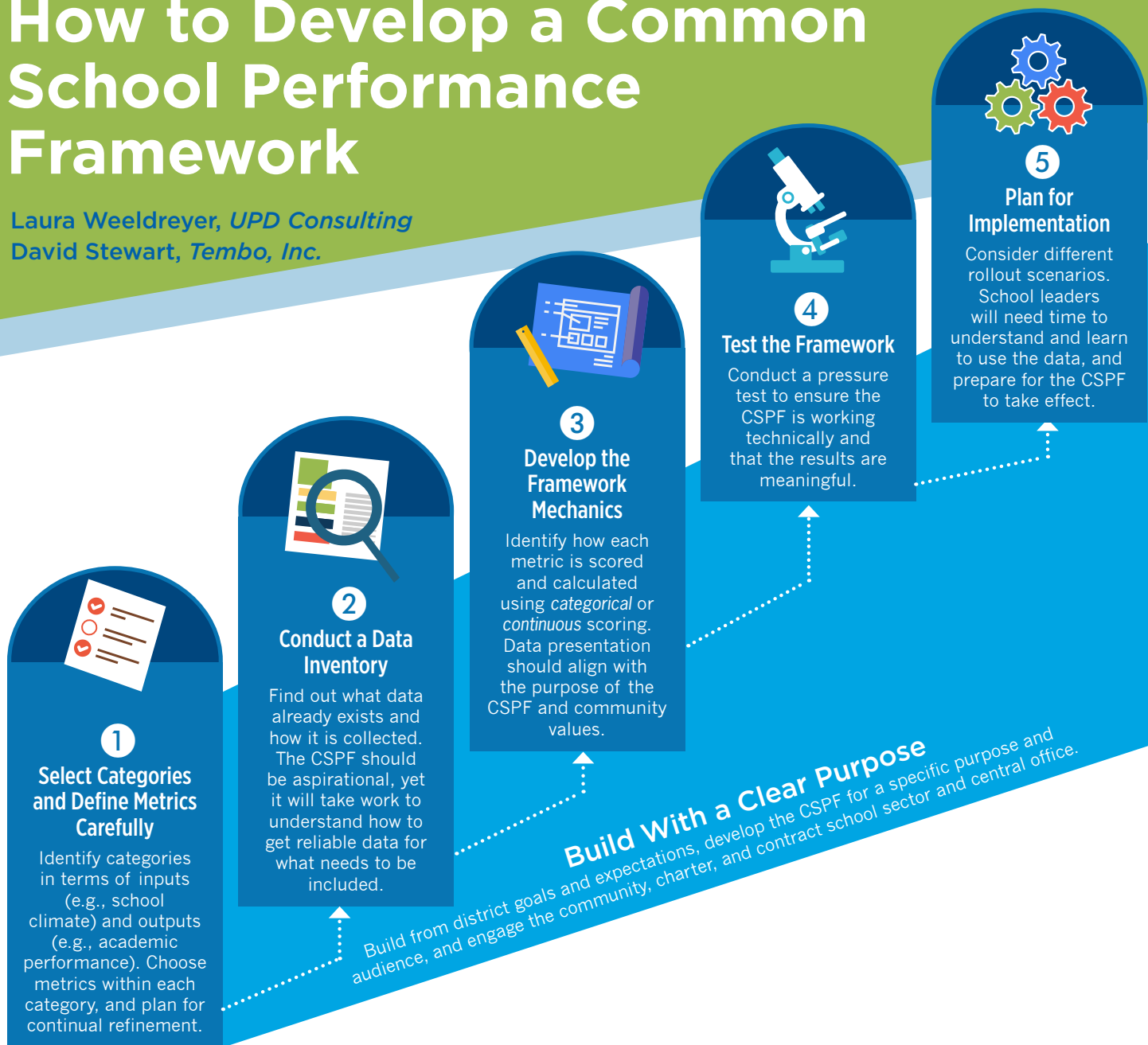


How to Develop a Common School Performance Framework

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A Common School Performance Framework (CSPF) is a systematic way of measuring and scoring school quality and effectiveness based on values and needs specific to a district or city's school system. The framework is built from district goals and expectations and is developed for a specific purpose and audience. Many CSPFs allow for districtwide or peer school comparisons. Districts may use a CSPF to manage schools, allocate resources and support, inform parents and families about school enrollment choices, and/or as the basis for charter renewal decisions. Strong examples of common school performance

frameworks exist around the country, including in Denver, Chicago, and Louisiana.

