districts to the state and federal level. The shift began with the implementation of state curriculum frameworks, assessment, and accountability requirements, but it was accelerated by the school and district ratings required by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which significantly raised the stakes of state curriculum frameworks and assessments for local schools and districts.

Before 2001, the federal role was mostly limited to providing financial assistance to schools serving low-income students through Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA). At its core, this Civil Rights–era law sought to protect the interests of children who had struggled historically to gain equal access to public education. NCLB reflected a belief that simply providing additional dollars to high-poverty schools was insufficient. The 2001 federal law required states to develop standardized tests and rank schools against one another based on their performance and progress toward closing achievement gaps between student subgroups.[11]

The federal government made another push to strengthen state authority in 2009 through a component of the Race to the Top program. The criteria for scoring proposals for this $4.3 billion competitive grant program awarded points to states with existing or new legislation empowering state education agencies to intervene directly in persistently low-achieving schools. At a time of dramatic Great Recession-era budget cuts, this federal initiative created a powerful financial incentive for state control and induced a wave of state-level policy change.[12]

Massachusetts responded in 2010 with *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which authorized the State Board of Education to take over chronically struggling schools and school districts. Simultaneously, this legislation strengthened the hands of local administrators, giving superintendents overseeing state-designated turnaround schools the ability to make changes, such as lengthening the school day and dismissing teachers outside of the collective bargaining process.

Educators have conflicting views about how the increasing weight of state and federal accountability has affected student learning. Higher standards and accountability have provided data that incontrovertibly document persistent opportunity and achievement gaps among student populations.[13] These data have pressured the field to work aggressively to improve instructional practices and help students acquire the more advanced skills required by today's knowledge-driven industries. Many attribute Massachusetts students' leading performance on national assessments to the state being among the first to adopt rigorous standards and accountability. But others feel that these policy efforts unintentionally pressured teachers to raise test scores above all else, narrowed the curriculum to tested subjects, harmed students with disabilities and those whose native language is not English, increased the concentration of poor students in high-poverty schools, and made teaching in these schools less attractive.[14]

As education policymakers have worked to refine test-based accountability, a variety of forces are pushing educators to think about learning and development beyond the confines of the K–12 system. These include growing awareness of the importance of early learning, increased focused on social-emotional development, and recognition that far too many students who

pass high school exit exams struggle to make successful transitions into post-secondary education and employment (see above sidebar).

These concerns have led to community-based collaborative impact efforts. Like education accountability, this approach uses data to build political will to tackle social problems. To their credit, these cross-sector partnerships pool resources and align interventions, but they have been largely driven by nonprofit and philanthropic leaders without state or local government affiliation. The approach has been criticized as too top-down, and many attribute the failure of a large num-

ber of these projects to their leaders' inability to build greater buy-in due to their external position.[15]

In Massachusetts, the Working Cities Challenge illustrates the potential of this kind of data-driven cross-sector initiative. Through the Working Cities Challenge, leaders in Lawrence worked in close collaboration with the school district to engage parents and help increase family economic stability. While the project has yet to demonstrate long-term outcomes, a recent independent evaluation finds that it has been highly successful.[16]

For Massachusetts education leaders interested in using local accountability to break down the walls of their schools to provide students with multi-dimensional learning experiences and developmental supports, the Working Cities Challenge model offers valuable lessons.

II. The Core Purposes of Local Accountability

Thus far we have outlined the argument for local accountability mostly in relation to the limitations of state and federal accountability. However, the last thing public schools want is to solve these problems with another level of bureaucracy. And given what experience tells us about limited data literacy within most school systems and the public at large (see sidebar, p. 5), there are also serious questions about how communities build capacity to carry out this process. While addressing these concerns will require considerable creativity and energy, local accountability has three core purposes that make placing attention on improving the practice vital.

1. Local accountability aligns school improvement efforts with local values.

Determining how well schools are performing requires value judgments about what is desirable and most important in education. Because values are a product of local culture, as well as social and economic conditions that can vary widely even among neighboring communities, the taxpayers, businesses, and families in any given school district may have different perspectives on the student learning outcomes their community should strive to influence.

Some districts may see the development of strong early learning systems as a priority; others may want to invest in vocational education to help more students develop skills that can

carry them directly into the workforce after high school. At a school level, parents and teachers may aim to help all students become bilingual. Other school communities may want all children to develop computer programming skills.

State and federal accountability do not prevent communities from doing any of these things, but overreliance on the state to measure school performance makes it very difficult to ensure that the educational experiences communities offer beyond the tested subjects are provided with quality. By delivering these experiences in a manner that is subject to true quality controls, a local accountability system puts educators in a better position to improve in areas that their communities value.

