



## Webinar on Re-Thinking Education Accountability Systems in Light of Covid-19

### Webinar Transcript

[Brian Gill] Thanks very much, Brian.

Thanks to all of you in our audience for joining us today for this REL Mid-Atlantic-sponsored conversation about education accountability in 2021 in the wake of the pandemic. We've got a great panel here. Let me start by introducing our panelists.

Chandra Haislet is the Executive Director of Accountability and Data Systems at the Maryland State Department of Education where she oversees the accountability to meet the requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. Chandra's responsibilities include publishing information on the Maryland Report Card, data collection and analysis to support state and federal reporting, and the State K-12 Longitudinal Data System. She's previously worked as a high school science teacher, a database administrator, and a researcher for REL Northeast.

Donna Johnson has served as Director of Accountability in the District of Columbia's Office of the State Superintendent of Education since 2018. There she launched the first-ever D.C. School Report Card and Statewide Accountability Framework, measuring the performance of all public schools in the district. She also led engagement for stakeholders related to the development and improvement of that framework. Prior to her current role, she's served in various education jobs starting her career as a high school teacher nationally board-certified. She's also served as a District Administrator and then was the Executive Director of the Delaware State Board of Education for seven years.

Finally, Chad Aldeman is a Senior Associate Partner at Bellwether Education Partners, where he's worked on the Policy and Evaluation Team since 2012 advising clients and writing on teacher preparation, teacher evaluation, and college and career readiness. In 2017, Chad led Bellwether's independent peer reviews of state accountability plans under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Previously, he was a Policy Advisor in U.S. Department of Education's Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development.

Welcome to all of our panelists for joining us today. Thanks for being here.

Let me talk briefly about the context that we're in at the moment for education accountability before I direct some questions to our panelists.

States, as most of you out in the audience surely know, are facing a lot of challenges related to implementing accountability systems and measures in the current school year. First of all, there's no state in the country that has test data from last spring. Schools were shut down with the pandemic. This, of course, is not just an issue for accountability from last year but creates challenges for measuring growth or improvement or for any measures that require using a multiyear average performance.

In addition, disruptions to schooling both last year and this year are sure to have negative implications for student learning, making it hard to know what kind of proficiency levels are reasonable to expect in the future, even relative to 2019 prior to the pandemic. Now, non-test measures were becoming increasingly used in state ESSA plans prior to the pandemic – measures like chronic absenteeism, school climate. Those are arguably even more important now as we deal with lots of hybrid and remote instruction, but they're also more difficult to measure and more difficult to make sense of.

Just last week, the Federal Department of Education issued new guidance which offers states some opportunities to modify their ESSA plans if necessary to deal with the missing test scores from last spring; and it gives them the opportunity to extend accountability timelines, for example, for identifying schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement. It gives them the chance to extend those timelines by a year, again in response to the missing data from last year.

But that guidance from the Department of Education also reiterated that testing requirements for *next* spring have not, at least not yet, been waived. The Department signaled that at least for now, states should plan to make accountability determinations next fall based on data from the current school year. Of course, we may possibly have a change in Administration prior to that; but it wasn't clear if this would make a change to that expectation since a week ago the Biden campaign declined to take a position on 2021 test waivers. If testing *is* going to occur in spring 2021, then many states are likely to have to figure out how to make it possible to test students, even students who are not in school buildings.

So we've got very difficult challenges for states and schools across the country related to all of these issues in the pandemic. So let me start then by asking our two State Education staff what kinds of things do you expect you might be able to measure for accountability purposes in the current school year?

Chandra, let's start with you. What are your thoughts on that?

**[Chandra Haislet]** Hello, and thank you, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this panel. These are important conversations and questions that I think everybody is asking right now.

As you just indicated, not only was 19-20 an unprecedented year, this year is also going to have its own unique challenges. In Maryland, all 24 of our local school systems developed reopening and recovery plans, like many of our districts across the nation. Pretty much across the board, our schools started in a remote virtual environment. Although all of our school districts are now in the process of bringing students into the school buildings, it's not going to be a typical year for our students. There are going to be challenges. However, every state and all of us that are engaged in education, we do have a responsibility to ensure that our students are educated this year.

So just stepping back a bit, the Every Student Succeeds Act provided every state the opportunity to develop accountability systems. Maryland was one of those states that engaged stakeholders across the state with representatives from critical stakeholder groups to develop a brand-new accountability system with a lot of new measures that had never been collected previously. I do agree that the measures in addition to assessment were important two years ago when we developed the system and are just as important now.

