THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABILITY

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Accountability in US Schools

- Historically, local governance has meant limited state-level accountability.
- Before 1970s, accountability was limited to fiscal reporting and inventories of inputs:
  - e.g., books in library, square footage for classrooms, existence of lesson plans
- 1970s saw first state initiatives in accountability, but they were still local in nature and low or no stakes.
- 1980s saw rise of state-driven accountability with emphasis on performance.

Accountability in US Schools

- 1990s saw increase in:
  - state testing as a means to compare schools
  - standards as a frame of reference for testing
  - performance levels (approaches, meets, exceeds)
  - school report cards
  - sanctions
  - increasing federal role
- 2000s saw strong federal role and extensive state activity
  - NCLB raised the stakes for schools, states
  - States experimented with a range of accountability approaches
- 2010s are witnessing a reaction to punitive accountability
  - NCLB waiver requests
  - Initial state experimentation with more collaborative models

What Is the Theory of Action Behind State and Federal Accountability Systems?

- State defines the desired academic outcomes, which are then measured through assessments tied to standards.
  - This approach is limited to learning outcomes that can be easily tested.
- Improvement theoretically occurs as teachers align instruction to standards and assessment, and then use test data to improve practices and techniques.
- Governance and program decisions remain at the local level
  - Assumes local districts and schools have the capacity to make necessary changes, adopt quality materials, provide targeted professional development, and institute systems improvement processes based on data.

Limited Focus of Accountability Measures

- Primarily reading and mathematics tests, although other measures such as attendance and high school graduation rates are used.
- This is based on two factors: what is considered universally important and what can be tested.
- This approach does not reflect more complex educational outcomes necessary for success such as:
  - recent findings on metacognitive (i.e., non-cognitive) learning skills and attributes
  - importance of thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking)
  - emphasis on college and career readiness for all students
  - increased need for all students to become adaptable lifelong learners

Where the Theory May Be Wrong

- Punitive approaches result mainly in compliance, not ownership of goals and systemic improvement.
- Local districts and schools rarely have the capacity to change as expected or mandated by the state.
  - Resources can be an issue, so can school culture.
- Schools get mixed messages from the system.
  - Federal and state accountability requirements may not be in sync.
  - State tests may not be aligned with standards.
  - Teacher evaluation requirements may not improve teacher skills.
  - Funding may not be aligned with state goals.
  - Higher ed. requirements may send mixed messages.
- Education improvement requires a systems approach.

The Progression of Statewide Testing in California: 1961-Present

- California has been engaged in statewide testing for over 40 years, with various (and varying) levels of consequence.
- Testing has been a primary tool to achieve state goals.
- However, limited continuity has made it difficult for educators to gear their programs to state goals.
- Also, many other system factors can affect test scores.
- The following 5 slides summarize testing in California.
- They illustrate the lack of continuity and radically different approaches to standards, testing, and accountability over this period of time.

The Progression of Statewide Testing in California: 1961-Present*

- **1961:** First statewide testing program in reading, writing and math at grades 5, 8 and 10.
- **1969** State testing changed to grades 1, 2, 3, 6 and 12.
- **1972** California Assessment Program (CAP) created to test reading in grades 2 and 3 and reading, writing and math in grades 6 and 12.
- **1978** High School Competency Exams established as a high school graduation requirement.
- **1983-84** Eighth grade added to CAP, Golden State Exam (GSE) grades 7-12 end-of-course tests added.

*Excerpted, summarized, and adapted from CDE and SBE materials.

Statewide Testing in California

- **1985-86** History, social science tests added to CAP.
- **1987** CAP writing tests added at grades 8 and 12; algebra and geometry added to GSE.
- **1990** U.S. history and economics exams added to GSE; CAP tests given as full program for last time.
- **1991** California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) established to test grades 4, 5, 8 and 10; GSE expanded to biology and chemistry.
- **1993** CLAS tests given in reading, writing and math at grades 4, 8 and 10.
- **1994** CLAS tests in history and science added at grade 5; Governor vetoes Senate bill to extend CLAS through 1999.

Statewide Testing in California

- **1995** No state testing except for GSE; state law creates Pupil Testing Incentive Program (PTIP) to test reading, writing and math in grades 2-10; State law calls for content and performance standards and authorizes Assessment of Applied Academic Skills in reading, writing, mathematics, history and science at grades 4, 5, 8 and 10.
- **1996** Test in written composition added to GSE.
- **1997** Standardized Testing And Reporting (STAR) program replaces PTIP. STAR tests reading, spelling, writing and math in grades 2-8 and reading, writing, math, history and science in grades 9-11; test in civics added to GSE.

