Colorado Educational Accountability

A Brief Overview for Boards of Education



Effective Board governance results from a clear understanding of the role of the Board of Education relative to the work of the district and school administration teams. The most effective boards focus on connecting with stakeholders, developing policy, establishing district priorities and monitoring progress in achieving those outcomes. In addition, the board is responsible for the evaluation of its sole employee, the district superintendent. It has been shown that the more adept Boards of Education are in engaging in these activities, the better for students' academic achievement[1].

Establishing, monitoring, and achieving community defined outcomes is considered one of the most important functions of a school board. In effect, desired outcomes of the district are determined by meaningfully engaging with stakeholders, considering state and federal expectations, and then codifying in policy and/or strategic priorities. This provides the necessary parameters for district leadership to implement operations. In turn, the Board of Education monitors these outcomes along with the success of the district in achieving the community's defined needs.

This resource provides a basic resource that explains Colorado educational accountability, at a conceptual level, while providing additional resources to facilitate a deeper dive into areas of interest by board members. The focus is on the state system with expectations which focus on the mastery of state standards, including English language arts, math, and science. The board, district leadership and community will need to decide how local values are integrated and even how to raise the bar higher than state and federal expectations as desired.

Purpose of the Education Accountability System

Colorado's education accountability system is based on the belief that every student should receive a quality education and graduate prepared for higher education or the workforce. Successful schools and districts are recognized and serve as models, while those that are struggling receive support and have additional requirements. As required by state and federal laws, Colorado evaluates school and district systems based on their overall student performance, graduation rates and performance of historically underserved students. Struggling schools and districts are offered a variety of customized support and resources to meet their unique context and needs. The unified improvement plan (UIP) provides a process that combines all requirements into one plan and includes staff and family input to shape improvement efforts.

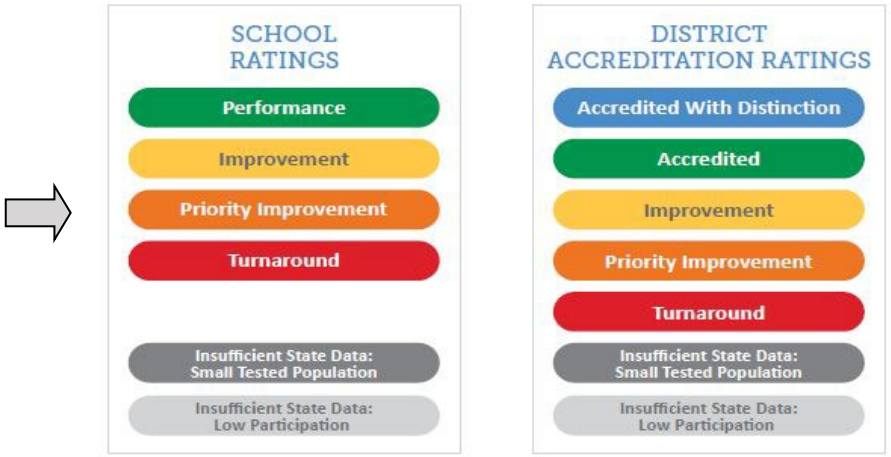
[1] https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608840.pdf

Performance Framework Ratings

Since 2010, the cornerstone of the Colorado Educational Accountability system has been the school and district performance framework reports. These reports are produced annually for all public schools in the state. In these reports, schools and districts receive a rating based on their overall performance, which includes the three categories (i.e., Academic Achievement, Academic Growth and Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness).

Performance Indicators:

- **Academic Achievement** – Average scores on state assessments for all students as well as specific groups of students
- **Academic Growth** – Progress students make in their achievement on assessments from one year to the next compared to their academic peers.
- **Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness** – Graduation rates, dropout rates, average scores on the SAT college entrance exam and matriculation into college and other postsecondary options.



Note. The ratings are presented from highest (green) to lowest (red). The ratings in grey indicate an insufficient amount of available data to calculate an overall rating.

The assigned rating is then used to identify districts and schools for recognition, support, and/or intervention based on statutory requirements. Additionally, the school identification and related data may be used by local Boards of Education as a tool to guide governance responsibilities.

Using Accountability Data & Framework Reports in Governance

Local boards may choose to use the state accountability system to monitor district success and inform governance priorities. This may be helpful when engaging in adopting a budget, evaluating a superintendent, and/or taking early action to help facilitate improved academic outcomes at the district or school level. When used effectively by local boards, the accountability system should serve as a tool to direct future action. In contrast, the application of accountability results in a reactive and/or punitive fashion may serve to undermine improvement efforts. Boards are encouraged to examine accountability ratings and state and local data holistically with the support of district leadership to determine best actions to be taken (e.g., adopting, revising, and/or removing policies that will help to better serve students).

The table below illustrates some possible areas in which education accountability results may intersect with board governance practices. Specifically, possible use of accountability data, examples and rationale are presented.

[1] https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608840.pdf

Applications of Accountability Data to Support Effective Board Governance

Use	Example	Rationale
Accountability Data/Results to Support Community Engagement	School District Alpha uses accountability results as a discussion for stakeholder engagement. This engagement supports the board in better understanding community values, needs and expectations concerning student performance.	A primary responsibility of board members is to communicate with stakeholders the performance of the schools and related actions occurring to achieve identified goals. Accountability results provide one avenue to facilitate these conversations.
Accountability Results as a District Priority (Outcome)	School District Beta incorporates performance expectations into outcomes policies and/or strategic priorities to guide work.	Explicit expectations provide clear indicators of district success and allow for monitoring of improvement over time. It also indicates expectations to district staff and helps guide their work.
Accountability Results as a Superintendent Performance Measure	School District Gamma uses accountability data as one of multiple measures of district academic success to gauge Superintendent effectiveness.	When accountability results are incorporated into district priorities or policy, they allow for an objective and transparent measure of Superintendent performance over time.
Accountability Results to facilitate early Action	School District Delta consults accountability results to identify persistent low performance to initiate more extensive structural changes to support improved student outcomes.	Accountability data provides objective information related to district performance on academic outcomes. This can focus efforts to select evidence-based state or local interventions to make more profound and urgent changes when necessary.
Accountability Results to inform Resource Allocations	School District Omega uses accountability results, along with other data, to inform fiscal expenditures and resources (e.g., staffing, curriculum, professional development).	Identified gaps in performance can be used to identify possible areas for resource (re)allocation. The data can also be helpful for monitoring progress.

[1] https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608840.pdf

Additional Colorado Educational Accountability System Resources

The Colorado Department of Education offers a variety of resources and training to education stakeholders. A number of those resources may be helpful to school board members as they work to develop their understanding of the Colorado Educational Accountability System. Some key resources include:

- Colorado's system for identifying schools for support and improvement at: https://ed.cde.state.co.us/accountability/stateaccountability.
- Schools and districts honored for outstanding performance at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeawards/awards.
- Support available for low-performing schools and districts at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/performance.
- Details about school and district performance, also called school and district performance frameworks at: https://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview/explore/welcome/.

Background to CDE Board of Education Supports: CDE support, grounded in C.R.S. 22-11-208, is non-directive and non-partisan, focusing on best practices and resources. CDE does not prescribe governance approaches; these decisions remain with local boards. Boards should consult legal counsel for specific guidance. Related resources are available at: https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdeedserv/board-of-education-supports

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