



# MEASURING STUDENT SUCCESS

## Innovative Approaches to Understanding Diverse Learners

The old management cliché “what gets measured gets done” applies to education as it does to other fields. Originally, this saying was intended to highlight the value of measuring progress as a way to ensure that projects proceed as planned—just as teachers define intermediate benchmarks and evaluate student progress to guide daily learning in pursuit of long-term goals. Yet this statement can also be read in another way: elements of success that can be measured easily tend to receive more care and attention than elements that are difficult to capture through traditional measurement processes. In this way, what “gets measured”—that is, what can be interpreted through well-understood methods of documenting progress—receives the time and resources to make sure it “gets done.” Meanwhile, outcomes that are more difficult to capture through existing measurement systems struggle to be seen as equal priorities, even when they are equally fundamental for driving long-term success.

Defining and measuring success are not merely process steps, but critical conversations that shape how education is understood and delivered. They influence how individuals within and outside the system perceive the goals of education. They shape the incentives for stakeholders seeking to improve educational outcomes. Methods of measuring success grounded in academic assessments generate student outcomes that can ignore real, meaningful differences in students’ abilities, interests, and goals. This year’s Condition of Education Action Guide highlights methods of measuring student progress beyond traditional academic assessments, expanding the definition of success in order to support—and celebrate—the aspirations and achievements of all learners. The following executive summary outlines 1) important advancements in the collection and use of student data, and 2) innovative approaches to measuring student progress, along with examples of those approaches in action.

### Collecting & Sharing Data

The examples of innovative practice in the 2020 Action Guide, highlighted on the next page, demonstrate that district- and state-level leadership can prompt new methods of measuring student success. State and district leaders have also produced important advancements in the collection and use of student data, particularly data from novel sources. Each of these methods has the potential to impact policy debates in the coming years.

#### District practices: Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment

The Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment comprises eight school districts interested in rethinking how student learning and school quality are measured. The consortium has a two-pronged approach: 1) teachers learn how to develop, use, and share high-quality performance assessments, and 2) a five-part school quality framework brings together academic results, surveys, school administrative data, and other sources of information to provide a fuller picture of students’ experiences at school. MCIEA helps participating districts learn and value new ways of measuring student progress, while focusing greater public attention on the factors that affect school quality and student success.

#### State practices: Data alignment across education systems

The Commonwealth has taken a number of steps to promote vertical alignment of data across early education and care, elementary and secondary education, higher education, and beyond. For young learners, state leaders have been developing a system to track data across state-funded programs serving children from birth to age five; they have also created a survey to capture local data on students’ experiences prior to kindergarten. At the other end of the education pipeline, the Performance Measurement Reporting System examines whether institutions of higher education are promoting degree attainment in high-demand fields, among other critical workforce indicators, and uses an equity lens to examine disparities across student sub-groups.

### DATA DASHBOARD

The Rennie Center’s Data Dashboard ([renniecenter.org/data](http://renniecenter.org/data)) provides an overview of school performance by compiling state-level indicators that illuminate areas of success and areas for continued improvement. Data Dashboard users can monitor general trends in the data over time and disaggregate results based on a range of student characteristics (e.g., race and English Learner status). Recognizing the need to focus on factors beyond academics, the Rennie Center has added several new indicators this year that highlight a broader range of students’ experiences and opportunities. Another new addition this year is a data resource guide, which offers links to a number of district- and community-level data sources and highlights sample indicators that can help uncover useful information about local students, educators, and resources.

## SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD

How can education systems examine the vital non-academic factors that contribute to students' long-term success, including physical and mental health?

Taking a whole child approach to assessment is critical for two reasons: 1) educators have the opportunity to see students participate in a range of social and academic experiences, offering important insights into how best to support those students' healthy development; and 2) non-academic factors like mental health, social-emotional development, and trauma can impact students' ability to learn and demonstrate what they have learned, which means that schools need to be aware of these factors as they look to evaluate student learning.

