

SPOTLIGHT



Carl Costas for Education Week

Christy Fernandez, a 5th grade teacher at Lemmon Valley Elementary, greets students before a social-emotional learning lesson.

REDEFINING STUDENT SUCCESS

EDITOR'S NOTE

Schools and districts are developing holistic approaches to get a more complete picture of student success. In this Spotlight, see how growth mindsets are factoring into student achievement, how states and districts are gathering data for new school-quality indicators, and how educators can better prepare students for college and careers.

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Mindset a Key Factor in Student Success

By Evie Blad

Having a growth mindset may help buffer students from low-income families from the effects of poverty on academic achievement, researchers found in a first-of-its kind, large-scale study of 168,000 10th grade students in Chile.

But poor students in the study were also less likely to have a growth mindset than their higher-income peers, researchers found.

Students with a growth mindset believe that skill and academic strength can be developed through effort and practice, said Stanford University researcher Susana Claro, who co-wrote the study with Stanford professors David Paunesku and Carol Dweck.

That's contrasted with students with a fixed mindset, who believe their intelligence and skill sets are unchangeable, like eye color. Dweck's previous research has found that interventions that help students develop more of a growth mindset can have positive effects on their academic achievement.

This new study expands on those findings, showing for the first time that they hold true in a national sample, and exploring how academic mindsets interact with family income to affect student achievement.

While students from low-income households typically score lower on standardized tests, researchers found that poorer Chilean students with higher levels of growth mindset had similar average test scores to their fixed-mindset peers from higher-income families.

"Strikingly, students from low-income families (the lowest 10 percent) who had a growth mindset showed comparable test scores with fixed-mindset students whose families earned 13 times more (80th percentile)," says the study, published this month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Researchers used test scores and student survey responses from an entire class of students enrolled in public schools in Chile during the 2012 academic year to reach their conclusions. They measured mindsets by asking students to agree or disagree with two statements: "You can

learn new things, but you can't change a person's intelligence," and, "Intelligence is something that cannot be changed very much." Claro, who is Chilean, worked with the country's ministry of education to include the questions on an existing student survey, Paunesku said.

The results are the first to show on such a large scale that the relationship between mindset and achievement "is comparably strong" with that between family income and achievement, the authors wrote.

Effects on Achievement

Researchers also found that a growth mindset was a greater predictor of success for poor students than it was for their higher-income peers. But students from the lowest-income households were also twice as likely to have fixed mindsets than their wealthiest peers. The findings suggest that the systemic problems that

poor students face, like a lack of a quiet place to study or adequate nutrition, may be compounded by psychological factors, Paunesku said.

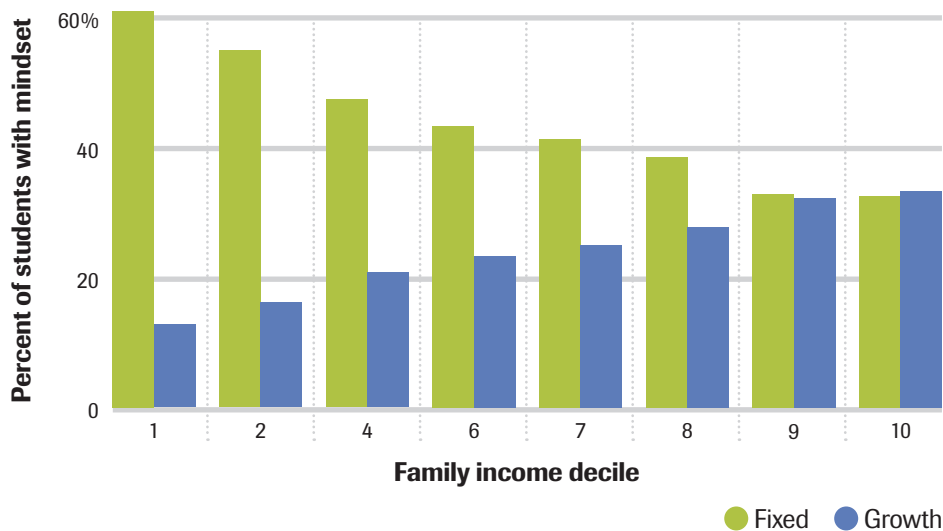
"By virtue of their economic deprivation, [low-income students] can't get a lot of things that we know are important to learning," he said. "Having a fixed mindset makes it even harder for them to overcome these barriers. ... If you have a fixed mindset, you're more likely to interpret a setback or something that's hard as a sign that you can't do it."

Critics of schools that emphasize concepts like growth mindset, grit, and persistence argue that such work can fail to take into account systemic factors that contribute to poor achievement. Some label this a "bootstraps mentality."

"To be clear, we are not suggesting that structural factors, like income inequality or disparities in school quality, are less important than psychological factors," the authors wrote. And growth-

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINDSET AND POVERTY

While research has found that a growth mindset may offset the effects of poverty, data from a large-scale study in Chile suggests that poor students are more likely to have a fixed mindset.



SOURCE: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

mindset interventions are not a replacement for systemic efforts, they added.

But, as schools address systemic issues, they should also be mindful that a student's difficult life circumstances can affect the way they approach learning, struggle, and failure in the classroom, Paunesku said.

"Mindset is an important part of how socioeconomic disparities get replicated from generation to generations. ... Structural barriers get in the way of people being able

to succeed, and they reinforce mindsets that tell [students] they can't succeed."

Rather than seeing growth-mindset interventions as a standalone strategy, some schools have worked in recent years to pair them with efforts to improve school climate and provide support for students' nonacademic needs. Educators seeking to nurture growth mindset in the classroom should also address the importance of developing new strategies to tackle difficult problems, rather than

emphasizing sheer effort, Paunesku said.

But isn't it possible that "doing well in school leads to a growth mindset rather than the other way around?" Claro and her co-researchers asked. To try to answer this, they controlled their results using other survey questions. They found that the relationship between a growth mindset and achievement remained significant even when controlling for factors like students' perceptions of their own academic skills. ■

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Data Loom Large in Quest for New School-Quality Indicator

States look hard at what's required To meet ESSA's mandate

By Daarel Burnette II

States scrambling to come up with more nuanced ways to measure school quality under the new federal K-12 law are running smack into an old problem: how to make sure they have the right data.

The Every Student Succeeds Act requires that states—in addition to using English-language proficiency, graduation rates, and scores on statewide achievement tests—add at least one new indicator of school quality or student success, such as school climate, chronic absenteeism, discipline, or college and career readiness.

For many states, adding that new indicator may mean spending more on data systems and collection, avoiding approaches that might demand too much of a data lift, or picking something off the shelf rather than crafting a more challenging indicator, because the information isn't easily available.

Complicating the matter, the law requires that the data for the new school-quality indicator must be valid, reliable, and comparable across districts, and that officials be able to break out the information by student demographics.

That presents a challenge for state education agencies that want to pick in-

dicators that use classroom observations or teacher and parent surveys to measure schoolwide indicators. Those might include whether parents feel engaged or if teachers are participating in effective peer-mentor programs, for example.

