Promising Practices in Accountability:

Report to the Chalkboard Project, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, Oregon Business Association, and Stand for Children

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About Education First Consulting

Education First Consulting is a Northwest-based firm that uniquely brings together knowledge of policy choices (best practices and research-based ideas) with how to implement them (navigating politics) to create powerful education reform plans and innovations. The firm has deep experience advising governors and chief state school officers around the country on system-wide education reforms in K-12 and higher education.

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Contents

Introduction

> *The best accountability systems, in any field, have a few things in common. They set clear goals for people to rally around—goals that are meaningful, challenging, achievable and measurable. They provide regular information and feedback, to those on the front lines as well as to consumers and clients, to guide the work. And, they inspire people to aim higher and seek support—and provide them with that support—when they need help. Most accountability systems … don't do any of these things very well. The goals are too low, the measures too narrow, and the incentives too weak to affect real change.*
>
> – Alissa Peltzman, Achieve, Inc., and Chris Domaleski,
> The Center for Assessment, 2010.

At the simplest level, education accountability systems are designed to indicate whether students, schools and districts are meeting expectations for student achievement. But strong accountability systems aren't just about reporting results on tests. Effective accountability systems that seek to improve schools clearly signal appropriate goals and expectations for improvement and are linked to strategies that build the capacity of educators to deliver.

Most states—Oregon among them—struggle to manage an accountability system that accomplish *any* of these important end results. Most of today's systems are not aligned to rigorous achievement measures, resulting in an incomplete picture of student achievement. Administrators, teachers and parents alike are bombarded with often confusing reports of student achievement, and in many cases are not provided enough information to meaningfully gauge student and school progress. Additionally, as Achieve—a nonprofit education reform organization created by governors and business leaders to help states raise academic standards and improve accountability—has argued, the goals of today's accountability systems "are perceived as something to meet to avoid state interference rather than something meaningful to work toward."[1]

The good news is that some states are beginning to adopt the next generation of accountability, one that is focused on college and career readiness, communicates the results effectively to parents and other stakeholders, and provides the necessary supports to better help ensure student success.[2] The lessons and experiments in these states, coupled with a growing consensus of policymakers around the country, are beginning to suggest what a more comprehensive, robust state accountability system could look like.

Commissioned by the Chalkboard Project and the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators and prepared by Education First Consulting, this report synthesizes promising practices in state accountability systems, including identifying a handful of states implementing these practices. The report also compares those identified promising practices to Oregon's accountability system and suggests strengths and areas for improvement.

The report concludes with suggested next steps and options for considerations that could help move the state toward an accountability system that incentivizes and supports the student achievement gains Oregon leaders want to see.

Methodology

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on Education First Consulting's review of national policy and research literature on state accountability systems. Two reports were particularly helpful: the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) *Key Elements of Accountability Systems* and Alissa Peltzman (of Achieve) and Chris Domaleski's (of The Center for Assessment) *Establishing a College- and Career-Ready Accountability System in Washington State: Leveraging Washington's Education Reform Plan*, which has many applicable lessons beyond the state of Washington. In addition, Education First examined accountability systems in eight states widely seen as having innovative systems and/or rapid gains in student achievement: Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio and Texas.

Education First gathered input and perspectives from Oregon superintendents through the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators' Vision/Policy Coordinating Committee, leaders of the Chalkboard Project, and interviews with key Oregon and national education leaders who helped identify and analyze strengths and weaknesses of Oregon's accountability system.

Promising Practices in Accountability

By making performance and results matter in schools—with a focus on rewards, consequences, supports and public reporting—effective accountability systems are widely seen by policymakers as an essential driver of change. But most also see accountability as just one part of a larger strategy for school improvement that also includes rigorous standards, assessments aligned to those standards, effective teaching, accessible and useful data, meaningful supports for improvement, and high quality school choices. It's important for accountability systems to reinforce and reflect these other state policies and provide a coherent approach and set of incentives.

Perhaps not surprisingly given these complexities, *no state has a perfect accountability system, and experts don't point to any one system as the nation's "best."* Because there are so many moving pieces that impact the effectiveness of the system, Achieve offers this advice to state leaders: "The fundamental design imperative is to figure out the right incentives, data, and supports students, educators and schools need in order to improve teaching, learning and preparation…There isn't a single or simple formula to follow" when developing accountability systems.[3]

Though there isn't a model accountability system to emulate, there are key elements and practices to point to. Education First sees three in particular that are especially relevant to Oregon:

1. **Establish college and career readiness as the appropriate outcome for the K-12 system**—and choose indicators that tell whether schools are preparing students for success after graduation. Most states have adopted—at least rhetorically—the goal of college and career readiness.[4] Some states, including Oregon, have started changing key K-12 policies to align with this goal, such as upgrading graduation requirements and creating high school exams that are used by higher education for placement decisions. Few states, however, have yet changed their accountability systems in meaningful ways to reflect this goal.

2. **Communicate results in a timely and effective manner to all stakeholders.** Several states have created snapshots of student performance in easy-to-understand reports and ratings for school performance. Some states report student and school growth toward meeting standards in addition to proficiency levels, and also demonstrate trends over time that inform improvement planning.

3. **Provide tools and resources for schools and districts to use reporting results** to inform instruction and help support the ambitious goal of college and career readiness for all students. Some states have focused on providing student achievement data in innovative ways to educators and stakeholders, such as through online portals that allow customizable comparison reports. Massachusetts explains in its *Race to the Top* application: "we must build a data system that facilitates instructional improvement rather than merely supports reporting and compliance."[5]Other states have focused on targeted and differentiated supports for low-performing schools and districts.

PROMISING PRACTICE

1

Emphasize college and career readiness as the goal of the accountability system

As states first started implementing accountability requirements for schools in the 1990s, they often didn't attach clear goals or expectations to accountability reporting; how good was good enough was not always clear. In 2001, the federal No Child Left Behind Act required states to develop "explicit statements of desired student performance – to convey clear and shared expectations for all parties" and it required states to take "corrective action" for high-poverty schools (those receiving federal Title I funds) that weren't improving.[6] States have submitted various performance goals such as "60 percent of all African American students in Oregon will be proficient in state English Language Arts standards by 2010"[7] in annual accountability workbooks to the U.S. Department of Education. In most cases, these new goals haven't always been appropriate, clear or ambitious enough. For example, they have been systematically aligned to state-defined levels of proficiency (and therefore not always particularly rigorous).

