

# STANDARDS-BASED REFORM:

## WHAT IS IT?

To deliver on our nation's ideals of an equitable, inclusive, and flourishing society that provides pathways toward economic mobility and opportunity for all, we must eliminate the structural barriers that stagnate educational outcomes for Black, Latinx, and low-income students. For the past 30 years, Standards-Based Reform (SBR) has been the dominant approach to do so. SBR has shaped policy debates, educators' practices, and student outcomes. So, what is SBR?

### SBR REFERS TO EDUCATION POLICY COMPRISED OF:

- 1. Academic expectations** or standards for students (e.g., what students should know and be able to do).
- 2. Alignment** of critical elements (e.g., standards, assessments, curriculum, improvement plans) of the educational system to promote attainment of academic expectations.
- 3. Use of student achievement assessments** to monitor performance.
- 4. Decentralization** of curricular and instructional decision-making and responsibility to schools.
- 5. Support** and technical assistance to foster the improvement of educational services.
- 6. Accountability** provisions that reward or sanction schools based on measured performance.

SBR became the dominant approach to education policymaking in the 1990s, beginning with the Improving America's Schools Act (1994) and accelerating with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001). SBR then evolved via Race to the Top (2009), Common Core State Standards (2010), and NCLB Waivers (2012). Most recently, the Every Student Succeeds (ESSA) Act (2015) rolled back some elements of SBR, though still maintaining the same policy paradigm. (See timeline on reverse).

# SUMMARY OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORM POLICY & NATIONAL DEBATE

## 1980 - 1990s

### Period of State-led Reforms

In the early and mid-90's, states led educational reforms by defining teaching and learning standards. States also began to experiment with their own assessments in this time.

## 1983

### *A Nation at Risk*

Published and becomes the seminal report that spurred policy debates on the outlook of the United States' educational system

## 1991

### Systemic Reform Concept Introduced

Smith and O'Day introduce the concept of "systemic reform" that encapsulated SBR as a call for student learning standards and alignment of other components of the education system

## 1994

### Improving America's Schools Act (IASA)

The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) called Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) marks a shift from state-led efforts to federal policy intervention around SBR

## 2000s

### Period of Federal-led Policy Reforms

By this time almost all states had adopted some form of reform standards. Federally led policies created mandates to tie reform practices to school and district accountability.

## 2001

### No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act

This policy created a shift towards increased accountability and assessment by codifying accountability standards for all schools and requiring that all students perform at academic proficiency levels by 2014

## 2009

### Race to the Top (RTT) Grants

Congress provides competitive grant support to states as an incentive to enact reforms

## 2010s

### Rebalancing of State and Federal Roles

Most efforts in this era were designed to re-balance state autonomy with federal oversight.

## 2012

### NCLB Waivers

These federally issued waivers gave states flexibility in meeting some of the NCLB requirements

## 2015

### Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Marks a turning point in the federal government's role in SBR. States and districts are given more autonomy to to revise accountability, assessment, and educator evaluation policies. They are also now able to include additional measurements in their standards