



# The K12 Research for Equity Hub Research Agenda: Cycle 2

November 2023



## INTRODUCTION

EduDream's mission is to disrupt systemic inequities in education. To do this, EduDream leads culturally responsive and community-centered research and strategy in partnership with nonprofits, foundations, and education organizations. Through our work in actionable research, program evaluation, needs assessment, and data strategy, we are redefining the potential of research while shifting the education system toward an equitable and just future.

In spring 2022, EduDream launched the [K12 Research for Equity Hub \(The Hub\)](#). The Hub is a multi-year actionable research initiative generating evidence to advance policy dialogue on K12 education accountability and assessment systems.

For each cycle year, The Hub establishes a research agenda. This document contains information about The Hub's commitment to equitable research, why this research is essential, and what we seek to learn in Cycle 2.

# THE HUB'S COMMITMENT TO EQUITABLE RESEARCH

Research is evidence that uncovers what works, for whom, and under what conditions. The Hub is committed to equitable research approaches that center the voices of communities and empower them to reshape our education system. As such, The Hub members, including advisors and researchers, share the following core beliefs:

- **Educational equity** is a moral and civil rights obligation to ensure that students receive the support and resources they need to succeed, regardless of background, race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, place of origin, native language, socioeconomic status, or any other discriminating factor. Educational equity means closing achievement and opportunity gaps.
- **Community-centered research** means elevating the needs and voices of those most impacted by research.
- **Research accessibility** requires communicating research findings in clear, concise, and highly accessible language and mediums to all stakeholders, from policymakers and education leaders to parents and students.
- **Deliberate community engagement** includes building authentic relationships and intentional efforts to engage communities in one or more phases of research.
- A **reimagined accountability and assessment system** is necessary to ensure effective teaching and learning for all students.

**Research done with people,  
not to them.**







## HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS AGENDA

In developing this research agenda, EduDream examined current K12 assessment and accountability research and requested input from a subset of the Hub Advisory Group members, Cycle 1 research teams, and other education research and advocacy organizations. Specifically, the following individuals and organizations contributed their insights and perspectives to the agenda:

- Dave Powell, Education First
- Eugene Pinkard, Aspen Education & Society Program
- Jill Pinsky, Watershed Advisors
- Khaled Ismail, Education First
- Lillian Pace, KnowledgeWorks
- Linda Kaminski, Loyola Marymount University
- Michelle Odemwingie, Achievement Network
- Rebecca E. Wolfe, KnowledgeWorks



# CYCLE 1 RESEARCH PROJECTS

In its first year, or Cycle 1, The Hub supported four research projects that studied the following:

- **Through-Year Assessments:** An examination of new through-year testing structures piloted in four states: Delaware, Florida, Nebraska, and Texas. This project elevates the perspectives of assessment directors, district leaders, and parents regarding how the tests work for students, families, and educators.
- **Early Warning Systems:** An understanding of how incorporating predictive analytics and measures from early warning systems into school accountability systems is helpful to teachers, school administrators, students, and parents.
- **Human Flourishing Design Principle Accountability Considerations:** An examination of the correlation between the presence of human flourishing design principles and practices in schools and students' well-being and academic success.
- **Accountability Implications for English Language Learners:** A study of schools' expectations of English Learners' language growth in language proficiency and academic content areas. It also explores the potential role of opportunity-to-learn indicators for English Learners.



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## CYCLE 2 FOCUS AREA:

### STATE AND LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

The Hub's Cycle 2 research agenda will focus on current and alternative accountability systems. Specifically, the **research will explore state and local accountability systems'** measures of student achievement and school quality, how families and communities understand and use the measures, and how the systems inform school improvement. Furthermore, the research seeks to understand the context and conditions under which alternative accountability systems are developed and used, developed but abandoned, or viewed as unnecessary. The research aims to understand how the federal education policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), encourages or impedes the development and use of alternative accountability systems.



## What is an Accountability System?

An accountability system is a set of policies and practices that aims to hold schools and districts responsible for student learning and identify schools needing additional support to improve student achievement. It relies on a set of measures that ensure transparency about the quality of the schools to students, parents, community members, and leaders. Summative assessment scores or end-of-year standardized assessments have been central to accountability systems. The Every Student Succeeds Act introduced additional measures such as chronic absenteeism and school climate.

## Why Focus on State and Local Accountability Systems?

COVID-19 and its effects on education have somewhat interrupted ESSA implementation. Thus, an opportunity exists to examine the extent to which federal accountability policy is fulfilling its purpose of fostering increased student achievement and school improvement. Currently, many states have two accountability systems: the state accountability system and the federal one. At the same time, more districts and states are leading local efforts to co-design an accountability model that reflects community priorities for student learning.

The Hub's Cycle 1 research agenda focused on three areas: alternative accountability models, innovative approaches to assessment, and community experiences. Emerging research learnings demonstrate a need for further in-depth analysis of state and local accountability systems to understand the successes, challenges, and underlying tensions introduced by ESSA implementation.

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# WHAT WE SEEK TO LEARN: CYCLE 2 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

How are state and local accountability systems measuring student achievement and school quality, communicating measures to families and communities, and using accountability data to drive equity and school improvements? How does ESSA encourage or impede the development and use of alternative accountability systems?





# CYCLE 2 SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

## MEASURES

1. To what extent are measures in the accountability systems effective in informing school improvements, equity considerations, and high-stakes decisions? What guardrails exist to ensure measures are valid, reliable, and robust?
2. How do accountability systems reflect community values and priorities? What is the impact of having community-informed measures in the accountability system?
  - a. What are the best practices and lessons learned to scale community-informed approaches for creating accountability systems and measures?
3. To what extent are alternative accountability models and ESSA federal requirements compatible? How do they work together, or are there any points of tension (e.g., Is the federal law impeding the use of a measure)?





## CYCLE 2 SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

### DATA ACCESSIBILITY & USE

1. To what extent do families and communities understand accountability system data? How are accountability system data shared with families and communities?
  - a. What supports and resources (e.g., clear and concise language use, data summaries) help stakeholders understand or interpret data? How can these supports be improved?
2. How do accountability system data guide families and communities' daily actions to support student learning in and out of the classroom? What information do families rely on to support student learning?
3. How are district and school leaders using accountability system data to ensure transparency and inform school improvement?
  - a. What have been the positive and negative effects of using accountability data for transparency and school improvement?







## **HOW WE WILL USE THIS RESEARCH AGENDA**

The main research question and a series of distilled or sub-research questions guide the research agenda. However, The Hub may ask proposed research projects to include additional context-specific questions that delve deeper into the nuanced and unique context of the local community and its stakeholders.

## **THE IMPACT WE SEEK TO HAVE**

The Hub's Cycle 2 research will highlight accountability systems focused on school improvement and producing equitable results in closing achievement gaps for Black, Latinx, and Native/Indigenous students. We aim for education policymakers and decision-makers to use Hub research to enact evidence-based and equity-centered accountability policy and practice shifts at the local, state, and federal levels.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Although the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation provide funding, no personnel from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation nor the Walton Family Foundation participate in designing or leading research for The Hub. The findings and conclusions contained within hub research deliverables are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or the Walton Family Foundation.

## Questions?

Email The Hub's Project Manager, Sophia Velez, at [sophia@edudream.org](mailto:sophia@edudream.org).

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