

# Next Generation Education Accountability

## Design Ideas from New England's Small-to-Midsized Urban School Districts

### Executive Summary

Can state **and** local educators take hold of this rare moment of transition, under the recently passed *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), and create a truly new approach to education accountability, one that accelerates opportunity and learning for all students?

To find out, MassINC assembled the Next Generation Accountability Learning Community (NGALC), a team of two dozen New England teachers, principals, superintendents, and state education agency officials, and asked these leaders to consider the opening ESSA provides from the vantage point of small-to-midsized urban districts. Throughout New England, this subset of communities serves a disproportionate share of high-need students with very limited resources. These cities are also home to most of the schools that have been designated as underperforming. As such, they present both a serious challenge and a prime opportunity for improvement.

In our five months of work together, we consulted national leaders on student achievement, social and emotional learning, college and career readiness, and accountability policy. We also conducted an extensive review of the research on education accountability. After close consultation with Learning Community members, the NGALC project staff have prepared this report.

The pages that follow lay out five "purposes" for accountability that states must first establish and clearly communicate as they review and revise their policies:

- 1) Promote equity;
- 2) Set high expectations;
- 3) Document outcomes;
- 4) Ensure transparency; and
- 5) Facilitate improvement through continuous learning.

To fulfill all of these important purposes, we support a mutual

accountability approach. It calls on states to set a high bar for student achievement, and work with districts to design next generation assessments to more clearly and deliberately measure and support improvement in teaching and learning. We challenge states to acknowledge the leadership and commitment of local school districts and engage them in accountability policymaking. And we challenge local districts to set priorities and develop specific accountability strategies that address them.

Moving toward mutual accountability will require that states and local school districts develop new approaches as they craft their ESSA implementation plan. We recommend that states and districts adopt four core design principles. If used together, they could usher in a genuinely new era of education accountability:

1. Distinguish between two critical areas of performance—student performance and school performance—placing equal emphasis on each. Make this distinction clear to students, educators, parents and the wider public.
2. Adopt additional measures of student access to and participation in activities that are essential to a well-rounded education and highly correlated with student success.
3. Offer incentives and support to help districts develop local accountability systems that foster collaboration, leverage resources, and encourage innovation.
4. Take a "learning" approach to accountability design, in order to build the capacity of schools, districts, and state agencies to improve over time.

Of these principles, the last—a focus on iteratively improving accountability practices—is perhaps the most important. In multiple states across the country, and right here in New England, educators are building systems that are designed to make schools and districts smarter, and to develop cultures of organizational learning and data-informed improvement in teaching and learning. These rigorous new experiments in accountability have the potential to address the twin challenge every accountability system faces: how to hold organizations accountable, while helping them improve.

Shaped with an eye toward small-to-midsize urban districts, these design principles should respond well to the needs of any district, urban or not. This is heartening, for it means states and districts can navigate toward this vision for next generation accountability with widespread support.

## I. Introduction

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) made a significant contribution to equity by ensuring that every school and district produces transparent evidence of student achievement, as measured by outcomes on a standards-referenced test. Thanks to NCLB and its implementation by the states, every community in the country can now produce evidence of student proficiency, identify students who require additional support, and map gaps in achievement by race, gender, age, and other key factors. Students, families, and educators have been the beneficiaries of these experiences.

But as we have discovered, it is tough to design a system that both passes judgment on people and institutions, and effectively helps those same people and organizations to do better. While many districts have been challenged to innovate, in part due to the calls-to-action that NCLB achievement gap data have rightly catalyzed, others have developed resentment and distrust of education accountability systems. ESSA offers a chance to reset the conversation and cultivate next generation accountability practices that can both hold schools accountable and foster and reinforce improvement.

Gaining greater buy-in from educators for next generation accountability systems is crucial because our changing economy increasingly demands that students graduate with a more advanced set of skills and dispositions. Creative new approaches are required to understand whether students are on track to gain all of these competencies.

