

A Seat at the Table:

Teachers' Guiding Principles for
Accountability under ESSA

A group of four women are seated at a long table in a meeting room. They are looking towards a large screen on the right side of the frame. The screen displays the logo for 'TEACH + PLUS', where 'TEACH' is in blue and '+ PLUS' is in green. The women are dressed in professional attire, and the room has wood-paneled walls. There are papers and a name tag on the table in front of them.

**TEACH
+ PLUS**

Acknowledgements

* denotes lead author.

Tim Adams

***Nicole Amato**

Sabrina Anfossi

Ray Baker

Caprice Banks

***Paula Barajas**

***Brigid Bennett**

August Brill

Kate Curtin

Patricia Davlantes

***Heather Debby**

Serena Griffin

Alex Kmickewycz

Debra Lomax

Chris Moy

Jillian Onque

Andrea Parker

Bailey Reimer

***Nicholas Schmidt**

Shannon Slade

James Staros

***Kathleen Kuempel**

Leah Stephens

Annemarie Thilmont

Alicia Torres

About Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success.

Six Guiding Principles for ESSA Accountability

Guiding Principle 1: Involve Teachers When Creating the System



Guiding Principle 2: Mindset—Accountability as a School Improvement Tool



Guiding Principle 3: Multiple Measures of Accountability



Guiding Principle 4: Measure Both Growth and Attainment



Guiding Principle 5: Accountability that Accounts for All



Guiding Principle 6: Multiple Opportunities for Educator Input, Yet Finalized in a Timely Manner.



I. INTRODUCTION

On December 15, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the latest reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The revised version of ESEA gives more responsibility to states to measure and hold schools accountable for success. This new responsibility, however, poses a new challenge: whose voices will impact the development of a fair and just system of accountability that will help students achieve? As implementation of ESSA moves forward, it is imperative for teachers to have a voice at the table during every step of the implementation process.

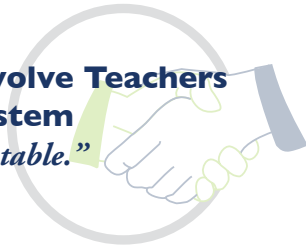
Although ESSA prescribes specific mandates for academic accountability (proficiency on a state exam, English language proficiency, and high school graduation rate), states have the opportunity to track additional factors in measuring school effectiveness. Illinois has an opportunity to thoughtfully include both academic and non-academic indicators of school effectiveness which examine the breadth and depth of a school's support for students.

As a group of high-performing public school teachers, we know that a strong accountability system must serve students, teachers, and schools. Our report lays out principles to guide the creation of such a system to ensure that all of Illinois' students have access to a great education.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principle 1: Involve Teachers When Creating the System

"Teachers need a seat at the table."



What does this mean?

Teachers should be involved in the development process for the accountability system at every step. Teachers, by virtue of their role in the classroom, often serve as the interpreters of federal guidelines for education, of researchers' recommendations for best practices in education, and of test scores, yet teachers are often overlooked when policy is being developed. ESSA requires Illinois to gain teacher input and support.

What does this entail?

It is crucial that teachers representing different school districts across Illinois are involved in the creation, vetting, and implementation of this new system. Teachers from urban, rural, suburban, and charter schools should all be at the table in the creation phase, providing a classroom perspective on school effectiveness. After an accountability system is proposed, teachers around the state need

the opportunity to learn about the proposal and provide ongoing feedback. Finally, once a system is implemented, teacher leaders need to guide their peers in developing understanding and support for the new accountability system.

Guiding Principle 2: Mindset—Accountability as a School Improvement Tool

"Accountability is a flashlight, not a hammer."



What does this mean?

The accountability system under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) functioned like a hammer, with sometimes severe consequences for underperforming schools. The new accountability system should be like a flashlight, showcasing schools that are doing well and identifying and assisting schools that need additional support. Once identified, principals and state administrators can deliver targeted resources that best meet the needs of the particular school. A more nuanced accountability system will also reflect the needs of today's diverse groups of learners. ESSA presents an opportunity for Illinois to develop an

accountability system that can better identify the key levers to improve educational opportunities for all students.

What does this entail?