2. Local accountability places transparent and commonly understood strategic objectives at the unit of change: the school community.

One of the strongest lessons from the past two decades of education reform is that change and innovation happen at the school level (see sidebar, p.6). The widely cited 2001 annual report of the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission underscored this point, noting that "[t]he school is the most effective unit of change, as it has the most direct impact on student achievement. The move to create change at this level *must be systematic and must engage the entire school community* [emphasis added]."[22]

In effect, this is a call for local accountability because experience tells us that for data-driven change to succeed, stakeholders must be able to trust the data and interpret it. To meet these conditions, it is critical that members of a school community (parents, teachers, and community stakeholders) have a strong role in the selection and development of new measures.[23]

Building a Culture of Data for Continuous Improvement

In a recent report looking at how accountability has made educators more data-driven, the national Data Quality Campaign (DQC) outlines several growing pains. Foremost among them, they note, "data were used as a hammer instead of a flashlight." While state and federal investment produced a wealth of data to comply with accountability laws, they were put to use for accountability purposes before teachers and schools had grown accustomed to these new data and developed an understanding of how to use them. They also point out that parents were rarely provided with tools to see their child's learning trajectory and information to help them better support student progress, and educators were not provided the conditions, capacity, and support to use the data in ways that built a culture of continuous improvement.[17]

While the DQC report describes the experience nationally, MassINC has seen

affirmation that these findings are just as relevant in Massachusetts. In 2016, MassINC convened an ESSA learning community with Gateway City leaders who expressed remarkably consistent views about how data is used in schools and the shortcomings of NCLB in this regard.[18]

Educators at these forums were particularly concerned that the public lacked data literacy, which made it difficult for them to be empowered by the available data. Public opinion polling reinforces this view. In 2017, MassINC found that a majority of registered voters in Massachusetts believed they had insufficient information on how well public schools in their communities perform; most relied on their own perceptions or word of mouth to form opinions about school quality.[19]

Between 2015 and 2017, in partnership with BU and the Rennie Center, MassINC

supported efforts to evaluate college and career readiness efforts in Gateway Cities through researcher-practitioner partnerships. The lack of capacity in Gateway Cities for data-driven efforts to develop and continuously improve evidence-based programs was one of the key takeaways from this project.[20]

Likewise, a recent evaluation of the Working Cities Challenge found that while these collaborative efforts were able to establish strong outcome measures for their projects, they struggled to generate and interpret data for continuous improvement.[21]

As leaders think about local accountability, they must recognize both the aversion to data-driven improvement created by state and federal accountability, and the limitations of data literacy and infrastructure in these communities.

3. As a process, local accountability can honor the integral role schools play in nurturing the civic health of their communities.

Public schools play a critical role in fostering personal relationships among adults and building their civic leadership skills. Schools also give children their first appreciable exposure to government institutions and democratic processes. It has been noted that school reform lacks "a vocabulary for how public education relates to place" (i.e., the communities in which schools operate), and, as a result, appreciation for the significance of the relationship between schools and civic health is underdeveloped. [24]

Local accountability can help ensure that public schools have "an orientation of care and consciousness" toward community both in how they define and measure schools success, and through the processes of determining school priorities and working collaboratively to improve performance in these areas.[25] Moving in this direction would be a departure from state and federal accountability approaches, which have rarely empowered struggling school communities to foster social capital and build civic capacity.

III. Guiding Principles for the Design of Local Accountability Systems

With the core purposes of local accountability in mind, we must now consider basic design principles. Below we expand on the extensive literature on designing state accountability systems by fleshing out questions unique to local accountability.[26] They include:

1. Structure: What kind of local accountability system will position the community to meet its objectives?

2. Coherence: How will school and district accountability policies complement and interact with the state's accountability system?

States Are Using ESSA to Give Districts a Larger Role

In contrast with NCLB, ESSA provides a clear opening to increase accountability at the local level. First, ESSA is less proscriptive than NCLB, which established a mostly formulaic approach to school and district accountability. This flexibility gives states room to work with districts to develop innovative accountability models. Second, as noted previously, ESSA explicitly reaches beyond test-based accountability systems by requiring states to include broader measures of school quality and student success. Finally, ESSA places much of the authority and responsibility for school improvement on districts. Districts are to develop and implement comprehensive support and improvement plans, including those schools identified for targeted support.

