

Accountability and Autonomy Subcommittee Report and Recommendations

Members:

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Subcommittee Charge: to further refine the following recommendations of the Governor's Task Force¹:

- #5 Revamp the State's Accountability Structure Involving Schools**
- #6 Empower Autonomy by Removing Constraints**
- #7 Annual Strategic Planning, Assessment and Continuous Focus on Improvement**

Subcommittee Deliverables:

- **Recommendations on the state's accountability measures and structure for public schools and timelines for implementation.**
- **Recommendations on changes to Idaho's education code to empower autonomy at the local level and timelines for completion.**
- **Recommendations on establishing continuous improvement methods in the public schools and timelines for implementation.**
- **Recommendations on training for school administrators and school boards.**

¹ [Task Force for Improving Education, Final Report, September 2013](#)

#5 Revamp the State's Accountability Structure Involving Schools

#7 Annual Strategic Planning, Assessment and Continuous Focus on Improvement

The 2013 Task Force recommended that the State revamp the school accountability structure to replace current compliance mandates with a system based on accountability for student outcomes. Central to the structure would be an annual continuous improvement cycle and strategic plan founded on improvements in student outcomes and key focus areas for each district.

Objectives and Components:

The objective of the accountability system and district annual planning should be to support the State's goal to have 60% or more of its students prepared for career or college².

To achieve this goal, the accountability and annual planning system must have two major components:

1. The first component is designed to provide state intervention and assistance for schools needing to improve.
2. The second component is designed to create dynamics that will propel good schools to become great schools, and great schools to continually advance. The design of the second component differs from the first, in that it is founded on continuous improvement and relies on local control and transparency to establish accountability to the local community.

Accountability Recommendations:

1. **We recommend that the state's 5-Star Rating System³ be revised and refined to facilitate accurate and fair measurement and ranking of schools and districts that require intervention and assistance.**
 - a. This system allows schools and districts to be sorted into multiple categories. The State should not impose an arbitrary bell-curve that forces schools into a

² [State Board of Education 60% goal](#)

³ [Idaho Five-Star Rating System](#)

- classification. The classification should reflect the actual performance of a school. Schools identified as needing improvement should continue to receive the necessary assistance from the State Department of Education in the form of expert assistance and resources. Schools that refuse additional assistance or do not "turn around" within a period of time would trigger more forceful intervention on the part of the State.
- b. Revisions to the existing 5-star system should adjust the balance between student growth, school achievement, and other relevant measures. The work team already in place to review the 5-star system should receive and consider this feedback.
 - c. The State's intervention and assistance program for schools should:
 - 1) Initially focus on resource and technical support and encouragement. State intervention should become more forceful only if a school does not improve, the district refuses outside assistance or demonstrates repeatedly that local leadership is unable to turn the school around.
 - 2) If necessary, replace local leadership (principal/superintendent) that has demonstrated its inability to turn around a school. Without this level of intervention, the state would be failing its constitutional and fiduciary responsibility, and the cost of this failure would be born directly by the students in that school and indirectly by the community and state when those students are not prepared for career and/or college. (For further notes on the role of superintendent in local accountability, see Final Notes, p. 11.)
 - d. If federal regulations allow, alternative schools should be removed from this part of the accountability system. An alternative ranking system should be explored that is clear, and more specifically tailored to alternative schools.

2. We recommend that the State implement an Annual Planning Cycle and Continuous Process Improvement Plans that Lead to Achievement Scores Aligned to the 60% Goal.

“Turn every good school into a great school”

- a. Update the State’s strategic planning law⁴ to focus on continuous annual improvement. The current legislation requires each district to have an "annual strategic plan," which has been interpreted in the context of classic organizational strategic planning rooted in mission and vision statements with a 3-5 year

⁴ [Idaho Code, Strategic Planning and Training](#); and [Idaho Administrative Rules, Strategic Planning and Training](#).

planning horizon. However, the original intent of the Governor's Taskforce was that each school and district have an annual improvement plan with clear, measurable goals. These plans were to be the foundation of local control and accountability to the community and an alignment mechanism to the State's overall strategic goal of 60%. Amending or replacing the existing legislation is necessary to reflect the original intent.

- b. Each school district, led by its board and superintendent, should be required annually to prepare a performance improvement plan which sets clear, measurable goals to improve achievement in the coming school year.

The plan would identify a focused set of targets for improvement, selected from

- a. a collection of relevant measures provided by the State Board of Education including the Career and College Readiness or High School Readiness score for the school/district (for more on "CCR Score" and "HSR Score" -- see below), and
- b. focus areas and measurable improvement targets selected for improvement.

