Performance-Based Accountability for Schools

Schools need to be caring, cheerful, exciting places. They also must be places where children learn the challenging things they need to succeed in the world. For all the possibilities that portfolio districts give to schools, schools must be able to show they are teaching all students, and that students are engaged and prepared for the next grade or transition.

In a portfolio district, it is commonly understood that effective educators get rewarded and effective schools get replicated, struggling schools get a strong array of support, and chronically low-performing schools are replaced.

To determine whether a school is replicated, supported, replaced, or closed, portfolio districts use performance measures. The best measures provide district leaders with warnings and clues about how well the portfolio—the combination of all schools currently operating—is functioning. These districts rely heavily but not solely on standardized testing, as well as on indicators of school climate and organizational health. Schools are evaluated based on data on absolute performance on tests, coupled with student growth in performance, and other measures like course completion and graduation rates and how these measures compare to those of other schools serving similar students.

These measures are the start, not the end, of the accountability process. New York City and Denver look closely at the circumstances of all struggling schools to see what other circumstances may be influencing their outcomes: prior preparation of students, increases in students learning English or who have special needs, leadership changes, and changes in neighborhood conditions. Many portfolio districts also consider factors such as demographic trends and family choice data, including waitlist length. If the district is considering closing a school, leaders may also consider whether better options are readily available, weighing factors such as the availability of qualified school leaders and lead teachers in current recruitment and training pipelines, or the capacities of charter operators and other providers. Taken together, all of these factors can suggest what might be done for the children in the existing school, including trying to improve the school as it stands, giving children chances to transfer to better schools nearby, or replacing the school with a new district-run or charter school with a specific mission suitable to the neighborhood.

ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON ACCOUNTABILITY

- Common school performance framework in place
- Performance framework uses multiple measures: student performance, student progress, school climate, student engagement, equity and access, long-term student outcomes
- Performance framework used as a significant factor in school expansion, intervention, replacement/closure decisions
- Publication of a school report card based on common performance framework

METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Are schools investing in their promise?**
- Increasing % of new schools that are expansions or replications of successful schools
- Increasing % of low-performing schools hiring proven principals

**Are schools divesting from failure?**
- Increasing % of persistently failing schools replaced or closed
- Declining % of principals with failing records retained (3 years with low performance and no growth)

**Are new investments paying off?**
- Decreasing % of students in failing schools
- Positive average gain for students moving from closed school to another district or charter school
- Positive average gain for students moving from closed school to newly opened school
- Equal or higher performance for students in newly opened schools relative to comparable students in comparable existing schools