TO: D.C. State Board of Education Members
FROM: SBOE Staff
RE: **STAR Framework Expert/Public Feedback Report**
DATE: December 3, 2021

Executive Summary
This *STAR Framework Assessment and Accountability Expert/Public Feedback Report* is the third in a four-part series of reports on input and feedback received from principals, teachers, other D.C. residents, as well as school accountability experts on D.C.'s school accountability system (i.e., STAR Framework and Rating). The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of expert and public witness testimony on the STAR Framework and Rating over the past year, following the publishing of the [State Board of Education's (State Board) Interim Report](#) on STAR Rating in December 2020.

All summaries in the following section are based on notes collected during expert panels, public testimony during public meetings, and State Board members engaging with and presenting to the public on the STAR Framework in 2021. Among public feedback, testimony came from 11 public witnesses and 11 Student Advisory Committee (SAC) members.[1] Listed below are meetings and contexts where expert witnesses and the public provided testimony and feedback. A timeline of meetings and public engagements can be found in [Appendix A](#).

- **October 20, 2021 Public Meeting- Rethinking Accountability Panel**
  - **Etai Mizrav**- *Senior Consultant and doctorate student for Educational Inequality, IBG Consulting Group and The George Washington University*
  - **Robert Simmons**- *Scholar in Residence and Scholar of Antiracist Praxis, School of Education, American University*
  - **Rashida Young**- *Chief School Performance Officer, DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB)*
- **October 8, 2021- Student Advisory Committee (SAC) STAR Framework Presentation**
- **June 16 Public Meeting- Accountability Panel**
  - **Elaine Allensworth**, *Lewis-Sebring Director, UChicago Consortium on School Research*
  - **Lynn Jennings**, *Senior Director, National and State Partnerships, The Education Trust*
  - **Deborah Temkin**, *Vice President, Youth Development & Education Research, Child Trends*
- **May 20, 2021- Assessment and Accountability Committee Meeting**
  - **Stephen Pruitt**, *President, Southern Regional Education Board*
  - **Jack Schneider**, *Assistant Professor, Leadership in Education Ph.D. Coordinator*
- **May 19 Public Meeting- Supporting Schools from the State Level Panel**
  - **Lane Carr**, *Director of Accountability, Nebraska Department of Education*

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[1] An updated version of this report, to be published in late December, will reflect notes from the November 15, 2021 State Board Fall Engagement #1 Assessment and Accountability Session, as well as the December 4, 2021 State Board Fall Engagement #2 Assessment and Accountability Session.

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- o **Russell Johnston**, *Senior Associate Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Education*
- o **Quentina Timoll**, *Chief of Staff and Operations, Louisiana Department of Education*
- o **Shirley Vargas**, *School Transformation Officer, Nebraska Department of Education*

Key Highlights from Expert and Public Testimony and Feedback in 2021

The following are major themes and highlights from expert and public witness testimony and feedback on the STAR Framework and Rating, broken into the following four categories:

1. Accountability System Summative Ratings and Alternatives
2. School Accountability Indicators
3. School Support Systems
4. Implementing a Revised Accountability Systems

Accountability System Summative Ratings and Alternatives

Concerns and criticisms about summative ratings like the STAR Rating, such as furthering segregation within schools and negative perceptions tied to low ratings.

- Mizrav shared concerns that the STAR Framework is a form of discriminatory signaling policies, exacerbating school segregation by acting as a mechanism that impacts decisions of where high quality educators decide to teach and where families send their students.
- Similar to Mizrav, Schneider's criticisms of the STAR system lies in its divisions created when middle-class white people are steered towards homogenized schools matching their demography, while stigmatizing schools with high concentrations of students from low-income households.
- Simmons shared that the STAR Rating does not tell the whole story of a school. He was not against getting rid of the STAR Rating, explaining stakeholders like parents or guardians use the STAR Rating to help them choose a school to send their child. What is lacking is a way to counteract negative perceptions of schools that have lower stars but are doing well in serving and educating children.
- At least six out of 11 public witnesses shared testimony critical of the STAR Framework and requesting the STAR Rating be eliminated altogether, for reasons such as not offering recommendations for improvement to school and adding to inequitable realities between schools.

Warnings of too much information or complexity to a lay audience with a dashboard.

