

# REIMAGINING ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

---

in Service to the  
Kentucky United We Learn Council's  
Moonshot

**Prototypes for Discussion & Consideration  
Version 2.0**

July 2024



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Background .....	2
Process & Prototypes .....	3
Policy Landscape.....	3
Prototype 1 .....	5
State Accountability .....	5
Table 1. School Quality Evaluation Framework .....	5
Policy Considerations.....	5
Federal Accountability .....	6
Table 2. Individual Student Growth Option.....	6
Policy Considerations.....	6
Assessment System .....	7
Table 3. Assessment System Options.....	7
Policy Considerations.....	8
Reporting .....	9
Policy Considerations.....	9
School Support and Improvement.....	9
Prototype 2: Valuing Vibrant Learning Experiences (VLE) within Accountability.....	10
State and Federal Accountability.....	10
Table 4. Vibrant Learning Experiences Indicator Options.....	10
Policy Considerations.....	11
Assessment System .....	12
Reporting.....	12
Policy Considerations.....	13
School Support and Improvement.....	13
Additional Possibilities.....	13
Appendix A: Design Principles for Assessment and Accountability System Redesign.....	14

## Introduction

### Background

During the April 2024 convening of the Kentucky United We Learn Council, the Menu of Options Workgroup was formed. This group is dedicated to enhancing education across the Commonwealth by co-creating a number of prototypes that describe how Kentucky might revise its assessment and accountability systems to align with the council-adopted moonshot: “To build a prosperous Kentucky, we will launch an accountability system that is meaningful and useful to all our learners.” The [Kentucky United We Learn Council](#) envisions new systems of assessment and accountability, first articulated in the [United We Learn report](#).

The reimagined assessment and accountability systems will prioritize innovation, personalization, local and student voice, and incorporate vibrant learning experiences (VLE). The Kentucky United We Learn Council defines VLE as, “In partnership with families and communities, students are agents of their own learning, engaged in relevant, authentic and joyful learning opportunities. Vibrant learning honors students' cultural wealth, gifts and interests. Vibrant learning culminates in the application of knowledge and skills demonstrated through personalized products.”

Menu of Options Workgroup members are considering the assessment as well as the accountability system. Assessment systems gather evidence on what students have learned and can do. Accountability systems should support improvement by cultivating relationships between the entities that have an interest in improving education. Families and caregivers, policymakers, educators and community members should have access to trustworthy information that allows them to support improvement of the student experience. The council seeks to design a reimagined system for school evaluation and feedback aligned with these principles that reflects community values and supports schools in meeting their communities' needs and goals.

During the April 2024 convening, the Menu of Options Workgroup used the Kentucky United We Learn Council's design principles to inform a conversation about aspirational elements of a reimagined state assessment and accountability system. These elements include:

- Value instructional useful information for improvement over summative ratings.
- Explore an accreditation-like model of evaluating school quality.
- Allow for flexibility in the types of evidence schools submit related to school quality, including leading and process-based indicators.
- Create greater transparency in evidence of school quality across a broad range of domains related to school, eliminate the labels/ability to rank/public shaming.
- Prioritize student growth on standardized assessments while valuing authentic performance-based assessments that drive strong instructional practices.

- Streamline the state assessment system in favor of local assessments in subjects that aren't required by federal law.
- Emphasize attributes that are valued by postsecondary education and the workforce.
- Focus on deeper learning indicators within the accountability system.

## **Process & Prototypes**

After collecting valuable input from the Menu of Options Workgroup in April 2024 and at virtual meetings on June 20 and 24, 2024, the workgroup put forth the following set of prototypes to capture the members' desire for long-term changes to Kentucky's assessment and accountability systems. These prototypes are preliminary versions for further discussion and serve as examples of potential approaches to assessment and accountability that better align with the Kentucky United We Learn Council's moonshot.

