

When Outcomes Drive Everything

A District & State Leader's Guide to the Education Outcomes Movement



WHAT'S INSIDE THE GUIDE

A framework for leading with outcomes

A checklist to bring to your team

The questions worth asking along the way

The Education Outcomes Movement Is Emerging and Accelerating

The evidence tells us what to do. Now it's time to connect it to student outcomes.

District and state leaders have already invested heavily in instruction, professional learning, assessment, and intervention. But investment alone is not the measure of progress. The question is what those investments are producing for students.

A growing number of education leaders are changing how they answer that question: connecting funding, procurement, policy, and instructional decisions directly to measurable student results. The Education Outcomes Movement asks leaders to define what success looks like – then use the evidence to act on it.

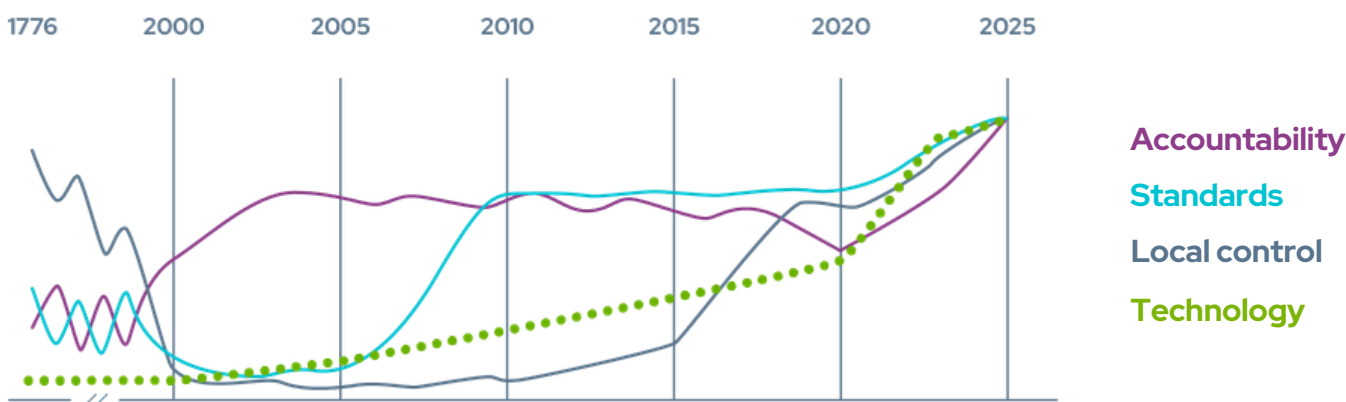
What it Means to Be Part of the Education Outcomes Movement

District and state leaders advance the Education Outcomes Movement through decisions they already make about funding, procurement, and implementation. The Outcomes Leadership Framework on page 4 shows how.

Four Forces Shaping Education Policy

Accountability pushed schools toward greater visibility, while standards set consistent expectations for schools and districts to work from. Local control decentralized decision-making. Technology, meanwhile, has expanded steadily, with recent innovations giving leaders, educators, and learners the opportunity to act in ways never before available.

United States Education Policy



THE EDUCATION OUTCOMES MOVEMENT CONNECTS ALL FOUR

The Education Outcomes Movement builds on accountability, standards, local control, and technology, connecting each more deliberately to measurable student results. outcomes based contracting (OBC) is one way this shows up.

¹ The Center for Outcomes Based Contracting (2025). *The Center for OBC's impact on education*.

From Inputs to Outcomes

Linking implementation evidence to student results shows leaders what is working and what needs to change.

WHAT WAS DONE	WHAT WE NEED TO SEE
Leaders allocated funding and resources	The investment produces measurable student growth at or above targeted levels
Schools adopted a curriculum, program, or instructional approach	Targeted student outcomes improve consistently across classrooms and schools
Educators completed professional learning	Instruction grows stronger and more confident and students make measurable learning gains
Leaders established implementation expectations	Districts and providers partner and adjust quickly when the work isn't producing results
Teams collected assessment and progress-monitoring data	Teams use the data to adjust instruction during the year
Students received intervention or additional support	Students accelerate toward grade-level proficiency or the defined learning goal

District and state leaders track different measures depending on the initiative, such as whether educators have the resources they need and whether practices are used as designed. An outcomes mindset connects those signals to student results, so leaders can see where to add support or change course.

Connect the evidence to the decision.

Evidence about delivery and practice helps leaders understand why results may or may not be occurring. Student results tell them what to do next.

What We Mean By Outcomes

Student outcomes are often reduced to a single end-of-year proficiency score. This guide looks at three layers that build on each other.

1

Implementation conditions

Whether the people, systems, and supports involved are functioning in ways likely to produce the outcome repeatedly.

