

Opportunity Measure Demonstration Project

SUMMARY OF THE FALL 2017 PILOT

MOMENTUM STRATEGY & RESEARCH

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Purpose

To Strengthen Accountability in Public Education through:

Diversification of measures and metrics specifically related to the unique values and expectations of individual schools and their communities;

Active accountability R&D demonstrating the viability of innovative measures for public accountability purposes.

Executive Summary

For years, Colorado alternative education campuses (AECs) have looked to expand the use of qualitative methods and recognition of unique measures as part of their evaluations. The Opportunity Measure Demonstration Project was created to look at how qualitative and unique measures could be included in accountability. Below we briefly describe the positive outcomes and key findings from the first phase of the demonstration effort.

Positive outcomes include:

- Participating schools represent a diverse mix of school demographics and programs and present a wide range of compelling and interesting Opportunity Measures;
 - The Demonstration Project launched with 12 participating schools, 7 of whom went through a full panel review in the Fall, with another 5 slated for a Spring 2018 review;
 - An additional 4 schools participated by supplying a review panel member – and these schools have been given the opportunity to undergo an initial measure review this Spring;
- Dividing the review process into two-steps (Fall and Spring) provides participating schools the opportunity to integrate feedback into their programs/interventions and their materials demonstrating outcomes;
- Attracting quality panel members from both in Colorado and across the country is possible, this round included over 30 individuals from across multiple states;
- Finding outside topical experts to participate as panel members may not be feasible for all opportunity measures.

Notable findings include:

1. School participation and commitment showed how important these unique measures are to the schools, and the presented measures showed key aspects of their programs that they feel aren't captured by today's accountability system;
2. An external review process featuring professionals as panelists combined with a detailed rating criteria can provide reliable ratings of these unique measures, as both useful feedback for schools and reliable ratings for accountability purposes; and
3. Lacking appropriate and compelling incentive, schools do not naturally track and collect outcome data related to internal supports at an "accountability quality" level.

These findings have shaped improvements to the review process for the forthcoming Spring panel reviews and the overall usability for accountability purposes.

Background

This report outlines the characteristics of the schools that participated in the Opportunity Measure Consortium's¹ Demonstration Project, the Opportunity Measures they submitted, and a review of the rating process and outcomes. The final section of this report summarizes how the entire process, from applications to final ratings, can be improved to a quality suitable for accountability use.

The Opportunity Measure Consortium and Demonstration Project arose in response to recommendations issued in December 2015, by a legislatively mandated working group tasked with improving state accountability efforts for Colorado's alternative education campuses (AECs). Those recommendations included a strong message recognizing the importance of broadening the ways success is measured for schools serving Colorado's highest-risk students.

The recommendation described *“qualitative measures, in addition to quantitative measures of a school's performance in serving high-risk students”*, and spoke of integrating qualitative measures into the SPF by *“capturing the essential unique qualities of effective AECs, and including additional performance measures that are relevant to a school's unique design and mission.”*

For the purposes of this project and report, “Opportunity Measures” are considered data and information that are packaged together to assess the impact of unique program offerings provided by schools for which the school could be given credit by external stakeholders; including, but not limited to, the State Department of Education.

Participating Schools

The Consortium invited all Colorado AECs to apply for participation in the 2017-2018 Opportunity Measure Demonstration Project. Schools applied to participate through an application that generally asked interested schools to describe their proposed Opportunity Measure, what the desired outcomes are for the measure, how they track student outcomes currently, and whether they have financial and/or staff time to contribute to the demonstration effort.

The Consortium hoped for a diverse set of between ten and fifteen schools to participate in the Demonstration Project, who would also feature a diverse set of Opportunity Measures. Twenty schools showed interest in participating, with twelve AECs ultimately submitting applications for this round, and another four who were not ready to submit this year but provided staff members to serve on rating panels (described later in the report) and may go through an initial measure review this Spring.

Diversity of Participating Schools

Though it was not the Project's goal for participants to be statistically representative of the entire Colorado AEC population, it was important to attract schools that were diverse across multiple dimensions, including school type (e.g., charter schools and district schools), targeted student population, size, geographic region, and/or primary instructional delivery method.

