

IN FOCUS:

**Recommendations for providing
a comprehensive portrait of
school performance on the
California School Dashboard**

MAY 2019



association of california
school administrators



ABOUT ACSA

The Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) is the largest umbrella organization for school leaders in the United States, serving more than 17,000 California educators from the school site level, to district and county office of education roles. ACSA's mission is to be the driving force for an equitable, world-class education system, and the development and support of inspired educational leaders who meet the diverse needs of all California students. One of ACSA's top priorities is advocating for public school students in kindergarten through grade 12, as well as adult learners.

ACSA'S ACCOUNTABILITY TASK FORCE

In December 2016, ACSA established an Accountability Task Force whose role was to support the successful implementation of the state's accountability and continuous improvement system, and to better inform the work of state agencies based on practitioners' experiences and perspectives. The Task Force is comprised of approximately 20 members representative of California's regions and the different administrator roles, including principals, directors and assistant superintendents, superintendents, and county office of education officials with expertise in all aspects of the local, state and federal programs and knowledge of each of the state performance indicators. Over the past three years, the Task Force has met to review and discuss agenda items coming before the California State Board of Education, and to help inform ACSA's position on key policy and implementation issues.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, California's educational landscape has undergone several major reforms, including the development and implementation of new academic standards, a new assessment system, a more equitable school funding distribution mechanism, and a more holistic and coherent state accountability system. California has pursued these major shifts in public education with one overriding goal: To improve learning so all students can be successful in school, college, work and life. Our state has raised the academic standards, empowered local school communities, renewed its commitment to equity, and changed the way it evaluates and supports schools.

Under the premise that every student, school and district can continuously improve, school communities are expected to use the California School Dashboard and their local data to inform their practices and local decisions on budget priorities. The Dashboard is a website that provides valuable information on multiple measures regarding student and school performance on certain performance indicators in an easy-to-understand, report card format. In its second year of implementation, the Dashboard continues to be a great resource to better communicate with parents what is going on in their local schools and districts, what student groups may need additional support, and what measures need additional attention, while also reflecting progress being made over time in the state and local performance indicators.

METHODOLOGY

ACSA survey sought recommendations to improve the Dashboard

In December 2018, ACSA conducted a survey with our membership and select committees and councils seeking feedback on the state's accountability system, including the second iteration of the California School Dashboard and the emerging system of support.

The responses from the survey helped determine recommendations to provide to the California State Board of Education, California Department of Education and Legislature for improvements to the November 2019 California School Dashboard and possible statutory changes.

After the Task Force analyzed the issues raised by members in the field, the group developed draft recommendations that were shared and vetted by members of the following ACSA groups:

- **ACSA Career Technical Education Council**
- **ACSA Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability Council**
- **ACSA Educational Options Council**
- **ACSA Student Services and Special Education Council**
- **ACSA Superintendency Council**

Positive Aspects of the California School Dashboard:

- **Use of multiple measures to assess student progress and outcomes.**
- **Evolution of the metrics on the Dashboard and improvements made to the design over the past year.**
- **The focus on continuous improvement and the commitment from the state to support the capacity building of district and school leaders.**
- **Efforts to align state and federal requirements into a single, coherent accountability system.**
- **The connection between the LCAP and the annual review process to evaluate student data with the goal of enhancing local conversations to support student achievement and close the achievement and opportunity gaps.**

ACSA and our education leaders from across the state have embraced the Dashboard and we appreciate the many good components of the new system (see above). We commend the California Department of Education (CDE) and State Board of Education (SBE) for working diligently over the past two years to make improvements to the accountability system and the Dashboard, such as the adoption of an alternative safety net methodology for assigning performance levels (colors) to Local Educational Agencies and schools with smaller student populations to minimize the volatility of the data.

While ACSA appreciates the CDE's and SBE's careful review and consideration of revisions to each of the performance indicators, these discussions have occurred for the most part in isolation, without consideration for how all of the indicators fit into one coherent system of accountability. Based upon ACSA's review of the performance data, as well as feedback from our Task Force, we have found there are several technical issues that, if remedied, could provide a more accurate and useful portrait of school performance.

As described further in this report, there are a number of reasons why data in the Dashboard may not actually represent what is happening at school sites.

- For instance, there appears to be overrepresentation of small schools and Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) schools in the Red and Orange performance levels. In reviewing the data for the college/career indicator, 80 percent of DASS schools had a Red performance level, compared to 6.8 percent of non-DASS schools.
- In another example, one district saw a 100 percent turnover rate of its foster youth population due to group home placement practices. This district's performance levels on the Chronic Absenteeism indicator went from largely Green to largely Red in one year due to the level of students being placed by the state in the group home setting.