The prototypes serve to communicate alternatives to our current assessment and accountability system for the purposes of discussion and refinement. Each prototype maintains the high expectations of accountability for Kentucky's education system. The expectation is that all students in Kentucky will participate in innovative practices and in the state's assessment and accountability systems.

This document comprises two prototypes with appendices. Each prototype describes the essential features of a unique approach to accountability and includes key options for discussion that describe implications for assessment, reporting practices, school improvement and support, and policy. The prototypes are intended to be provisional, in that they will be adjusted based on feedback during the review and revision process. Adjustments may include shifting options or elements across the two prototypes and other refinements.

## **Policy Landscape**

Currently, Kentucky's assessment and accountability systems are deeply impacted by state and federal requirements for assessment and accountability. As depicted in the [Comparison of Federal and State Assessment Requirements \(ky.gov\)](#), both require statewide summative testing of students in academic content areas that measures the depth and breadth of the *Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS)*. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school participate in assessments of reading and mathematics, and that students take a statewide science assessment once per grade span. In Kentucky, state law also requires students to be assessed in writing, social studies, a postsecondary readiness assessment, and a kindergarten screener. Federal law also requires that students who are English learners take an English language proficiency test annually. As assessments change, Kentucky must submit them for federal approval through an [Assessment Peer Review Process](#).

Kentucky is also required by [federal and state accountability](#) laws to develop an accountability system that comprises a number of distinct indicators that are combined to produce a summative rating of a school's performance. These requirements are satisfied by a single accountability system in Kentucky and this system including information about how the state satisfies federal assessment requirements is described in a consolidated state plan (CSP) that the Kentucky Department of Education submits to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for review and approval. If the state wishes to make changes to its assessment or accountability system, those changes must be documented in the CSP and re-submitted to USED for review and approval. Per state law and regulation, changes must also be routed through various advisory bodies and depending on the change, may necessitate legislative and/or action by the Kentucky Board of Education. It will take several years to accomplish amendments to current law, secure federal approval and fully implement revisions to the current assessment and accountability systems.

When legislative changes occur, they often have a fiscal impact. Changes within the prototypes – such as accreditation, collection of evidence and additional reporting – will impact human resources and implementation costs at the school, district and state level. The fiscal impact caused by any legislative changes will need to be part of the ongoing discussions and advocacy.

## Prototype 1

### *Accreditation-style evaluation within state accountability*

This prototype presents an accreditation-style model for the state’s accountability system alongside the basic requirements needed to meet federal law. Several choice-points on essential elements are included to support discussion around a set of possible options. Feedback on these elements will be critical to reach consensus on critical choice points.

### **State Accountability**

The reimagined assessment and accountability systems will emphasize transparency by providing families and communities with information on a broad set of school quality domains, which could include:

*Table 1. School Quality Evaluation Framework*

Academic Outcomes and Growth, + Portrait of a Learner (POL) Competencies	Vibrant Learning Experiences	Teaching and Leadership	School Culture and Student Well-being	Community Connections and Post-secondary Readiness	Locally Determined Criteria <i>(optional)</i>	Locally Determined Criteria <i>(optional)</i>	Locally Determined Criteria <i>(optional)</i>
State developed rubrics evaluated using a mixture of state-required and locally-specific evidence. For each indicator, some evidence would be required (e.g., growth metrics in reading and math), other evidence would be locally determined (e.g., evidence of community engagement).					Fully local criteria and evidence.		

Schools will engage in gathering evidence of school quality relative to each of the domains to share with the local board of education and an external evaluator for review and feedback. An external evaluator, the local board of education, and district and school leaders would work collaboratively to set goals based on the evidence, as well as accompanying school improvement strategies and needed state support. Schools will update their evidence of quality as it becomes available and re-submit their evidence to the external evaluator for formal evaluation at regular intervals, at least once every three years.

This reimagined, accreditation-style system would create a state system separate from a federal accountability system and eliminate color ratings to schools.

