PERSONALIZED LEARNING POLICY PLAY #5: PUBLISH ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARDS ON APPROVED MODELS

CONTEXT

Districts and schools that want to implement personalized learning currently suffer from a deficit of information about effective providers and models. This can make it difficult to choose the best providers or models to meet student needs—and may discourage districts and schools from moving forward with personalized learning strategies. States can help address this information deficit by developing systems to track and publicly report the results produced by providers and models. Current accountability systems provide little transparent information about performance. Even as providers and models play a larger role in delivering education to students, schools continue to bear primary accountability for student achievement results. This imbalance in accountability may make schools and districts reluctant to enter into partnerships with third-party vendors to pilot new technologies and programs, given that they will bear the weight of accountability if the provider's model fails. Because not all providers are equally effective in improving student outcomes, and because their performance may change over time, states should consider establishing metrics to hold providers publicly accountable for their role in student learning outcomes.

PLAY IN ACTION

Schools should continue to bear primary responsibility for student learning results, but state and district policymakers could improve transparency about the impact of different models by publishing annual report cards for each approved provider. States already publish report cards that provide data on student performance—including graduation rates, statewide assessments, and college-readiness metrics—for each school and district in the state. Personalized learning report cards would build on this idea by reporting comprehensive student performance data across all schools working with a specific personalized learning provider or implementing a certain model. School leadership can refer to these report cards when establishing their own models or contracting with a vendor. In addition, states can use these report cards as a tool to assess the overall impact of approved models and to inform decisions about whether providers or models can retain approved-model status (see Play No. 2).

To date, no states have published report cards for personalized learning providers, or for any providers of instructional materials, for that matter. Ohio, however, has an accountability system for career-technical education (CTE) providers that offers a potential model for personalized learning accountability. Under a new system approved in 2013, Ohio publishes report cards for each of the state's 91 Career-Technical Planning Districts, which are consortia of districts that work together to provide career and technical-education services to students from participating districts. Under the new accountability model, each planning district receives a letter grade ranging from A to F based on five measures of student outcomes: academic achievement, graduation rate, post-program outcomes, federal accountability results, and preparation for success. These grades provide transparent information to the public about the performance of CTE programs in Ohio. The data are also used for program accountability under the Perkins grant program—a federal program that provides funding to CTE programs.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

To produce meaningful report cards for personalized learning models or providers, states must first establish an appropriate framework for evaluating their performance. Ohio's report cards for CTE programs include five components with specific metrics to assess student progress. To assess post-program outcomes, for instance, the state surveys CTE programs about students' post-program placement and progress toward receiving an industry credential. States creating personalized learning report cards should also consider multiple components of student progress. States will need to identify specific metrics to assess providers on these components and set expectations for insufficient, sufficient, and exemplary progress for each metric. States may wish to tap expertise outside the education agency to help them develop and implement effective frameworks and performance measures, including experts with deep

content knowledge of accountability, student assessment, and digital learning tools and practices. In reporting data to the public, states should also take care to provide appropriate context about the differences in missions and student populations served by different providers, which may contribute to differences in absolute results among providers.

State policymakers will also need to decide if and how they will use report card data. In some states, the annual report cards could simply act as a source of information to guide schools and districts. But other states may wish to use this information to make consequential decisions about providers and models. States with the approved-model designation process described in Play No. 2 could condition continuation of approved-model status on how schools and students perform on the report card. States could also decide to prohibit districts or schools from partnering with or using state funds for providers that receive low ratings on the report card for multiple years.

LEGISLATION

Ohio, S.B. 316 (established report cards for career-technical education programs)