



The Path Forward for School Accountability

Chris Domaleski, Juan D'Brot, Laura Pinsonneault, Brian Gong, and Chris Brandt
Center for Assessment

August 2, 2023

Welcome!

- Please introduce yourself in the chat
 - Name
 - Organization
- We encourage interaction!
 - Questions at any point? Use the Q&A or chat feature
 - We'll have time for discussion after the presentations
- Everyone will get an email with the webinar recording and slides.

Presenters



Chris Domaleski



Juan D'Brot



Laura Pinsonneault



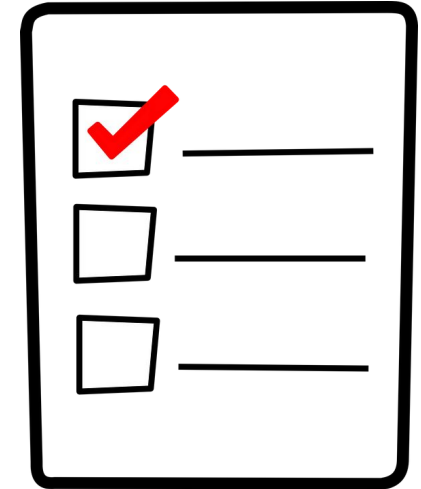
Brian Gong



Chris Brandt

Session Outline

- Review the purpose and promise of accountability
- Acknowledge the challenges and critiques of current school accountability systems
- Review strategies to promote improvement
 - Employ a principled design process
 - Support customized approaches
 - Measure more of what matters
 - Connect information to support
- Q&A



The ideas covered in this presentation are discussed in more detail in our recent paper, “The Path Forward for School Accountability,” available at: <https://www.nciea.org/library/the-path-forward-for-school-accountability/>



THE PATH FORWARD FOR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY:
Practical Ways to Improve School Accountability Systems Now

June 2023

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What is the promise of accountability?

In the best case, school accountability systems:

- Signal what outcomes are valued
- Provide information about the conditions and resources that affect school performance
- Report on how schools are progressing on prioritized outcomes



Accountability systems should clarify and promote the conditions for success and help identify where and how improvement can be supported.

What one word comes to mind when you think about state school accountability systems?

Enter this URL in any device to submit your response or scan the QR code.

<https://pollev.com/cassessment154>

You may skip the prompt to sign-in



Challenges and Critiques

- There is growing unrest with the status quo of ESSA-based school accountability systems. Calls for changes are not new, but they were amplified by pandemic-related disruptions.
- What are some of the critiques?
 - **Narrow.** Heavily influenced by proficiency in English language arts and mathematics. Many other measures also matter (academic and otherwise).
 - **Not Useful.** Increasingly complex and inscrutable to stakeholders. Timing and nature of results don't help improve outcomes for students
 - **Unfair.** May establish incentives that are misaligned and/or expectations that are unattainable. Concern that the deck is stacked against some schools.
 - **Ineffective.** Sparse evidence that accountability contributes to improved outcomes for students, schools, and communities.

Guiding Principles

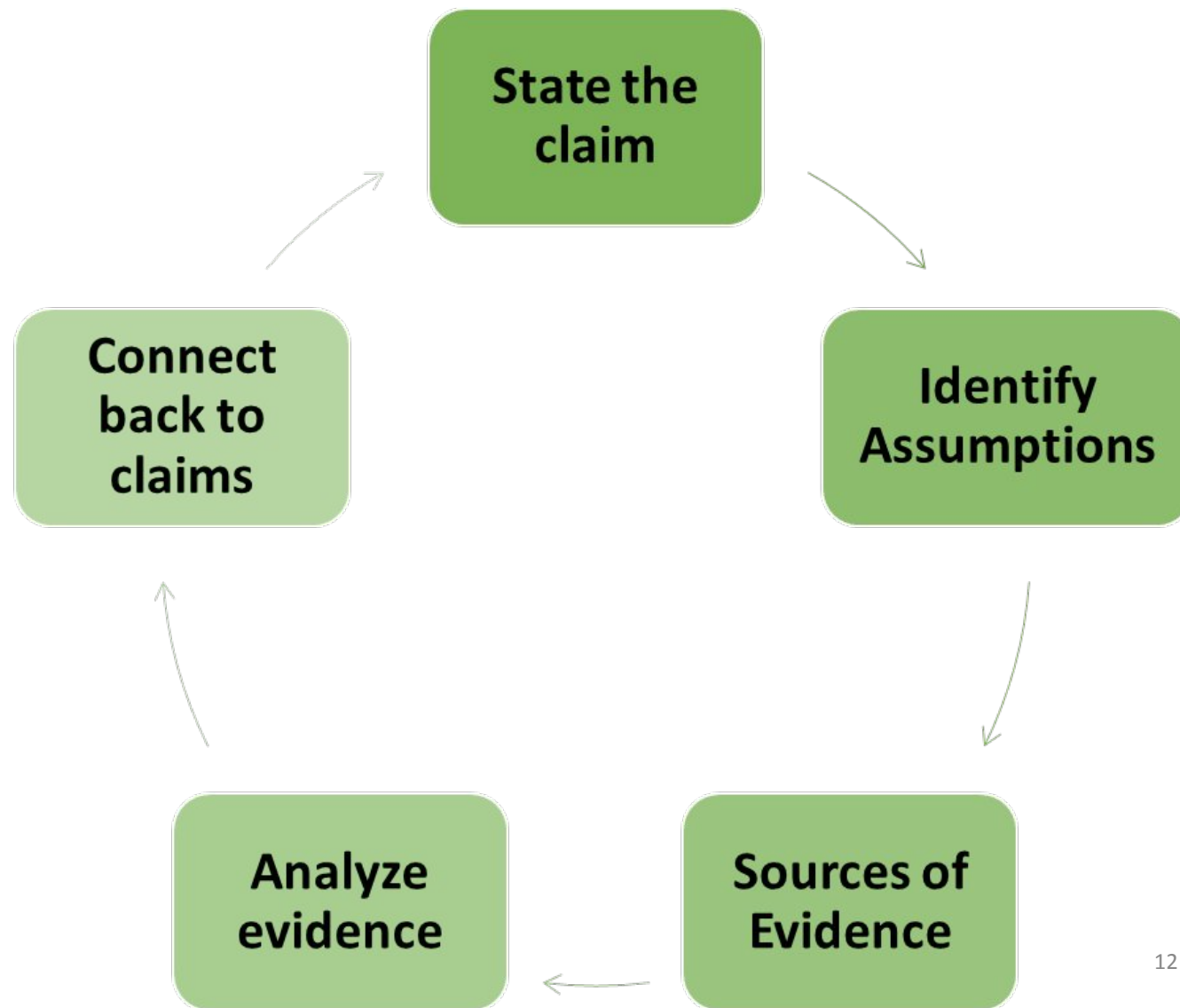
- **Form follows function.** States must connect system design and implementation to clear statements of the goals they want to prioritize.
- **Measure more of what matters.** States must go beyond academics and include a broader range of indicators that more fully capture the dimensions of critical school quality and student success.
- **Reporting is just the start.** Improvement will not happen by reporting data alone and hoping users know how to act on it.
- **Process is essential.** Include a broad and diverse range of stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of accountability systems.



