# THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM ENGLISH LEARNERS DESERVE:

## Framework for An Effective and Coherent Accountability System For ELs



CALIFORNIANS TOGETHER
CHAMPIONING THE SUCCESS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

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SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION

**California's accountability system is not working for English learners (ELs).** Since the passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) six years ago, the state has created a new accountability system based on multiple measures to inform district and site continuous improvement. The stated goal of LCFF was to move toward a system focused on local control and equity. However, the system has not set ambitious goals for ELs, created indicators that obscure English learners' needs, nor allocated sufficient resources to ensure that their needs are met, and failed at designing an appropriate approach to English learner accountability. Piece by piece, as the accountability system has evolved, it has been a challenge to push for the recognition of English learners' specific needs. Lack of transparency undermines progress. Inappropriate cut scores and analysis are shaped more by concerns about district reputations and county and state capacity than on striving for equity. Failure to support struggling districts has resulted six years later, in an accountability system that falls inexcusably short on its promise of equity, parity and continuous improvement for ELs.

In a state where close to one in five students is an English Learner, we can no longer accept an accountability system that fails to set high standards. The current system appears more focused on measures reflecting our school system's historical inability to meet the academic and instructional needs of ELs appropriately, leading to low expectations for student progress and for Local Educational Agency (LEA) responsiveness. An example is the discrepancy seen when comparing the low achievement for ELs to the identification of districts for support on the Academic  indicator. This has led to significant shortcomings in each of the three key mechanisms of the accountability system: (1) The Data Dashboard, (2) Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs), and (3) The System of Support). Indeed, the state's accountability system fails on several counts. It sets low expectations and obscures the view of current ELs' actual academic needs. As a result of these first two problems, the planning (LCAP) and continuous improvement (System of Support) processes attention to English learners lack urgency, transparency, and honesty about their needs. Ultimately, the state's broken system as a mechanism of accountability has failed its EL students and their families and teachers. **Enough. We deserve better.**

**It is time to create an accountability system under which English learners can thrive.** The good news is that California has elements in place that could contribute toward an accountability system that is truly equity-focused, assets-oriented, and based on high expectations for meeting the needs of ELs. The CA English Learner Roadmap policy has articulated visionary goals for EL education. These should be used as the bedrock for building an improved EL accountability system. It is time to construct a system that is fair to ELs from Pre-K to 12th grade. We suggest one that accurately and validly reflects what they know and can do, ensures they get what they need, aligns with our vision and commitments, and addresses the urgency of closing achievement and opportunity gaps.

In addition, the State Board of Education is developing a Growth Model for the academic indicators of math and English language arts. This is the perfect opportunity to disaggregate the current ELs from the Reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) pupils using matched student scores over two years or a multiyear period — a crucial step towards transparency.

Californians Together has worked with educators, advocates, and parents throughout the state to develop a framework for an effective and coherent accountability system that centralizes the needs and honors the potential of EL students. We call upon California's leadership—the State Board of Education, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Thurmond, and the legislature—to step up and finally build the accountability system that ELs deserve, and that will serve our state's goals of equity and quality education for all.

## THE EL ROADMAP: GOALS FOR ENGLISH LEARNER EDUCATION

Three years ago, the State Board of Education unanimously passed the CA English Learner Roadmap, articulating a new vision and mission for our schools in which ELs and their peers fully and meaningfully access and participate in a 21st-century education from early childhood through graduation, resulting in:

- attaining high levels of English proficiency,
- mastery of grade-level standards, and
- opportunities to develop proficiency in multiple languages.

The Roadmap committed the state to creating schools that affirm, welcome, and respond to a diverse range of EL strengths, needs, and identities while preparing graduates with the linguistic, academic, and social skills and competencies needed for college, career, and civic participation in a global, diverse, and multilingual world. It is an assets-oriented and equity-based commitment—designed to turn away from a system historically marked by inequities, low-expectations, and inadequate services.

