



Ohio Senate Education Committee

Public Hearing on SB 316: Standards for Drop-out Recovery Schools

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Summary of Testimony given by the Colorado League of Charter Schools

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Background

The Colorado League of Charter Schools was the lead author of the statute, in 2001, to 1) define schools that deserved special consideration regarding their performance standards and 2) help develop the rules for those alternative performance standards. A number of student characteristics were used to define students as being at high risk of school failure and a school that serves 95% of these high-risk students is designated as an Alternative Education Campus, or AEC. While Colorado's AECs include more than drop-out recovery schools, drop-out recovery schools are included in the set of AECs. Therefore, we believe that the alternative accountability system developed in Colorado can provide Ohio with a framework for creating a similar system.

It should be noted that in Colorado only about a third of all AECs are charter schools and the same rules apply to all AECs, charter or no.

Between 2001 and 2009, AECs were waived from receiving a school rating for accountability purposes. However, the enactment of Colorado's SB 161 now mandates all public schools receive a rating and specifically calls out the mandate to develop a method by which to hold AECs accountable

"...the state board shall promulgate rules establishing objective, measurable criteria that the department shall apply in recommending to the state board that an alternative education campus implement a performance, improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan or that an alternative education campus shall be subject to restructuring. The state board, in adopting the criteria for evaluating the performance of an alternative education campus, and the department, in applying the criteria, shall take into account the unique purposes of the campuses and the unique circumstances of and challenges posed by the students enrolled in the campuses." (C.R.S. 22-11-210 (1)(b)) emphasis added.

Full language for C.R.S. 22-11-210 and the corresponding AEC rating rules are attached for your convenience (see attachments 1 and 2).

Why Alternative Accountability Systems are needed

Alternative accountability systems are needed to ensure that all students have access to the best option for their situation. Waiving alternative campuses from accountability does not allow us to restructure or close schools that may actually be harming students, but accountability for these schools needs to recognize that alternative education campuses do serve students that are far off track and at very high risk of dropping out, if they have not done so already. These students require more time and more intensive intervention than other students to get to graduation, and the schools that serve these students need to be given the time, space, and resources to get them there. Alternative accountability systems grant schools that time and space, while ensuring that students are being served well.

The use of two systems of accountability, one for traditional schools and one for drop-out recovery schools, validates the entire educational accountability sector. Alternative education campuses tend to dominate the list of schools at the bottom of the performance spectrum—particularly when the list is established using proficiency rates on statewide assessments. By creating appropriate systems of accountability for AECs we allow other schools, schools harming more traditional students, to fall to the bottom too. In essence, alternative accountability allows us to identify the bad apples in both types of schools with greater accuracy—whereby validating educational accountability altogether.

Ideal Components of an Alternative Accountability System

1. Multiple measures including local academic, behavioral mission critical and qualitative measures of student growth and achievement.
2. Weighting of measures focused centrally on growth and readiness for the next stage—most often college and career but could also be readiness for going on to, or reintegration into, high school in some cases.
3. Typical measures of achievement (i.e., proficiency rates) provided little weight in the overall rating.
4. All benchmarks and cut-points set by AEC normative data, which are re-evaluated on a periodic basis (e.g., every 2 or 3 years)
5. Flexibility in the system for schools with different missions or student populations to select the measures that show the schools' success at meeting their mission and serving the population well.

Policy and infrastructure needs to establish an ideal system of alternative accountability

1. Policy for determining which schools qualify as alternative education campuses
2. Policies outlining the structure and function of an alternative accountability system
3. Infrastructure allowing for the collection and tracking of data at the school, district/authorizer, and state levels.

4. Analysis of statewide performance of students attending AECs for characteristics upon entry, including: age, grade, accumulated credits, historical state assessment scores, historical growth, grade level skills, prior number of school attended, and drop out history.

5. Analysis of AEC's current school-level performance on statewide and local measures, including the percentage of students from each school that are included in each of those measures as well as the percentage of students in each grade.

Colorado's Alternative Framework

In 2009, with the passing of SB 161 The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) worked with the Colorado League of Charter Schools (the League) and the Colorado Coalition of Alternative Education Campuses (CCAEC) to develop their statewide alternative school performance framework. CDE asked the two organizations to work with schools to come up with a proposal for how AECs should be held accountable, which they did. CDE reviewed the framework and continued the research and development effort—contracting with the League to complete the effort. The resulting framework (summarized below) is the product of two years of research and development and included input from AEC leaders and several education reform organizations across the state. The framework was adopted by the State Board of Education in May of 2011 and implemented the following August (see attachment 3 for a mock-up of the scoring rubric).