As 2016 draws to a close, educators at all levels are trying to deepen their understanding of how ESSA can introduce positive change when it takes full effect. Assessing the act's potential contribution is difficult because it remains very much a work-in-progress. Federal administrators are rapidly crafting regulations that will govern the application of the new law, but state leaders will have significant autonomy to make different decisions, state to state, regarding their accountability systems. With a tight timeframe to get new systems in place, state education agencies are moving forward without the benefit of final federal regulations and lessons learned from other states, hurriedly preparing implementation plans for approval by their boards and submission to the US Department of Education in the spring of 2017.

Amid this bustle, it is paramount that we reflect deeply on the next generation accountability systems that ESSA and the states will bring to life in the coming years, and their likely effects, especially within small-to-midsize urban districts. In New England, the ultimate success of new approaches to education accountability will rest heavily on how well they address the needs of this particular set of communities.

To help policymakers consider ESSA implementation from the small-to-midsize city vantage point, MassINC brought together two dozen state and local educators with experience in these districts, from across New England. This report synthesizes takeaways from our engagement with these knowledgeable leaders. In the pages that follow, we lay out the rationale for designing state accountability systems with heightened sensitivity to small-to-midsize urban districts and explore the purposes of accountability that will provide a compass as we consider a fresh start. We then advance a set of design principles to maximize the opening ESSA provides for moving in new directions, both short-term and through iterative change in the near future.

## II. Why New England States Must Design Accountability Policy with Heightened Sensitivity for Small-to-Midsize Urban School Districts

State policymakers are obligated to design accountability systems that function effectively across their diverse range of school districts. However, there are at least three compelling arguments for giving additional consideration to how new accountability frameworks effect change in small-to-midsize urban districts:

### 1. Small-to-midsize urban districts serve large numbers of high-need students.

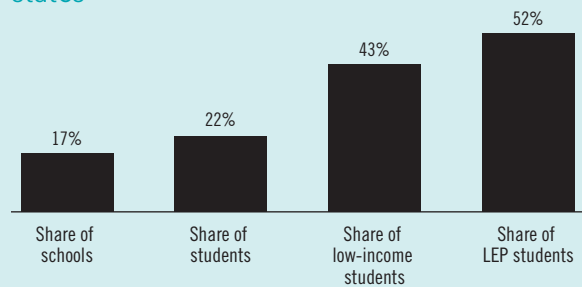
Throughout New England, small-to-midsize urban school districts educate substantial proportions of the region's low-income and limited English proficiency (LEP) students. The 44 New England districts that we identify as small-to-midsize urban enroll 22 percent of all students, but roughly twice as many low-income students and more than half of all LEP students (see graph at left).

Given the dramatic achievement gaps that persist and the original civil rights intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, state accountability policy must be tailored to maximize improvement for disadvantaged students attending schools in these small-to-midsize urban districts. At its core, an effective accountability system will ensure that these communities receive an equitable share of federal resources. But it must also anticipate other distributional considerations affected by the design of state accountability systems.

For instance, NCLB assessment research documents both the contribution to student learning made by excellent teaching, and the shortage of highly-skilled instructors in urban schools. There are indications that the accountability system itself can add to the uneven distribution of teachers. Research suggests NCLB accountability policy may have exacerbated the pervasive difficulty of retaining highly effective teachers in schools serving large concentrations of low-income students.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly problematic for small-to-midsize urban districts; unlike their big city or suburban counterparts, these communities often lack the resources and amenities to attract and retain talented and culturally-diverse teachers.