While this data points to the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps statewide, it also indicates that there are systemic challenges in serving certain student populations, and that these challenges are not limited to any one particular community. It is important to have accurate and complete data for schools and student groups, and to

monitor the progress they are making over time. ACSA believes that making changes outlined in this report can significantly improve the accuracy and usefulness of this data for school administrators, governing boards, parents and other community stakeholders.

What is required to make these changes?

Implementing the recommended changes would require the following actions:

- Trainings and communication to school and district leaders
- Changes to business rules developed by the California Department of Education
- Action by the State Board of Education
- Statutory changes by the Legislature

ACSA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Communications to the field

ISSUE: Improvements to the Dashboard over time will require ongoing communication to a variety of stakeholders.

As additional improvements to the accountability system are made and the performance indicators become more robust, school and district administrators will benefit from training on how to communicate this information to teachers, parents and other stakeholders. To date, the Communication Toolkit prepared by the CDE, including the Frequently Asked Questions and the revisions to the Dashboard Technical Guide, are two relevant resources for educators to use.

Recommendations:

- Create a monthly electronic newsletter with relevant updates related to the accountability system and system of support.
- Designate one place on the CDE's website for a repository of updates and information related to accountability issues and data reported on the Dashboard.

2. General issues

ISSUE 1: CALPADS and CBEDS data may be incomplete or not synced with student information systems.

Districts are unable to share all of their data until the student data systems are synced better with the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). The student information systems, such as AERIES and PowerSchool, need to have the right codes and, more importantly, the vendors' staff and the staff at the district office who submit the CALPADS data need to be trained.

As of 2017-18, CALPADS relies solely on information from the Department of Social Services (DSS) information system to identify and track foster students. As a result, DSS information system does not fully identify and interface with CALPADS. This often leads to the inability to link students with county foster placement agreements, case identifications, and foster identifications to CALPADS. In addition, students who are in foster care through the Federal Foster Refugee program or those who are placed in group homes through adoption services are not identified as foster students in CALPADS.

Recommendations:

- Consider trainings on 1) accuracy of data reporting on CALPADS and CBEDS and 2) data analysis as part of the system of support provided by the county offices of education and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE).
- Provide training and clear communication to student information system vendors regarding data captured in CALPADS.
- Allow school districts to identify foster youth in addition to the current linkage to the DSS' systems.
- Clearly define the programs that qualify as foster student placements to include federal refugee programs, adoption services placements, kin-gap etc.
- Modify the length of the optional narrative box on the Dashboard to be a minimum of 1,500 characters, or remove the limit altogether, to enable districts to provide context on the performance level on the indicator(s) or additional information about the school district or school sites.

ISSUE 2: LCFF statute does not reflect the multiple measures accountability system and does not account for differences in school types and student groups.

The LCFF statute requires county offices of education offer differentiated assistance to a school district if any student group meets the criteria for two or more LCFF priorities, even though there are eight state priorities with close to two dozen individual metrics.

It is important for the CDE, the SBE and other stakeholders to consider the complex and varied issues facing students with disabilities and other student groups. Current law requires districts to outline goals and progress for each student with a disability through their locally-developed Individual Education Program (IEP) plan. School districts may already be implementing strategies for these students under a Performance Indicator Review (PIR), and alignment between state and federal requirements is important.

Recommendations:

- Explore whether certain state indicators should be weighted differently (e.g. districts are eligible for differentiated assistance if any student group is Red or Orange on the Smarter Balanced Assessment and three or more LCFF priorities).
- Explore the feasibility within the state accountability system to measure the progress of students with disabilities through their IEP, particularly for students who are taking an alternative curriculum or who have moderate to severe disabilities.
- Modify the N-size for foster youth and homeless youth to 30 students to align it to the other student groups in the LCFF statute.

ISSUE 3: Locally funded charter schools are not incorporated in a district's data.

In what could be considered an unintended consequence of the LCFF statute, locally funded charter schools, also known as dependent, are not included in their district's Dashboard data and they are required to have their own separate Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). A dependent charter school is created by the district governing board and is an integral part of the district's portfolio of schools, and is reliant on the district for their governance structure, curriculum, professional development, instructional oversight, and administrative services. The performance of these schools is ultimately the responsibility of the district, yet separate LCAPs and a separate Dashboard creates a fragmented view of performance.

Recommendation:

- Change the LCFF statute to clarify that locally funded charter schools are exempt from writing an LCAP when considered in a district's LCAP and that their data should be part of a district's Dashboard.

3. Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

ISSUE: Students facing unique challenges, such as foster youth and medically fragile youth, can skew data.

