The Generation Next Data Committee[1] identified the following summary messages to aid the coalition's partners in appropriate use and interpretation of state accountability data under Minnesota's new North Star System.

The North Star Accountability System, managed by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), is the result of extensive stakeholder input and feedback from all around the state. This system:
- aligns federal (ESSA) and state (World's Best Workforce, or WBWF) requirements into one unified system
- includes more equity levers, compared to other recent Minnesota accountability systems, to support state goals of eliminating disparities[2]
- remains heavily based on tests and graduation rates, as federal law still explicitly requires

The system is intended to emphasize continuous improvement and implementation science; in other words, it:
- identifies the "smoke not the fire," as MDE leaders have described it, meaning that while the indicators are about students, they are intended to be "lagging" indicators of adult actions that impact those student results
- operates on a three-year cycle, starting with planning in the first year, then implementation in the next year
- will be evaluated and refined, based on national research and local impacts, for the next cycle in 2021

The North Star System focuses on supporting schools to meet their community-defined World's Best Workforce (WBWF)[3] goals, expanding the number of schools that will receive support.
- **Schools have different missions; supports will be tailored based on those missions.**
- **Resources have been increased, but not enough for all the schools that need support.**
- 150 schools were supported under the previous system; now, approximately 500 will be provided support.
- Schools will receive support regardless of their Title I status. (In the past, only Title I schools were supported.)

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[1] Generation Next is a coalition of civic, business and education leaders from across Minneapolis and Saint Paul dedicated to closing achievement and opportunity gaps. Generation Next uses rigorous data analysis and community engagement to identify what works and replicate the most promising practices. The Data Committee, comprised of representatives from institutions committed to measuring educational trends in the Twin Cities, supports the Generation Next Leadership Council, staff, and networks in several ways, including promoting effective data use to plan, implement, monitor, and improve the activities of Generation Next.

[2] "Minnesota's Equity Commitment" (MDE) https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE073769&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

[3] World's Best Workforce (MDE), https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/wbwf

- Districts will also be identified for support: the lowest 10% of traditional districts (33 districts) and lowest 10% of charters (17 charter schools) will be supported, as well as other districts identified at the Commissioner's discretion, based on their WBWF plans and outcomes.

North Star, unlike its predecessor, has no summative rating, by design.
- **Reports present distinct indicators, which are not intended to be combined.**
- Schools are more complex than one number and require specific feedback to improve.

The state needs a way to determine whether a school gets support or not. Several types and levels of indicators help to determine which kind of support is best suited to each school.
- Comprehensive Support (~150 schools) is indicated by one of the following:
  - The lowest 5% of Title I schools, as required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)[4], based on several stages of achievement, progress, and attendance measures. This will include 47 schools: 34 elementary, 7 middle, and 6 senior high.
  - All public high schools with a four-year graduation rate below 67% overall, or for one or more student groups (to support a focus on equity)
    - This measure is intended to cast a wide net and then distinguish, through a needs assessment, between the levels of support actually needed.
    - If a school is doing well with their mission, they won't need as much support. For example:
      - One of the most common situations in this category will be schools identified only for students receiving Special Education services. In many cases, these students have the right to continue their high school education beyond four years, including through transition services. In these cases, the school may be meeting its mission by providing additional time to these students.
      - Alternative programs have a mission to serve students who aren't on track to graduate in four years. Students may be in alternative programs because the climate in mainstream schools was not good for them; the alternative program may be serving them better, even though the program may be identified in this category.
    - Four-year rates do not mean four years for all students.
      - Newcomer students or Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) are frequently placed in a grade based on their age, even though they may not have actually completed credits at the rate of other students in that grade.
      - Students who have had interruptions in their education for family or personal reasons may have been advanced through grades, even though they did not have the same amount of time as their peers.