"Here's a great opportunity for departments to innovate, and they're being placed right back in a box," said Mark Elgart, the president and chief executive officer of AdvancEd, a group that's consulted with education departments to help them create new accountability systems.

But many consultants working with state departments are advising that they not let data-collection issues impede innovation.

"If something's not feasible to collect, you have to treat it as an implementation issue," said Joanne Weiss, who was a chief of staff to former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and who currently consults with state education departments. "That doesn't mean it's not an important indicator that shouldn't be included in the system."

The U.S. Department of Education in June issued its proposed regulations for states putting together new accountability systems under ESSA, which is due to go fully into effect in fall 2017. The draft

repeats the law's requirements for four mandated academic indicators, as well as for the new "fifth indicator" of school quality or student success.

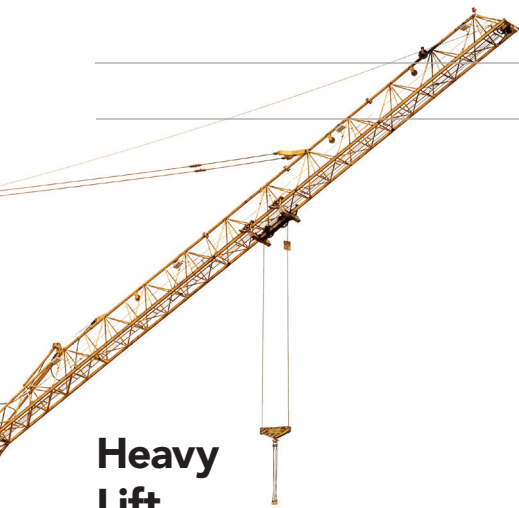
Tough Choices

In the meantime, many states already are wrestling with whether to pick a school quality indicator that is ideal and ambitious, versus one that is practical and safe, with data collection and analysis a major factor.

- California's education department has pushed back against aggressive efforts by parent and advocates to measure school climate, an indicator that officials say they don't yet have enough reliable information to measure.
- Connecticut's education department rejected proposals to add civic engagement to that state's accountability system—an indicator that would require collecting new data.
- And South Carolina officials, not wanting to trample on the state's accountability task force's imagination, will spend more than \$1 million to measure school and career readiness as part of its new accountability system. "We know we're going to be collecting significantly more data with this new system," said Sheila Quinn, South Carolina's deputy schools superintendent.

One big issue: whether states and districts are able to retrofit their data-collection systems to answer new and increasingly difficult questions, a potentially arduous and expensive task.

For many measures, state officials say they lack the infrastructure to collect enough reliable information to attach high stakes. Many districts' data-col-



Heavy Lift

As states revamp their accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act, some are wrestling with what it will take to collect the data needed to incorporate new indicators into those systems.

CALIFORNIA

Indicators: Considering indicators in four areas: chronic absenteeism; suspension rates; college and career readiness; school climate.

Time Frame: Data collection starts in September; system rolls out fall of 2017.

Data Specifics: Work needed to collect clear, consistent, up-to-date data across districts in certain areas.

CONNECTICUT

Indicators: Adopted five indicators: attendance/chronic absence; college and career readiness; postsecondary entrance; physical fitness; arts access.

Time Frame: The state plans to submit new accountability system to U.S. Department of Education after making minor tweaks to comply with the recently released regulations.

Data Specifics: State for several years has collected all the data required to measure the indicators picked for the accountability system.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Indicators: Refining indicators in four areas: elementary school readiness; middle school readiness; high school readiness; college and career readiness.

Time Frame: End of summer to refine indicators, accountability system to roll out at the start of the 2017-18 school year.

Data Specifics: New, centralized data-management system estimated to cost more than \$1 million. The system will flag course work schools offer and how students perform in those courses.

SOURCES: California, Connecticut, South Carolina Departments of Education

lection systems are scattershot and outdated. Scores of technicians responsible for processing data have been laid off in recent years amid budget cuts. And local superintendents have complained that they're already required by states to collect an inordinate amount of data.

The details are daunting. Scott Norton, the Council of Chief State School Officers' strategic-initiative director for standards, assessment, and accountability, said pulling all the right data together requires syncing districts' systems, then coding those systems to collect the right information.

Some data points, such as whether a student is a foster child or part of a military family, are pretty straightforward. But others—such as how students feel about a school's climate or whether teachers are receiving a certain amount of professional development—may require a bevy of surveys that then must be manually entered into the database.

As a result, many education departments, depending on their capacity, will consider outsourcing the work or paying millions of dollars to purchase entire new systems, consultants say.

Student-Level Information

There's also the sheer volume of information. School districts today collect hundreds of thousands of data points about children that are often stored in large data warehouses. Students track their academic progress in data binders, teachers tweak their curriculum based on rapid-fire online quizzes, and principals tally office referrals to craft new discipline procedures.

Against that backdrop, Brennan McMahon Parton, the Data Quality Campaign's associate director for state policy and advocacy, has traversed the country in recent months urging state education departments and lawmakers to evaluate data they already collect before deciding to collect more as they weigh new school quality indicators.

"Many states have meaningful and useful data in their system already," she said. "That's not to say with a push of a button, you get what you need."

In Connecticut, more than two-thirds of local superintendents said in a 2012 survey that the amount of data the state requires them to collect was duplicative, burdensome, and costly. That year, Democratic Gov. Dannel Malloy signed an education bill that tasked the state department to reduce by a third the

number of data forms districts annually fill out.

So when the education department formed a task force two years ago to construct a new accountability system, superintendents and the agency pledged that any new indicators would have to be based on information the department already collected.

"Oftentimes, when the state asks for new data, we tell them we already have it or we've been giving it to you in other ways," said Joseph J. Cirasuolo, the executive director of Connecticut's superintendents association. "Usually, it's not where it has to be."

In the end, Connecticut decided to add access to arts courses, chronic absenteeism, career readiness (based on students' performance on the state's achievement test, SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate tests), schools' college-entrance rates, and three new ways to measure graduation rates to its accountability system.

Big Price Tag

In South Carolina, the task force designated to come up with a new accountability system decided to collect information on elementary, middle and high school readiness and career readiness. That state's districts all collect data using separate systems, many with different contractors. Definitions of indicators such as chronic absenteeism or what qualifies as a suspension vary widely.

In order for South Carolina to measure the new indicators, the department will spend more than \$1 million to buy a new collection system that pulls data points from each district's systems.

"We collect attendance, but the question is: What is the quality of the attendance data that we receive?" asked Daniel Ralyea, the director of the state education department's office of research and data analysis. "I can aggregate it at the state level, but what happens is, in practice, elementary schools may not be as concerned with recording attendance as high schools are."

And in California, the debate over whether to use school climate as an indicator involves such factors as classroom observations and a host of student, parent, and teacher surveys.

"We think (those surveys) are used best at the local level," said Keric Ashley, the deputy superintendent of California's education department, pointing out that the data are prone to errors. ■



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Students Help Design Measures of Social-Emotional Skills

By Evie Blad

RENO, NEV.

Schools in this city, known for its aging casinos, are using a comprehensive social-emotional learning strategy to tackle student engagement and academic success.