Now, some states are beginning to shift away from accountability systems focused only on federal minimum requirements and toward meaningful college- and career-ready measures. The goal of the accountability system in these states is to help ensure students are on track for college and career readiness and to target resources based on schools' results. Achieve notes, "As more states align their standards, graduation requirements and assessments to college- and career-ready expectations, it

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY INDICATORS:
The Basis of Meaningful Accountability Systems

Cohort Graduation Rate using either U.S. Department of Education or National Governors Association formulas

Students obtaining a College- and Career-Ready Diploma

Students participating in college- and career-ready testing such as ACT or SAT

Students enrolling in postsecondary institutions within a year of graduating high school

Students participating in postsecondary remediation in reading, writing or math

Students earning college credit while in high school through AP, IB and/or dual enrollment

Source: Achieve, *College- and Career-Ready Accountability Systems*

is increasingly important that states develop a fully operational accountability system that reinforces and prioritizes their college and career readiness goals."[8] And the move in most states to adopt the new Common Core State Standards—which represent a set of "fewer, clearer and higher" standards benchmarked internally and aligned to demands of postsecondary and the workforce—adds even more urgency to this need.

The move to a focus on college and career readiness—which represents a higher expectation for K-12 school performance—is informed by a growing and convincing body of economic research that concludes some post-high school education (a one-year certificate or degree at a two- or four-year college) is needed for success, defined as living-wages to support a family. It's also informed by research that suggests most states are already and will face even greater "skills gaps" in the education required for available jobs and the education levels of their population.[9]

Texas is the leader in this area of re-aligning accountability systems, reporting the most robust and comprehensive set of college readiness indicators of any state.[10] Its accountability system reports on advanced course/dual enrollment completion, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate test results, and Texas Success Initiative program which considers higher education readiness in English/language arts and math).This unique accountability reporting system was collaboratively developed by the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, as part of a broader, high-level commitment among Texas leaders to work to improve college and career readiness in the state. According to state officials, though the emphasis is on college- and career-ready standards and reporting on the progress of meeting those standards, the "program is also creating a college and career readiness culture in education."[11]

Colorado includes performance indicators aligned to its definition of "high academic growth and achievement," based in part on college- and career-ready standards.[12] Colorado has four categories of indicators:
1. Student Academic Achievement
2. Student Academic Growth
3. Gaps in Academic Growth
4. Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness

The postsecondary and workforce readiness indicators include 1) drop-out rate, 2) graduation rate, and 3) average Colorado ACT Composite Score. The state has defined the levels of appropriate performance for these indicators: "Meeting the state expectation for performance in postsecondary and workforce readiness is defined as having a graduation rate of 80% or higher, a drop-out rate at or below the state average, and an ACT composite score at or above the state average." [13]

In Hawai'i, the state department of education annually provides a College and Career Readiness Indicators Report for every high school, which "presents information on how well Hawai'i's graduates are prepared to meet the [Department's] *Vision of a High School Graduate*."[14] The state looks at and reports on a range of related indicators for high schools, including whether students are enrolling in college, earning college credit while still in high school, taking the SAT, and completing the state's "college and career readiness" course track for graduation, as well as state assessment results, high school completion, and college enrollment in remedial or developmental courses.[15]

Louisiana leaders have focused on college and career readiness in two significant ways. First, the State Board of Education has developed three very public and ambitious education improvement goals for the state—and

it reports state progress annually. The goals specify how the state's students overall should be performing in three areas related to college and career readiness by the 2015-16 school year (as well as what annual progress is expected between now and then).

Established in 2005, the goals signal state priorities and help focus school s and districts on a clear set of expectations from policymakers over a 10-year period. Louisiana's three state education goals include:

- *Increase the High School Graduation Rate*—from 64.8% four-year cohort rate in 2006 to 80% by 2016
- *Increase Postsecondary and Career Readiness*—by increasing the percentage of students meeting the state's "Core 4" college-bound graduation requirements from 58.5 % in 2006 to 80% by 2016, and by improving students' "college-ready scores on ACT from 46.1% in 2006 to 63% in 2016
- *Increase Participation in Postsecondary Education*—from 51.4% of students enrolling in Louisiana public postsecondary institutions in 2006 to 70% by 2016

(Importantly, in addition to the average specific percentage gains expected for all students, Louisiana's goals specify the gains policymakers want to see in each goal for key ethnic groups as well.)

Secondly, at the school level, Louisiana reinforces these state goals by reporting on a graduation index that awards points to schools based on each student's high school outcomes. Up to 180 points per student are awarded to schools for students receiving a high school diploma with a college readiness/academic endorsement and 120 points per student are awarded to schools for students receiving a regular high school diploma. Schools receive zero points for students who drop-out of school. The graduation index is the school's average number of points earned by students in a given cohort.[16] Schools with SPS scores below 60 are labeled Academically Unacceptable. These schools must implement "remedies" including District Assistance Teams, supplemental educational services, school choice and eventually state takeover. Each additional year a school is labeled Academically Unacceptable (and has an SPS below 60) it is required to implement more remedies. Schools receive flags, identifying them as a School of Recognized or Exemplary Academic Growth, for meeting or exceeding yearly growth targets.

By emphasizing college and career readiness as the goal of the accountability system, states such as Texas, Colorado, Hawai'i and Louisiana have focused their accountability conversations around a clear set of expectations.

Selecting the number of indicators for any accountability system can be challenging. According to Achieve, "Generally speaking, the inclusion of multiple measures bolsters the validity of the outcomes. On the other hand, too many elements may make the model too complicated to understand and too burdensome to implement. Taken to the extreme, such an approach could be regarded as simply a 'data dump' where it is difficult to detect the signal through the noise. There is a real risk that by including too much, we can lose sight of what is most important. In a system built around college and career readiness, the indicators of whether or not students are, in fact, college- and career-ready— whether or not they've completed the college- and career-ready course of study, achieved at the college- and career-ready level on the state anchor assessment, and graduated—must remain prominent."[17]

Achieve proposes five categories of indicators:

- *Achievement:* How do students perform on state and national assessments designed to signal college and career readiness?
- *Course Completion:* Are students 'on-track' as they progress through a college- and career-ready curriculum?