What's the Path Forward? Beginning with a Principled Process

Consider a Detailed Theory of Action

Our systems should tell data-driven stories. We should strive to make those stories both compelling and accurate.

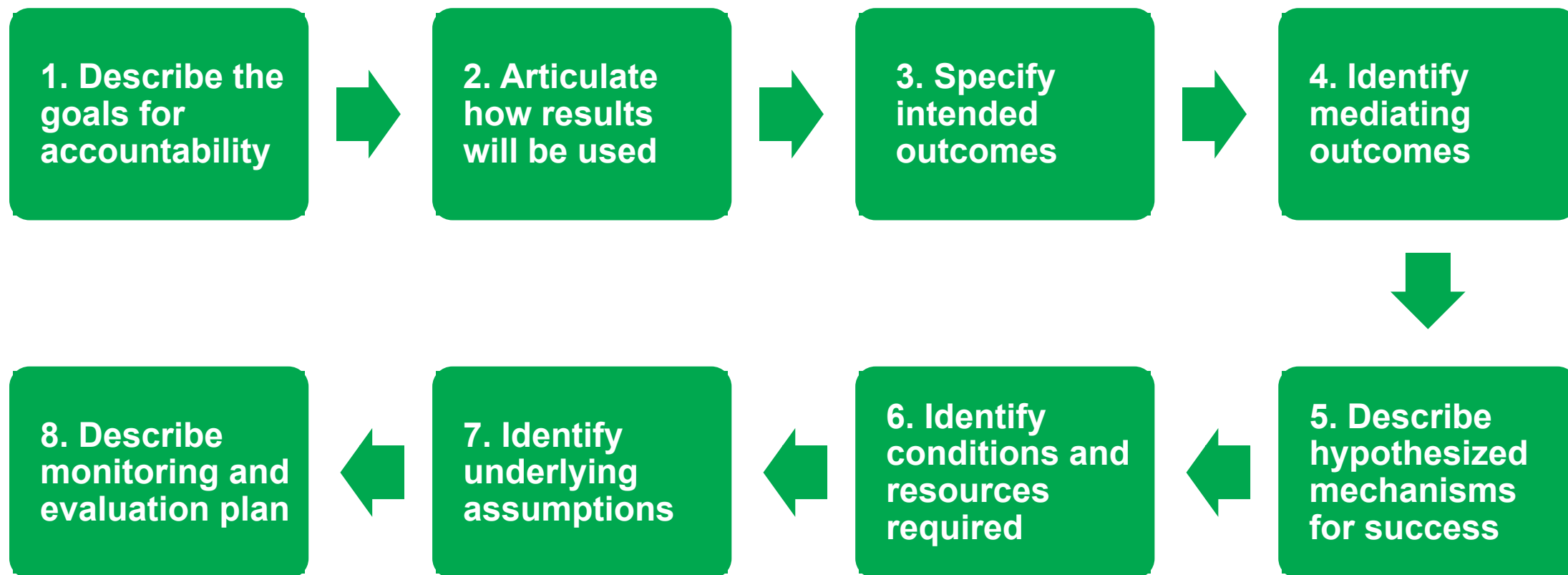


Theory of Action: The Foundation

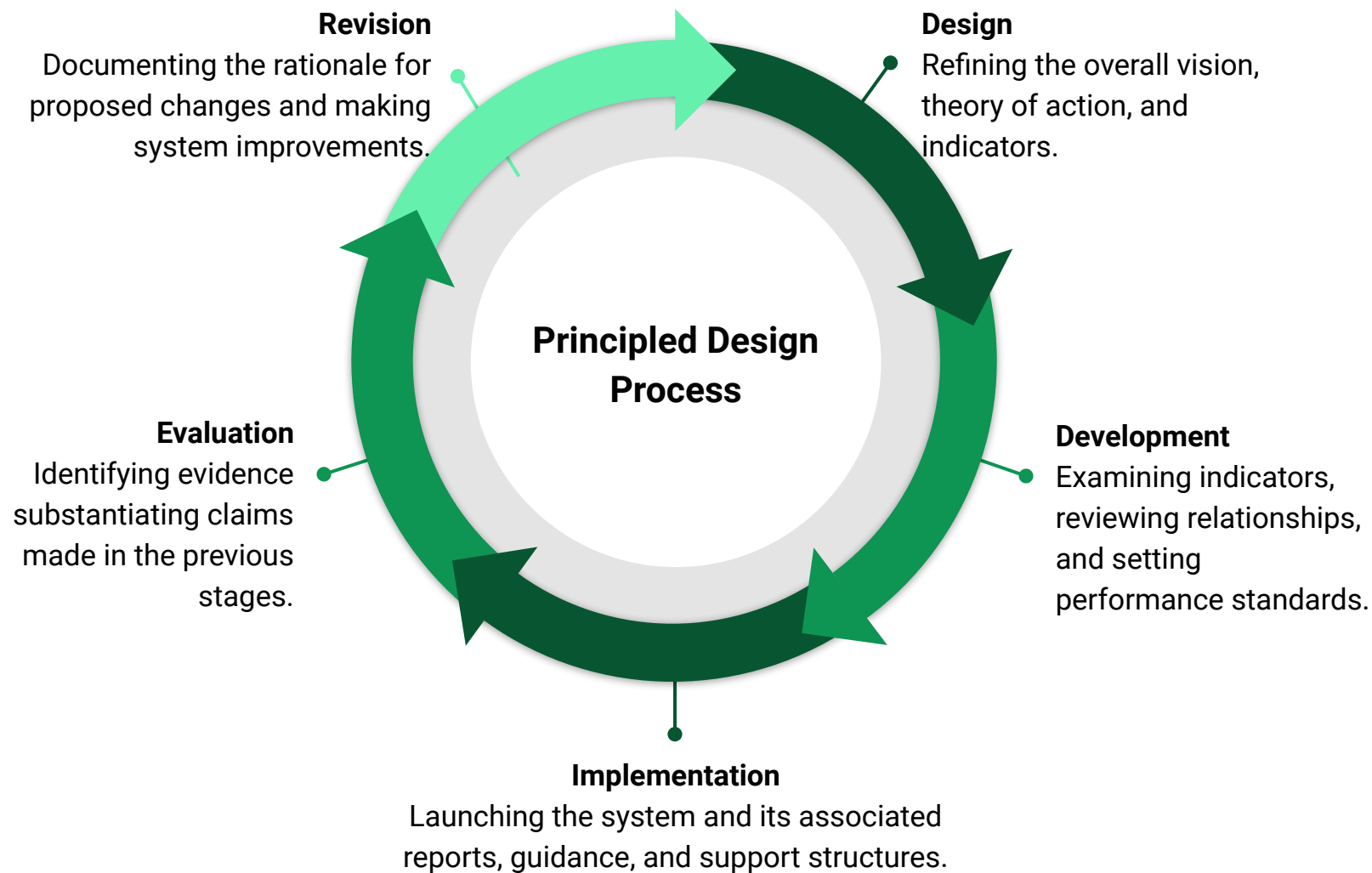
- At the foundation of any credible accountability system is a well-explicated **Theory of Action (TOA)**. The TOA:
 - Reflects a hypothesis for how the system will bring about the desired changes, including conditions and assumptions that must hold.
 - Acts as a blueprint to show how the elements are intended to come together to reach the desired result.
 - Guides inevitable decisions regarding priorities and tradeoffs.
 - Serves as a framework for evaluating and continuously improving the system.



