



# APPLES to APPLES

Common School  
Performance Frameworks  
as a Tool for Choice  
and Accountability

## OVERVIEW

Sarah Yatsko and Alice Opalka

## LESSONS FROM CHICAGO

Jessica Sutter

## HOW-TO GUIDE: DEVELOPING A CSPF

Laura Weeldreyer and David Stewart

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

## **Acknowledgments**

This paper was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We thank the Foundation for its support. The ideas presented here are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Foundation. We are grateful for the many education leaders from school districts, the charter sector, and the community in the six cities who generously lent their time to this research by welcoming us to observe their process of developing Common School Performance Frameworks, or participating in interviews and follow-up questions.

## **About The Center on Reinventing Public Education**

Through research and policy analysis, CRPE seeks ways to make public education more effective, especially for America's disadvantaged students. We help redesign governance, oversight, and dynamic education delivery systems to make it possible for great educators to do their best work with students and to create a wide range of high-quality public school options for families. Our work emphasizes evidence over posture and confronts hard truths. We search outside the traditional boundaries of public education to find pragmatic, equitable, and promising approaches to address the complex challenges facing public education. Our goal is to create new possibilities for the parents, educators, and public officials who strive to improve America's schools. CRPE is a nonpartisan, self-sustaining organization affiliated with the University of Washington Bothell. Our work is funded through philanthropy, federal grants, and contracts.

## **CRPE Quality Assurance Process**

Independent peer review is an integral part of all CRPE research projects. Prior to publication, this document was subjected to a quality assurance process to ensure that: the problem is well formulated; the research approach is well designed and well executed; the data and assumptions are sound; the findings are useful and advance knowledge; the implications and recommendations follow logically from the findings and are explained thoroughly; the documentation is accurate, understandable, cogent, and balanced in tone; the research demonstrates understanding of related previous studies; and the research is relevant, objective, and independent. Peer review was conducted by research or policy professionals who were not members of the project team.

# An Overview of Common School Performance Frameworks

Sarah Yatsko and Alice Opalka  
Center on Reinventing Public Education



**In most cities today, school choice is the norm, not the exception.** According to our [recent survey](#) of eight U.S. cities, 55 percent of parents said their child attends a school other than their neighborhood school. Students in cities are likely to have a choice between a wide array of district-run magnet and alternative schools, public charter schools, and private schools. Nationwide, 6 percent of all public school children attend a charter school and 13 percent of children in traditional public schools attend a school their parents chose rather than the one they were assigned to, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

Cities across the country continue to offer more public school options to their students. The number of charter schools [more than doubled in the past decade](#). And dozens of school districts are now employing a “[portfolio strategy](#),” expanding and diversifying school options while holding all schools, no matter the type, accountable for performance. Families living in the [Cleveland Metropolitan School District](#), for example, can send their children to a charter school, or a district school with a focus on digital art, architectural design, or environmental studies, or a neighborhood school with a traditional curriculum.

In the midst of this dramatically changing face of public education, the need for meaningful, comparable, and understandable measures of school performance has never been more urgent. Urban parents need information to help them make choices among a sometimes dizzying array of options. Schools need to be able to understand how their performance compares to other schools. And government agencies overseeing the city’s entire portfolio of schools need ways to make a wide range of decisions, including which schools should be expanded or replicated, receive targeted support, or be replaced.

Yet within most cities, district schools, charter networks, and independently operated charter schools provide different sets of performance information to different regulators and groups and are held to different performance standards and measures of quality. In Detroit, for instance, public schools are overseen by a dozen different charter oversight agencies, the Detroit Public School District, and the state-run Education Achievement Agency, all with their own methods of rating schools and holding them accountable. In Detroit, St. Louis, and Memphis the situation has become so confusing for families that local nonprofits and advocacy groups have begun publishing their own rating systems to inform parents and, in the case of Detroit, to ensure that low-performing schools are closed.

To address problems like these, some cities are developing new citywide performance systems that (1) provide consistent information to families and schools and (2) provide one tool to allow government agencies to make informed and fair school oversight decisions. These systems are referred to as Common School Performance Frameworks (CSPF) in this report; they also are sometimes called Unified Accountability Systems.