### Share of all schools, students, low-income students, and LEP students in small-to-midsize urban New England Districts

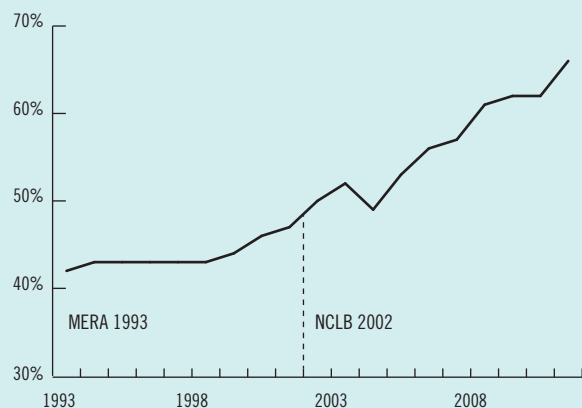
44 districts total, across six New England states



Note: For purposes of this graph, urban districts have more than 40 percent low-income students. To capture the differences between the northern and southern parts of the region, this analysis treats small-to-midsize districts in southern New England as having enrollments of between 5,000 and 25,000 students. Districts in northern New England with more than 3,000 students get this designation.

Source: State DOEs

## Share of students who are low-income in Massachusetts Gateway Cities



Source: MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

### 2. School accountability is crucial to the economics of small-to-midsized residential cities.

NCLB-era accountability systems have been criticized for "producing a list of zip codes." In other words, they tended to identify all of the low-income communities in a state as struggling, reinforcing the notion that inclusive urban schools are low-performing and to be avoided. A school's performance on standardized tests can influence home values in the surrounding community, especially when schools receive a "failing" label, a harsh negative consequence for fragile urban neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>

While value-added measures of student growth provide a more complete indicator of student achievement, documenting how inclusive urban schools actually perform, these measures have had little impact on perceptions about school performance. This is probably because the data—which can focus on statistical terms of art like "student growth percentiles"—are generally less accessible and more difficult to interpret.<sup>3</sup> States that have attempted to provide more complete performance data to parents through user-friendly school report cards have had varied success changing perceptions about actual school performance.<sup>4</sup>

Addressing this challenge is particularly important for small-to-midsized cities because they depend heavily on residential property to generate revenue, especially in comparison to major cities, which can draw on large commercial tax bases to fund schools and other municipal services that help meet the needs of low-income students and families.

While education agencies are often most concerned by how their decisions impact what goes on within the four walls of the school, they must recognize that the design of the accountability system has broader ramifications for communities and the lives of students and families. Education policymakers should be particularly attuned to these concerns, as the concentration of poverty in these communities has accelerated since the passage of NCLB (see figure at left).<sup>5</sup> To reverse this destabilizing trend, these primarily residential cities are heavily reliant on next generation accountability designs that accelerate school improvement and convincingly demonstrate school quality and effectiveness.

### 3. Small-to-midsized urban districts can serve as laboratories for innovation.

In part due to the attention that NCLB standards and assessment have focused on achievement gaps in small-to-midsized urban districts, many of these communities have been experimenting with new instructional models. Their smaller size can make them more nimble than larger systems, though their scale is large enough to offer multiple learning environments for family choice. This choice component usually creates easier innovation, as families not interested in new strategies can opt out. Further, despite lacking community resources on a par with their larger urban counterparts, small-to-midsized urban systems tend to have greater access to community partnerships and alliances than their suburban and rural peers. ESSA gives states and districts more power to collaboratively develop new approaches to accountability, assessment, and intervention. Under ESSA, states have a clear opportunity to develop accountability designs that capitalize on the ability of these communities and systems to serve as laboratories for innovation, developing effective new practices for broader dissemination.

### III. The Core Purposes of Accountability

Accountability has been discussed in so many different contexts since the development of NCLB that even educators have difficulty keeping the original intent of accountability policy in focus. With attention turning to ESSA, many are reflecting back on why we have accountability and what it can and cannot achieve.