The 64,000-student Washoe County district wants to raise its graduation rate, which reached a record 75 percent in 2015, to 90 percent by 2020, an ambitious goal in a state where young adults can make a middle-class salary valet-parking cars without a diploma, Superintendent Traci Davis said.

A growing body of research connects skills like responsible decisionmaking and recognizing and responding to emotions with greater engagement in the classroom and improved academic outcomes such as higher graduation rates. But, until recently, the district had very few ways of measuring the effectiveness of its social-emotional learning efforts, which it launched as a result of a 2010 strategic plan.

It asked questions many educators and researchers are facing: What's the most accurate way to determine if students are learning so-called "soft skills," like how to empathize with their peers? And what's the best way to respond to the resulting data?

Better data would also help answer a core question for the district: Is social-emotional learning contributing to that rising graduation rate? Educators who've embraced the strategy believe it's necessary, but they've lacked data in the past that proves how much they are moving the needle for students.

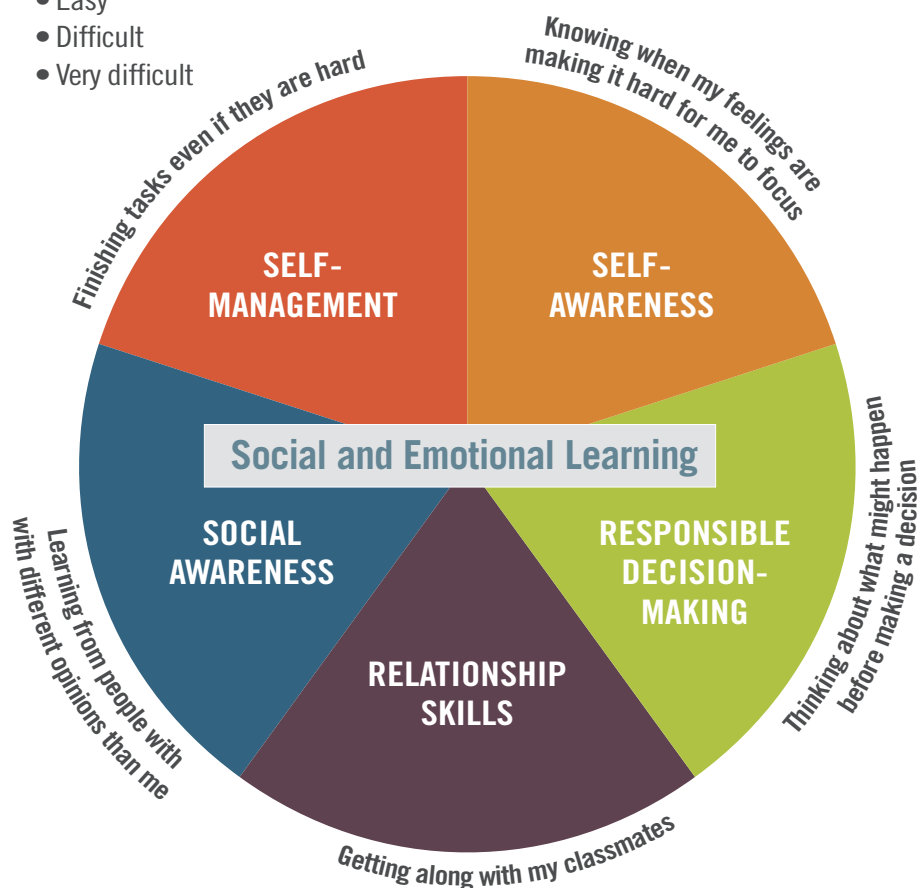
"If we could come up with good measures, then maybe we could measure the mediating effect of social-emotional learning competencies on this risk [of not completing high school]," said Ben Hayes, the district's chief accountability officer. "That became the kind of learning goal, and from there we found out very quickly that we need to have better measures."

While Washoe County is way ahead of

TAKING MEASURE OF STUDENTS' SKILLS

How easy or difficult is each of the following for you?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Difficult
- Very difficult



other school districts on developing more refined and careful measures of students' skills, educators there say there is much more work to be done before the results should be used for accountability.

Better Measures

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the main federal K-12 law, states are now required to include at least one measure other than test scores in their

accountability systems, an issue that has raised the profile of social-emotional measurement questions.

With the help of a federal grant and assistance from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, Washoe County administrators developed new survey measures, working with students to understand how they respond to questions about social-emotional skills and with teachers to develop data that could actually be used to change what

happens in the classroom.

Alongside the district's existing early-warning system, which tracks risk factors for dropping out throughout a student's school career, the data being gathered around social-emotional learning is helping educators ensure that students' needs are met and their skills are developed as they progress through school.

A majority of the district's enrollment is students of color. Next to white students, who make up about 46 percent of Washoe County's enrollment, Hispanic students are the largest group, at about 40 percent. Nearly half of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals, a common measure of poverty, and about 16 percent of them are English-learners.

Social-emotional learning is a key to helping otherwise successful students thrive after graduation and to helping buffer risk factors for students considered more likely to drop out, the district found.

In an analysis of 2014 data, students who were classified as "high risk" in the district's early-warning system but who also demonstrated strong social-emotional competencies performed just as well as their low-risk peers on state assessments.

The district's work has been noticed and replicated. Questions developed through its social-emotional measurement project have been adopted by the district in Austin, Texas, and incorporated into statewide student surveys in Alaska and Nevada.

Washoe County is one of eight urban districts that have committed to implementing comprehensive social-emotional learning practices for students in elementary, middle, and high schools and al-

lowing researchers from the American Institutes for Research to measure their results. Districts in the group, coordinated by CASEL, include Anchorage, Austin, Chicago, Cleveland, Nashville, Tenn., and Oakland and Sacramento in California. All have taken their own approach, reworking discipline policies, boosting student-staff relationships, and gradually adopting direct instruction of social and emotional skills in classrooms.

In Washoe County's elementary and middle schools, for example, students learn the concepts through role-playing exercises, games, and class discussions.

Older students, like those in Damonte Ranch High School, learn about forming healthy relationships and meeting long-term goals in their traditional, subject-oriented classes and in special advisory periods.

And adults in the school have learned new skills, too.

Administrators now require teachers to solve non-violent problems in the classroom or by calling for a quick consultation in the hallway, rather than sending a student directly to the office.

Principal Denise Hausauer, an exuberant woman who is passionate about the school's strategies, wears a jingle bell on a lanyard around her neck so students can

Lemmon Valley Elementary 4th grade teacher Amy Stevens takes time to shake hands and talk with her students, another feature of the Washoe school district's work to build strong social-emotional skills in students.

hear her coming down the hall. She wants to catch them doing something good so she can reinforce positive behaviors through praise.

"When I say, 'I'll be there with bells on,' I mean it literally," she said.

And the school's values and expectations for students are painted colorfully in the school's hallways.

"If you're not strategic about this stuff, you're not doing enough for your kids," Hausauer said.

'Ceiling Effect'

But how do Washoe County educators know if the strategy is working?