Factors to consider in measuring success with a whole-child lens:

- Use multi-tiered supports and universal screening to identify and address students' needs;
- Prepare and equip staff with appropriate skills to implement, monitor, and interpret non-academic results; and
- Engage students, parents, and community partners to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences outside of school.

### PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

#### Methuen Public Schools

Methuen Public Schools is a state leader in designing programming and services to facilitate understanding of the whole child. Over the past few years, the district has developed and refined its approach to screening for depression and anxiety among students. The model relies on broad preventive screening coupled with intensive support and interventions for students identified with moderate to severe depression or anxiety. The results of this effort have demonstrated that Methuen's mental health evaluation and service model is not only preventing crisis situations in schools and strengthening the school mental health infrastructure, but also leading to broader improvement in student behavior, engagement, and academic outcomes.

*To learn more about Methuen Public Schools, see pages 8-9.*

## SERVING ALL STUDENTS

How can education systems identify assessment practices that reveal useful and relevant information about all students, regardless of their cultural or educational background or their current level of proficiency?

Students enter the classroom with different skill sets, benefit from different instructional methods, and have different goals and interests once they leave school. Therefore, there needs to be a way to measure how well students are building the knowledge and competencies they need to succeed. Practitioners should consider how to apply innovative assessment practices in order to understand students as individuals.

Factors to consider in measuring success for all students:

- Integrate multiple means of assessing student learning within daily pedagogy;
- Support assessment models that integrate culturally and linguistically sustaining practices; and
- Bring students into the process of co-designing assessments and measuring/understanding their own learning.

### PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

#### Natick & Newton Public Schools

In Natick and Newton, assessments are not viewed merely as a way for educators to evaluate student learning. Instead, they are tools for students to understand themselves and set a vision for their future. By engaging students in a participatory assessment process, both districts are gaining important knowledge about each student as an individual and preparing graduates to advocate for themselves and their interests.

With input from students, families, and community members, Natick Public Schools developed a "profile of a graduate" that articulates the core elements that graduates should know and be able to do. Natick also developed a system of annual self-reflections and assessments aligned with this profile that all high school students use to gauge their abilities, interests, and future plans. Newton Public Schools, meanwhile, has built a robust approach to transition planning for students with disabilities. Students assemble a portfolio of assessments that document their personal strengths and needs. Throughout the process, they have the chance to share their perspective on which assessments worked for them and what they learned, building self-knowledge and helping define their own progress.

*To learn more about Natick and Newton Public Schools, see pages 12-13.*

## BUILDING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE & CAREER

How can education systems include practices and measurement strategies that promote opportunities for students to understand multiple career pathways and the education and training requirements associated with them?

A school system that supports multiple pathways allows students to choose from a variety of courses, programs, and learning opportunities that prepare students to progress beyond high school toward a goal aligned with their aptitudes and interests. Effective methods of assessment can help students demonstrate the competencies they will need to access and advance in college or a career.

Factors to consider in measuring success across multiple pathways:

- Leverage community partnerships and other sources of information to understand what students know and can do, both inside and outside the classroom;
- Understand and identify student aptitudes and how these can support thoughtful and effective planning regarding postsecondary pathways;
- Ensure students develop transferrable skills and competencies to support success in college and career.

### PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

#### Vermont Agency of Education

Students in Vermont have many choices when it comes to how they will complete their high school experience and transition to a college or career pathway. Under Vermont's Flexible Pathways Initiative, school districts create a menu of options for students: dual enrollment, early college, work-based learning, virtual and blended learning, a state-developed High School Completion Program, and career and technical education. In keeping with the proliferation of options, the state has also built into its accountability system two indicators that recognize the value in a variety of pathways. The first examines whether high school graduates received a passing score on one of eight college and career readiness assessments. The second looks at whether students are participating in college or career programming within 16 months after graduation. Tracking this data requires an investment in infrastructure and staff support, but it enables a broader understanding of school—and student—success.

*To learn more about Vermont, see pages 16-17.*