As part of the Center on Reinventing Public Education’s (CRPE) ongoing work to understand and support successful portfolio management and district-charter collaboration, this report is meant to be a resource for city leaders who are considering implementing or refining a CSPF across all schools, both district and charter. CRPE studied the experiences of six cities, including conducting interviews with district and charter leaders in Chicago, Los Angeles, Denver, and New Orleans<sup>1</sup> and working directly with leaders in Memphis and Sacramento to look more deeply at the process. See Table 1 for a description of 11 cities that currently, formerly, or will soon use various types of school performance reports. The goal was to document lessons about how these frameworks are developed and implemented to inform other cities.

1 The Louisiana Charter School Performance Compact was developed as a performance accountability tool for all charter schools authorized by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. This Charter School Performance Compact applies to [over 70 percent of students](#) in New Orleans as of this writing.

To gather the information presented here, CRPE contracted with researchers and practitioners who observed and supported two cities through their efforts to develop CSPFs. This guide includes two important resources:

### **Lessons from Chicago: Developing a Common School Performance Framework**

This case study, written by Jessica Sutter of EdPro Consulting, describes Chicago's efforts in developing its School Quality Rating Policy. It is an illustration of one city's approach to a CSPF, including how it overcame common hurdles such as district-charter tensions and data limitations.

### **How to Develop a Common School Performance Framework**

Laura Weeldreyer of UPD Consulting and David Stewart, founder of Tembo, Inc., prepared this practical how-to guide for cities at or just beyond the decision point to develop a CSPF. To prepare this report, Weeldreyer draws on her two decades of work in education, both as a high-level district administrator and as a consultant to districts and state education agencies. She also spent 10 months facilitating the creation of CSPF in a large city and has compiled insights and advice on how to create a framework with input from well-informed key stakeholders using reliable and available data that track progress toward agreed-upon goals. Stewart's contributions include some of the more technical aspects of choosing and defining metrics.

These resources are valuable for any "high-choice" city looking for ways to inform parent choice, government oversight, or strategies for portfolio management of the system of schools. They will deeply inform both the technical and political challenges involved in rethinking school accountability and provide specific guidance on how those challenges can be overcome.

They also provide important ideas and lessons to any city or state that is grappling with how to develop rich accountability measures under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). They offer essential guidance about which metrics cities commonly consider, including how they prioritize them and what political and technical considerations one should give to them.

## **What Is a Common School Performance Framework?**

**A CSPF is a tool for measuring the performance of an individual school, using a defined set of metrics that is common to schools across different agencies or governing bodies.** CSPFs are shared between district-run schools, charter schools, contracted public schools, and charter networks within the same city or geographic area. The goal is to enable comparisons across and between all public schools in the area, regardless of who runs them.

CSPFs are specific to a region (typically a city), as opposed to a state school rating or accountability system. They allow a city to set their own priorities for how school quality is defined and measured that go beyond any state definitions or tests, and while state rating systems usually rely solely upon standard testing data, CSPFs commonly incorporate multiple metrics, including non-academic measures such as school climate.

Cities often provide families with common data to inform school choice and to provide transparency (for example, information in the Washington, D.C., [Equity Reports](#)). A CSPF goes further, providing an evaluative rating that is easy for parents and community members to digest. One important goal, although rarely achieved, is to ensure there are common

consequences where schools in the same ratings categories get the same treatment across sectors. For example, when any public school, district or charter, falls below an agreed upon performance standard, it is provided with support or intervention services, or it is replaced with a school that has been consistently rated as high performing and is ready to expand.

Despite these common goals, cities that have invested in fully developed CSPFs have all taken somewhat different approaches, as shown below.

**The purpose of the tool.** Cities vary to what extent they attach consequences to the CSPF. Some use the data simply to highlight successful schools, place informal pressure on low-performers, and inform parents. Most, however, use the framework to help officials decide:

- ▶ Which schools to target for additional support, intervention, or closure.
- ▶ Whether to allow charter schools to replicate or have access to district facilities.

For cities pursuing a portfolio management strategy, CSPFs are a key component to ensuring continuous improvement and equity across the city. Denver, for

example, uses its CSPF to determine where high-quality schools are located, which neighborhoods are in need of better options, which schools should be replicated, which schools are in need of intervention or support, and which schools should be closed.

### **The types of measures included in the tool.**

Standardized test scores are almost always included, but cities differ in whether they emphasize proficiency or growth scores or in how they break scores down by different student populations or sub-groups. Most cities, however, also use other measures of quality, such as Advanced Placement enrollment rates, high school exit exams, and measures of college readiness such as SAT test performance. Beyond academics, cities also have decided to incorporate school climate that can be gleaned through measures including student attendance rates; teacher turnover; teacher, student, and/or parent surveys; or rates of use of discipline, including suspensions and expulsions.