Developing a Theory of Action



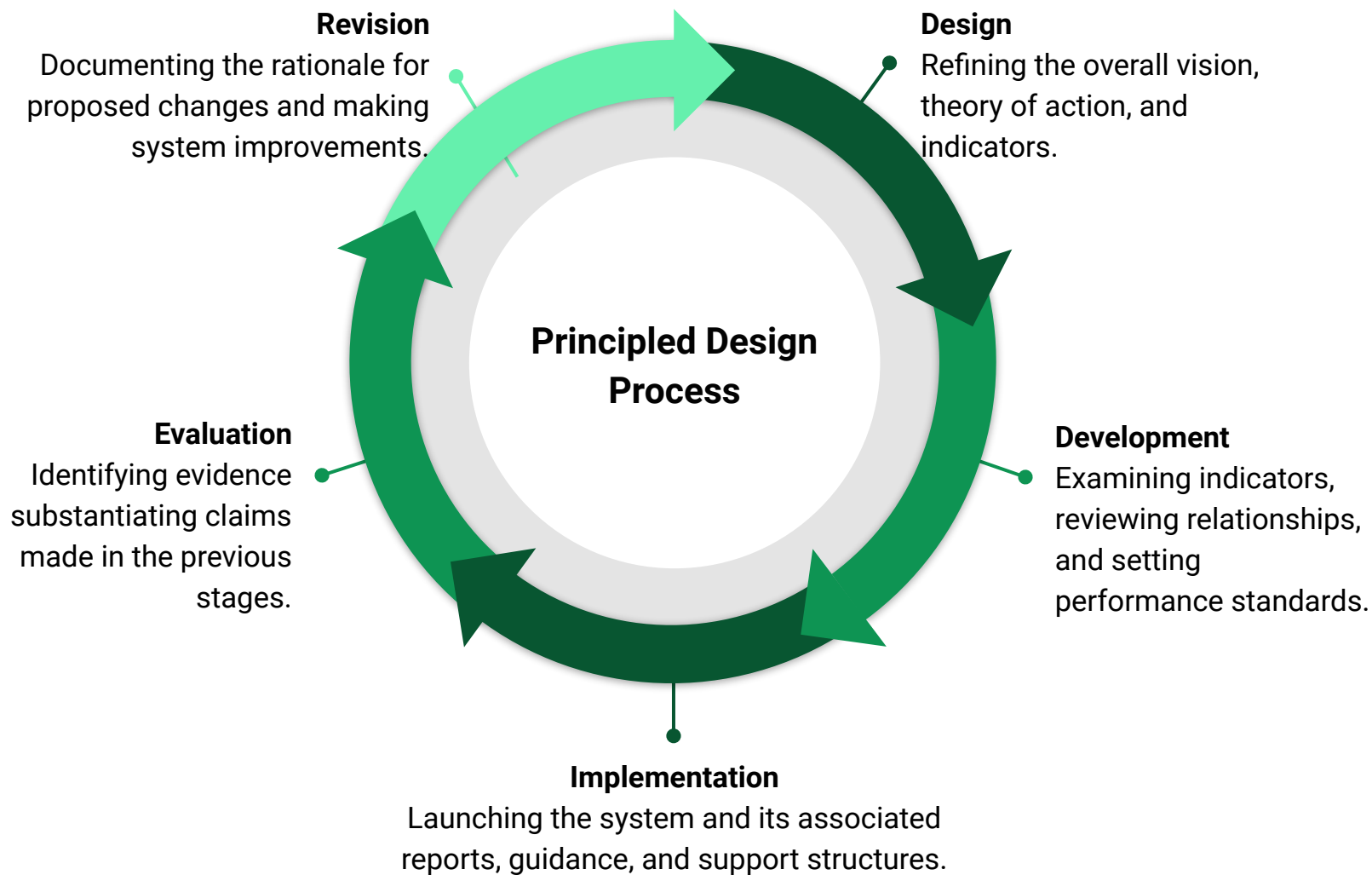
Employing a Principled Design Process



Employing a Principled Design Process

Systems that are intended to drive improvement and support are never “set it and forget it.”

It is critical to revisit design, development, and implementation by defining your evaluation plan early, and documenting the changes that are needed.



Connecting to a Principled Process

Theory of Action

A detailed theory of action serves as the foundation for guiding principles, the expected outcomes of the system, and its coherence with other systems.

Principled Design Process

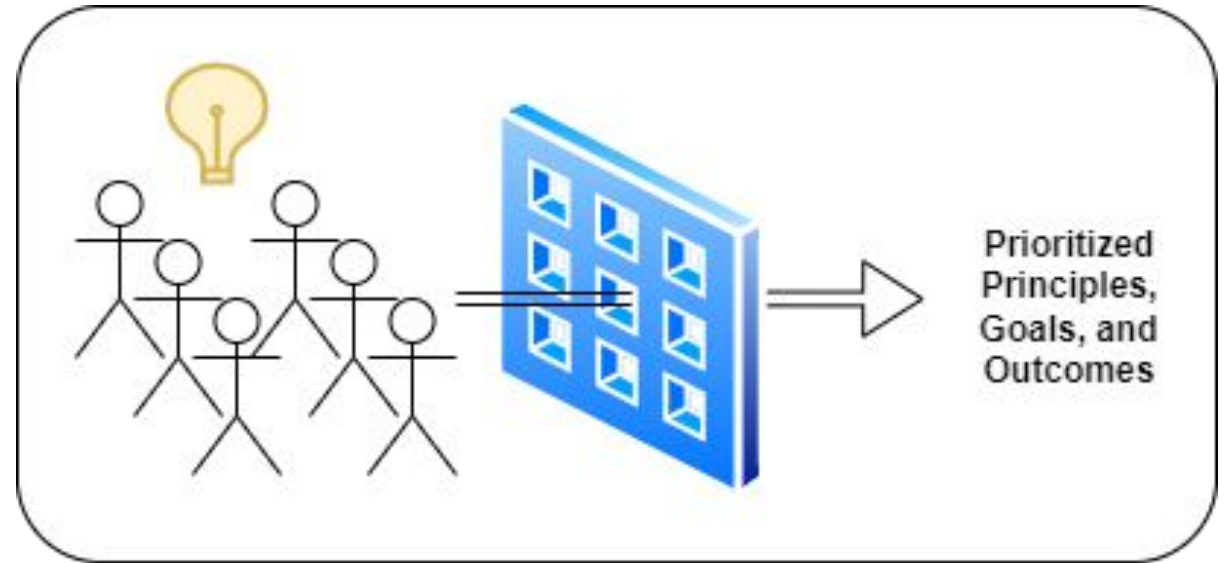
A structured approach to ensure goals are well-defined, that systematic processes are enacted, and claims can be substantiated.

