



SANDLER
FOUNDATION

Putting in Place Measures for Next-Generation Accountability and School Improvement Systems

Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

RAND Education's new report, "Expanding Measures of School Performance," includes a set of policy ideas aimed at helping federal policymakers. The Sandler Foundation sought input from a range of stakeholders and experts in order to develop additional ideas for how RAND's findings translate into the federal policy context.

Different measures of school success and student learning have different purposes. These recommendations distinguish between outcome measures used for accountability purposes, diagnostic measures used for school improvement, and resource measures used to inform decisions at higher levels of the system.

➤ **Encourage states and districts to experiment with and study a broader set of measures of schools.**

We know that additional measures can enhance school accountability and improvement. However, we still do not have enough information about which measures are best at driving improved student outcomes, better schools, and better school resource allocation. There is a need to pilot a range of measures and study their effects. This research need might be filled by:

- Incorporating development and evaluation of measures into existing federal research and competitive grant programs;
- Encouraging consortia of states to collaborate on developing and evaluating shared measures, thereby helping states save money
- Sponsoring a competitive grant program focused directly on developing and evaluating new measures
- Making measures that are developed and supported with federal funds universally available

Measures that are developed with federal funds should be contingent on the provision of clear, explicit support to teachers and principals so they can interpret the new measures and adapt their practices in response.

➤ **In ESEA reauthorization, broaden the range of measures beyond those currently mandated under NCLB.**

The new ESEA should promote expanded use of educationally appropriate measures for accountability, school improvement and resource allocation without specifying the measures states must use.

Accountability (Outcome Measures):

Key categories of promising additional outcome measures include:

1. **Achievement and attainment beyond math and English Language Arts,**
-

including measures of student growth, performance in other subject areas, and advanced course-taking.

2. **Progress indicators** demonstrating student advancement toward high school graduation or college- and career-readiness.

Federal law should permit and encourage each state to propose and use additional, outcome measures for federal accountability determinations, so long as their use is aligned with college and career readiness goals and subject to rigorous peer review and research. States have expressed strong interest in using additional outcome measures that drive their systems more effectively to college and career readiness. Under No Child Left Behind, states have a strong disincentive to add additional measures for federal accountability purposes, because each measure is structured so that if any single measure is not reached, a school fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Federal policy should allow states to include measures into a blended determination for AYP, so that the combination of outcome measures leads to the final determination.

School Improvement (diagnostic and resource measures):

Key categories of promising diagnostic and resource measures include:

1. **Positive school culture**, including student and teacher satisfaction, academic challenge, engagement, safety, and orderliness.
2. **Positive behavioral, emotional, and physical health outcomes**, including indicators of attendance, suspensions, expulsion, and physical health.
3. **Information about discrepancies in resources** available to schools and students.

While all schools should be encouraged to use appropriate diagnostic and resource measures, federal policy should require the use of such measures in the lowest-performing schools. States would use a two-step accountability model where: (1) key outcome indicators are used to identify low-performing schools; and (2) diagnostic and resource indicators are used to identify specific problems and plan school improvement or inform decisions at higher levels of the system. The schools that are required to engage in a deeper diagnostic review should be those schools that are a particular focus of federal reform (e.g., the bottom five percent of schools).

Such a federal requirement is limited in scope, thereby respecting state and local decisions for most schools and limiting costs and data collection burdens. At the same time, it enables federal policy to play a catalytic role in shifting the paradigm to more nuanced, effective, and cost-efficient use of data in school improvement.

Note: Information on resources available to schools tend to be less useful in decisions made at the school level, since schools have little control over the resources they receive, but is relevant in decisions made about resource allocation at higher levels of the system.

➤ **Avoid mandating specific new measures.**

There is currently insufficient information on how using specific measures will affect student outcomes, school improvement, and resource allocation. Experimentation and evaluation of measures is a priority, and it is premature for federal policy to mandate specific new measures.