Statewide Testing in California

- **1998** Tests in reading/literature and high school math added to GSE; SAT-9 given as part of STAR program.
- **1999** California Standards Tests (CSTs) in English and math added to STAR; second-year Spanish and physics tests added to GSE; High School Exit Exam authorized; PSAA establishes Academic Performance Index (API);
  - *Test results now have direct consequences for schools.*
- **2001** CSTs in history and science for grades 9-11 and writing tests for grades 4 and 7 added to STAR.
- **2002** Exit Exam given to 10th-graders.

Statewide Testing in California

- **2003** Grade 9 history CST moves to grade 8; CAT/6 replaces SAT-9 for STAR; Exit Exam graduation requirement postponed to 2006; final year of GSE.
- **2004** CSU Early Assessment Program (EAP); Grade 8 and 10 NCLB science exams.
- **2006** Redesigned Exit Exam.
- **2013** STAR replaced by California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).
- **2014** Field test of SBAC with no stakes.
- **2015** First administration of CAASPP (SBAC) with stakes.

Major Elements of Current CA Accountability System*

- Federal (NCLB requirements)
  - For 2013–14, the APR reflects Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results for high schools, Program Improvement (PI) results for all Title I-funded schools and LEAs, and cohort graduation rates.
  - The AYP determinations are based on the grade ten California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) and California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), as well as the graduation rate.
- Academic Performance Index (API) score
  - At the March 2014 meeting, the State Board of Education (SBE) voted not to calculate the following API reports:
    - 2014 Growth API
    - 2014 Base API
    - 2015 Growth API

*Source: California Department of Education http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ar/aprfaq.asp

Major Elements of CA Accountability Framework Going Forward

- Federal
  - NCLB requirements affected by any reauthorization by Congress
  - CORE districts waiver (School Quality Indicator Index)
- State
  - Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)
    - Rubric to guide use of funds to achieve local and state priorities
  - Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs)
    - District, not school, level
    - Aligned with eight state priorities
    - Require community participation
- Smarter Balanced (SBAC) tests address federal and state.
- This is not yet a system, but a framework for a system.

What Are the Elements of a Systems Approach to Improvement?

Process Measures

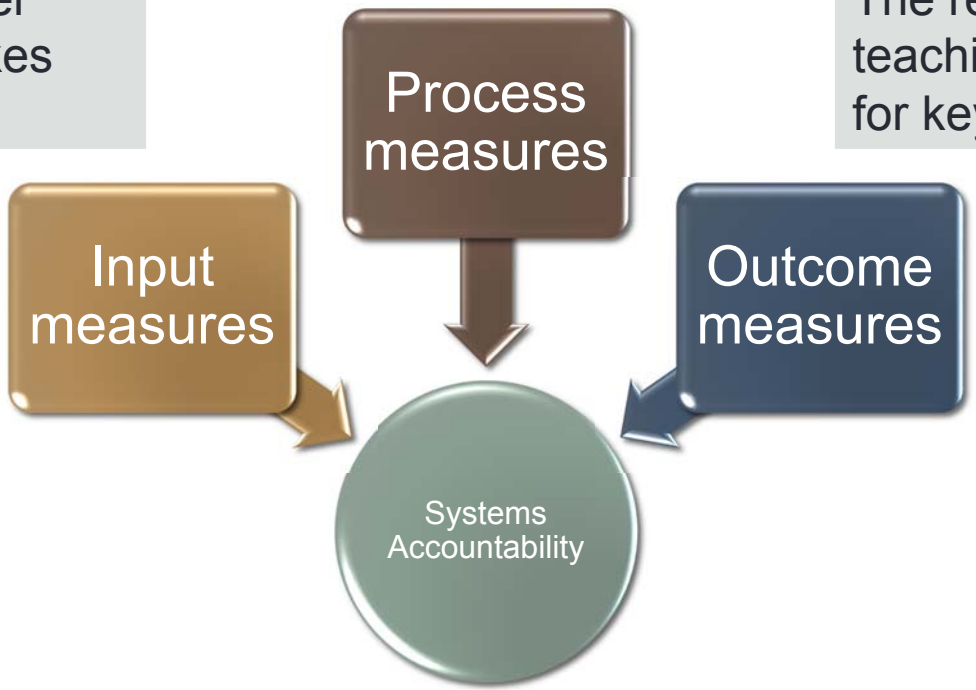
The educational processes that take place