The state of Illinois has the opportunity to create a system that examines key indicators of school effectiveness, highlights schools that can serve as models in certain areas, and directs targeted supports and resources to struggling schools. This accountability system will highlight the areas where a school is successful and the areas where it needs to improve. For example, a school might be recognized for showing strong student achievement in English while also being recognized for a need to improve math performance. Or a school could be recognized for its strength in providing a strong socio-emotional support system for homeless students while faring poorly in providing similar supports for its English learners. As experienced teachers, we expect that a more nuanced accountability system focusing on success and customized interventions would yield increasingly greater gains while reducing student and teacher anxiety. Additionally, it will provide all stakeholders with a more comprehensive and accurate picture of what is going on within the school walls.

Guiding Principle 3: Multiple Measures of Accountability

“A school is a complex ecosystem.”

What does this mean?

The levers that drive academic success in a school go beyond the classroom. School evaluation systems should produce a diverse data set revealing the complexity of a school. Since states are required to include data around academic and non-academic factors, evaluation systems should include a broader picture of their schools. While ESSA requires measurement of attendance and student attainment, it encourages states to go beyond this basic framework. A comprehensive view of a school allows for more informed decision-making and strategic resource allocation. Students, teachers, and schools need a well-rounded, balanced accountability system that fairly displays specific areas of successes and areas of need. By moving from a narrow focus to a

wider focus with multiple measures, our state and district leaders will be better able to move beyond test scores as the sole measure in evaluating schools and begin to pinpoint determinant factors (trauma, truancy, etc.) as well as targeted interventions for those factors.

What does this entail?

To accurately gauge the effectiveness of a school and rate the education it provides, additional measurements of school climate and wraparound services should be included in the evaluation framework.

School climate: Gathering data from students, staff, and families

Teachers know that providing a safe and engaging environment is as important to learning as a rich curriculum. Effective measurements of school culture already in use in Illinois, such as the 5 Essentials Survey from the University of Chicago Consortium, focus on school leadership, teacher collaboration, family engagement, and sense of safety within the building. We recommend continuing the use of this metric and including it in the new accountability system.

Wraparound services: Teachers are not doing this work alone

Coordinated efforts between teachers, in-school counselors, and outside services are critical components of student learning. Illinois’ new school evaluation system should measure each school’s ability to coordinate these components. Specifically, a school’s ability to coordinate stabilizing services such as counseling for students in crisis, health and dental screenings especially in underserved communities, services for homeless students, and services for students with severe disabilities should be measured. Programs such as All Kids Health Care, Action for Children, and Prioritization of Urgency of Need Services (PUNS) are based in Illinois and provide much-needed services to the students we teach. Schools should be held accountable for coordinating these services through the creation of a wraparound supports index measure or the use of a proxy measure, such as the adequate staffing of counselors and other SEL providers.

Guiding Principle 4: Measure Both Growth and Attainment

“Highlight the schools attaining great heights as well as the schools making great progress to meet them”³

What does this mean?

To achieve these goals, we recommend that Illinois adopt growth measures when holding schools and districts accountable. These measurements give accurate data on the abilities of their students in relation to standards, can be used to create percentile data that gives parents an idea of how their child compares to peers, and show how the child has progressed from the previous year. No matter what assessment is chosen, the state of Illinois should use a formula to calculate each student’s growth to level the playing field between students.

What does this entail?

There are many tests already in existence for the states to use as school evaluation tools, each with their various benefits and drawbacks. Which test is chosen is important because it not only measures our students but measures the results of our work. The test results often define success in the eyes of our administration and community leaders, and so these tests must be accurate. They must be able to say where our kids are in relation to the standards, their peers, and their previous performance.

To achieve these goals, we recommend that Illinois adopt adaptive, criterion-referenced growth measures when holding schools and districts accountable. These measurements give the most accurate data on the abilities of their students in relation to standards and can also be used to create percentile data that gives parents an idea of how their child is performing compared to peers. Adaptive assessments are useful for gathering data for students below, at, or above grade level. No matter what assessment is chosen, the state of Illinois should use a formula to calculate each student’s growth to level the playing field between students.

Data from these tests alone, however, is not sufficient for teachers to make informed day-to-day decisions on how best to serve students. Illinois should encourage schools to implement strategies for teachers to rapidly get the information they need on their students. Successful approaches have included (but are not limited to): 1) training teachers to develop teacher-created formative assessments that align to the state standards and 2) using a computer-graded interim or diagnostic assessment that provides quick turnaround of data for use in the classroom.

Guiding Principle 5: Accountability that Accounts for All

“Make all students visible by moving from an ‘n’ of 100 to an ‘n’ of 20.”⁴

What does this mean?

