

# School Accountability Systems: Framework and Examples

A look at design characteristics  
and some examples

Brian Gong  
Center for Assessment

A presentation to the U. S. Department of Education OUS  
PES, sponsored by CCSSO

August 30, 2001, Washington, DC

# Accountability Systems

- Assessment – measures of performance
- Accountability – consequences based on performance
- School as unit of accountability

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues

# Purpose and Context - History

- Standards based
- All students
- School as unit
- Consequences for schools
- More focused and extensive assistance
- More resources
- Sense of urgency

# Purpose and Context – Variations

- States implement accountability programs for different purposes.
- States have different strategies and political climates for garnering support for educational reform.
  - “What is possible”: Timelines, specificity (state vs. local control of curriculum), budgets, role of state (e.g., intervention/assistance), continuity, in-state leadership
- States like to customize programs to their circumstances. Result: much variation.

# Examples of Purpose and Context

- Kentucky – 1989 State Supreme Court decision on fiscal equity extended to whole system; based on decades of grassroots and political movement to dramatically increase educational attainment
- Texas – incremental implementation of comprehensive system over a period of over 10 years
- California – multiple iterations (curriculum adoption, effective schools, high school graduation)
- Massachusetts – focus on student accountability in relatively high achieving state; strong business involvement

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues



# Three Definitions of Desired Performance

A “Good” school is one where:

- Students perform to standards (Status);
- School is improving its performance over time, so that successive classes of students are doing better than previous classes (School Improvement);
- Individual students make growth from where each was previously (Student Growth).

# Models of Desired Performance

- Status (Students perform to standards) – measured by “percent above cut” (PAC)
- School Improvement (school scores go up over time) – measured by meeting “growth target” showing progress towards some standard
- Student Growth (Students grow from where they were) – measured by pre-post scores, judged in relation to some “expected growth”

# Examples of Models of Desired Performance

- **Status: Texas, North Carolina**
  - Excellent = 90% of students meet or exceed standard (PAC), Strong = 80%, Poor = 50%
- **School Improvement: California, Kentucky, Louisiana**
  - School has Improvement Goal to be on track to meet state's long-term goal within set time period, e.g., to go from 400 to goal of 800, should improve 20 points each cycle.
  - Excellent = exceeds Improvement Goal; Strong = within 2 points +/- of goal, Poor = no improvement or declines
- **Student Growth: Tennessee, North Carolina**
  - Students growth is measured by pre- post-tests
  - Excellent = more than expected growth, Strong = meets expected growth, Poor = no growth or declines

# Variations of Models

## ■ Texas

- uses status primarily; requires comparable subgroup performance
- also has provision for school improvement;
- requires comparable school performance for rewards

## ■ Kentucky

- original system based exclusively on school improvement; now has some status provisions (upper bar)
- Sets growth expectation once
- Requires reduction in percent of students at lowest level for rewards

## ■ Tennessee

- Uses student growth; began explicitly as teacher evaluation system; reporting kept confidential to school by statute
- Uses state average growth as expected growth

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- **Assessments/performance indicators**
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues

# Assessments/performance indicators

## ■ Indicators

- Assessments
- Attendance, dropout
- Other

## ■ Multiple measures

- For validity (measure what is intended to be measured)
- For reliability (consistent repeatability, given no significant changes)
- Combining measures and measurements – some lessons learned

# Multiple Measures

## ■ Validity

- To provide depth and breadth of coverage of standards
- To provide accurate assessment of range of individual skills and styles

## ■ Reliability

- To provide accurate assessment by reducing fluctuations due to “good/bad day,” sampling, equating, scoring, etc.
- To provide an indication of how confident we may be in drawing conclusions or taking action based on these results

# Examples of Indicators Used for Accountability

- Kentucky: state custom student assessments in reading, math, science, social studies, arts & humanities, vocational studies/practical living (CR and MC, administered 4,5, 7, 8, 10, 11); writing portfolio; NRT (grades 3, 6, 9); attendance, dropout, retention in grade; successful transition to adult life (college, military, work)
- California: modified version of SAT-9 (3-11)
- Louisiana: state custom assessments and NRT (3-8); high school test; attendance, dropout
- North Carolina: state custom tests (3-hs)



# Examples of “Multiple Measures” in Accountability System

- Texas: students can retake tests required to graduate up to eight times
- Louisiana: students who do not pass state test initially have six provisions, including local decision to promote (grades 4 & 8 only; not high school graduation)
- Kentucky: appeals process for schools
- Massachusetts: three-tier system for identifying schools—accountability system scores; panel review; on-site visit

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues

# Standards

- How are performance standards set for students
- How are performance standards set for schools
  - How much are schools expected to improve, in how much time

# Examples of Standards

- Texas: PAC, raised over period of 10 years; more rigorous test introduced this year
  - PAC sensitive only to performance at cutpoint; not sensitive to growth below or above
- Kentucky: Improvement Index, target of 100 within 20 years. When system started, highest performing school had score less than 60
  - Index gives more weight to improvements at lower end
  - System requires lower performing schools to improve more than higher performing schools
- North Carolina: Both Status and Student Growth
  - Student Growth not indicative of standards; doesn't account for “rising/falling tide”

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- **Inclusion**
- Consequences
- Some operational issues

# Inclusion

- Inclusion for assessment
  - Range of assessments provided so all can participate (alternate, accommodations, etc.)
- Inclusion for accountability, including subgroup performance
  - How to deal with: absent, modified, not sufficient attempts, irregularities; medical; move ins/move outs; dropouts; repeaters; with changed populations due to redistricting, other changes
  - Accountability requirements: participation, improvements by subgroups

# Examples of Inclusion

- Oregon's range of assessments
  - Standard; levels A, B, C; challenge up/down; accommodations; Russian/Spanish versions; extended (alternate); juried; ELL modification
- Texas and California
  - Includes students only if were in district previous year
- North Carolina
  - Includes if student in school for 90 days prior to testing
- Kentucky
  - Includes if student in school day of testing

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues



# Consequences

- Reporting
- Assistance, additional funds
- Governance change
- Student transfer, staff evaluations, reconstitution
- Positive recognition and recommendation
- Financial rewards
- Reduced regulation

# Framework

- Purpose and context
- Definition of desired performance
- Assessments/performance indicators
- Standards, including improvement or progress
- Inclusion
- Consequences
- Some operational issues

# Some Operational Issues

- Standards and governance
- Time to administer
- Time to score, process, and report
- Budgets
- Assistance resources and expertise
- District accountability
- Interactions with student accountability

# Contact Information

Brian Gong, Associate Director  
Center for Assessment

[bgong@nciea.org](mailto:bgong@nciea.org)

[www.nciea.org](http://www.nciea.org)

Accountability Systems and Reporting SCASS

CCSSO

Rolf Blank

[rolfb@ccsso.org](mailto:rolfb@ccsso.org)

[www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)