Overall, the participating schools represent a healthy cross section of Colorado AECs, a point further supported by the variety of Opportunity Measures put forth for evaluation.

¹ The Opportunity Measure Consortium consists of several Colorado alternative education campuses and Momentum Strategy & Research.

Diversity of Opportunity Measures

Participating schools submitted a variety of thoughtful Opportunity Measures for review. The Opportunity Measures being evaluated range from assessing the quality of child care provided to the children of adolescent high school students, to the development of independent living skills for blind and deaf students once they graduate high school; from the effectiveness of community correctional programming on changing the attitudes and behaviors of juvenile offenders, to the impact of providing services and an opportunity to learn to recent immigrants and refugees. Though many of the Opportunity Measures focused on students' social-emotional learning or well-being, each varied in the extent of tracking being done, the methods being used, and the depth of opportunities being offered. In addition, schools varied on the stage of implementation of both their specific programming and/or their data collection efforts to track students' progress in response to the programming.

As Momentum received the applications and gave feedback to schools on the additional information that might help the review panels make accurate ratings, it was clear that not all schools were ready for a full panel review in November. Thus, the five schools in the more developmental stage received a "paper review" in December (general feedback to strengthen each schools' materials), and will have a full panel review in the Spring of 2018.

Key Finding: School participation and commitment showed how important these unique measures are to the schools. Nearly one quarter of all alternative education campuses showed interest and voluntarily participated as either a school to be reviewed or a reviewer for one or more opportunity measure panel reviews. The presented measures highlighted key aspects of the schools programs that they feel aren't captured by today's accountability system.

Data Collection Process

Using the responses from each application, the project team provides feedback and works with each school to identify the best possible information and/or data that the schools could submit for evaluation by the panels. Notably, the first round of schools' subsequent submissions did not provide a great deal of outcome data. While surprising, it became clear that that the schools did not regularly collect outcome data for Opportunity Measure efforts if not required for accountability purposes.

To provide additional insight on each Opportunity Measure, Momentum's project team conducts a literature review related to the target populations and/or the effectiveness of the identified programming (as identified in the applications). This summary is included as part of the panel review materials and includes information on at least some of the following:

- Additional background information about target population;
- Published "best practices" for interventions and/or supports of target population;
- Common methods/measurement tools used to assess post-intervention/support outcomes; and
- Typical outcomes of identified interventions and/or supports.

In addition, when a school identifies the use of a specific measurement tool, Momentum reviews the tool's psychometric properties (e.g., validity and reliability, scales scores, sub-scales, typical change score, if available, etc.), and the appropriateness of the tool for the intended use.

Each panel member then receives a packet for their respective school's Opportunity Measure that summarizes the school-submitted information, data, and outcomes, and Momentum's literature review. In addition, Momentum provides guidance outlining the purpose and goals for the panel and the use of the rubrics used to rate the Opportunity Measure.

Panel Composition & Review Process

As previously described, Opportunity Measures are school-specific, and not commonly used for accountability purposes. Thus, they typically do not come with much, if any, psychometric information (such as published validity and reliability test information, norms based on the specific sample of students, and/or benchmarks for assessing success). In lieu of such traditional, quantitative validation, the Opportunity Measure Demonstration Project relies on external panel review and consistent rating rubrics to provide objective measure review.

Panel Design: The design of review panels reflects the project's interests in ensuring: 1) Objectivity; 2) Diversity of perspective- including expertise; and 3) Feasibility and affordability.

Panel objectivity is done through the deliberate selection of non-interested panel members and the signing of conflict of interest forms.

Diversity of perspective is another priority as shown by the model composition of each panel:

- Two peers from other alternative schools;
- One person with subject-matter expertise;
- One person with accountability and evaluation expertise, and
- One person with an education policy background

Affordability is maintained through the use of volunteer panelists wherever possible, which carries with it the danger of panelists backing out or being underprepared. As a result, our first panels generally ended up with at least four members.