Some cities, such as New Orleans and Los Angeles, intentionally use very few measures of performance to make it clear when schools will face state intervention and to ensure that parents can quickly and easily assess how a school is faring. With a large number of charter schools overseen by the state, the Louisiana Department of Education wanted a common way to measure school performance for all charter schools authorized by Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Because of the unique nature of the New Orleans school system (a nearly all-charter school system), Louisiana made sure that the autonomy of charter schools was preserved in the process; the state intentionally kept metrics very simple and understandable, and it made sure not to infringe on schools' individual priorities. Denver, on the other hand, uses roughly 80 different metrics to create a comprehensive tool that allows school operators to evaluate performance using multiple measures yet can be streamlined to provide parents with the information they need to choose the best fit for their child.

**The process for gathering stakeholder input and managing the political process.** Every city studied for this report gathered input from school staff and others, but the process differed in each city. In Nashville, an alignment of frameworks across sectors evolved with little fanfare. Charter school authorizers, with the support of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), developed a strong performance framework that they then shared with the Metro-Nashville Public Schools. The district saw it as an improvement on what they had been using and decided to use parts of it themselves. In contrast,

those who led Chicago's CSPF efforts pointed to extensive public engagement, many focus groups, and lots of work to help schools understand and calculate their scores in advance of public release as key to successful implementation. The [case study](#) included in this report provides more detail on that process. In Baltimore, as the sole charter school authorizer, the district heavily engaged with the charter sector on the development of a performance framework that would be used to make charter renewal decisions. The end result in 2013 was a framework that was aligned, but not identical to the framework the district had simultaneously developed to hold traditional schools accountable. Yet charter school leaders still publically supported the new charter accountability tool, thankful to have provided input during its development.

Sacramento's effort to elicit broad input was easily the most comprehensive example studied, with tens of focus groups with schools and community members and with district officials making dozens of home visits to interview families in the city. The framework's design iterated throughout the process based on evolving feedback. But public engagement alone is not enough. Without the development of a plan for sustained momentum or buy-in from the incoming administration, the framework did not survive a transition of superintendents and other district administrative staff.

Similarly, in Memphis, even after a strong public engagement campaign and months of facilitated meetings between Shelby County Schools and the state's Achievement School District (ASD), the effort to create a CSPF was unsuccessful. Differences emerged over metrics and their weights and how schools, particularly the lowest-performing ones, would ultimately be represented in the framework. The ASD has since adopted their own aligned—although not identical—accountability frameworks and, as of this writing, continue to work through a broader engagement with the district.

The effort in Memphis illustrates how critical it is for those involved to maintain a high level of commitment throughout the development process. Luckily, a local community organization independently developed the [Memphis School Guide](#) for parents, a tool to compare all district and charter schools in the city, after sensing that the CSPF process could be derailed. Though not as robust as a full CSPF given limited publically available data that it draws upon, the Memphis School Guide does fill a gap by providing parents with easy access to public school performance and other information to support parent choice.



**The technical decisions made about how to ensure that the tool is analytically sound and understandable.** The process by which city leaders develop a performance management tool that will be used for high-stakes decisions such as charter renewal must be able to withstand criticism and challenge. For that reason, many decisions need to be made:

- ▶ What data sources to include?
- ▶ How to reconcile different data sources across district and charter systems or how to collect new kinds of data?

- ▶ How to weight different factors?
- ▶ Whether to roll up the different metrics into one summative “rating” or to present independent ratings for specific domains, such as school climate and academic achievement?

Each city studied had different preferences and approaches to these questions. The accompanying [guide](#) goes into depth about the tradeoffs involved in different approaches and examples of approaches used.

## Avoiding Landmines

Any time performance data are compiled, presented, and especially when used for high stakes decisions, much can go wrong. Charter school leaders can resist being pulled into a system that they believe will limit their autonomies or that will impose a new set of performance standards that they did not originally agree on. District schools may fear that new consequences will be attached to the framework on top of current expectations. A variety of community leaders, union representatives, and others all may have very strongly held views about the “correct” measures of school quality.

CRPE’s research across all six cities offers some critical high-level lessons for avoiding landmines and making sure CSPFs can be effective long-term tools for school improvement throughout a city.