States are beginning to use these flexibilities to engage local school districts in the development of accountability indicators. California, for instance, began to decentralize accountability for public education, requiring communities to develop Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) in 2013. Each district, county office of education, and charter school must submit an LCAP that describes the overall vision for students, annual goals, and specific actions that will be taken to achieve the vision and goals. The LCAP is developed and reviewed each year in coordination with the district's annual budget cycle through a process that requires strong parent and community engagement. California has used the flexibility afforded by ESSA to further position LCAP development as the central component of accountability in the state.

In 2017, Texas passed a law establishing local accountability systems that allow districts and charter schools to develop plans to conduct evaluations using locally developed indicators and combine these measures with three state-mandated indicators to assign overall A-F ratings for each school. Currently, 20 school districts are developing these accountability systems, which will go into effect for the 2018-2019 school year.

Other states are using ESSA to encourage more subtle forms of local accountability. In Vermont, for instance, districts will be able to select from a set of college and career readiness measures, including SAT scores, scores on AP tests, or the percentage of students earning industry-recognized certificates. Other states, including Hawaii and Oregon, plan to include local measures on school report cards.

3. Engagement and Communication: How will the school and district engage the community in both the development of the system and the response to the results?

Structure

Unlike a state accountability system, which has a relatively standard structure, local accountability systems can range in intensity. The most basic approach is a system built for goal setting based on strategic objectives. For example, a community may want to establish highly visible goals for recruiting and retaining teachers of color district-wide. At a school level, there may areas of learning unique to a school's design that are important to elevate and document (e.g., an arts magnet may want assessments and goals for proficiency in a instrumental music). By providing a formal framework for collaboratively developing indicators and carefully evaluating performance in these areas, a local accountability system can place additional focus on improvement across a broad set of learning outcomes.

At the other end of the spectrum, communities may want a full-blown local accountability system with a more well-rounded set of measures built on innovative assessments that can detect knowledge, skills, and dispositions that traditional standardized tests have difficulty capturing. Such an approach would help address concerns that state accountability is narrowing the curriculum and provide a much more reliable indicator of school progress across multiple dimensions of learning. While more complex, systems that measure more indicators ensure that gains in one area are not at the expense of another. And, if the measures are combined correctly, a full-blown local accountability system will also have far less measurement error than a system that relies on only a handful of indicators, providing a stronger signal that school performance is trending in one direction or another.

Whether opting for a limited approach or a complete accountability system, communities should have a sound theory of action. Together, leaders must be able to clearly articulate to each other and to the public why they are developing the system and how the data will be used to achieve stated objectives. One theory of action is that local accountability processes will promote "social accountability" by empowering parents and community leaders through increased awareness of school and district goals and performance.[27] But simply generating information is not sufficient. To serve this "social" purpose, parents and community members must have an interest in accessing data and the ability to both interpret it and act on it.

Another theory of action is that local accountability will promote a deeper understanding of school progress, positioning educators to problem-solve. This purpose is particularly

Dimension	Key Question	Examples
External Coherence	Are connections among multiple accountability systems logically consistent?	The outcomes that are rewarded in the local system either support or extend (in a manner that does not inhibit) those in the state/federal system.
		Parent, family, and community partners experience and articulate a strong sense of engagement and alignment with local accountability policy and practice.
Internal Coherence	Are the components within the local system logically related to one another?	Valued performance on one indicator will not detract from performance on another indicator.
		Efforts are not duplicated and are aligned with pre-existing tools, methods, and priorities.
K–12 Coherence	As students advance from kindergarten to grade 12, are the different levels of the system logically connected?	Incentives for performance in each grade address key prerequisites for success in subsequent grades.
		The desired outcomes in elementary and middle school are selected to support success in high school and beyond.

credible when schools and districts build their accountability systems on locally developed assessments that provide more actionable data than the end-of-year state summative assessments. Or when, by selecting an area for accountability, they commit resources and attention to working with researchers and experts to devise an evidence-based strategy, and collect reliable data to make more-informed decisions.

Theories of action are not mutually exclusive, and nothing prevents communities from integrating several. However, like the state and federal model, every local accountability effort should include promoting equity as a core theory of action (see sidebar, p. 9). To the extent that schools and districts can broaden outcome measures with local accountability, they can work to ensure that all students are thriving on all aspects of learning.

Coherence
Coherence refers to a system that is rationally connected. As summarized in the table on p. 7, at least three dimensions of coherence should be considered: external, internal, and K–12 coherence.

External coherence recognizes that while local accountability systems are necessarily distinct from federal and state initiatives, these systems can align in ways that are mutually beneficial. One way this is accomplished is by developing a local system that helps districts and schools to achieve the high-level outcomes called for by the state and federal system. For example, a district that wants to focus effort on closing subgroup gaps in the four-year graduation rate can develop a local accountability system that emphasizes benchmarks and indicators for the interventions it is putting in place to accomplish this goal.