The intent is that all plans lead toward the achievement of the career and college readiness goal for the state. The goals for each school and district should be summarized into a simple one-to-three page plan headlined by the CCR Score (or HSR Score) and the targeted CCR Score (or HSR Score). The district's current CCR and HSR Scores, the annual improvement plan, the goals for improvement and the results against the prior year's goals should then be published and widely shared within the district, the community and to the State Board of Education by August 1st of each year.

- c. Each school in the state should be scored on two metrics: Readiness and Improvement.
 - 1) Readiness is the percent of graduating students that are prepared to continue to the next level.
 - a) The Career and College Readiness Score (CCR Score) should be measured as the percentage of students leaving a particular high school who are deemed academically ready to move to the next level. For high schools, this would be a measure of how many high school students from that school are ready for career or college work, directly in alignment with the state's 60% goal.
 - b) If the school is an elementary, middle school, junior high, etc. that does not continue through 12th grade, then the measure would be the percentage of students completing the highest grade within that school who are academically testing at or above the level that is deemed to prepare that student for success at the next level. For a school that sequentially precedes high school, this (for example) would be called the High School Readiness

Score (HSR Score) and would measure proficiency rates of the highest grade (8th or 9th) as measured by an appropriate statewide assessment. If an elementary school’s highest grade is 6th grade, their score would be a 7th Grade Readiness Score... etc.

- 2) Improvement is the year over year improvement in the level of readiness produced by that school. The Career and College Readiness Improvement (CCR Improvement) or High School Readiness Improvement (HSR Improvement) should be measured as a percentage change in the CCR Score or HSR Score measured year-over-year. For example, if a school in 2014 had a CCR Score of 56%, and the same school had a CCR Score of 51% for 2013, then the CCR Improvement for that school in 2014 would be +9.8% ((56%/51%) – 100%).

Examples	Readiness Score	Improvement Score
High School	Career and College Readiness Score (CCR) (e.g. % students >= 500 on all SAT Sections)	CCR Improvement (e.g. 2014 CCR / 2013 CCR)
K-8 School	High School Readiness Score (HSR) (e.g. % students proficient or above on 8 th grade statewide assessment)	HSR Improvement
K-6 School	7th Grade Readiness Score (7GR) (e.g. % students proficient or above on 6 th grade statewide assessment)	7GR Improvement

- 3) The State will provide each district with its official Readiness and Improvement Scores by school at the end of each academic year.
- 4) These State reports should include state goals, and statewide and cohort comparisons so that local districts have a context to interpret the numbers. Such interpretative context is critical to local accountability.
- 5) Timeliness of the report must be adjusted to match the planning rhythm of the districts.

3. We recommend that the State offer professional development and collaborative training and support for local boards/leadership to develop awareness of and competencies in continuous improvement practices.

- 4. We recommend that the timing of data be reviewed and adjusted to align with budget and annual planning deadlines for both school boards and teachers. The timeliness of the State's report information is critical to the districts' annual planning process. Today, data is delivered too late for analysis and planning during the school year.**

#6 Empower Autonomy by Removing Constraints

The 2013 Task Force emphasized that autonomy is critical for two reasons. First, autonomy ignites empowerment, engagement, and ownership for results. Second, local circumstances vary greatly and change frequently, thus optimal decisions can only be derived from local knowledge of factors material to the decision.

Far too often, the state has exercised its authority and accountability for our education system via laws and rules that dictate and micro-manage how things are done and how money is spent. Although well intentioned, this level of operational control/mandates work to undermine the level of engagement by local people, and erode the level of efficiency and effectiveness.

This subcommittee discussed areas of K-12 policy that impose a high burden on school districts with a corresponding low return of value. Based on input from superintendents across the state and a review of existing laws and administrative rules, the committee recommends the following to improve autonomy for local school districts.

- 1: We recommend that the legislature research and consider the potential impact of proposed new laws on the education system.**

We urge lawmakers to fully research short and long-term financial and personnel implications, not just to the state general fund, but also to individual schools and districts as well as state education agencies. We further recommend that the legislature conduct a cost/benefit analysis of new laws before adoption to assess effectiveness and determine unintended consequences.

Many times, new legislation imposes requirements on the system that are burdensome and costly and do not lead to efficiency or improved student outcomes. New laws and regulatory requirements should be minimized. Review of new laws could be achieved through sunset clauses on new legislation.

- 2: We recommend that the legislature limit the number of funding streams to school districts and prescriptive requirements for disbursement whenever possible to allow districts flexibility to use funds as needed based on local needs.**

While it is the Legislature’s role to set the K-12 budget, districts would benefit from more flexibility in the allocation of those funds. We recommend only two funding “buckets” – one for compensation and one for operational expenses. Directives governing the use of operational funds should be kept to a minimum so that local district boards and administrators can best address the needs of their schools year to year.

