
Focusing the Conversation

Developing and Using Guiding Principles to Strengthen School Accountability Systems

October 23, 2024

WestEd's Mission

WestEd is a national, nonpartisan research, development, and service agency that works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults.

Today's moderators



Eric Crane
Senior Research Manager



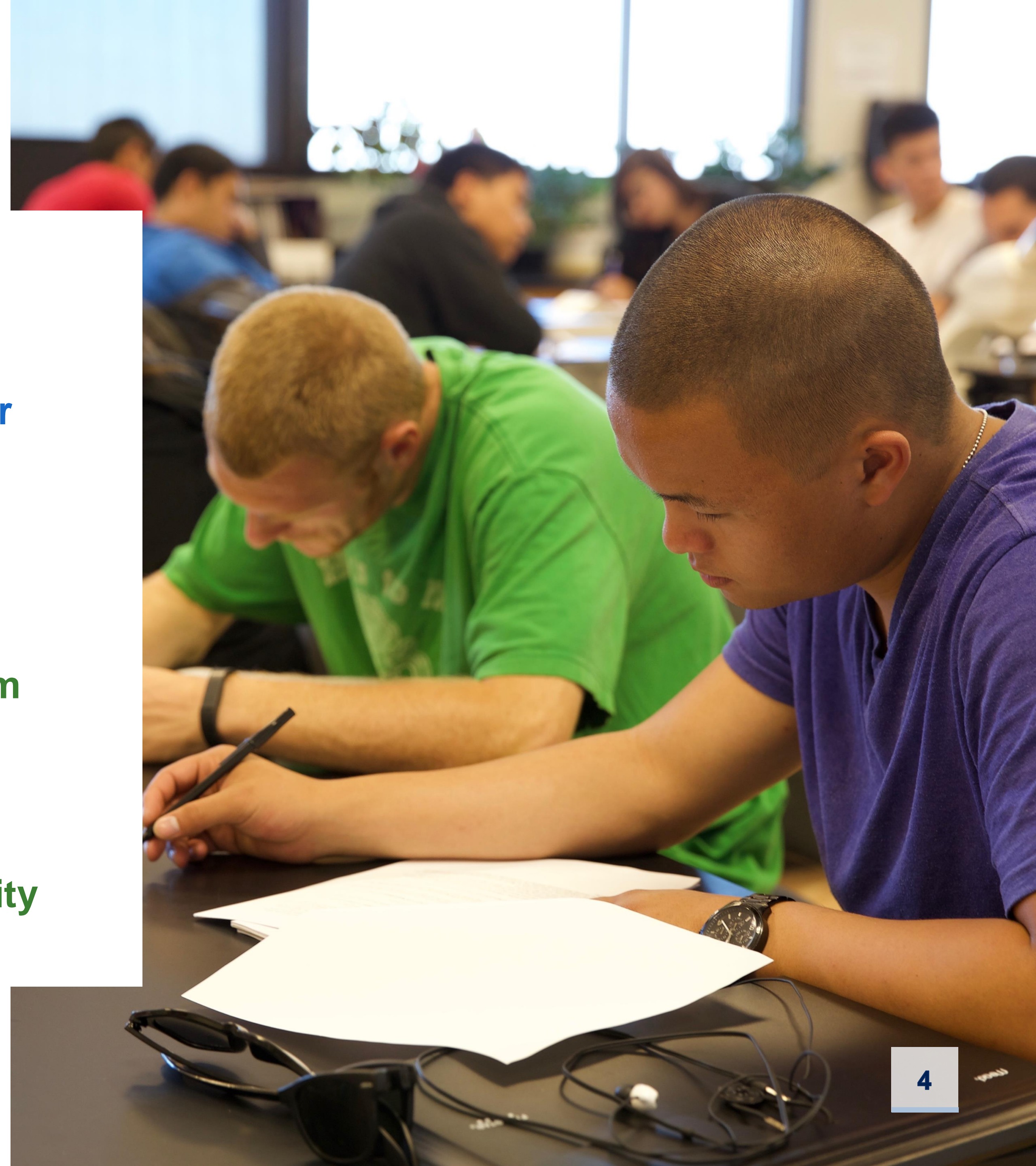
Mitch Herz
*School Accountability
Researcher*

Housekeeping

Today's webinar is **being recorded** for you to use or share with colleagues.