Key Finding: Expectations for topical expertise *and* panel participation may not be feasible. In seeking topic panelists, the greater the level of subject-matter expertise, the harder to gain commitment to a fixed-date for all panel members to attend. One potential solution is to solicit and incorporate topical experts' input prior to the panel meetings for the balance of the panelists' benefit. Another option is to modify expectations of the level of expertise needed to sit on a review panel.

Procedural Consistency

In addition to the panel members, each panel review meeting includes three other individuals to provide consistency across the panel review process: one facilitator, and two "quality controllers". The facilitator is responsible for setting panel member expectations and responsibilities and for outlining the meeting

objectives and agenda. The facilitator reads from a previously prepared script, which includes timelines and instructions for the flow of the panel meetings. The facilitator was consistent across each of the first seven panel reviews.

The two “quality control” people each serve a specific function. One was hired as an impartial observer who is responsible for providing feedback on the overall rating process, including the documents that are provided to panel members, the flow and organization of the panel meetings, common themes regarding how panelists receive and respond to the information provided, and the quality of feedback panelists provide about the Opportunity Measures.

The other quality control person supports the facilitator in sticking to the schedule and script, while also capturing themes and commonalities across panel member comments. These notes form the basis of each school’s feedback report after the review process is completed.

Rating Rubrics

Panel members are asked to rate each Opportunity Measure on two indicators: *Strength of Evidence*, and *Strength of Impact*. Each indicator is rated based on a corresponding rubric with possible ratings of 0-5.

The panel review’s rating process is an evaluation of the evidence presented by the school in support of their intended outcomes. Evidence include student improvement data, third party testimony, expert testimony, student surveys, or any other form of data the school believes to be informative.

The *Strength of Evidence* evaluates how well the school documents success relative to the unique measures presented. Panelists review: 1) The extent to which the school has provided a well-thought-out connection between the identified student needs and how students will benefit from the services and support being provided (e.g., research on the use of the identified intervention with the targeted student population); 2) How students are identified to receive the support services; 3) How progress is tracked and documented before, during, and after receiving the stated support service.

Strength of Impact evaluates the transformative impact the activities have on students’ lives. The rubric takes into account both the number and proportion of the student body receiving/participating in the support/programming, as well as the life-changing significance of the results.

Review of Outcomes

Seven of twelve panel reviews have been completed at the time of this report’s publication. The remainder of the reviews will take place in the Spring of 2018.²

Our process for quality control and review of outcomes started with a focus on consistency and the goal of answering the question of whether the ratings reflect the overall strength of the group’s information. However, what ended up driving the conversation of the review of outcomes was the overall lack of outcome data and details provided by the initial pilot schools, how to explain that shortcoming, and how we can help schools fill that gap moving forward.

² Though seven panel reviews were completed, one school opted out of the pilot prior to completion. Therefore, all summary data provided is for the six schools that remain in the pilot effort.

The average panel member ratings received by the first of the pilot schools can be seen in Table 1.

School	Avg. Evidence Rating	Avg. Impact Rating	Total Avg. Rating
1	3	3.25	3.13
2	1.5	2	1.75
3	2.75	3.25	3
4	2.5	2	2.13
5	3.75	1.8	2.35
6	1.6	2.4	2

The total ratings (with an average of 2.45) are consistent with the materials reviewed and confirms an overriding observation of the panelists that the materials submitted did not provide the level of outcome data that one would find in other accountability metrics.

In reviewing why this is the case, the project team focused on two areas: 1) The directions, forms, and materials provided; and 2) Whether schools simply do not collect and track Opportunity Measure data at “accountability ready” levels.

Based on the first round of applicants, the project team has taken steps to help improve the process, including:

- Asking each participating school to include a theory of change in their submitted information:
 - Who their students are;
 - What their students’ needs are;
 - How those needs are identified;
 - How the school is addressing those needs;
 - How the school knows the programs or interventions are working;
- Restructuring the data collection form to ask more specific questions:
 - Regarding both short- and long-term goals, and
 - Including a stronger narrative of the programming/interventions.