School accountability must measure the needs of specific sub-groups that are present in many but possibly not all schools; these populations include but are not limited to race, gender, English language learners, students in temporary living situations, students in foster care, and those with disabilities. Measuring these subgroups will ensure that all students’ needs are being appropriately met. This approach will more accurately reveal strengths in schools that have attained a low rating, and weaknesses in schools with strong ratings.

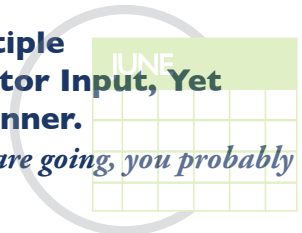
What does this entail?

Because schools are complex systems, it is important to make sure the successes of smaller subgroups are highlighted. By measuring subgroups of as small as twenty students, Illinois will be able to identify schools that have developed best practices for subgroups and replicate those practices. The state can also more carefully track students whose needs are not being met and help schools improve their services for those students. In some cases, there may be populations of need with very low numbers (n less than 20) at a school. In these situations, we suggest their data be aggregated with other groups showing similar need. For example, a school may have fifteen students in temporary living

situations and fifteen students in foster care. Rather than “lose” all 30 students, aggregating them will continue to highlight issues that need attention.

Guiding Principle 6: Multiple Opportunities for Educator Input, Yet Finalized in a Timely Manner.

“If you don’t know where you are going, you probably won’t end up there”⁵



What does this mean?

Illinois needs to create a clear timeline for the development of an accountability system which will allow for systems of feedback and engagement and enable adoption of the system by March 2017, in time for schools to plan for the next school year. Systems of feedback and engagement will enable the new accountability system to represent the full diversity of our state and gain support from educators. Timely adoption and communication of the new accountability measures will allow schools to adjust their plans if necessary.

What does this entail?

Since states are not required to implement new accountability systems until the 2017-2018 school year, the next 16 months are vital to the development of the new accountability system. While we applaud ISBE’s recently announced calendar for engaging stakeholders, we recommend that the agency chair a committee to draft guidelines on the accountability system for Illinois. This group should be comprised of teachers, principals, other school leaders, parents, assessment experts and representatives from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The committee should work openly and inclusively, with all voices carrying equal weight. Guidelines should be released no later than September of 2016 for feedback from the public. Multiple public hearings should then be held throughout the state from September to December 2016 at convenient times for students, parents, and teachers to attend. The committee should use this feedback to revise its draft and propose it to ISBE no later than January 2017. The new accountability system needs to be adopted by March 2017, in time for Illinois’ schools to make any necessary adjustments when planning for the next school year.

III. CONCLUSION

The switch from NCLB to ESSA has been applauded by many across the US. However, the new law will only be as effective as its implementation in each state. To ensure that teachers and school leaders are invested in the success of the state’s accountability system, it is vital that they are involved in the process of its creation.

The state of Illinois needs an accountability system that includes multiple measures, weighs growth and attainment, and accounts for all student subgroups. Most importantly, these components should make up a system that is used as an improvement tool. We are confident that engaging in a process that is inclusive, transparent, and fair will create a system that will help students and which stakeholders will embrace and implement with fidelity.

ENDNOTES

1. A Technical Guide to the CORE School Quality Improvement Index. 2014-2015. John Gardner Center for Youth at Stanford University. Retrieved March 10, 2016, from <http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CORE-Index-Technical-Guide-SY-2014-15-updated-2.1.16.pdf>
2. Anderson, M., & Johnson, W. (2012). A New Model: Schools As Ecosystems. Retrieved March 10, 2016, from <http://ny.chalkbeat.org/2012/02/06/a-new-model-schools-as-ecosystems/#.VuHnmvkrLIU>
3. Ehlert, M., Koedel, C., Parsons, E., & Podgursky, M. (2014). Choosing the Right Growth Measure. Education Next. Retrieved March 10, 2016, from <http://educationnext.org/choosing-the-right-growth-measure/>
4. A Technical Guide to the CORE School Quality Improvement Index. 2014-2015. John Gardner Center for Youth at Stanford University. Retrieved March 10, 2016, from <http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CORE-Index-Technical-Guide-SY-2014-15-updated-2.1.16.pdf>
5. Zemeckis, R. (Director), & Roth, E. (Writer). (1994). Forrest Gump [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.