More Effective Systems

An approach that can be evaluated against its goals can yield a system that is more effective and can be better used and understood.

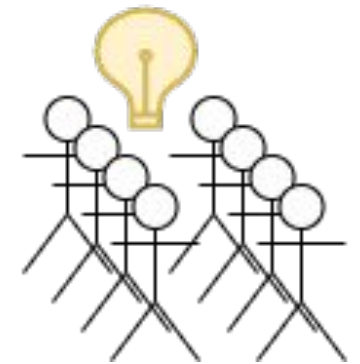
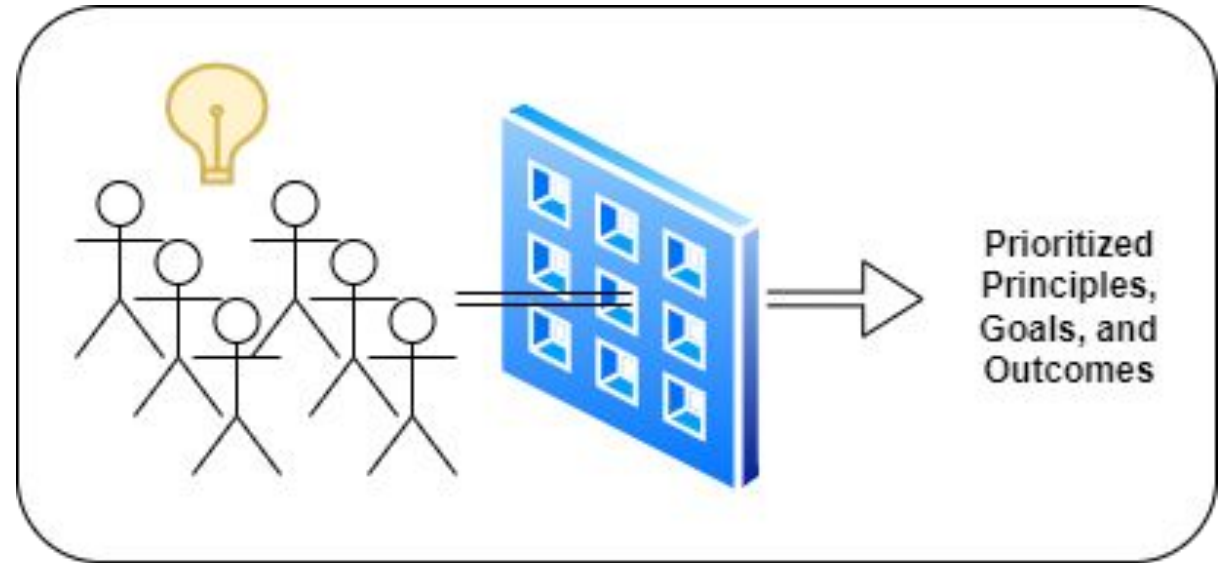
Representation Drives Design

- Those at the table define the principles that are prioritized.



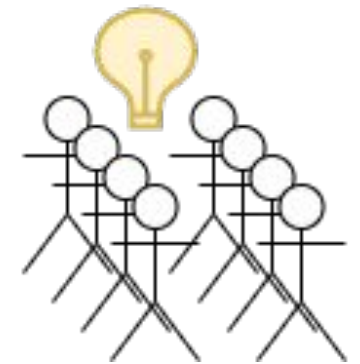
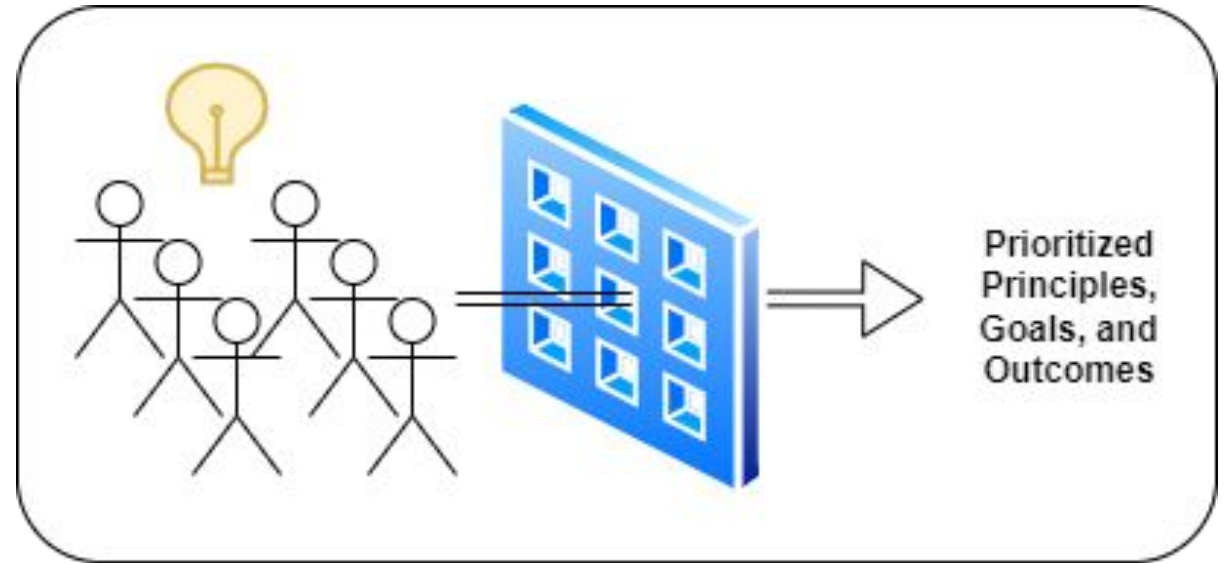
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Representation Drives Design

