Colorado

★★★☆

THREE STARS OUT OF FOUR

Colorado's high school accountability system emphasizes the growth and achievement of all students. Rewarding schools where students earn college credit via AP, IB, or dual enrollment programs would further improve the system.

The Purpose of This Analysis

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than did its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Consequently, states now have an opportunity to design school rating systems that improve upon the NCLB model, especially when it comes to high achievers.

NCLB meant well (as did many state accountability systems that preceded it), but it had a pernicious flaw: it strongly incentivized schools to focus exclusively on low-performing students' "proficiency" and high school graduation rates, ignoring the educational needs of high achievers, who were likely to pass state reading and math tests and earn a diploma regardless of what happened in the classroom. This may be why the United States has seen significant achievement growth and much higher graduation rates for its lowest-performing students over the last twenty years but smaller gains for its top students.

Starting in 2011, former secretary of education Arne Duncan offered waivers to states that wanted the flexibility to redesign their accountability systems. In particular, states were allowed to incorporate the use of real student growth measures into their school determinations. This was a much fairer way of evaluating schools' impact on student achievement than looking only at proficiency rates, which are strongly correlated with student demographics, family circumstance, and prior achievement. And, just as significantly, well-designed growth measures can eliminate the temptation for schools to ignore their high achievers.

In 2015, Congress replaced NCLB and its waivers with the ESSA, which maintains NCLB's requirement that states assess students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school. Under ESSA, states must now use four types of indicators to rate high schools: academic achievement (which can include student growth); graduation rates; growth toward English proficiency for English language learners; and at least one other valid, reliable indicator of school quality or student success. Furthermore, each of the academic indicators (1–3) must carry "substantial" weight and, in the aggregate, must count "much more" than the fourth.

To help states make the most of the ESSA opportunity, we have reviewed how well their present, intended, or most recently employed accountability systems serve high achievers. If a state's system doesn't do a satisfactory job of incentivizing schools to focus on high achievers, we believe that strengthens the case for changing it materially.

States may think we're being premature in evaluating their systems during this time of massive change. Please understand that our primary objective is to identify the design features of an accountability system that works for all students—which we hope will become the prevailing model now that ESEA is reauthorized and states' testing regimes are becoming stable once again.

Here we examine Colorado's plan for rating high school performance under ESSA. We do not examine the quality of the state's standards, tests, or sanctions for low performance.

Part I of this report, released in August 2016, examined Colorado's rating systems for elementary and middle schools.[1]

HOW STATES CAN PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS IN THEIR HIGH SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

In our view, states can and should take four steps to ensure that the needs of high achievers are prioritized under ESSA.

1. **For the first academic indicator required by ESSA (academic achievement), give high schools incentives for getting more students to an advanced level.** Under ESSA, states will continue to track the percentage of students who attain proficiency on state tests. They should also give high schools incentives for getting students to an advanced level (such as level four on Smarter Balanced or level five on PARCC). For example, they might create an achievement index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to a basic level, full credit for getting students to a proficient level, and additional credit for getting students to an advanced level. (It's not entirely clear from the Department of Education's proposed regulations whether this will be allowed, though we don't see anything in the law prohibiting it.)

2. **Use the flexibility provided by ESSA to rate high schools using a true growth model—that is, one that includes the progress of individual students at all achievement levels and not just those who are low-performing or below the "proficient" line.** Regrettably, some states still don't consider individual student growth, don't use it at the high school level, or use a growth-to-proficiency system that continues to encourage schools to ignore the needs of students above (or far above) the proficient level. Using true growth models— such as those that estimate a school's value added or median growth percentile— is preferable.

3. **When determining summative high school ratings, make growth—across the achievement spectrum— count at least as much as achievement.** The Department of Education's proposed regulations under ESSA require states to combine multiple factors into summative school ratings, probably through an index. Each of the first three indicators (achievement, graduation rate, and progress toward English proficiency) must carry "substantial" weight. In our view, states should (and, under ESSA, are free to) make growth count at least as much as achievement does. Otherwise, schools will continue to face an incentive to ignore their high performers. (States that don't yet roll their indicators up to a summative rating for the school receive a "not applicable" designation here.)