- 1. Carefully tend to politics and engagement to build long-term sustainability.** A CSPF can be rushed in implementation or forced on schools through dictates, (i.e., a district charter authorizer can unilaterally develop and enforce a CSPF) but there may be a significant price to pay in political backlash or simply a lack of commitment when those who pushed the idea move out of the city.

Those implementing a CSPF should pay close attention to the political context in their city and consider which individuals and organizations need to be involved in the process to improve the metrics and to ensure that there is a long-term commitment to its use. Having firm commitment from the superintendent and key charter leaders is essential and should be cultivated and managed appropriately.

Chicago CSPF leaders did extensive outreach throughout the city and across different types of schools. They sought general consensus on the goals and metrics, especially among school leaders. Thanks to this extensive engagement during all aspects of the process, implementation of the CSPF was smooth.

No one set of performance measures can address the specific needs or interests of every group, however. Both Chicago and Louisiana leaders made it clear that despite an extensive engagement process, it would be impossible to accommodate the preferences of every stakeholder.

As the accompanying [Chicago case study](#) notes, it’s wise to check in early with the people who have the ability to kill the effort to create a CSPF, know who is steadfastly in your corner, focus especially on the political system and its players, and know your base. It is impossible to engage too much given how much these schools have on the line.

- 2. Be realistic about the outcomes and metrics of the CSPF.** The process of developing a CSPF can easily take on a life of its own, resulting in a tool that attempts to be everything to everyone or that tries to provide data for every possible question. For that reason, clarity on the goals of the CSPF is critical to success. The risk of extensive engagement is that the tool becomes watered down, rendering it useless. It takes strong leadership to keep the process focused for a strong end result. Some cities did this by getting community input on a strawman tool, others took community feedback and developed a tool that would meet basic community concerns. Both resulted in solid tools because the purpose was clear.

Just as important, the metrics used in the CSPF must be realistic. It must be feasible to collect the data, both technically and politically. Los Angeles and Louisiana leaders found that simple metrics are easier to agree on and require little to no policy changes. Leaders in both places saw the CSPF as an opportunity to make a coherent story out of the extensive data that are already collected, rather than finding ways to collect new data. At any cost, be sure that school staff believe in the core assessment data. That will make or break efforts to implement a CSPF.

**3. Be purposeful and focused.** Throughout the process, it is important for leaders of the process to communicate clearly how the framework will be used and what outcomes are expected. This helps reduce arguments and uncertainty. Transparency and effective communication about how the community's values and priorities are being conveyed through the CSPF will support use and gain broader buy-in.

**4. Be thoughtful and gradual on implementation.**

Give schools time to adjust to the new system and develop respect for it. A CSPF is useless if it is not used for decision making, but decisions will not be politically sustainable if the framework is not seen as valid, reliable, and sensible. Some cities gave schools their data ahead of time so schools could see how they would rank or compare in the new system. Others allowed charter schools to opt in rather than being forced to take part in the new system. Still others offered a year of "safe harbor" before the new rankings took effect. Across all of these examples, time spent letting schools work with and understand the data was time extremely well spent. The new frameworks in most of these cities were generally viewed as better than the old systems. And because no rating is ever perfect, most cities solicited early feedback and committed to making iterations and improvements over time.

## Conclusion

Through CRPE's research, we have found that CSPFs can be an essential tool for informed decision making, accountability, and parent information, but only if developed with diverse and strong buy-in and with a broad understanding of and commitment to how it will be used. The six cities referenced here (and many beyond those included here) shared a need to provide parents with reliable and consistent measures of school quality across all public schools. They also share difficult political tensions and the pernicious problem of how to sustain such efforts amidst leadership turnover and shifting priorities. So this work is not for the faint of heart and it is not a quick fix for either parent information gaps or holding

schools to high standards. In places that failed to fully implement the CSPF, the hurdles included changes in district leadership, stakeholder opposition, and poorly conducted community engagement. In those places that have continued to use a CSPF, there is an openness to iteration and a school board that has hired leaders who pledge to prioritize and preserve it.

As cities and states re-think their school accountability measures under ESSA, the observations and suggestions represented here provide direction to mitigate political opposition and build a tool that facilitates choice and is representative of the community's values.

