Accountability Purposes and Theories of Action

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New York Regents Retreat

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March 27, 2017

What's the purpose of accountability systems?

- School accountability systems **must be designed** to:
  - Accurately characterize "**school effectiveness**"
    - To help identify schools in need of support to become more "effective"
  - **Incentivize the types of behaviors we think will lead to more effective schools**
  - **Avoid incentivizing** inappropriate behaviors and other **negative consequences**
- We must consider how our design and indicator selection supports these three principles

A Focus on Utility

- Accountability systems have been designed for "naming and shaming"
- But what's the theory of change with such systems?
- We and others argue that accountability systems must be designed to improve the quality and effectiveness of schools and student learning
- How do we know if accountability systems can meet this utility goal?
  - Research evidence (including non-U.S. cases)
  - Coherent with a theory of action and change
  - Evaluation and continuous improvement
  - Thinking carefully through use cases (see attached handout)

Data-Driven Improvement and Accountability

Andy Hargreaves and Henry Braun outlined 5 key factors that influence the success or failure of improvement-based accountability systems:

1. *The nature and scope of the data employed by the improvement and accountability systems, as well as the relationships and interactions among them;*
2. *The types of indicators (summary statistics) used to track progress or to make comparisons among schools and districts;*
3. *The interactions between the improvement and accountability systems;*
4. *The kinds of consequences attached to high and low performance and how those consequences are distributed;*
5. *The culture and context of data use -- the ways in which data are collected, interpreted and acted upon by communities of educators, as well as by those who direct or regulate their work.*

Accountability is a Piece of the Puzzle

- Your goal statement is a clear reminder that accountability is just a relatively small, albeit visible, part of the educational system

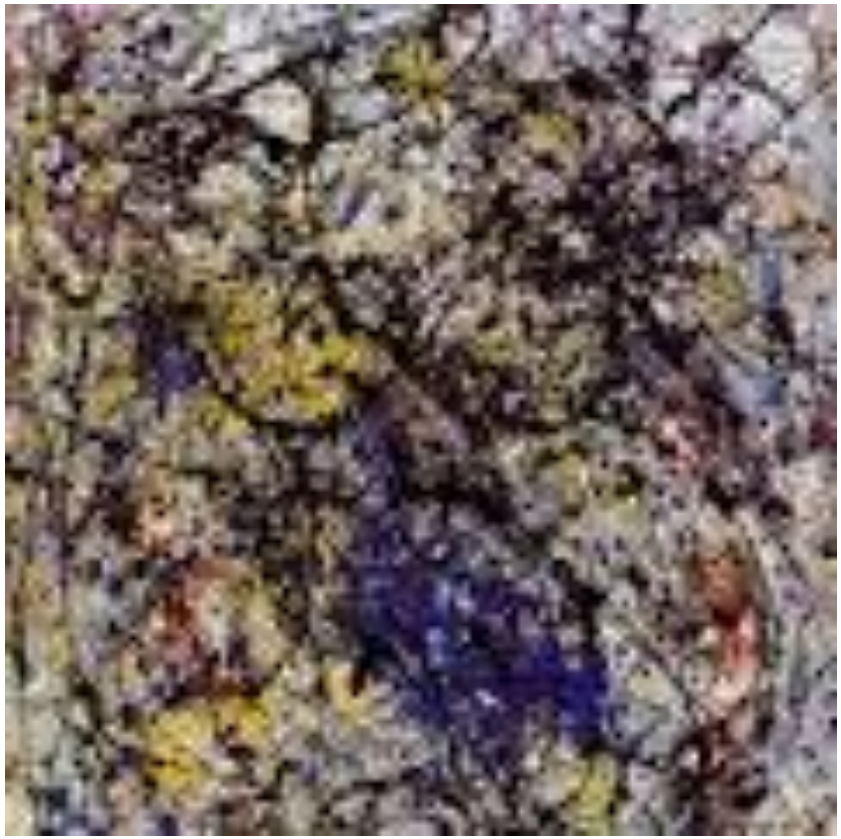
- Accountability results will **NOT** solve funding disparities, but if well designed, accountability systems should shine a light on such contextual factors and on effective processes

Selecting Indicators

The selection of indicators must follow a **thoughtful process** tied to an **explicit theory of action** and our understanding of the educational system

