District and School Accountability and Supports

Framing the Issue

The coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has created new challenges for school accountability, continuous improvement, and supports. In the area of accountability, for example, educators are seeking additional measures of student progress to identify and monitor progress in comprehensive school improvement (CSI) and targeted support and improvement (TSI) districts and schools in the absence of state assessment data. Moreover, educators at all levels want to ensure that districts and schools continue to set high standards for all students, despite the disruptions of COVID-19, and provide the support and guidance to help schools meet students' academic and nonacademic needs.

Many schools also face new challenges as they reopen for the 2020–21 school year, because the communities they serve are impacted by COVID-19. In addition to the public health and socioeconomic impact of recent months, students may return to school with greater social-emotional needs that will affect their abilities to engage in their education. Schools will need assistance in meeting these new challenges, and education leaders will want to identify the needs and challenges in different communities so that they can provide the appropriate support and guidance. The following are some strategies and resources that educators can use for both accountability and supports.

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Key Takeaways

Potential new approaches and measures for district and school accountability and support in the absence of state data include the following:

Identify additional indicators of improvement. Examples include the following indicators:

- Data from fall 2019 to determine whether schools were on track for achievement goals

- Indicators from state longitudinal data systems that help identify which schools were on track and which schools were not on track

- State or local monitoring data if monitoring occurred before schools transitioned to remote instruction

- Early warning indicators that schools use for early identification and intervention with students to help them get back on track for major educational milestones

- Surveys of TSI and CSI instructional staff to determine what challenges they face

Incorporate emerging community needs related to COVID-19 into school supports. Schools will want to collect information about the following:

- Students' social-emotional well-being

- Students' access to different learning options

- Community factors such as socioeconomic status, household composition, minority and language status, and access to housing and transportation

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Exemplars

As state education agencies developed their reopening plans, they shared the following strategies for adapting their approaches and supports for district and school accountability and continuous improvement.

Differentiate support. Although support should always be tiered and based on district and school needs, these needs may have changed in recent months. For example, the adoption of remote instruction or a hybrid instructional model may mean that limited broadband access now has a significantly greater impact on students' abilities to participate in school. Communities with higher rates of COVID-19, as well as higher poverty and other social vulnerabilities, may have new challenges that affect students' education needs. Some of the resources listed below can help educators identify areas of emerging needs.

Ensure multiple perspectives. When developing and implementing supports, work closely with local health departments and community organizations and foundations to get feedback and share resources.

Engage with partners. Work with local partners, such as technical assistance organizations, national and regional nonprofit organizations, and university partners, that are developing resources to help schools respond to COVID-19.
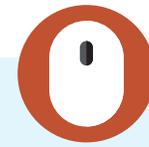
From the Field

- "Schools are not islands. They are grounded in communities, and with all of the changes that are occurring, there may be some emerging schools and communities in need. . . . By sharing information about local access to broadband and social vulnerability, states can make decisions about how to support these communities based on their needs."
  — Susan Therriault, Managing Researcher, American Institutes for Research

- "We are really thinking about supporting CSI and TSI schools with a multi-tiered systems of support approach, and now we have the added complexity of schools that are COVID-19 hot spots. . . . We are thinking about the supports for reopening for all of our schools and students, but we also know that the support we offer to schools is going to be differentiated." — Lane Carr, Director of Accountability, Nebraska Department of Education

Resources

- The Rhode Island Department of Education's **Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment Reopening Guidance for SY20–21** (http://media.ride.ri.gov/EEIE/GuidanceSY20-21/CurrInstAssessReopeningGuidanceSY20-21-ALL.pdf) includes best practices and recommendations that districts and schools can apply to their local context.

- The Centers for Disease Control's **Social Vulnerability Index** (http://media.ride.ri.gov/EEIE/GuidanceSY20-21/CurrInstAssessReopeningGuidanceSY20-21-ALL.pdf) provides data, tools, and maps illustrating different socioeconomic factors that may influence how a community responds to stresses on human health.

- The Federal Communications Commission's **Fixed Broadband Deployment map** (https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/#/) provides information about broadband access by state, county, congressional district, tribal area, and other geographic units.