However, as Principle #3 of the EL Roadmap recognizes, fulfilling that commitment and becoming schools that realize that vision cannot occur without a coherent and effective accountability system that fosters, motivates, and ensures improvements to get from where we have been to where we want to go. Without systems to reinforce them, the state's commitments in the EL Roadmap risk being treated as unenforced priorities—things that schools may choose to consider voluntarily, instead of policies that guide their daily work.

SECTION 2

# FRAMEWORK FOR AN EFFECTIVE AND COHERENT ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Imagine a coherent and effective accountability system that meets the high expectations set forth in the EL Roadmap instead of replicating and reinforcing our state's historical inability to serve these students well. Imagine a system that shines a light on the achievement and opportunity gaps that have persisted for too long, rather than hiding them (as the California Schools Dashboard does). Imagine a coherent and effective accountability system aligned to our vision, goals, and belief in EL students—one that provides students, districts, educators, and parents with appropriate and accurate data to inform planning and continuous improvement.

An effective and coherent accountability system for ELs would support all levels of the state's educational system by:



## SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL SCHOOLS AND LEAS REGARDING EL ACHIEVEMENT.

**Sets high expectations.** The system sets aspirational goals for progress and attainment for ELs on the Data Dashboard.

**Focuses on closing gaps.** The system centers equity, with clear and ambitious goals for closing opportunity and academic gaps between ELs and non-ELs—including setting differentiated growth expectations for ELs in the LCAPs that commit all educators in our system to catching them up to their peers.

**Sets clear goals for development of English proficiency.** The system focuses on growth toward English proficiency. It encourages the celebration of benchmarks as progress is made—incorporating EL-specific elements such as tracking the length of time ELs have been in the system, tracking the language acquisition programs and services they receive, etc.

**Sets expectations for use of resources.** The LCAPs and system are designed to track the allocation and use of supplemental and concentration funds and other resources targeted to meet the needs of ELs, establishing accountability for appropriate investment in evidence-based approaches and investments in quality implementation.

**Aligns to the vision for EL achievement in the EL Roadmap.** The system aligns to the CA EL Roadmap's asset-based vision and 21st century education goals, including its priority on developing students' dual language proficiency.

## 2 ASSESSING AND MONITORING AGAINST THOSE EXPECTATIONS (STATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT).

**Identifies and focuses on subcategories of ELs.** Recognizing the diversity within the EL population, the system utilizes meaningful and clear definitions and subcategories of ELs. It is transparent about who is included in definitions for calculating specific dashboard indicators, thus enabling targeted responses and equity/gap analyses. The LCAPs and Dashboard indicators enable disaggregation and analysis by typology of students, programs or services provided, and length of time in U.S. schools. This includes newcomers, Long Term English learners, and English learners with disabilities.

**Utilizes meaningful and reliable assessments.** The system uses assessments reported on the Data Dashboard that accurately and validly reflect what EL students know and can do. The assessments are normed for English learners and are standards-based. The ideal case is to match the language of instruction to language in which a student is assessed for dual language programs, which in turn should address any biases in the design.

**Monitors access and structures for opportunity gaps.** The system tracks access and inputs in the education of ELs, such as instructional minutes, access to digital and other materials, access to the full curriculum, provision of Designated and Integrated ELD, appropriate staffing of programs, etc.—thereby informing continuous improvement towards closing achievement and opportunity gaps.

**Focuses on growth.** The system and Data Dashboard incorporate a growth model focusing on progress towards goals with clear tracking of starting points, articulation of growth expectations by year, and how timelines to English proficiency will be assigned to a newly identified EL of various typologies.

**Addresses goals of biliteracy.** The system further codifies California's goals of increased opportunities for all students to attain proficiency in two or more languages. It recognizes the importance of EL biliteracy by incorporating assessments that track biliteracy progress, all of which is included in the Data Dashboard.



# 3 ENSURING ACTION BY IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND PROMISE.

**Shines a spotlight on the successes.** The system identifies the strengths in schools in order to inform action and spotlights promising practices where the system is succeeding.

**Highlights areas needing improvement.** The system enables identifying areas of need both in terms of student progress and achievement and in terms of practice and implementation as part of all levels of the System of Support.