- Mizrav recommended getting rid of the STAR Rating to focus on a dashboard approach—with more measures—to improve school accountability.
- Dashboards can provide more information publicly about schools to parents, but drawbacks include making accountability more difficult and confusing. Temkins, as a data scientist, felt more data is better than a single rating. Allensworth pointed to tradeoffs of using a dashboard—it gets more information to parents, while making it difficult to know

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which direction to go in, as well as softens accountability. If the goal is improvement, there should be more information; but you need more support to know how to use that data.

- Three of the 11 public witnesses requested the STAR Framework be replaced with a dashboard.

School Accountability Indicators

Ensuring qualitative indicators play a larger role in the STAR Framework (Simmons).

- Simmons shared that while quantitative data such as test scores might have a faster turnaround time for collection, qualitative data such as teacher, student, and family experiences provide a more holistic picture of the school, lending itself to both as a signal to families choosing schools and school leaders who want to improve their school. This means increasing weights to non-academic, qualitative indicators in the framework. Psychometricians strongly advise against using standardized test measurements to be the singular measure of teacher ability. Qualitative data should assess experiences inside the school, including those of staff, and whether they have the resources to teach.

Concerns about the use of academic proficiency scores in accountability systems and preferences for increasing academic growth metrics.

- Mizarav warned that judging a school based on proficiency scores will ensure schools with high rates of students designated at-risk will continue to be labeled as low-rated schools—he called for zero percent academic proficiency weights and 100 percent growth, noting that how these two are weighted should partly answer the question of what the purpose of the education system is.
- Jennings, Schneider, Allensworth, and Pruitt shared similar testimony on the importance of growth scores serving as a spotlight for schools and having value in accountability systems. Allensworth shared that standardized tests are a narrow measure of student achievement when striving for an equitable accountability system. Jennings shared her concern that accountability systems should be much more than just performance tests.
- The overwhelming majority of public witnesses who spoke on the STAR Framework at State Board public meetings over the past year were critical of the STAR Framework and Rating—10 out of 11 provided criticisms including the weighting of proficiency scores was too heavy in its assessment of school quality. It should be noted that the one public witness who testified in favor of the STAR Framework expressed that changes needed to be made to the metrics it uses, most notably recommending the shortening of the PARCC test.

The concept of "Big A" versus "little a" accountability arose amongst experts and the public, where "little a" describes data collected from schools that provide transparency and information to schools and families, but has no negative, state-level ramifications for those schools.

- Schneider made the case for using *"little a"* accountability indicators to see how they correlate/predict students' performance and behavior (i.e., choosing fine arts). Such

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indicators would then go into building a school profile (i.e., what is offered at the school, rates at which students are using resources and participating in what is offered, etc.).

Experts urged for ensuring validity across school accountability metrics.
- Schneider urged that in accountability systems—from a psychometric sense—agencies should ensure that what they are measuring is what they intend to measure. For example, chronic absenteeism as an ESSA non-academic indicator is easy to collect and measure but does not do a good job of truly measuring the quality of a school.
- Simmons warned against the use of re-enrollment, sharing it is not a reflection of school quality or students' experience by itself.

School climate surveys can be both valid and useful in going beyond test scores to measure school performance; however, such an approach takes time to introduce to communities and build their trust.
- Temkin warned against less valid climate surveys that are built in white suburbia, explaining such elements of quality might not be translatable in D.C. She recommended getting a pulse in D.C. and understanding there is a balance in the views and needs of the community.
- Allensworth explained that in creating school climate surveys, one of the questions her research team asks is "do we see the same patterns in our survey responses as we do with our standardized tests in regard to economic status correlations to outcomes?" measures that exhibit differences with measures that are strongly related to school improvement (i.e., student feelings of safety in the school)—those measures are what parents and families care a lot about.
- Schneider pointed to his study [Adding "Student Voice" to the Mix: Perception Surveys and State Accountability Systems](#)", which observes that student survey data shift school accountability ratings in small but meaningful ways and appear to enhance functional validity. Student survey results introduce information about school quality that is not captured by typical accountability metrics, correlate moderately with test score growth, and are not predicted by student demographic variables.
- Pruitt suggested making a conscious effort to work directly with schools and celebrate those having high (e.g., 100 percent) response rates on teacher surveys.