**Table 1: Cities or Regions That Are Using, Have Attempted, or Are Developing a CSPF**

Name of Framework	Stage of Development	Features and Coverage of Framework	Purpose	Contact Information
<b>CHICAGO</b>				
School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP)	Complete; in use by Office of Accountability since the 2013-2014 school year.	Developed by Chicago Public Schools. Provides summative ratings for all CPS-run schools and all but one charter school.	Used for 5 purposes: parent information, identification of high-achieving schools, as a goal-setting framework, targeting assistance, guide Board decision making.	Office of Accountability <a href="mailto:sqrp@cps.edu">sqrp@cps.edu</a>
<b>DENVER</b>				
School Performance Framework (SPF)	Complete; in use since 2008.	Developed by Denver Public Schools. Over 80 metrics used. Rates all DPS-run schools and all charter schools.	Used for 5 purposes: diagnostic tool, performance transparency, district decision making, basis for accreditation, compensation decisions.	SPF, in the Academic and Innovation Office <a href="mailto:spf@dpsk12.org">spf@dpsk12.org</a>
<b>LOS ANGELES</b>				
School Performance Framework (SPF)	Complete; in use since Fall 2012.	Developed by Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to apply to all LAUSD-run schools, and independent and affiliated charter schools.	Developed with the intention of making previously gathered data useful for schools.  Used as a tool for school-level decision making, parent information, differentiated oversight of schools, charter renewal.	Division of Intensive Support and Intervention <a href="mailto:SchoolPerformanceFramework@lausd.net">SchoolPerformanceFramework@lausd.net</a>
<b>LOUISIANA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</b>				
Charter School Performance Compact (CSPC)	Complete; in use since the 2013-2014 school year.	The CSPC applies to all charter schools authorized by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, including most schools in the Recovery School District.	Used as a tool for differentiated oversight of high- and low-performing schools, parent information, growth and renewal decisions.	Louisiana State Dept. of Education (877) 453-2721
<b>MEMPHIS</b>				
Common information system: <a href="#">Memphis School Guide</a>	In development; in initial attempts, leaders were not able to create a fully aligned CSPF. Memphis is still working towards a full CSPF.  A third-party group independently developed the Memphis School Guide parent information system, which is complete and in use.	Project was a collaborative effort between Shelby County Public Schools and the Achievement School District (ASD). Would have applied to all public schools in the city: traditional, charter, and ASD schools.  Memphis School Guide was developed by a parent group and encompasses all Memphis public schools, both district and charter.	CSPF was intended to be a consistent way to measure school quality.  The Memphis School Guide is a parent information system, to support school choice.	Memphis School Guide <a href="mailto:hello@memphischoolguide.org">hello@memphischoolguide.org</a>
<b>SACRAMENTO</b>				
Guide to Success	Incomplete; project was abandoned after leadership transition.	N/A	Intended to be used as an accountability tool.	N/A



Name of Framework	Stage of Development	Features and Coverage of Framework	Purpose	Contact Information
<b>BALTIMORE*</b>				
Two systems: One for charter schools ( <a href="#">School Effectiveness Review</a> ), one for district schools	Both frameworks are complete, and recently adopted.	Baltimore City Public Schools houses the frameworks in the Office of Achievement and Accountability. The frameworks used for district and charter schools are closely aligned.	School Effectiveness Review is an aspect of all Baltimore charter schools' renewal process, and is a tool for differentiated oversight for all schools.	Achievement and Accountability Office (443) 984-2000
<b>CLEVELAND*</b>				
<a href="#">School Quality Guide</a>	Development of common school profiles are complete, which include common academic metrics. First reports were in 2013.	The <a href="#">Cleveland Transformation Alliance</a> , a public-private partnership, developed the School Quality Guide. The profiles are created for all Cleveland district schools and most charter schools.	The School Quality Guide is primarily a tool for parent and community information.	Cleveland Transformation Alliance (216) 592-2425
<b>WASHINGTON, D.C.*</b>				
Common information through the D.C. <a href="#">Equity Reports</a> and the <a href="#">Learn D.C.</a> website	No common school ratings across district and charter schools, but the <a href="#">Equity Reports</a> are complete and have been in use since the 2012–2013 school year.	Developed collaboratively between the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the DC Public Charter School Board, and the Deputy Mayor for Education. Reports are created for all D.C. district and charter schools.	The Equity Reports are used primarily for parent and community information.	Office of the State Superintendent of Education <a href="mailto:osse@dc.gov">osse@dc.gov</a>
<b>NASHVILLE*</b>				
Two systems: district ( <a href="#">Academic Performance Framework</a> ) and charter	Both frameworks are complete. The Academic Performance Framework (APF) was adopted in 2013.	The APF was developed by Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and is applied to all MNPS-run schools. MNPS has an aligned framework used to evaluate charter schools.	The APF is used as a tool for differentiated oversight of schools and support to schools as well as parent and community information.	Metro Nashville Public Schools <a href="mailto:FamilyInfo@mnps.org">FamilyInfo@mnps.org</a>
<b>TULSA*</b>				
<a href="#">Tulsa Value-Added Reports</a>	No common framework, but the district has worked with district-authorized charter schools to develop a framework for charter schools. Value-Added Reports are used for both district and charter schools.	Value-added school reports, developed by Tulsa Public Schools (TPS), are created for all district schools and district-authorized charter schools. There is interest in a CSPF, but it is not yet in development.	Value-added reports are used for informing district decision making, identifying best practices and low-performance.	Tulsa Public Schools <a href="mailto:valueadded@tulsaschools.org">valueadded@tulsaschools.org</a>