Chat is set to go **directly to the presentation team**; we'll disengage that for an activity a little later.

We will reference **your state's accountability system** frequently, but we know there are many who don't work for an SEA here today. If you are in a role that doesn't involve developing and implementing an **accountability system**, think about the **accountability system you interact with most frequently**.



Today is Part 1 of a two-part series on principles in accountability systems

Today:

- **Introducing and surfacing guiding principles for accountability systems**

December 11:

- **Developing and implementing guiding principles for accountability systems**



Agenda

1. **Setting the table**
2. **Principles, defined**
3. **Why are principles important for accountability systems?**
4. **Principles in action in California and Michigan**
5. **Small group discussion: What might (or do) principles look in your accountability system?**
6. **Closing**

How did WestEd get involved in this work?

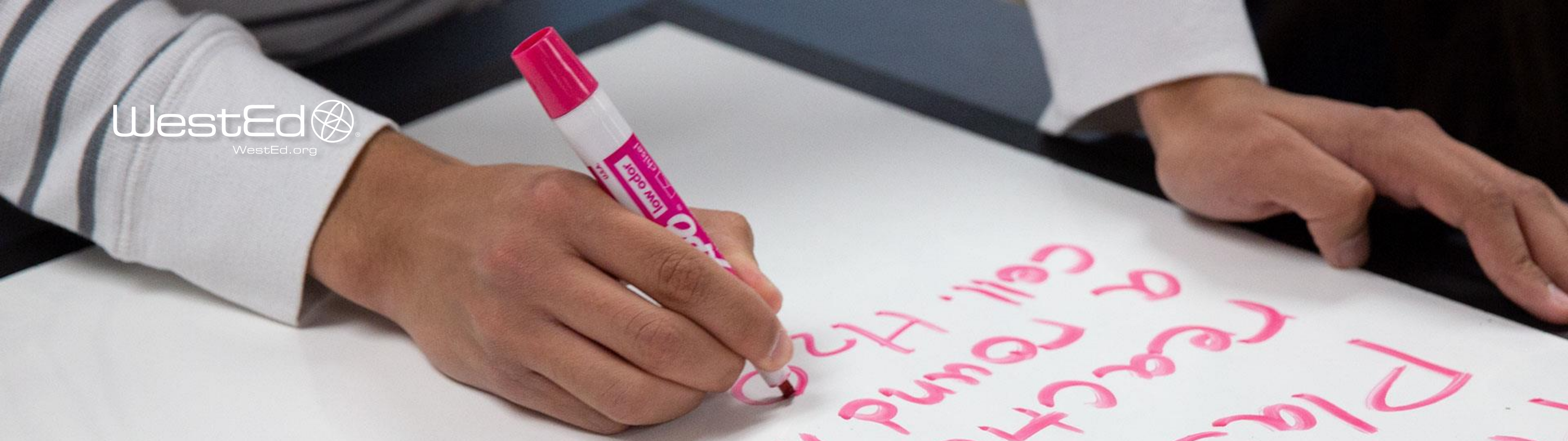
For years, WestEd has provided accountability capacity building services to states

- Content expertise developing and revising ESSA state plans
- Technical committee participation
- Facilitating accountability-related conversations (convening stakeholders to discuss system vision, growth models, reporting/communication)