Who would be interested in a CSPF and why? The key to this question lies within the name: "common." A CSPF is a framework that spans multiple governing bodies, such as a school district and charter schools that are authorized by the same district or are located within the same geographic setting. Multiple agencies must collaborate to design a CSPF to include schools that have previously followed different standards of accountability.

Build With a Clear Purpose

Before a city engages in any of the processes related to developing a CSPF, it should think carefully about the purpose. Any city that seeks to do this work must be able to answer questions about the purpose and use of a CSPF:

- ▶ What do we need a CSPF to answer for us that we cannot answer now?
- ▶ What will the CSPF be used to do? By whom?
 - How will the CSPF be used once it is developed—for accountability, charter renewal or expansion decisions, and/or to help parents make informed choices?
 - Should the CSPF differentiate for schools in turnaround?
- ▶ Who is the intended consumer of the information and ratings produced by a CSPF?
- ▶ Who must have buy-in for this tool to be effective at driving the change we envision?
- ▶ How will local values and context be incorporated into a CSPF? What will it communicate about our district as a process and a reporting mechanism?
- ▶ How can the CSPF function to satisfy state or federal accountability requirements as established through the Every Student Succeeds Act?

The answers vary greatly across cities, and they will shape everything from what metrics are considered to who is involved in the process of developing the CSPF,

how the final format is designed and how the results get shared; choosing quality metrics is only one of the key elements.

Once a clear purpose has been defined, developers should consider how developing a CSPF can be integrated and aligned into processes, timelines, policies, and structures that already exist in their city.

- ▶ Is the CSPF replacing a tool that did not work as well or was outdated?
- ▶ Is the CSPF something new that will require a lot of implementation work?
- ▶ Does the city or district have strategic goals that can be incorporated into the CSPF, creating a cohesive and aligned plan for schools?

Again, the answers will help guide the process that is used to develop the CSPF.

If, for example, a city wants the CSPF to guide how schools are managed and supported, or to allocate financial resources, it will need to align the CSPF with the budget timeline. If the developers want to use the CSPF to make charter renewal decisions, they need to align the release of the CSPF results with the charter renewal timeline and consider what the language in the charter contracts says about how renewal decisions will be made or what can be used for accountability purposes. If the developers want to use a CSPF to inform parents, then it must be published in time to factor into school choice decisions. Timelines and intended use must go hand in hand.

Framework vs. School Profile

Most districts have a lot of information about schools that could be very useful (based on the intended purpose) but should not be scored as part of the CSPF. Developers of a CSPF might consider creating two kinds of information in parallel: the school performance framework and a school profile. A *CSPF* is a group of scored metrics that result in some combination of domain and overall ratings. A *school profile* is a collection of critical but unscored information and/or metrics about a school that can be widely shared alongside the rating of a school's performance and quality.

The *CSPF* serves an accountability function:


- ▶ Defines goals and expectations.
- ▶ Allows “apples-to-apples” school comparisons.
- ▶ Helps district administrators offer support and/or differentiates the management structures for schools.

The *school profile* serves an informational function:

- ▶ Provides critical information in one spot.
- ▶ Offers a snapshot of the school.
- ▶ Is flexible over time as the school grows or offers new programs.

Undoubtedly, some important information about schools will not get included in the CSPF. If school profiles are simultaneously being built, CSPF developers can consider including that information in the profile.