\*These cities were not part of CRPE's in-depth CSPF research.

# Lessons From Chicago: Developing a Common School Performance Framework

Jessica Sutter  
EdPro Consulting

In 2013, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) created the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), a system in which all schools—neighborhood schools, magnet schools, charter schools, selective enrollment schools, and special option schools—receive a rating based on a standard set of metrics. Schools were given scores and ratings (levels 1 through 5) for the first time at the end of the 2013–14 school year.

The SQRP was designed with several different goals in mind. CPS wanted a framework that would recognize high-achieving and high-growth schools and help identify schools in need of targeted or intensive support for improvement. This SQRP also would need to work as a framework for schools to set goals and for the school board to use in their decision-making around school actions, such as turnarounds or closures. Finally, the tool would need to communicate to parents and the public about academic success for individual schools and for the district as a whole.

The school board adopted the SQRP as the tool for assessing performance and rating schools according to Illinois School Code. All charter schools authorized by CPS have accountability provisions in their contract, and the school board has decided to use the SQRP as the accountability system for charter schools. Thus, the school board is responsible for approving the SQRP as the accountability system and the CPS CEO is responsible for its implementation.<sup>1</sup>

With an understanding that engagement and political support would be critical to its success, according to sources from CPS, the process for developing the

SQRP began with many focus group meetings led by the Office of Accountability. The planning team invited anyone interested in discussing the framework to participate; initial discussions included researchers from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, education funders, school leaders, internal school district staff, and community partners. While these diverse stakeholders were all part of the planning committee, there was some tension over the group composition. Charter school leaders had a lot at stake in the outcome of the framework, but they had equal standing with other interested parties. While district officials in the Office of Accountability built the final framework, input from this initial planning group directly informed many aspects of the SQRP.

While CPS expected to use the SQRP as the performance accountability tool with charter schools going forward, existing charter schools had the option of amending their contract language to embed this tool. At the outset, 80 percent of the existing 131 charter schools signed on to have the SQRP function as their performance accountability system, and by the beginning of implementation, all but one school had adopted the SQRP. One CPS staff member noted that this high level of voluntary participation and active engagement by charter schools “made it so we couldn’t get lazy” with the development process. The single Chicago charter school that did not adopt the new system has had the same accountability system in their charter contract for 13 years and does not want to change. This has led to, as one official noted, a “100 percent single accountability system—minus 1.”

<sup>1</sup> The Illinois School Code requires the CEO of CPS to monitor the performance of all schools using a criteria and rating system to identify schools struggling with achievement in reading and math, attendance, or graduation rates, as well as schools failing to implement required programming or improvement plans. Charter schools are exempt from this provision of the school code.

While the development of the SQRP was relatively smooth, the Office of Accountability still had to negotiate a variety of important decisions with input from the stakeholder focus groups.

**Outcomes vs. inputs:** Focus groups negotiated whether all of the SQRP metrics should reflect academic “outcomes,” or whether some should reflect measurements of school climate or other “inputs” for school quality. The Office of Accountability decided, with stakeholder support, to heavily weight outcomes and include some inputs for “color and context.” While academics were much more heavily weighted, these inputs also could influence a school’s final score and rating category.

**Proficiency vs. growth:** The groups also considered how achievement proficiency and growth should be treated and whether one should be weighted more heavily than another.

