ANet Releases Key Actionable Guidance on Use of Assessments for Coming School Year

Boston, MA (May 20, 2020) – In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting disruption to schools, today Achievement Network (ANet), a leading national education nonprofit, released timely and important guidance for schools and systems for how to best use assessments to combat learning loss when students return for the next school year. The report entitled “3 Principles for Assessments During Instructional Recovery and Beyond,” recommends three specific and practical steps districts take regarding use of assessments to mitigate what they identify as amplified learning loss. Those steps are:

1. Establish a tiered approach to collecting data;
2. Prioritize data close to instruction, and
3. Use data to increase student and family engagement.

“Districts should not aim for a quick fix that returns students to a status quo that already had too many students inadequately engaged in learning,” the paper states. They go on to urge that leaders should take this opportunity to use a strategic approach to leverage standards-aligned materials and assessments to mitigate the loss and begin to eliminate any preexisting gap students may have had.

ANet CEO, Mora Segal observed “Regardless of how you feel about summative assessments and their link to accountability measures, we will not have them this year. As a result, we must seize this moment to reexamine the purpose of assessments — that is, to inform instruction in a way that accelerates student learning. We believe these guiding principles will help systems establish strong, purposeful assessment systems for not only this school year but for the years to come.”

In a previous white paper, Teaching Comes First, ANet offered that the key considerations for using assessments to drive instruction are volume, purpose, and quality. Building on this work, and in recognition of post-COVID challenges and exacerbated inequities, they state that it is more important than ever to focus on the purpose of assessments—to serve children and families with the best information to accelerate learning.
“Today we must be even more intentional about the role of data and assessments in service of student learning. Assessments and data can play a crucial role in successfully addressing learning loss,” Mora Segal said. “But the information from assessments can also be used in a way that perpetuates and magnifies actions that prevent all students from equitable access to the challenging, engaging instruction they deserve. It's crucial that leaders have informed opinions about data and clear plans for how assessments will be used to accelerate all students.”

The guiding principles are applicable across instructional delivery scenarios: from long distance learning to schools opening as they historically have, for leaders just getting started in planning, and for those beginning to implement instructional recovery plans. Aligning to the principles will ensure districts have the right data to adjust and respond to changing realities throughout the school year. In developing the principles, ANet drew on its unique position of having a high level strategic perspective while simultaneously engaging in daily interactions with schools and school leaders.

For each principle, the report provides a description and rationale as well as an opportunity to engage further through a set of reflection questions and recommended action steps. Additionally, two sample resources are included—a sample map for data review and a reflection & action plan—to support systems in applying these principles to their assessment strategy for the coming school year.

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**About Achievement Network (ANet)**

For nearly fifteen years, Achievement Network (ANet) has worked to ensure schools provide equitable opportunities for all children by supporting teaching and learning grounded in standards, data, and the practices of great educators. ANet works alongside school and system leaders to strengthen their school- and system-wide practice, and their culture of using learning standards and data to get breakthrough results for students.

Through these partnerships, ANet seeks to support schools serving student populations that are predominantly from communities of color, low-income populations and marginalized groups. Working with approximately 950 underserved schools and 100 systems across 23 states and the District of Columbia gives ANet on-the-ground insight into how schools and systems are successfully transitioning to new practices leading to school-wide improvement. ANet is headquartered in Boston, MA.