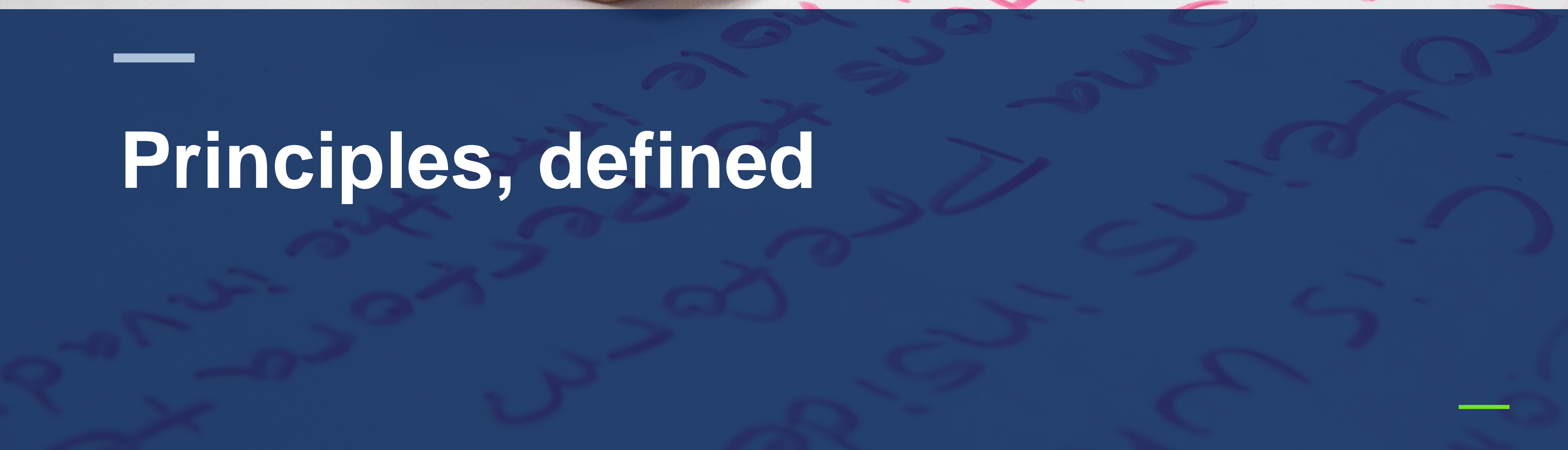
Often, state clients we worked with had to address stakeholder questions about **what was in and out of bounds for the state's accountability system.**

Our first question to those clients:

"Well, has it ever been articulated?"