**Informs planning and drives continuous improvement.** The system is designed to support learning and inquiry, enabling schools and districts to form hypotheses about why a school or district has certain results, address those results, and inform further actions (such as program planning or resource allocation in the LCAP or budget).

**Supports targeting specific subcategories of English learners.** The system drives inquiry and planning that identifies and responds to the specific needs of particular subcategories of English learners.

**Builds the capacity of educators.** The system includes training and support for educators in understanding and using assessment and accountability data meaningfully for inquiry and informing their planning and services as part of the professional development described in the LCAP.

**Ensures implementation of the CA English Learner Roadmap.** The system focuses educators' attention on the comprehensive and inter-related principles of the CA English Learner Roadmap, aligns local policy with the EL Roadmap, and explicitly facilitates local continuous improvement goals and plans for implementing the Roadmap as part of all levels of the System of Support.



## 4 ENGAGING ALL LEVELS OF THE SYSTEM (INCLUDING THE STATE) WITH CLEAR ROLES FOR THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, THE COUNTY OFFICES OF EDUCATION, AND THE CALIFORNIA COLLABORATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE.

**Provides support and guidance.** The system provides high-quality guidance and triggers supports for improvement that are robust, appropriate, and EL informed. This requires the California Department of Education as well as California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) and County Offices of Education (COEs) to be adequately funded and staffed with EL expertise to support an EL-responsive accountability system.

**Incorporates a strong monitoring role for the state.** The state monitors differentiated growth targets and holds districts accountable for meeting those targets. It also establishes policies, protocols, and procedures for COEs to monitor and set differentiated growth targets for their districts and monitor the EL's English proficiency progress, which is benchmarked to expected growth targets for specific EL typologies.

**Empowers COEs to hold districts accountable.** The system establishes a consistent message of urgency, expectation, and bottom lines for EL access and growth, with clear consequences of support and, when necessary, oversight and assurance that the EL's needs will be addressed, including through LCAP reviews and differentiated assistance by COEs.

**Commits to a robust state accountability role in times of unusual threats to equity and access.** The system is responsive to extraordinary circumstances that pose a threat to equity and access, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, by engaging EL expertise at the table, shaping guidance to the field, and defining responsive accountability measures to evaluate and track equity and access.



## 5 SUPPORTING KEY DRIVERS OF SUCCESS THROUGHOUT, INCLUDING:

**Engages stakeholders.** The system meaningfully engages stakeholders in linguistically and culturally accessible transparent forums and formats that assure voices and concerns play a meaningful role in shaping the LCAPs and the continuous improvement plans of schools and districts.

**Provides transparency.** The system is designed to facilitate meaningful involvement of people both inside and outside of the school system. This includes making it possible for all stakeholders to understand how and to what extent the EL student group's performance counts toward overall school accountability ratings.

**Establishes an equity imperative.** The system is focused on the equitable distribution of resources and the closing of opportunity gaps.

**Focuses on meaningful continuous improvement.** The accountability system and the System of Supports shine the light and urgency on gaps and celebrate growth and bright spots—holding all stakeholders accountable for continuous improvement at a significant pace.

**Provides adequate resources.** The system provides resources necessary to implement and maintain the accountability system, including the state's monitoring of districts and support for professional learning for educators.



SECTION 3

# WHERE ARE WE NOW VERSUS WHERE WE NEED TO BE: HOW ARE WE DOING?

In light of the Framework for an effective and coherent accountability system of English learners described above, it is clear that while California's current accountability system addresses some elements and commitments consistent with EL goals, there remain significant gaps requiring urgent improvements.

## SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

### The System ELs Deserve

**Sets high expectations.**
Based on a vision of a system that truly meets the needs of ELs and setting high bars for expectations of LEAs for EL progress and attainment.

**Focuses on closing gaps.**
Use of growth measures and clear expectations for the attainment of English proficiency.

**Sets clear goals for development of English proficiency.**
English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI) cut scores are based on meaningful and ambitious goals aligned to attainment of English proficiency within six years.

**Sets expectations for use of resources.**
Exhibits transparency in the use of LCAP and other funds for meeting needs of ELS. Carryover of supplemental and concentration funds are not folded into base program funds.