### Policy Considerations

Kentucky state statute KRS 158.6455 would require significant changes to achieve the prototype articulated here. Politically, education advocates will need to lay considerable groundwork with

legislators to make the case for the required statutory changes with both the legislature and Kentucky Board of Education. The groundwork must acknowledge that the legislature recently approved amendments to the state’s accountability system that created the color rating system.

**Federal Accountability**

The state will continue to meet federal assessment and accountability requirements, including annual statewide testing in reading and mathematics and gradespan assessments in science. Federal accountability would include the results on state assessments, progress on English language proficiency, quality of school climate and safety survey, postsecondary readiness (high school only) and graduation rates (high school only) for identification of school support.

The state’s federally-compliant accountability system will be simplified and reduced to meet the minimum federal requirements to identify three categories of schools for the purpose of providing resources and support: 1) Targeted Support and Improvement/Additional Targeted Support and Improvement, 2) Comprehensive Support and Improvement, and 3) Meets Requirements.

*Table 2. Individual Student Growth Option*

<b>Option 1.1.A.</b>	<b>Option 1.1.B.</b>
<p>Additional simplifications to the federal accountability system could include replacing the “Change” component with individual student growth. Student growth would be determined from one year to the next. Kentucky currently uses a “Status” (current year performance) and “Change” (difference between Status of current and prior year) for each indicator.</p>	<p>No changes to the “Change” component of the federal accountability system.</p>
<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> The General Assembly would need to replace the existing “Change” indicator with individual growth throughout KRS 158.6455. KDE would need to submit a revised amendment to its ESSA state plan to reflect these changes in the way school identification is calculated.</p>	<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> No changes.</p>

## Assessment System

The statewide assessment system for Prototype 1 could encompass one of the following three options. These options will be shared and discussed with an inclusive and broad set of stakeholders before an approach is selected.

*Table 3. Assessment System Options*

<b>Option 1.2.A.</b>	<b>Option 1.2.B.</b>	<b>Option 1.2.C.</b>
<p>The single summative assessment in reading and math is replaced with a statewide through-year model that captures student learning and growth in reading and math within the academic year. The through-year assessments are adaptive in that the items adjust to identify where students are in the scale, including above or below grade level. While this approach would increase the number of test administrations and lead to an increase in the state assessment footprint, instructionally relevant information could be provided in a more timely manner. However, the through-year model is intended to replace the locally-adopted interim assessments, ideally reducing local assessment costs and testing time.</p> <p>The state assessment in science, social studies, and writing would stay the same.</p>	<p>The state pilots a new system of assessment that adopts a competency-based approach and includes authentic demonstrations of knowledge and skills. The assessment system in math, reading and science would include a combination of short-form standardized assessments and authentic performance tasks. The authentic performance assessment would measure both academic standards and student skills relative to the competencies on the state’s Portrait of a Learner. Student work on the performance assessments would be available immediately for educators to score and inform instructional next steps. The innovative assessment system would be piloted and refined in a subset of districts before scaling statewide.</p>	<p>The state will reduce the number of the assessments used to determine academic proficiency to meet the minimum federal requirements (i.e. reading, mathematics and science). Social studies and writing would be assessed using local assessments. The state assessments to meet federal requirements could use a single summative or through-course approach as described in Option 1.2.A.</p> <p>The reductions in the state assessment system create room for local assessment innovations, such as authentic demonstrations of learning across the broader set of content areas (e.g., social studies, arts), and may include student capstone projects, performance assessments and student-level defenses of learning. These local determinations of learning are valued alongside the state assessment results within the first domain of the</p>