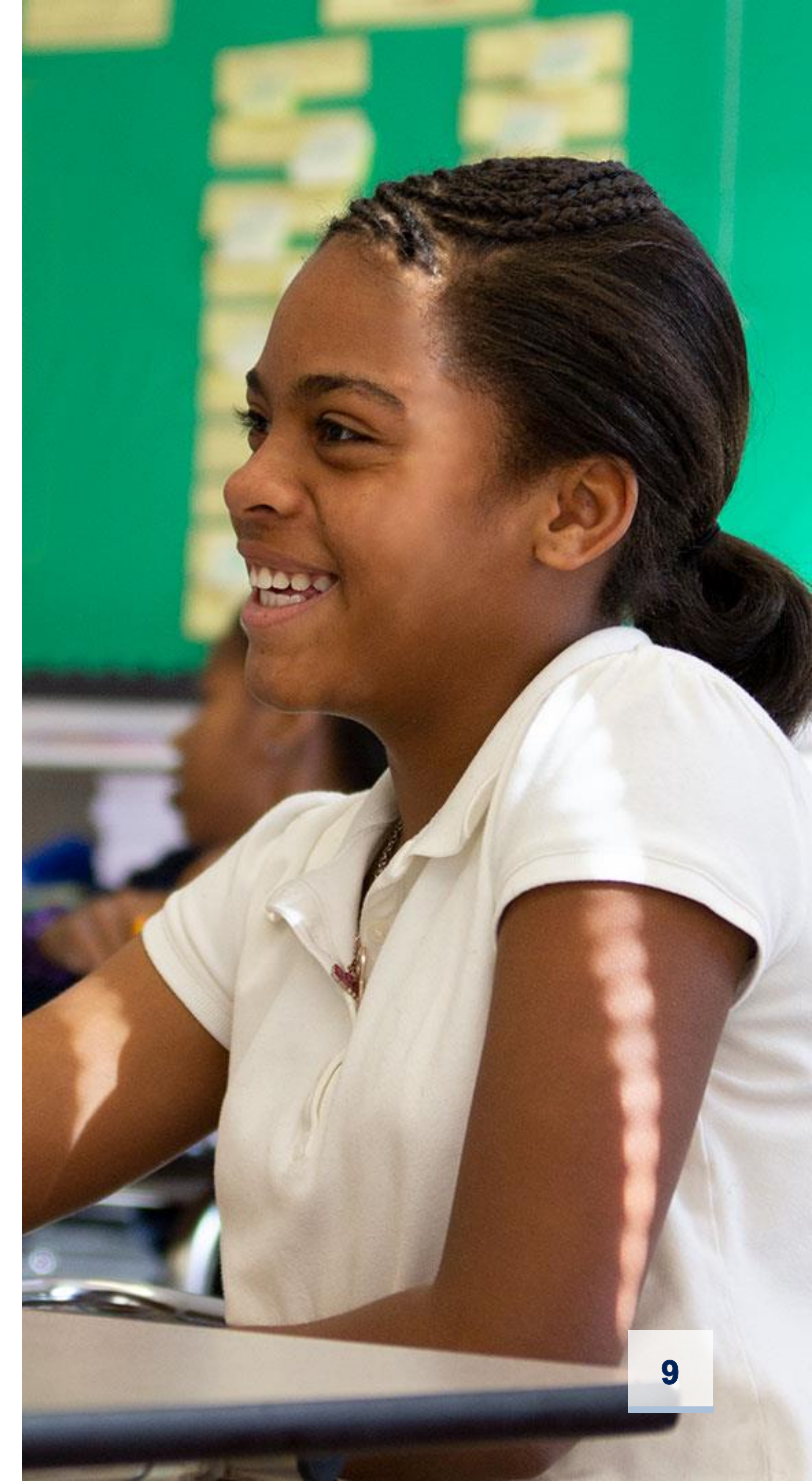


Principles, defined



Defining “principles” in the context of accountability systems

- Principles are guiding rules for action that act as a bridge between theory and practice (Skaar et al, 2020).
- Principles ideally provide specific translations for understanding of abstract concepts and theories *so that actions can be better directed toward achieving a goal.*
- Principles should take the next step in operationalizing theoretical concepts without getting bogged down in detailed instructions.