Finding Common Ground in Memphis



Shelby County Schools (Memphis, TN) wanted to greatly expand its school choice options and provide parents with more information on the performance of all the schools available to them as they navigate the enrollment process. As part of this multi-year effort, Shelby County Schools wanted a tool that could show school quality for all of the schools in its city: traditional public schools, charter schools, and the schools that the state department named as low performing and are now part of the state's Achievement School District. While the Tennessee Department of Education and the Achievement School District already had their own performance frameworks, no system covered all Memphis public schools in a way that conveyed the values of the community. To create a tool that all three groups could agree upon, Shelby County Schools convened a steering committee with representatives from all three groups, as well as community education leaders who were committed to transparency and quality for all children in Memphis, regardless of what kind of school a child attends or who manages it. The CSPF Steering Committee met together for nine months to determine the metrics and the scoring system and to agree upon a conceptual approach to a CSPF. This was a necessary first step before the partners felt comfortable engaging in their own stakeholder engagement processes. Negotiation and collaboration trumped any one party being “right,” as the purpose, and indeed the power, of the proposed CSPF was that it would stretch across governance structures to bring common ground to the entire city.



Terms to Know

METRIC: A point of data within a general category to be measured. Defined by “business rules” about what exactly is being measured and why, population size to draw from, and what data are included. For example, under the category of “Academic Achievement,” a metric might be “PSAT scores,” which could be specifically measured as Average Overall PSAT Scores, Percentage of Students Above X in Math, or Percentage of Students with Above X in All Subjects.

Inputs: Non-academic metrics, such as school climate.

Outputs: Measurements of test scores, academic achievement, or achievement gap closure; what happens as a result of “inputs.”

WEIGHTS: A way to prioritize different metrics. Particular categories of metrics could count or be “weighted” more heavily than others, depending on the priorities, values, and purpose of the CSPF.

FLOOR and TARGET: Floor is the minimum level for a metric, the score on a particular metric below which a school will get no points. Target is the exemplar or standard, the score for a metric that will receive the maximum points possible for that category.

CONTINUOUS or CATEGORICAL: How values/points are scored to the data of each metric. If the value could be any number within a range of data, such as average PSAT score, it is continuous. If data are limited to certain categories, such as yes/no, or points are assigned based on defined ranges, then data are categorical.



Step 1: What Will Be Measured?

The first step in the process of developing a CSPF is defining the categories to include. Most cities include categories for academic performance and academic growth, often referred to as **outputs**. Other commonly used domains include school climate, college and career readiness, equity/achievement gap closure, and student perception, referred to as **inputs**.

Once categories are defined, metrics are chosen within each category. Metrics must be specifically defined, including explicit business rules about what exactly is being measured, a rationale for including a specific metric, N size, what data will populate the metric, and when those data are available. For example, a high school domain of College and Career Readiness could include a metric of PSAT scores. However, PSAT scores could mean *Average Overall PSAT Scores*, *Percentage of Students Above X in Math*, *Percentage of Students with Above X in All Subjects*, or something else entirely. Figure 1 lists common categories and metrics.

CSPF developers can open the lens and start with the largest set of possibilities. They should think of everything they want to know about school quality and how they might know it. But they should also revisit the list and make sure each metric connects with the purpose—the “why.” The number of metrics included and the weights assigned to each metric should be based, at least in part, on the stated goals of the CSPF.

If the primary purpose of the CSPF is to make district school closure and charter renewal decisions, the developers may want to include more metrics than they would if the primary purpose is to help parents select the right school for their child.

Next, developers should comb through the metrics again and consider whether including certain metrics may result in unintended consequences (e.g., *number of suspensions*, which may suppress the reporting of suspensions) or whether the way business rules are defined for a metric may result in unintended consequences (e.g., *Advanced Placement (AP) pass rates*, which may discourage schools from having students sit for the AP exam unless they think the students will pass, vs. *AP pass rates of all 12th graders*, which actually encourages AP participation). Make sure the metrics and business rules are incentivizing the right kinds of behaviors in schools and are communicating the values that stakeholders feel represent their community.

A solid list of metrics will demand continued refinement with stakeholder input and the school district’s value for specific metrics in decision making in, for example, how seriously a metric will be considered for the kinds of decisions the CSPF is intended to inform, as well as any political or community ramifications.

There is a common desire to have a single CSPF answer to every accountability need for city schools: how school quality is measured, how parents are informed, how supports are allocated, and how charters are renewed. The tool will be more effective the more focused and specific the purpose and

planning is. If a city hopes to have a tool serve multiple purposes, then it should consider developing different versions, one for each purpose. Cities use different elements or views of the CSPF for different goals, but no one version can equally and fairly achieve multiple purposes for multiple audiences.