Local accountability also provides a powerful opportunity to achieve external coherence with other educational systems in the community, such as efforts to ensure successful transitions to kindergarten by partnering with private early education providers, or programs to align high school and community college curriculums to reduce the need for remedial courses when students move on to these public educational institutions.

Internal coherence refers to design choices which help ensure that all the elements within a given school's accountability system are working together to support intended outcomes. Research tightly links a school's capacity to improve student learning over time to organizational processes that connect and align work across the organization. In part, these pro-

cesses work by boosting collective efficacy, or teachers' beliefs about their faculty's joint ability to advance student learning.[28] To create this culture, communities can use local accountability to empower educators to develop aligned assessments and goals, as in the Student-Centered Accountability Program (S-CAP) in Colorado (see sidebar, on p. 8).

Finally, K–12 coherence refers to efforts to align the system at each level, from kindergarten to graduation and beyond. Decisions about allocation of resources and instructional priorities should be positioned to support success across grades, programs, and schools. K–12 coherence has a cumulative beneficial impact on students as they progress. For example, in a system that values STEM outcomes in high school, strong mathematics, science, and technology programs at the elementary and middle-school levels ensure that students enter high school prepared to meet high expectations for technical performance.

Engagement and Communication

A major limitation of state and federal accountability is the difficulty it has in engaging the broader community in developing the system, and spurring action on the signals these systems send in a way that is beneficial to the larger community. Local accountability can be far stronger in this regard.

Research clearly shows high-performance levels in schools where teachers, union-building leaders, and management plan and problem-solve together with a model of shared governance that identifies strategic priorities for improvement. Local accountability can further such work in places that have established shared governance practices, and create an opening to foster labor-management collaboration in places that are not yet engaging in this approach.[31]

Similarly, research reveals a strong link between engaged parents and school success. Local accountability offers a unique opportunity to involve parents meaningfully in the school community. The potential benefits are particularly large in urban districts, where systemic solutions are needed and educators often lack insight into the native language, culture, and community context. However, engaging parents in the development of accountability systems is a complex proposition. Schools must find ways to revise a culture whereby parents are their "clients," and bridge the power gaps that are often present between families and professional educators.[32]

Communication is central to engagement. A major shortcoming of state accountability is the technical nature of accountability regulations and policy, which makes them generally inaccessible to the public. To be effective, education leaders must be able to clearly communicate not only the purpose, but also the content of the accountability plan and how everyone is responsible for achieving shared goals (see sidebar, p. 8). From video and websites to mobile phone apps, information technology opens up new possibilities to accomplish this difficult task at relatively low cost.

Finally, in terms of both engagement and communication, planners must keep in mind from the outset that accountability is not a single event that culminates performance reports. Rather, it is a cyclical process that involves reviewing the assumptions and conditions for reform and evaluating the extent to which the system is incentivizing the right actions and results (See sidebar, p. 9). By implementing an ongoing system of monitoring, evaluation, and improvement, local accountability systems can better fulfill their promise of helping local leaders, parents, and other stakeholders improve outcomes for students.

IV. Examples of What Communities Can Track with a Local Accountability System

Every accountability system is built on a collection of indicators or measures. Below we offer some examples of what communities could track in their systems and how they would generate the necessary data. (See table on p. 12 for a sample of indicators and their sources.) However, as the aim of local accountability is to position communities to think creatively about what best meets their needs and aspirations, this information is intended merely to stimulate thoughtful consideration among those drawing up locally customized plans.

College and Career Readiness

State and federal accountability have been criticized for failing to include indicators that ensure students are ready for success beyond high school.[36]

In 2016, the national Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) convened an Accountability Working Group to recommend measures for tracking college and career readiness. The blueprint issued by the group includes measures relating to co-curricular learning and leadership experiences, progress toward earning post-high school credentials, and, most notably, transitions beyond high school.[37]

Building on the findings of a 2014 CCSSO Accountability Working Group, they also recommended improving assessments of readiness to evaluate the development of higher-order skills that are essential to success in life.[38] Critical thinking, problem-solving, communicating, working collaboratively, leadership, initiative, and adaptability are all deemed essential in today's knowledge-driven economy. While schools can teach these skills and dispositions, current standardized tests have difficulty isolating their acquisition.[39]

Performance tasks (i.e., assessments that ask students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and proficiency by applying their skills in context) can assess the development of this full range of higher order skills. Advances in the design of performance assessments, including computer-based task simulations and automated scoring, facilitate increased use of performance assessments at the local level.[40]

Weaving these alternative assessments into local accountability programs will require educators who are trained and

supported to develop common rubrics and auditing processes for evaluating student work consistently. As previously mentioned, a number of Gateway City districts are already working to adopt this approach through the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Educational Assessment (MCIEA). Adopting a rigorous approach will give schools and school communities meaningful information about their progress in these areas.