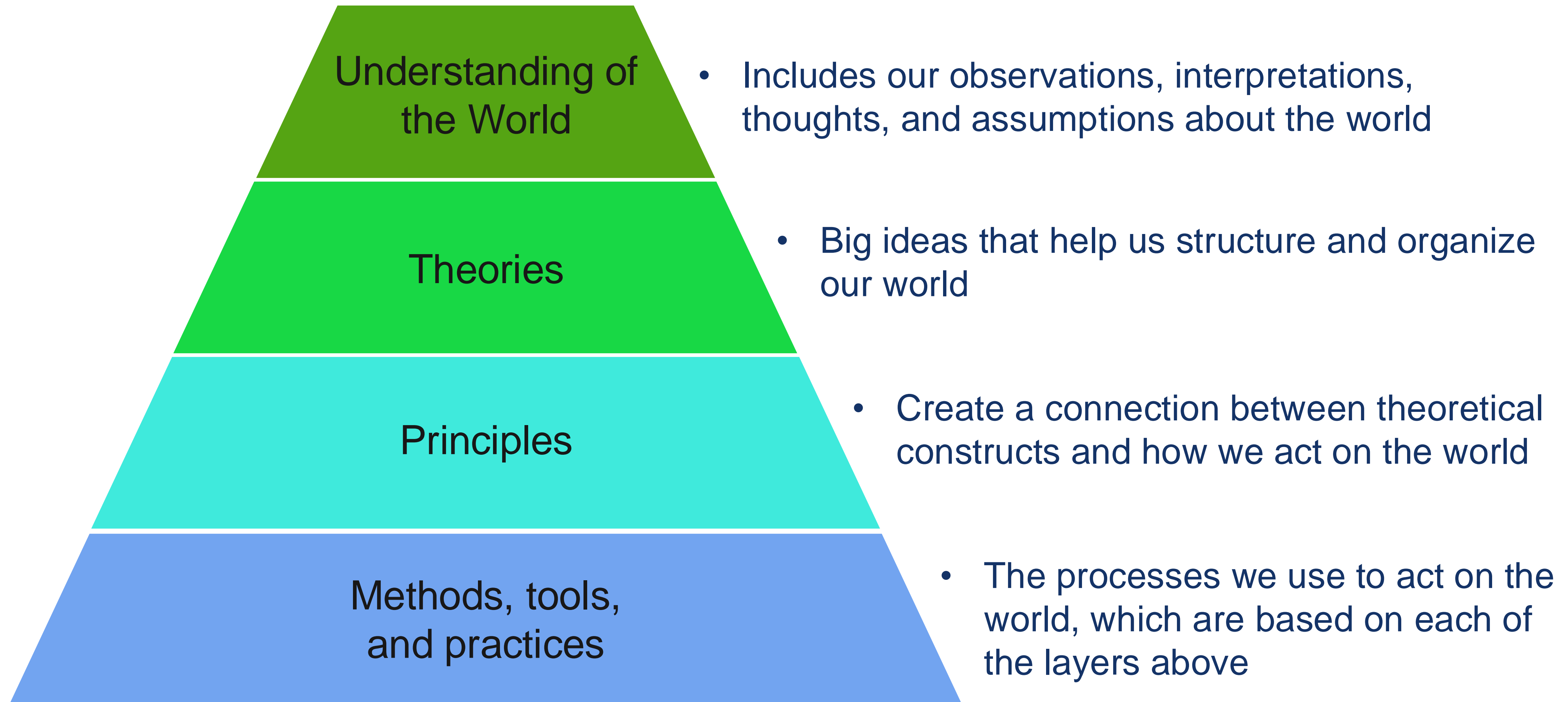


Related terms and how they relate to “principles”

- **Guidelines**—not as lofty, easier to suspend
- **Priorities**—more specific, more subject to change with changing leadership/administrations
- **Values**—closely related; can create discomfort in public policy settings
- **Business rules**—very specific; how principles are put into effect
- *It may be tactical to use one of these words for certain conversations.*
- *For the purposes of this webinar, we will use the term “principles.”*



The Relationship Between Theories, Principles, and Methods