Accountability overall is important information, and it needs to be actionable; and it's critically important now. The challenge is that some of the data may or may not be available this year, but the conversations are starting right now in regard to a couple of key questions. It is the accountability system that we developed, one that we want to continue with; and I think many states are grappling with that conversation right now because obviously when the systems were developed, it's not the same as where we are today.

The other pieces that even though we want answers, it's going to take time to figure this out. We have to engage the stakeholders to address the questions of whether or not our accountability systems are ones that we want to continue with or to change. So having those conversations takes time.

But there's another piece that's just as critical. It's that we really don't know today what the rest of the school year is going to look like. We currently are planning to collect all of the information that was in our previous accountability system. We have the processes and the systems in place to collect that information. The end result of all that is even though we have that data, there's going to be a lot of evaluation in regard to whether that data can be used for an accountability system to hold our schools accountable.

We really do not have crystal balls today to determine where we're going to end in nine months, but I agree that the conversations are important; and I think every state is engaging in those conversations right now. With that, I'll turn it back to you.

**[Brian Gill]** Okay, thank you, Chandra.

Donna, your thoughts from D.C. on what sort of things we might be able to measure for an accountability system.

**[Donna Johnson]** Thank you very much, Brian; and thank you for the opportunity. Good afternoon to all of those participants.

I think I would echo a lot of what you just heard. This is something that is important for all of us to think about and to process through with a lot of deliberate action because there are a lot of things that people are going to talk about that can be measured. Sometimes those items are things that would be appropriate for measurement at a school level, at a local LEA or district level. Then some others would be appropriate for accountability, whether it be high stakes or lower stakes type of accountability at a state level.

There's a lot of information of things that people should be taking a look at to make instructional and programmatic changes and supporting the needs of our teachers and our students and making sure that we're able to drive learning. Not all of those are state-level accountability items. So we're really trying to grapple with that notion of just because we *can* measure something doesn't mean that we should.

Also thinking about when we present data, how is it used; and how do we help people understand the meaning of the data and use it appropriately? Sometimes that means that there's going to need to be a level of education and communication around the comparability of data and whether or not it makes sense to look at this data in any form of a lens that utilizes trends or if we need to look at it separately.

One of the things that I think you'll hear from everyone is that data is important. Accountability is important. Our assessment data is critically important, perhaps now more than ever. We need to know where our students are and need to be able to identify the gaps in learning. We need to know about attendance. We need to know in many cases when we're thinking about attendance, it's a very different situation now. So now we're really grappling with not just what does it mean to be present but what does it mean to be engaged? That's something new and something that we're all trying to think about how we measure it and how do we act upon it because accountability is really an action.

What actions do we take based on the data that we see in the analysis that we do?

This is going to require us to engage our stakeholders to talk about what is meaningful, what is impactful, what is useful? Not just what can be done. I think we have to balance that with the capacity that we're dealing with right now as well. We have a lot of new demands upon our schools, our school leaders, our teachers; and the last thing that we want to do is further burden them with something that might not necessarily be meaningful and impactful to the work that is before them. So we have to balance those very carefully.

As you heard Chanda talk about, we don't necessarily know what the future holds. So we're still – it's a process in looking to see what is available, what isn't available. We know what we would *like* to have available. That doesn't necessarily mean that it will be and that it's still a work in progress. We're not trying to throw away accountability. I don't think you'll hear anyone say they want to do that, but we need to think about it and move forward responsibly.

**[Brian Gill]** Thanks Donna. You mentioned the issue of trends, which is relevant across the country, again given the absence of the spring 2020 testing. One of the things I've been hearing occasionally is that for states that look at either trends or growth measures or value-added measures that there's at least consideration and the possibility of using a two-year growth measure, just assessments occur in 2021, where 2019 would be the baseline since the 2020 doesn't exist. So are D.C. and/or Maryland considering that possibility? Is that something that would be on the table?

We'll start in D.C. with you, Donna Johnson.

**[Donna Johnson]** So one of the things that I think is really important to think about and what you're referring is oftentimes referred to as "skip-year" growth.

**[Brian Gill]** Yes.

**[Donna Johnson]** There are a lot of states around the country that are evaluating this, and it's going to be unique to each individual entity. So you really have to think about when you calculate that if you look at that, what does that measure? Does it measure a representative sample of your students? If you have a highly mobile student body, then you're probably going to find that a large number of your data will fall out because you won't have data from that student from the 2018-2019 school year, as well as from the 2021 school year.

You also have to look at the grade configurations of your schools because if you are doing skip-year growth, then schools that end in fourth grade will not have growth attributed to them; and you'll have other configuration challenges as well.