**Customized metrics for upper grades:** When focus groups considered a high school-specific measure of “college persistence,” they had pushback from high school faculty who felt it would be unfair to hold them accountable for results after students left. They challenged, “Will you hold K–8 schools accountable for high school persistence?” This discussion led to a broader conversation of the validity of college enrollment data, sourced from the [National Student Clearinghouse](#). As one district official noted, these validity questions become key when schools are “scratching and clawing for 0.1 of a point” on an evaluation system.

As of the 2015–16 school year, the SQRP has been in use for two years, and school district staff say that the tool has done exactly what they hoped it would do. In the years prior to implementing the SQRP, CPS had used several different accountability systems. The most recent system was a three-tier rating scale that placed 50 percent of schools in Level 3, the lowest tier. According to CPS staff, this scoring distribution undermined the accountability system because it did not differentiate enough between challenged schools. Additionally, since the prior system was designed for traditional public schools but was used for oversight of charter schools and alternative schools, CPS had to add other specific metrics that were more appropriate to the needs of such schools. For decision making about charter school renewals and closures, CPS used a “comparison school metric.” This led to complex explanations of the metric and feelings from charter schools that the district was intentionally making the process opaque. Alternative schools also required a new metric to accommodate for limitations of the

traditional assessment metric. The Prairie State Assessment (a standardized test taken by all Illinois high school juniors, administered until 2014) assumed that all students were attending the assessment school for a full year; yet most alternative schools served students for only a portion of a school year. A metric designed to address this issue only made things more complex, undermining efforts by CPS to promote transparency of data and decision making for schools.

The school district and schools themselves are the primary audiences for the SQRP, with the community and parents as a secondary audience. In the first year of implementation, CPS announced SQRP ratings in October 2014 for the 2013–14 school year; this process is repeated annually. The school district cited “a few very smart things” the Office of Accountability did to make sure that the first year of implementation was successful:

- ▶ It worked proactively to make the development of the SQRP a very public process and to generate buy-in from charter schools and education stakeholders.
- ▶ It made sure that schools were not surprised by their scores on the SQRP at the public release. All schools received “calculators” to allow them to prepare their scores on their own and figure out where they would be according to the system.

Additionally, the Office of Accountability now provides schools with a preliminary roster for each metric during the summer, with the opportunity to review and provide feedback before official scores come out. This not only helps schools understand how they are being scored, but catches any problems with data or evaluation. While this process does slow down the release of the ratings, one official said, “It is worth it to ensure accuracy.” Said another district official, “Three years ago, people wanted my head on a platter; now, they’re calling me six months ahead of time to say, ‘I think we may have a school on the warning list.’”

After the first year of implementation, district staff report that “to a person, for all schools, the SQRP is a better evaluation system” for several reasons. Schools believed the assessments and metrics included in the SQRP were an improvement over the prior evaluation tool. The five-tier system allows for greater specificity in categorizing schools and avoids grouping all low-performing schools into one tier. However, there are still kinks to be worked out as CPS and schools move forward with the system. For the schools that adopted the system, there are still adjustments. Officials noted that some charter schools were confused over scores generated by the calculators. One result of this is that