Establishing consensus on the core purposes of accountability is critical. As states develop next generation accountability policies, they have an opportunity to reinforce the value of accountability in ways that resonate with educators and the general public. Members of the NGALC see five distinct purposes for accountability, none of which can be overlooked:

#### 1. Promote equity.

Protect the right of every student to engage in a quality educational experience and ensure the support and opportunity to succeed. Design accountability systems to provide well-rounded learning experiences, great teaching, and multiple opportunities and supports for students to experience success. Treat equity as the achievement of comparable goals, against agreed-upon standards, for all students. Recognize that equity is not simply about equal deployment of resources or opportunities; achieving proficiency for districts serving large concentrations of high-need students requires a diversity of commitments and resources, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

#### 2. Set high expectations. Affirm clear, rigorous goals for achievement that will allow students to succeed in college, career, and civic life.

Design accountability systems to ensure that "all" truly means *all across the full continuum* of competencies students will need to succeed in each of these domains.

#### 3. Document outcomes.

Generate widely-understood and accepted evidence of student, school, and district outcomes. Employ multiple measures in assessing student and school results, so as to avoid overreliance on any single measure and to give educators a wide array of data and insight. Focus on outcomes, measures, and methods that will produce results educators can use to improve teaching and school practices.

#### 4. Ensure transparency.

Inform parents, students, educators, key stakeholders, and

the public, thoughtfully balancing complexity with clarity. Transparency requires that data be frequent, useful, reliable and clearly presented. Ensure that people experience the data and reporting of accountability systems as trustworthy. Provide parents, educators, and the public with ready access to data and analysis, and simplify without distorting.

#### 5. Facilitate improvement through continuous learning.

Help educators, schools, and districts to understand student outcome and school diagnostic data that they can use to improve their practice. Align the data collection and reporting of accountability systems with the teaching and assessment cycles of districts and schools, so that accountability data is reliably put to use in planning for teaching and professional development. Position states and other stakeholders to effectively support these learning and improvement efforts.

### IV. Design Principles for Next Generation Accountability

With a very short timeframe to develop new policies, there is a good chance that the new accountability systems that states initially implement under ESSA will look and behave in ways that are quite similar to NCLB-era approaches. Yet these new systems will be subject to steady scrutiny and states will enjoy substantial freedom to continuously adapt and improve on them.

To advance in these directions, we offer four design principles that states can reasonably incorporate in their 2017 plan, and in which districts can engage both in their advocacy and in their educational practice.

#### 1. Distinguish between two critical areas of performance—student performance and school performance—placing equal emphasis on each. Make this distinction clear to students, educators, parents and the wider public.

*Student performance* measures pinpoint student achievement and help us understand a student's progress toward state standards. Many measures count as student performance: examples include an individual student's performance on a standardized test, or a student's demonstration of a competency to a panel of educators. Student performance measures can also be aggregated to describe how well a class, grade, or entire population of students

did on a test. When sorted by subgroups (i.e., English Language Learners, students with disabilities, or students of one race or ethnicity or another), student performance data can reveal gaps between and among diverse populations of students.

### Illinois At-a-Glance Reports

While no state has developed the perfect model for providing parents with a rich portrait of student learning, Illinois' At-a-Glance Report is the reigning leader. The report gives parents an understanding of each school's academic, career development, physical education and athletic offerings. In addition to providing information on per-pupil resources and teacher and principal turnover, the report includes measures of post-secondary success and results from school climate surveys. These reports are free of jargon and technical terms. Data are presented in a clear format that is accessible to the general public.

### Creating Opportunities to Innovate

Many districts and states may seek alternatives to the core design of ESSA. In fact, ESSA provides for USDE to create an accountability pilot program that can admit up to seven states into an alternative system, within which they will be afforded flexibilities and options not permitted other states. But outside of this competitive process, states cannot independently create alternative programs and exempt districts from ESSA rules. While states could invite districts to voluntarily participate in two statewide accountability systems—the ESSA system and a separate, state innovation system—this option seems burdensome and unlikely to be chosen by busy districts. One idea for states to explore is the creation of a single statewide system which builds in the opportunity for districts to experiment, by augmenting core state accountability requirements with new, innovative approaches. These could be generated by districts, and encouraged and studied by the state.

