A National Roadmap for the Future of Assessment & Accountability

March 2025

> At this pivotal moment in education, what shared policy, research and innovation priorities can move the field forward on assessment and accountability?

Every student deserves a high-quality education that prepares them for success in life and in the postsecondary pathways and careers of their choice. Assessment and accountability systems provide critical information to ensure students, schools and systems are making progress towards this vision and guide supports and interventions when they are not.

To achieve this, assessment and accountability systems must be grounded in high expectations, transparency and continuous improvement, ensuring that all students receive the opportunities and support they need to thrive. They must drive meaningful action—not only recognizing and replicating strong schools but also identifying, supporting, and, when necessary, intervening in schools where students are not being served effectively.

Over the last two decades, assessment and accountability policies drove some progress in closing achievement gaps, particularly in the early 2000s. But today, the latest NAEP scores tell a sobering story: this generation of students is learning less than the prior one, with those at the lowest achievement levels losing the most ground. The consequences—for students' future earnings, career opportunities and overall well-being—are devastating, not only for them but for their families and communities. Even though we have a deeper understanding than ever before of the conditions necessary for student learning and success, and rapid advancements in research, technology and artificial intelligence are opening new opportunities for innovation and problem-solving, the reality is: research and technology are evolving far faster than our systems are adapting.

The federal, state and local education landscape has shifted significantly, especially in the wake of COVID-19 recovery efforts, a new presidential administration and changes in congressional leadership. As the priorities of the Trump administration and new Secretary of Education are being implemented and the roles federal policy, state leadership and local autonomy take shape, the core principles of maintaining data transparency, holding school systems accountable for improvement and ensuring all students, including students with disabilities, students of color, English learners and students experiencing poverty, have the opportunities they need to succeed remain tantamount.

We need a renewed commitment to student success and a roadmap for the future of assessment and accountability—one that ensures every student receives the preparation they need to succeed in life and in a future economy.

Education First convened the first National Forum on the Future of Assessment and Accountability in February 2025, bringing together more than 300 individuals representing school and district leaders from 30 states and 72 national think tanks, foundations, technical assistance and advocacy organizations, psychometricians and test developers and research organizations working to improve systems of assessment and accountability across the country. The Education First team synthesized lessons learned, discussions and contributions across the three day Forum to develop this Roadmap for the Future of Assessment and Accountability.

A National Roadmap for the Future of Assessment & Accountability

This Roadmap outlines key priorities for policy and systemic changes, research and innovation needed to improve assessment and accountability across local, state and federal systems.

More than 300 people attended the National Forum on the Future of Assessment and Accountability. The Forum included 40+ sessions and more than 100 speakers who represent a diversity of view points and perspectives. The views and conclusions in this report reflect the synthesis, analysis and perspectives of the authors alone.

Conditions for Success

The following enabling conditions are necessary to drive progress towards the priorities outlined in the Roadmap:

- There must be a clearer distinction between federal, state and local accountability systems, particularly in terms of their consequences, supports and incentives. Coherence between these systems is essential and will look different in each community, however, each of these systems should include both rewards and consequences to incentivize improvement.

- To ensure that assessment systems are coherent, trusted and responsive to local needs, state education agencies must deepen ongoing partnerships with local communities, as well as with the vendors, researchers and technical assistance providers involved in their design and implementation.

- Local and state education agencies must maintain robust stakeholder engagement efforts that build buy-in, transparency and commitment to continuous improvement as part of any change efforts.

- New technologies must be investigated with guardrails that maintain student privacy and mitigate unintended consequences.

- Educators, policymakers, researchers, community leaders, advocates and technical experts must have adequate space and funding to collaborate and partner.