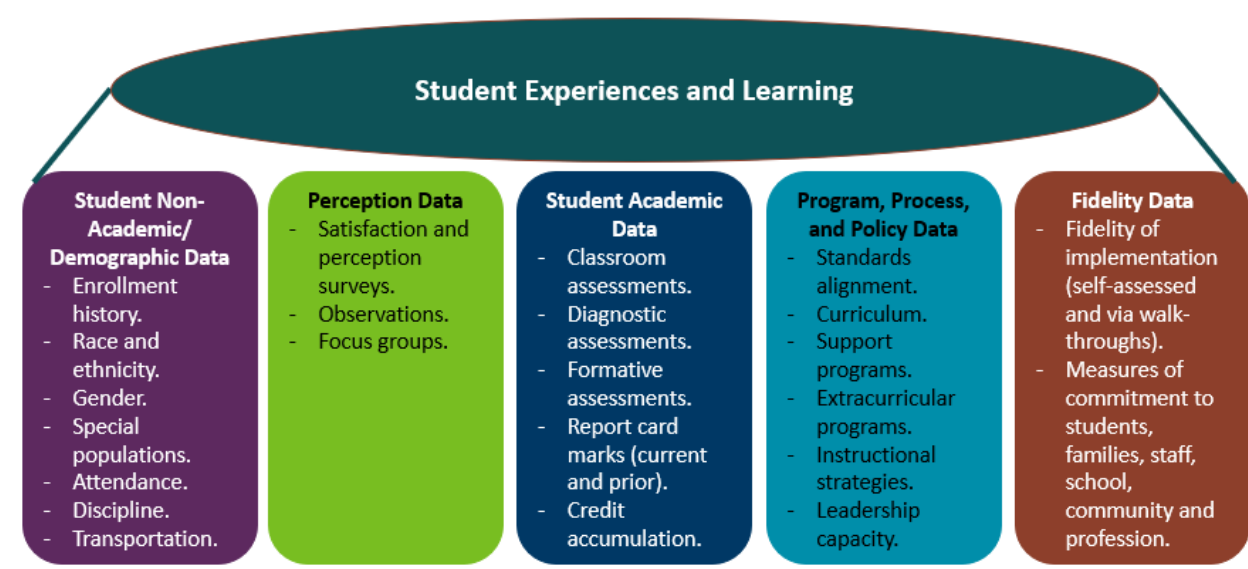[4] U.S. Department of Education, https://www.ed.gov/essa

Definitions of progress, arguably the most contentious topic in stakeholder discussions, have changed from previous systems.
- Progress measures still start by looking at each individual student's results.
  - English Language development progress compares actual score changes to individual growth targets on the ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs) assessment.
  - Progress in math and reading combines each student's individual change in the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) proficiency categories.
    - The MCA is a criterion-referenced test, which means it measures what a student knows and can do.
    - MCA proficiency levels are assigned to each student for each subject based on how their score compares to set cut scores for proficiency: Exceeds (E), Meets (M), Partially Meets (P), Does Not Meet (D).
    - The growth measure under the previous system (Z score) showed the actual change in student score, compared to other students (a normative metric), regardless of what they know and can do
      - The main concern about the Z score is that it does not show how a student's growth relates to proficiency
      - Z scores are problematic as a statistical measure, reporting what one Data Committee member characterized as "mostly noise"
      - Z scores will still be reported for schools, as required by state law, but not as a measure in the North Star system
      - There are concerns about two different growth measures, but any change would need to be legislative
      - Schools and districts should use formative assessments to measure student change over time, in addition to these summative assessments. However, multiple assessments have often run into concerns about total testing time.
    - The current progress measures change in MCA <u>level</u>, so a student could increase in score but not show up as making progress unless they move up a level
      - Data Committee members expressed concern that this could lead to focus on students who are close to a different level, not on those who are far from a level change
      - As part of stakeholder conversations with technical experts, MDE analyzed previous years' data and found that the change from z-score to the current progress measure did not have an impact on those identified for support.
- Student group results on progress measures combine individual progress results described above.
- All student groups are then averaged together, which gives smaller groups a higher weight in this system.

MDE will continue to report data in different ways for different audiences and purposes.
- *Minnesota Report Card*: General summary data for the broader community
  - Adds new types of data:
    - Preschool participation
    - Discipline
    - Advanced coursework
    - School finance
  - Shows results for additional student groups:
    - Students in foster care (academic achievement and graduation)
    - Students with parents on active military duty (academic achievement)
- *Accountability Public Data Files*: Detailed spreadsheets on districts and schools
- *Secure Reports and Rosters:* Interactive tool that goes deeper than the Report Card, including student rosters, for school and district staff authorized to access private student data

The Data Committee recognizes the tension between the punitive perceptions and supportive intents of accountability. The North Star system does have some aspects of both. Overall, it provides useful information to prioritize limited support resources, but represents only one part of one type of data needed to understand Student Experiences and Learning.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)