Schools are supporting foster and homeless youth and their families who face unique challenges, including attendance, socio-emotional needs, and academic gaps. However, the accountability system does not consider how these special circumstances impact performance on the Dashboard. The Department of Social Services allows 30-day placements for foster youth in emergency shelters that are meant to serve as transition points, thus foster youth attendance fluctuates due to the enrollment and exit within a short period of time. In these instances, the measurement metrics do not reflect accurate progress for these students from year to year.

In addition, the increased number of wildfires in 2017 and 2018 had an impact on school communities statewide, and in some cases, resulted in increased absences for students who were tragically displaced from their homes.

Recommendations:

- When a student group population, such as foster or homeless youth, turns over by a certain percentage, the performance levels on the Dashboard should be considered as “not applicable” or designate a new base year without designating a performance level.
- Clarify to districts that students who are in a home hospital program need to be reported as such in CALPADS, so that these types of absences are not incorporated in the Chronic Absenteeism indicator.
- Exempt students in severely handicapped classrooms or those considered medically fragile from the Chronic Absenteeism indicator.
- Remove in-school suspensions from counting against absenteeism rates.
- Explore if there are certain considerations or exemptions that are warranted to address foster youth absenteeism rates.
- Authorize districts to file for a waiver for the Chronic Absenteeism indicator if a natural disaster or other exceptional circumstances resulted in 10 percent of the absences of students.
- Allow homeless students to be waived from Chronic Absenteeism requirement.
- Exempt Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten students from being included in the Chronic Absenteeism calculation since these are not compulsory grade levels.
- Authorize school districts to give Independent Study for one or more days to students, particularly those who are medically fragile.

4. Suspension Rate Indicator

ISSUE: Data on suspension rates could be inconclusive due to reporting of “in-school suspensions.”

While school sites and districts have improved their focus on restorative practices and embraced positive behavior intervention supports, the Education Code clearly articulates the offenses that trigger a mandatory suspension. School districts remain concerned that a few suspensions could skew their data, and as a result, the performance level may be an overrepresentation compared to the realities of what is happening at school sites.

Recommendations:

- Provide training and clarification to school districts and student information system vendors, such as AERIES and PowerSchool, on the recent change in the business rules on what constitutes an “in-school suspension,” per CALPADS update Flash #145.
- Adopt a minimum threshold before “Change” is included in the Suspension Rate indicator.

5. Graduation Rate Indicator

ISSUE: Graduation rates are not capturing students who receive education in an alternative setting.

We understand, yet remain concerned, with the federal requirements that constrain the CDE from including students who transfer to an adult education program or community college as high school graduates under the four-year graduation cohort.

There are concerns that the graduation rate for continuation schools under the Dashboard Alternative Status Schools (DASS) designation does not accurately capture the success of individual students. School districts encourage and are supportive of students in continuation high schools to return to their home school to graduate after recovering course credits in the alternative school setting. As a result, the continuation high school's graduation rate is lower because they are not receiving credit for these students' successful transition to a regular campus.

Furthermore, while we appreciate that the one-year modified graduation rate for DASS schools will include students earning a Special Education Certificate of Completion as a graduate if they meet the state's criteria, there are concerns that students with disabilities who are being served in a traditional, comprehensive high school will be deemed dropouts as a result of federal requirements. This policy will unfortunately penalize school districts and school sites who are doing their best to serve students with disabilities through access and support to a general education.

Recommendations:

- Explore the feasibility of giving credit for graduation to both the continuation high school and the home high school for students who receive a diploma with a minimum number of instructional days spent at a continuation school (e.g. one third of the year).
- Explore the feasibility of a federal waiver to give districts credit for students who graduate in alternative settings, such as an adult education program or community college.
- Pursue statutory changes to develop a state-defined alternate high school diploma for students with disabilities.

6. College/Career Indicator

ISSUE 1: Additional improvements to data collection are needed for the College/Career Indicator to meet its intent.

School districts support the direction the SBE has taken to make the College/Career Indicator (CCI) a more robust metric that incorporates both college and career measures as part of a three-year implementation plan. However, one of the main challenges for submitting outcome data for Career Technical Education (CTE) is the lack of alignment in the CTE metrics and definitions and reporting schedules between the various CTE funding sources and the CCI. Of particular concern are the definitions of pathway completers, work-based learning, and certifications, as districts have indicated they need clearer and more uniform definitions for “work-based learning” and “certificate data” in order to make this reporting manageable.

Furthermore, there are several issues with the existing CCI requirements. Under current practice, the state only allows for CTE courses to count in one category. This poses a challenge for students to complete A-G requirements, Early College Credit courses and a CTE pathway if each course only counts toward one category.