Early and Out-of-School Learning

Although researchers have not reached a precise consensus, they broadly agree that a disproportionate share of human cognitive potential is established in the pre-K years. While interventions during this stage of rapid brain development have lasting impact on intelligence and behavior, current governance and accountability dis-incentivizes efforts to focus resources and attention on this stage of life. Local accountability measures could address this shortcoming by elevating a set of performance measures capable of detecting the benefits of early intervention.

Some meaningful data to inform outcome measures are readily available. For instance, the state has developed a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to monitor the quality of family and center-based providers, and many districts have developed reliable kindergarten-readiness assessments.[41] Other critical indicators of early intervention are less well established. Data to measure efforts to deliver pre- and post-natal services to high-risk mothers are particularly lacking. Local accountability could provide an impetus to monitor the success of these early interventions, which would likely generate significant long-term benefits for public school districts.[42]

Similarly, local accountability could provide an impetus to strengthen afterschool and other out-of-school learning programs operated by private providers. Efforts to improve the quality of out-of-school learning have waxed and waned with the availability of both public and private resources. But educators note that accountability has also played a role in the level of support for these programs. Increasing focus on standardized tests has reduced support for community organizations, some educators claim, or has at least shifted these groups' orientations from their traditional focus on promoting social-emotional development to providing academic support.

With greater awareness of the importance of social-emotional skills, communities are now beginning to partner with their out-of-school providers to ensure that youth have more direct access to enrichment activities, explicitly to nurture social and emotional growth. Lawrence Public Schools has used extended learning time to weave enrichment opportunities offered by community-based organizations into the school day in order to make these experiences available to all students.[43]

Boston After School & Beyond provides a powerful model for how communities can establish and track measurable goals for out-of-school programming, particularly in the social-emotional development domain and the attainment of "digital badges," which represent competency determinations aligned with the multi-state Next Generation Science Standards. While Boston has considerable resources to undertake this work, Gateway Cities integrating out-of-school learning into their local accountability systems can glean a lot from the framework that Boston has spent more than a decade creating and refining.[44]

Health and Wellness

Public schools have a critical role to play in influencing the social determinants of health, which have profound implications for well-being over a lifetime.[45] Unfortunately, evidence suggests that accountability may have had a net negative health impact over the past two decades.

Since the late-19th century, physical education has been a central component of American public schools. The medical community has noted an alarming decline in the role of schools in promoting physical education, which has been partly associated with the rise of test-based accountability.[46] Less physical activity has contributed to rising rates of childhood obesity, which is strongly linked to both earnings and incidence of chronic illness in adulthood.[47] School districts looking to improve physical education have many reliable measures that local accountability can elevate, most notably the age-based standards developed by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).

Diminished physical education is certainly not the only cause of the childhood obesity epidemic, and improving access to these school programs is not the only response. But solving the problem calls for the kinds of cross-sector efforts that schools are uniquely positioned to lead, with local accountability strategy as a guiding force. Successful childhood obesity prevention initiatives rely heavily on public schools as providers of health education, physical education, and nutrition. The national-

Sample of Local Accountability Indicators and Sources

CATEGORY/INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE/INSTRUMENT
College and Career Readiness	
Share of 9th grade cohort earning post-secondary credits while in high school	District SIS
Share of 9th grade cohort completing work-based learning experience while in high school	District SIS
Share of 9th grade cohort earning credential with labor market value	District SIS
Share of 9th grade cohort enrolling in post-secondary studies without remediation	DHE
Share of students entering the workforce directly earning more than $600 weekly	DESE
Early and Out-of-School Learning	
Percent of high-risk mothers enrolled in home visiting prenatally	
Percent of family child care providers with Quality Rating and Improvement System Rating 3 or 4	EEC
Percent of children entering kindergarten ready to learn	Local assessment
Percent of students enrolled in high-quality summer program for at least 4 weeks	Local assessment
Health and Wellness	
Incidence of childhood obesity	Local assessment
Percent of students who report being the victim of bullying during past year	Climate survey
Percent of students who report being physically active for 60 minutes, 5+ days per week	Climate survey
Percent of students who attain Red Cross Level 5 swimming skills	American Red Cross
Percent of students meeting gender and age-group health-related physical fitness standard	NASPE
Community Engagement and Civic Health	
Percent of students who complete service learning project	Local assessment
Improvement on student voice index	Climate survey
Improvement on parent engagement index	Climate survey
Improvement on Civic Health Index	Community Survey
Educator Recruitment and Development	
Percent of teachers who identify as nonwhite	District
Percent of teachers retained	DESE
Percent of principals retained	DESE

ly recognized program Shape Up Somerville exemplifies the power of systemic community-wide public health approaches to improve childhood health and well-being.[48]

