

**BEST PRACTICES TO ACCELERATE  
STUDENT LEARNING SERIES**



**SELECTING MEANINGFUL  
MEASURES ACCOUNTABILITY  
TOOLKIT**



**NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR  
PUBLIC  
CHARTER  
SCHOOLS**



## SELECTING MEANINGFUL MEASURES ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLKIT

As schools and students recover from the pandemic, education sector leaders recognize that it will take years for most students to recover from lost instructional time<sup>1</sup> and that schools need to provide additional supports to accelerate learning.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to monitor school progress in helping students with pandemic recovery. Additional measures are needed in the aftermath of COVID-19 to provide a more complete view of school quality, allowing schools to implement earlier intervention and support, to identify any barriers to learning, and to inform charter renewal decisions.<sup>3</sup> The additional measures also provide a way for schools to better track and monitor if programs in areas such as student and family engagement are effective.<sup>4</sup>

Authorizers and schools must balance the need to collect additional data with the recognition that many school staff are already at or over capacity. As data collection takes time and resources, schools should only collect meaningful data that will be used.

This toolkit will provide resources to help schools and authorizers review what is already being collected so that they can identify potential gaps, then fill those gaps with meaningful measures.

For each indicator authorizers are incorporating into performance frameworks, we include:

- A list of questions to consider as part of the selection process for individual measures
- Links to additional tools

This toolkit provides an overview of newer indicators such as school climate and social and emotional competencies. However, the toolkit is not exhaustive.

As authorizers and schools use the toolkit, other indicators and measures may be important to collect. For example, authorizers or schools may be interested in collecting information on college preparedness (e.g., FAFSA completion), parent engagement (e.g., attendance at parent-teacher conferences), or student academic outcomes (e.g., improvement in the percentage of at-risk readers).

The tools in the toolkit can also help highlight guiding questions to consider when identifying new indicators and measures.





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### Measuring what matters

It is important to evaluate whether or not programs and initiatives are working as intended. In evaluating those programs, too much data can be just as much of a problem as not enough data. When selecting indicators and measures, make sure they are meaningful. Some strategies include:

- **Importance:** What key aspects of programming should be evaluated? Are they currently being evaluated?
- **Availability:** What data is already being collected that could be used?
- **Consequences of data collection:** How might the data collection change behavior? Can those behavior changes be used to promote good practices? For example:
  - Measures of attendance and truancy improvement instead of static attendance rates may incentivize schools not to drop students from their rolls.
  - 5-year and 6-year graduation rates incentivize schools to keep working with students, such as students with disabilities or English learners, who may need additional time in high school.
- **Stakeholder involvement:** How should schools best involve members of the school community such as students, staff, and families when identifying indicators and measures to make sure what is selected is meaningful?

#### Selecting reliable and valid measures What is reliability and validity?<sup>5</sup>

*Reliability* is the consistency of a measure. For example, if a student takes a school climate survey two times, reliability would be the similarity of the scores.

*Validity* is the extent that scores from a measure represent the concept they are intending to measure. For the school climate survey example, validity of the measure would be how confident a school leader is that the survey reflects the school's climate.

It can be challenging to create reliable and valid measures. Slight changes to wording or question placement can impact responses for surveys.<sup>6</sup> The measures must also be accessible so that families and students understand the questions. Reading level, age-appropriateness of questions, and availability of translated materials are all important.

Because of these challenges in creating reliable and valid measures, authorizers and schools should select measures that have already been validated by a test developer or publisher for a particular use.\*

\*It is important when selecting that the measures are used in a way that is consistent with what the developer intended.



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For additional resources on identifying indicators:

- [A-Game](#) – Access: Global access, Academics, Mission, and Equity: Helping develop and disseminate tools to assist charter school authorizers in the oversight of alternative education campuses (AEC) to capture school quality
- National Association of Charter School Authorizers Multiple Measures Tools: [Readiness Assessment](#) and [Credibility Tool](#)
- [National Academies: Building Educational Equity Indicator Systems: A Guidebook for States and School Districts](#)

The next section of the toolkit goes through five different types of indicators. For each indicator, the toolkit:

- Describes the indicator and types of measures that could be used
- Provides guiding questions in selecting the measures
- Provides links to resources for additional background information

### Measures of academic growth

What is it?

