



650 W. State Street • Room 307 • Boise, ID • 83702
P.O. Box 83720 • Boise, ID • 83720-0037

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Contact: Mike Keckler
208-332-1591 (office)
208-866-5734 (cell)
Mike.Keckler@osbe.idaho.gov

Developing Accountability Goals that are Realistic and Achievable

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

We focus a lot of attention in education on student performance and how best to measure improvement. During February’s State Board of Education meeting, we spent considerable time discussing performance metrics and how they comply with federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

In 2018, the Board approved its ESSA consolidated state plan, which contained interim and long-term goals for student proficiency and growth in math, English language arts, and graduation rates.

ESSA requires states set achievement goals for all students and for sub-groups of students who are disadvantaged (economically, English as a second language, etc.). However, the State Board cares about our achievement goals for more than merely federal compliance. These goals should help drive success for all schools, not only those that get identified for federal support.

Two years later, the Board has come to realize that perhaps we put too much emphasis on student proficiency and not enough on growth, given the diversity of districts we have in our state. And, given that we recognize the importance of tracking and noting performance growth, “I think you will see more of a reflection of where school districts really are and that it really is about student growth rather than cut scores on tests,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said.

The accountability discussion must be comprehensive and not solely focused on federal requirements. Accountability, at the fundamental level, is a local function. I agree with my fellow Board member Kurt Liebich's thoughts on this.

"Ultimately, if ESSA metrics are only used and visible at the state level in order to appease the federal Department of Education, then they will not have any impact on student achievement and continuous improvement," he said. Idaho uses a single accountability system for state and federal accountability purposes. We want to use appropriate accountability where it best serves students and support the work of local school boards in accomplishing their goals as well as the federal accountability requirements under ESSA.

We have commenced a review of student performance measures and how we might adjust how they are "weighted" in order to place more emphasis on student growth. "I believe every student should be growing," Dr. Clark said. "Are your top kids growing? Are your middle kids growing? Are your kids who are struggling growing?" That certainly sounds like an equitable measure for all of Idaho's school districts, for parents and for students. Over the next several months, the Board will be having further conversations about this and how it would meet Idaho's long-term goals under ESSA. If you have thoughts you would like to share, feel free to send me an email at board@osbe.idaho.gov

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