Then last, but certainly not least, is you would want to look at the impact that this has not just on the all-students measure but looking at your individual student groups. So when you run this type of analysis, you can probably look back and run this type of analysis with prior years' data to get an estimate of whether or not it would be appropriate for your jurisdiction or not. And you would want to make sure and look and see what is happening with your low socioeconomic group. Are they falling out at a higher rate? Are you disproportionately measuring growth of just your higher, less disadvantaged students? And the same is true with your students with disability, and each individual state will have to do that individually.

There's also – some of the assessment experts have taken a look at that and looked into that. The Center for Assessment has published some things about looking at and using the concept of skip-year growth in a manner that would be an informative manner to provide information that could be helpful and guide the work of LEAs and schools but should not be used for high-stakes accountability. That really is going to be an individual state-level decision that would have to be made, and it would really depend upon their individual data.

We will engage in the same process. But, as you know, in D.C. we do have a highly mobile population and some schools with very small populations as well as grade configurations that would likely result in a number of schools not having growth; and that's not the intention of our accountability systems since we weight growth more heavily at the elementary and middle school than our achievement is weighted.

**[Brian Gill]** Thank you, Donna. Yeah, I think you're raising interesting issues here and pointing out there are potentially separate decisions to be made related to what *can* be measured; then what that measure *tells* you; and third, how the measure can be used. Those things are related but not necessarily amounting to the same decisions.

Chandra, is there anything you'd like to add to that issue about the possibility of using skip-year growth from Maryland's perspective?

**[Chandra Haislet]** I do think that you two have covered most of it. The one thing that I may add is that not only do we need to engage stakeholders in determining what can and cannot be used for accountability, there's also going to need to be a level of transparency as we go through this year in regard to the decisions that are made. Just looking at it as an opportunity to really educate folks in regard to the purpose behind accountability, what can and cannot be used for different situations. But I definitely agree with everything that has already been said in that regard.

**[Brian Gill]** Thank you, Chandra.

I'm going to turn to our external expert, Chad Aldeman from Bellwether, in a minute; but I'm realizing that there's a couple of things that I should have said relevant to our whole audience that I should have said at the beginning.

The first one is that we have various resources included in the Resource tab for this webinar. Those include a reference list of various things on accountability, among which are several Bellwether papers that Chad contributed to.

The second thing I want to mention is that we are planning to leave some time in the last few minutes of the hour for audience questions for our participants. If you have any questions for our panel, you can feel free at any time to start entering them in the Q&A box on your panel. Then I'll try to read some of those for our panelists toward the end of the hour.

So turning to Chad Aldeman, I want to ask about some of the things that your reports from Bellwether have recommended. Also, in light of one of the other things that's in our Resource list is a recent brief from the Aspen Institute and the Center for Assessment describing some of these assessment challenges in pretty dire terms. It raises questions, a whole series of questions, related to some of the issues that Donna just mentioned about whether it's possible to make any valid interpretations of results if assessment administration isn't consistent in the spring. That is, in particular, if it turns out that some kids in a school or a state will take the assessments in school buildings as usual; and others may take them from home.

Now, the series of reports that you and your colleagues at Bellwether put together this summer acknowledged a lot of these challenges but came out nonetheless firmly opposed to abandoning state testing this year. So I'm wondering if you can say something about why you think it's particularly important for states to continue *some* form of assessment in this highly unusual current context.

**[Chad Alderman]** Yeah, thanks, Brian. Thanks for having me.

I have the luxury of looking at this from a high level, unlike Chandra and Donna who are engaging this day-to-day. So I will frame my remarks in a couple ways. One is about what tests could do for us now, and two is the purposes that we might use them for. I think that is an important discussion when we're talking about validity. "Valid for what" I think is an important follow-up question to that.

I'll start by talking about how we're sort of flying blind at the moment. We are using the best information we have available in lots of different contexts. In the educational context, we have anecdotal reports; we have some projections so far about what the COVID lost learning time will do to students, both in the short term and long term. I think that is one thing that I've seen.

I've been doing a series of reports for the 74, looking at the lessons from research on past educational disruptions; and the implications are very real. We know that students will lose academically in the short run. They'll lose academically in the long run, which has longer-term outcomes in terms of lost employment, lower employment rates, lower wages, which can pass for essentially someone's whole life for someone who loses time when they're young.

Bellwether has a report out recently called "Missing in the Margins," where we found – we're trying to estimate – we estimated three million kids are disengaged from school since March that we just have lost track of them. We don't where they are. They have not engaged with any school whatsoever is our best estimate for that.