Good data both informs efforts and helps motivate teachers by showing them how they are helping students, said Laura Davidson, director of research and evaluation for the district.

The district first incorporated questions about social and emotional skills into a 2013 version of a school climate survey it administers to students annually, but administrators quickly realized the responses to those questions weren't helpful.

The surveys asked students to rate on a one-to-five scale whether it was easy or difficult for them to do various tasks, like empathizing with a peer.

But Davidson found a "massive ceiling effect," she said, because large amounts of students ranked everything as easy. The team working on the measures analyzed the data and found that students were "topping out" for three reasons: they really did have high skills in those areas, they got bored taking the surveys, or they didn't understand the questions.

"Lots of kids were saying that they had perfect skills or really good skills," Davidson said. "The problem with that is that we can't tell, do the students really have these skills or are they really not engaging in the survey?"

So the team turned to the students themselves, holding focus groups to create questions they could understand and relate to and about skills they would find more challenging, skills linked to the district's social-emotional learning goals.

"By having them talk about these relationship skills as they happen in their classroom, we were able to come up with all sorts of ideas for more challenging items," Davidson said.

And researchers also teamed up with teachers to generate items they could actually respond to and address, said Jeremy Taylor, CASEL's director of assessment and continuous improvement.



Carl Costas for Education Week

“If a teacher can’t really do anything about it, it’s not really useful to measure it,” he said.

Through the process, the district came up with 150 items that measure students’ competency in the five areas it seeks to nurture: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decisionmaking.

Within that list, the district identified 17 “anchor items,” questions it plans to include on future student surveys. High student scores on those items correlate with stronger academic and behavioral outcomes, the team found, suggesting they are valid measures.

Washoe County isn’t using its social-emotional data for high-stakes school accountability, and both Davidson and Hayes said they don’t recommend using their survey items for that purpose.

The Future of Measurement

Concerns about how measurements of non-academic skills should be used have gotten a heap of attention since Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act late last year. Some social-emotional learning advocates have suggested that using measures of students’ skills in state

accountability systems would encourage more schools to adopt such programs.

But some high-profile researchers have said the measures shouldn’t be used for any kind of accountability because they are still prone to biases, and because they could lead to unforeseen consequences, like shallow classroom exercises that focus on how to correctly answer surveys rather than really changing student behavior.

The question of how to responsibly and accurately measure students’ social-emotional strengths and skills is one that CASEL and other groups are working to address, Taylor said.

A 30-member working group of researchers and practitioners will review what measures schools are currently using and how to use the resulting data.

The group will also work to explore the future of social-emotional learning assessments, examining the feasibility of tools like classroom-based performance items and computer programs to measure student strengths, Taylor said.

“We want to determine the characteristics that make any measure as useful and practical for educators as possible,” he said.

As researchers work to refine measures, schools are already putting them in place.

Washoe County plans to make its mea-

asures available for other schools to use, along with some resources about how to learn from the resulting data.

And the district wants to continue exploring how to analyze students’ strengths, particularly among younger students, Davidson said. The answer may be a more creative vehicle, like video games that put students in hypothetical situations, she said.

Once Washoe County finalizes results from its most recent survey, it will share them with students in a “student data summit” where they can openly ask questions and learn about how their schools measure up in academics, social-emotional learning, and other comparative data.

When the social-emotional measurement team sought students’ input, they realized just how interested the students were in their schools’ results, Hayes said.

“They know what we’re talking about, and they can really inform the conversation.” ■

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Moving Beyond Just Academics As a Way to Assess Effectiveness

Suspension rates, school-climate surveys, and students’ social-emotional skills are key factors for California’s CORE districts

By Evie Blad

LOS ANGELES

As discussions about school accountability begin to focus more intently on factors beyond standardized-test scores, educators and policymakers nationwide are closely watching a group of California school districts—collectively known as the CORE districts—as they rethink how they evaluate school effectiveness.

In 2013, six districts received the only local-level waiver from the U.S. Department of Education when it bypassed California’s state education department to excuse those school systems from some requirements of the outdated No Child Left Behind Act.

In return for the federal flexibility, the districts—including Los Angeles Unified, San Francisco, and Fresno, some of the state’s largest—agreed to create a first-of-its-kind local accountability system that relies on a broad range of indicators in addition to traditional test

scores to monitor schools.

Those indicators include suspension rates; school-climate survey responses from parents; and measures of traits related to students’ social development and engagement, like self-management and social awareness.

That work foreshadowed an inclusion of nonacademic factors as a part of school accountability in the Every Student Succeeds Act, a bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that was signed into law by President Barack Obama in December. Under ESSA, state

accountability systems will be required to include at least one nonacademic indicator. The legislation lists educator engagement, student engagement, and school climate measures as examples, and it leaves the door open for others.

“We need to make sure that our schools’ quality is measured in a way that is much more reflective of the hard work that’s been done,” said Antwan Wilson, the superintendent of the Oakland district, which is also under the CORE waiver, along with Long Beach and Santa Ana. (Three other districts—Garden Grove, Sacramento, and Sanger Unified—are a part of CORE, but do not operate under the waiver.)

Broader Accountability

The accountability system, known as the school quality index, will be maintained by an organization that is governed by the districts’ leaders known as the California Office for Reforming Education, or CORE. (The Sacramento and Sanger Unified districts were originally approved to be a part of the waiver group, but later withdrew.)

Efforts to broaden accountability to include nonacademic factors come with some big questions.

At a time when some influential researchers have cautioned against using measures of noncognitive traits in school accountability, CORE officials are navigating uncharted territory in their ongoing work to determine what student traits should be used in their accountability system, how to measure those traits, and what to do with the results.

Their work could be informative to states as they seek to select what “other indicator” they will use to measure their schools as the federal government steps back from its previously prescriptive model for accountability and devolves more authority to the states in designing their systems.

The process of creating the CORE accountability system has also created excitement among education leaders who see it as a chance to move away from traditional accountability measures, which they say rely too heavily on standardized-test scores and tend to foster a culture of blame among educators rather than an atmosphere of support.

CORE pairs schools that fall to the bottom of the quality index and also rank lowest in academic achievement, known as priority schools, with demographically similar high-achieving schools. The aim

is that principals and teachers trade techniques and strategies to improve.

The system also gives every school a “dashboard” of indicators it can monitor throughout the school year.

“The history of accountability systems has been about, ‘What is the thing I need to do to avoid the punishment?’” said Noah Bookman, CORE’s chief accountability officer. “We are trying to move the conversation to: ‘What am I learning? What strengths do I need to leverage? What are the challenges I need to address?’ and ‘What do I need to do that?’”

How It Works

Key to the CORE districts’ waiver was a promise to reduce the number of students required for a school to be held accountable for a given subpopulation—students from racial- and ethnic-minority groups, English-language learners, low-income students, and special education students—from 100 to 20. That means schools with smaller numbers of students from those populations will be held accountable for their performance for the first time under the new index.

The school-quality-improvement index bases 60 percent of a school’s score on academic factors. Under that category, schools will be judged by their proficiency rates and growth in proficiency rates on the Smarter Balanced test, aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

That yardstick includes the scores of all students combined, as well as the scores of each subpopulation: English-language learners, low-income students, students with disabilities, and students in the lowest-performing racial or ethnic subpopulation at that school.

High schools’ academic-category scores will also include how their four-year, five-year, and six-year cohort graduation rates compare with those of other high schools in CORE districts.

And middle schools’ academic scores will include a “high school readiness” rate, which is the number of 8th graders who meet criteria researchers have linked to a higher likelihood of high school graduation: a GPA of 2.5 or better, an attendance rate of at least 96 percent, no Ds or Fs in English/language arts or math in 8th grade, and no suspensions.

The remaining 40 percent of a school’s score will be a combination of factors related to school climate and students’ noncognitive skills, such as self-management. Current school-level report cards crafted under the index include three factors in

this category: rates of chronic absenteeism, suspension and expulsion rates, and the rate at which English-language learners are redesignated as fluent. Beginning in 2016, two other factors will be added to that nonacademic domain: measures of students’ noncognitive skills and the results of student, staff, and parent surveys about school climate and safety.

Social-Emotional Factors

After consulting a growing body of research that links such skills to a higher likelihood of college and career success, the CORE districts identified four student traits to measure and track: social awareness; self-management; self-efficacy, which is the level of confidence an individual has in his or her ability to succeed and to “control ... their own motivation, behavior, and environment;” and growth mindset, which is defined as an understanding that academic skill is not an inherent, fixed trait but one that can grow through effort.

The districts plan to assess those traits through surveys that ask students questions like how frequently they come to class prepared and how much they agree or disagree with statements such as: “Challenging myself won’t make me any smarter” and “I can earn an A in all of my classes.”

CORE districts piloted a longer menu of survey questions with 450,000 students. After refining that list, CORE will conduct surveys at every school this year.

Leaders of the districts say including such factors in the index will help track the effectiveness of social-emotional-learning programs and similar interventions already in place in many of their schools and help them call out good work that may previously have gone unrecognized.

Oakland, for example, is one of eight urban districts piloting a comprehensive social-emotional-learning program in consultation with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, a Chicago-based organization that promotes research, policy, and practice related to such strategies. Other districts have made efforts on a school-by-school basis.

Among those schools is Beachy Avenue Elementary, which is part of the Los Angeles Unified School District. It uses the Second Step social-emotional-learning program to teach regular lessons in subjects such as empathy and anger management alongside its core subjects.

In one such lesson this fall, third-year teacher Cocoro Morimoto showed a video



I think they feel more empowered when they are solving problems on their own. I am giving them words for their feelings.”

COCORO MORIMOTO

TEACHER, BEACHY AVENUE ELEMENTARY

of two young boys describing their interactions at a sleepover—one had a great time, and the other lamented that his friend left his room a mess—and asked her 4th grade class to identify and relate to each boy’s perspective. In the future, she asked, how could the boys handle their interactions differently?

“Empathy!” several students yelled as they remembered the concept all at once.

Such lessons have a significant impact on a student’s academic success, Morimoto said in an interview. Before she used the curriculum, she lost valuable instructional time addressing student conflicts that erupted during recess.

“I think they feel more empowered when they are solving problems on their own,” she said, adding that social confidence helps boost students’ confidence with challenging academic content. “I am giving them words for their feelings.”

Even without such measures, Beachy Principal Stephen Bluestein said he knows the social-emotional lessons are working. Since adopting the approach, the school’s office referrals have dropped and individual students’ academic performance has improved, he said, although the school still performs below district averages academically.

“It has indirect and direct positive effects that reflect in reading, writing, and arithmetic,” he said.

Researcher Cautions

But will the CORE districts’ noncognitive measures detect the changed attitudes of students?

Researchers of that topic have warned that those measures should not be used for school accountability because they are subject to biases and flawed responses. For example, in some schools in other states, students who’ve been taught about issues



Jamie Reitor for Education Week

like self-control rate themselves lower than their peers because they have a greater awareness of what those concepts mean.

Currently, “perfectly unbiased, un-fakeable, and error-free measures are an ideal, not a reality,” researchers Angela Duckworth and David Yeager said in a May essay published in *Educational Researcher* that detailed an array of flaws with current measures.

Influential Stanford University psychology Professor Carol Dweck, who popularized the idea of growth mindset, said she doesn’t support the inclusion of that measure in the CORE districts’ system.

“To use the mindset measures directly for accountability is, I think, asking for problems,” Dweck said. Such practices may lead to shallow interventions that don’t actually improve student learning, she said, and they could indirectly encourage teachers “to be teaching their students how to check off the right box on a questionnaire.”

“I’m deeply pleased that they value the hard work that we’ve done, but then, that said, I have these concerns,” Dweck said.

Researchers with Transforming Education, a Boston-based organization that consulted with CORE on its social-emotional measures, expressed some concerns about bias in student responses, Bookman, the CORE accountability chief, said. But preliminary results show that strong student scores in noncognitive areas correlate with stronger academic performance and observable traits, like regularly turning in homework on time, which lends validity to the results, he added.

Sara Bartolino Krachman, the executive director of Transforming Education,

Beachy Avenue Elementary teacher Cocoro Morimoto displays a card summarizing the Second Step program concepts that she uses with her 4th graders. She believes lessons from the social-emotional learning program have had a great impact on student success.

said the questions used on student surveys passed several levels of pilot tests without showing signs of the biases researchers expected.

And CORE Executive Director Rick Miller said traits like self-efficacy and growth mindset are far too important for student success to delay measuring them.

Some of the same researchers who’ve criticized gauging such traits for accountability are actively working to develop more consistent, reliable measurements. Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Martin West, for example, is working in Boston-area charter schools to devise new tools to measure student traits. Miller said CORE is open to changing its measures over time as new, more-sophisticated tools are introduced.

And, as a new federal accountability law leads to the end of the district-level waiver, the CORE districts intend to continue developing their model for comparing schools, whether or not it is tied to high-stakes federal accountability, he said. ■

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A New Approach to Student Success

How to kickstart your school or district's focus on using data to support students

By Aaron Feuer

How do you know if your students are on track for college and career readiness? To answer this question, school and district leaders might convene a meeting to look at students' ACT scores. But educators know that test scores alone don't paint a complete picture of whether a student is growing and thriving in school.

Maybe your school or district has implemented an "early warning system" that includes data from multiple sources, including academics and behavior, to track college and career readiness. Yet all too often, these systems only flag students that are already at-risk once these indicators have been updated and students have already been impacted.

These examples shine a light on two common problems in schools: looking at data in isolation and using data to diagnose issues too late to change outcomes.

Shifting Mindsets Toward Student Success

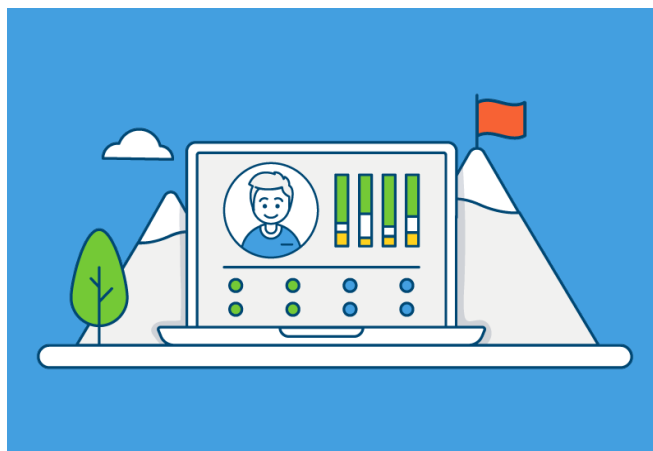
Today, innovative educators are shifting their focus to using data *proactively*, instead of waiting for results of an assessment, and *holistically*, by looking at academic, attendance, and behavior data alongside data on students' readiness to build healthy relationships, practice wellness behaviors, and develop social-emotional learning skills.

To support this new way of thinking about student success, many schools are evolving their core practices to reflect the desire to support *every student's overall progress both in and out of school*.

At Panorama Education, we work with school and district leaders to bring academic and non-academic indicators together in one platform and recommend targeted action steps to support students. In our work with thousands of schools across the country, we've identified several best practices that teams of educators can use to effectively reflect on data and take action to support every student's success.

Using Data to Guide Holistic Conversations about Student Progress

One practice in particular, the Student Success Meeting, offers an opportunity to look across multiple data sources



at how students are doing and address students' needs on a weekly basis.

Many schools host weekly Student Success Meetings to promote positive discussions through data inquiry and to pinpoint solutions to support their students. In these meetings, staff come together to scan across indicators to notice trends and flags for individual students, student groups, and the whole student body, and to plan timely interventions.

Most educators have been in meetings to look at data and make a plan of action, but too often these meetings are focused on only one type of data. These meetings may bring together teachers and administrators to look at state assessment data, suspension and referral numbers, or test scores in one content area, like reading. These are all worthy data sources to consider, but in isolation, we don't see the full picture of how our students are doing.

The goal of Student Success Meetings is to create a consistent practice of using regularly-updated data and looking across indicators to plan actions and interventions to support students. Student Success Meetings help ensure that no students fall through the cracks and that every student receives appropriate supports when they need them.

Focusing discussions during Student Success Meetings around key questions helps your school team identify and "unpack" what's happening when it comes to individual students' progress and school-wide trends.

We've observed that Student Success Meetings are most effective when they involve a carefully-selected cross-section of a school's staff, including administrators, counselors, teachers, and classified staff. Student Success Meetings help underscore that every adult in school has a role to play in helping students build strong relationships and thrive.

Here are four tips for hosting a weekly Student Success Meeting in your school or district:

4 Tips for Data-Driven Student Success Meetings

1. Start with a team-building welcome

- *Welcome and discuss goals for today's meeting*
- *Rose, bud, thorn: What's been the highlight of your week (rose)? What's been challenging for you this week (thorn)? What are you most looking forward to in the week ahead (bud)?*

2. Review weekly updates to your school-wide data trends

- *Which students moved into an at-risk or a critical status this week?*
- *What do we notice about changes in our attendance, academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning (SEL) data this week?*
- *Are there subgroups of students whose key indicators have shifted this week?*
- *Are we on track to meet the longer-term goals we've defined for this semester. If not, what actions can we take this week?*

3. Identify 2-3 students in need of support this week and dig deeper into student-level progress

- *Is this student on track for college and career readiness? For graduation?*

- *Does this student have recent behavioral incidents? Looking across this student's data, what might have been the cause for the incident?*
- *What connections can we make to this student's social-emotional learning (SEL), extracurricular, or home life?*
- *Has this student been attending school/classes consistently? If not, which days and/or classes is the student missing?*
- *To which programs or interventions does this student currently belong? Do these programs or interventions appear to be making a difference for this student over time?*
- *Which adults in the building can best support this student this week?*

4. Develop action plans for success

- *What interventions could we put in place to support these students?*
- *What challenges do we anticipate in providing these supports for these students?*
- *How will we prioritize these interventions for students?*
- *Who is responsible for each next step? By when?*
- *What data will be collected and evaluated for evidence of impact?*
- *When is the next Student Success Meeting? Who will serve as facilitator next time?*

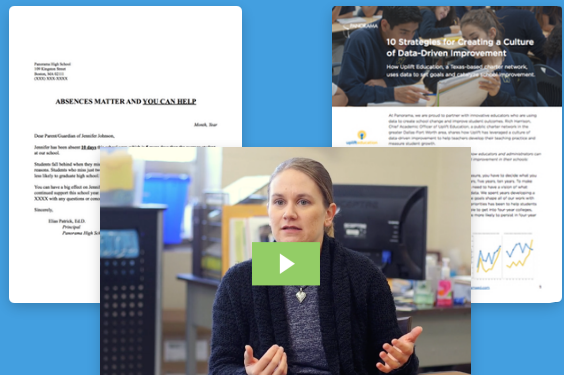
We hope these tips help you facilitate strong student-focused meetings so that you can spend your valuable time with your students, supporting their success.

To access more student success resources, please visit: www.panoramaed.com/student-success.

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COMMENTARY

Published March 16, 2017, in *Education Week's Top Performers Blog*

How to Prepare Your Students For College and Work

By Marc Tucker

The typical American high school student leaves high school two to three years behind the typical high school graduate in the countries with the world's best education systems, reads at a 7th or 8th grade level, has a hard time comprehending college texts written at a 12th grade level, struggles with middle school math and is a poor writer. In global terms, our typical high school graduate leaves high school for college so badly prepared that 4 in 10 fail to get a degree. But the typical high school graduate in the top-performing countries, who is actually doing college level work in college, is more likely to get a degree.

We say we want our high school students to be ready for college and work. But what does that mean? Do we mean that we want our high school graduates to be ready for the first year of the typical American college—which in global terms is really high school for many—or do we mean that we want them to be ready for what the top-performing countries mean by college, which is far more demanding?

And what about work? If by 'being ready for work' we mean being ready to enter the workforce after leaving high school, do we mean being ready for work that can be done by young people who have not mastered 8th grade algebra, cannot read text set to a 12th grade level of literacy and have a lot of trouble writing a literate, grammatically correct paragraph of any sort? Or are we talking about the skills possessed by graduates of the typical vocational high school in Singapore or Switzerland, young people whose vocational skills are built on reading, writing and mathematical skills far above those of most of our kids who are just entering the work force?

There is a world of difference between these two conceptions of what it means to be college and career ready. Millen-

nials in the American workforce are last or nearly last in the most recent survey of the basic skills of national workforces because, in most states, our standards for high school graduation and for what college level work is are so abysmally low.

Looking ahead, most jobs will require at least some college. When we try to decide what it means to be college ready, we look to studies that correlate student grades on tests like the SAT and the ACT



with the grades that students get in the first year of college. Generally, a student who gets an average of an A or B in the first year of a typical college program is deemed college ready. That correlates nicely with certain scores on the ACT and SAT. But note that this method does not tell you anything about what the student can actually do. If the first year of college only required that the student master the skills we normally expect of elementary school graduates, a student would be deemed college ready if that student could do what we now expect of elementary school graduates. That seems silly, but

the truth is that we now deem students college ready if they can only do what we expect of middle school graduates—or even less.

The logic of this system is circular. You might imagine that our colleges say that they will only admit students who are ready for college-level work. But the majority of American colleges will take whatever they can get. No college says, if we cannot get enough students who meet our academic standards, we will close our doors. So, for most institutions, college-level work, in practice, is defined as the work that most high school graduates can do, whatever that turns out to be.

Suppose we did it differently. College is the 13th year of school. Suppose we said that we will set the standard of 'college ready' at a level that requires a high school graduate to read not at an 8th grade level, but at a 12th grade level. Suppose we said that for a student to be deemed 'college ready' that student would have to have mastered not only middle school math—a standard most high school graduates are now having trouble with—but high school math, whatever we decide that means. Suppose we said that 'college ready' means that a student would have to be able to write a two-page analysis comparing and contrasting the coverage of the same front page story in two daily newspapers that portrayed the content of the stories accurately, captured the main points of agreement and the main points of difference and was coherent and logically developed.

I've just described a few core elements of basic literacy. You might hope for more than that from students who had been going to school for 12 years and are on the cusp of college. You might, for example, want them to have a good grasp of the big ideas in the sciences and an equally good grasp of the fundamental principles of engineering or understand something about the conditions under which free countries developed over hundreds of

years, what makes those conditions so fragile and what it takes to preserve freedom. And this, of course, is just the beginning. You might, in other words, instead of simply saying that ‘college ready’ is a near-meaningless numerical score on the ACT or SAT, spell out what you think a student would actually have to know and be able to do to be college ready.

Then you would say that if a student knows this and can do that, then that student is ready for college. Now the hairs are rising on the back of your neck. Because you are now realizing that there are all kinds of colleges: liberal arts colleges, technical colleges, colleges that won’t let you in unless you have aced a whole raft of AP exams and colleges that will be happy to let you in if you can fog a glass. There are technical schools that won’t let you in unless you have a firm command of the calculus and many others that do not care if your arithmetic is rather shaky, as long as you sign over your federal student loan. This, of course, is why we have a rhetoric of ‘college readiness’ but have worked so hard to avoid saying what we really mean by college readiness. We are declaring students ready for college who have only a shaky command of middle school mathematics because we have colleges—lots of them—that are ready to accept such students.

The United States is almost alone among the advanced industrial countries in the high proportion of private institutions among its colleges and universities. It is also unusual in funding its higher education system by putting so much of the government money for these institutions in the hands of students to take it wherever they wish rather than funding the institutions directly. Countries that fund the institutions directly can more easily decide as a matter of policy what the standards for admission to those institutions will be and how readiness will be measured.

So let’s imagine that we are setting policy here for the public higher education institutions only. We decide that the current public system makes no sense. We decide that we want to do college in college and high school in high school. The next step is to set up a typology of institutions in the public postsecondary system. Say, community colleges, technical colleges, polytechnics, state universities, applied universities, research universities and so on, whatever makes sense for your state.

Now we decide that we want each class of institution to have entrance standards that are competitive with the standards in similar institutions in countries that are

leading the world in education achievement and, at the same time, enrolling large numbers of people and, finally, are enjoying completion rates much higher than those typical in the United States. We ask employers to do the same thing for entry-level standards for jobs available to people who want to enter the workforce right out of high school and for the jobs requiring two or three years of college rather than four.

The standards could be expressed in terms of scores on tests, but we decide instead to express them in terms of grades that the student must get on standard courses that are assessed statewide or



In this system, it is quite clear what the schools are accountable for: making sure that every student is able to leave that school with a qualification that will enable them to take the next step, whatever that is.”

MARC TUCKER

nationally. Students heading right into the workforce would have to take specified standard courses but would also have to pass practical tests that showed they could use their knowledge to accomplish the tasks that they will be expected to do right out of school. That way, we could be sure that poor and minority students have the same opportunity to learn that other students have. For each class of institution, program or job, the students would know which courses they would have to take and what grades they would have to make to be admitted to the programs of their choice. The tests and grading system would also be standardized so everyone could be sure that the grade means the same thing everywhere.

I have just described the way most education and training systems work in most of the countries with much better-educated workforces than the United States.

It is called a qualifications system. The expectations are crystal clear. Everyone knows what it takes to be ready for each class of postsecondary institution and for each job training program.

The same holds, in most cases, for the transition from middle school to high school and from the transition from the end of the sophomore year in high school into the more specialized programs in the upper division of high school. Many pathways are possible through the skein of qualifications. Students can start with one set of goals, change goals, and go up another pathway. Most such systems are not time bound. That is, it is never too late to enroll in a program to achieve any qualifications in the series. Different kinds of institutions are available to provide people from every kind of background the support they need to obtain any qualification at any age.

What these systems do not do is pretend. They do not pretend that a student is in college when that student is actually in a high school or middle school level program. A 40-year-old person who might want to go to college, but has only an elementary school qualification can find a public institution designed to provide a middle school qualification and then a high school qualification to adults who missed out and want to get back on track. The money is there for them and so are a whole range of supports of the kind that person is likely to need.

In this system, however, no public funds are available to educational institutions that just want to take a student’s money and are not prepared to provide the services that student needs to succeed. Employers and colleges do not have to wonder what a high school diploma means because there are no high school diplomas, only qualifications that make it clear which standard courses the student has taken and how well the student has done against standards that are uniform and widely understood.

Students work much harder in this system because they know exactly what it takes to realize their dreams, whatever those dreams are. The expectations are the same for students everywhere, not different for different students.

In this system, it is quite clear what the schools are accountable for: making sure that every student is able to leave that school with a qualification that will enable them to take the next step, whatever that is. We live in a country in which the majority of students leave high school unprepared to succeed at the next stage.

That rarely happens in countries with well-crafted qualifications systems. It is obvious in such systems which schools are failing to get their students ready for the next stage and the state is expected to take the necessary steps to fix it if the school does not.

I am not describing a dream nor am I describing an exotic system that we could not possibly implement on the scale of an American state. I am describing the typical system in high-performing countries. This system, along with the policies that typically surround such a system, go a long way toward explaining their success.

Some of you will think that I have climbed aboard the bandwagon of competency-based systems of education, in which students can go at their own speed, using mainly computer-based instruction, with some coaching from their teachers and test out whenever they are ready. That is not what you will see in the top-performing systems. Instruction is provided not by computers but by highly educated and very well-trained teachers. Most of the assessment is done not by computers but by humans whose judgments on the things that matter most are likely to be much more accurate. The aim in these systems is not to “test out,” but to acquire and learn to apply the kind of complex knowledge and skills that will be required in the emerging workplace.

Anyone interested in a system in which students master high school in high school? ■

COMMENTARY

Published August 10, 2016, in Education Week

Data Are Critical for High-Mobility Students

By Jennifer Bell & Nadja Young

The Every Student Succeeds Act requires states, for the first time, to measure and report on the academic performance of homeless and foster children, as well those from military families.

Providing student-growth measures for these vulnerable subgroups will give states and districts a clearer picture of how—or whether—the needs of these students are being met. As states and districts plan how to incorporate these data into their accountability systems, they must also understand how to mitigate the unique challenges of measuring the academic growth of these students.

Homeless, foster, and military-connected student subgroups include a higher proportion of high-mobility students, missing test scores, and smaller student sample sizes than many other subgroups—all of which can hinder the ability to measure their academic growth.

Students connected to the active-duty military, for instance, move three times more frequently than their civilian counterparts, according to the Military Child Education Coalition. In addition, high percentages of homeless and foster students experience frequent school changes, often moving from one district to another.

These disruptive transitions can lead to lost testing data. Many states, including Arkansas, Delaware, and Kentucky, have expanded their statewide student-information systems over the past decade and now have the ability to share data on students who move across district lines. (Privacy laws, however, still stymie efforts to track student data across state lines.) While sharing data between districts should mitigate the loss of existing testing data, students in these subgroups are also more likely to miss tests in the first place.

Many state student-growth models can't incorporate students who are missing recent test scores, because those models focus on a change in student achievement, in a single subject, only from one



year to the next. States and districts attempting to use these simplistic growth models will struggle to generate information on highly mobile subgroups. How do we make sure data shine a light on how these potentially at-risk students are being served?

Sophisticated growth models, such as those used in Tennessee and Pennsylvania, can include more of these students, even those missing test scores from the previous year. Both states have used Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) models for many years and have a rich history of using data for both reflecting on instructional practices and improving student outcomes.

By including additional prior testing data—across different subjects, grades, and assessments—advanced growth models provide a more accurate understanding of students' knowledge and skills when they enter the classroom. This ap-

proach gives teachers better information on how to work with those students and provides a clearer baseline from which to measure growth in the current year.

Another challenge in collecting good data is that homeless, foster, and military-connected student subgroups represent a small percentage of the overall school population. For instance, 15 states have fewer than 5,000 homeless students. With a smaller subgroup of students, it is more difficult to produce meaningful growth measurements, given the inherent statistical limitations of small samples.

The American Statistical Association recommends that estimates from student-growth models be presented alongside information on the precision and limitations of the model used. This is an especially important reminder when faced with small subgroups, as smaller samples have more built-in error. Adopting a model that includes the standard error around a group's growth measure can mitigate that problem, by essentially telling users how confident they should be in the measure.

In its notice of proposed rulemaking under ESSA, the U.S. Department of Education allows states to set their own student-subgroup minimum amounts, but requires states to get federal approval for a minimum sample size greater than 30

to make sure they are still capturing the performance of small groups. As states consider different growth measures for their accountability systems and school report cards, they must also take the limitations of small-group measurement into account. Incorporating standard error adds critical context and protects schools against incorrect classification.

Some states use student-growth measures to classify schools into different categories, such as letter grades, star ratings, and schools "in need of improvement." The standard error indicates how confident we can be in concluding whether the growth measure meets, exceeds, or falls short of the growth expectation. Only when there is enough evidence is a growth measure categorized into something other than "meeting expectations."

The data challenges of small, mobile subgroups are not insurmountable; if we conquer them, we can do more than just meet new ESSA requirements. ESSA prompts states to design accountability systems that look back on how they served students the previous year. More advanced models also look to the future, toward how to better serve these often-overlooked subgroups in the coming years. Advanced models incorporate predictive analytics, which allow for student projections to future state

assessments and Advanced Placement and college-readiness tests.

With projections and early-warning indicators, teachers and schools can see a student's trajectory and more proactively implement remediation, intervention, and enrichment strategies that foster academic improvement. Better still, they can accomplish this with the same underlying standardized-test data required by ESSA.

As states and districts redesign school accountability systems, student-growth measures remain a valuable indicator of school quality. But let's use all the data we have to meet the distinct needs of homeless, foster, and military-connected students. Where possible, let's examine these vulnerable groups individually. And let's not remove a child from an analysis because he or she is missing a test score. All kids count, so let's count all kids. ■

Jennifer Bell is an education specialist at the data-analytics-software company SAS. Previously, she was a social studies teacher, instructional coach, and North Carolina teacher of the year. Nadja Young, a former teacher of career and technical education, is the senior manager for education initiatives for the SAS State and Local Government Practice.

COMMENTARY

Published June 8, 2016, in *Education Week*

Improving School Attendance Requires Good Data

By Russell Rumberger & Michael Gottfried

More than 7 million school children in America are absent more than 10 percent of the school year. The problem has garnered increased attention from local, state, and federal officials, including President Barack Obama. In February, the Obama administration launched an initiative to raise awareness and to help solve the problem with the use of student mentors.

One reason for the increased focus on this issue is the growing body of research documenting the detrimental impact of chronic absenteeism. Students who

are more frequently absent from school have weaker performance on state exams, higher odds of grade retention and dropout, reduced psychological development, increased problem behaviors, higher chances of alcohol and drug use, and lower employment prospects. These outcomes not only have an impact on students themselves; they also generate substantial costs to taxpayers in reduced tax payments, higher health-care costs, and an increased toll of crime.

More effectively addressing the problem requires good data. With the right data, school districts can identify those

students who are chronically absent and intervene before they fall behind. But which data are good data?

At first glance, it may appear that simply knowing the number of days that a student misses school is sufficient. However, not all absences are created equal. Research reveals that excused versus unexcused absences have completely different implications for how well students fare at school.

Two students who miss the same amount of school will experience different outcomes if one is sick and one is cutting class. Neither is great for student performance, but the latter has more significant consequences. Tracking the reasons for missing school also might lead to different systems of support. A reliable data-collection system must take into account the type of absence. Any data collection must also take into account truancy—the act of missing school for unexcused reasons. Truancy includes not only unexcused absences but unexcused tardies as well.

If we are to understand all reasons why a student might be missing school, it can

be critical to examine tardies. With truant tardies, students are missing increments of school. While it may not seem as dramatic as missing an entire day, missing small portions of in-school time adds up, over time, to large amounts of valuable instructional minutes.

Hence, a focus strictly on absences may obscure the full portrait of who is missing school and how much school they're actually missing and why. To identify students who are frequently absent as well as frequently tardy, the reach of attendance programs and practices must be far broader in order to have a greater impact.

Another element of missing school involves days students are not enrolled. Some students enter school late, after the first day of class. One study found that 19 percent of middle school students entered school after the first day of class. Other students transfer schools midyear and miss school because they fail to enroll in their new school immediately after leav-

ing their old school.

Enrollment data need to be coupled with absenteeism data to get a complete picture of how many school days students are enrolled in and attending school over the course of the year.

Finally, it is important to consider rates of absences. Recently, there has been a focus on "chronic" absenteeism—students missing 10 percent or more of the school year, or about 18 days. But we shouldn't get too fixated on that rate. A study in Chicago found that missing even five days of school in a semester reduced graduation rates by 24 percentage points.

The bottom line? Good data are critical for addressing America's school attendance crisis. ■

Russell Rumberger is a professor emeritus at the Gevirtz School of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Michael Gottfried is an associate professor at the Gevirtz School.



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