

A Parent's Guide to School Accountability in Kentucky



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For more than 20 years, Kentucky has been a national leader in P-12 education. In 2011-12, Kentucky became THE leader as the first state to teach and test students on new, more rigorous academic standards and base school and district performance on whether students are on pace to graduate from high school ready for college and/or career.

Kentucky public schools and districts are now accountable for educating children under a new system called Unbridled Learning: College/Career Readiness for All. It includes multiple measures that take into account all areas of a school's work. Unbridled Learning is designed to promote continuous improvement in our schools and districts. Results will be reported in a transparent and timely way.

Additionally, the federal government has granted permission for Kentucky to use the new system for federal accountability in place of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. So now, Kentucky schools and districts will have a single set of goals to meet. Those in need of improvement will receive appropriate support and interventions.

Educating children is a shared responsibility. Schools, teachers, administrators, parents, communities and students all must demand and strive for excellence in public education. Our vision is every child proficient and prepared for success, which means all students graduate from high school college/career-ready and prepared for the future. We all must work together to realize this vision.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Kentucky Education Commissioner



What is accountability?

Kentucky schools and districts are held to high standards for educating children. Accountability is the way we measure their effectiveness --- how well they are doing. It also serves as the basis for identifying those schools or districts that may need support to reach their goals.



Why do we have a new accountability system?

In 2009, Kentucky legislators passed Senate Bill 1, which required many changes in the state's public education system. It did away with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), which focused on student proficiency and used a 140-point scale, in favor of a new system that focuses on college and career readiness and ensuring success after high school. It is called Unbridled Learning and uses a 100-point scale to gauge school and district performance.

How will I know how my child is doing on state tests?

Test results will be reported to parents near the beginning of the next school year. You will receive detailed reports on how your child performs on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP), end-of-course exams, EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT. Because the standards on which some tests are based are more rigorous than in the past (to ensure that students are competitive), scores may decline in the short term, but should show improvement as teacher and students become more comfortable with the standards.

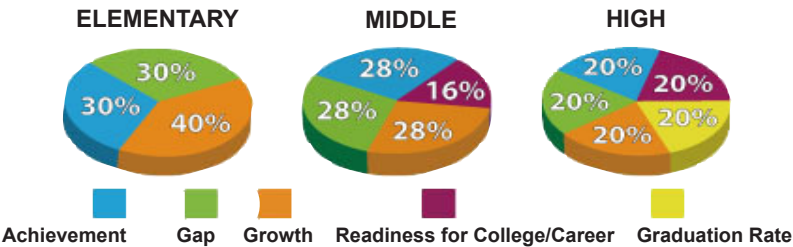
How will student performance be used for accountability?

Next-Generation Learners is the main component of Unbridled Learning and is based on many measures of student performance on various tests. Points will be awarded based on how well a school performs on each measure.



- **Achievement** - Just as in the past, elementary and middle school students' scores will be labeled as novice, apprentice, proficient or distinguished. Kentucky's goal is 100 percent proficiency for all students. At high school, achievement is based on end-of-course exams and an on-demand writing test.
- **Gap** - Schools will compare test results for African-American, Hispanic, Native American, special education, low income and limited English proficiency students, combined into one gap group, to results for other students who are not in those categories.
- **Growth** - A statistical program will measure how much students' scores are improving from one year to the next.
- **College/Career Readiness** - School and districts will provide information about how many students are ready for college and/or careers, based on test scores and certifications earned.
- **Graduation Rate** - Schools and districts will report how many students graduate within four years of high school.

Calculating Next-Generation Learner Score



Will I be able to tell how my school/district is doing compared with others in the state?

Yes. Scores for the various measures and components are weighted and tallied to produce an overall accountability score from 0 to 100.

To encourage continuous improvement, each school and district will have an annual goal to reach -- an annual measurable objective (AMO) -- based on how much improvement is needed to reach the ultimate goal of 100. Schools and districts also will have goals to reach in achievement, gap reduction, college/career readiness and graduation rate.

Overall district scores are ranked in order: overall school scores are ranked by level -- elementary, middle and high. Based on where they are in the order, schools and districts will fall into one of three main classifications:

- **Distinguished** -- the top 10 percent of districts or school from a particular level (90th percentile)
- **Proficient** -- in the top 30 percent of districts or schools from a particular level (70th percentile)
- **Needs Improvement** -- the remaining schools/districts

Within each of these main classifications, school/districts meeting their AMOs, student participation rate for “all students” group and each subgroup, and graduation goals also receive a “Progressing” designation.

All this information will be reported each year on the School/District Report card.

Note that school and district performance cannot be compared with performance under past systems.

