

MEASUREMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN K-12 EDUCATION

Insights from Students, Caregivers, and Educators

The GovLab - October 2021

The GovLab engaged a large, diverse population of students, caregivers and educators to better understand the focus, role, and process of measurement and accountability in schools. Through a series of rapid, online, public engagements with 18,000+ participants in Spring 2021 we solicited perspectives on:

1. DEFINITION OF SCHOOL AND STUDENT SUCCESS

2. NEW APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT

3. COMMUNITY-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY



SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Recommendation 1: Real World Relevance.** Invest in more expansive measurement and assessment systems that track the quality of school learning environments and student growth around a broad range of non-academic skills that have real world relevance.
- ▶ **Recommendation 2: Mental Health and Social Support.** Provide more robust mental health services and social support systems.
- ▶ **Recommendation 3: Innovations in Assessment.** Decrease dependence on standardized tests and invest in innovative assessment approaches including early warning systems, career-oriented portfolio and certificate programs, and personalized, relationship-driven student feedback routines.
- ▶ **Recommendation 4: Community Trust and Engagement.** Invest in efforts that build school capacity around community-based governance, increase trust between schools and communities, enable better access to participation in decision making, and demonstrate the results of that participation.
- ▶ **Recommendation 5: Educator Empowerment.** Formalize mechanisms that allow teachers to shape the direction of teaching and learning in their own classrooms and schools, as well as in education policy more broadly.



FINDINGS: DEFINITION OF SCHOOL AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The recommendations are based on the findings from these consultations where we asked:

“What do students, caregivers, and educators value most when it comes to the goals of education?”

- ▶ **Finding 1: Students, caregivers, and educators want to expand definitions of student success to include key non-academic skills that have real world relevance.** Students, families and educators strongly support expanding measures of student success to include: problem solving skills, creativity and collaboration, interest and career exploration, and social and emotional skills. But students, families and educators do not want to diminish the importance of core academic knowledge and skills.

- ▶ **Finding 2: Students, caregivers, and educators see civic engagement, persuasive communication skills and media literacy as important elements of student success.** Educators, students and caregivers demonstrated strong support for teaching students: Oral and written communication skills, community and civic engagement practices, and advocacy skills. In addition, educators and caregivers were particularly supportive of media fluency and information literacy, including identifying credible sources and misinformation.
- ▶ **Finding 3: Students, caregivers, and educators want measures to focus on learning conditions and opportunities in schools, not just student outcomes.** Educators, caregivers, and students all identified positive school environments as critical to student success and called for better measurement of school performance on:
 - ▶ **relevance** - student perception that what they're learning will be relevant to their lives
 - ▶ **support** - student perception that adults in their schools care about them and provide help when needed
 - ▶ **engagement** - student sense of engagement and desire to engage in school opportunities
 - ▶ **belonging** - student perception of comfort and welcomeness in their school
 - ▶ **opportunity** - student perception that they're able to pursue positive futures
- ▶ **Finding 4: Students, caregivers, and educators want more mental health services and social support systems and resources in schools.** To support an expanded definition of student success, caregivers, educators and students were robust in their call for schools to provide critical social and mental health support. Teachers, in particular, expressed a strong need for:
 - ▶ Increased numbers of nurses, social workers, and counseling services
 - ▶ More direct accommodations for students with difficult home circumstances
 - ▶ A broad range of interventions aimed at addressing basic needs for students from high poverty communities including health and mental health services.



FINDINGS: NEW APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT

How do students, caregivers, and educators view alternative forms of assessment, measurement, and evaluation?

- ▶ **Finding 5: Students, caregivers, and educators want to move beyond standardized tests and give students multiple opportunities to show growth and competency.** Stakeholders across all three groups were interested in: moving away from 'one time' tests, giving students multiple opportunities to display competency, and recognizing growth not currently measured by standardized tests. Caregivers in particular demonstrated a strong desire to have their children attend schools implementing these alternative approaches to assessment.
- ▶ **Finding 6: Students, caregivers, and educators want non-punitive early warning systems to help them understand which students need support.** Caregivers, teachers and students expressed preferences for "early warning systems"—information and assessments that identify students who need support in specific areas. These kinds of systems look at indicators like attendance, course performance, behavior, homelessness and court-involvement that predict outcomes like high school graduation, and aim to provide services (e.g. tutoring, meetings with caregivers, individualized learning plans) ahead of time.

- ▶ **Finding 7: Students want rich, personalized feedback rooted in strong teacher-student relationships and routines.** In the context of strong and trusting relationships, data suggest that students, in particular, want these alternative forms of evaluation and measurement to result in personalized attention and interventions that prioritize constructive feedback and positive encouragement. This stands in contrast to algorithmic and technology-centric approaches to personalization currently promoted by advocates of personalized learning platforms.
- ▶ **Finding 8: Students, caregivers, and educators want student accomplishments demonstrated through career portfolios and certifications that have real world application.** Students, educators and caregivers want assessments to yield real world relevance and career usefulness. As means to publicly demonstrate skills developed, they asserted strong interest in: job-oriented portfolios, individualized learning plans, and certifications. In contrast, they indicated considerably less interest in peer-based evaluation and feedback, performance-based evaluation, and even less favorability towards community-based feedback and assessment.
- ▶ **Finding 9: Students and caregivers have concerns about some alternative assessment models when it comes to student motivation and recognition by colleges and employers.** When asked, “What will happen if schools move to alternative models of assessment?”, 70% of caregivers shared concerns that alternative systems might not be widely recognized by colleges and employers and 68% of students were worried that removing traditional tests and grades might depress student motivation



FINDINGS: COMMUNITY-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY

How do students, caregivers, and educators want to be involved in education decision and policymaking?

- ▶ **Finding 10: Students, caregivers, and educators want schools to move away from punitive, high-stakes accountability.** Students, caregivers, and educators are dissatisfied with forms of accountability that are perceived as punitive or high stakes. Teachers, in particular, view high stakes tests as limiting innovation and effective pedagogy.
- ▶ **Finding 11: Caregivers and students need trust, reciprocity and resources to participate in school governance.** Caregivers and students indicated that they value involvement in accountability and school governance, but lack the trust and confidence in school leaders needed to make it viable. Evidence strongly suggests the need for more resources and capacity building for schools and districts around how to involve students and families effectively and equitably in decision-making.
- ▶ **Finding 12: Students and caregivers want to be actively involved in school governance and accountability systems.** Our findings demonstrate that shifting to alternative measures of school and student success isn’t enough. There also needs to be a shift in how measures and overall school priorities are decided, with the inclusion of students, educators, and caregivers.
- ▶ **Finding 13: Educators and caregivers want teachers to be empowered to shape the direction of teaching and learning in their classrooms and schools.** Our findings show that teachers feel disempowered by current accountability systems, and have a strong desire to have a more direct voice in shaping what teaching and learning look like in schools.