**Aligns to the vision of EL achievement in the EL Roadmap.**
Includes expectations and focuses on developing multilingual proficiency.

### California's Current Accountability System

**Does not set high expectations.**
Expectations are driven by the system's historical inability to appropriately meet the needs of ELs. Low expectations for LEAs regarding EL progress and attainment in Dashboard. ELs do not appear as priority for LEAs.

**Does not close gaps.**
No cohorts or growth measures overall that enable a focus on *progress* towards attainment of English proficiency.

**Does not set clear goals for development of English proficiency.**
ELPI sets low aspirations—and fails to set a sense of urgency or visibility re English language proficiency.

**Does not set expectations for use of resources.**
Inadequately tracks the allocation and use of supplemental and concentration funds and other resources targeted to meet the needs of ELs.

**Does not align to the vision of EL achievement in the EL Roadmap.**
Doesn't match the goals of the EL Roadmap or set state goals related to biliteracy.

# ASSESSING AND MONITORING

## The System ELs Deserve

**Identifies and focuses on subcategories of ELs.**
Disaggregates data and reports by EL, RFEP, LTEL, and other EL categories for accountability.

**Utilizes meaningful and reliable assessments.**
Sets broad measures and approaches for pre-K to 12th grade.

**Monitors access and structures.**
Sees need to add length of time in program, program placement, and services.

**Focuses on growth.**
A growth model provides data and supports analysis that shows progress and growth using cohort data.

**Addresses goals of biliteracy.**
Measures literacy in English and target or home language to support dual language programs and to measure dual language competency (and monitor language loss).

## California's Current Accountability System

**Does not identify and focus on subcategories of ELs.**
Masks status of current ELs within RFEP and overall Ever EL definition (which might equate with invisibility). Even when using local disaggregation of data, it seldom appears as a basis for LCAPs, goal-setting, or decision-making.

**Does not utilize meaningful and reliable assessments.**
Uses narrow measures and limited approach with very few metrics for elementary students.

**Does not monitor access and structures.**
Does not include key aspects of EL experience that shape growth goals and inform responses, such as length of time in the program, program services provided, etc.

**Does not focus on growth.**
Includes no growth model. No cohort data.

**Does not address goals of biliteracy.**
English only measures for language arts undermines dual language programs. Does not measure dual language competency. No mechanism is in place for gauging language loss.





# ENSURING DISTRICT ACTION

## The System ELs Deserve

**Shines spotlight on successes.**
Disaggregates EL data by program to identify successful models. High levels of progress and achievement for ELs trigger identification of successful practices.

**Highlights areas needing improvement.**
Fosters continuous improvement and encourages open conversations about the need for districts to improve and acknowledge low-achievement instead of hiding it. Keeps urgency when goals for ELs are not met and identifies all districts and schools that are not meeting ambitious goals so that we are honest about the support needed and work ahead.

**Informs planning and drives continuous improvement.**
Provides districts with more useful data and support to inform LCAP development. Data and support services inform how districts set aspirational growth targets for ELs and resource allocation (including the allocation of supplemental and concentration funds) in the LCAP.

**Supports targeting specific subcategories of ELs.**
Data are disaggregated by EL typology (e.g., LTEL, newcomer, ELs with disabilities) as well as program, enabling focused analyses and responses.

**Builds the capacity of educators.**
Provides training and support for educators in understanding and using assessment and accountability data meaningfully to inform planning and services.

**Ensures implementation of the EL Roadmap.**
Aligns measures to the EL Roadmap, and enables continuous improvement and support work toward the fulfillment of the four EL Roadmap principles.

## California's Current Accountability System

**Does not shine spotlight on successes.**
Data are not disaggregated by program. Analyses do not focus on bright spots and successful practices.

**Does not highlight areas needing improvement.**
Perceived need not to make school districts look bad. The system currently diminishes the urgency of addressing educational needs of the EL subgroup and undermines the equity intent of the LCAP. A low bar for Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) for Differentiated Assistance (DA) provides a "pass" and contributes to continuing practices that are not serving ELs well (e.g., lack of ELD services).