2

Leading indicators

Whether students, teachers, and schools are progressing toward the outcome quickly enough to act on.

3

Student outcomes

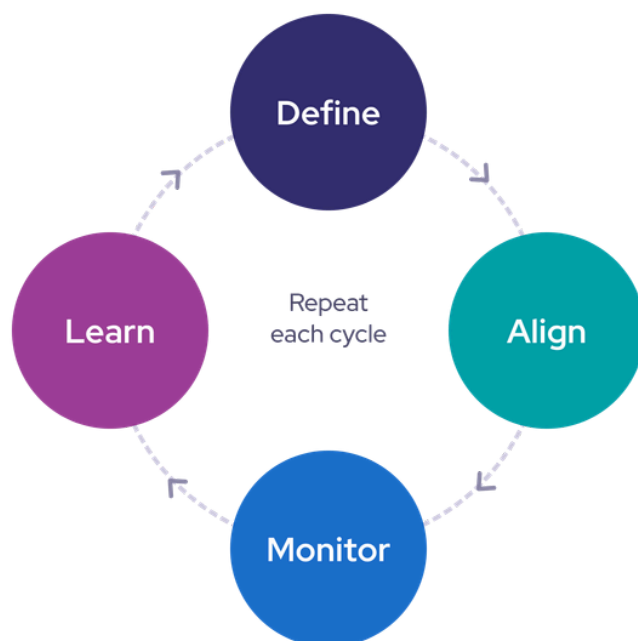
What students learn, know and can do.

REFLECTION If every major investment had to demonstrate student outcomes, what would you sustain, strengthen, scale, or shift?

The Outcomes Leadership Framework

Bring more discipline to decisions you already make, starting with one priority you can realistically move.

- 1 Define the Goal**
Choose a specific student result, population, and timeframe.
- 2 Align All Parties**
Align people, funding, instruction, data, and partners around a shared definition of success.
- 3 Monitor Early**
Track implementation and leading indicators while there is still time to respond.
- 4 Learn & Improve**
Use the evidence to sustain, strengthen, scale, or shift the investment.



Three conditions keep the cycle working year after year:

Build Capacity

Strong investments should build a district's ability to implement well, use evidence, solve problems, and sustain progress. Outside expertise can speed the work, but the capacity to carry it forward has to be the district's own.

Are we building the capacity needed to sustain progress?

Connect Systems

Curriculum, assessment, staffing, funding, and implementation all shape student progress. Outcomes-focused leaders look for shared priorities and shared evidence across all of them, with no gap between policy and practice.

Are the parts of the system reinforcing the same goals?

Align Incentives

How leaders structure partnerships shapes what everyone prioritizes. Traditional contracts reward delivering the service; an outcomes-focused approach adds ownership for the results the partnership is meant to produce.

Are our partnerships structured around the results we expect?



"When outcomes become the starting point, priorities become clearer."

Karl Rectanus
CEO, Really Great Reading

The next opportunity involves a new way of thinking about the work already underway. Districts and providers can partner on what is producing results, where support is needed, and how to deliver for local needs.

The Outcomes Leader Checklist

A short list to bring to your leadership team.

1 Choose Where to Start

What's the one student outcome where focused effort would move the most? For many systems it's literacy, since reading shapes access to learning in every subject.

2 Build the Capacity for outcomes based Contracting

The Center for OBC's Standards of Excellence name five domains every strong outcomes based contract needs.

Population & Program	→	Have we clearly defined which students this serves, what the program does, and the dosage required for it to work?
Outcomes & Metrics	→	Are our outcomes measurable and research-backed, with clear expectations for how and when data gets shared?
Contingent Payments	→	Does payment include a base amount plus a structure tied to results, not just delivery?
Mutual Accountability	→	Do all parties have minimum service requirements and clear remedies when responsibilities aren't met?
Continuous Improvement	→	Do we have review structures in place to learn and adjust as we go, not just measure at the end?

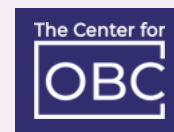
Source: The Center for OBC, *Standards of Excellence for outcomes based Contracting™*: Edtech Instructional Interventions.

3 Start Small, but Start

You don't need every domain fully built before you begin. Start where your capacity is strongest, and grow the rest as you go.

WHO'S BUILDING THE MODEL

The Center for Outcomes Based Contracting



The Center supports states and districts designing contracts that pay for student results, and publishes some of the field's most widely used practical guidance on outcomes based contracting – including exemplar contracts, model policy, and standards for what a strong OBC agreement includes.

"Outcomes based contracting changes the question from whether a service was delivered to whether students actually improved. That single shift puts districts and providers on the same side of the same result."