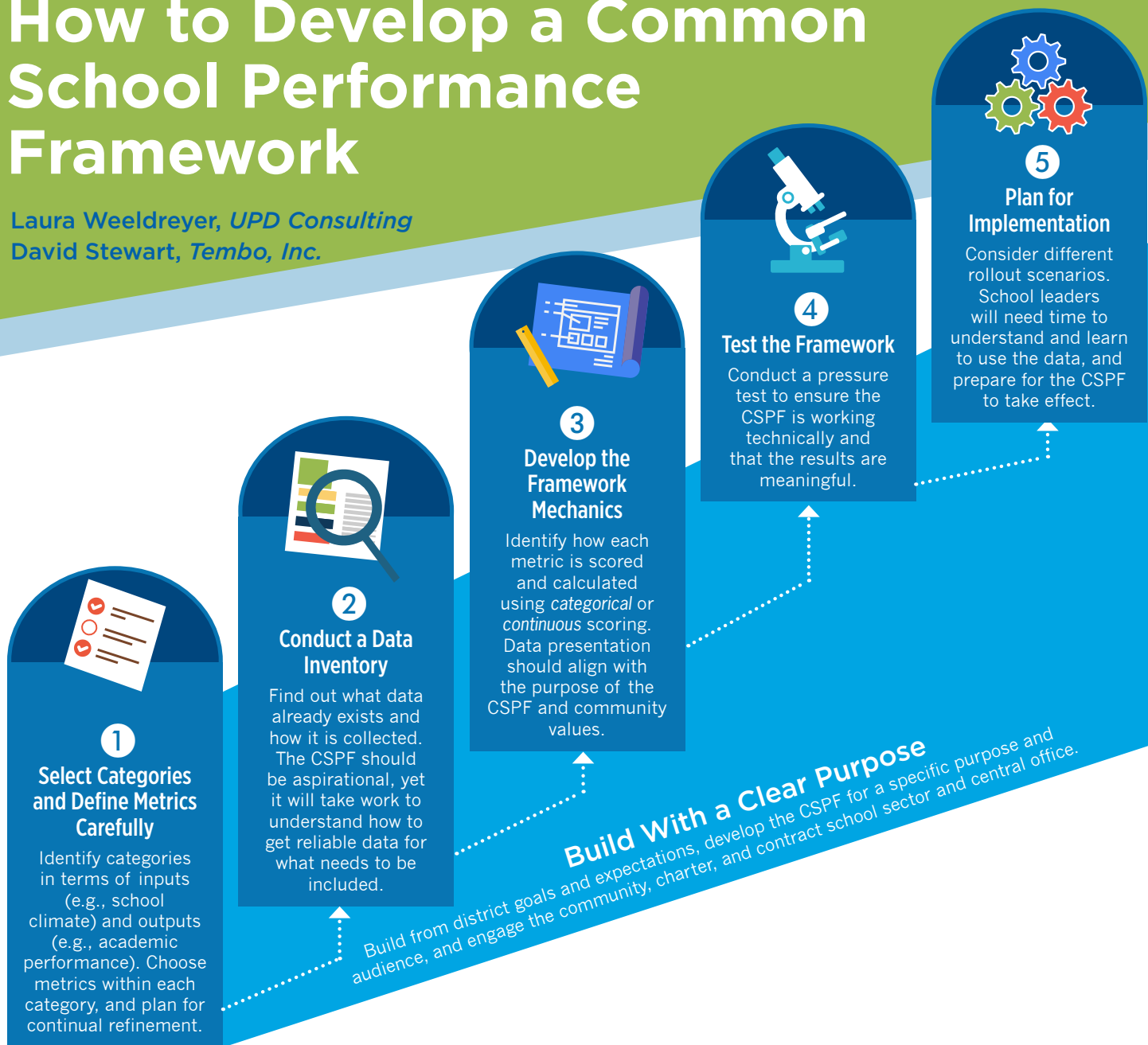
many schools are now working to better understand the NWEA MAP assessment (Northwest Evaluation Assessment Measures of Academic Progress test), which is the primary test used for assessment, and the growth metrics used in the SQRP. School district officials say that while they think the schools will need time to adjust to all the aspects of the new system, they are confident that the system will continue to be implemented.

CPS staff offer the following “pearls of wisdom” for other cities interested in pursuing a common school performance framework:

- ▶ **Check in early with the people who have the ability to kill the effort to create a CSPF.** Know your base and seek out people who are steadfastly in your corner. Focus especially on the political system in your city and its players.
- ▶ **Get the assessment metrics right.** “Do you have an assessment everyone believes in? If not—get that first and get people comfortable with it. That’s the ballgame.”
- ▶ **Involve lots of people so that they can see the evolution of the system and the process.** Use strawman after strawman to demonstrate the system and its possible results. It is impossible to engage too much given how much schools have on the line with an evaluation system.
- ▶ **Be aware of the big risk of losing the forest for the trees.** A strong system design can start to get watered down when trying to address the concerns of individual schools. Find a balance when engaging stakeholders.

# How to Develop a Common School Performance Framework

Laura Weeldreyer, *UPD Consulting*  
David Stewart, *Tembo, Inc.*



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

\*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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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?
<b>Academic Performance</b>	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
<b>School Climate</b>	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.

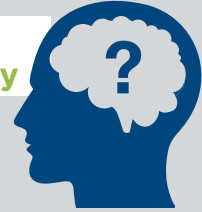
The final mechanical decisions have to do with weights for each category and within each category, for each metric. This is another opportunity to communicate values. What a city values most will be weighted the heaviest. Developers can start by assigning weights to categories. Once those look like the 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](mailto: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.