As noted earlier, a key theory of action for local accountability is the ability to devise evidence-based strategy and data-driven action through the process. A growing body of literature suggests this approach is particularly effective when applied to public health challenges. Randomly controlled studies show that when researchers and community members in Gateway City–scale settings identify a local public health challenge and develop and test interventions collaboratively, they can make considerable progress.[49]

Community Engagement and Civic Health
A 2017 report by the Education Commission of the States makes a powerful case for the role of accountability in ensuring that schools clearly identify and fulfill their civic missions, noting that schools must "cultivate students' care and concern for their communities and equip students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to participate effectively in democratic life."[50]

Communities that want to position schools as generators of social and civic capital can use local accountability to elevate these objectives. Such measures would include indicators ranging from student completion of high-quality service-learning projects to school climate surveys that capture a school's commitment to incorporating student voices into decision-making.

School climate surveys can also assess levels of parent engagement, not only as it relates to their children's education but also to their involvement in the broader school community, from participating on committees and volunteering in the schools to monitoring school performance data and acting politically on behalf of their communities.

Educator Recruitment and Development

A strong local accountability system could help districts recruit and retain talented teachers. Research shows that dissatisfaction with accountability policies is a major driver of teacher separations.[51] Moreover, recruiting and developing talented teachers and principals is a vital community function. Leaders across the community should ensure that the district has a sound strategy, and contribute to its execution as appropriate.

Devising visible measures for educator recruitment and development in local accountability systems is one way to ensure that community leaders jointly undertake this shared responsibility. These measures could range from educator responses to school climate surveys to progress made toward a more diverse educator workforce. Measures could also come from local strategic plans, such as the yield of a "grow your own" teacher pathway initiative, which structures a student and paraprofessional pipeline for local teaching careers.[52]

V. Furthering Our Sense of What is Possible

Experience with state and federal accountability over the past two decades shows that measuring student outcomes has had profound impact on public education, both positive and negative. We have learned a tremendous amount about the strengths and weaknesses of state and federal accountability systems. While the potential of local accountability to respond to the challenges that remain has not been rigorously tested, many strands of evidence suggest that it is a particularly good time to pursue this line of inquiry and innovation. As policymakers think about the function of accountability in education reform moving forward, it is critical that they consider strategies to strengthen the role of local leaders, in schools and out.

The next two papers in this MassINC series will demonstrate that district and community capacity to develop and govern local accountability systems, with a few exceptions, is very weak—particularly in Gateway Cities. While some might think the status-quo reflects real-world realities destined to make local accountability futile, we believe the current situation simply illuminates conditions that leaders in Massachusetts—at every level—must resolve to address.

A conversation about governance structures and other processes necessary to make local accountability a success ultimately reverts back to how you define local accountability. Our goal with this paper has been to sketch out the rough contours of what has been a rather amorphous concept. We encourage readers to approach this first attempt as a work in progress, and to join in the discussion. What is your vision for local accountability? How would you describe your theory of action and the principles that should guide design of an effective local accountability system?

While we always encourage readers to contact us with ideas, our hope is that these conversations will occur foremost within communities, particularly among school committee members and those who sit on nonprofit boards and lead cross-sector collaboratives. As noted at the outset, Gateway Cities are already innovating in this area and demonstrating what is possible. Their activity is laying firm groundwork upon which together we must continue to build.

Notes

1   Benjamin Forman and Andrew Bundy. "Next Generation Education Accountability: Design Ideas from New England's Small-to-Midsize Urban School Districts" (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2016).

2   For a recent review, see Collin Hitt and others. "Do Impacts on Test Scores Even Matter? Lessons from Long-Run Outcomes in School Choice Research" (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2018).

3   Forman and Bundy (2016).

4   For more on the "fifth indicator" see Scott Marion and Susan Lyons. "In Search of Unicorns: Conceptualizing and Validating the 'Fifth Indicator' in ESSA Accountability Systems" (Dover, NH: National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, 2016).

5   For instance, ESSA only allows for indicators that are reliable, valid, and comparable for all students. It also limits how much weight the fifth measure could assume in the formula states devise to calculate overall school performance.

6   John Portz. "'Next-Generation' Accountability? Evidence from Three School Districts" *Urban Education* (2017).

7   See *The Gateway Cities Vision for Dynamic Community-Wide Learning Systems* (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2013).