The Center for Outcomes Based Contracting

CASE STUDY

Indiana Applies outcomes based Contracting to Adolescent Reading



outcomes based Contracting in Indiana

In response, Indiana began qualifying reading vendors for outcomes based contracts. Vendors must show evidence of effectiveness upfront, and payment depends on measured student growth.

31%

of students in grades 6–8 still not reading at grade level in 2025, even as grade 3 literacy rose nearly 5 points

APPLY THE FRAMEWORK

Define the Goal	Grade-level reading proficiency for older students, not program completion
Align all Parties	Schools opt in, and each contract sets specific, measurable growth expectations
Monitor Early	Payment tied to results, so districts and vendors share the incentive to catch and adjust course early
Learn & Improve	Harvard's Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) is evaluating the pilot, and its findings will inform whether the model expands.

What Outcomes-Driven Leaders Ask

The shift from traditional thinking to an outcomes-driven mindset.

TRADITIONAL QUESTION

- Did we train all teachers?
- Did schools implement the intervention?
- Did we purchase the assessment platform?
- Did the vendor meet contractual deliverables?

OUTCOMES-DRIVEN QUESTION

- Is stronger practice improving student learning?
- Are targeted students accelerating?
- Is the evidence informing instructional decisions?
- Is the partnership producing the agreed-upon result?

Source: Indiana Department of Education. (2025, September 10). Leveraging outcomes based contracting to drive adolescent reading improvements.

Outcomes-Focused Leadership Is Taking Shape

States, districts, researchers, and providers are putting outcomes-focused approaches into practice.

POLICY

\$50M

consolidated across five federal funding streams over four years, with up to 15% of local education agencies piloting greater funding flexibility¹

States can create the conditions

States shape the conditions districts work in through policy, funding, procurement, and technical assistance. Indiana's 2026 waiver is one example: consolidating federal streams and freeing districts to direct dollars toward measurable student needs.



PRACTICE

72%

of participating students met at least one contracted outcome as Santa Ana scaled from 42 to 1,152 students across 27 schools²

Districts can test and scale new approaches

Districts are testing purchasing models tied to measurable outcomes. Santa Ana Unified started with a small pilot and expanded it as results came in.



EVIDENCE

8

early-adopter districts studied in a 2026 WestEd evaluation of outcomes based contracting³

Research is identifying what makes them work

The WestEd study found stronger district-provider communication, shared responsibility, and use of data. Results were strongest when districts clearly identified the students being served and ran the intervention for its full intended duration.

ORGANIZATIONS REFERENCED



THE BROADER LESSON

Outcomes based contracting goes beyond payment. Clear goals, shared responsibilities, timely data, and strong partnerships all matter.

Sources: 1. U.S. Department of Education. (2026, June 16). *U.S. Department of Education approves Indiana's Returning Education to the States waiver, freeing up millions to invest in students*. 2. The Center for Outcomes Based Contracting. (n.d.). *Impact in action, Vol. 2: Santa Ana Unified School District*. Southern Education Foundation. 3. Krausen, K., Tanner, S., Caparas, R., Garcia, B., & Harrington, H. (2026). *Evaluation of outcomes based contracting: Final report*. WestEd.

Turn Outcomes Into Action

Use these questions to assess whether your priorities, partnerships, data, and policies support an outcomes-focused approach.

FOR DISTRICT LEADERS

FOR STATE LEADERS

Is the priority clear?

- Baseline data for the target population is in hand
- District and school teams understand their roles
- Teams have the capacity and support to do the work

- Priorities name clear student needs and measurable goals
- Funding and technical assistance support local capacity
- Districts have flexibility to respond to local conditions

Does every partner understand what success requires?

- Results are defined before procurement or launch
- District and provider roles are clear
- Progress measures and a plan for barriers are set

- Funding and procurement guidance set expectations for results
- Guidance explains how results will be measured and reported
- State vendor lists include evidence-of-effectiveness requirements

Can teams see results and respond in time?

- Participation and progress are visible year-round
- Teams regularly review shared measures
- Support can be adjusted when results call for it

- Districts have timely, usable information
- Funding and policy allow districts to respond mid-implementation
- Statewide data helps spot patterns and target support

Do policies and procedures support the approach?

- RFPs can define needs, results, and measures of success
- Contracts clearly define shared responsibilities
- Procurement and payment can support outcomes based agreements

- Funding rules let districts test outcomes-focused approaches
- Procurement policies support outcomes based agreements
- Waivers, grants, or pilots provide flexibility with oversight

REFLECTION If most of your answers are "yes," you may be ready to pilot. If most are "not yet," begin with a clear priority and the data to track it.



BRING OUTCOMES TO READING INTERVENTION

Outcomes Drive Everything

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Add your district's voice

See how RGR is putting outcomes into practice with **LitOS™**, our new K-8 reading intervention system.

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