I have another report looking at lost time that even school districts that are doing hybrid schedules, they maybe have cut Mondays as a professional development day for teachers. Maybe they've pushed the school year back a couple weeks to plan. Maybe they're not offering as much instructional time for students. All of these are defensible choices at the individual level; but at the aggregate, they add up to a lot of consequences for students.

So that leads me to testing. Why would we do testing in this environment?

I think it's because we need to know at the individual student level how they're making out in this pandemic. I would look at it more as information that we can get as quickly as possible about students, and then we have a chance to act on them. If we don't collect that information, even if it's slightly imperfect, it's not the best, I think we're going to have to make do with some of that. It's better to have that information than to not have it.

Then that brings me to the stakes, and the sort of words that we use to describe the consequences for the testing results this year matters a lot. So if you say, "Should we *label* schools this year," I think most people would say, "No." If you say, "Should we *identify* schools that need more help," maybe more people would say, "Yes." So I think that the connotations of the words that we use is really important.

I think the consequences that will actually happen to schools is important to parse down. Will teachers be dismissed from low test scores this year? I don't think so. I think most states will deemphasize that or take that off the table. I hope that they will.

Should students be held back this year for states that have third-grade reading loss? Maybe and maybe they should be. If students are not reading at third grade, that is an indication that they're off track and they need more support. So that sort of decision comes at the state level and what they want to do with their existing policies.

Then the last thing is so if we start thinking of this identification as a tool to target resources of the schools and districts, then I think that changes the conversation a little bit. For districts and schools that have not been able to engage and keep students learning, then how do we help them write an improvement plan, figure out how to get kids back on track as much as we can going forward?

I'll pause there, and I'm sure there's lots of questions.

**[Brian Gill]** Great, thank you, Chad. So you referred to at least two of three purposes that your series Bellwether identifies as traditional purposes of state accountability systems: identifying low-performing schools for intervention, providing data to inform continuous improvement, and promoting transparency for parents and the public.

So I'd like to go back to our State agency representatives. I'd like to ask them if during this current crisis, are you focusing more on one of those purposes than others; and if so, what does that imply for the kind of data you are trying to collect now? And not just the types that you'd normally collect, but are there any *new* types of information that you might be trying to collect this year?

Donna, let's turn to you and the D.C. perspective.

**[Donna Johnson]** Well, with one thing I think it's clear. Every state in the country received an ESSA waiver for their 2019-20 school year. So that eliminated one of those elements used for accountability ratings in terms of using accountability ratings for school designations. That doesn't mean that you're not still using data in 2021 to evaluate the progress that those schools are making, but you're not using them to make designations based on 2019-2020 data. So that's something that's different.

The other challenge is that those reasons for using data are not going away. We still have the need to provide valuable and useful data to schools to make improvements to their programs, to their initiatives, to the work that they're doing to support student learning, to be able to highlight and identify those that are making great successes as well as know where to direct additional supports to those that are struggling.

Then we also have the need for parents in our community to know how our schools are doing and to be able to look transparently at the progress that our schools are making. So those two areas aren't going away, even though we had a waiver from using it for high-stakes accountability for one. So looking at the data and thinking about how do we support those two components from an accountability standpoint is getting to the point that oftentimes we often refer to as "big A" and "little a" accountability. So when we think

about what it means in terms of not high stakes but any type of accountability is high stakes to someone in some way, shape, or form. So while it might not be relevant to a school designation or a school improvement requirement, it is still going to be high-stakes in the manner that it is driving work that is supporting student learning.

One of the things we always have to keep asking ourselves every time we look at the data we're collecting is the bottom line is how does this support our ultimate goal of improving student learning. So if we're collecting things, we're measuring things, that aren't going to drive in that effort, then we kind of have to step back and ask ourselves why. So hopefully, as we take a look at our accountability systems and the work that we're collecting and we ask, "Does this work to help improve student learning; and if so, how?"

So in terms of what are we collecting differently, right now we know that in many places our attendance looks different. So we've had to adjust how we're taking attendance when we have students who are learning both asynchronously as well as synchronously. We have remote learning; we have blended learning; we have in-person learning situations taking place all throughout the country. So we how collect that data and then the ability to disaggregate that data is probably going to be very important when we look at the impact.

Then how we can shift from, in many cases, a state-level accountability system is oftentimes referred to as "the autopsy." So if we're thinking about this as being a wellness check instead of an autopsy. So if we can look at our data and see, hey, can we tweak the way in which we collect the data? Can we provide meaningful information perhaps related to attendance or defining how LEAs can gather engagement?

