Accountability System Development for 2013 and Beyond
Accountability Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC)

System Safeguards

Introduction

System safeguards have been a feature of both the state and federal accountability systems. Findings from both components of the PBM system (the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System [PBMAS] and the PBM Data Validation System) have been incorporated into state and federal accountability appeal decisions made after the ratings release. For example, leaver data quality was a consideration in evaluating dropout rate and completion rate appeals for campuses as well as districts. In addition, one Data Validation indicator was included in the state accountability ratings evaluation. In order to receive a rating of *Exemplary* or *Recognized*, districts evaluated under standard accountability procedures could not exceed accountability targets for underreported students. However, persistently poor performance on the PBMAS indicators or Data Validation indicators did not directly affect state accountability ratings.

Federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) used another approach to integrating system safeguards for assessment results, and applied the safeguards equally to campuses and districts. The AYP participation rate indicators ensure that performance rates are based on performance of at least 95 percent of students. In addition, the assessment performance rates limit use of proficient results from modified and alternate assessments. The caps ensure that successful performance is based on results from the modified and alternate assessments for no more than three percent of students.

As the index framework is developed, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will determine how to incorporate system safeguards. The priority will be to ensure the validity and fairness of the indicators and the resulting accountability ratings in a way that is not punitive to most districts and campuses that follow assessment program guidelines for testing and submit accurate leaver data.

Indicators

The following are indicators that are proposed for use as safeguards in the accountability system.

1. Participation Rates – The student assessment program is designed to test all students enrolled in Texas public schools, and participation rates statewide are very high. Although participation rates do not measure performance directly, high participation rates are essential to the validity of an accountability system based on test performance.

   Reading/English language arts and mathematics participation rates are indicators in the federal AYP ratings. All Students and each student group that meets minimum size criteria must meet a participation rate target of 95 percent to meet AYP for the subject. In 2012 only 46 campuses failed to meet the 95 percent standard and only nine campuses missed AYP due participation rate alone.

   In 2010-2011, almost 99 percent of all students statewide were tested. The only student groups with participation rates below 95 percent in 2010-2011 were English language learners, where 6.9 percent of students were exempt from testing that year due to limited English proficiency,

and Asian, where 4.3 percent of students were exempt from testing due to limited English proficiency. Under the STAAR assessment program, all English language learners will be tested.

2. STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate Results – Similar to participation rates, consistent use across districts of modified and alternate assessments for students receiving special education services is essential to the validity of the test performance indicators. District level caps on use of satisfactory performance results from STAAR M and STAAR Alt in the accountability indicators, such as those used for AYP, maintain the integrity of local decision-making regarding appropriate assessment of special education students while limiting any potential advantage of overuse.

3. Leaver Data Quality – Accuracy of the leaver data reflects on the fairness of the ratings assigned to districts and campuses. The longitudinal high school graduation rates require tracking a cohort of students over a number of years, from the time they enter Grade 9 until after their anticipated graduation date. For the class of 2011 cohort, 1,061 students (0.3%) could not be tracked because of identification errors. In addition, 4,585 students (1.2%) from this cohort were underreported by districts. Although most districts have very low rates for identification errors and underreported students, for a few these errors represent a significant percentage of students in the cohort. Also, data errors and underreported students are higher for some student groups. The leaver data quality indicator used in the former state accountability system was an annual measure. TEA is researching the use of annual and longitudinal data quality indicators at the district, campus, and student group levels.

4. Grade 7-8 Annual Dropout Rate – The state average annual dropout rate for Grades 7-8 was 0.2 in 2010-2011, a decrease from 0.4 percent in 2005-2006 when the national dropout definition was adopted. About 80 percent of districts and 73 percent of campuses with students in Grade 7-8 had no Grade 7-8 dropouts in 2009-2010. Although Grade 7-8 annual dropout rates are low statewide, this can be attributed in part to including this indicator in the state accountability system, and there are still performance gaps between student groups. However, because the rates are so low, a small number of misreported students can result in a relatively high dropout rate. For this reason, the ATAC Performance Index Workgroup recommended using the Grade 7-8 annual dropout rate for monitoring rather than evaluating performance.

Approaches to Applying Safeguards

Following are brief descriptions of different approaches to applying safeguard indicators in the performance index framework.

- Link PBM and state accountability ratings – Use the PBMAS System and PBM Data Validation System as a safeguard to the state accountability system through a more direct link between poor performance in the PBM systems and state accountability ratings.
- Evaluate outside the index structure – Failure to meet state accountability targets on safeguard indicators leads to assignment of the lowest rating label and/or state monitoring or interventions.
- Lower accountability rating – Failure to meet state accountability targets on safeguard indicators results in lowering the accountability rating that would otherwise be assigned based on performance.

- Lower index performance group assignment – Failure to meet state accountability targets on safeguard indicators results in lowering the performance group assignment for any index to which the safeguard is applied. In the proposed structure for the rating system, a campus assigned to the third performance group based on index score would be lowered to the second performance group for failure to meet safeguard standards, for example. Since every index includes assessment results, the participation rate might apply to all four indexes. The leaver data quality and Grade 7-8 annual dropout rate indicators would apply to Index 4, and to Index 2 (progress) and Index 3 (closing performance gaps) if they include graduation rates and dropout rates.
- Reduce index score – Failure to meet state accountability targets on safeguard indicators subtracts points from the index score for any index to which the safeguard is applied. We currently assume the index score will range from 0 to 100 for each index. If the participation rate is evaluated separately by subject for All Students and for each race/ethnicity student group, there are a maximum of 40 possible targets campuses and districts must meet. (Few will meet the minimum size criteria on all rates.) One point (or two or five) would be subtracted from the index score for every rate that does not meet the target.
- Discount performance rates – Failure to meet state accountability targets on safeguard indicators results in removing credit for performance of those students from the indicators to which the safeguard applies. If the district/campus does not meet the participation rate target for Asian students in science, for example, the Asian students who meet the performance or progress standard on a science test would not be added to the numerator of the performance or progress rates. Participation rates would apply to any assessment indicator. Data processing constraints may make it prohibitive to use this approach for leaver data quality and Grade 7-8 annual dropout rates.
- Indicator definitions – For some indicators the safeguard can be built into the indicator definition, reducing performance rates accordingly. Applying caps to use of modified and alternate assessment results is an example of this approach.

Performance Index Framework Safeguards

In a performance index framework, the construction of the index score allows stronger performance in one area (subject, student group, or performance level) to compensate to some extent for weaker performance in other areas. Ratings are assigned based on overall campus or district performance regardless of how poorly a campus or district performs in a particular area. Following are some approaches to addressing this inherent weakness of the performance index framework.

- Design decisions can address the compensatory nature of the performance index framework. Some of the design decisions in the proposed index framework address the compensatory nature of the performance index.
    - Including STAAR Level II performance indicators and STAAR Level III performance indicators in different indexes means that stronger performance at one performance level cannot compensate for weaker performance at the other performance level.
    - Evaluating race/ethnicity student group STAAR progress in Index 2 and STAAR Level III performance and graduation rates in Index 4, along with the focus on performance of students who failed in the prior year in Index 3, makes it more difficult for campuses and districts to ignore performance of a low-performing student group.

- Interventions can focus on specific areas of weak performance. Reporting of performance by student group, performance level, subject, and grade allow interventions to be tailored to the areas most in need of improvement.
- Performance floors can be added for any indicator where very low performance is not sufficiently addressed across the indexes.