- **Achievement (15%)**
 - Pct Proficient in math, reading, & writing (required)
 - Pct scoring at grade level on local, standardized assessment (optional)
- **Growth (35%)**
 - Median Growth Percentiles in math, reading, & writing (required)
 - Pct meeting growth targets on local, standardized assessment (optional)
- **Post-Secondary & Workforce Readiness (35%)**
 - Completion rates, drop-out rates, average COACT score (required)
 - Course completion, post-secondary success rate, on-track to graduate (optional)
- **Student Engagement (15%)**
 - Average daily attendance & truancy rate (required)
 - Re-engagement, continuous enrollment, socio-emotional or psychological adjustment (optional)

No one agrees that the system is perfect. There is always room for improvement but the system does contain all of the components of an ideal alternative accountability system:

-Multiple measures under each indicator

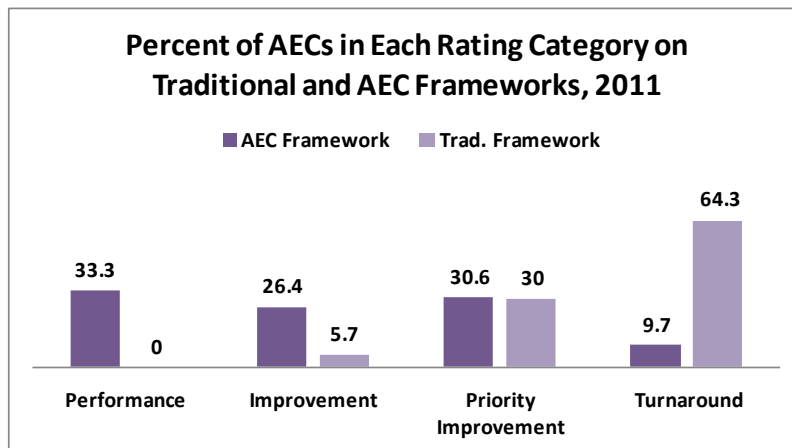
-Weighted most heavily on student growth and readiness, while achievement carries little weight

-Allows schools, together with their district or authorizer, to select optional measures that suit their school's mission and population served

-All cut-points for the optional measures were set using ranked distribution of the alternative schools only

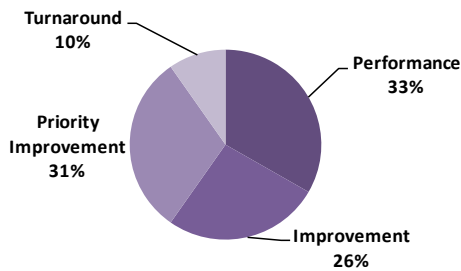
Benefits of the implementation of an alternative accountability system seen thus far:

- Increased the communication and collaboration between districts/authorizers and these schools
- Created a wide distribution of performance across the state’s AECs,

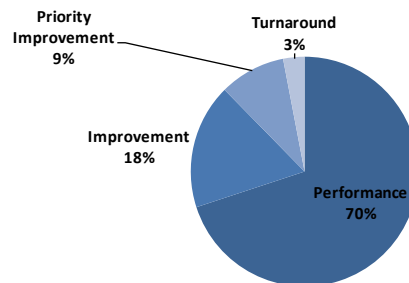


- Though the framework is more rigorous than the traditional framework, with a higher percentage of AECs receiving a turnaround rating than traditional schools and a lower percentage of AECs receiving the highest rating.

Percent AECs in Each Category using the 2011 AEC Framework



Percent of Traditional Schools in Each Category using the 2011 Traditional Framework



- Schools feel that the framework is fairer than being compared to traditional schools and like that the data used is meaningful to the work they do with their students and for their school improvement efforts—rather than just being a useless requirement.

- One authorizer successfully won an appeal to the state board of education to close a chronically low performing AEC using this framework.

Voiced Criticisms

- While the cut-points were set using the rank percentile method, the percentiles chosen were somewhat arbitrary in nature. Practitioners find them too high in some instances, while ed reform think tanks with the college for all mindset believe the “standards” are too low.
- Colorado’s AECs do more than credit and drop-out recovery. Some AECs target populations like pregnant and parenting teens, students with severe emotional or psychological disabilities, or students that want to get out of a gang. These schools that specialize still feel that the comparison group (all AECs) is not a true apple to apple comparison.

One Negative Outcome

- We have reports of several districts closing district run AECs because they are now “too much paper work.”