**Does not inform planning or drive continuous improvement.**
Not getting info that could be useful. Obscuring EL results has detrimental effects on districts' abilities to address LCAP goals, set growth targets, focus programs and services, and allocate supplemental and concentration funds for ELs.

**Does not support targeting specific subcategories of ELs.**
Overall, EL definitions lump ELs together without attention to the specific subgroups.

**Does not build the capacity of educators.**
The training is limited to the use of the data from the Data Dashboard, which is not transparent and doesn't help educators plan for services.

**Does not ensure implementation of the EL Roadmap.**
Is not aligned to the EL Roadmap principles or goals. Continuous improvement support plans do not necessarily align with the EL Roadmap and are generic for all students.

# ENGAGING ALL LEVELS OF THE SYSTEM (INCLUDING STATE ROLE)

## The System ELs Deserve

**Provides support and guidance.**
Funded EL specialists in CDE and COEs to inform the Systems of Support. Ensures those with EL expertise are engaged in accountability and Differentiated Assistance (DA) teams.

**Incorporates a strong monitoring role for the state.**
Encourages stronger state involvement in monitoring and ensuring access coupled with capacity-building efforts for the districts.

**Empowers COEs to hold districts accountable.**
Holds districts accountable for LCFF, LCAPs that comprehensively address ELs and base, supplemental and concentration funds for comprehensive programs and services for ELs.

**Commits to a robust state accountability role in times of unusual threats to equity and access.**
Provides devices and connectivity for each student, daily inclusion of designated and integrated ELD, live interactive instruction in the program language (in-person and virtual), and bilingual communication by teachers and districts.

**Holds the state accountable for outcomes.**
Sets state goals for overall EL progress, attainment, and equity (closing gaps) with regular and transparent monitoring of progress toward those goals.

## California's Current Accountability System

**Does not provide support and guidance.**
Insufficient EL expertise in CDE and COEs to inform the Systems of Support. (DA) teams do not necessarily include EL expertise.

**Does not incorporate a strong monitoring role for the state.**
Weak and unclear state role. This is a residual from NCLB being too prescriptive, which has led to a fear of a strong state role.

**Does not empower COEs to hold districts accountable.**
Even targeted dollars and services within LCFF/LCAPs aren't being targeted to meeting EL needs—no system that holds accountable for this.

**Does not commit to a robust state accountability role in times of unusual threats to equity and access.**
Response to Covid-19 hasn't been met with focus on threats to EL access and equity—and few ways exist to track, assess, hold accountable.

**Does not hold the state accountable for outcomes.**
Responsibility is deflected to LEAs. No state goals and all goals are set locally.







SECTION 4

# RECOMMENDATIONS

While there is room for improvement in most aspects of our accountability system, there are some high priority gaps that must be addressed immediately. We call upon the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Instruction, and education leaders and policymakers to urgently address the following:

## 1 INCREASE TRANSPARENCY

- Create consistent and transparent definitions of which students are included in the "English learner" category for the various state indicators, and provide clarity in every analysis about which students are included in that definition and the data presented.

- Disaggregate the "Current English Learner" data from the RFEP data in the development of the growth model, incorporating additional information and typologies related to the length of time they have been in U.S. schools, English and home language (when possible) proficiency level, language group, and program placement. All data runs in the development of the Growth Model should be displayed with disaggregated EL typology data.

- Any decisions about new additional measures or redesign of current measures, indicators or performance levels should first be examined by reviewing the impact on student subgroups which would include data runs before final adoption.

## 2 SET HIGH EXPECTATIONS

- Reset the ELPI cut-scores used in constructing the Data Dashboard analysis to reflect high expectations and aspirations for English learners' progress towards English proficiency. Specifically, a reasonable expectation of at least 80% of ELs progressing one level in a year should be set as "high"—signaling to LEAs when continuous improvement must be directed to their EL programs and services to better meet the needs of ELs.

- Provide state guidance on biliteracy trajectories and expected growth toward biliteracy. Incorporate this guidance into accountability for programs and services designed to build biliteracy, and include a measure of responsibility for whether the language of the assessments are matched to the language of instruction in biliteracy programs.

