

# TOWARD JUSTICE FOR ALL?

## The Opportunities and Risks for Educational Equity in New York State Under ESSA

New York State should use the opportunities and levers in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to set clear expectations that our education system must raise achievement for all students, focus attention and resources on the full range of student groups, and insist on prompt action when schools do not meet expectations. To achieve these objectives, we recommend that state policymakers incorporate the following principles and provisions into New York's accountability system:

### PRINCIPLE 1: Make the main thing the main thing.

*To fulfill our high expectations for all students, New York's accountability system must ensure that academic achievement drives school performance determinations and improvement strategies.*

#### **Maintain high academic standards**

- ✓ Ensure that New York State maintains high academic standards for all students.

#### **Keep student achievement and attainment front and center**

- ✓ Ensure that academic measures together represent more than 75 percent of each school's rating.
- ✓ Heavily weight English language arts/literacy (ELA) and math proficiency in school ratings.
- ✓ Incorporate an appropriate measure of student growth in ELA and math as an accountability indicator.
- ✓ Include achievement on state science assessments.
- ✓ Help English learners reach high academic standards.
- ✓ Include appropriate measures of high school graduation rates.
- ✓ Ensure that all groups of students remain visible by adopting the smallest feasible "n-size."

#### **Include a limited number of key additional indicators**

- ✓ Ensure that any school quality or student success indicator is linked to research into what will increase achievement and improve postsecondary success for New York students.

- ✓ Include college and career readiness as a new indicator of school quality or student success.
- ✓ Include chronic absenteeism and student discipline as new indicators of school quality or student success to encourage schools to maximize instructional time for students.
- ✓ Highlight other important measures, such as teacher equity and resource gaps, through needs assessments and school report cards.

#### **In implementing these recommendations, New York's accountability system should avoid the following important pitfalls:**

- ✗ Do not enact provisions that attempt to "water down" proficiency or graduation rates or that give schools "extra credit" in ways that hide achievement and opportunity gaps.
- ✗ Do not adopt too many accountability indicators.
- ✗ Do not adopt accountability indicators that are beyond the control of the school.
- ✗ Do not adopt accountability indicators that cannot be disaggregated or that cannot bear the weight of accountability.

## PRINCIPLE 2: Take action when schools are not meeting rigorous expectations for any group of students.

*New York's accountability system must set ambitious performance and gap-closing goals for all groups of students and implement evidence-based strategies when those goals are not met.*

- ✓ Set clear, ambitious, and achievable long-term goals and measurements of interim progress both for students overall and for every group of students.
- ✓ Expect immediate action when any group of students is struggling to meet the long-term goals and measurements of interim progress.
- ✓ Create an improvement process that sets schools on a path to success.
- ✓ Create a state-established list of approved evidence-based solutions when a school is not meeting expectations, and direct federal resources to support these strategies and encourage innovation.
- ✓ Establish exit criteria from comprehensive or targeted support and improvement based on whether schools are making significant, sustainable progress toward their long-term goals and measurements of interim progress.
- ✓ Ensure that the state provides sustained support for schools to maintain programs and services that led to successful improvements and the fulfillment of exit criteria.

## PRINCIPLE 3: To help schools improve, generate additional data beyond test scores in grades 3-8 and on Regents exams — including by addressing teacher equity and resource equity.

*New York's accountability system must incorporate a holistic vision of what contributes to student success and what it means to be a quality school in order to inform the improvement process for schools that are not meeting expectations.*

- ✓ Require that the state, school districts, and schools publicly report and act on measures of equitable access to strong educators, school funding, and other instructional resources (including early childhood programs and advanced high school coursework).
- ✓ Require an annual review of resource allocations — with actionable information for districts and the state — in each school district comprising significant numbers of schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement.
- ✓ Explore ways to generate additional data to inform schools' needs assessments and public reporting, including data relating to school climate and safety, student and educator engagement, and social and emotional learning.

## PRINCIPLE 4: Make families and educators full partners through transparency and inclusion.

*New York's accountability system must clearly communicate whether schools are meeting expectations for all groups of students and, on an ongoing basis, include families and educators in the development and improvement processes.*

- ✓ Establish a single rating for each school that describes the school's summative performance on the accountability indicators and clearly signals when any group of students is consistently underperforming.
  - ✓ Ensure that consistent underperformance of any subgroup is reflected in a school's summative rating.
  - ✓ Provide clear, timely, and thorough data to educators and the public on the performance of each subgroup on the school's accountability indicators.
  - ✓ Highlight schools that demonstrate high levels of achievement for all groups of students and successfully close achievement gaps.
  - ✓ Prioritize involving educators, parents, and community members in the development of the state accountability system.
  - ✓ Require meaningful engagement with families about improvement strategies and interventions when a school is not meeting expectations.
  - ✓ Take advantage of funding opportunities in ESSA to encourage independent parent voices and parent-led organizing.
  - ✓ Continue to enhance educator and parent confidence in standards and assessments.
  - ✓ Provide highly accessible, parent-friendly information.
- In implementing the above recommendations, New York's accountability system should avoid the following pitfalls:**
- ✗ Do not reduce transparency by replacing a summative school rating with a "dashboard."
  - ✗ Do not weaken accountability for meeting test participation rate requirements.