Because oftentimes when we think about local decisions, curriculum, engagement, and how you define that is really oftentimes a local decision and not necessarily something that is created or dictated by the State. But are there ways that we can facilitate and help our local jurisdictions in sharing and seeing that information to learn from others? So those are all new things that we need to be able to take a look at. So while we can possibly do that with some of our required collections, such as attendance, we can look at ways to disaggregate that based on *how* students are attending.

**[Brian Gill]** Great, thank you. So the purposes remain relevant, but you might need to get some different kinds of data to address those.

Chandra, are all three of these accountability purposes still relevant in Maryland this year as well?

**[Chandra Haislet]** I would say yes. I think one of the things I also wanted to highlight is that even though we may not be identifying schools because of the waivers that were provided to states, there is still being provided support and technical assistance to schools that were previously identified. So that strand of work is still critically important for schools that may have been identified previously. That did not stop, even though we got a waiver, from any kind of new identifications. We also didn't exit schools based on the data from last year, so there's quite a bit of work going on with those lowest-performing schools.

I would also just emphasize that data, as we've already mentioned, is critically important. I think the push right now is really for actionable data so that we can provide the supports that may be needed and make the decisions that are needed, one could argue, a little bit faster than what we would normally be able to do with accountability data because, as Donna mentioned, it tends to be an autopsy. It's a longer-term strategy for improving schools in many ways. So we're trying to look for that data that can be collected and used to make more timely decisions.

The challenge is that there's a lot of data out there, so we have to balance that with what is the burden for collecting that information with can we actually act on that information. That's an ongoing push/pull that I know Maryland is experiencing and probably a lot of other states as well.

I do want to say transparency continues to be important. We have report cards to provide that information, and we will continue to leverage our report cards to provide as much data that we can provide and messaging around what is available and what can be used. It's going to be a challenge because collecting

data sometimes takes time. I know that everybody wants data now; but there's a challenge between collecting it and making sure that we can use it, it's valid, and getting it out there for people actually to use the data.

The other piece that is equally as important that goes along with the data piece is that every local school system in Maryland, and probably across the nation, have plans to reopen schools. Maryland is working with our local school systems to ensure that those reopening and recovery plans are implemented. One could argue that that is kind of a "little a," where we are providing support and just ensuring that what our districts said they were going to do they are doing and identifying and providing supports as needed.

Maryland also has a few other things that we are doing to collect more actionable data – or the hope is to have more actionable data. One is a technology survey where we are focused really on identifying what devices have connectivity and access students have. So that is something that we are actively collecting at this point in time, and we hope that that can be very actionable to provide support to our schools and districts.

Another is that we have set up quarterly reporting of information provided by our districts, basically at the end of each term of school. So now we don't have to wait to the end-of-year data. We've actually identified things that we can collect from our local school systems quarterly. This is specifically around diagnostic testing, how it's being used to really close those achievement gaps that may have been identified at the beginning of the school year.

There's also some other metrics that Maryland is tracking in regard to the safety of the students, getting students back into the school buildings and just engagement of students in education.

So our focus really of the three has been on the data but specifically to that "little a" accountability, what kind of data can we collect now to make actionable and timely decisions.

**[Brian Gill]** Thanks. It sounds to me like a lot of the things you've just described might fall in the category of "opportunity to learn data," which is a phrase that I don't know that I heard much before a month ago; and since then, I'm hearing it every day.

I was going to ask is it possible to document something about what districts and schools are doing to serve their students in this remote and hybrid environment. It sounds like looking at the plans as you've described, collecting quarterly information, things like participation, are exactly that kind of information.

I wonder, Donna, in D.C. are you also thinking about this broad category of opportunity to learn data?

**[Donna Johnson]** I was smiling because I agree. This is the newest acronym, I think, on the EduData sphere; and it has kind of taken a huge rise. But, yes, we have our reopening plans that all of our schools have submitted; and they're published on our website that's available for everyone to be able to access and review, to think about how schools are supporting student learning.

There's a lot of different things that I have heard people capturing in "opportunity to learn" scenarios. Some of them are things that we already have. Some of them are new. Some of them are elements of data that are captured by other divisions beyond an accountability or an assessment division that are now being shared more broadly with LEAs or even things that LEAs collect themselves. That becomes a district-level collection around the opportunity to learn, and oftentimes those are much more impactful.

So when you think about things that schools and districts and even the State might not have collected before, which I believe was one of the questions that we were asked, was thinking about what does screen time look like for your learners? What is the device accessibility? What is the Internet accessibility and being able to capture that? What types of learning is taking place?