3. We recommend that the State Board of Education’s Accountability and Oversight Program Manager regularly review new and existing statute and rules to assess relevance and efficacy, and report annually to the State Board of Education.

Reviewing statute and rule to assess relevance and efficacy and to identify areas for consolidation and streamlining should not be a one-and-done exercise. The Board should implement a continuous improvement process with respect to education laws and rules. We recommend that the Accountability Oversight Committee⁵ solicit and review input from K-12 stakeholders, ensuring that school and district administrators are involved who can provide feedback and recommendations on how to reduce or eliminate requirements that inhibit efficiency and focus on students.

4. We support the work of the Innovation and Collaboration subcommittee to mitigate the burden of data reporting to the State Department of Education’s ISEE system.

Much of the feedback from school administrators regarding burdensome regulation and reporting requirements involved reporting requirements of the state’s ISEE system. A disproportionate amount of time is spent on reporting, and smaller districts face a larger burden based on resource availability to support data entry and reporting.

⁵ [State Board of Education Accountability Oversight Committee](#)

Definitions of Key Terms

1. "**Achievement**" means academic performance relative to a standard. For example, one measure of achievement could be the percentage of students who score 500 or greater on Standardized Achievement Tests, such as SAT
2. "**Improvement**" measures the change (positive or negative) from year to year in the percentage of students in a particular school or district who met the achievement standard. For example, if 70% of students at a particular high school achieved 500 or greater on the SATs in year one, and 77% achieved or exceeded that level the following year, that would be a 10% year-to-year improvement.
3. "**Relevant Indicators**" includes such factors as the number of Advanced Placement tests taken and passed, the number of students successfully participating in dual credit programs, and similar indicators of advanced academic achievement.
4. "**Growth**" measures the improvement in the performance of an individual student from the beginning to the end of a given school year (or specified number of years), relative to the student's initial status and growth of his or her relevant cohort.
5. "**60%**" or "**60% Goal**" refers to the State Board of Education's that 60% of Idahoans age 24-35 will have a post-secondary certificate or degree by year 2020. For the purposes of the taskforce work on the K-12 system, we focused on how the K-12 system prepares its students to achieve that goal.

Note: the terms "*improvement*" and "*growth*" should not be used interchangeably. "*Improvement*" is measured at a school or district level, and relates to the change in levels of "*achievement*." "*Growth*" is measured at the individual student level, and may or may not result in aggregate "*improvement*" depending on the starting and ending points for the measurements and the mix of students being measured.

Guiding Principles for the Statewide K-12 Accountability System (K12-AS)

1. The goal of the K12-AS is to help the State achieve its overall goal of >60% of young adults entering the workforce having completed some form of post-secondary (PS) degree/certification. The role of the K-12 system in this goal is to prepare students for success at the post-secondary level, in alignment with the state's 60% goal (see Key Terms above).
2. The K12-AS must serve two related but different purposes. First, it must have an "intervention" system for under-performing schools designed to move the entire system to acceptable levels of performance. Second, the accountability system should serve as a catalyst for "good schools" to become "great schools." In Idaho, we don't want merely good schools. We want all Idaho schools to be great schools. The two elements of the system have very different methods by which they would accomplish their respective purposes. It would be a mistake to try to serve both purposes via the same mechanisms.

3. Key elements of the “intervention” system:
 - a. The intervention system must have clearly defined measures and triggers used to identify a school that is *underperforming* and in need of intervention.
 - b. The intervention system should define clear levels. These levels should indicate the degree of underperformance and chronic nature of the situation. These clearly defined levels would, in turn, drive the type and degree of intervention(s) required.
 - c. The intervention system must not simply produce a “judgment”. The system should offer tools and assistance to help struggling schools improve performance.
 - d. The system should apply to a school, not a district, although the district superintendent would be the “point person” for of accountability. The State should not undermine local leadership by meddling in local operational matters. The superintendent and local board bears responsibility to hold local building leadership and personnel accountable. The local board is accountable to local voters. The superintendent is primarily accountable to the local board, and secondarily accountable, as the district's senior leader, to the State. For further discussion on this matter, see the side notes at the end of this document.
 - e. The State, in cooperation with the local school board, would be the primary agent of enforcement at this level of accountability.
 - f. This part of the accountability system would necessarily require force – we cannot allow struggling systems to fail continually.