- *Attainment:* Do students graduate college- and career-ready?
- *Postsecondary Success:* Do students successfully transition to a college or career?
- *Equity:* Are traditionally low-performing students experiencing new levels of academic success that meaningfully reduce achievement gaps?[18]

Achieve and The Education Trust have developed a framework for states to think about how to organize college- and career-ready indicators on a continuum of readiness. Rather than simply report whether students are "college and career ready," their framework illustrates examples of indicators in course completion and success, achievement and attainment in a three-phase continuum: along the way toward college and career readiness, meeting college and career readiness, and exceeding college and career readiness (see Figure 9 for a detailed illustration of this continuum and associated indicators). [19] The goal of this three-part continuum is both to report publicly and to give schools feedback on a more nuanced set of indicators about progress beyond simply high school graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment. The continuum also helps policymakers and educators understand how well schools are making progress toward ambitious college and career readiness goals as well as how well they are exceeding these goals.

A guiding maxim as states have introduced new assessments tied to clear standards and designed accountability systems to report progress is "what gets measured matters." What these state examples point to is a growing interest among state leaders in ensuring the indicators used in accountability system truly represent the things that should matter most in terms of success—the things policymakers and parents should pay attention to, and the things educators should be focusing their efforts on. Most agree that college and career readiness is the benchmark to be focusing on and not simply 10th-grade-level proficiency.

PROMISING PRACTICE

2

Clearly communicate the purpose and results of accountability to stakeholders

How states communicate accountability results – to district leaders, administrators, teachers, parents and other stakeholders – is critical if states want the results to be used for improvement planning and instruction decisions. This information should include, according to the Council of Chief State School Officers (the association of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states), "communication about the goals and consequences of the accountability system as well as the communication of results, such as score reporting."[20] District and school leaders need high quality summative reports to shape overall improvement plans, while classroom educators need real-time access to student performance to regularly adjust, target and improve instruction. Educators' reports also should be detailed enough to help them identify viable strategies and supports for improvement directly linked to areas of weakness.

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education published results from national surveys that examined teachers' access to and use of student data. The report suggests what educators most want in reports on student and school performance, such as timely access to student achievement results for the group of students with whom the teacher is currently working, course enrollment histories, students' participation in supplemental education services, attendance and course grades.[21]

Policymakers and educators also are looking more seriously at how "growth models" that look at student progress over time can be an important reporting tool. At their simplest, growth models calculate the change in a student or cohort of students' score on an assessment over time (such as a test given at the beginning of the school year and then at the end). This information can help answer the questions "How much has student achievement changed from one grade to the next?" and "At what rate is student achievement changing across multiple grades?" Colorado has been using student growth information in its accountability system for several years, and its approach is attracting national attention in part because Colorado leaders have proactively invited other states to adapt the formula (see box below for a description of the Colorado Growth Model).

More user-friendly report cards would incorporate some of the following design principles:

- Provide an easily understood rating category that helps put a school's results in context—but also explain in clear language the rationale for the grade
- Report on both absolute student achievement (meeting standards) and growth (progress toward standards)
- Show trends over time (not just compare one year to the previous year)
- Indicate how individual school performance compares to similar schools, the district as a whole and the state as a whole

Several states issue reports that include these data. Louisiana provides school-level report cards for both principals and parents. The principal report card provides detailed information about how much the school has improved, achievement results by subgroup, graduation and drop-out rates, all with an emphasis on the school's progress over time.

Louisiana's parent report card—see example in Figure 1—provides concise overviews of the school's performance and improvement over time, including descriptions of labels, progress and incentives. The report card clearly articulates expectations for acceptable progress to inform parents and other stakeholders.

The Colorado Growth Model

The Colorado Growth Model shows individual students (and groups of students) progress from year to year toward state standards, and also shows which schools and districts produce the highest growth. The Student Growth Percentile shows how much growth a student makes relative to a student's academic peers (defined as a student in a the same grade with a similar state standardized test performance history in Colorado):

- A student growth percentile of 60 indicates the student grew as well or better than 60% of his/her academic peers.
- A student growth percentile of 50 is considered "typical growth"; a student growth percentile above 65 is considered "high growth"; and a student growth percentile below 35 is considered "low growth."

Adequate Growth shows how much growth is necessary for a student to be on track to proficiency within three years or by 10th grade, whichever comes first.

12 states have signed MOUs with Colorado to use and customize the SchoolView displays, including: Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

FIGURE 1: Sample Section from Louisiana Parent Report Card[22]

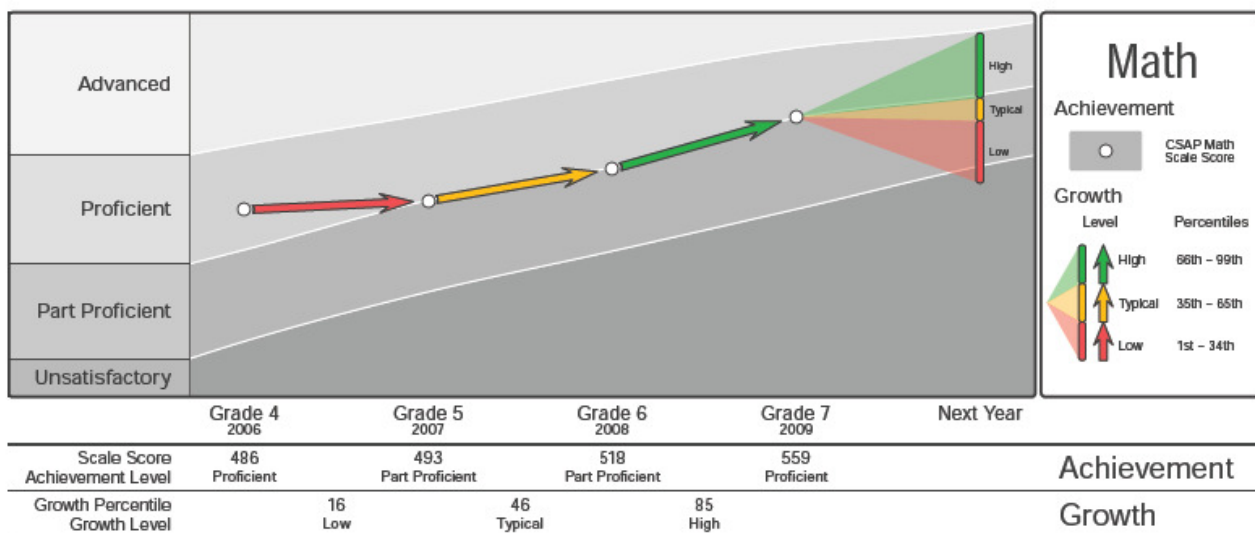**How Is Your Child's School Performing?**
- School Performance Score (SPS): 108.7
  By 2014, the state's goal for each school is an SPS of 120.0.
- Performance Label: *Three Stars* ★★★
- Your school is not in any level of performance or growth failure.

How Much Has Your Child's School Improved?
- Your child's school had an SPS Growth Target of 2.2 points. The SPS increased 6.4 points from last year.
- Growth Label: **Recognized Academic Growth**
- Based upon growth, your school is **eligible for a monetary reward.**

Colorado's report cards provide a snapshot of the district or school's level of attainment on academic achievement, growth, growth gaps and postsecondary readiness. In addition, parents and educators—using the complementary "SchoolView" online tool—can easily compare and contrast the performance of similar schools and districts, as well as the performance of an individual student to peer students. Another effective component of Colorado's reporting tools is the inclusion of low, typical and high growth projections that can be used to inform school-level planning and improvement strategies. Figure 2 illustrates these projections for a sample school for 2010 (see projections for the following year on the right-side of the graph).

FIGURE 2: Sample Section from Colorado Summary Report for a School

|	Grade 4 2006	Grade 5 2007	Grade 6 2008	Grade 7 2009	Next Year	
Scale Score Achievement Level	486 Proficient	493 Part Proficient	518 Part Proficient	559 Proficient		Achievement
Growth Percentile Growth Level		16 Low	46 Typical	85 High		Growth

Ohio provides District and School Report Card snapshots that provide overviews of essential information as well as more in depth data around achievement and growth, as shown in Figure 3 below:

FIGURE 3: Sample Ohio District Report Card[23]
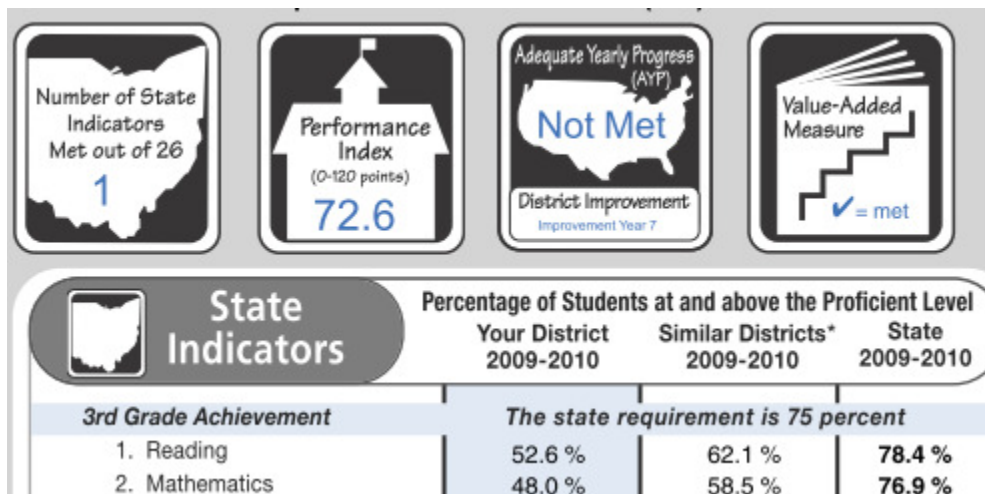
Florida uses a letter-grading system—tied to clear explanations about what sort of performance earns which grade—that indicates student progress toward meeting the state's standards. In 2010, 950 schools received an "A," 363 received a "B," 363 received a "C," 67 received a "D," and 30 received an "F." The grades are based on a point system that awards schools "one point for each percent of students who score high on the [state assessment] and/or make annual learning gains. [24] There is growing interest in some other states to adopt a letter grade scale, but currently only four states—Florida, Indiana, Michigan and Tennessee—have implemented such a system. Figure 4 explains Florida's grading scale, including the number of points needed for each category.

FIGURE 4: Florida School Grading Scale[25]
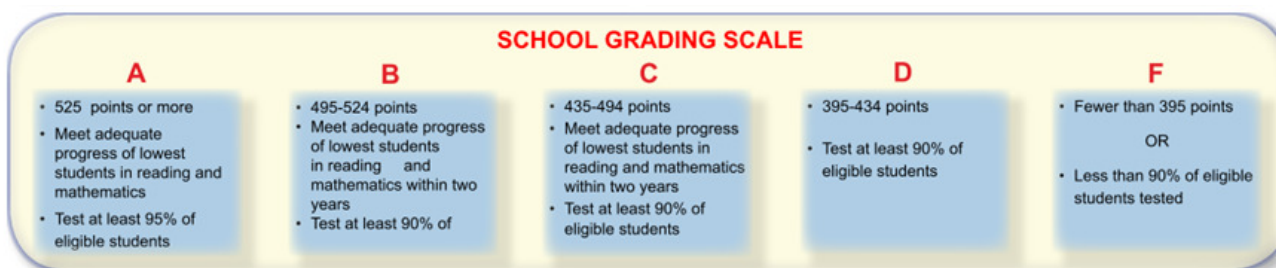
The timeline of the release of the results is also important. Teachers should get the results as close to real-time as possible to truly inform changes in behavior and practice (something Oregon has already prioritized as it has moved to computer-based tests in the OAKS assessment program) , and parents and other stakeholders need accurate and clear information to advocate for their children's education. And states need to be clear about the intent of each report it releases and its significance for educators and stakeholders. Achieve explains: "To support data-driven decision making, states and school districts must provide data *in*

real-time to help educators and families monitor progress and make decisions. The data must be accessible and reported in ways that are easy for students, parents, teachers and principals to access and use." Many states have moved to a one-time release of state and school report cards, clearly indicating the significance of the report. Other states, including Colorado, release the results on line and allow educator and stakeholder access to reports that can be customized at any time.

PROMISING PRACTICE 3

Provide the necessary tools and resources for schools and districts to use reporting results to inform instruction and ensure college and career readiness

Accountability systems void of complementary supports and assistance will not contribute to sustainable or meaningful change. What states do with the data from their accountability systems is just as important as collecting the data. The CCSSO emphasizes the importance of this support: "The focus [of accountability systems] is on the roles of state, district, and school agents in developing a plan for school improvement, communicating this plan, and providing the necessary resources to ensure that each school can meet the overarching goals."[26] States that provide useful tools and clear feedback for support are far more likely to reap the benefits of their accountability system than those who simply report the results.

All states provide some level of support to their low-performing schools. While extensive literature exists about the qualities of successful schools and the steps struggling schools take to improve, there is little research to document which state-provided models of support (or which key characteristics of support) actually have helped schools improve dramatically. Still, many states have developed especially well-designed and intriguing approaches worth studying in more detail.

Achieve explains how support systems that include incentives "are important to creating an environment in which accountability goals are perceived as something meaningful to work toward, not just something to meet to avoid sanctions. When accountability systems are too focused on fixing failures, they are often not doing enough to motivate exemplary performance. Just as educators, schools, and systems that are struggling should receive support, those that are meeting and exceeding expectations should realize benefits."

Examples of motivating rewards for schools and teachers include:
- Recognition by the state, including cash rewards for the school
- Opportunity to participate in district or state policy decisions
- Additional or discretionary use of resources, along with greater principal autonomy/flexibility
- Waivers or other autonomous privileges from many state requirements[27]

Colorado and most other states provide a tiered support system for districts and schools based on the needs of the students. Districts and schools with the most challenging achievement needs qualify for the highest support levels, including consultative services, evaluation and feedback on district and school plans, and targeted turnaround supports.[28]

Indiana schools in the state's Academic Probation category (the lowest category of performance) receive a series of supportive interventions. State law ensures that these schools cannot lose funding regardless of the number of years in Academic Probation.[29] In an attempt to provide motivating supports, the state also

recently adopted a strategy for rewarding the most effective teachers (based on student test scores) with additional pay.

Louisiana focuses on differentiated supports for its lowest performing schools. The state requires that "Academically Unacceptable" schools pursue "remedies" including support from District Assistance Teams to implementation of supplemental education services.[30] District Assistance Teams (DAT) are comprised of district and higher education staff who can provide targeted support to struggling schools: "The DAT functions throughout the improvement process: planning, implementing and evaluating. The DAT is responsible not only for leading the needs assessment but also for interfacing and collaborating with the School Improvement Team (SIT) in implementing and evaluating improvement activities."[31] Louisiana also provides an online tool called the Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA) to schools that helps educators select school improvement strategies from a list of options.

Massachusetts, which has seen some of the nation's largest gains in student achievement, uses District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) that "help identified districts and their schools strategically access and use professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise achievement for all students."[32] Professional development focuses on math and English/language arts instruction and aligns strategies to schools' areas of weakness. (Importantly, Massachusetts also has made a significant investment in student supports to reach higher standards, investing $1 billion over ten years between 1993-2003.)

Achieve explains that "a complete state strategy" on accountability must identify and segment schools by level of under-performance and mobilize different interventions to match each school's circumstances; especially as states expect students to graduate college- and career-ready, policymakers will need to think about the appropriate ways of helping both mediocre schools that are helping most but not all students as well as clearly failing schools where many students are not even graduating.[33] Schools performing at very different levels have very different capacities for improvement—and state policies need to recognize these differences in the support provided.

Oregon's Accountability System – Current Status

Since its creation in 1999, Oregon's accountability system has revolved around reporting "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) of districts and schools, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Indeed, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) website describes the state's accountability division as having a primary focus on federal reporting requirements: The accountability division provides "information on scoring assessments and compiling reports to determine if Oregon schools have made adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the goal of having all students meet rigorous academic standards by 2013-14 school year." Importantly, the department's assessment and accountability team members are engaged in other projects as well and not just producing accountability reports).[34]

Indicators in Oregon's Accountability System
Oregon's current accountability system indicators mostly align to minimum federal requirements (with some exceptions) and are not well-aligned to college- and career-ready goals. The current indicators include:
- Student achievement (reading/literature and mathematics in grades 3–8 and 10; writing in grades 4, 7, and 10; and science in grades 5, 8, and 10) by subgroups
- Student test participation by subgroups
- District financial data
- District and school federal "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) status
- Attendance data
- Staffing information
- Special populations data
- Video conferencing data

More interesting are the state's annual Freshman Profile Reports, assembled by the Oregon University System (OUS) for each high school, with some of the data provided by ODE. These reports indicate how well-prepared students are upon entering the state's higher education system. The reports detail:
- Enrollment of first-time freshman and persistence to the following fall at an OUS institution
- Trends over time for enrollment and persistence at an OUS institution
- Percentage of each high school's graduating class who attend an OUS institution
- High school academic preparation (GPA, SAT and ACT)
- First-year OUS performance (GPA, first courses in composition, arts and letters, social science, math and science)
- Oregon state assessment results for first-time freshman

Figure 5 (next page) shows an example of the five-year trend for persistence at one of the six Oregon University System institutions from graduates of an affluent Portland-area high school. While these reports may be less accurate for smaller high schools in rural areas (where sample size is small), the data is more useful than the state's formal accountability system in clearly communicating how well school districts and high schools are preparing students for success in college. Nonetheless, these reports are not a formal part of the state's accountability system nor are they widely shared with parents and classroom teachers.

Importantly, ODE is in the process of revising its assessment achievement standards at the lower grades to ensure they are better predictors for high school performance. Moreover, ODE research suggests that the state's existing "High School Achievement Standard" (what performance on the 10th-grade OAKS assessment

is good enough) is a strong predictor of success in college and is consistent with the mean student performance on the international assessment PISA.[35]

FIGURE 5: Five-Year Trend Graph Depicting Persistence to Following Fall of Wilson High School (in Portland Public Schools) Graduates Compared to all Oregon Graduates on the OUS Freshman Profile Report
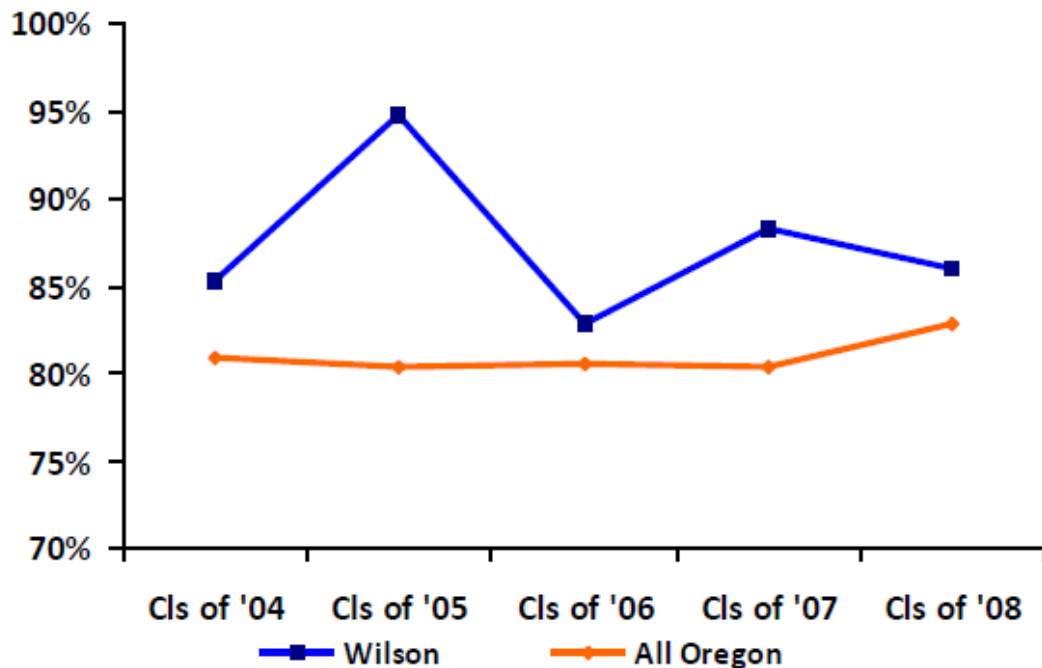

Oregon's Accountability Reporting

All states must determine a process for validating and "cleaning" data reported from schools and districts, and Oregon is no exception. Many states have opted for an intensified validation period (ranging from 2-3 weeks) near the end of the school year when district and state leaders must work around the clock to ensure data accuracy. Oregon has taken a different approach—validating data several times throughout the year—to try and ensure a relatively smoother cleaning process and greater confidence in the accuracy of the data. The downside of this approach is that Oregon district leaders feel as if they are constantly validating data through preliminary, preview and final reports all year long. ODE is working to eliminate duplicative reports, and department officials plan to implement new processes in spring 2011 to further reduce requests for duplicate student demographic data and to streamline the process further.[36] There remains, however, a perception gap between school district leaders—who see requests for particular data they don't want or need—and state officials—who believe federal and state regulations limit their flexibility in collecting different or less data.

Another gap exists in how the state communicates the purpose and results of its accountability system: District leaders and stakeholders are confused by the differences between performance reports (some with completely contradictory results) and unsure how to use the data provided to inform change in instruction. Oregon lacks a consistent message from the state about what goals or improvements are most important (what should parents, educators and the public be paying attention to), and whether any individual school's performance is "good enough" or how it compares to similar schools.

The reports themselves—purposely designed to be succinct and use little paper—also do not provide the type of information that encourages improvement. The Oregon Department of Education readily admits the limiting nature of its communications on the report cards: "Oregon rates schools as either Outstanding, Satisfactory, or In Need of Improvement, and while these ratings cannot tell you everything about your school, they are a good starting point for talking about our successes and opportunities for improvement."[37] The report card provides a scale showing where schools fall in the three tiers—without the extra information provided in some states, including Florida (shown in Figure 4 above), about these categories, the reasoning behind the school's placement, and areas in need of improvement:

FIGURE 6: Sample Section from Oregon Report Card
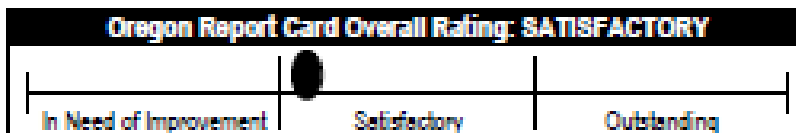
Additionally, federally required AYP reports and Oregon student achievement reports often contradict each other—in part because the Oregon report card is based on an easier achievement standard than the AYP reports and the Oregon report card uses a weighted average of student sub-group performance (as a counter to AYP's focus on requiring each subgroup to show progress in each content area). The state recently raised its achievement standards for the mathematics assessment, which will increase the rigor of the report card but also will likely increase the number of schools not meeting the federal AYP requirement. This mis-alignment between federally-driven AYP measures and state-specific achievement measures is a reality in most states—but some other states have begun choosing to de-emphasize the federal requirements and instead focus more attention on state-driven priorities and more actionable data for schools. Moreover, nearly all observers agree federal policymakers will significantly overhaul or more likely eliminate AYP reporting when the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act is finally reauthorized.

Finally, while Oregon's report card does include one section showing progress from the previous year in reading, math and graduation rates by subgroup of students, the information does not provide enough trend data to tell the school's story effective, and does not connect the growth (or lack of growth) to meaningful outcomes that parents and teachers could use.

Oregon's Supports for Low-Performing Schools

ODE has developed a "Logic Model" that describes its Statewide System of Support for assisting schools not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, as required by the federal government.

The first stage of accountability supports is through "ODE Oversight." Oregon Department of Education staff are assigned to School Improvement Resource Teams (SIRT) to serve as liaisons between the schools and the department and to help connect schools to additional resources.

The second stage of support is called the "Network of Support." In this stage, the state provides low-performing schools and districts with a Regional Network Coordinator in one of five Regional Service Districts in the state. The coordinator's job is to find and provide local services to schools and districts to support targeted needs. The Regional Network Coordinator also helps provide professional development for instructional coaches in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Education.
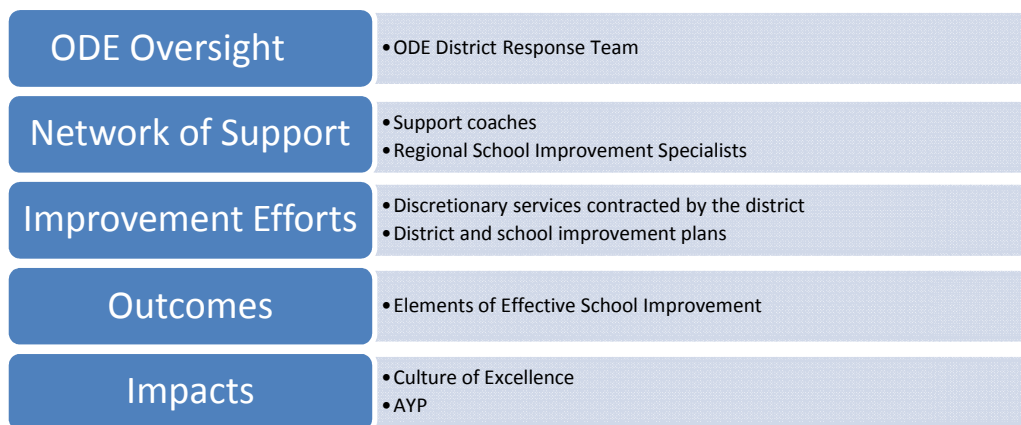
The Network of Support also includes School and District Support Coaches. These coaches meet with school and district leadership teams to identify areas in need of targeted interventions.

Oregon has been involved in an innovative approach to support through its Direct Access to Achievement (DATA) Project. The DATA Project, funded through a federal grant, incorporates in-service data-use training with input from the field to determine specific areas of needs. The result is a targeted approach to "building educators' capacity for using data to inform instruction."[38]

The Oregon Department of Education explains the importance of aligning statewide supports throughout the Network of Support work: "The goal [of the network of support] is to ensure that [state-level] initiatives work in concert to support the schools. Among these initiatives are Oregon Administrator Mentoring Program, Response to Intervention, the Oregon DATA project, Literacy framework and implementation of the Common Core Standards."[39]

The Oregon Department of Education emphasizes the role of the district in improving low-performing schools in its Elements of Effective School Improvement. These elements are research-based practices that need to be in place if a school is to address the issues causing low performance. The elements emphasize that "districts must be fully engaged to support the efforts of the school leadership team" to bring about the necessary change.[40]

FIGURE 7: Oregon's Logic Model for Support for Low-Performing Schools

ODE Oversight	• ODE District Response Team
Network of Support	• Support coaches • Regional School Improvement Specialists
Improvement Efforts	• Discretionary services contracted by the district • District and school improvement plans
Outcomes	• Elements of Effective School Improvement
Impacts	• Culture of Excellence • AYP

Like most other states, Oregon has selected a model of supports for struggling schools that reflects promising practice—but here again the emphasis of these supports is on getting schools to achieve AYP and not college and career readiness. Moreover, while the logic model detailing ODE's intended approach is solid and well-constructed, it's not at all clear the state is executing well or that its efforts are valuable or effective for local schools that are struggling. Indeed, anecdotal reports from superintendents suggest that, despite a thoughtful model for how the state could engage, ODE lacks capacity and resources.

Oregon's Accountability System – Options for Improvement

Though the state needs to focus on changing major portions of its accountability system—as described in more detail below—Oregon does have some things in place that would make the shift to a stronger accountability system easier:

- The state has a substantial K-12 longitudinal data system in place that could be made more user-friendly and readily accessible as part of an improved accountability system.
- The State Board of Education's adoption of the Common Core Standards this fall puts Oregon on a path to revamp and upgrade expectations and curriculum over the next few years, and indicates the state's desire to move toward measures of college and career readiness.
- Similarly, Oregon is a leader in the new SMARTER/Balanced national testing consortium to develop next generation formative and summative assessments, another sign that the state is ready to focus on meaningful measures of student success. Perhaps more important, the consortium will be producing new, high quality formative/classroom assessments that give teachers better tools for gauging student progress.
- Finally, Oregon is implementing new, higher graduation requirements—fully effective with the class of 2014—specifically designed to better prepare each student for success in college, work and citizenship.

Moreover, most observers expect federal school accountability requirements to be overhauled when Congress eventually reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the act was due to be reviewed and reauthorized in 2009; many observers think Congress may take action in 2011, but some think it could be as long as 2013, after the next presidential election, before a new law is enacted). Leading members of Congress and key members of the Administration have both criticized the federal government's focus on Adequate Yearly Progress, and many predict the reauthorized ESEA may direct states to set college and career readiness as their new goal for school improvement (the Administration has specifically made this recommendation to Congress). Thus, within the next few years, it's expected federal guidelines will direct states to move toward new accountability systems in any event.

Recognizing this imminent change in federal expectations and building on the state's strengths, Oregon leaders and educators should take the opportunity now to define a new accountability system that better meets the needs of stakeholders and educators. Promising practices from other states can be a guide in building a new system that is better functioning and meets Oregon's unique values and priorities. And, even if some argue for a "wait and see" approach to eventual federal requirements, Oregon will be well-served developing its own point of view *today* about which goals and data should matter most rather than passively waiting for the federal government to decide.

Three Key Design Questions to Answer

The scope of Education First's research report was primarily to identify promising practices in accountability systems from other states and consider how closely Oregon's system emulated these practices. An important next step for state leaders and educators will be to build on this initial research and engage in a comprehensive redesign of Oregon's system. An important starting point—as described in our review of promising practices from other state—will be developing a clearer point of view at the state level (informed by local practitioners and superintendents) about the right focus that answers three questions:

- What data is most important—to policymaker and parents—to gauge the quality and success of Oregon schools? (In other words, where should educators be focusing their efforts?)
- What data is most meaningful to educators who are trying to classroom and schools ?

- What are the right incentives and interventions? The Obama Administration has focused its education reform efforts on the urgency of turning around the lowest-performing schools—a valid and important goal—but Oregon needs to consider not just its strategy for helping consistently failing schools to produce better outcomes, but also how to help struggling schools improve and to how to recognize and validate successful schools.

With clearer goals in place, state leaders and other stakeholders can then engage in a more specific and technical review of Oregon's systems, looking for the best ways to redesign the system to accomplish these goals. The issues this technical analysis would assess include the data needs and capacity of the state and districts; how often data would be collected, "cleaned" and reported; how to weight different indicators; what accomplishments earn what sort of accountability ranking; the design of a public report card; etc.

Four Immediate Next Steps

As Oregon begins this redesign work of its accountability, several changes could be made immediately or could be guideposts for redesigning the system—as described in four specific findings below.

1. Focus on College and Career Readiness

Oregon should overhaul the indicators used and reported in its accountability system to include a richer set of information that suggests how well schools are helping students prepare for college and careers. Achieve proposes an especially helpful framework describing the college- and career-ready indicators on which states should focus accountability reporting; as shown in Figure 8 below, Achieve arrays these indicators along a spectrum (that values progress toward readiness goals, meeting readiness goals and exceeding readiness goals.[41] The OUS reports on high school student persistence also can be a helpful source of data for K-12 accountability reports focused on college and career readiness.

FIGURE 8: Achieve's Framework for Organizing College- and Career-Ready Indicators

	ALONG THE WAY TOWARD COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS	MEETING COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS	EXCEEDING COLLEGE- AND CAREER READINESS
COURSE COMPLETION & SUCCESS	• Timely credit accumulation • Credit recovery	• Successful completion of college- and career-ready course of study	• Participation in AP, IB and dual enrollment
ACHIEVEMENT	• Performance on aligned assessments early in high school • Grades	• Meeting standards on college- and career-ready statewide assessment • Postsecondary remediation rates	• College-level performance on AP and/or IB exams
ATTAINMENT	• Graduation	• Earning a college- and career-ready diploma	• Earning credits in dual enrollment courses • Application to and enrollment in postsecondary

In many cases, Oregon does not have a good source for the data Achieve recommends, and new policies will need to be enacted and new data collected to create this more robust snapshot of college and career readiness.

While it's likely new federal accountability requirements will nudge all states in this direction, even if they don't, Oregon leaders can—like leaders in promising states have already—better define an accountability system of their own that values college and career readiness, rather than one aligned to minimum federal standards.

2. *Provide Data That Motivates Educators to Improve*

To help educators identify strategies schools can adopt that truly help struggling students succeed—and not just assume struggling students will always struggle—Oregon should improve its measurement and use of student growth scores. The Council of Chief State School Officers explains why growth models improve on states' status models that look only at achievement at one point in time: "Growth models assume that student performance, and by extension school performance, is not simply a matter of where the school is at any single point in time, and a school's ability to facilitate academic progress is a better indicator of its performance."[42]

One immediate opportunity for Oregon to consider is adopting both the methodology of Colorado's Growth Model and the complementary SchoolView portal for in-state use. At least 12 states have already formally committed to use Colorado's methodology—which was developed with the explicit goal to be shared among states and is connected to the open-source SchoolView online data analysis tool—and many more states seem poised to move in this direction. The Colorado methodology provides a readily available way for Oregon to expand the reporting of student growth information and to give educators a powerful, easy-to-use tool for analyzing data.

(It's important to recognize that Colorado's Growth Model is norm-based—meaning student growth is calculated by looking at all similar student peers and then plotting whether a given student is growing faster or slower than the average—and is not keyed yet to predicting college and career readiness. However, Education First includes this idea in our recommendations for Oregon because of the helpful predictive nature of the Colorado model and because of the associated tools that allow educators to compare student growth across similar schools. Combined with other indicators that look more absolutely at whether students are making progress toward the goal of college and career readiness, the Colorado Growth Model could be part of a more robust data system that helps educators readily understand how similar but higher performing schools are helping their students perform.)

3. *Ensure Accountability Reports that Are User Friendly—and Educator-Actionable*

The state should revamp and streamline its reporting system, including considering the reporting timeline, the number of reports, and the usefulness of the data to inform instruction and decisions. A deeper survey of best practices for releasing data in other states—many of whom still report the same data as Oregon, but don't do so in a way that is so confusing or episodic—would be instructive. ODE leaders have already taken steps in this direction that should be both encouraged and accelerated.

Again, Oregon has an effective reporting tool in its Freshman Profile Reports for high schools and should look at additional ways K-12 and higher education can collaborate on accountability and reporting.

And, while there is a limit to the amount of information that can reasonably be presented on a school report card, Oregon should ensure educators have easy access to mine its longitudinal data system to dig deeper and compare similar schools to each other.

Finally, given the growing number of English-language learners in Oregon schools, any effort to identify new accountability data sources and judgments of "how good is good enough" should explicitly consider the

unique challenges of educating students whose first language is not English. All states are struggling with this issue, but Oregon would benefit from a deeper, more specific examination of promising practices in this particular area (including looking closely at states with both innovative accountability systems and large numbers of English-language learners, such as Colorado and Florida)?

4. *Provide Incentives and Rewards*

The state should explore which incentives will motivate schools and districts to continually improve or to maintain success, as part of the state accountability system. Such incentives can include anything from housing incentives to recruit effective educators, performance pay increases to reward improving low-performing schools, and additional planning time for collaboration and support in low-performing schools. The important point here is that, while the state should appropriately focus limited resources on low-performing and persistently failing schools, it shouldn't do so at the expense of supporting high-achieving schools too. Oregon's accountability system should value and incentivize high-performing or fast-improving schools too.

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