Figure 1: Common Categories and Metrics Considered in Common School Performance Frameworks

Category	Metrics
Student Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State or local education administration test scores, different grades, different subjects • Proficiency levels at specific grade levels • Course passing rates for specific “gateway” courses • Tennessee School Success Rate • Compared to peer school/district/state
Student Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth on state test scores over time • Use of Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) or Value Added Models (VAM) • Achievement level gains or scale score gains • Compared to peer school/district/state
Career and College Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSAT scores • ACT or SAT scores • Participation rates for PSAT, ACT, and/or SAT • Percent of 9th grade cohort completing high school within four years • Percent who meet state university entry requirements • Achievement on state high school exams • Enrollment and passing rates for AP or International Baccalaureate coursework • Early childhood literacy rates • Compared to peer school/district/state • Percent FASFA completion
School Climate/ Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey ratings from parents, teachers, and/or students • Attendance • Chronic absenteeism rates • Staff attendance • Expulsion/suspension rates • Student persistence/re-enrollment averages • Compared to peer school/district/state • Participation in leadership activities, extracurricular activities, enrichment activities (#/% of students)
Achievement Gap Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap closure for various sub-groups (English as Second Language students, free and reduced-price meal students, minority students) • Compared to peer school/district/state
Transformation or Gateway*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch up and keep up growth • Continuously enrolled growth (measuring students who have been enrolled 2+ years)

*District-specific data that have been showcased as key to/highly correlated with ultimate achievement

Clarity Around Goals in Louisiana



The Louisiana State Department of Education (LSDOE) wanted a common school performance framework that would help it balance the need to provide accountability and differentiated support to the state's charter schools while maintaining the autonomy of its diverse system of schools. To facilitate the development of its *Charter School Performance Compact (CSPC)* and to minimize controversy in the process, LSDOE took the perspective that simplicity and clarity were key. LSDOE leaders defined a clear purpose of what the CSPC was and was not: it was about accountability, oversight of the system, and parent information. Larger conversations about fundamental charter school issues or the specific agendas of individual schools and advocacy groups were certainly important, but they should happen at another time.

As a result of setting this intention, LSDOE, along with 16 charter and consulting firms, decided to keep the categories of metrics very limited, focusing on academic, organizational, and financial metrics as a baseline to compare schools. They chose to operate within the existing policy framework for school accountability and develop a tool that was simple for schools to use and understand, with a small number of indicators and clear consequences and outcomes for schools.



Step 2: Conducting a Data Inventory

Once CSPF developers have a list of categories and metrics, they can conduct an inventory of what data already exist, how they are collected, who or what office collects them, and when. The answers may vary for districts and charter schools. Depending on local policies and specific state charter laws, the developers may be dealing with multiple data systems. If so, they will need data-sharing agreements so that one agency can collect data from all involved parties for the CSPF. The technical mechanics of data sharing and transfer will need to be worked out.

Timelines are important because they will relate back to the purpose. If, for example, the purpose dictates that CSPF results need to be available by May, and the district wants to use a CSPF to evaluate principals or make staffing decisions, then it will have to think about when data are available for those kinds of decisions and what can be included in a CSPF. Timelines can also effect availability of metrics: based on timing, certain metrics may not be able to be included, or some data may have to lag by a year to make sure the purpose of the CSPF is met.

This is the second step because CSPF developers should not be bound to what data are currently available; the CSPF should be aspirational. In other words, if a city does not have the data now, how can it get them? This might mean introducing an agreement to administer a specific survey or even agreements to collect different kinds of data that have not been used before, such as the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), student engagement data, or ratings from school reviews. These are examples of data that might currently be collected by other offices or programs and not traditionally used as part of an accountability framework. There might be metrics that require kinds of data that the district collects but the charter schools do not, or vice versa. In Memphis, the schools in the Achievement School District, for example, administered NWEA's MAP assessment, but Shelby County Schools did not at the time.¹ Developers may also decide there is a need for data that do not currently exist but are valued or prioritized in the development of the CSPF. The district and charter schools will then have to collaborate on a plan for how to collect such data.