4. **Include an indicator that gives high schools an incentive to help able students earn college credit before they graduate.** One "indicator of school quality or student success" should be the percentage of students who earn college credit via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs, which are among the best ways to challenge high performers. It's important that states focus on actual attainment of college credit or the equivalent, not just participation in these programs, lest the incentives encourage the wrong behavior by schools: shoving students into AP, IB, and/or dual enrollment even if they are not prepared to succeed, leading to frustration on their part and potentially harming the experience of their higher-achieving peers. Let us also acknowledge the questionable value of many of today's dual-enrollment programs. Students are often taught not by college professors but by high school teachers, and the "college credit" earned doesn't always transfer to bona fide colleges. States should therefore encourage more high schools to offer AP and IB courses because those come with external exams, which ensure program quality and rigor.

DOES COLORADO'S HIGH SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS?

INDICATOR	RATINGS	NOTES
1. Does the state rate high schools' academic achievement using a model that gives additional credit for students achieving at an advanced level?	★	Colorado will base its new academic achievement indicator on a school's average scale score, thereby rewarding advanced achievement. (See Exhibit A.)
2. Does the state rate high schools' growth using a model that includes the progress of all individual students, not just those below the "proficient" line?	★	Colorado will use a student growth percentile model. (See Exhibit A.) A student growth percentile model will compare students to peers with similar achievement in the previous school year by ranking them based on their year-to-year growth.
3. When calculating summative high school ratings, does the state assign at least as much weight to "growth for all students" as it does to achievement?	★	At the high school level, "growth for all students" will count for 40 percent of summative school ratings, while achievement will count for 30 percent. (See Exhibit A.)
4. Does the state rate high schools' success in helping students earn college credit before graduating via AP, IB, and/or dual-enrollment programs?	☆	Colorado will not rate high schools' success in helping students earn college credit before graduating. (See Exhibit A.)

EXHIBIT A[2]

Scoring Guide for 2016 District/School Performance Frameworks

Performance Indicator	Measure/Metric	Rating	Point Value		
Academic Achievement	*The district or school's mean scale score was (2016 baseline): see table below for actual values*		All Students	Each Disaggregated Group	
	• at or above the 85th percentile of all schools in 2016	Exceeds	8	1.00	
	• below the 85th percentile but at or above the 50th percentile	Meets	6	0.75	
	• below the 50th percentile but at or above the 15th percentile	Approaching	4	0.50	
	• below the 15th percentile of all schools in 2016	Does Not Meet	2	0.25	
	Students Previously Identified for a READ Plan (bonus point)				
	• Mean scale score at or above 725 (CMAS PARCC Level 3 cut)		1 bonus point		
Academic Growth	*Median Growth Percentile was:*		All Students	Disaggregated Group	English Language Proficiency
	• at or above 65	Exceeds	8	1.00	4
	• below 65 but at or above 50	Meets	6	0.75	3
	• below 50 but at or above 35	Approaching	4	0.50	2
	• below 35	Does Not Meet	2	0.25	1
Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness	*Dropout Rate: The district or school dropout rate was (of all schools in 2015):*				
	• at or below 0.5%	Exceeds	4		
	• at or below 2.0% but above 0.5%	Meets	3		
	• at or below 5.0% but above 2.0%	Approaching	2		
	• above 5.0%	Does Not Meet	1		
	Average Colorado ACT Composite score was (using 2010 cut-scores):				
	• at or above 22.0	Exceeds	4		
	• at or above 20.0 but below 22.0	Meets	3		
	• at or above 17.0 but below 20.0	Approaching	2		
	• below 17.0	Does Not Meet	1		
	Matriculation Rate (of all schools in 2015):				
	• at or above the 85th percentile (73.1%)	Exceeds	2.0		
	• below the 85th percentile (73.1%) but at or above the 50th	Meets	1.5		
	• below the 50th percentile (59.3%) but at or above the 15th	Approaching	1.0		
	• below the 15th percentile (41.1%)	Does Not Meet	0.5		
	Graduation Rate and Disaggregated Graduation Rate (Best of 4-, 5-, 6-, or 7-year):		All Students	Each Disaggregated Group	
	• at or above 95.0%	Exceeds	4	1.00	
	• at or above 85.0% but below 95.0%	Meets	3	0.75	
	• at or above 75.0% but below 85.0%	Approaching	2	0.50	
	• below 75.0%	Does Not Meet	1	0.25	