How is accountability determined?

Based on their main classifications and overall scores, schools and districts will be placed in categories for the determination of recognition, support and consequences. All schools/districts must develop, review and revise improvement plans annually.

| Category | Qualifications | Rewards/Consequences |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kentucky Schools/Districts of Distinction | The highest-performing elementary, middle and high schools or districts -- those with overall scores at the 95th percentile or higher | These schools/districts will receive recognition of achievements, such as Web logos and other promotional materials. |
| Kentucky Highest Performing Schools/Districts | Elementary, middle and high schools or districts with overall scores at the 90th percentile or higher | They also will serve as models for lower-performing schools/districts. |
| Kentucky High-Progress Schools/Districts | Title I and non-Title I schools showing the highest progress, as compared to their peers (top 10% of improvement), and districts showing the highest progress, as compared to their peers (top 10% of improvement) | Subject to availability of funds, financial rewards may be offered, along with other recognition activities. |
| Kentucky Focus Schools/Districts | Schools and districts with low achievement gap scores; high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent for two consecutive years; and schools with low scores among gap groups | Revise Comprehensive School or District Improvement Plans (CSIPs or CDIPs) with the goal of student improvement to specifically address area of need (low gap or graduation scores); receive ongoing assistance from KDE based on identified needs; use guidance from the Commissioner's Councils to write needs assessment and revise improvement plans. Those remaining in Focus category for three or more consecutive times must have CSIP or CDIP reviewed, revised and posted on the appropriate website. For schools, the superintendent and school council must agree on the content of the CSIP. If still in Focus status and not making AMO four consecutive times, subject to more oversight and direction by KDE. |
| Kentucky Priority Schools/Districts | <p>Schools identified as Persistently Low-Achieving (PLA) as defined by KRS 160.346</p> <p>Districts with overall scores in the bottom 5 percent for all districts that have failed to make their AMOs and show adequate yearly progress for the last three consecutive years.</p> | Revise CSIPs or CDIPs with the goal of student improvement to specifically address area of need (low achievement); receive targeted assistance from KDE; document meaningful and family and community involvement outlined in CSIP. Priority Schools/Districts identified as Persistently Low-Achieving will receive help and consequences outlined in KRS 160.346 and 703 KAR 5:180. Those remaining in Priority category two or more consecutive times must have CSIP or CDIP reviewed, revised and posted on appropriate website. For schools, the superintendent and school council must agree on the content of the CSIP. If remaining in Priority status for three or more consecutive times, subject to more oversight and direction by KDE. |

What are the differences between NCLB and Unbridled Learning?

| | NCLB | UNBRIDLED LEARNING |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| School/District Labels | Two separate labels for state and federal purposes | One label for state and federal purposes |
| Accountability | Based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); different types and numbers of goals for schools/districts | All schools/districts must improve each year; lowest-performers get intense assistance; high performers recognized |
| Consequences | Only schools/districts funded by federal Title I program | All schools/districts |
| Testing for Accountability | Reading, mathematics, science | Reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing |
| Other Measures | Graduation rates | Graduation rates, achievement gaps, college/career readiness, student academic growth Program Reviews for arts & humanities; practical living/career studies; K-3; and world languages |
| Federal Funding | Limited flexibility | More flexibility to move funds where they are needed |
| School Transfers | Offered when practicable | Not offered; school/districts required to make concrete efforts toward improvement |

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What can parents do to ensure high-performing students and schools?

- Demand high levels of performance from students, schools, and districts. Realize that educational excellence is a shared responsibility. Take an active part in your child's education.
- Know what is expected of students in the different subjects and at the different grade levels. Ask school staff about any questions you may have about academic standards or the curriculum being taught.
- Use Kentucky's online Student Information Systems, Infinite Campus, if available in your district, to monitor your child's progress. Your school or district should be able to provide log-in information.
- Discuss your child's progress report and state test results with his/her teachers. Look for strengths and weaknesses in the different subject areas and work with the school to develop a plan for enrichment or improvement.
- Ask about programs or services that may be available to help your child improve such as Extended School Services, Family resource/Youth Service Centers, tutorial programs or other opportunities in the school or community.
- If your child is in middle or high school, ask the school how to log in to your child's Individual Learning Plan (ILP). It includes valuable information about test scores, career interests and tools that will help you and your child plan for college.
- Refer to the school's consolidated plan to learn about its plans for improvement. Address the School-Based Decision Making Council (SBDM) with any questions, concerns or suggestions you may have.



Where can I find out more information about Unbridled Learning?

More detailed information is available in the Kentucky Department of Education website at www.education.ky.gov. On that site, click on the Unbridled Learning logo on the left side.