Input Measures

The conditions under which education takes place

Outcome Measures

The results of the teaching/learning process for key goals



LCAP Required Indicators

Required Indicators	Input	Process	Outcome
Test score gains			✓
English proficiency			✓
College/career readiness			✓
Attendance		✓	
Dropout rates			✓
Graduation rates			✓
Student engagement surveys		✓	
Completion of college/career pathway			✓
Completion of workplace or service experience			✓
Suspensions, expulsions		✓	
Student/parent/teacher climate surveys		✓	
Parental input/involvement efforts		✓	
Parent participation surveys		✓	
Teacher misassignment	✓		
Access to materials	✓		
Adequate facilities	✓		
Common Core implementation		✓	
Course access in core academic areas		✓	

What is California Doing in These Areas?

- California may be at a historical moment where significant changes have the potential to occur in concert in multiple areas of the system:
  - fiscal (LCFF)
  - local (LCAP)
  - eight state priority areas
  - lack of a funding crisis, potential for more adequate resources
  - support for schools through CCEE, county offices as resources
  - investment in career pathways
  - higher ed. engagement in alignment at the system level
  - changes in educator preparation programs
  - licensure changes
  - more coherent policy environment and potential policy continuity

A State-Local Partnership

- Process to support a state-local partnership for accountability.
  - State identifies priorities.
  - Districts and schools develop strategies and adopt programs to address priorities in partnership with county offices.
  - State sets priority areas.
  - State requires some measures, locals choose others.
  - LCAPs operationalize state-local partnership.
  - State looks for patterns of success or need for improvement in district or school profiles that combine state and local measures.
  - Schools in need receive targeted support from state (CCEE) and local (county offices) levels.

Multiple Measures

- Accountability systems that capture the state of school performance require multiple measures.
- Some of those measures will be identified by the state to ensure equity issues are addressed.
- Others will be a local choice.
- Local measures will:
  - be aligned with state priorities and included in LCAP
  - reflect local programs and priorities
  - use data gathered locally that may not be available statewide
  - use measures that may not meet technical requirements of high-stakes test but are highly valid and useful
  - tie closely to school improvement goals and programs

Example of Multiple Measures

- The PSAA Advisory Committee received a report on potential measures of college and career readiness.
- Five indicators were investigated and analyzed.
- No one indicator emerged as ideal for all schools statewide
- Course-taking behaviors and patterns were recommended as a potential indicator.
- Additional indicators were:
  - college admission exams
  - advanced coursework
  - innovative measures
  - career preparedness assessments

School Accountability Profile

- This hypothetical example combines state and local-level indicators.
- Rather than rating a school, the profile suggests areas of strength and those in need of improvement.
- State-level trends would identify areas where policies need to be changed or adjusted.

Sample School: Grade 11	Performance Score	Trend Score
State-level Indicator 1. Reading	Meets	Static
State-level Indicator 2. Mathematics	Approaches	Improving
State-level Indicator 3. Attendance	Meets	Improving
State-level Indicator 4. Graduation Rate	Approaches	Declining
State-level Indicator 5. Application Rate	Exceeds	Static
LCAP Indicator 1. College/Career Preparedness	Approaches	Improving
LCAP Indicator 2. Community Involvement	Meets	Improving
LCAP Indicator 3. Student Interest Explorations to Increase Aspirations	Approaches	Static

Challenges in Moving toward a Systems Approach to School Improvement

- Equity vs. local control
- Dysfunctional schools, districts, or school boards
- Student needs vs. adult needs
- Need for wider range of potential outcome measures
- Conjunctive vs. compensatory approaches to profiles
- State capacity to support improvement
- Intermediate and local capacity to support improvement
- Scattered and fragmented authority for education policy
- Public support and acceptance of new and varied metrics
- Sustaining focus over sufficient time to see results
- Teacher sense of self-efficacy and buy-in

The Bottom Line

- Improvement is more likely when schools receive consistent and coherent messages from all parts of the system.
- Coherence and buy-in are enhanced through a state-local partnership for improvement.
- California schools are still strongly embedded in their local community contexts.
  - While some common statewide measures are necessary, additional measures are required to capture performance in the local context.
- California has an unprecedented opportunity to rethink accountability within a systems improvement framework rather than a punitive model.

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