Add dropout rates, industry-recognized credentials, on-track rates for 9th graders, and/or dual enrollment opportunities in the STAR Rating.
- Jennings recommended the inclusion of the following metrics in a school accountability system: dropout rates, industry-recognized credentials, on-track rates for 9th graders, dual-enrollment opportunities. Temkin noted many of the metrics collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) are helpful to understanding opportunity
- SAC members shared many different input-type metrics like: outreach programs, extracurricular and sports offerings, availability and enrollment at their schools, and student/teacher satisfaction.

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- A few of the public witnesses who spoke critically of the STAR Framework—4 out of 10—expressed that there should be more holistic metrics and indicators that are included in school assessment. Suggestions made by these witnesses include emphasizing growth over proficiency, as well as including supports for student success after graduation and including measures of equity in school assessment.

School Support Systems

Tie the D.C. accountability framework to teacher supports and recruitment.
- Simmons urged for changes to D.C.'s funding mechanism and accountability around schools having a diverse teacher force.
- Johnston, Vargus, and Timoll all described ways of leveraging evidence-based requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to unlock Title I funds and support the science of reading initiatives within schools. For example, Timoll described pre-K–3 focus areas in the school system to gain access to federal funds to help hire literacy coaches.
- One public meeting witness who expressed criticism of the STAR Framework suggested that D.C. schools should move away from a focus on testing and instead place a heavier emphasis on other education initiatives, including increased attention to teacher training and professional development.

Fund schools based on data coming from schools and ensure funds go towards specific school needs.
- Simmons said funding should be tied to specific needs of the school.
- Vargas urged that when talking about equity, people should also think about who is benefitting and who is not from the educational experience; it is a fact that not every child is accessing equitable resources in each district.
- Allensworth described "little a" accountability[2] with parent/public perceptions, which influences school choice and determines movement of both people, and resources to and from schools.
- Vargas urged that when talking about equity, people should also think about who is benefitting and who is not from the educational experience; not every child is accessing equitable resources.

More targeted supports to schools based on students' groups/historical performance and enrollment behavior, grade level, and performance on different metrics.
- Jennings explained that while schools in D.C. should have received targeted assistance, but this is not happening. She acknowledged that parents may look across D.C. for better schools, which speaks to the need to getting resources to lower-rated schools to ensure equity and thusly raising the ratings of such schools.

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[2] "Little a" accountability in this report refers to data collected at a school that provides transparency and actionable information, but with little sanctions tied to them, unlike "Big A" accountability that are tied to metrics like high-stakes testing.

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- Temkin stated accountability by nature is a stick—what is needed are carrots, not a fear tactic, but a useful tool. She added that identifying schools for supports is different from providing data to parents. Both are important and both have different needs.
- Schneider shared that schools are accountable for providing things like a rich curriculum, safety, etc. In return, state education systems should be held accountable for getting schools those resources, with parents serving as allies/advocates, calling for a trigger system in place.
- Timoll shared that a gap in Louisiana's accountability system—there was nothing for early childhood (K–2). Louisiana is now focusing on observation and screeners to see where students in early grades are starting and how they are progressing. Growth metrics are something Louisiana is trying to implement more strongly for in grades 3–8.
- Johnston described one way Massachusetts is providing targeted support to low performing schools is by accounting for students who are in a particular school for more than one year, at least two years and are scoring the lowest 20 percent; this is to better ensure schools are attentive to these groups of students. Massachusetts takes all schools and places them into four quartiles and sets targets for schools based on historical performance.
- Vargas described Nebraska's Department of Education visiting schools and engaging in conversations with local school boards, families, students, school staff (i.e., teachers, school leaders, custodians, etc.), and community members to get a better sense of the needs and quality of the school.

Implementing a Revised Accountability Systems

Build public trust/knowledge and capacity within schools when implementing a school accountability framework. This includes listening to a broad range of voices for both the planning and implementation of a new accountability system, allowing for a gradual roll out of the accountability system rather than a sudden policy shift, and following through with schools throughout the implementation process.