Visual adapted from Skaar, J., Bølviken, T., Koskela, L., and Kalsaas, B.T. 2020. "Principles as a Bridge between Theory and Practice." In: Tommelein, I.D. and Daniel, E. (eds.). Proc. 28th Annual Conference of the International Group for Lean Construction (IGLC28), Berkeley, California, USA, doi.org/10.24928/2020/0065, online at iglc.net.

Why are principles important for accountability systems?

Well-designed accountability systems...

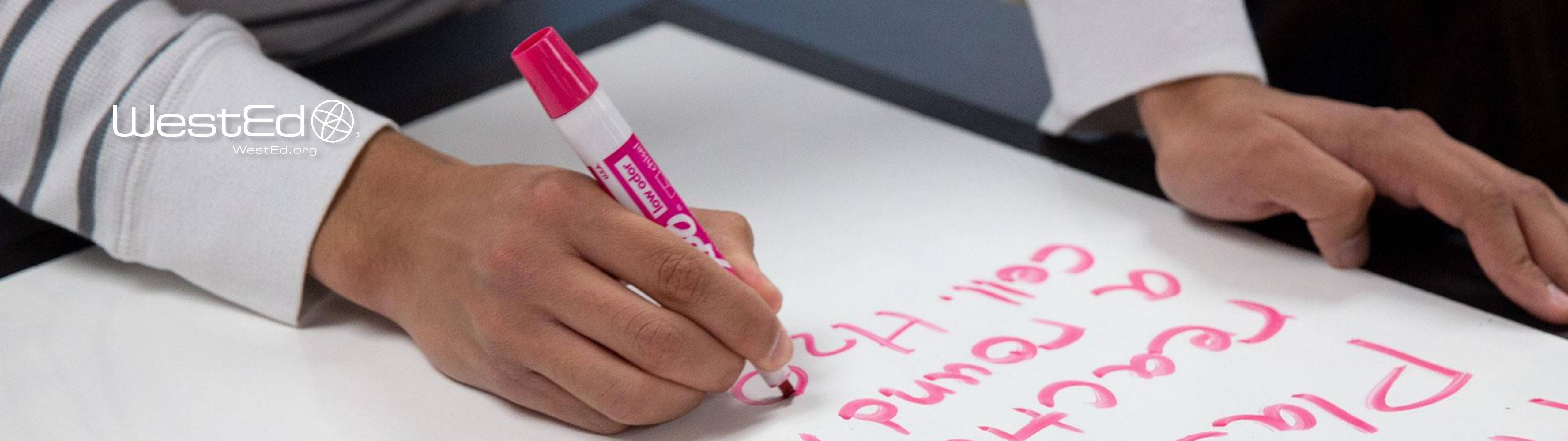
- create a shared, easy-to-understand language for discussing school performance;
- incentivize focused attention on valued outcomes;
- identify districts, schools, and student groups that need support;
- facilitate understanding of schools' progress over time; and
- connect reporting with action.



