

Develop reciprocity across the system.

What does it look like for state and local education systems to ensure excellence and equity in the middle of a global pandemic? This brief, a companion to our piece on "Assessment, Accountability, and the Adaptive Challenge of COVID-19," offers some of our recent wonderings related to one of the three areas of the new vision of assessment and accountability originally described in Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm – **developing reciprocity across the system.**

"We are asking schools to fix problems that run much deeper than the tools they have at their disposal to address. Rather than 'tsk tsk'-ing at them and barraging students with more frequent tests that just tell us what we already know, I think we ought to be pushing resources into those schools so they have the tools to overcome the obstacles."

- Jeremy Wilhelm, Atlanta parent and Senior Study Director at Westat

Last semester, for the very first time, everyone in the entire American education system witnessed resource inadequacies that plainly interfered with students' attendance, engagement, and learning. Inequitable access to and distribution of resources persisted before the pandemic; it's just harder to ignore when "school" is at the full mercy of students' at-home ability (physical, technological, mental, and emotional) to connect. Even after school buildings begin reopening, the blurring of lines between home and school raises important questions about our collective responsibility for providing necessary resources for learning.

Along with louder calls for resource reciprocity, we are sensing a shift occurring in power and decision-making authority that represents a new kind of reciprocity: a rebalancing of who is accountable to whom, and for what. COVID-19 is accelerating a rebalancing of authority from states to districts as districts are charged with building plans for reopening schools. Paul Leather asks, "might these same district muscles be exercised reciprocally with state policies and practice, allowing districts to make recommendations for quality local assessment and accountability systems that aggregate data back up to the state for equity purposes?"

Additionally, by serving as the "adult in the room" supporting distance learning, parents and caregivers more visibly joined the "instructional core" with teachers and students. Now more than ever, strong, reciprocal relationships between families and schools are important and more clearly impact the ability of schools and districts to meet state level expectations. Districts and schools have thus become more accountable to families and communities and share with them the responsibility for student engagement and learning. As Tony describes, such reciprocity is especially critical in the face of a potentially dramatic increase in the number of disengaged youth caused by COVID-19 and its resulting blow to community well-being. On the flip side, the "pandemic pods" rapidly forming among families with means hints at the fragility of public education systems that are not perceived to adequately address community needs. This phenomenon heightens the imperative for targeted universalism, such as providing "pods" for all families in ways that support equity.



Together, these issues raise important questions for education leaders and communities to consider as they design accountability systems that recognize **growing reciprocity** emerging across the system, including:

- In what ways does the design of our accountability system signal a shared belief that every child can learn and a shared commitment across system levels to do whatever it takes for each child succeed? How can we design systems where all actors throughout the system are aware of and assume responsibility for their contributions to the success of all students?
- How might we hold a higher awareness of inequitable access to needed resources, and what information should we gather to better understand each student, family, and school's unique challenges? Additionally, how might we better recognize and partner with family and community strengths?
- What other data points are important to include in more comprehensive attempts to understand student and system needs and progress? For example, how will we address educator capacity development and access to quality educators in a newly defined system? And, if we know that the depth and quality of teacher relationships with students and parents matters, how can we ensure this information informs how we look at the quality of the system? Which of these data points might be generated at a local level, and what information would stakeholders need to be confident that local data is accurate and reliable?
- In what ways can funding formulas, resource allocations, and other state and district policies prioritize equity and adequacy given what we know (or need to learn) about each school and communities' unique circumstances?
- How might accountability systems center on the holistic needs of students and their communities?
- How might we develop greater reciprocity in decision-making related to accountability, providing greater opportunity for districts to report how they will hold themselves accountable to a learning agenda tied to state goals?

We believe questions like these are best explored by education leaders and their local communities in collaborative, inclusive conversations about how assessment and accountability policies can best place students and their needs at the center. Change is both imperative and already happening; we need only to ask the right questions, listen, and answer the call to action.

CIE is excited to support and learn alongside education leaders and communities as we leap from a semester of crisis management into a future of hope. We invite you in as a learning partner to help inform our thinking on this and other topics as they play out. What are you noticing? What are you wrestling through? We invite you to tell us at jenny@leadingwithlearning.org or take our survey on [how COVID-19 is changing your perceptions of education](#).