Some districts have a district wide social/emotional health survey or may want to implement that, but it's not necessarily a state-level initiative but could be a district-level. It could be some surveys that people are



doing with students and with their staff and with their parents to think about the needs and supports. So those are all things that are really measuring that opportunity of a student to learn, meaning not just access to instruction but the ability to actually learn, grow, and improve and what actions might they be able to take.

So thinking about depending upon what their reopening plan looks like or what their remote learning plan looks like, they may want to measure different things; and they may have some different collections that already exist within their district, within their school, within their state, that they could capitalize on and use perhaps in a different manner.

**[Brian Gill]** Great, thank you.

So both of you mentioned one of the challenges here with collecting new data is that you don't want to put too much of a burden on local staff and school staff who are struggling with enormous burdens of trying to reinvent schooling this year, which is a real concern. One of the things I've been wondering -- which I think is related to some of particularly the district kind of systems that you just mentioned, Donna -- is whether, perhaps paradoxically, there may be some kinds of information that could actually be easier to collect now than in the past because they are automatically corrected by the digital platforms that schools are now using to deliver instruction, to assess students, and to correct their work.

So in that light, there have been commentators who have suggested, for example, that gathering information about the assignments that are given to students would create a valuable kind of transparency. I'm wondering if any of you see any opportunities to harvest data from digital platforms to do that without creating an excessive burden on school staff. I'll say any of you who feel -- go ahead.

**[Donna Johnson]** Brian, I'll jump in quickly. I think we do ourselves a disservice if we assume that every LEA in every school has a learning management system, an LMS, because that is certainly not the case. With the constraints on budgets that we see and the timeline in which people moved towards remote learning, they adapted to remote learning in a variety of ways. Not all of them included an LMS.

I would also say that the nature of assignments, as well as the nature of local assessments, is not the role of an SEA but certainly could be the role of a school, could be the role of a district. Those are things that districts are likely taking a look at.

When I was a district administrator, I think about the common assessments that we used as benchmark assessments; and we used those internally. Those were all common across all of our schools, across an individual grade band; and they would be very useful. They were very different than a summative assessment. That summative assessment, which measures the progress that a student is able to make against state-level standards and is the same across all schools across the state, has a very different purpose than a benchmark or a local assessment, which is structured very differently. It gets to the nature of the differences of assessments.

So while districts may want to take a look at the *types* of assessments and the types of assignments that are being done, that would be more of an analysis at a local level not at a state level.

**[Brian Gill]** Yeah, so that's interesting. I mean, it suggests that at least for the *transparency* aim of accountability, you could view it as an opportunity here for the local agencies to take some initiative in that direction if they wanted to.

Chad or Chandra, any additional thoughts on that issue?

**[Chad Alderman]** I would just second what Donna said. I mean, there are some really interesting data pieces out there the districts have put out from their Learning Management System. The Los Angeles School District had a really interesting report that showed engagement on their learning management by student type, by week, by day. So with the data that they have, they can do a lot; but I wouldn't expect all of California districts to have the same thing. I don't think it's a State responsibility to say that, and there might be other ways that other districts are engaging with students.

Some are using low-tech solutions -- like mailing worksheets or phone calls, other things that might be other ways to engage students. From a state level, I would want the State to have an expectation for all students being engaged somehow, learning the state standards, but not necessarily getting into the weeds about how that actually happens.

**[Brian Gill]** That makes a lot of sense.

(Multiple voices)

**[Donna Johnson]** Go ahead, Chandra.

**[Chandra Haislet]** No, no, go ahead, Donna. You said "quick," go ahead.

**[Donna Johnson]** Yeah, there was a question in the Q&A that really just followed up on what we were just talking about around that use of "big A" accountability and "little a" accountability, not at all showing deference to the fact that that came from the Delaware State Board of Ed[ucation]. But I do want to reference that the way we use data and the responsibility that we have in making sure that we communicate the purpose of data, that we're transparent on it and that we educate people around what the data means as much as what it doesn't mean, is important.

When we say that we're using something to inform for programmatic and for institutional growth or to change the processes or the supports that are available, we need to stay true to that. So if we say something is not being used for high-stakes accountability, we do accountability overall a disservice to shift gears and then incorporate that in a "big A" accountability manner. So there are a lot of different ways that we can use some of this data, and we need to be transparent and honest about what we're using them for. Then we need to help people use the data responsibly.

**[Brian Gill]** Thank you, Donna. The purpose—

**[Chad Alderman]** Can I make one more point on this, Brian?

**[Brian Gill]** Go ahead, Chad.

**[Chad Alderman]** I'll speak up for states here that there's a lot of pressure being put on states to collect all this data. It's November; and states take some time, the districts take some time, to respond. We would want to hold someone accountable, a school district accountable, for something that they didn't know at the start of the year; and so I think that is a real timeline issue that people need to think through when they're saying states should do x or y. Well, we have to give schools some timeline and some lag so that they can prepare for it and get ready for it.