These measures can be used to craft plans to close gaps. They can also reveal trends across diverse populations, which in turn can inform larger funding and resource allocations at the state and federal levels. However, student performance measures do not provide an unfiltered view of school performance. Since low-income students typically have access to fewer family and community resources, student performance in high-poverty schools tends to reflect the socioeconomic status of the student population.

*School performance* measures, by contrast, tell us how a school, as a unit, stacks up against its own past performance, and as contrasted with the performance of other schools, in advancing student learning. Student growth measures assess how well each student is doing, not in comparison to her classmates, but in comparison to her academic peers, elsewhere in the district or state. One common measure, the student growth percentile, assesses how well a student did when compared to the performance of all other students who had a similar academic profile in the prior year. The resultant percentile score helps educators understand the student's achievement as a function of her experience in that school or classroom. While currently in use in many states, growth measures have chiefly been applied to standardized tests; in the future, it will be of potentially great value to apply growth analysis to a more comprehensive set of measures, including attendance, discipline, graduation, engagement, or other vital student outcome measures.

By highlighting the effects of a school and its programs on student outcomes, growth measures give us an inherently more accurate and balanced view of school performance. Every child deserves access to opportunities to learn and the experience of being held to high standards. And every school community—students, parents, and educators—deserves to know how well or poorly it has performed its core task. There can be no tolerance for low expectations, but neither can there be a willingness to label as failing or deficient those schools that are significantly accelerating the learning of high-need students, even if some students are not yet proficient.

Accurately differentiating between school performance and student performance, and making the difference between them clear to all parties is a task many states and districts have not yet accomplished. Distinguishing performance



across these two critical dimensions will give schools a better sense of where they stand, independent of demographics, and it is likely to increase stakeholder buy-in, and encourage those who need to improve to take action.

## **2. Adopt additional measures of student access to and participation in activities that are essential to a well-rounded education and highly correlated with student success.**

One of the rising efforts in accountability systems across the country is documenting student access to and participation in learning opportunities such as enrichment offerings, advanced coursework, vocational training, and career development activities, among many others. Beyond the measures appropriate for inclusion in the formal accountability system, Illinois and several other states provide additional data on their school accountability "report cards," offering the public a more complete view of learning opportunities that are highly correlated with student success.

Providing information regarding student exposure to and participation in such activities can:

- Draw attention to opportunity gaps in small-to-midsize cities;
- Highlight and affirm to students, families, and educators that such programming is valued and regarded as educationally consequential;
- Create incentives for educators, schools, and districts to seek tools and resources to increase access and participation to such opportunities, over time; and
- Encourage state and local governments and private philanthropy to identify funding to close gaps.

If done well, documentation of student access and participation rates within schools and districts in such learning, enrichment, and career development opportunities has the potential to do what NCLB's rigorous academic achievement reporting undeniably did: make plain the differences in the experiences of students, between one school or system and another.

Schools or districts reporting on measures of student access to enrichment and learning opportunities could offer the chance for new kinds of benchmarking, which could be of use both to the schools/districts recording the data, and to educators in other locations seeking to learn from the example and experience of others who are improving their

outcomes. In those cases where school performance is high or progress on student achievement is marked, reports and benchmarks of this nature may also prove useful to districts and states as they try to identify and learn from successes achieved by schools that have taken an unusual path.

Tracking such student access and opportunity measures may not directly yield evidence of improved student performance. However, if districts or schools track student access to resources which are highly correlated with enhanced achievement and student growth, they document student experiences, demonstrate institutional commitment to student opportunity, and change the student and parent experience and perception of the school or district.

### **Evidence of Impact: The Power of Engaging Local Educators in Local Accountability**

Recent research and field work in improvement science highlights the role of a data-friendly, learning culture in effective organizations. As states and districts design accountability systems, they would be wise to build on this compelling research about how organizations learn by encouraging innovation through local accountability systems and engaging teachers in the development and continuous improvement of accountability policy. Among the many insights from this research:

- Measurement is best used for learning rather than for selection, reward, or punishment.<sup>6</sup>
- Improvement results when individuals and teams fail in order to learn. Learning as a team requires ambitious goals, experimentation, and "intelligent" failure, which leads to new knowledge when followed by data analysis, unflinching inquiry, and ongoing experimentation.<sup>7</sup>
- Learning in teams requires "psychological safety"—when a school or organization is psychologically safe, people say what they think; disagreement is common and encouraged; and acknowledging what one does not know is a sign of curiosity, leadership, and readiness to learn.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Offer incentives and support to help districts develop local accountability systems that foster collaboration, leverage resources, and encourage innovation.**

Some of the goals we have for deploying data to improve instruction and student outcomes are best left to local accountability systems, especially in smaller, inclusive urban districts responding to a wider array of student needs. States can overcome the problem of "what gets measured is what gets done" by creating incentives for districts to develop additional, locally-determined measures and rewarding them for improving outcomes in these areas.

States can do this in diverse ways. One approach might be to create incentives through grant programs. For example, states could prioritize early-college and dual-enrollment funding to districts that include post-secondary completion rates in their local accountability system. Similarly, early learning grants could go to districts that make kindergarten readiness a local accountability measure. Used in this way, local accountability models could help move communities toward stronger governance and shared responsibility across early education, K-12, and higher education systems.

Fostering local accountability initiatives also provides important avenues for under-resourced districts to form collaborative partnerships, so as to overcome their limited capacity to purchase additional support. For instance,

working with philanthropic partners and other institutions, states can develop incentives for multi-district partnerships to leverage resources for the development of innovative forms of assessment across communities.

Evidence suggests small-to-midsize urban districts are eager to leverage their capacity by entering into cross-district partnerships. The recently formed Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Educational Assessment (see box below) is an example of a network of small-to-midsize urban districts working together to develop innovative approaches to gauging student learning and documenting success on locally-defined measures.

### **4. Take a "learning" approach to accountability design, building the capacity of schools, districts, and state agencies to improve over time.**

States are still adjusting to the increase in autonomy ESSA provides. While they are under intense pressure to comply with the law's quick implementation timeframe, in the future they will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, and to make use of their increased leeway to foster changes that could accelerate student learning and success.

States have the power to initiate and develop policy that responds to local needs, they have the chance to seek the active engagement of districts in this creative process,

#### **Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA)**

MCIEA seeks to build a student, school, and district assessment system that focuses both on accountability and improvement. MCIEA leaders believe the use of multiple measures will help them make credible determinations of student progress and school quality, while also helping improve local instruction and assessment practice. They seek ways for students to demonstrate what they know and can do through real-world application and performance on teacher-generated, curriculum-embedded, standards-based tasks. Teachers will be directly involved in designing standards-based performance tasks and assessing student work, the public will identify what it most wants to know about students and schools, and multiple measures will provide a more robust picture of student and school progress.

Based on multiple focus groups with parents and others, MCIEA's initial areas of accountability data collection will be Teachers and the Teaching Environment, School Culture, Resources, Indicators of Academic Learning, and Character & Wellbeing Outcomes. The resultant portraits of schools and districts will provide a more nuanced and richer picture of participating schools.

Launched in 2016 with both public and private funding, MCIEA is practitioner-driven. The governing board is comprised of superintendents and union presidents from the eight participating districts. MCIEA is led by the Center for Collaborative Education.



and they have the opportunity to improve on new systems continuously, since they now possess a higher degree of responsibility and discretion over accountability design. The best way to protect these three advantages is to recognize them now, and to embrace a deliberate and strategic approach to continuous learning, periodic reinvention and improvement on existing models, and a long-term commitment to iterative change and growth that is responsive to the experiences and insights of districts and educators.