- Those at the table define the principles that are prioritized.
- Perspective and experience drive the principles that are elevated throughout system design.
- Ensuring that interested and affected parties include those who use, consume, or are the source of the information is vital. This is what helps make systems credible, relevant, and inclusive, which can help drive change in practice and outcomes.



Support Customized Approaches

Flexibility and Freedom

- ESSA is very constrained on a few things, but offers a lot of **flexibility** on other things
- Additional **freedom** is offered outside of ESSA
- States should take advantage of this flexibility and freedom to design the accountability system that reflects their values, following the principles and suggestions in the paper
 - States should evaluate and modify their accountability and related systems until the systems achieve the desired results

ESSA key requirements and flexibilities

Key Requirements	Key Flexibilities
<p>Must assess reading/ELA and math in at least grades 3-8 and once in high school; must assess science at least once per grade span; must assess English learner progress in grades 3-8 and once in high school for accountability</p>	<p>May add other assessments, including of School Climate/Student Success May add additional grades State’s content standards and performance standards</p>
<p>Must calculate graduation rate using 4-year cohort model</p>	<p>May add extended-year graduation rates at state’s weights</p>
<p>Must identify schools for CSI and ATSI using “bottom 5% of all Title 1 schools” and grad rate $\leq 66.6\%$; must identify schools for TSI annually</p>	<p>May set additional requirements for TSI and ATSI May include non-Title 1 schools May include designations in addition to CSI/ATSI/TSI Set exit criteria for identified schools</p>
<p>Academic indicators must count majority of weight in school determinations</p>	<p>State sets specific weights and rules</p>
<p>Must provide support to identified schools (some financial and other requirements)</p>	<p>State largely designs and implements supports</p>
<p>State’s ESSA assessments and accountability systems must undergo federal reviews/approvals</p>	<p>State can have assessments and accountability systems outside of ESSA; no federal review</p>

Results of ESSA Flexibilities

- States have included a wide range of assessments in their accountability systems
- States have had a very wide range of accountability designs approved
- States have identified a wide range of percentages of schools for CSI/ATSI/TSI
 - Example: in 2023, states' school identification rates for CSI/ATSI/TSI ranged from less than 10% of all schools to more than 60%
- Several states have non-ESSA accountability systems in addition to their ESSA systems
 - Non-ESSA systems allow even more freedom to reflect state values and purposes