4. Key elements of the “Good-to-Great” system:
 - a. The goal of this system element is not episodic intervention, but rather continuous improvement, innovation and collaboration. With this in mind, specific annual improvements should be determined and driven locally.
 - b. The good-to-great system should have an annual cadence and rhythm with ongoing small improvements, continually refined and compounded over time. This is how schools become great, and stay great.
 - c. The good-to-great system requires a finer-grain measurement system than the 5 Star System. This measurement should allow for annual progress that can be measured, evaluated, and celebrated. Coarse-grained measures such as the 5-Star System and underperformance triggers are not useful in continuous improvement efforts.
 - d. Unlike the intervention system, the good-to-great system should be owned and driven by the local school boards and administration. The State’s role would be to support these local efforts with clear, concise, uniform, and transparent measures, which would serve as the foundation of the improvement system. (Outcomes would measure improvement, and should not be confused with activities and activity measures.)
 - e. Public transparency and the local school boards would provide accountability in this system.

5. The foundation of the K12-AS is clear, concise, uniform, and transparent measurement of student achievement. Measures that are overly complex or indirect in terms of whether they accurately measure student learning should be avoided. The measures should lead directly to the identification of opportunities for improvement. People need to understand and have clarity on what is needed; this is eroded with complex or questionable metrics.

6. The focal point of the state's K12-AS must be local leadership, specifically the local Superintendent. The state should not disenfranchise the local community by reaching around the Superintendent. Nor should the State hold the "district" or "school" accountable. The accountability system should focus on leadership both to identify schools where intervention is required or to support continuous improvement to make good schools great,

Guiding Principles for the Annual Planning Process

1. The greatest value of annual planning is not in the plan itself, but in the process of developing the plan: establishing performance measurements, providing clear and transparent data, gaining the alignment of key stakeholders, understanding outcomes in the context of current performance relative to best practices, and lastly and most importantly, setting priorities to focus on a critical few areas for annual improvement. The actual plan itself should be very brief, likely 1-3 pages. This is because the plan is not the result of surveying the entire continuum, which happens in the early stages of planning. The plan is the result of identifying key focus areas for the coming year. Without this annual planning and improvement effort, it is highly unlikely a district will achieve the 60% goal of preparing its students for successful post-secondary education or career pursuits.
2. Key attributes of proper execution of the annual planning process:
 - a. Clarity and data transparency and about the measurements that matter most. The process should be framed by the improvement of one or more of a defined set of metrics. This forces leadership at all levels to gain clarity and alignment across the state on what is most important for our schools, to understand how each school is performing against these focus areas, and to set clear targets for improvement for each local school. Each school is unique. The local board and leadership should have the autonomy to set specific targets and focal points for improvement as they see fit, as long as the overall school and district are in alignment with the State's higher goal of 60% for career and college preparedness.
 - b. Local ownership – State alignment. The annual planning process should be executed within a framework that is provided by the State Board. This allows the State to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility and constitutional mandate. However, the actual plan, focus areas and goals are completely at the discretion of the local school boards and leadership. Each local district and school is free to select and adjust their local initiatives and goals to fit local circumstances.
 - c. Clear alignment and focus between the State, the local school board, and the local administration on achieving the 60% goal.
 - d. Accountability for performance and improvement progress rest with the local community. By providing clear and consistent measurement, along with the autonomy to adjust to local circumstances, the annual planning process should provide the transparency needed to govern local schools. Achievement against these locally defined improvement goals should become the core basis of local leadership evaluations.

Final Notes – Superintendent Accountability to the State

1. Under the State Constitution, the State has a clear role in the K-12 system. The constitution designates constitutional offices and grants them authority (the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction) to govern the school system.
2. Local school boards are accountable to the local electorate. No line of accountability exists from a local board to the State, other than areas covered by law. Laws are about compliance, not performance.
 - a. Therefore, accountability to the state must exist somewhere. If accountability does not exist with the Local Board, then the only other option is the local superintendent.
 - b. In law, today, the State grants a license to a Superintendent without which s/he cannot practice in this State. If the State has authority to grant a license, it logically follows that the State can withhold that license.
 - c. In law, today, the State has the authority to take over a chronically underperforming school according to existing statute. Once the State takes over a district, then the superintendent would be accountable to the State.
3. Because the superintendent is primarily and normally accountable to the local board, it follows that they are also, in certain matters, accountable to the State.

In relation to GROWTH METRICS:

1. Growth metrics that measure the longitudinal growth of students over a school year are somewhat controversial at this point in time. Research shows that unless there are strong and consistent standards across the overall system, growth metrics should not be used for formal accountability at the State level.
2. An argument can be made that growth metrics are best used as a part of teacher feedback and for tactical/operational improvements in the classroom. The State's role in accountability is at the school and district level. And the State's role is oversight for achievement levels, not operational practices. Thus it can be argued that growth is not a measure the state should be using for the district accountability system.
3. The State's goal is clearly stated as the 60% benchmark. Growth, while related, is not directly a measurement of that 60%. Thus introducing this into the State's accountability system brings complexity.
4. For this reasons above, it does not make sense to include growth metrics into the State's accountability system.