		school quality evaluation framework (see Table 1).
<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> Kentucky’s General Assembly would need to revise state statute to prescribe a through-year math and reading assessment in alignment with federal requirements.</p> <p>KDE would need to submit the new assessments to USED for peer review to ensure they align with federal technical requirements. The state would also need to submit a revision to the state’s ESSA plan to reflect this assessment strategy.</p>	<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> KDE would need to submit an application to USED for the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority to pilot new, competency-based assessments in math, reading and science with a cohort of districts in lieu of current statewide assessments.</p> <p>Kentucky’s General Assembly would need to replace all required state assessments with a competency-based assessment approach and build in processes to ensure quality implementation. This new law would make replacement of the state’s math, reading and science assessments with competency-based assessments contingent on USED’s review of the state’s pilot and approval to transition from a pilot to full-state implementation.</p>	<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> The General Assembly would need to revise state statute to eliminate any statewide assessments in subjects other than math, reading and science, with direction to replace with authentic local assessments. The state would need to submit a modified ESSA plan to USED for review and approval.</p>

Note: Menu of Options members have discussed other potential changes in state assessments, such as incorporating K-2 assessments and reconsidering Kentucky’s ACT testing mandate.

## **Reporting**

Schools and the public will have transparent access to the school evaluation data through a state-provided, but locally customized, refreshable data display. For each domain in the School Quality Evaluation Framework, the school-level goals, current evidence of quality and ratings on the statewide rubrics would be provided to support community conversations and responsive accountability practices. The data displays would serve in place of the current state-issued report card. While some metrics will allow for comparability across the state (e.g., academic growth), other evidence will allow schools and districts to lift up their unique local practices.

Information from the reimagined state accountability system will serve as the primary means of communicating about school quality to the public through a state-provided, locally-customizable data display. The federal school ratings (i.e., Targeted Support and Improvement/Additional Support and Improvement, Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Meets Requirements) and indicator outcomes will be reported as required.

## **Policy Considerations**

In addition to the federally required components on the state school report cards, the Kentucky Board of Education could amend regulation 703 KAR 5:140 to enable the inclusion of local indicators of vibrant learning if a district or school chooses to opt-in. The Kentucky Board of Education could also consider whether to revise regulation 703 KAR 5:225 on continuous improvement planning for schools and districts to specify that district and school continuous improvement plans could include an emphasis on locally-determined indicators of vibrant learning in addition to academic achievement and growth if a district or school opts-in. Lastly, while not a formal policy change, KDE would need to revise its data collection and reporting templates to comply with changes to these regulations.

## **School Support and Improvement**

Information from the federal system will only be used to identify schools for receipt of federal school improvement funding. Receiving federal funds is associated with specific requirements and expectations. Information from the state accountability system, on the other hand, will serve as the primary means of informing state decisions about resource allocation, policies and support.

**Prototype 2: Valuing Vibrant Learning Experiences (VLE) within Accountability**  
*(adds indicators related to VLE within state and/or federal accountability systems)*

**State and Federal Accountability**

Kentucky will value and prioritize innovative local practices by placing emphasis on vibrant learning practices within the state and/or federal accountability systems. Both options are presented below for discussion. Feedback on these options will be critical as we work to identify the best path forward..

*Table 4. Vibrant Learning Experiences Indicator Options*

<b>Option 2.1.A.</b>	<b>Option 2.1.B.</b>
<p>The <b>federally approved Title 1 accountability system</b> will include a new menu of options indicator of “Vibrant Learning Experiences.” The indicator will capture the percentage of students engaged in one or more of the following student-centered learning experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student capstone projects</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student-led conferences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Service-based learning experiences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work-based learning experiences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student defenses of learning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Personalized learning pathways (e.g., career connected learning, independent study, dual enrollment)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Another locally-proposed, federally-approved option</li> </ul> <p>This indicator is aimed at providing student-centered learning experiences for all students and valuing those experiences within the federal accountability system as an additional indicator of school quality or student success. This indicator is calculated and reported annually for all schools (i.e., elementary, middle, high school).</p>	<p>The <b>state accountability system</b> aims to support the spread of deeper and more meaningful learning experiences for all students across the state by crediting schools that are engaged in high-quality local processes and practices that support vibrant learning experiences for students.</p> <p>The Vibrant Learning Experiences indicator will identify where schools are along a continuum of implementation of creating vibrant learning experiences for their students. Schools will be rated on a 5-point rubric that represents a progression toward rigorous and more meaningful learning opportunities that meet grade-level standards for their students that may include, but are not limited to: student defenses of learning, digital portfolios, student capstone projects, student engagement in work- or service-based learning experiences, or other locally determined indicators.</p> <p>Though there is flexibility in how schools operationalize vibrant learning for their students, all schools will be rated on the same set of rubrics that identifies the underlying high-leverage processes and practices that</p>