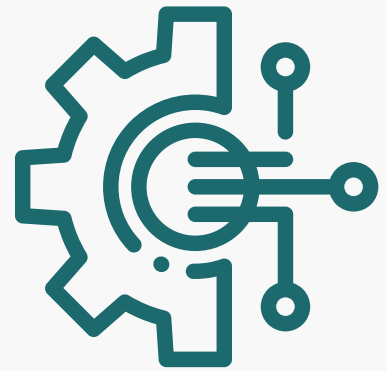# Policy Priorities

Local Education Agencies must…

- Rethink definitions of school quality using multiple measures of success aligned to local needs and building on their state systems. Beyond academic achievement and progress, LEAs may consider schools' learning environments, students and teachers' sense of belonging and engagement, students' access to rigorous learning opportunities and postsecondary preparation.

- Partner with local business and government agencies to define, measure and monitor long-term goals and outcomes for readiness and success in college, career, workforce and military.

- Ensure all parents and families have transparent, actionable information about their own student's progress, their school's quality and improvement efforts.

States must…

- Advise local education agencies to reduce and streamline local assessments and ensure data is used to drive school improvement.

- Develop statewide, longitudinal data systems that integrate instructional, school quality and student outcome data to inform future policy, resource allocation and improvement.

- Improve real-time, accessible actionable and audience-specific data reporting.

Federal agencies must…

- Enforce foundational principles and statutory requirements for assessment and accountability, transparency, continuous improvement and support for students with disabilities, students of color, English learners and students experiencing poverty.

- Grant states and districts flexibility for innovation and implementation of new assessment and accountability models aligned to local goals and values.

- Maintain and strengthen national data collection, access and reporting efforts (including administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)) to provide critical information that guides national priorities, research and innovation while preserving transparent data for all students.

Innovative Tools and Practices Priorities

Leverage Technology

- Utilize Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technologies to streamline assessment design processes, reporting and data interpretation to support educators and policymakers' decisionmaking.

- Leverage AI to support effective school improvement planning, evidence-based strategy selection and progress monitoring.

- Develop interoperable data systems to enhance decisionmaking and data reporting systems for actionability, accessibility and timeliness.

Streamline and Modernize Assessment

- Reduce testing burdens on students and educators by streamlining local assessments and developing coherent statewide systems that drive teaching and learning.

- Incorporate student choice, adaptive models, real-world application and deeper-learning into assessment designs to better prepare students for the future of learning and work.

Communication and Support

- Use valid, reliable data to communicate student performance and needs transparently, honestly and consistently to families and the public.

- Strengthen educator and school leader development to support effective data use and interpretation and inform classroom instructional, school-wide and system improvement.

Research Priorities

Measures & Indicators

- Identify which measures and indicators effectively drive positive change at the school, district and state levels and which best support school improvement.

- Investigate how academic and non-academic school quality indicators vary by race, income, disability and language status to ensure measures are accurate, reliable and meaningful for all students.

Data & Technology

- Identify the technology and support systems needed to make data actionable, accessible and user-friendly for different stakeholders including educators, families, policymakers and researchers.

- Investigate the data, systems and supports needed to drive effective decisionmaking at the student, school, district and state level.

Assessment Innovation

- Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of emerging models - performance-based, competency-based and through-year assessments on state and local assessment systems.

Many education leaders and organizations are working to advance these priorities

Are you or your organization working to advance any of these policy, innovation or research priorities? **Add your name to the list** of education leaders and organizations committed to advancing the future of assessment and accountability.

Click here to add your name to the list

About Education First

Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy organization with deep expertise in education improvement. We help system leaders, advocates, funders and policymakers think bigger and work smarter to create the conditions that drive equity, coherence and excellence for all students. Our mission is to deliver exceptional ideas, experience-based solutions and results so all students—and particularly Black, Indigenous and other students of color and students living in low-income communities—are prepared for success in college, career and life.

We are seasoned strategists and trusted practitioners. Since 2006, Education First has partnered with state and local education agency leaders in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Our 80+ team members live across 24 states and bring deep credibility in their home communities coupled with national connections and content expertise. Our team have taught in public schools, advised superintendents, governors and CEOs, staffed national and state policy organizations and school districts, developed public policies and lobbied legislatures, led successful nonprofit advocacy organizations, worked for and with major media outlets, and managed multimillion-dollar education grantmaking programs. We bring authentic, in-your-shoes expertise in the content, issues, and politics of making real change that yields real results for educators and students.