fast five

Five Recommendations for Engaging Stakeholders in the Development, Implementation and Evaluation of Results-Based Accountability and Support Systems

States working to establish and refine results-driven accountability and supports systems identified stakeholder engagement as vital to the process. Inviting stakeholders to the table ensures a diversity of perspectives will inform the development process, thereby strengthening the ultimate design.

In the fall of 2020, the NCSI RBAS team interviewed five states who have implemented results-based accountability and support systems to learn more about their experiences and ask what advice they would offer other states interested in creating similarly results-focused general supervision systems. What follows is a list of five considerations to include when engaging stakeholders to inform this work. We express our sincere gratitude to Colorado, Indiana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Vermont for sharing their insights with us.

1. Plan for the initial and ongoing role of stakeholders.

States who have successfully incorporated results into general supervision systems have utilized stakeholder input and critical feedback as a cornerstone for systems change. By fostering effective communication between the state, districts, and other stakeholders, the state ensures that its general supervision system will reflect a wide variety of perspectives.

Some states interviewed described how stakeholder voice was foundational in the initial, exploration phases, including in the selection of which results or outcomes data elements to incorporate into state accountability metrics. Some states also reported engaging stakeholders in an ongoing way to help guide implementation of their new system

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and make refinements over time. Many states reported embedding feedback loops within existing stakeholder groups to provide this critical thought partnership, such as their State Advisory Panel (SAP), statewide SSIP stakeholder groups, or stakeholder groups established specifically to guide the state's results-driven accountability efforts.

2. Involve stakeholders in designing not only a results-based accountability system but also supports and assistance for districts.

The states interviewed sought stakeholder input not only on the design of their results-driven accountability system but also the resources, professional development, and technical assistance available to districts identified as needing support. For example, some of the states interviewed reported using both results data and feedback received from stakeholders to customize technical assistance to districts. Stakeholder input has also informed states' internal capacity-building activities with their own staff in order to better support districts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

3. Collect and incorporate feedback received from districts along the way.

States that have embraced a results orientation to their accountability and support practices have also noted that it can lead to shifts in the way they interface with districts. For example, the states we interviewed indicated that they want to cultivate a partnership-based relationship with districts and create opportunities to better understand their unique story and context. They feel this will result in the ability to provide better, more responsive support to districts.

Part of building that type of relationship involves collecting and listening openly and honestly to district feedback — even criticism — about changes to the state's accountability and support system.

The states we interviewed have been mindful of criticism received during the initial rollout of their new system design and have used this information to drive additional improvements to their system designs. Throughout the design and implementation process, communication matters and, according to the states interviewed,

will lead to better, user-informed system designs and, ultimately, acceptance of the state's results-driven approach to accountability and support from districts.

4. Consider district needs and priorities.

States reported including and being mindful of districts' needs and priorities when redesigning their accountability and support systems. For example, the states we interviewed were intentional about avoiding placing extra data burden on districts and instead sought ways to analyze existing data in creative ways (e.g., establish growth measures) rather than create new data collections that would impact districts. As one state explained, "[There will be] no new measures; we will make do with what we got."

States also indicated an awareness about districts that need support to address compliance issues as well as challenges with student outcomes, and they are seeking ways to provide assistance at the universal, targeted, and intensive levels that differentiates and responds to districts' needs. States also mentioned that districts that do not meet compliance requirements are often the same districts that need assistance to improve student outcomes.

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Finally, it is important to recognize that barriers to change at the state level, including changes in leadership or high turnover of staff, impact districts as well. Being mindful of these challenges at the local level as a new accountability and support system is implemented can help states adopt a proactive, supportive approach to working with districts and navigating these issues.

5. Embrace the iterative nature of the systems redesign process.

States report this work is iterative. Some states needed to engage additional internal and external stakeholders at different points in the process and even had to go back to the drawing board a number of times. For example, states reported the benefit of modeling calculations like LEA determinations or risk assessments with various data points or indicators included, excluded, or weighted differently. Running these various models, sharing the outputs with stakeholders internal and/or external to the state agency, and then considering needed changes takes time. In addition, collecting feedback from stakeholders during and after the first year of implementation, coupled with development of responsive revisions, was also key to states obtaining and receiving buy-in from both internal and external stakeholders.

Regular, ongoing engagement with stakeholders and commitment to having a diverse set of perspectives weigh in on key design decisions are what ultimately build support for a new system and approach. As one state phrased it, when it comes to creating a results-driven general supervision system, "Stakeholder engagement is likely the biggest thing."