<p>KDE will engage with an inclusive set of education stakeholders to co-design a coherent set of resources and support for schools to adopt student-centered learning practices. To support the validity of this indicator, KDE will engage deeply with education stakeholders to develop a set of policies and procedures that ensure equity in opportunity across the state.</p> <p>Additional changes would include eliminating the Quality of School Climate and Safety survey, as Vibrant Learning Experiences will now serve in its place.</p>	<p>support quality implementation. For example, one dimension for evaluation might be community engagement processes that support reciprocity and transparency. The rubrics would be co-developed by the state with an inclusive group of education advocates.</p> <p>School ratings on the Vibrant Learning Experiences portion of state accountability will be determined through a self-scoring process along with corroborating evidence submitted to the state. All schools will be subject to regular state audits of their local processes and practices to support the validity and consistency in the Vibrant Learning Experiences indicator.</p> <p>The Vibrant Learning Experiences indicator will be reported alongside the federally approved accountability indicators in the state report card. Schools that achieve a rating of 4 or 5 on the Vibrant Learning will move up one rating on the state color scale (i.e., Red → Orange, Orange → Yellow, Yellow → Green, Green → Blue). The shifts in the color ratings that occur as a result of the Vibrant Learning Experiences indicator reflect the value that the state places on the significant time and resources that schools have invested in creating more vibrant learning experiences for their students.</p>
<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> Kentucky state statute KRS 158.6455 would need to be modified to add a “Vibrant Learning Experiences” indicator to the federal and state accountability systems. The current School Climate and Safety survey requirement could be removed. Authority will</p>	<p><u>Policy Considerations</u> Kentucky state statute KRS 158.6455 would need to be modified by adding a “Vibrant Learning Experiences” indicator to the state accountability system and assigning it the appropriate weight. Authority will need to be delegated to the appropriate entities (i.e., the</p>

<p>need to be delegated to the appropriate entities (i.e., the Kentucky Board of Education, the Kentucky Department of Education) to implement the new indicator. The state would need to submit for approval an updated ESSA plan to USED inclusive of the new indicator.</p> <p>Politically, education advocates will need to lay considerable groundwork with legislators to make the case for this change. Education advocates should acknowledge that some districts are further ahead of others in meeting the criteria for this indicator. As a consequence, some sort of allowance or grace period should be included in this proposal for those districts that have not engaged in innovative approaches in as much depth.</p>	<p>Kentucky Board of Education, the Kentucky Department of Education) to implement the new indicator. The General Assembly would also need to revise the color coding criteria for school rankings to give schools that receive a 4 or 5 on the vibrant learning indicator a rating of one level higher on the state color scale. Because this indicator would only be used at the state level, no engagement with thUSED would be required.</p> <p>Politically, education advocates will need to lay considerable groundwork with legislators to make the case for why this particular indicator should be added to Kentucky’s accountability system. Education advocates should acknowledge that some districts are further ahead of others in meeting the criteria for this indicator. As a consequence, some sort of allowance or grace period should be included in this proposal for those districts that have not engaged in innovative approaches in as much depth.</p>
---	---

**Assessment System**

There would be no changes to the statewide assessment system, or, incorporation of one of the three options presented in Prototype 1.