- Jennings shared it takes work to build trust, using Colorado as an example of working with communities and schools. Instead of just sharing data, there needs to be training to conduct engagement and information-sharing with communities and schools.
- Temkin shared that in D.C., building trust in schools took work, and showing schools data and helping them through this data is part of ensuring their understanding and acknowledgement for areas of growth.
- Allensworth recommended a gradual rollout, which is easier with public buy-in.
- Pruitt also recommended for D.C. to start with a slow rollout when changing an accountability system, starting with "little a" accountability metrics and build up to both more solid psychometrics using slow roll out, as well as buy-in from education community implementing new items/indicators. Pruitt shared that part of building trust, buy-in, and compliance to an accountability system, then the system needs to be easily understood; he used the idea that the system should be able to be explained within the time it takes to stand in a grocery check-out line. He further suggested on this point that at the very beginning of improving an accountability system, being able to define the purpose of it, why the State

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Board cares about it, and why the community should care about it, then get input from the community is crucial.

- Schneider recommended respecting and taking more seriously the community and its values (especially lay residents), empowering educators, and scaffolding supports/information such that they can understand the new system.
- Johnston explained the importance of following through when implementing an accountability system, using early literacy and dyslexia intervention as an example; this entails staying on message and defining concepts (i.e., early literacy) and being clear through professional development opportunities and guidance on areas like intervention for dyslexia; this includes promoting collaboration with teachers on shared goal to address literacy and dyslexia.
- Johnston shared that a critical component to accountability systems is focusing on engaging families as decision makers, providing critical info on their child's learning process. This entails effective and ongoing communications.
- Johnston stated school systems must own what they implement, which translates to the need for new initiatives based on clear data analysis so they can own policy decisions.
- Vargas pointed to Nebraska working with education leaders to help them understand both how to look at data to understand areas of growth within their school. She too urged for consistent communication and messaging to families, educators, and school leaders around education policy.
- Timoll described going beyond buy-in from communities but having a shared collaborative posture—this entails creating insight stakeholder groups used to inform topics (e.g., special education, providing equitable educational experiences for English-language learners). She shared Louisiana building a coalition of support (i.e., facilitating teachers working with parents) and also informing initiatives.
- Carr explained it is not enough to facilitate engagement sessions for feedback, engagement needs to be meaningful from the beginning. Nebraska, for example, aims to center student voice in policy decisions like supporting schools.
- Johnston stated that it matters who is at the table when building out education policy, adding that Massachusetts is working on a racial equity tool, making sure to employ racial equity at the core of policy-making, being mindful who is participating and who will be impacted.

Ensure high quality instructional materials.
- Vargas explained that variability in student outcomes was, to some extent, reflected in the variability of learning materials being used across Nebraska; teachers use hubs such as Nebraska's open education resource (OER) to upload their lessons. This serves to help track whether teachers are using high quality education materials. This form of transparency would then help identify areas where schools might need support.
- Johnston described the importance of not just high quality education materials but having a dedicated team to track their usage and alignment with state standards.
- Timoll described teachers being empowered to help with choosing resources and materials, participate in the writing of their school's intervention plans, as well as receive professional

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development to reinforce the integrity of the program to be implemented at their school. She also described having roundtables and two-way dialogues as part of important approaches to stakeholder engagement.

Leverage evidence-based requirements in ESSA (e.g., science of reading initiatives).
- Johnston, Vargus, and Timoll all described ways of leveraging evidence-based requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to unlock Title I funds and support the science of reading initiatives within schools. For example, Timoll described pre-K–3 focus areas in the school system to gain access to federal funds to help hire literacy coaches.

