



Network of State Turnaround and Improvement Leaders – Leadership Council

Thought Leadership Forum Brief: Multiple-Measures Accountability: California's Progress and Lessons Learned

April 2017

Thought Leadership Forum Series

The Center on School Turnaround (CST) at WestEd is hosting a series of online Thought Leadership Forums for state education agency (SEA) officials who are members of the Leadership Council of the Network of State Turnaround and Improvement Leaders. The forums are intended to explore major considerations in implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with regard to students in chronically low-performing schools and to explore how turnaround plans impact SEAs' broader improvement efforts and ESSA implementation.

The third forum, held on April 10, 2017, focused on California's recent experience developing a new multiple-measures accountability system and school dashboard. The forum featured a presentation from Eric Crane of the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd. Crane had previously provided California SEA leaders with extensive technical assistance during development of the new system. Prior to joining WestEd, Crane managed the Research and Analysis Unit at the California Department of Education, where he provided technical and policy support during two different cycles of accountability systems in California.

This brief summarizes the key ideas from the April 10 forum regarding multiple-measures accountability for schools and local education agencies (LEAs) in California.

The Path to Multiple-Measures Accountability in California

From 2000 to 2014, California’s accountability decisions for schools and LEAs were based on the state’s Academic Performance Index (API), a single-number summary of each school’s or LEA’s performance, with scores that ranged from 200 to 1,000. According to Crane, that index’s biggest advantage — its simplicity — was also its biggest disadvantage. “You can start a conversation with just one number,” Crane pointed out. “But you’re inevitably going to miss a lot.” Moreover, for several years, differences in federal and state accountability reporting requirements had placed a burden on California’s administrators and educators to manage the two reporting systems simultaneously. Over time there was “a groundswell of support for nuance, a variety in measures, and a much richer conversation about performance,” according to Crane.¹ In recent years, leaders at the California State Board of Education and at the California Department of Education have engaged in extensive dialogue with various stakeholder groups across the state to identify aspects of the state’s accountability system needing refinement or redesign. State leaders also reviewed systems from other states and jurisdictions.² In 2017, building on these discussions and reviews, California launched a new rating system for schools. The new system rests upon a set of core principles

¹ California’s interest in a more comprehensive, multiple-measures rating system also coincided with the state’s shift in 2013 toward more local influence over funding and planning decisions, via the state’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which is described online at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/aa/lc/>.

² Crane pointed out that California’s new system closely parallels the color-coded model used in Alberta, Canada, and other forum participants cited similarities to recent dashboard-style school accountability systems implemented (or planned) in Oregon and Indiana.

emphasized by the State Board, which include reflecting both status and change in performance (i.e., “where you are and where you’re going”); promoting local conversations about school performance; focusing on continuous improvement for all schools (i.e., “pathways for everyone”); and reporting results with simplicity and transparency.

California’s New Rating System

The California Accountability Model and School Dashboard³ rely on five performance levels represented by colors: Red (lowest), Orange, Yellow, Green, and Blue (highest). The color-coded system rates schools on seven state-reported indicators of progress: English Language Arts Achievement (for grades K-8), Mathematics Achievement (K-8), Chronic Absenteeism, Suspension Rate (K-12), English Learner Progress (K-12), Graduation Rate (9-12), and College and Career Readiness.⁴ All seven indicators are equally weighted. The specifics of some of these indicators are still being defined in ongoing discussions related to data quality and submission formats. According to Crane, the type of summary report displayed in Figure 1 provides “an accessible on-ramp for local conversations about schools, much like a student report card.” Such conversations are taking place across California in 2017 and will inform the system moving forward.

The performance levels for each of these state-reported indicators are determined using color-coded reference tables that display both school status and change, as seen in the example for graduation rate performance shown in Figure 2. “Progressing up and to the right is the goal, and

³ More information about the California Accountability Model and School Dashboard is available online at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/>.