Recommendations:

- Communicate new work-based learning data collection to student information system vendors to ensure they understand the appropriate method for reporting the new data.
- Provide additional guidance to school districts on the new work-based learning data collection on how to provide accurate reporting during this transition.
- Review definitions and reporting schedules of the various CTE funding sources and propose recommendations to the CCI and/or statute to align the requirements on outcome data.
- Allow CTE courses to be counted for meeting multiple requirements within the CCI (e.g. count courses for both CTE Pathways Completion and Early College Credit).
- Create pathway-specific Dual Enrollment course codes in the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) in order to track students completing pathways using Dual Enrollment.
- Develop guidelines to provide clarity on Dual Enrollment.
- Create new CALPADS course codes that indicate courses that meet both A-G and CTE course requirements to enable districts to count courses such as science, fine arts, and electives that are part of a pathway as both.
- Allow homeless students to be considered college and career ready if they have met all graduation requirements pursuant to the McKinney-Vento Act and enroll in a college or career preparation program, community college, Job Corps or Conservation Corps upon graduation.
- Revise the CCI to remove the Smarter Balanced Assessment for English Language Arts and mathematics data as an indicator of college and career readiness since this data is already captured in the Academic indicator.

Issue 2: CCI is not a suitable assessment for alternative schools.

In regards to alternative schools, even with the adjustments resulting from the DASS, the CCI is not an accurate assessment for students seeking to recover credits in these alternative settings. Because of the size and needs of the school, students in continuation schools may not have access to all A-G courses, Advanced Placement courses, or full CTE pathways. For small school districts, it is very difficult to get qualified CTE teachers to offer two years of CTE pathway classes, and transportation and scheduling challenges make it difficult to connect students in rural and small districts with concurrent enrollment course offerings through local junior colleges. Students in continuation schools tend to have different graduation requirements, which raises the question of whether there should be a modified CCI for measuring the progress of students in continuation schools.

Recommendations:

- Seek input from the CDE Alternative Schools Task Force on recommendations for alternative measures, including work-based learning and/or certificate programs, to use for DASS schools.
- Consider graduates from DASS who enroll in college, community college or a career preparation program as “college and career ready.”

Issue 3: Require modified CC metrics for students with disabilities.

ACSA supports high standards, full access and equity for students with disabilities. However, some disabilities preclude students from taking CTE, A-G classes, and/or other general education classes. Some students' disabilities prevent them from being able to meet any of the pathways to achieving CCI despite achieving the learning goals outlined in their IEPs. It is important that the state continues to explore modified methods that enable students with disabilities to receive credit for the CCI.

Recommendation:

- Allow schools and school districts to indicate that students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) are college and career ready if they have met the criteria based on the student needs and goals articulated in their IEP. This could be applied to a broad scope of disabilities, or be limited to moderate/severe disabilities.

7. Academic Indicator

Issue 1: Support the inclusion of a student growth model in the state's accountability system.

We appreciate the incremental approach to allow the SBE enough time to consider its options before making the final decision on the best model and the methodology, while allowing the state to have several years of data of growth cycles in the Smarter Balanced Assessments to minimize additional changes in the future.

Recommendations:

- Incorporate a student growth model that considers the recommendations from the CDE's Technical Design Group and the Growth Model Stakeholder Group.
- Reevaluate the criteria for the California Distinguished Schools Award Program in the context of the Dashboard and an accountability system with multiple measures that recognizes continuous improvement and growth over time.

Issue 2: Combining all students with disabilities into a single group does not accurately reflect the challenges or growth of this group.

With the current accountability model, all students with disabilities are considered one student group, which may not account for the broad spectrum of needs and severity of disability.

Recommendations:

- The Smarter Balanced Assessments for students with disabilities should have their own scale, or perhaps just their growth should be measured.
- Analyze the data for each special education classification and determine whether it would be appropriate to disaggregate the data further. Results for the new special education student groups could then be analyzed to determine appropriate individualized indicator cut points.

CONCLUSION

The state has made some significant changes that are reflected in the November 2018 Dashboard. At the same time, there remain several issues that are technical in nature or which require legislative review as we embark on the third year of the implementation of the new accountability system.

Since there have been modifications to the performance levels over the past 24 months, it will be important for the Board and the public to understand how all of the indicators fit together and the implications the performance levels have on the number of districts and schools identified for differentiated assistance and comprehensive support. After revisions are considered next year,

we encourage the Department and Board to consider making November 2020 the last time it pursues changes for the existing indicators for at least two or three years so that there is stability in the indicators and educators can better focus on leveraging the data to support teaching and learning.

While there is much more work to be done to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for California's students, our state's many dedicated educators will be working diligently to achieve this goal. ACSA looks forward to continuing to be a partner in this endeavor to improve the opportunities and outcomes for all of our students.

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