Measures of academic growth are assessments that show a student's progress over time.

Questions to ask:

- **National norms for comparisons:** Are there national norms that compare your students to other students in the nation to provide a reference for performance?
- **Alignment:** How well does what is being asked on the assessment align with what is being taught in the classroom?
- **Administration time:** How long does it take for students to complete the assessment?
- **Accommodations:** What types of accommodations are available for students with disabilities and English learners? Are the accommodations consistent with what is offered in the classroom and on the statewide assessment?
- **Reporting:** How easy is it for educators to use the data?
- **Training and support:** What resources are available from the vendor to help educators use the data?

Examples of vendors:

- [Curriculum Associates i-Ready](#)
- [NWEA Map Growth](#)
- [Renaissance Star](#)



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Examples of resources:

- “[Interim Assessments in Brief](#)” by Joan Herman (2017) describes interim assessments, background on their effectiveness, and criteria for selecting the assessments.
- The Thomas B. Fordham Institute in Ohio recently updated its [Performance Framework](#) to include an Alternative Accountability Framework that integrates the state assessment and nationally normed academic assessments for both achievement and growth.

### School climate

What is it?

Typically surveys that ask questions about relationships with peers, staff, and feelings of safety at school.

An authorizer could also decide to use both the climate surveys along with external measurements like enrollment rates to gauge school climate. The Colorado Charter School Institute uses enrollment information — student stability rate and returning student rate — as a measure of student climate.

Questions to ask:

- **What is being measured?** Does the instrument cover the aspects of school climate you are interested in measuring?
- **Grade appropriateness:** For which grade levels is the measure most appropriate?
- **Participants:** Who is being included: students, staff, and/or families?
- **Access:** If the instrument is online, do members of the school community have access to devices and the internet so that they can complete the survey?
- **Translated versions:** Is the instrument available in different languages, particularly if it will be administered to parents?
- **Privacy:** How will privacy be protected?
- **Consent:** Based on district policies, do parents need to provide consent for students to participate?
- **Reporting:** How will the information be reported? Will the results also be analyzed and reported by different subgroups?
- **Response rate:** Will it be administered during class time to increase response rate? How will the information be used if there is a low response rate?



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Examples of resources:

- The U.S. Department of Education has a [compendium of reliable school climate batteries](#).
- The Colorado Education Initiative, “[Measuring School Climate: A Toolkit for Districts and Schools](#),” provides best practices for planning and administering school climate surveys.
- WestEd has a [School Climate Improvement Toolkit](#) to help schools use the school climate data to improve the school’s climate.

### Social and emotional competencies

What is it?

Instruments that ask questions about concepts such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.<sup>7</sup>

Questions to ask:

- **Alignment with curriculum:** Does the instrument measure what is being taught in the classroom?
- **Grade appropriateness:** For which grade levels is the measure most appropriate?
- **Administration time:** How long does it take for students to complete the assessment?
- **Privacy:** How will privacy be protected?
- **Reporting:** How will the information be used?

Examples of instruments:

- [The Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessments \(WCSD-SECAs\)](#) are “free, open-source instruments that measure the self-reported social and emotional competencies of students in grades 5-12” made in collaboration with the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the University of Illinois at Chicago.
- [Panorama](#) is a popular, fee-based service for measuring social and emotional competencies.



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Examples of resources:

- AIR's "[Stop, Think, Act: Ready to Assess](#)" includes a brief, decision tree, and tools to determine whether to use and how to select social and emotional learning assessments.
- CASEL's "[Making SEL Assessments Work](#)" focuses on recommendations to help policymakers and practitioners appropriately use social and emotional learning assessment data.