Based on preliminary findings for the Spring round, the materials submitted with the above guidelines look more complete and detailed than the first group.

Perhaps more profound, however, is the realization about a school’s documentation and data collection practices, leading to the following Key Finding:

Key Finding: Lacking appropriate and compelling incentive, schools do not naturally track and collect outcome data related to internal supports at an “accountability quality” level. Even in cases where schools have been providing support services to students or their families for years, collecting accountability-quality outcome data that speaks to the impact of their programming and services is not the norm. What became clear is that schools focus data collection efforts on what they are required to supply to districts, charter authorizers, and the State.

While the application reviews indicated to the project team that seven schools were ready to provide the data and information required to undergo a full panel review, the materials schools submitted provided less outcome data than expected. This resulted in panelists having several questions that the call facilitator was not able to address—her explicit instructions were to allow the panelists to rate the school based solely on the information the school provided.

Because of the limited data and information, some panel members struggled with how to reconcile the sense that the school was doing great work from the evidence provided to “prove” that. Some panelists even gave two ratings—one based on what they assumed was happening, and one based on the evidence provided. In cases where we received more than one rating per indicator from a panel member, we averaged the two and rounded to the nearest whole number.

Reviewer Feedback

While the pilot project was successful at finding schools that varied in their readiness and overall quality of information, in this initial round we found that most of the low ratings of the Opportunity Measures were the result of the general lack of data, as opposed to being the result of “poor performance” on the measure. Our independent reviewer noted this trend and had some thoughtful recommendations for how Momentum might remedy this into the future. Below are some of the questions the independent reviewer suggested we ask schools in the future:

- a. *What portion of students are included in the current accountability measures?*
- b. *Why is the current accountability system not fully capturing how the school impacts students?*
- c. *How will this measure help the school more fully capture how it impacts students?*
- d. *If this proposed measure were included in the accountability system, what other significant components of the school program remain unmeasured?*
 - a. *If a large portion of the program remains unmeasured, does that diminish the relevance of the proposed measure, especially when comparing across schools that may get this opportunity to include additional data in their accountability systems?*

Moving Forward

Fortunately, the project team can put into place some of the recommendations for improving the process of acquiring information and data from schools for the Spring 2018 panel reviews.

At a larger level, the previously discussed finding on the readiness of schools to supply accountability-level outcome data leads to a recommendation regarding the implementation of innovative accountability systems. Based on the outcomes of this pilot, we believe that this new level of innovation in accountability will require additional time and effort on the schools’ parts. Unfortunately, expecting schools to increase their efforts without seeing a return on their time and effort is unrealistic. The

Opportunity Measure Consortium is looking to work collaboratively with people on the state and district/authorizer level to increase incentives for the schools to put in the appropriate amount of work needed for them to make additional investments in staff time and/or systems to capture the necessary data.

For example, using the Colorado alternative accountability context, a State pilot effort could offer provisional accountability framework points for a school who is participating in the pilot. In subsequent years, the school would be required to submit adequate data and information for a panel to evaluate, and the rating would then drive the number of points the school receives on their accountability framework.

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for participating as panel reviewers and/or volunteer schools in this demonstration project.

Participating Schools:

Chaffee County High School
Colorado High School Charter
Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind
HOPE Online Academy High School
Landmark Academy
New America School: Lowry
New America School: Thornton
New Legacy Charter High School
Red Canyon High School
Ridge View Academy
Yampah Mountain High School

Panel Reviewers:

Erin Abshere, Sr. Accountability Researcher
California Charter Schools Association

Lili Adeli, Headmaster
Boulder Prep High School

Jon Berninzoni, Principal
New America School, Lakewood

Tisha Bouwmeester, Education Consultant
Cyndi Bush-Luna, Founding Principal
Colorado High School Charter

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Mark Connell, Coordinator of School Improvement
Life Skills High School of Colorado Springs

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Colorado Charter School Institute

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Red Canyon High School

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Colorado High School Charter

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