Accountability and Annual Planning Recommendations – Draft

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's goal of 60+% of its citizens entering the workforce with some form of post-secondary diploma or certificate (1, 2, 4, or more) by 2020 that prepares them to enter the workforce. The actual SBE goal is that Idahoans age 25-34 have achieved the 60% goal. For the purposes of the taskforce work on the K-12 system, we are focused on citizen's entering that demographic group (25 year olds), and how the K-12 system prepared it's students for achieving that goal.

Please 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 therefore in need of intervention.
    b. There should be identified levels within the intervention system. 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" in terms of accountability. The meaning of this specifically is for the purposes of the state, accountability for the results of the schools in the district and the annual improvement of those results rests on the district superintendent. The state should not undermine local leadership by meddling in local operational matters. It is the superintendents and local board's 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 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 require "teeth" and force – we cannot allow struggling systems to continually fail.

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 start system. This measurement should allow for annual progress 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 role of the state 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 disempower the local community by reaching around the Superintendent. Nor should the state hold the "district" or "school" accountable. Whether used to identify school where intervention is required or support continuous improvement to make good schools great, the accountability system should focus on leadership.

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: making performance measurements and data clear and transparent gaining the alignment of key stakeholders that results from reviewing current performance relative to best practices, to gain a true situational understanding, and lastly and most importantly, the forcing function of the tradeoffs and decisions required to focus on a critical few priorities for annual improvement. Subsequently, the actual plan 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. Data transparency and clarity about the measurements 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 states higher goal of the 60% prepared for career and college.
   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 best fit local circumstances.
   c. Clear alignment and focus between the state, the local school board, and the local administration, each year, on achieving the 60% goal.
   d. Accountability to performance and improvement progress to 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.

Recommendations for the Statewide Accountability System and Annual Planning Process

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 college, as indicated by matriculation in post-secondary education. To achieve this goal, the accountability system must have two major components. The first component is designed to provide state intervention and assistance for struggling or failing schools. 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.

The specific recommendations of this sub-committee are that the State should:

1. **Revise and refine the 5-Star Ranking System to facilitate accurate and fair measurement and ranking of schools and districts that require intervention and assistance.**
   This system allows schools and districts to be sorted into categories which are either superior, adequate or failing. Failing schools should receive additional assistance from the State Department of Education in the form of expert assistance and additional resources. Failing 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. The measurements for this sorting system at the high school level should include achievement, improvement and relevant indicators that support achievement and improvement. For the middle school and elementary school level, the measurements should also include an indicator of individual student growth.

Revisions to the existing 5-star system should include:

1.1. Adjusting balance between student growth, school achievement, and other relevant measures. Today, too much weight is placed on growth and other relevant measures, many born out of federal regulation. The work team already in place to steer the 5-star system should receive and consider this feedback.

1.1.1. We recommend placing greater weighting at all levels on achievement and improvement, such that there would be a strong correlation between the weighted star rating and the levels of academic achievement and improvement;

1.1.2. Include a component of "growth" only at the elementary and middle school levels;

1.1.3. Be simplified, so that the calculation of the weighted score is more transparent and understandable;

1.1.4. Be published in an open and timely fashion, so that the results are available to all interested parties.

1.2. One of the core purposes of this system is to comply with Federal regulations, and it should continue to serve that purpose.
1.3. The intervention and assistance in place for failing schools (1 and 2 stars?) should balance support and encouragement initially, before triggering more forceful intervention by the State should the school in question continue to fail and/or the district refuses outside assistance or demonstrates repeatedly that local leadership is unable to turn the school around.
1.4. The ultimate intervention should include replacing local leadership (principal/superintendent) that has demonstrated, for whatever reason, that they are unable to turn a failing school around. Without this level of intervention, the state will be failing its constitutional and fiduciary responsibilities. And the cost of this failure will be born directly by the students in that school; and indirectly by the community and state when these students are not prepared for career and/or college. (For further notes on the issue of to whom the local superintendent is accountable to, see the last section of this document.)
1.5. If federal regulations allow, alternative schools should be removed from this part of the accountability system. These schools are outliers in relation to a more typical school, and it is illogical that they be held to the same measures. An alternative ranking system should be explored that is clear, and more specifically tailored to alternative schools.

2. **Implement Continuous Annual Planning and Process Improvement Plans that Lead to Achievement Scores that Align to the 60% Goal.**
The second component of the statewide accountability system is focused on turning good schools into great schools and does this via continuous improvement. This component is intended to make continuous annual improvement a requirement for every school in Idaho. The foundational element of this is annual improvement planning and goal setting. Goals and accountability for achievement of the goals are set and maintained at a local level. Accountability for the school's performance and its ability to achieve its annual goals is enforced via clear, understandable, transparent measures published within the community, and reviewed for the State Board of Education.