Academic Achievement: Mean Scale Score by Percentile Cut-Points

The Academic Achievement Indicator reflects achievement as measured by the mean scale score on Colorado's standardized assessments. The presented targets for the achievement indicators have been established utilizing 2016 school baseline CMAS Science, CMAS PARCC and DLM data.

Mean Scale Score by Percentile Cut-Points - 1-year (2016 school baseline)

Percentile	English Language Arts				Mathematics				Science			
	Elem	Middle	High	All	Elem	Middle	High	All	Elem	Middle	High	All
15th percentile	722.3	724.1	724.6	723.1	719.1	716.5	717.3	718.2	531.9	527.7	564.4	538.7
50th percentile	739.5	740.1	739.6	739.6	734.3	731.2	729.8	732.9	601.7	591.4	609.2	600.2
85th percentile	755.9	757.3	753.3	754.9	751.9	746.2	746.0	749.3	655.9	643.3	651.3	652.7

Cut-Points for Each Performance Indicator

	Cut-Point: The district or school earned...of the points eligible.	
Achievement; Growth; Postsecondary Readiness	• at or above 87.5%	Exceeds
	• at or above 62.5% - below 87.5%	Meets
	• at or above 37.5% - below 62.5%	Approaching
	• below 37.5%	Does Not Meet

Total Possible Points by Indicator

Indicator	Total Possible Points per EMH Level	Elementary/Middle	High/District
Achievement	36 total points (8 for each subject for all students and 4 for each subject by disaggregated groups)	40%	30%
Growth	28 total points (8 for each subject for all students and 4 for each subject by disaggregated groups) and 4 for English language proficiency	60%	40%
Postsecondary Readiness	18 total points (4 for each sub-indicator except 8 for graduation, and 2 for matriculation)	not applicable	30%

Cut-Points for Plan/Category Type Assignment

	District	School	Plan Type/Category Type
Total Framework Points	%	not applicable	Accredited w/Distinction (District only)
	%	%	Accredited (District) or Performance Plan (School)
	%	%	Accredited w/Improvement Plan (District) or Improvement Plan (School)
	%		Accr. w/Priority Improvement Plan (District) or Priority Improvement (School)
	%	%	Accredited w/Turnaround Plan (District) or Turnaround Plan (School)

Version and Corresponding Data Utilized in Framework

Version & Included Data	Version A	Default one year calculations reported by individual EMH levels
	Version B	One year achievement and growth calculations combined across EMH levels with one year PWR calculations
	Version C	One year achievement and growth calculations reported by individual EMH levels with three year PWR calculations
	Version D	One year achievement and growth calculations combined across EMH levels with three year PWR calculations

September 30, 2016

ENDNOTES

1.   Michael J. Petrilli, et al., *High Stakes for High Achievers: State Accountability in the Age of ESSA*, pages 51–55, (District of Columbia: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016), https://edexcellence.net/publications/high-stakes-for-high-achievers.

2.   "Scoring Guide for 2016 District/School Performance Frameworks," Colorado Department of Education, accessed October 11, 2016, http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/2016_framework_scoring_guide.