



## **ESEA Reauthorization Recommendations: Accountability**

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### *Develop accountability systems that better support student learning*

- Transform the federal accountability system from a system with a singular focus on academic achievement and results that fail to differentiate between schools' performance,<sup>1</sup> to a system that is based on multiple and broader measures that are indicative of overall school quality and success. Such a system would combine a variety of indicators into a comprehensive index much like a Continuous Progress Index that provides information (and accountability) on measures that comprise overall school quality. This index could include measures such as academic performance, dropout rates, graduation rates, college and career readiness, student attendance, health and wellness, and school climate.
- Require states to create the next generation of accountability systems that include two key elements: (1) more accurate identification of school progress on multiple measures, including assessments of critical-thinking, problem-solving, and performance, as well as graduation rates, and (2) differentiated actions for schools that have not made adequate progress based on their strengths and needs.
- Support graduation rate accountability that includes 4, 5 and 6 year cohorts to create incentives for keeping high-need students in school until graduation and reclaiming students who have left high school; provide schools full credit in the accountability system for students who graduate in five or six years.
- Apply improvement requirements before withholding federal funds when enforcing federal programs.

#### *Ensure subgroup accountability works*

- Ensure that schools helping ELLs become proficient in English are rewarded, not penalized.
- Require states to establish stable ELL subgroup membership for accountability purposes. States should:
  - 1) Designate students as members of the ELL subgroup based on their English language proficiency status at entry into school in the state in which they reside.
  - 2) Maintain students' designation as ELLs for purposes of accountability for the duration of their schooling in the state.

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<sup>1</sup> The current system fails to differentiate between schools that are improving but miss academic targets because of only one subgroup or fall just below the target, and those schools that consistently fail to meet the needs of all their students.

- Allow states to develop policies for assessing English language learners that take into consideration unique needs such as accommodations and timelines of evaluation of English language proficiency and academic achievement.

#### *Reform school improvement*

- Focus on evidence-based supports for school improvement rather than requirements for specific sanctions. Take into account the diversity of student populations (such as ELLs and students with disabilities), as well as schools' success in graduating high-need students, in evaluating school effectiveness and strategies for improvement.
- Match strategies for addressing the needs of schools identified for improvement to the nature of the situation they face, as well as the pervasiveness and severity of the problem, focusing attention on the lowest-achieving schools, while providing states the flexibility to address the needs of other schools.
- Authorize continued support for effective implementation of longitudinal data systems.
- Provide flexibility for school turnaround models; allow districts and communities to choose the elements within a school that need change.

#### **Rationale for Improvements**

The current federal accountability system needs improvement. California's system provides an alternative method for calculating student performance and, with the addition of a student-level growth component, should be considered a model for the nation. In addition, with the large number of schools presently identified as needing improvement under current law, a more robust set of indicators would allow States to prioritize schools that need the most help over schools that are making progress.

#### **California Overview**

California has its state accountability system,— the Academic Performance Index (API) — that operates in conjunction with ESEA. The API system is used to assess the academic progress of schools in the state. The API is calculated by converting a student's performance on statewide assessments across multiple content areas into points on the API scale. These points are then averaged across all students and all tests. An API is calculated for schools, LEAs, and for each numerically significant subgroup of students at a school or an LEA. The key features of the API include the following:

- The API is an improvement model. It is used to measure the academic growth of a school. The API from one year is compared to the API from the prior year to measure improvement. Each school has an annual target, and all numerically significant subgroups at a school also have targets.
- The API requires subgroup accountability to address achievement gaps between student subgroups.
- The API is designed to allow for multiple sources of evidence about student learning to be integrated into the index and to be represented in analyses of school progress.

- The API provides a scale that shows how far a school has progressed. It allows differentiation among schools that are making stronger and weaker progress.
- The API is used to rank schools for state recognition and intervention programs. This ranking is done by comparing a school to other schools of the same type statewide and to 100 other schools that have similar demographic characteristics.
- The API is currently a school-based requirement only under state law. However, API reports are provided for LEAs in order to meet federal requirements under ESEA. The API also serves as one of California's "additional indicators" for Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP.