As any coach who has shepherded a team to March Madness knows, tournament success demands more than just attending to the final outcome. Coaches recruit strong players and ensure their teams master everything from the fundamentals to tournament-winning plays. Each year, states assess their education performance and find that too few students graduate with the requisite skills and dispositions to succeed in life. Achieving those goals, in schools as in basketball, requires alignment with input, process, and outcome measures needed to create a successful system.

Types of Measures

A better way to inform continuous improvement for stakeholders across the education system, according to Conley, is to think of measures within three categories: inputs, processes, and outcomes.

Input Measures. Input measures reflect conditions affecting the education students receive. Some consequential questions states can ask around inputs: What percentage of teachers in a school are trained to teach in their subject area? What are the conditions of facilities? What are the course offerings and learning opportunities provided students? Reflecting on input measures not only helps inform school actions, it also informs the level of support districts and the state are providing schools to achieve the goals set out in the standards.

Process Measures. Process measures reflect practices that affect the quality of education. Some consequential questions states can ask around processes: Are students in a school engaged? How involved is the community in the school? What is the school climate, and how well are students working together? Reflecting on process measures can inform actions educators and schools take to meet the demands of the standards.

Outcome Measures. Outcome measures reflect movement toward achieving systemic goals. Some consequential questions states can ask around outcomes: How well do students perform on state tests, and what are their graduation rates and postsecondary outcomes? How large are achievement gaps? Is your state using the right outcomes? For example, a preponderance of states make use of a handful of summative assessments to gauge student success. Thomas B. Fordham Institute has

Patients do not assume the blood pressure rating is a holistic reflection of their health or all they need to inform healthier living, neither can one education measure inform schools.

Measures Must Align with Standards for Learning

Expectations, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, Professional Learning, Accountability System, Measures of Effectiveness

SOURCE: NASBE’S CENTER FOR COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC READINESS
analyzed the most commonly used state assessments to gauge their rigor and alignment with standards. States would benefit from a review of that information on how their assessments compare with others. By ensuring that these outcome measures are fair, valid, and reliable and are founded on a comprehensive definition of success, states can have confidence they are supporting students, educators, and schools.

These three categories of measures can inform actions at individual schools (i.e., allocation of resources among departments, professional development offerings, and graduation rates) or classrooms (i.e., materials an educator uses, instructional approaches, and formative assessments). They also apply to state policy and to state board of education actions in particular. For example, states can have schools report on educational inputs on school report cards; school quality reviews and dashboards for failing schools can inform schools’ capacities to imbue students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions embedded in standards; statewide assessment systems can use different instruments—performance assessments as well as more traditional assessments—to inform their understanding of student and school performance.

A state system that accounts for inputs, processes, and outcomes is more accountable, diagnostic, and comprehensive than systems that do not. It ensures that educators have the resources they need to succeed, have information to improve their practice, and that their performance reflects the full range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions the standards require. Most important, such a system does not treat educational outcomes as a black box but appropriately emphasizes the leading indicators—that is, inputs and processes—that drive those outcomes and therefore inform continuous, systemic improvement.

**STATES TAKE MEASURES**

A number of state efforts reflect this more comprehensive commitment to measuring success.

**California.** Under Local Control Accountability Plans called for by the California State Board of Education, local education agencies adopt and implement plans that address input, process, and outcome measures. These include student engagement, school climate, and parental involvement in addition to traditional measures such as test scores and graduation rates. This system empowers local ownership of success and a greater focus on how well a school is addressing state standards.

**Illinois.** The Illinois statewide report card adopted by the state board of education promotes greater transparency around inputs, processes, and outcomes. The report card, accessible at IllinoisReportCard.com, highlights student performance, the experience of teachers at a particular school, the types of programs and activities offered at a school, and results of student and teacher surveys on the statewide 5 Essentials Survey. Schools that are strong in the majority of surveyed elements are up to 10 times more likely to improve student learning than weaker schools.

**Colorado.** The Colorado State Board of Education revised its state graduation requirement, beginning with the class of 2021, to align with a menu of competency-based requirements that districts may select from in crafting new diploma policies. The state created “graduation guidelines,” outlining ways that students can demonstrate mastery in four content areas: English, math, social studies, and science. The menu also includes demonstrations of competency, including capstone experiences and obtaining an approved industry certificate. Local education agencies are expected to set district-level requirements in alignment with state policy.

For years policymakers have asked more of students, parents, and educators in order to meet the demands of an evolving economy and a democratic society. NASBE’s Standards-Based Leadership Framework, in turn, asks more of policymakers: more and better support, more responsibility, more clarity, and more cohesion of policies.

To realize the full promise of this framework, new measures must rise to match the knowledge, skills, and dispositions embedded in new standards and the new responsibilities placed on states under ESSA. Old measures are insufficient: They simply do not align with aspirations for an excellent education system. By moving toward more comprehensive measures that reflect the inputs, processes, and outcomes underlying statewide standards, state boards can help achieve the promise of new standards and ensure significantly more students are prepared for college, careers, and civic life.

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**NOTES**

1. K. Yuan and V. Le, “Estimating the Percentage of Students Who Were Tested on Cognitively Demanding Items through the State Achievement Tests,” Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012. A subsequent study by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Teaching found that new consortia tests fare much better on cognitive rigor. For example, nearly 70 percent of math and ELA items on the Smarter Balanced assessments measure higher levels of cognitive rigor. At the same, it should be noted that a number of states are backing out of these assessments. Furthermore, as noted by Linda Darling-Hammond and David Conley, even consortia assessments do not account for the full range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions students need (“Creating Systems of Assessment for Deeper Learning,” Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2013).