One strategy to advance this approach might be to build periodic sunset provisions into new or experimental elements of any new state accountability system. States might adopt a deliberately experimental component to some areas of accountability work in ways that leverage ESSA's provision for alternative approaches.

Taking a long-term, learning approach also calls for building local capacity to partner with the state to improve accountability policy. In New Hampshire, the PACE districts (see box right) are part of a state education agency-initiated effort to create a new state assessment and accountability system with common and local performance assessments as the primary means to make determinations of student proficiency. This model epitomizes how states can both build trust with local educators and engage them as true partners, working together to improve assessment and accountability practice.

Both the PACE effort and the MCIEA are seeking to foster "cultures of improvement" that can supplement the use of standardized testing, and can generate a new body of data that has the potential to positively influence teaching practices. They are working to create learning communities and exchanges at both state and district levels, out of a deep belief that this is what teachers need in their classrooms and their school teams if continuous improvement is to become the norm. Each project envisions teams of teachers—at grade levels/departments, at the school level, at the district level, and across districts—creating and using a diversity of locally-developed measures, policies and practices that can supplement equity-focused standardized testing.

Other researchers refer to this kind of data-driven improvement culture within organizations as fostering a climate of "positive deviance"—the practice of straying off the beaten path in order to make discoveries and attain new

### New Hampshire's Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE)

During the 2014-2015 school year, New Hampshire piloted the Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) program. PACE is a locally developed and administered testing program integrated into students' everyday learning experiences. Students in the PACE system now take standard assessments only three times (once in elementary school, once in middle school, and once in high school). In lieu of standardized tests in the off years, PACE schools administer high-quality performance assessments, calibrated to provide reliable results across districts.

The PACE system has been co-developed with local educators. This participatory process, initiated by the state education agency, was designed to engage and support teachers, drawing heavily on network theory. In addition to face-to-face workshops, the state has used online tools to engage educators and provide personalized professional development to learn about designing and assessing performance-based assessments and instructional strategies to help students build the higher-order skills these assessments seek to detect.

Early evaluations have found that working across districts has been key to the effort, citing noticeable improvements in teaching and learning. The cross-district collaboration led to higher quality tasks than would be the case if districts were working on their own.<sup>9</sup>

levels of success which would otherwise be out of reach. As illustrated in the table on Page 10, data are the lifeblood of any positive deviant.

While ESSA by no means guarantees a great leap toward a stronger improvement culture or the enlargement of subjects studied and data collected, it takes a positive step in that direction. The new law explicitly calls for the development of new measures of learning, innovation in assessment, and greater state and local flexibility. Using the purposes and design principles presented here, educators at every level can kindle the energy for innovation and continuous improvement that will be needed to fashion powerful new approaches that help systems improve.

### A comparison of approaches to the use of accountability data

Normal	Positively Deviant
Compliance-driven	Curiosity-driven
Data-resistant; dreading the data	Data-hungry; anticipating our data
Evaluate (meaning focused on individual contributions, success and failures, with an eye forward rating)	Developmental (focused on shared successes and failures with an eye on improvement and increased capacity)
Masking/obscuring data and evidence; treating data as a burden	Embracing all data; putting data at center; treating data as friend
Using data as a threat or club	Using data as a flashlight, to illuminate

## IV. Closing Thoughts

The five purposes and four design principles put forward here are rooted in the knowledge and experience of many educators and leaders. They also align with the experiences and potential of the small-to-midsize districts that have been our focus. We have come to understand that these purposes and principles can apply to any school, district, or state, as it contemplates how best to live up to its accountability responsibilities. This commonality across all districts is a strength: if what works for small-to-midsize urban districts will work for all schools and systems, we face fewer political impediments to achieving these purpose and design objectives.

The members of the Next Generation Accountability Learning Community, in their tireless work on this project, have embodied the curiosity, love of students, and passion for equity that is at the core of the country's best efforts in urban public education. We thank these New England educators. To the extent that the ideas and approaches outlined here prove useful to other educators, and to policymakers, it will be because of their generous leadership and incisive analysis.