**Reporting**

While Kentucky’s schools will still collect and report school quality data as outlined in current state and federal law, the state will value local innovation by collaborating with local schools and districts to evolve the statewide school report card into a comprehensive data display that features locally-relevant evidence of school quality. Schools can opt into a range of customizable display options that showcase the vibrant learning happening within the school while continuing to provide communities with access to traditional metrics outlined in state and federal requirements.

Vibrant learning evidence could include process-based information, student outcomes on local measures and even examples of authentic student work. The new data display will be co-created with the districts involved in the Local Laboratories of Learning and the Kentucky United We

Learn Council to ensure the voices of students, educators, parents and communities are represented in the design process.

In addition to improving local report cards, KDE will work to streamline and align data collection efforts across all of its programs to ensure local innovations are valued and celebrated as an important indicator of school quality. This will minimize the local reporting burden while ensuring public information better aligns to local values.

### Policy Considerations

The Kentucky Board of Education would need to amend regulation 703 KAR 5:140 regarding requirements for school and district report cards to enable the inclusion of local indicators of vibrant learning if a district or school chooses to opt-in. The Kentucky Board of Education could also consider whether to revise regulation 703 KAR 5:225 on continuous improvement planning for schools and districts to specify that district and school continuous improvement plans could include an emphasis on locally-determined indicators of vibrant learning in addition to academic achievement and growth if a district or school opts-in. Lastly, while not a formal policy change, KDE would need to revise its data collection and reporting templates to comply with changes to these regulations.

### **School Support and Improvement**

While the current structures and processes for state systems of support would stay the same, the system will evolve to incorporate the new emphasis on local practices to support vibrant learning experiences.

### **Additional Possibilities**

In conclusion, it's important to recognize that the assessment options and accountability prototypes discussed here represent only a subset of possibilities. Future versions of this document will be shaped by valuable input from superintendents, Menu of Options members, Local Laboratory of Learning leaders, the KUWL Council, the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Board of Education and other stakeholders in the education community.

## **Appendix A: Design Principles for Assessment and Accountability System Redesign**

After completing and reviewing committee members' research into innovative assessment and accountability systems within and beyond Kentucky, the Accelerating Innovation (AI) committee met in March 2023 to articulate an initial set of design principles that will guide the work on the accountability system redesign.

These design principles reflect cross-cutting themes and recommendations resulting from the committee's research, collective experience and expertise, and the aspirational themes identified in the [United We Learn](#) report. Specifically, AI members identified the following 12 design principles, which, in this document, are organized into three thematic clusters:

### **Theme 1: Prioritize Student Experiences and Outcomes**

- Principle 1: Design to Support Vibrant Learning Experiences
- Principle 2: Design with Marginalized Students at the Center
- Principle 3: Design to Empower Students as Agents of Their Own Learning

### **Theme 2: Value Local Contexts and Expertise**

- Principle 4: Design to Reflect Labor Market Needs in Kentucky and Beyond
- Principle 5: Design for Local Flexibility
- Principle 6: Design to Value the Professionalism of Educators
- Principle 8: Design for Transparency, Trust and Reciprocal Accountability
- Principle 12: Design to Minimize Opportunities for System Corruption

### **Theme 3: Continuously Improve within State Policy Context**

- Principle 7: Design for Sustainability
- Principle 9: Design in Alignment with Theories of Action
- Principle 10: Design for Continuous Improvement based on Evidence
- Principle 11: Design with Policy in Mind

At this coarse-grained level, these principles simply represent valuable best practices for innovative system design, but the way these will be put into practice in Kentucky will vary locally as it will be driven by the specific needs and characteristics in these contexts.

The principles articulate a set of priorities to be reflected in the design of any future accountability “system of systems” recommended by the Kentucky United We Learn Council. That is, they act as “north stars” or guardrails for the design of local and state solutions and affect critical aspects of the design, implementation and evaluation process for the resulting local and state systems.