

# Accountability Handout: Theory of Action, Logic Model, and Indicator Selection Criteria



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## 1. **Theory of Action:**

A theory of action<sup>1</sup> is an “if, then” statement declaring the causal relationships between the components of an accountability system (i.e., context, inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes) and intended impacts.

A theory of action should center accountability over aspirations, reflect what we expect the system to accomplish, acknowledge the system’s context, be plausible and measurable, and have transparent and updatable assumptions.<sup>2</sup>

Here’s a template for a theory of action:

Acknowledging [ **A** ], if Oregon’s schools [ **B** ], then [ **C** ].

**A** is a statement about the context.

**B** are statements about the inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes.

**C** is a statement about the impacts.

## 2. **Logic Model:**

A logic model is a visual representation of the theory of action. In addition to the accountability components, the logic model specifies the purpose<sup>3</sup> and the assumptions<sup>4</sup> of the accountability system.

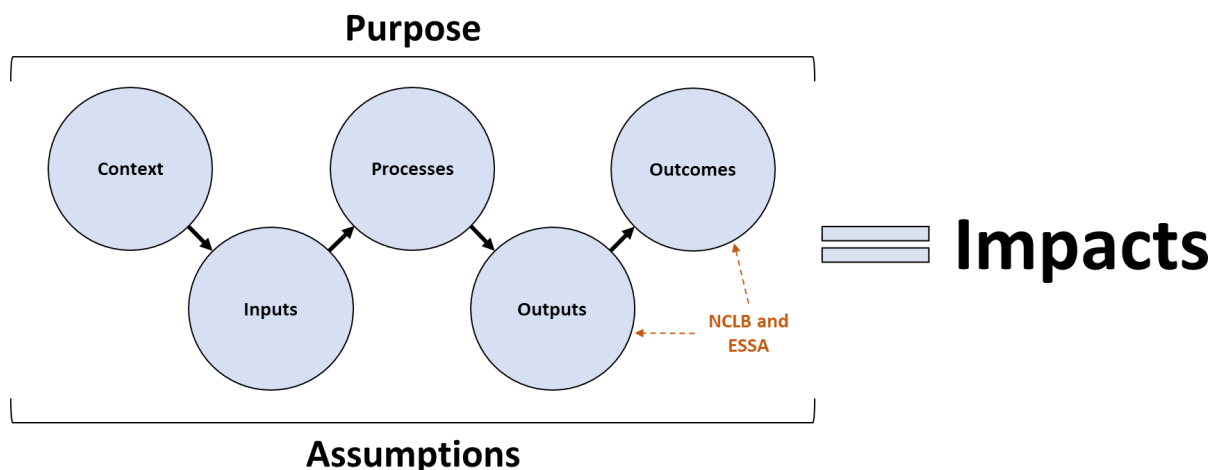
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<sup>1</sup> Also known as a theory of change.

<sup>2</sup> Forti, M. (2012). Six theory of change pitfalls to avoid. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.48558/9CJH-XR51>

<sup>3</sup> Aims and intentions of the accountability system.

<sup>4</sup> Beliefs, assertions, and perceptions underlying the accountability system.



School accountability systems (e.g., NCLB and ESSA) have largely focused on outputs and outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, graduation), and ignore context, inputs, and processes.

### 3. **Definition of Accountability Components:**

**Context:** Conditions under which schools operate (e.g., cultural, economic, historical, political, and social circumstances; federal and state laws; district policies and support; geography and climate).

**Inputs:** The resources available to schools (e.g., school finance, physical infrastructure and assets, human resources, curriculum and instructional materials).

**Process:** The activities schools implement (e.g., classroom instruction, opportunities for students to learn, extracurricular activities).

**Outputs:** The evidence that schools implement the activities (e.g., student engagement and belonging, regular attendance, participation in CTE, student learning).

**Outcomes:** The changes occurring as a result of the implementation of the activities (e.g., academic achievement, graduation, post-secondary enrollment).

**Impacts:** The intended consequences of the accountability system (e.g., all students are able to self-determine and meaningfully engage, participate, and contribute to society).

### 4. **Indicator Selection Criteria:**

**Meaningful:** Indicator is publicly credible, supported by research and theory, and has a clear association with student and school success.

**Available:** Indicator is available or could be available without imposing an unnecessary burden on students, classrooms, schools, or districts.

**Accessible:** Indicator use and interpretation are understandable to the public.

**Measurable:** Indicator is reliable<sup>5</sup>, valid<sup>6</sup>, comparable<sup>7</sup>, and meaningfully differentiates between schools<sup>8</sup>.

**Fair:** Indicator doesn't favor (or disfavor) a student group or school over others.

**Actionable:** Schools have the ability to influence this indicator.

**Not Gameable:** Indicator, and its respective consequences, (i) motivate responsible and ethical behavior, and (ii) are not susceptible to corruption or manipulation as a response to the high-stakes nature of the indicator.<sup>9</sup>

**Disaggregation:** Where relevant and appropriate, the accountability system can split or separate the indicator into smaller, meaningful parts (e.g., student groups) in order to reveal important patterns, trends, and performance.

**Not Duplicative or Redundant:** Indicator uniquely contributes to the accountability system.

## 5. **Other Accountability Considerations and Questions:**

Outside of the student groups required by ESSA, should the accountability system report disaggregate indicator data for additional student groups?

How should the accountability system deal with small schools (or small student groups) as well as charter and alternative schools?

How should the accountability system incorporate indicator improvement across years in addition to current year indicator performance?

How should the accountability system use or combine indicators to identify schools?

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<sup>5</sup> Indicator is precise or consistent.

<sup>6</sup> Indicator measures what it intends to measure.

<sup>7</sup> Interpretation of the indicator is identical across student groups, schools, and time.

<sup>8</sup> Indicator can distinguish between lower and higher performing schools.

<sup>9</sup> See [Campbell's law](#) ("The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor") and [Goodhart's law](#) ("Any observed statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed upon it for control purposes").

Should the accountability system only identify the lowest performing schools or should all schools have designations (including the highest performing schools)?

What supports, resources, or incentives should ODE provide to schools identified by the accountability system?

How should ODE report the accountability system to the public?

What scaffolding and supports should ODE provide to ensure the accountability system is clear and understandable to schools, districts, and the public at-large?

How should ODE involve community and education partners in the maintenance, improvement, and evaluation of the accountability system?