**[Brian Gill]** That makes a lot of sense.

**[Chandra Haislet]** This is Chandra. I'm agreeing with what everybody is saying. I'm also just going to reiterate the fact that the "big A" accountability has a theory of action behind it, and it takes time to implement that theory of action. The data that is used in an accountability system is very vetted; it's valid; it's reliable; it's thoroughly studied. But that doesn't mean that there is not value in the data that our local school systems are collecting in the LMS system.

I just wanted to kind of end on a high note in regard to this remote environment before we turn it over to questions. One of the things that we are actually starting to hear about is there are cases where the remote environment is actually better for some students.

So I think there is an opportunity for our local school systems to really study this granular data that they are collecting to identify when and where students are actually doing better in the remote environment that they can then leverage as we go forward. Because I think the accountability wants to ensure that all students are

meeting standards among other things, that the schools are being held accountable for making sure all students are getting their needs met and are thriving in the schools that they're in. If the remote environment is good for them, then that is something that our local school districts can actually start to leverage to improve students in schools across their districts.

**[Brian Gill]** Thank you, Chandra.

I have to say as a researcher, hearing you talk about trying to learn something with this data is music to my ears. One of my hopes here, apart from the accountability questions, is that it will be possible to get an enormous amount of data out of all of the different things that school districts across schools and districts across the country are trying now to help the field as a whole identify what's working well, what isn't working well, including what's working well for some students perhaps and not others.

Okay, so I should – Donna has already started moving us into the audience questions here with the sneak preview from the Delaware State Board of Education. I'm going to take a look at some of the others that you've all started to propose here and pass them along.

So we have one person asking about State guidance to local schools and educators: "I'm wondering how much guidance you're providing to districts and schools about options for looking at accountability data, including data coming from the learning platform. I've heard from many superintendents and principals who are overwhelmed with all of the additional priorities and having trouble thinking about these issues systematically."

Any thoughts about that from our panel?

[Pause for responses]

**[Chad Alderman]** I'll say one thing not on an accountability lens, per se, but it's more of a policy lens -- is time, required time that students receive. All states have an expectation for a normal year of how many days or hours that a student is expected to be in school. Last spring, when the shutdowns happened, districts were looking to States for guidance; and I don't think they always got clear guidance. There were a few states that did but lots of states that did not.

So guidance over the summer based on some legislation, but even then I think it's really important to revise those and to say we're in an environment – we're doing this webinar on Zoom instead of live, we're all in this world. What is a reasonable expectation for an amount of time that a student should be receiving; and that should vary by grade, I assume. So having that guidance from State, I think would be helpful still.

**[Chandra Haislet]** Hello, this is Chandra. There's a couple things. One, I can talk to specifically the guidance around time. Maryland actually did provide some guidance through State Board policy in regard to the amount of synchronous learning that students should be receiving. That may be unusual compared to other states, but Maryland is a local control state. So each of our 24 local jurisdictions does have a plan, and so our state is taking a proactive approach in regard to helping our local school systems implement their plan and making sure that they implement their plan.

I will say that the piece about guidance to school districts and folks is one of the challenges around transparency. I think there is a tremendous amount of guidance going out to districts. Is it as quick as everybody would want it? It may or may not be. I mean, we are in challenging times right now; and things do change pretty rapidly. But there is definitely guidance, as the states know it, as we work together with local school systems to develop it that is being provided to the school districts and down to the schools and teachers.

The transparency is probably going to play catchup because we're getting into the hands of the people we think need it the most; and so just making sure that it is dispersed in widespread ways is more of a challenge, given just how rapidly this information is coming out.

**[Brian Gill]** Okay, thank you.

So we have some questions coming in about student experience and accountability data. I think this relates to some of the opportunity to learn issues. So if you were to look at district plans, for example, you can see what they're planning in terms of remote and hybrid instruction, in terms perhaps of synchronous and asynchronous learning including time. Are you also, at the state level, able to track numbers of students participating in different kinds of approaches and any more detail on the kinds of educational experiences that the students are having?

I'll start with you, Donna, since we didn't get to you on the last one.

**[Donna Johnson]** We *did* adjust the way in which we collect attendance. So that indicates whether a student is attending that day in a virtual setting, in an in-person setting. Then we put some qualifications around when a student is remote, what does that mean for attendance in terms of the engagement that they have had in that setting. So we published that guidance out there and then have adjusted some ways in which we collect the data. So to the extent that you're able to disaggregate your attendance to see whether a student has been attending a certain number of days in a remote setting or an in-person setting, that is something that we will be able to do.