2.1. It is recommended that the state strategic planning law be updated to reflect the following elements listed below. The genesis of that legislation was the Governor's Taskforce recommendation requiring that each district have an annual strategic plan in place. The intention in that original recommendation was that each school in the state fully embraced a continuous improvement model of making focused, targeted improvements towards the State's 60% goal every year. Unfortunately, the legislation that passed keyed on the word "strategic," and subsequently interpreted that in the context of classic organizational strategic planning models that are rooted in mission and vision statements and 3-5 year planning horizons. The recommendations below are intended to clear up this misinterpretation and sharpen the language to hopefully remove the ambiguity. The original intent of the 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 local community and an alignment mechanism to the state's overall strategic goal of 60%. Thus these changes to the existing laws are critical to the Taskforce recommendations in the area of structural change.

2.2. Each school district, led by its board and superintendent, will be required to prepare annually a performance improvement plan, setting clear, measureable goals to improve achievement in the coming school year.

2.3. Each school in the state should be scored on two clear metrics. The first is a measure of the Career and College Readiness Score of the students exiting that school. The second should be the Career and College Readiness Improvement score.

2.3.1. The Career and College Readiness Score (CCR Score) should be measured as the percentage of students leaving that 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. 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 example – proficiency rates has the highest grade as is measured by the SBAC or equivalent.

2.3.2. The Career and College Readiness Improvement (CCR Improvement) should be measured as a percentage change in the CCR Score last year, when compared to that school's CCRS for the prior 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%).

2.4. The state will provide to each district with its official CCR Score and CCR Improvement scores at the end of each year. The timeliness of this information is critical to districts annual planning process. Additionally, the data today is delivered too late for analysis and planning work while the teachers are still on contract. This timing issue needs to be addressed. Districts should be scored as the aggregate scores of the high schools in that district. These scores are the core of the annual improvement plans, and should be a focal point of continuous improvement for every school in the state.

These reports from the state on CCR scores should include cohort and statewide comparisons from schools across the state. Specifically, the best-in-class schools for the relevant metric should be identified along with that schools score in that area. Cohorts are like-kind schools and should be based on schools of similar size, funding, and circumstances (e.g. student body Title 1 and ELL rates).

This report serves two purposes. First, it allows local leaders and communities to see how their schools are performing relative to peers and to the state. This context is critical to local accountability and to planning and target setting. Second, it provides some level of actionable information that will spur collaboration across districts. Best-in-class districts can be contacted for further detail on their efforts and sharing of best practices. These two purposes should combine to provide the catalyst for statewide school improvement towards the 60% goal.

2.5. The plan will identify a focused set of targets for improvement, selected from a collection of relevant measures provided by the State Board of Education (including the CCR for the school/district). The focus areas and measurable improvement targets selected for improvement. The intent is that all plans lead towards the achievement of the career and college readiness goal for the state.

2.6. The goals for each school and district should be summarized into a simple one-to-three page plan, headlined by the CCR Score and targeted CCR. The plan should then be published and widely shared within the district and the community, as well as submitted to the State Board.

3. We recommend 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. Attached you will find examples of the CCR scoring and annual planning documents – these will hopefully minimize the natural confusion that arises from the ambiguity of the English language.

Side Notes

Side note:

The discussion regarding accountability, the role of the State in relationship to the local superintendent.

1. Constitutionally and fiduciary-wise, the state has a clear role in the K-12 system. The constitution speaks to it, it designates constitutional offices and grants them authority (the State Super and the State Board).

2. Local school boards are accountable to the local electorate. Period. There is no lines of accountability from a local board and the State. (other than laws, and laws are about compliance, not performance)

3. So there must be accountability to the state... somewhere. If it is not the Local Board... then the only other option is the local Super. Then if you add the following sub-facts, this accountability relationship becomes quite clear...
    a. In law, today, the State grants a license to a Super... without which the Super cannot be a Super in this state. So existing law already establishes a line between the super and the state. And if the state has authority to grant a license, it logically follows that the state can withhold that license. So existing law has this line setup, the remaining is that terms of that license, not a new relationship
    b. In law, today, the State has the authority to take over a failing school ... this is in the existing statue, but it has not been used to my knowledge. Once the state takes over a district, than the Super is now accountable to the state... as the state is running the school. Thus again, the super is accountable to the state, albeit in extreme circumstances. But the idea of the state removing a super IS and extreme case, so this is the very case we are discussing.

    So in light of 3, 3a, and 3b, I can only conclude that there are clear accountability between the state and the local Super.

4. Just because the super is primarily accountable to the local board, it is in no way inconsistent that they are also, in certain matters, accountable to the state. This idea does not represent a new idea or precedence ... as is illustrated in #3. Multiple accountabilities – with one not nullifying the other is not a novel concept, it happens often. The idea that the state would exercise this accountability in anything other than an extreme case, is crazy. It legally exists today, but has never been used... even when justified.

In relation to GROWTH METRICS:

1. Growth metrics, that is 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 is strong and consistent standards across the overall system, grow metrics should likely not be used for formal accountable at the State level.

2. These metrics have potential, but an argument can be made that they are best used as a metric in 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. 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 the growth style metrics into the State's accountability system, at this time.