Measure More of What Matters

Measuring More of What Matters

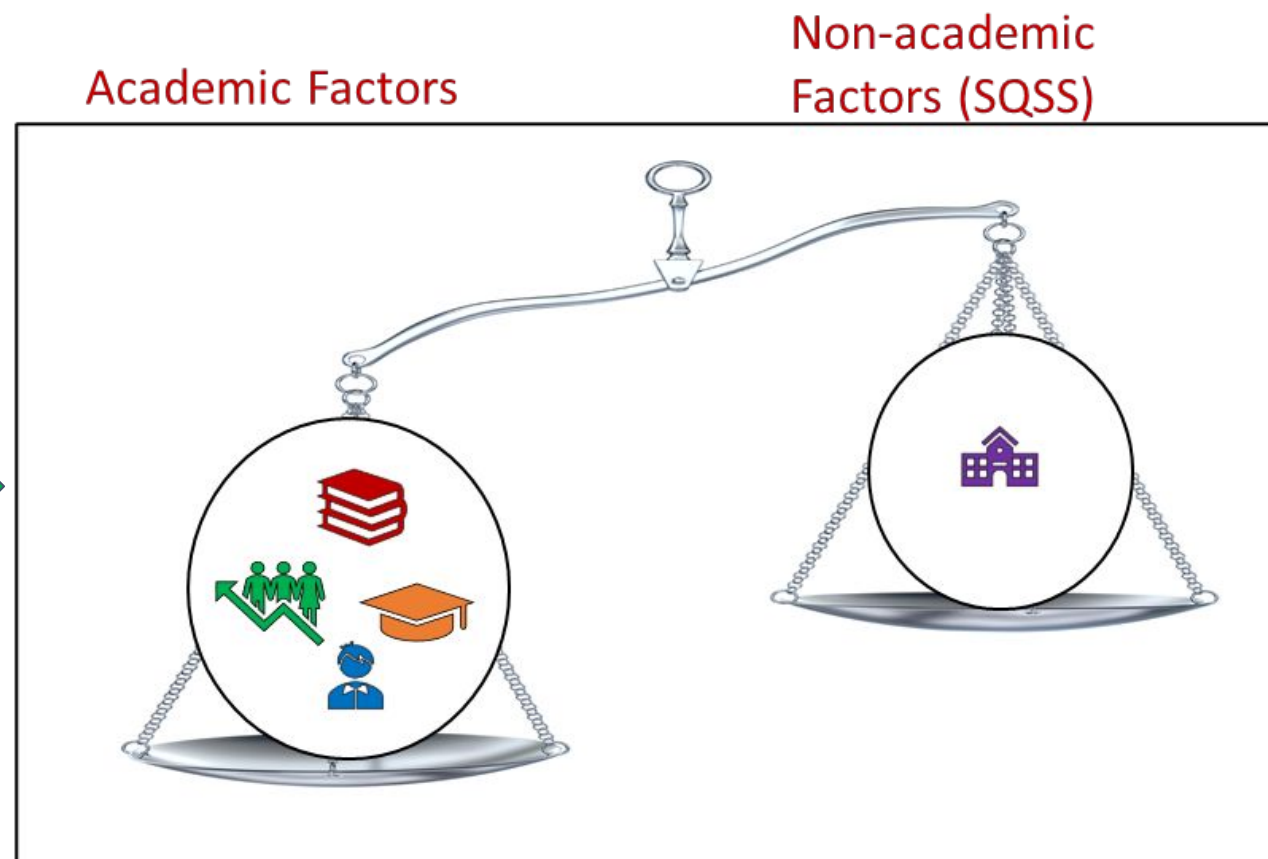
ESSA SQSS Requirement

For all public schools in the state, at least one indicator of **school quality or student success** (SQSS) that allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance and is valid, reliable, and comparable.

Measuring More of What Matters

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Academic factors must be given “much greater” weight.

Moving Beyond SQSS

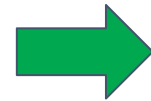
Flexibility under ESSA prompted some SEAs to reconsider school quality...

- **Definitions:** What is a high-quality school? How might definitions of quality vary across communities?
- **Measurement:** How do we measure this new definition of “quality?”
- **Measurement for Improvement:** How can these measures be reported and used to get better?

Moving Beyond SQSS

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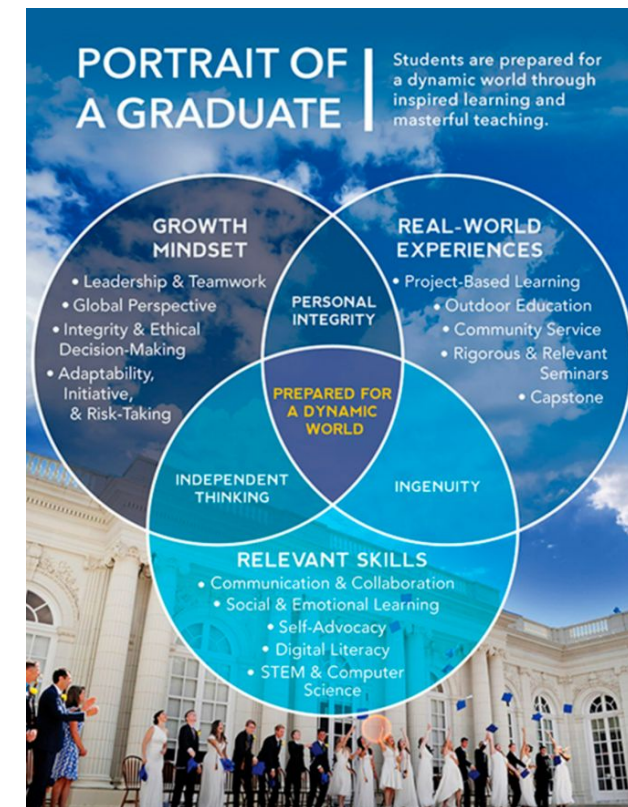
Other Indicators

- 21st Century skills
- Social and emotional learning
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Social and emotional development
- Opportunity to learn
- Post-secondary success
- Parent engagement
- School finance

State Examples: Rethinking Accountability



**Kentucky
Department of Education**



Caveats...

- Stakes matter! Beware of Campbell's law:

The more any quantitative indicator is used for decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the processes it is intended to monitor.