⁴ There are also locally determined indicators, including parent engagement and the implementation of state academic standards, that will be reported (without color coding) as either Met, Not Met, or Not Met for Two Years.

your trajectory matters,” Crane explained. “The State Board has stated that Green is the objective. Green means that things are on target, and anything lower, even Yellow, means that there is work to do.”






In recent months, California State Board of Education leadership has emphasized that its actions regarding the accountability system reflect only an initial phase of implementation, and that the state intends to refine and improve the system annually. At the same time, State Board leadership envisions that the reference table system will be in place for the next three to five years, with state leaders wanting to exhibit “consistent and enduring expectations” while adjusting design elements as needed over time.

Connections with Federal Requirements

The recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) affords more discretion to states with regard to accountability than did its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act. The new federal law requires the tracking of academic proficiency, graduation rates, and “one additional measure,” using a methodology that allows states to identify and intervene in the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools (as well as in all high schools with graduation rates of 67 percent or lower). To identify its lowest-performing schools, California has adopted an approach that treats all indicators equally. In this approach, school ratings decline as performance levels decrease. Under California law, a school will receive differentiated assistance if any student subgroup is rated Red for two or more state priority areas⁵ — or, in the case of locally reported indicators, rated at the Not Met for Two Years level. Beginning in 2018/19, schools will receive intensive intervention if three or more

⁵ The state has identified a set of priority areas, described online at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/aa/lc/statepriorityresources.asp>, which generally align with (but do not exactly correspond to) the indicators on the California Accountability Model and School Dashboard.

Figure 1. Example of California's state-reported indicator ratings

State Indicators	All Students Performance	Total Student Groups	Student Groups in Red/Orange
Chronic Absenteeism	N/A	N/A	N/A
Suspension Rate (K-12)		11	3
English Learner Progress (K-12)		1	0
Graduation Rate (9-12)		8	7
College & Career	N/A	N/A	N/A
English Language Arts (K-8)		5	1
Mathematics (K-8)		5	4

Source: California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/>

Figure 2. Sample ratings rubric for California's state-reported graduation rate indicator

		Graduation Performance Categories				
		Graduation Change				
Level		Declined Significantly by more than 5%	Declined by 1% to 5%	Maintained Declined or improved by less than 1%	Increased by 1% to less than 5%	Increased Significantly by 5% or more
Graduation Status	Very High 95% or more	Gray	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
	High 90% to less than 95%	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue
	Median 85% to less than 90%	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green
	Low 67% to less than 85%	Red	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
	Very Low Less than 67%	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red

Note: Change reflects the comparison with the rolling three-year average for that school/LEA (where calculable). As required by federal law, parallel reports will be prepared for all required student subgroups.

Source: California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/fivebyfivecolortables.asp#GraduationTable>

student subgroups are rated Red in two or more state priority areas in three out of four consecutive years. The precise criteria for exiting out of assistance status are still under consideration by the State Board, with the working understanding being, according to Crane, “What got you in is what will get you out.” For example, a school that has been identified for assistance because its students-with-disabilities group was rated Red in two priority areas could be eligible to exit assistance if it raised performance in those particular areas.

Next Steps for California

Local education leaders in California can now access a web-based interface with data displays such as the example shown in Figure 1 in this

brief, and state leaders are working to link the current School Dashboard with other reports. In the coming months, the state will also define a new accountability indicator for chronic absenteeism, refine the college/career indicator, and ensure that the English Learner Progress indicator reflects the new English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). Further work in progress involves determining how to handle accountability for alternative schools, which the state system does not currently cover. Crane concluded, “The new system represents a good start. It summarizes data well, but there are no shortcuts. There is no substitute for digging into local data, particularly at the grade or subgroup level, to examine the nature of performance challenges or strengths and constantly ask, ‘Why?’”



<http://centeronschoolturnaround.org>

This brief was supported by the Center on School Turnaround through funding from the U.S. Department of Education, PR/Award Number S283B120015. The contents of this brief do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.

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Suggested citation: Center on School Turnaround at WestEd. (2017). *Thought Leadership Forum brief: Multiple-measures accountability: California’s progress and lessons learned*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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