- Set high expectations for biliteracy and ensure assessments to measure these expectations are in place. The California Spanish Assessment (CSA) needs to be enhanced in its structure and content so that it is parallel to the ELA assessment and is able to demonstrate biliteracy for students in dual language programs or those that are already biliterate through other means.

## 3 PROACTIVELY CLOSE GAPS

- Require that LEAs develop differentiated goals and growth targets for subcategories of ELs in their LCAPs.

- Immediately establish a work group to focus on the specific threats to access and equity for English learners in the Covid-19 era, issue guidance on the kind of tracking and expectations for LEA action to address these barriers to access and equity, and engage CDE in monitoring.



SECTION 5

# CONCLUSION

In a state in which nearly two in five students are or have been English learners, and where the more than 1.1 million English learners have consistently faced opportunity gaps and inadequate public services, we need an accountability system that makes their needs and gaps visible. We need a system that strives for continuous improvement in our system to respond. When comparing the current California accountability system against our Framework of what a Coherent and Effective Accountability System for English learners should be, it is clear that the state accountability system falls woefully short. If the system doesn't work adequately for English learners—and it clearly doesn't at this point—it isn't an adequate system for our state. We call upon state leaders to respond to the immediate recommendations in this brief and to engage in serious reflection and consideration of the Framework as work continues to build an accountability system that matches what should be California's commitment to equity and access and the embracing of our English learner students.



# SUPPORT FOR THE ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

CALIFORNIANS TOGETHER
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**Californians Together** along with the undersigned partner organizations, call upon California's leadership—the State Board of Education, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Thurmond, and the legislature—to step up and finally build the accountability system that ELs deserve, and that will serve our state's goals of equity and quality education for all.

ADVANCEMENT PROJECT CALIFORNIA

Alliance for A Better Community

AMAE
ASSOCIATION OF MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS

Two-Way & Dual Language Education
ATDLE

cabe
California Association for Bilingual Education

CABE PAC
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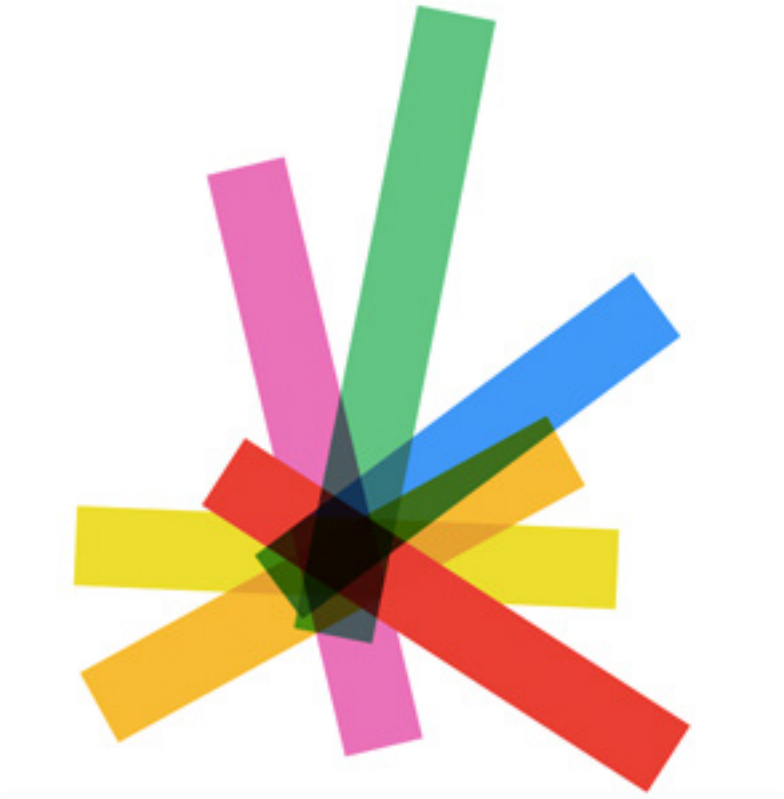









This is a partial list of organizations who signed on at the time of printing.
For a complete list and access to resources for sharing or signing on to the Accountability Framework, please visit **caltog.co/accountability**



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