8   The Working Cities Challenge is a competition led by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (FRBB). Cities submit proposals for multi-year projects that will solve problems through collaborative leadership and systems change. The inaugural round of the Boston Fed's Working Cities Challenge was held in 2013. Six cities—Lawrence, Fitchburg, Chelsea, Holyoke, Salem, and Somerville—were awarded a combined $1.8 million in grant awards. In a second round held in 2015, five Massachusetts cities (Haverhill, Lowell, Pittsfield, Springfield, and Worcester) were each awarded $475,000. The FRBB has expanded the competition to cities in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

9   The 1993 act says "the 'competency determination' shall be based on the academic standards and curriculum frameworks for tenth graders in the areas of mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, foreign languages, and English, and shall represent a determination that a particular student has demonstrated mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge in these areas, as measured by the assessment instruments described in section one I. Satisfaction of the requirements of the competency determination shall be a condition for high school graduation." Regulations adopted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (603 CMR 30) simply require students to score proficient on the math and English MCAS and on one science or engineering discipline.

10 Co-chaired by the principal, this body includes parents of a current student elected by parents, teachers selected by teachers, other community representatives, and, in high schools, at least one student. MERA charged School Councils with assisting in identification of the educational needs of students attending the school, reviewing the school budget, and formulating a school improvement plan. See General Laws Chapter 71, Section 59C.

11 It is worth noting that in the decade between the enactment of MERA and the implementation of NCLB accountability requirements, Massachusetts did proactively develop a variant of what might be considered local accountability practices. Administered through the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), Massachusetts established standards for districts and schools, complete with rubrics, models, tools, and other resources. Unfortunately, much of the effort devoted to fostering local accountability in the first decade of MERA was overwhelmed by the demands of NCLB.

12 William Howell. "Results of President Obama's Race to the Top" *Education Next* 15.4 (2015).

13 See https://number1forsome.org

14 For example, see: Margaret Crocco and Arthur Costigan. "The Narrowing of Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Age of Accountability: Urban Educators Speak Out." *Urban Education* 42.6 (2007); Linda Darling-Hammond. "Race, Inequality, and Educational Accountability: The Irony of No Child Left Behind." *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 10 (3); and Alexander Bogin and Phuong Nguyen-Hoang. "Property Left Behind: An Unintended Consequence of a No Child Left Behind 'Failing' School Designation." *Journal of Regional Science* 54.5 (2014).

15 For example, see "When Collective Impact Has an Impact" (Denver, CO: Spark Policy Institute, 2018).

16 "Massachusetts Working Cities Challenge: Final Assessment of Round 1 Progress" (Boston, MA: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, July 2018).

17 *From Hammer to Flashlight: A Decade of Data in Education* (Washington, DC: Data Quality Campaign, 2017).

18 Forman and Bundy (2016).

19 Steve Koczela and others. "The Public's Take on Education Accountability: Results from a Survey of Massachusetts Voters" (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2017).

20 Ben Forman. "Improving College & Career Outcomes through Research-Practice Partnerships: A Case Study of ILP Implementation in Three Gateway City School Districts" (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2017).

21 "Massachusetts Working Cities Challenge: Final Assessment of Round 1 Progress" (Boston, MA: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, July 2018).

22 See Maxine Minkoff and others. *Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission Annual Report* (2001).

23 For example, see Amy Edmondson. *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* (San Francisco, CA: JosseyBass, 2012).

24 David Gruenewald. "Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education" *American Educational Research Journal* 40.3 (2003).

25 Ibid.

26 This is not intended to address the full set of considerations associated with developing education accountability systems, which has been the focus of other publications (e.g., see Marianne Perie and others. *Key Elements for Educational Accountability Models.* (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, 2007). Rather, the intent is to describe the core principles that distinguish strong initiatives at the local level from those designed solely for state or federal purposes.

27 Social accountability is a term derived from international economic development. It refers to strategies to improve government performance by increasing both citizen engagement and the responsiveness of public institutions to citizen input. Social accountability is distinct from political accountability, where citizen voice in education has indirect influence through elected representatives. See Johnathan Fox. "Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?" *World Development* 72 (2015).

28 Richard Elmore and others. "The Internal Coherence Assessment Protocol & Developmental Framework: Building the Organizational Capacity for Instructional Improvement in Schools. Research Paper." *Strategic Education Research Partnership* (2014).

29 See https://scapbvschools.weebly.com/)

30 See https://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/grass-roots-approach-rethinking-accountability/

31 Saul Rubinstein. "Strengthening Partnerships: How Communication and Collaboration Contribute to School Improvement" *American Educator* 37.4 (2014).