### Measuring missions

What is it?

Particularly for charter schools with specific missions, measures to ensure that the school is advancing that mission.

Questions to ask:

- **School's mission:** Does the school have a nonacademic mission, such as teaching character development, that would not be assessed with academic assessments?
- **Theory of action:** What are the core activities to further the school's mission? What student outcomes are expected?
- **Stakeholders:** Given the specific mission, who is being included in ensuring the school is furthering the mission: students, staff, and/or families?

Examples of resources:

Logic models can be a helpful tool to identify different parts of a charter school's programming. For instance, a school could evaluate day-to-day instruction to determine if that aligns with its mission. Alternatively, it could look at student outcomes to evaluate if students are seeing the impacts of the mission.

There are many guides for creating logic models. Two include:

- [The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance \(Lawton et al., 2014\)](#)
- [W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Logic Model Development Guide](#)



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### Operational efficiency and capacity

What is it?

Measures to gauge how efficiently schools are using resources, such as grant spending.

Questions to ask:

- **Requirements:** What types of compliance measures are federally or state required?
- **Leading indicators:** What type of indicators would provide schools or authorizers advanced notice of a potential operational issue within the school? For example, are there early indicators of financial instability?
- **Structures for continuous improvement:** What processes does the school have in place to strengthen school quality?

Examples of resources:

- Colorado Charter School Institute has updated its organizational measures with the [Performance Framework](#) to include indicators of school operations and environment.
- WestEd’s [“Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools: Tools to Support Authorizer Data Collection”](#) is a resource to help charter school authorizers identify leading indicators so authorizers and school leaders can act early to support school improvement.
- Bellwether’s [“Continuous Improvement in Schools Workbook”](#) provides school leaders with a framework to implement continuous improvement practices that are grounded in goal-based metrics.

### Conclusion

This toolkit provides a starting point to help authorizers and schools identify gaps in their data collection and select new measures of school quality.

To help students and schools recover from the pandemic, extending the types of measures collected is essential to understanding what is working or not working to improve student learning. In order to select those measures, they must produce valid and reliable information and they must assess what is most impactful for students and schools.





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<sup>1</sup> Karen Lewis and Megan Kuhfeld, “Progress Toward Pandemic Recovery: Continued Signs of Rebounding Achievement at the Start of the 2022–23 School Year,” research brief, NWEA, 2022, [https://www.nwea.org/uploads/2022/12/CSSP-Brief\\_Progress-toward-pandemic-recovery\\_DEC22\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nwea.org/uploads/2022/12/CSSP-Brief_Progress-toward-pandemic-recovery_DEC22_Final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> “Helping the School Community Recover From the Pandemic: Supporting Staff, Mental Health, and Families to Accelerate Student Learning,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2024, <https://publiccharters.org/news/best-practices-to-accelerate-student-learning-series/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Rethinking Charter School Accountability Frameworks,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2024, <https://publiccharters.org/news/best-practices-to-accelerate-student-learning-series/>; “Helping the School Community Recover From the Pandemic: Supporting Staff, Mental Health, and Families to Accelerate Student Learning,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2024, <https://publiccharters.org/news/best-practices-to-accelerate-student-learning-series/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Formal Programs to Help Families in Poverty Navigate Crises,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2024, <https://publiccharters.org/news/best-practices-to-accelerate-student-learning-series/>.

<sup>5</sup> Rajiv S. Jhangiani, I-Chant A. Chaing, Carrie Cuttler, and Dana C. Leighton, “Reliability and Validity in Measurement,” in *Research Methods in Psychology* (Montreal: KPU Pressbooks, 2019), <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/psychmethods4e/chapter/reliability-and-validity-of-measurement/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Writing Survey Questions,” Pew Research Center, n.d., <https://www.pewresearch.org/our-methods/u-s-surveys/writing-survey-questions/>.

<sup>7</sup> “Fundamentals of SEL,” CASEL, <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>.