To learn more, readers are strongly encouraged to visit our website, [www.massinc.org/ngalc](http://www.massinc.org/ngalc), where you will find all of the expert presentations to the learning community. We invite you to join us in the ongoing dialogue as we work collaboratively to advance accountability policies, models, and practices that can support, challenge, and enhance the capacity of small-to-midsize urban districts across New England and the nation.

## Endnotes

- 1 Li Feng and others. "School Accountability and Teacher Mobility." Working Paper 16070. (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010).
- 2 Alexander Bogin and Phuong Nguyen-Hoang. "Property Left Behind: An Unintended Consequence of a No Child Left Behind 'Failing' School Designation." *Journal of Regional Science* 54.5 (2014).
- 3 Scott Imberman and Michael Lovenheim. "Does the Market Value Value-Added? Evidence from Housing Prices After a Public Release of School and Teacher Value-Added." *Journal of Urban Economics* 91 (2016).
- 4 Rebecca Jacobsen and others. "Informing or Shaping Public Opinion? The Influence of School Accountability Data Format on Public Perceptions of School Quality." *American Journal of Education* 121.1 (2014).
- 5 Thirty-seven percent of public school students in Massachusetts are low-income. Since 2002, the share of students who are low-income grew by roughly 50 percent in all Massachusetts schools. Boston saw a slight decline in low-income enrollment over this period. In contrast, Gateway Cities experienced a sharp rise: 42 percent of students were low-income in 2002; in 2014, fully two-thirds of students in Gateway City school districts were low-income.
- 6 Amy Edmondson. *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012).
- 7 Donald Berwick. "A Primer on Leading the Improvement of Systems." *British Medical Journal* 312 (7031): 619–22, 1996; Donald Berwick. "The Science of Improvement." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 299(10); Edmondson (2012).
- 8 Edmondson (2012).
- 9 See: Chris Sturgis. "Reaching the Tipping Point: Insights on Advancing Competency Education in New England." (Vienna, VA: iNACOL, 2016).

## **ABOUT MASSINC**

The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC) is a rigorously non-partisan think tank and civic organization. We focus on putting the American Dream within the reach of everyone in Massachusetts using three distinct tools—research, journalism, and civic engagement. Our work is characterized by accurate data, careful analysis, and unbiased conclusions.

## **ABOUT THE GATEWAY CITIES INNOVATION INSTITUTE**

The Gateway Cities Innovation Institute works to unlock the economic potential of small to mid-size regional cities. Leveraging MassINC's research, polling, and policy team, the Institute strengthens connections across communities and helps Gateway City leaders develop and advance a shared policy agenda.

## **ABOUT THE NGALC**

NGALC helps state and district leaders in New England leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to advance the success of students in small-to-midsized urban school districts. NGALC has three goals:

- Focus accountability policy and public attention on both the challenges facing small-to-mid-size urban districts and their potential leadership as innovators;
- Deepen participants' knowledge of emerging federal accountability policies and options in ESSA, and increase their capacity to implement needed improvements; and
- Equip leaders, within the learning community and beyond, to develop, influence, and support accountability innovations—in policy and practice—that lead to improved student outcomes.

NGALC focuses on small-to-midsized urban schools and districts because they serve a significant fraction of the region's high-needs students, face great challenges in raising student achievement and striving for equity, and are often in a position to leverage innovation to advance student and school performance.

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PREPARED BY

Andrew Bundy, Partner, Community Matters  
Ben Forman, Research Director, MassINC

WITH ASSISTANCE FROM

Karla Baehr, Consultant  
Lainy Fersh, Partner, Community Matters  
Ryan Reyna, Ryan Reyna Consulting  
Alexia Lipman, Intern, MassINC  
Nick Monroe, Research Associate, Community Matters

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11 Beacon Street, Suite 500  
Boston, MA 02108  
bforman@massinc.org