¹ In school year 2015-2016, Shelby County Schools began administering MAP testing.



Step 3: The Mechanics

The mechanics of the metrics must be carefully thought through. Once metrics have been identified with the inventory of current data in hand, developers will have to consider how the metrics are actually scored. This means formally documenting the business rules and definitions for each metric (see Figure 2 for examples). This kind of documentation will be useful down the line in ensuring that the CSPF is transparent and for training and communications purposes.

Along with the business rules, developers must agree upon the scoring range for each metric and how the scores will be calculated. Districts have approached this question differently. There are many examples of **categorical** or **continuous** scoring.

Another approach to scoring that is gaining increased appeal nationally is to set **floors** and **targets** for each metric—for example, define the floor (the score on

a particular metric below which a school will get no points) and the goal line of a particular metric, or the target for a school. For instance, if the CSPF includes a *Student Attendance Rate* metric and a *4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate* metric, and each metric is worth 10 points, should a school that achieved 80 percent on each metric receive 8 out of 10 points? Probably not. A school with an attendance rate of 80 percent may not be awarded any points, but a graduation rate of 80 percent may be worth 8 or 9 of the 10 possible points. To optimize the ability to award points based on meaningful scores and to equate different types of metrics, developers may want to consider applying a floor and a target to each metric.

Using attendance as an example, consider the possible ways to score attendance in a CSPF, as shown in the inset.

Figure 2: Examples of Metrics and Business Rules

Category	Indicator	Indicator Number	Measure	Grade Level(s)	What does this mean?
Academic Performance	Achievement	1.A.1	Composite proficiency rate for reading/language arts	3–8	The percentage of eligible students who earned scores of Proficient or Advanced on the TCAP in Reading/Language Arts
	Achievement	1.A.2	Composite proficiency rate for math	3–8	The percentage of eligible students who earned scores of Proficient or Advanced on the TCAP in Math
School Climate	Students	3.A.2	Overall attendance rate	K–12	The average number of days students attend school divided by the average number of days students are enrolled
	Students	3.A.3	Overall student persistence rate	K–12	The percentage of eligible students who are enrolled at a school on the audited enrollment date and June 1 in the same school year
	Students	3.A.3.a	Student persistence rate for economically disadvantaged students	K–12	The percentage of eligible students who are enrolled at a school on the audited enrollment date and June 1 in the same school year

Attendance has a score range of 0 to 100 percent. Generally, the state sets a standard for satisfactory attendance, depending on grade levels served. In Maryland, for example, the state standard for elementary schools is 96 percent.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE: Two Different Approaches



Categorical Approach

To define categories, a city might look at the range of attendance data and see that no school has an annual attendance score of less than 75 percent. So they might define the four categories of attendance scores as follows: 0 points = below 75 percent, 1 point = 75–85 percent, 2 points = 86–90 percent, 3 points = 91–95 percent, and 4 points = 96 percent and above.

Floors and Targets Approach

To define the floor, a city might look at the range of attendance scores for all of the schools and see that no school in the district has an annual attendance score of less than 75 percent. So 75 percent will be the floor—for example, if a school's attendance rate is below 75 percent, the school will receive 0 points within the CSPF. The target could be defined as the state standard of 96 percent: a school that meets the state standard will receive the maximum points possible. A school that has a 97 or 98 percent attendance rate will not get extra points. In this example, then, the point value for attendance will be assigned within a range of 75 to 96 percent.

Many different methods can be used to determine floors and targets, and there is no right or wrong answer. Some school systems use the actual distribution of scores for all schools over a one- to three-year period and assign the 10th or 90th percentile as the floor and target respectively. Other models have used historical data to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each metric and assigned floors and targets that represent two standard deviations below and above the mean. Another fairly common option is to assign floors using one of the models just described and to assign targets that are aligned to district or authorizer priorities. For example, the 90th percentile for math proficiency rates for the past three years might be 84 percent, but the district or authorizer may choose to set the target at 100 percent to align with a stated goal.