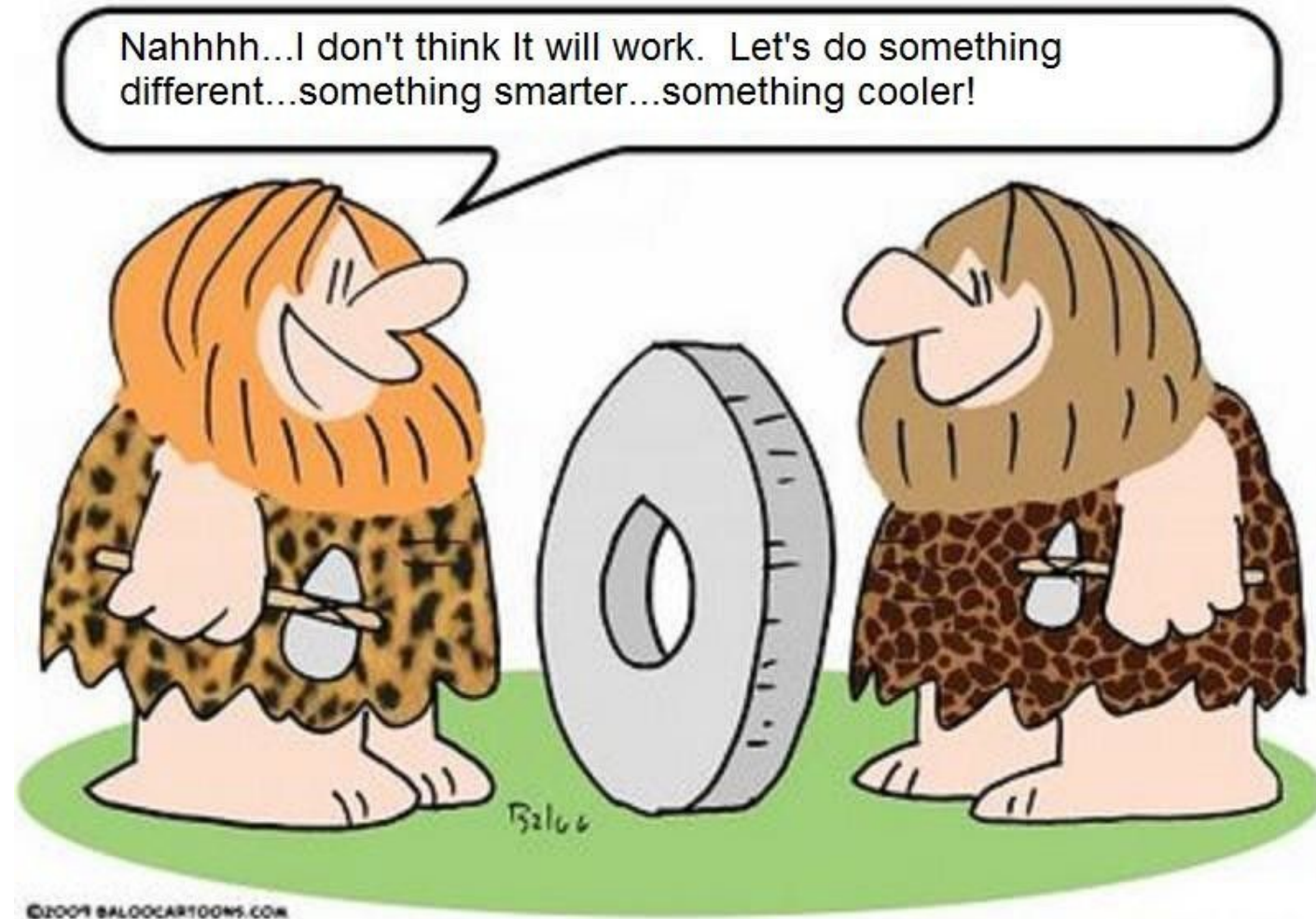


- For this reason, many states are exploring strategies to collect, report, and support appropriate use outside of ESSA accountability
 - 'little a' vs 'Big A' accountability

Avoid Reinventing the Wheel

Resources for Little “a” Improvement

- **Equity and Opportunity to Learn (OTL):** National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. [Monitoring Educational Equity](#). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- **21st Century Skills:** PBL Works/Center for Assessment, [Instructing and Assessing 21st Century Skills](#)
- **Social and Emotional Learning:**
 - Assessment Work Group (AWG) [Tool for Selecting Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Assessments](#)
 - [RAND SEL Assessment Finder](#)
 - Explore SEL Frameworks and Terms: <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/>
- **School Safety:** The National Center on Safe and Supportive School Environments [Catalog of Survey Instruments](#)



Connecting Information to Support

Why connection-making should be part of the path forward for accountability

- Reports that actually inform and support local decisions and improvement activities
 - ↳ connected information and actions
- Support systems that reflect identified needs
 - ↳ connected accountability system and school improvement design and implementation

Improving reporting resources & practices

To connect information to action

- Be clear about identifications
- Describe what the data mean
- Provide sufficient detail and direction to initiate and inform local improvement planning (using local data)

What we mean

Be clear

Include applicable thresholds for identification

Show all identifications a school qualifies for

Display relevant indicator weights



Be descriptive

Use sentences to describe key takeaways

Signal what question(s) different data can answer

Include relevant context and describe that too

Link to relevant resources to support interpretation

For Example

Rates of absenteeism are higher across all student groups in this school this year compared to last year.

Be detailed

Connect results to actions

Make space for local data (new questions to answer)

Display outcomes for all student groups

Link to relevant resources to support local improvement planning

For Example

See below for questions that will guide your local improvement planning

Specifying a support system

Accountability is more than the data comprising a single annual report.

It is a landscape of state and local data, interpretation, and school improvement support plans and resources.

If we attend only to the reports, we miss the point.



What this looks like

- Design measurement and reporting systems that reflect their intended use – informing school improvement
- Consider: how does what you (the state, district) know about accountability results inform the supports you prioritize and deliver?
- Intentional coordination and connection between the various accountability and school improvement resources so that they point to and reinforce one another.



Questions/ Comments



Let's Talk Some More...

Join us for more discussion about improving accountability at our **annual conference**, the Reidy Interactive Lecture Series (RILS), on **Sept. 21-22** in beautiful Portsmouth, N.H.!

Register [here](#) or use this QR code:





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