

ADMIN & MANAGEMENT

Don't leave points on the table: Maximizing state accountability systems at midyear

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore January 10, 2025



As winter sets in, school district leaders face a critical opportunity: the midyear review. By this point, diagnostic data is available, attendance trends are clear, and patterns in instructional quality are emerging.

This moment is key to assessing progress against state accountability metrics and ensuring principals and their teams focus on the measures that matter most. Unfortunately, many districts fail to pay enough attention to how schools and districts can maximize their state accountability systems to earn the highest possible ratings.

Some states emphasize accountability and some merely comply with it. Either way, leadership should pay attention to it as the ultimate 'scorecard' of how well schools and the system are doing.

By leaving points on the table, districts miss chances to celebrate successes, allocate resources wisely and demonstrate value to their communities. This guide offers practical midyear strategies to 'win' at state accountability.

Whether navigating rigorous frameworks like Florida and Texas or more flexible ones like California and Massachusetts, the following steps will help you maximize performance and ratings.



Understand your state's accountability framework

Every state accountability system is different, but most include common elements, such as:

- Academic Achievement and Growth: Test scores and year-over-year progress.
- Graduation Rates: Often evaluated within four- and five-year cohorts.
- English Language Proficiency: Measured through tools like ACCESS for ELLs.
- School Quality Indicators: Metrics such as chronic absenteeism and college readiness.
- Subgroup Performance: Data disaggregated by demographics to highlight equity gaps.

Superintendents must master their state's metrics to focus efforts effectively. For example, Florida emphasizes growth percentiles, while California's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) gives districts more flexibility to align goals with local priorities.

Without a nuanced understanding of your system, you risk investing time and resources in the wrong areas. **A resource:** Start with tools like the Education Commission of the States' [accountability comparison](#) and state department websites for a clear view of your framework.

Convene a midyear accountability meeting

Midyear reviews are essential to align district leaders and recalibrate strategies. A well-structured meeting should include:

1. Data Presentation: Share performance metrics disaggregated by school, subgroup and key indicators. Visual tools like Tableau and PowerBI can help illuminate trends.
2. Breakout Sessions: Divide leaders into teams (e.g., instructional, operational) to analyze data and propose targeted improvement strategies.
3. Whole-Group Alignment: Conclude with a unified action plan that addresses gaps and capitalizes on strengths while prioritizing the district's strategic goals.

An example: While many districts do a midyear board report on data, we found [a clear and compelling example](#) of progress monitoring at Coatesville Area School District in Pennsylvania.

Reset principals as accountability leaders

Principals are pivotal to student success and school improvement. An action-oriented reset can energize and refocus their efforts.

- Host a Principal Retreat: Bring principals together to analyze school-level data and collaborate on solutions.
- Refine School Improvement Plans (SIPs): Use midyear data to update SIPs, focusing on Tier 1 instruction and targeted supports for struggling students.
- Conduct Individual Reviews: For schools showing significant gaps, meet with principals to develop personalized action plans.
- Promote Peer Networks: Encourage collaboration among principals to share strategies and insights.
- Create a Culture: Create a culture of accountability by discussing it frequently, particularly during school visits and walkthroughs.



An example: DeKalb County School District's [strategic plan review](#) engages principals to align on district goals and strategies.

Evaluate performance and take strategic action

Many districts struggle to interpret state metrics. To avoid this pitfall:

1. Provide Training: Host workshops featuring state education officials or local experts to deepen understanding.
2. Meet Regionally: Convene neighboring superintendents and school accountability leaders to unpack the state system and share ideas.
3. Conduct a Gap Analysis: Use data to pinpoint disparities and prioritize interventions.
4. Develop SMART Goals: Ensure that action plans are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

An example: Merced Union High School District's [midyear LCAP update](#) provides a transparent review of progress, highlighting both achievements and adjustments

Reallocate resources to maximize impact

Use mid-year data to align resources with accountability priorities:

- Focus on High-Impact Areas: Target funding to schools and subgroups with the greatest need.
- Enhance Professional Development: Invest in training for teachers in key areas like literacy or English Language Learner (ELL) support.
- Leverage Predictive Analytics: Identify at-risk students early and direct interventions accordingly.

Resources: Explore tools from [EdTrust](#) and [Education Resource Strategies](#) for guidance on optimizing resource allocation.

Engage stakeholders for buy-in

Accountability requires collaboration and transparency:

1. Community Updates: Share progress through newsletters or dashboards.
2. Family Engagement: Partner with parents to address barriers like chronic absenteeism and build family commitment to student-owned learning goals.
3. Board Collaboration: Ensure the school board understands and supports district strategies.

Address equity challenges proactively

With state systems increasingly focused on equity, districts must prioritize underserved populations:

- Disaggregate Data: Use data to spotlight gaps in subgroup performance.
- Conduct Equity Audits: Review policies to ensure fairness in resource distribution.
- Adopt Culturally Responsive Practices: Train staff to better serve diverse student needs.



A resource: The [Building Equitable Learning Environments framework](#) provides a way for district and school leaders to identify systemic obstacles to the success of all students.

Plan beyond the mid-year reset

Midyear accountability efforts can set the stage for long-term success:

1. Build Educator Capacity: Invest in professional development to sustain improvements.
2. Capture and Test Innovative Approaches: Scan for “positive deviants” who are getting results. Consider “strategic shedding” of platforms, materials, and strategies that aren't working.
3. Prepare for Next Year: Begin planning for adjustments to next year's strategic plan.

Don't leave points on the table

We started thinking about 'leaving points' when Michael Maine, the incoming superintendent in Martin County, Florida, began saying, “We can't become an 'A' district if we're leaving points on the table.” In Martin's case, the issue was college and career readiness points.

We've seen similar prioritization in Midland ISD, led by Dr. Stephanie Howard, where every principal we talk with can describe their school-specific theory of action for maximizing points under Texas's “growth or performance” model.

A well-executed midyear reset transforms state accountability from a burden into an opportunity. By aligning district leaders, resetting principals and strategically reallocating resources, superintendents can maximize outcomes and ensure no points are left on the table.

Take the time now to reflect, recalibrate, and recommit. When the school year is done, nothing says success like “winning.”

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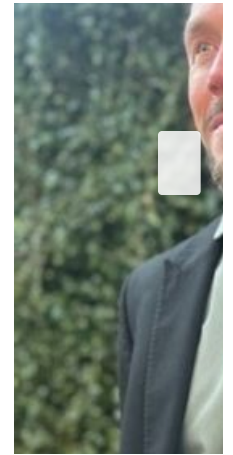
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