To put the metrics together in such a way that the CSPF tells a story about the school's quality and effectiveness, developers must make numerous decisions about how the CSPF works as a whole:

- ▶ Scaling: How is the SPF scored (A–F type grades, stars, numbers, or labels)?
- ▶ Rollup: How are the metrics rolled up into a score or scaled individually/by category?
 - Will domain-specific scores be reported in addition to the overall grade (e.g., sub-grades for school climate, academic growth, and achievement gap closure, etc.)?

- ▶ How is the CSPF presented and displayed: school report cards, summary scores, PDFs, district or school website, interactive comparison tool?

The best way to answer these questions is to continuously return to the purpose of the CSPF and check answers against that purpose, thus ensuring alignment. If the CSPF is intended to inform parents, an online tool linked to school enrollment processes and forms might make the most sense. If school accountability and the allocations of resources (management, support, or financial) is the goal, then an annual release of school report cards or school progress reports could be the answer.

The final mechanical decisions have to do with weights for each category and within each category, for each metric. This is another opportunity to communicate values. What a city values most will be weighted the heaviest. Developers can start by assigning weights to categories. Once those look like the right communication of your values, developers can move on to weighting the individual metrics. Developers will have the chance to test these weights in the next phase of work. Most districts choose to weight academics most highly, but even that has nuance: Will they weight academic performance more highly than academic growth, or the opposite? This is also an opportunity to revisit whether the CSPF creates the correct incentives.

For example, in lower-performing school systems, a tendency often exists to weight growth or student progress more than academic achievement. Within a

Most states have an accountability framework for measuring a school's performance. Cities developing a CSPF should ask themselves what they are trying to do differently. This is a chance to be thoughtful about how a locally developed framework can complement what is provided by the state. As a city enters into the process of developing and then building a CSPF, it should keep these guiding questions in mind:

Thoughtful Accountability



Equitable

- Are the measures reliable (e.g., standardized test scores, growth measures)?
- Are the measures systematically biasing certain schools (e.g., performance vs. growth)?
- Are the measures creating the right incentives (e.g., suspensions, AP pass rates)?

Actionable

- Are there clear rewards and interventions?
- Are parents able to use the tool to make informed enrollment decisions?
- Are there different expected actions associated with the different overall scores?
- Can the CSPF be used to focus school supports/interventions?

Transparent

- Do key people understand how the framework works and are they able to explain it easily and clearly?
- What are the tradeoffs between technical precision and access/understanding?

particular domain, developers may want to count some metrics (e.g., *Proficiency Rate in Mathematics*) more than other more aspirational metrics (e.g., *Percentage of Students Earning Scores of Advanced in Mathematics*).

Once you have a list of metrics, weights, floors, and targets, all that is left with regard to scoring is figuring out how to roll everything up into one or more scores or ratings. Developers may choose to use words (e.g., Model, Not Meeting Standards, Priority, Focus, Exemplary), letter grades, or tiers (e.g., Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3), but regardless of how the different outcomes

are labeled, developers will need to figure out what cut scores to assign to each possible outcome. One option is to simply divide the total number of possible points by the total number of different outcomes so that each overall level is based on the same size scoring range. Another option is to simulate the results using different cut scores to end up with a distribution that makes sense. Additionally, developers will need to decide whether to report domain-specific grades or ratings in addition to the overall score, or whether they will simply use one summative index.



Step 4: Conducting a Pressure Test or Trial Run

Now that the mechanics have been worked through and all the pieces fit, it is time to test the whole CSPF as a working framework. Developers must conduct a pressure test of the CSPF to ensure that it is working technically—for example, the data are being pulled in from the correct sources and are being aggregated and scored according to established business rules, and that weights are being applied correctly. A pressure test also can be used to look at the distribution of school scores: do scores match intuition and pass a “sanity test?” Developers can consider what it will look like if these results get published in the local newspaper. Will they make sense to the average citizen? Specifically, do the scores contradict ratings from the state accountability system or any other accountability measures? If so, developers will need to think carefully before releasing the scores. Developers of the CSPF may be comfortable with the differences (especially

if they are the result of weighting growth more highly than performance, for example) but must be prepared to answer questions from the school community.