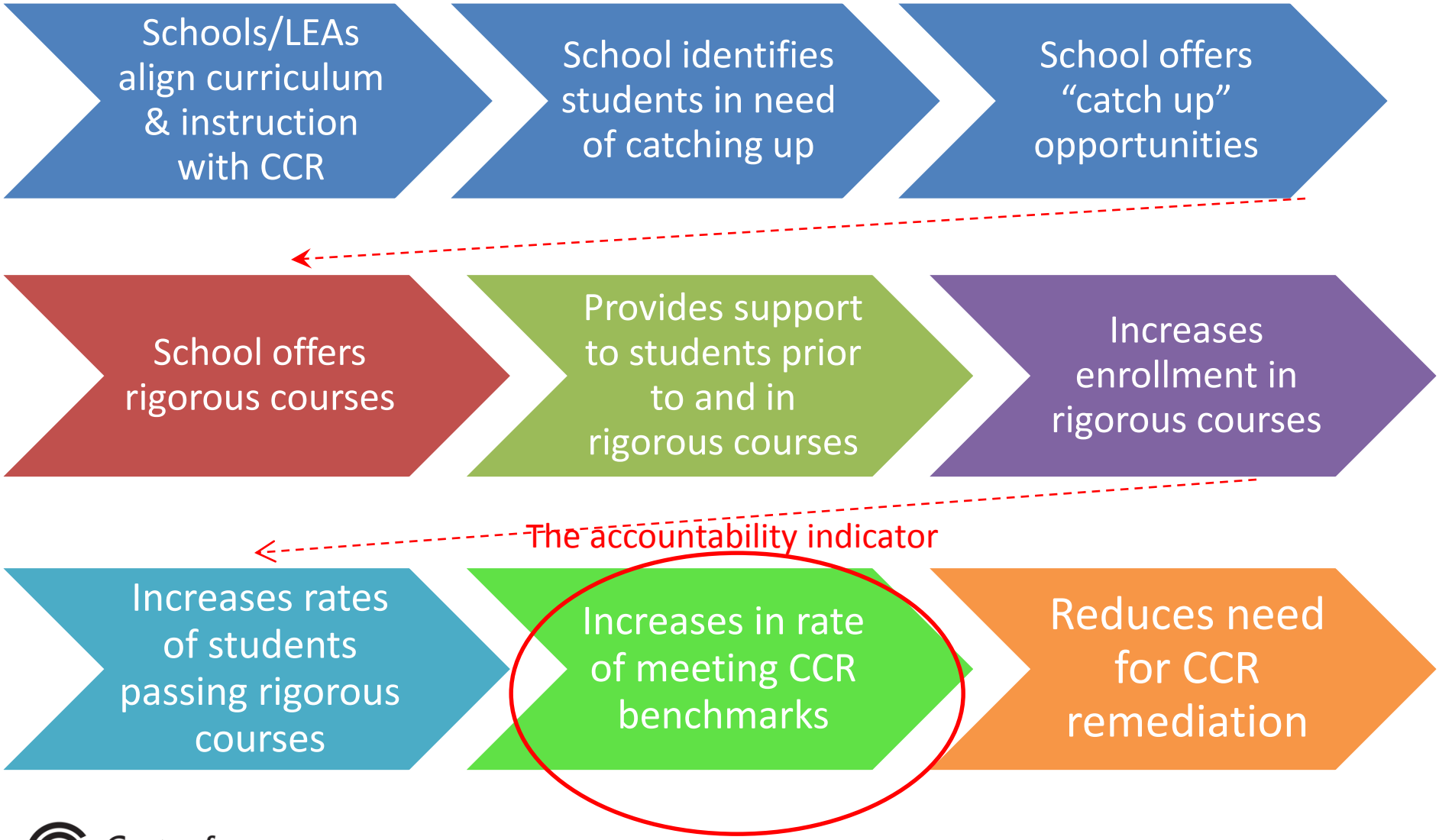
We're going to ask you to engage in such a process shortly

As a reminder, the following slide illustrates how a selected indicator fits within a theory of action



Jackson Pollack, Reflection of the Big Dipper (1947)

Reporting indicators on the way to a meaningful outcome



Selecting Indicators

We need to ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Is this indicator required (federal or state)?
2. To what degree can school personnel control changes in this indicator?
3. Is this an outcome, input, or process?
4. If schools improve on this indicator, what other downstream improvements should we see?
5. What are the potential (unintended) negative consequences associated with using this indicator?
6. Does this indicator add new information to the system?
7. Does the indicator have sufficient technical and policy properties:
    a. Differentiates among schools and is comparable
    b. Can be disaggregated for student groups
    c. Is not easily corruptible
    d. Data quality is reasonable or better