

# IN PURSUIT OF TRANSFORMATION:

HOW ADVOCATES CAN  
ADVANCE ASSESSMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY INNOVATION



Since 2019, over ninety organizations – including state education agencies, nonprofits, advocacy groups, assessment developers, and researchers – have led efforts to transform K-12 assessment and accountability systems. *In Pursuit of Transformation: Five Years of Investments in Assessment and Accountability Innovation*, a report developed by Education First, details the explorations, accomplishments, and lessons learned from these 90+ organizations.

**D**rawing on insights from **National Urban League** and **UnidosUS**, two organizations among the 90+ highlighted in the report, this brief illustrates how education advocates can advance assessment and accountability innovation.

### **UNIDOSUS AND NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE'S ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ADVOCACY**

In response to widening opportunity gaps following the COVID-19 pandemic, UnidosUS and the National Urban League launched and co-chaired a national civil rights coalition focused on informing the federal policy debate on assessments and accountability by bringing into the dialogue stakeholders who are typically excluded from policy discussions that impact them. Their work resulted in a series of findings and other collateral that will guide future conversations with stakeholders, civil rights and education equity leaders and ultimately lead to creating a clear policy agenda to guide advocacy in 2025 and beyond.

In the Pursuit of Transformation report, Education First offers the following considerations for education advocates for future assessment and accountability advocacy:

- 1. Prioritize authentic, ongoing, and meaningful engagement** with key stakeholders, particularly those charged with implementing state and federal policies (educators, system and school leaders) to understand their needs, concerns, and experiences.
- 2. Consider the implications of new and expanded definitions** of student success and school quality and how future policy can continue to balance the roles of local, state, and federal oversight.
- 3. Advance a proactive national research and policy agenda** for the future of assessment and accountability and foster renewed bipartisan dialogue on education policy.
- 4. Encourage continued and regular updates** to federal guidance to align with advancements in the field.

UnidosUS and the National Urban League’s work demonstrate how three of the four considerations for advocates in the report can be achieved.

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### **Prioritize authentic, ongoing, and meaningful engagement with key stakeholders to understand their needs, concerns, and experiences.**

UnidosUS and the National Urban League undertook a thorough stakeholder engagement involving over 250 individuals in the first phase and another 250 in the second phase. The engagement process included virtual focus groups, interviews, and closed-door roundtable discussions. In the second phase, the engagement expanded to include roundtable discussions held during three state convenings (California, Ohio, and New York State). Additionally, three steering committees—led by youth, caregivers, and civil rights leaders—provided guidance and recommendations throughout the process. The participants included Black and brown students, parents and guardians, teachers, youth development leaders, high school and college admissions counselors, assessment directors, state board of education members, researchers, education equity leaders, and civil rights leaders. Additionally, the roundtable discussions, state convenings, and steering committees featured experts and leaders with varied backgrounds and perspectives representing the civil rights and education equity community. All of the insights gathered were leveraged to inform a national policy agenda around assessment and accountability.



## 2

### **Consider new and expanded definitions of student success in school quality.**

During the focus groups and interviews, stakeholders emphasized the need for broader and more inclusive measures of student and school success that go beyond traditional academic metrics. Stakeholders expressed the need to shift from traditional measures of student success that focus solely on academics to include a broader set of skills, attitudes, and competencies—encompassing social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Stakeholders suggested the focus on success should be shifted to creating supportive environments at the classroom, school, community, and system levels. They recommended adopting additional measures of performance, including faculty retention, school leadership quality, support staff, class sizes, the number of certified teachers, access to extracurricular activities, the diversity of curriculum and extracurricular offerings. Additionally, they underscored the importance of assessing student, parent, and staff engagement, which reflects the overall school climate and culture and indicates how effectively the school addresses the needs of its community.

## 3

### **Advance a proactive national research and policy agenda**

National Urban League and UnidosUS are working to develop a set of civil rights principles and policy recommendations for the next generation of assessments and accountability. Their efforts will ultimately inform federal policy and advance the notion of educational accountability beyond the federal role into more actionable concepts of community and statewide accountability for improving student outcomes.

Learn more about their stakeholder engagement and findings in their recent report, [\*\*\*Education Assessment, Accountability & Equity\*\*\*](#).