The pressure test can also be used to verify scaling distinctions. For example, does the cut score for each step in the scale (top, average, failing schools) make sense, or does it create meaningless and inactionable distinctions? Are the results actionable, do they support sound decision making and potentially provide good incentives? Are the metrics strongly correlated? Are there redundancies or skewing? These questions can only be answered by running a simulation of the CSPF scores. In addition, the pressure test can produce results that can be used to brief a school board or to train and communicate with schools prior to scores becoming public.



Step 5: Gearing Up for Implementation

While it is easy to focus on the technical aspects of building a CSPF, the best efforts focus equally on the process. From the start, there should be involvement from various stakeholders, including those who will make use of the data produced by the CSPF and those who will be affected by the results (such as school leaders, school management organizations, or parents). Stakeholder input ensures both that the framework, metrics, and weightings chosen reflect the needs, values, and reality in that city and that there is broad understanding of the purpose of the CSPF and how it will be used. A pressure test has been conducted, and the engagement and communications efforts must expand greatly. CSPF developers must create engagement and communication plans to get wide buy-in from key stakeholders in order to roll out the CSPF. These plans can also include training on the categories, metrics, and scoring of the CSPF.

A city may want to consider whether to roll out the CSPF for a period of time before applying the consequences or interventions for schools. Stakeholders will need time to understand the data, question the data and, ultimately, to learn to use the

data. Some districts introduce it with a no-stakes rollout for one academic year as a soft launch. It may increase buy-in if stakeholders can learn about the CSPF without immediately worrying about consequences. Another way to assist school leaders in understanding the framework and preparing for rollout is to provide a score “calculator,” or a score projection tool, ahead of releasing the final scores. This allows schools to predict their scores, work proactively to improve their scores, and correct any mistakes in data or information before scores go public.

The school district and charter organizations also will need time to learn about the CSPF internally and to integrate it into existing processes for performance management, school support, and/or charter renewals. The CSPF communication and engagement strategy must include the central office as well. This will be a new way of thinking about school quality for all parties. To ensure consistent and positive communication about the CSPF, developers should make sure that the central office staff has a full and common understanding of the framework.

Conclusion

As illustrated in the [case study](#) on Chicago's School Quality Rating Policy, as well as in examples embedded in this guide, no process of developing a CSPF is exactly alike; the development process is just as important as the CSPF itself in ensuring smart use. A CSPF can be a tool for facilitating informed decision making for both parents and school system leaders, as well as for targeting supports, interventions, and rewards for schools. But it is only successful when built with a shared understanding among stakeholders

of how schools will be measured, the purpose of the tool, and how it will be embedded into decision making processes. Through thoughtful consideration during the development process of who needs to be engaged and how, as well as the proper metrics to align with its purpose, cities and states embarking on the development of a CSPF can create a tool that is understandable, supported by school leaders, conveys the values of the city, and supports a truly citywide system of schools.



Find More Information

Cities and states can use this guide to develop an effective and fair tool for measuring school quality across district and charter lines. The following organizations and resources also provide relevant and useful information and services:

- National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) [Core Performance Framework](#) is an in-depth guide to creating a performance framework, developed based on NACSA's research on best practices for charter school authorizers as well as experiences with supporting ten authorizers through a process of development of performance frameworks. NACSA also has a library of resources on performance frameworks, including case studies on cities' experiences and presentations on accountability, which can be found [here](#).
- Columbia University's [Center on Research and Policy Leadership \(CRPL\)](#) provides consulting support for organizations interested in developing CSPFs to be used by state departments of education, cities, school districts, charter organizations, advocacy groups, and other nonprofits. CRPL can be reached at cpri@law.columbia.edu.
- [Tembo, Inc.](#) provides consulting for data management, analytics, and telling a story through data for school systems. Their work has included projects such as school performance frameworks, equity reports, school snapshots, and more. Tembo, Inc. was founded by David Stewart, who provided technical support to two school districts for this project and is a co-author of this how-to guide.
- [UPD Consulting](#) provides consulting on performance management for public sector organizations, including school districts, advocacy groups, or charter organizations. Laura Weeldreyer, a consultant at UPD, acted as a facilitator for the development of one city's CSPF for this project and co-authored this how-to-guide.