Avoid schools gaming the system.
- Pruitt described an "unidentified consequences committee" whose charge was to find ways to game the system being proposed and to help thing through how people might misuse/misconstrue the system.
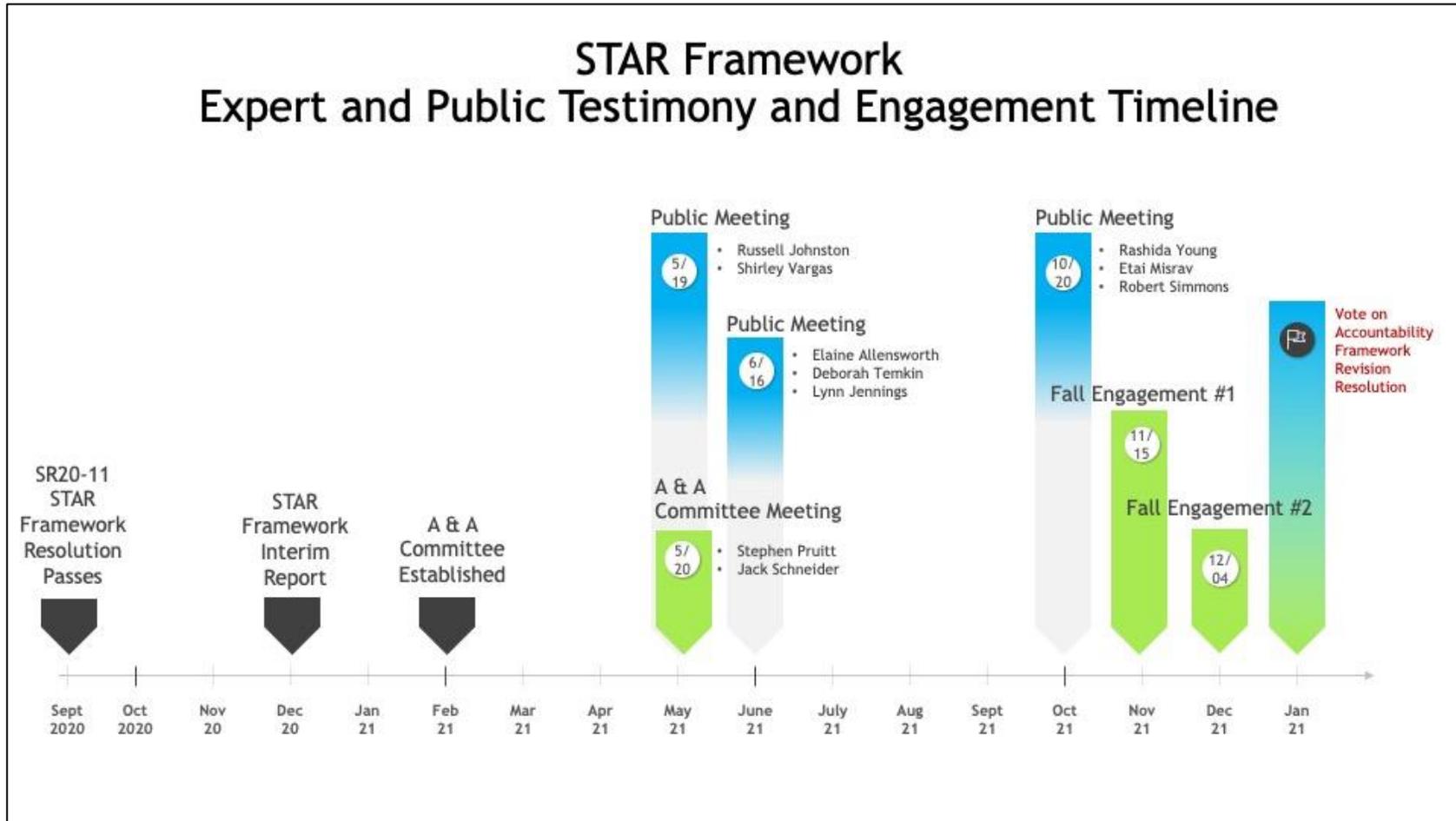
Be mindful of student sub-groups.
- Pruitt described instances where the number of students that were counted in each sub-group, and how such a requirement impacted the validity and unintended consequences of those students who might negatively impact other schools they matriculate to. Accountability systems should be designed to account for the movement into—and away from schools and how this impacts schools' ratings, rankings in accountability systems, and funding.
- Vargas described Nebraska targeted improvement schools that were performing well but had specific student groups that were struggling, which meant providing those schools with specific supports based on what student sub-groups needed.

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Appendix A[3]

STAR Framework
Expert and Public Testimony and Engagement Timeline

[3] Black arrows indicate past State Board milestones regarding the STAR Framework, blue arrows indicate public meetings with expert and public witnesses speaking on accountability systems, green arrows indicate other meetings where expert and public input was collected, and the blue/green arrow at the end indicates the public meeting where the school accountability system resolution will be voted on. Arrow heights have no significance.