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CORE Districts Introduce New School Quality Improvement Index

Index uses multiple measures, includes nation's first use of social and emotional learning indicators in school district educational accountability systems

Providing an important new example for education leaders and policy makers working to develop and strengthen educational accountability systems, CORE Districts today introduced its new School Quality Improvement Index at the California School Boards Association conference in San Diego.

The Index uses a new system of multiple measures to provide schools and teachers with more and better information to improve student learning. In addition to academic achievement, the Index includes a first in nation use of Social, Emotional Learning and School Climate indicators. The Index also makes more students visible by including results for any student group with 20 or more students.

“Our new School Quality Index offers schools a flashlight, not a hammer said Mike Hanson, Superintendent of Fresno Unified School Districts and chair of the CORE Districts board of directors. “The school districts participating in the development and use of the Index have chosen to shine a brighter, wider light on the needs of all students and on their own educational strategies and practices to improve student learning and achievement. They are not seeking to avoid accountability, but rather to create a better, more comprehensive system to inform and guide the efforts of schools to improve learning opportunities for students.”

The first year Index findings provide a baseline of information about both academics and newly designed measurements of social and emotional learning. Academic information accounts for 60 percent of the Index and includes measurements of English Language Arts and Mathematics learning, graduation rates (four-five and six year cohorts) and High School Readiness Rates of 8th Graders. The Social-Emotional & Culture-Climate indicators are weighted at 40 percent of the index and currently include measurements of chronic absenteeism, suspension/ expulsion rates, and English Learner re-designation rates. In 2016 the Index will measure growth in academic achievement and the social/emotional–culture climate elements will expand to include student, family and staff surveys as well as indicators of Social-Emotional Skills. The Index was developed by educators working in collaboration across school districts in CORE with input from academic experts in educational



accountability systems at Harvard, Stanford and other institutions. All Indicators for the index are intended to be measurable, actionable and meaningful.

“We have known for a long time that academic performance is one of many factors that make a great school, but CORE districts are now serving as a model for how we can actually measure these factors and look more holistically at school outcomes,” said Ramon Cortines, Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District. “Working together, educators have created an Index that captures more information that matters, and it has great potential to help schools and districts meet the needs of our students.

School districts participating in CORE are reviewing the preliminary data from the index and preparing to share the findings with their schools, as well as with parents and others in their school communities. CORE Districts will publicly release school-level reports for the initial version of the School Quality Improvement Index (2014-15 data) in early February. School reports will be made accessible to the public on the CORE Districts website. A comprehensive research file with all of the publicly reported data from the school reports in a downloadable data file will also be provided by CORE Districts, consistent with state practice around the release of school accountability data.

In introducing the new School Quality Improvement Index, CORE Districts today released several examples of CORE wide findings from the Index data. By considering both academic and social emotional/culture-climate factors the Index offers a more holistic and actionable picture of schools. The initial findings show that schools with strong social-emotional /culture-climate performance tend to have stronger academic performance, but also indicate that schools with similar levels of academic performance can have markedly different results when it comes to the non-academic factors. The examples also show how Index data can be used to identify schools that are beating the odds with high poverty populations that can be models for other schools, as well as to identify schools that may be struggling. The findings also confirm continuing and substantive gaps in performance among student groups.

“This kind of information provides actionable places for school leaders and communities to focus their improvement work, said Richard Carranza, Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District. The Index helps us to learn from schools that are succeeding, as well as to better understand both academic and culture-climate and social-emotional factors among schools that may be in need of intervention and support.”

The School Quality Improvement Index is a key element of the CORE Districts School Accountability system developed by educators as part of a federal waiver replacing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability rules. It is the nation’s largest demonstration of multiple local education agencies developing and implementing a system to measure school quality using multiple measures in a holistic approach. Individual schools and Districts will be able to use information from the Index to examine the needs of their students and consider ways to better meet their needs. They will also be able to consider findings about other schools, and use that information in collaborative efforts to strengthen teaching and learning.

In subsequent years, additional data will provide important insights into schools that are excelling and the strategies they are using, as well as help to identify schools in need of additional support.

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About CORE

CORE Districts is a nonprofit organization working to improve student achievement through highly productive, meaningful collaboration and learning between member school districts. Currently, nine school districts, serving more than 1 million students, participate in the collaborative including Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger and Santa Ana Unified. Together these districts, share a fundamental belief that all students can achieve at high levels and are deeply committed to providing learning opportunities that will help them to do so.

