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Non–Academic Indicators to Address School Quality or Student Success Outcomes

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In this memo, commonly used measures and strategies for improving outcomes across five School Quality or Student Success (SQSS) indicators are provided, along with measurement considerations and supplemental resources.[1]

The five indicators discussed are:

1. Reducing Student Suspensions
2. Building a Positive School Climate
3. Reducing Chronic Absenteeism
4. Implementing an Extended-Year Graduation Rate
5. Expanding Access to College and Career Ready Curriculum

Reducing Student Suspensions

Measures: Common measures to reduce suspension rates include tracking the number and average length of suspensions for individual at-risk students, as well as patterns in rates of exclusionary discipline (e.g. suspending low-performing students prior to state testing). As both in- and out-of-school suspensions represent an interruption in learning time, consider reporting both types of disciplinary responses. To ensure that this data is reliable, all districts within a state should employ a consistent measure to track suspensions. States have taken a number of approaches to calculating overall suspension rates:

- California reports the number of in- and out-of-school suspensions divided by the school's total enrollment and tracks annual changes in these rates.
- Rhode Island reports annual suspensions per 100 students at both the statewide and school levels, and tracks the types of infractions that result in suspension.

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[1] The information provided in this memo comes primarily from two sources:

- Making ESSA's equity promise real: State strategies to close the opportunity gap. Learning Policy Institute.
- Innovative approaches and measurement considerations for the selection of the school quality and student success indicator under ESSA. Council of Chief State School Officers.

- West Virginia reports the percentage of students who receive zero out-of-school suspensions each year.

Strategies: In order to alleviate underlying causes of and ultimately reduce behavioral referrals, appropriate student-facing interventions include restorative practice; conflict resolution and peer mediation; student conferences; social emotional learning (SEL); multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), including positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS); and early warning systems. Professional development and coaching, especially on implicit bias, ensures that staff are equipped with necessary resources. Strategies, including ensuring staff know the differences between educator discipline and discipline facilitated by law enforcement, and the elimination of law enforcement referrals for nonviolent and noncriminal offenses, are generally recommended.

Building a Positive School Climate

Measures: To more fully understand school climate, many states use a combination of student self-report surveys and structured classroom and school observation protocols. Student surveys amplify student voice, capturing diverse perspectives and illuminating differences among student subgroups. However, surveys are prone to social desirability bias, wherein students may respond with what they feel are the 'right' answers, or most favorable, rather than their true perceptions. Moreover, student surveys rely on students' reading comprehension, so they are not appropriate for early elementary students with emerging literacy skills.

Strategies: As with the strategies recommended for reducing suspension rates, strategies that seek to improve school climate include SEL, MTSS, and professional development, particularly around understanding student survey data. To ensure data collection is impactful and actionable, consider selecting specific focus areas; for example, Ohio focuses improvement efforts on student engagement, parental involvement, and community connection.

Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Measures: Chronic absenteeism is typically defined as missing 10% or more days during a school year; however, states employ a variety of measures to identify change in rates of absenteeism over time.
- Connecticut has set a goal to reduce average statewide rates so that 5% or fewer of all students are considered chronically absent.
- Indiana has set a goal to build a student body comprised of 80% "model attendees", who attend school 96% or more days of the year, or attend 3% more days than the prior year.
- Virginia has set a goal to reduce average statewide rates by 2024, so that 10% or fewer of all students, including within disaggregated subgroups, are considered chronically absent.

It is important to set a measurable goal that is relevant to all districts, as well as to align definitions of absence statewide. Ensure that partial-day absences are defined and tracked consistently, and include in- and out-of-school suspensions as absences, as both can result in lost learning time.

Strategies: To ensure early prevention, implement early warning systems that incorporate absenteeism, academic performance, and discipline in order to understand risk factors that influence rates of absenteeism, including whether certain student populations may require more intensive intervention. Among students who are chronically absent, consider high-touch interventions such as mentoring or case management, and ensure students and families have access to the support of social workers and school psychologists. Finally, provide professional development or communities of practice so that staff are connected to integrated supports, as well as community resources.

