

Q&A ABOUT AN INNOVATION ZONE FOR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

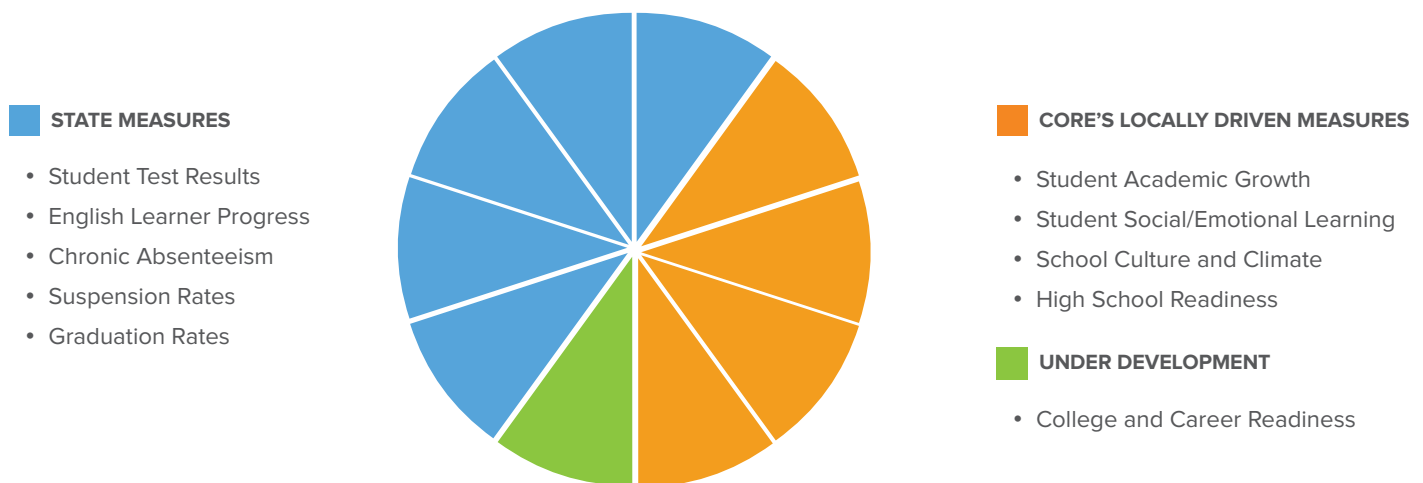
Q: *What is the proposed Innovation Zone for School Accountability?*

A: The CORE Districts have created a shared school improvement and accountability system that focuses on traditional measures of school improvement, such as test scores as well as nonacademic measures including student academic growth, high school readiness, student social-emotional learning and school culture and climate. The CORE Districts are proposing that California use the federal Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) waiver provision to establish an Innovation Zone within the state's accountability plan. This Innovation Zone would allow local districts to identify low-performing schools by taking into account the state's accountability measures, plus the tested, locally driven measures used in the CORE system. The Innovation Zone would provide an opportunity to learn more about local improvement strategies before bringing them to scale across the entire state.

Q: *How would the Innovation Zone for School Accountability work?*

A: All school districts in the state would collect and report on the state measures (blue in the graph below). In addition, districts in the Innovation Zone would also collect, report on and be held accountable by the state and federal government for locally driven measures that have been vetted in the CORE Districts, including student academic growth, high school readiness, student social-emotional learning and school culture climate (gold in the graph below).

THE CORE DISTRICTS' SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM INCLUDES



Any school district that voluntarily agrees to share its data within the CORE Districts' accountability and improvement data system could be part of the Innovation Zone. (Currently more than 800,000 non-CORE rural, suburban and urban school students are in the data system.)

Q: *How will the Innovative Zone for School Accountability benefit California's schools and students?*

A: The Innovative Zone allows educators and policymakers to learn more about local strategies for improving student outcomes and school performance before bringing new accountability measures to scale across the entire state.

Q: *Is this the first Innovation Zone for School Accountability in California?*

A: Not really. To better judge school performance during the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, the CORE Districts were granted a federal waiver to establish their own school improvement and accountability system. The system is still being used today because it emphasizes student equity and access by focusing on traditional improvement measures, such as test scores as well as nonacademic measures, including student academic growth, high school readiness, student social-emotional learning and school culture and climate.

Q: *Is new legislation required to establish an Innovation Zone for School Accountability?*

A: No. California's school funding and accountability laws already emphasize local innovation. Plus, the ESSA gives states substantial authority for waivers to design accountability systems that best advance positive education change. With this waiver authority, California has broad discretion to establish an Innovation Zone within the state's accountability plan that will be submitted to the federal government in fall 2017.



THE CORE DISTRICTS

8 of California's largest districts

1 million students

56,700 educators

1,800 schools

The Innovative Zone allows educators and policymakers to learn more about local strategies for

IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

before bringing new accountability measures to scale across the entire state.

Q: *How many school districts would be included in the Innovation Zone for School Accountability?*

A: The state should consider inviting any local education agency that voluntarily agrees to share its data within the CORE Districts' established school improvement and accountability system to be part of the Innovation Zone. (Currently more than 50 urban, rural and suburban school districts are sharing data in the CORE network.)

Q: *How would schools in the Innovation Zone for School Accountability be identified for technical assistance?*

A: The process is simple. The state would use its five accountability measures/methodology to determine a specific number of schools identified for technical assistance within each Innovation Zone district. Then each Innovation Zone district would mirror the state's methodology and add specific weight(s) for the locally developed indicators (that is, student academic growth, high school readiness, student social-emotional learning and school culture climate) to identify the same number of schools. Using both state and local measures to identify the lowest-performing schools will allow California to distinguish between schools that are on the road to improvement and those that are not and to ensure California's limited resources are directed to schools where students are the furthest behind. Meanwhile, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), in partnership with the CORE Districts, will study results and use quantitative and qualitative research to inform the state as to whether using these additional locally developed measures better identifies schools most in need of assistance.

Q: *How will the Innovation Zone for School Accountability help districts focus on schools that need the most assistance?*

A: State and federal resources for technical assistance are limited, and they should be aimed at schools where data clearly shows a lack of progress among students. One way to think about how this work is by considering data available about student academic growth across the CORE Districts. The CORE Districts developed this academic growth measure to help pinpoint schools where student outcomes are improving and where they are lagging in math and English. In math, for example, among the 1,107 elementary and middle schools in the CORE Districts, 332 schools serve students showing very low academic growth in math, and 342 schools serve students showing very high growth in math. Through the additional data collected within the Innovation Zone, districts will be able to pinpoint the schools most in need of support.

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PINPOINT THE SCHOOLS MOST IN NEED OF SUPPORT.

Q: *Does the federal law allow this?*

A: Yes. Under ESSA, as compared to NCLB, states have greater authority to design accountability systems that best advance positive education change in each state's context. In addition, ESSA also includes a waiver provision that gives states authority to pursue innovative ideas beyond statutory requirements to further improve student outcomes. This waiver request is consistent with California's strong support for local control and continuous improvement.

Q: *Is the Innovation Zone for School Accountability concept unique to California?*

A: Several states have created Innovation Zones under state law, and several are considering them under ESSA. For example, New Hampshire's Innovation Zone allows participating school districts to give fewer standardized tests to students, and Kentucky's Innovation Zone emphasizes capacity building for teachers and administrators. Also, superintendents in Louisiana are proposing an Innovation Zone to allow school districts to choose their own measures of school quality and to use the SAT or ACT instead of state standardized tests. With its focus on local control and accountability for public schools, California is well-positioned to establish an Innovation Zone under ESSA that benefits local schools, educators and students.