Well-articulated PRINCIPLES help the accountability systems...

- create a shared, easy-to-understand language for discussing school performance;
- incentivize focused attention on valued outcomes;
- ~~identify districts, schools, and student groups that need support;~~
- ~~facilitate understanding of schools' progress over time;~~
and
- connect reporting with action.





Principles in Action



Continuum of state practices related to accountability principles

- **There is little consistency across the states about whether and how they communicate accountability principles:**
 - Most states are silent / do not articulate principles.
 - In some states, principles can be found only in summary language about the origins of the system.
 - Some states allude to principles.
 - A few states explicitly name accountability principles. (Looking at you, California and Michigan!)
- **Another important dimension: easy vs hard-to-find**

Today's presenters



Cindy Kazanis

*Director of the Analysis,
Measurement, and
Accountability Reporting
Division*

*California Department of
Education*



Chris Janzer

*Assistant Director in the
Office of Educational
Assessment and
Accountability*

*Michigan Department of
Education*

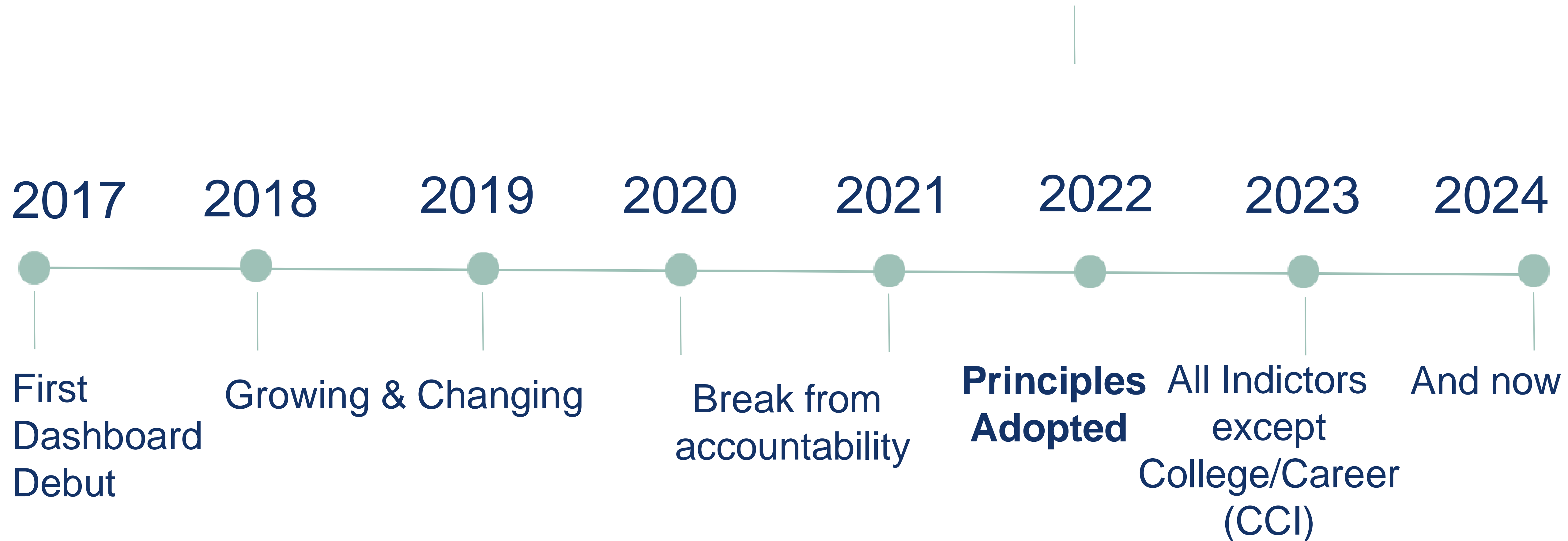


California School Dashboard Principles

October 23, 2024



Accountability Timeline



California's Accountability Tool



Expansion of Student Groups

- **Race/Ethnicity Student Groups:**

- African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Filipino
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races

- **Program Student Groups:**

- English Learners
- Long-Term English Learners
NEW in 2024
- Foster Youth
- Homeless
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
- Students with Disabilities

Proposed Addition of New State Indicator

Academic Indicators:

- English language arts/literacy (ELA) and Mathematics

English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI)

Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

Graduation Rate Indicator

Suspension Rate Indicator

College/Career Indicator (CCI)

Science-Proposed for addition in 2025!



California's Journey

- In 2015, the California State Board of Education used a set of principles to help frame conversations and decisions to developing California's new accountability system.
- With the commitment to continually improve upon the components within the Dashboard, WestEd helped California develop a set of principles specific to the Dashboard
- We engaged in intentional educational partner feedback and iterated the language and scope at several public State Board of Education meetings.

Practical Use

- The eleven principles specific to the accountability system are designed to be used as an anchor to evaluate future changes and additions to the indicators reported on the Dashboard.
- Every item in the annual workplan now ties to one or more Dashboard principle to demonstrate how the work is grounded in these principles.

Sample: Dashboard Principle 1

Focuses on elements that express the commitment to a well-rounded, well-supported education and makes space for what is valued locally.

California's accountability system reflects a broad set of indicators that measure student educational opportunities and outcomes.

These indicators leverage data in three areas: 1) Academic Performance, 2) Academic Engagement, and 3) Conditions and Climate. The system is designed to adapt as priorities evolve and add new meaningful information to the Dashboard and remove data that may no longer be relevant.



Guiding Principles for Michigan Accountability

Chris Janzer

Assistant Director, Systems and
Accountability

Michigan Department of Education

What Prompted Development?

Started as internal document (early 2010s)

- Unified approach and beliefs to supporting schools
 - Helped us think about how to provide support given limited resources
 - Is anybody going to look at this resource? Is there a better way to provide this information?
 - Accountability data appeals
- Concerns with data quality/game playing
 - Misunderstanding the data, practices undermining system reliability