Implementing an Extended-Year Graduation Rate

Measures: As with efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism, most states identify a specific long-term goal for improving graduation rates, including extended-year graduation rates.
- Illinois has set a goal to ensure that 90% of students graduate within four years, 92% to graduate within 5 years, and 92.5% to graduate within 6 years by 2032.
- New Jersey has set a goal to ensure that 95% of students graduate within four years and 96% to graduate within 5 years, across all subgroups by 2030.
- New Mexico has set a goal to ensure that 85% of students graduate within four years, 88% to graduate within 5 years, and 90% to graduate within 6 years by 2022.

Strategies: In order to achieve these goals, states employ school-level programs as well as targeted individual supports. At the student level, strategies may include SEL, relationship building efforts (such as student advisories), universal design for learning (UDL), personalized learning plans as early as middle school that ensure on-time graduation, and priority enrollment in classes that meet graduation requirements, particularly for students who have experienced educational disruptions. Schools and districts can prioritize wraparound supports that integrate both academic and social services, such as physical and mental health services, after-school and summer mentoring and tutoring, and collaborating with other community resources.

To select and tailor strategies to students' needs, an early warning system can help identify students who may benefit from early interventions. Consider potential barriers to completing high school in four years (e.g. students who have children, students with disabilities, newcomer students with limited formal education prior to immigration, students who must work to support their families); these student 'profiles' may differ from district to district. For example, if students in some districts finish 8th grade without ultimately enrolling in 9th grade, it may be appropriate to implement a 'summer bridge' program to support students' transition to high

school. In Illinois, schools can engage in a needs assessment focusing on governance and management, curriculum and instruction, and/or culture and climate in order to more effectively leverage potential student supports in these focus areas.

Expanding Access to College- and Career-Ready Curriculum

Measures: When focusing on improving access to postsecondary opportunities, ensure that both college-level coursework and career-ready training are made available and tracked for students in all districts. States may choose to collect data on resources that are available to students prior to graduation, postgraduate outcomes such as employment or enrollment in a postsecondary institution, or a combination of the two.

- Delaware tracks the number of students who enroll in a postsecondary institution within a year of high school graduation, as well as the percentage of 9th graders earning core academic credits, in order to indicate whether students are on track to pursue advanced coursework.
- New York tracks the number of students who meet college- and career-ready benchmarks, such as achieving satisfactory scores on AP and IB exams or earning a career and technical industry credential.
- South Carolina has set a goal to ensure that 90% of their students will graduate with the skills outlined in their "Portrait of a Graduate" by 2035. To achieve this, the state tracks the number of students who meet at least one of nine college- and career-ready benchmarks, then calculates a completion rate by dividing it by the number of students in the 12th grade cohort. South Carolina also tracks the percentage of recent graduates enrolled in credit-bearing coursework at a postsecondary institution, with the goal to reduce students requiring remedial postsecondary coursework by 5% each year.

Strategies: Districts may consider partnering with college access programs such as AVID, as well as with postsecondary institutions that can provide dual enrollment or early college programs, though it is imperative to remove AP exam fees or tuition costs associated with dual enrollment to ensure equitable access to these resources. For career and technical education, states can focus on educator recruitment and retention efforts, especially in high-demand areas of study. For all staff, professional development that focuses on personalized learning so that all students can achieve success is recommended.

Conclusion:

In accordance with ESSA regulations, all SQSS data collected and reported should be disaggregated by student subgroups. Other best practices regarding data use include conducting periodic data audits, reporting outcomes at the district- or school level to track gaps between districts or types of schools, and sharing data with practitioners in a way that is accessible, clear, and concise.

Some approaches presented in this memo can be implemented statewide in order to better support all students, such as developing and communicating clear statewide goals. Others are highest-leverage at a district- or school level, such as selecting specific strategies to reduce absenteeism or suspensions, where the effectiveness of an intervention may be contingent on community factors. To maximize impact, consider identifying organizations or community-based organizations that are poised to offer support and/or provide wraparound services to students and families.

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