With respect to the different nuances of how, that's something that an individual district would be able to look at. We do have their learning plans, and we can look at that and say how are they doing this type of learning. But the actual number of hours in which a student in an elementary school might be in a full class discussion in an online setting versus a small group instruction versus an online activity that they're doing is not something that we have the data, but that's something that a district would and something that a school would.

**[Brian Gill]** Yeah, for just the data on remote versus in-person attendance, what are you doing with that information? Is that going to be in school report cards, or what's it going to be used for?

**[Donna Johnson]** We have to report. Our accountability system and our report card system now has multiple metrics that involve attendance. They obviously were not set up to disaggregate. So what we decide to do with that data is something that is yet to be determined and really needs the engagement with our stakeholders and to inform those conversations around what our data looks like in terms of saying, hey, when did we go back into in-person learning? Maybe it didn't happen; maybe it did happen, and really think about how we can use that data.

I can't commit to saying it will be on a report card in this way, shape, or form to the extent we really need to engage our stakeholders. But the fact that we have set up the process so that we have that data and our schools have that data in their attendance app that they can look at, and they can see their data every day. They can look at it and they can see what's my attendance look like in this code, in that code; and they can disaggregate it and see it in real time. So we're constantly looking at ways and what type of information can we give them in that daily attendance application that would improve the work that they're doing.

**[Brian Gill]** Okay, let's see, here's an interesting question. We have a person asking: "If there's an opportunity in the current environment to begin innovating with big data/meta data from learning management systems and learning applications for possible future inclusion in "big A" accountability systems -- that is, even if it's true that today the states don't have access to the kinds of rich data that are in learning management system but that at least some local agencies have access to -- thinking in the longer term, is there any reason to believe that those systems might usefully inform "big A" accountability measures in the future?"

Any of our panelists have thoughts on that?

**[Chandra Haislet]** This is Chandra. I know that in our 24 local school systems, they each have their own accountability systems. So they have set up measures and metrics that they may be measuring that they know will improve their "big A" state-level accountability systems. So there's already a history in Maryland in

regard to our local school systems taking data that they have that we may not have and making that link to potential future "big A" accountability measures that we could consider in the future.

I know that with ESSA, there was the opportunity for states to look at continuously improving the accountability system. So I am always hopeful that any new innovation or additional data that could be used to inform could be put into the "big A" accountability in the future.

**[Brian Gill]** Great, thank you.

**[Chad Alderman]** I would just add, I think we're a little ways off from doing the types of things that the questioner was asking. I think I'm optimistic over the long run that this opportunity, this moment, will give us an opportunity to build some of those infrastructure for things like competency-based assessments or accountability based on competency for students. And certainly we have both the opportunity and the motivation now with students going in widely different directions. I just don't think we're there yet in terms of the assessments or stated option of them by any means.

**[Donna Johnson]** I would also want to add that as you start looking at what is available at a local level, think about the equity lens in terms of that because what you have measured and able to be implemented at a local level and measured through a local district or a local charter's application system might not be something that would be common across all states. And the nature of our statewide accountability system means that we must have common measures and that we have to have that balance of equity. So I would always want to take a look at that with an equity lens and making sure that everything that we were moving towards had that equity component built in.

So I think in terms of continuous improvement, there's always an opportunity that we are looking to improve and build upon and keep our system moving; but we also want to have our "big A" accountability, our statewide accountability system, have that ability to be stable year over year. We don't want to see a constant change. We want to have some stability so that we can look at comparability across time. That doesn't mean that we don't want to improve it, but we want to make sure that the statistical validity and the measures that we're reviewing have that level of usability for some high-stakes decisions. So I think, yes, from using anything like that we are quite a ways off.

**[Brian Gill]** Okay, well, we are just about at an hour. So I want to thank all of our panelists for participating. I think this has been a great discussion.

And thank you to the audience for joining us and asking some really good questions.

From my perspective, I think this has been really valuable in helping to point out the ways that we in the policy world and the education world can speak more broadly about accountability recognizing, as we've heard from all of our panelists, that first of all accountability is not just about high stakes for low-performance schools. It has other purposes in mind, things like transparency and continuous improvement. In addition, that those other purposes can be served not just at the state level but there are ways that local education agencies and schools can use their own data to serve those purposes as well.

Again, we have various materials in the panel view that you can look at here including a list of references that I hope you'll check out.

I want to thank our sponsors at the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education for supporting this work.

Again, thanks to our great panelists and to our audience. Good to see you.