32 See Ann Ishimaru. "Rewriting the Rules of Engagement: Elaborating a Model of District-Community Collaboration." *Harvard Educational Review* 84.2 (2014); Amanda Stefanski and others. "Beyond Involvement and Engagement: The Role of the Family in School-Community Partnerships." *School Community Journal* 26.2 (2016).

33 Glenn Laverack and Ronald Labonte. "A Planning Framework for Community Empowerment Goals within Health Promotion." *Health Policy and Planning* 15.3 (2000).

34 Diana Mitlin and John Thompson. "Participatory Approaches in Urban Areas: Strengthening Civil Society or Reinforcing the Status Quo?" *Environment and Urbanization* 7.1 (1995).

35 See http://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/schools/accountability

36 For example, see "Opportunities and Options: Making Career Preparation Work for Students" (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

37 See Council of Chief State School Officers. *Destination Known: Valuing College AND Career Readiness in State Accountability Systems* (Washington, DC, 2017).

38 See Council of Chief State School Officers. *Recommendations from the CCSSO Accountability Advisory Committee: A Vision for Improved Education Accountability Systems* (Washington, DC, 2014). See also Linda Darling-Hammond and others. "Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm" *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 22 (2014).

39 Chris Gabrieli and others. "Ready To Be Counted: The Research Case for Education Policy Action on Non-Cognitive Skills" (Boston, MA: Transforming Education, 2015).

40 Suzanne Lane. *Performance Assessment: The State of the Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity in Education, 2010).

41 For instance, Somerville has developed the Kindergarten Entry Skills Inventory, which captures multiple domains (early literacy, early math, motor skills, and social-emotional learning). Somerville also collects Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) data to measure classroom quality and teacher-child interactions, which inform coaching delivered in both public and private early learning settings.

42 For example, see Susanna Loeb. "Accountability for Early Education—A Different Approach and Some Positive Signs" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, August 2018).

43 Ben Forman and Amy Dain. "Leading Together: Four Case Studies of Successful Gateway City Initiatives" (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2015).

44 More than 200 after-school and summer programs serving close to 20,000 opt in to this network as part of a deliberate strategy to augment city and district efforts. Boston Beyond's Achieve, Connect, Thrive social-emotional skills framework includes nine skills and dispositions that are predictive of school, college, and career readiness and that can be taught, learned, measured, and improved in a variety of settings. School and youth development leaders provided substantial input to ensure that the framework could be applied practically, and RAND ensured that the framework drew on the latest research from a variety of fields. Boston Beyond and BPS use related program- and student-level data to illuminate how specific program practices and instructional approaches lead to skill development.

45 Michael Marmot. "Social Determinants of Health Inequalities." *The Lancet* 365.9464 (2005).

46 Russell Pate and others. "Promoting Physical Activity in Children and Youth: A Leadership Role for Schools." *Circulation* 114.11 (2006); Patricia Anderson and others. *Adequate (or Adipose?) Yearly Progress: Assessing the Effect of 'No Child Left Behind' on Children's Obesity*" (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011); Harold Kohl and others (eds). *Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School.* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2013).

47 Felicia Carey and others. "Educational Outcomes Associated with Childhood Obesity in the United States: Cross-Sectional Results from the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health." *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 12.1 (2015).

48 Virginia Chomitz and others. *Shape Up Somerville: Building and Sustaining a Healthy Community, Reflections over 15 years* (1998-2013). (Somerville, MA: Shape Up Somerville, 2013); Christina Economos. "Shape Up Somerville Two-Year Results: A Community-Based Environmental Change Intervention Sustains Weight Reduction in Children" Preventive Medicine 57.4 (2013).

49 David Hawkins and others. "Testing Communities That Care: The Rationale, Design, and Behavioral Baseline Equivalence of the Community Youth Development Study" *Prevention Science* 9.3 (2008); Lawrence Palinkas and others. *Research-Practice-Policy Partnerships for Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices in Child Welfare and Child Mental Health* (New York, NY: William T. Grant Foundation, 2015).

50 Paul Baumann and Jan Brennan. "State Civic Education Policy: Framework and Gap Analysis Tool" (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2017).

51 Anne Podolsky and others. "Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators" (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016).

52 See Dan Brown. "The Grow-Your-Own Game Plan" *Educational Leadership* 75.8 (May 2018).

53 See: http://myways.nextgenlearning.org.

54 Defining Graduate Aims: A Collection of Research and Resources for Design Teams (Transcend Education, 2017).

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11 Beacon Street, Suite 500
Boston, MA 02108
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