First posted publicly in 2016

- Annual updates – usually minor
- Increased visibility within state

Principles Overview

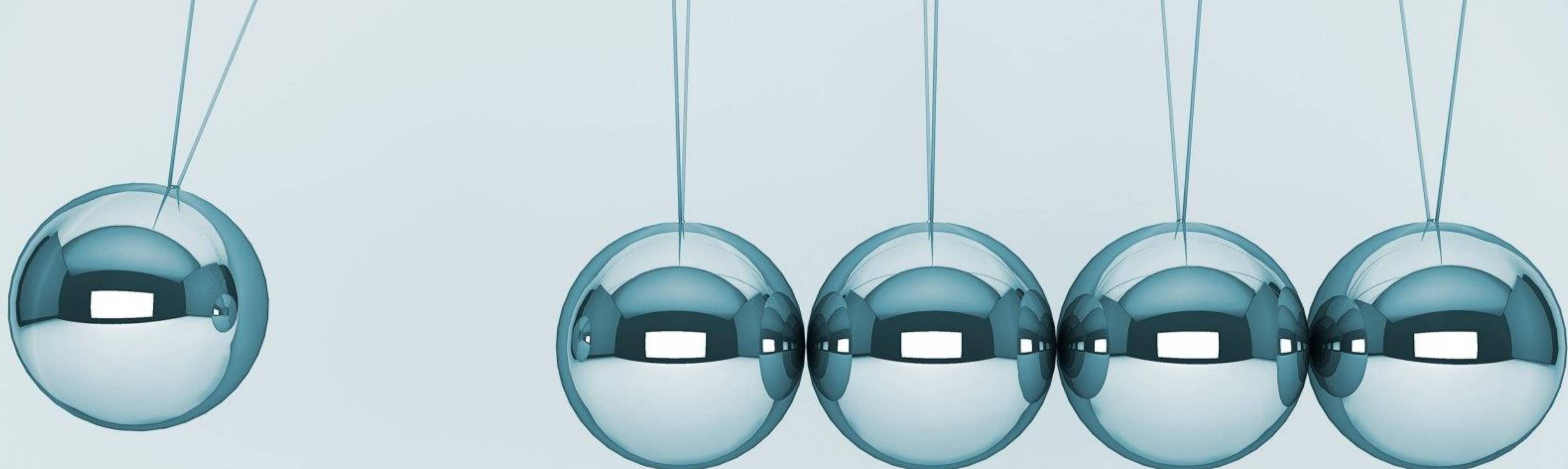
- Team mission statement: “Improving learner outcomes through student-focused, useable, and understandable data tools and resources that increase the transparency and accountability of our Michigan public schools.”
- Rest of document is set up with belief (value) statements (5) and corresponding actions or principles (48)

All schools should be held to the same high standards, and these standards must be fair, transparent, and consistently applied.

resources – not as a punitive measure, but as a key to identifying areas needing improvement.

- Apply standard measures to all students and schools.
- Act to be as transparent and open as possible.
- Document each policy, business rule, and decision.
- Communicate accurately and clearly on a regular and timely basis to schools.
- Adhere to our written documentation for policy and procedure.
- Hold to state collected data sources (MSDS, REP, EEM, state assessments) as the sole source of accuracy in student and school data systems.
- Hold to published deadlines and enforce them equally for all schools.

Impact on System

- 
- Customer Service
 - Better and more effective documentation
 - Purpose- and audience-focused
 - Standardized answers
 - Data Quality/Governance
 - Data review windows for more timely reviews
 - Digital certification for data accuracy
 - Appeals -> preview
 - Tighter control over when data can be changed
 - Extensive data quality checks -> very unusual to have inaccurate data during preview

Resources and Contact

Chris Janzer

janzerc@michigan.gov

[Guiding Principles](#)

[Accountability Resources](#)



Questions for our Presenters



Thinking About Principles in Your Context

Now that we've heard examples from two states that have articulated accountability system principles, let's shift to thinking about guiding principles in the context of your accountability system.

How well does your state's accountability system articulate guiding principles?



Small Group Discussion

Think about what guiding principles would help you implement and/or use your state's accountability system most effectively in your context.

Within your groups, discuss the following prompts:

- 1. Introduce yourself (organization and role).**
- 2. What guiding principles would be (or have been) most important for your state's accountability system?**
- 3. In what situations would having established accountability principles be most helpful for you in your role?**

Reflecting on Small Group Discussion

-
- Reflecting on the presentations you heard today and the conversation within your small group, answer the following question:

What is the biggest takeaway that surfaced for you during today's webinar?

- After reflecting, type your answer in the chat box, *but wait to submit the chat until prompted.*

Closing and Next Steps

Post-webinar survey



- **Next session on principles within accountability systems: December 11**
 - Developing and implementing accountability principles
 - Building out the timeline
 - Whom to involve, how, and other process guidance
 - Connecting reporting to identification and support
- **Please complete our post-webinar survey**
 - Link in the chat and QR code to the left

Two Invitations

Full disclosure: we like discussing this! So,

- **If you work within the SEA context: reach out if you would like a thought partner for the process in your state**
- **If you work outside the SEA context: reach out to collaborate if you have a context you would like to discuss**
- **Continue the conversation:**
 - Eric Crane (ecrane@wested.org)
 - Mitch Herz (mherz@wested.org)

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