

Accountability System Development for 2013
Joint Meeting of the Accountability Policy Advisory Committee (APAC)
and the Accountability Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC)
March 5, 2012
Meeting Outcomes

Meeting Objectives

The objective for the first meeting of the Accountability Policy Advisory Committee (APAC) and the Accountability Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) was threefold: to provide orientation to the 56 joint members; to establish goals and guiding principles for the new accountability system; and, to determine committee member recommendations for the overall system framework design.

Goals and Guiding Principles

A review of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) draft of goals and guiding principles resulted in discussion of three primary concerns for the new system—that the system be understandable; that the meaning of postsecondary readiness be clear; and, that the system be designed to avoid unintended consequences.

The term postsecondary readiness is defined to mean that Texas public high school graduates have the skills necessary to be successful in college or in the workforce. Though the goals endorsed by the advisory committee members focus on evaluating performance at the Advanced Academic level, the system should motivate academic improvement for students both at the higher and minimum performance levels.

The system should also be designed to make postsecondary readiness goals relevant for elementary and middle schools.

Overall Framework

Two types of system frameworks meet the accountability requirements in statute – Separate Indicators and Performance Index. A Separate Indicators framework requires districts and campuses to meet accountability targets on each performance measure. This framework clearly identifies the lowest-performing subject, student group, or other indicator. The former state and federal accountability systems were based on a Separate Indicators framework. However, while performance was evaluated separately for each subject and student group, the former systems were modified Separate Indicators systems because they included other features that provided campuses and districts with alternatives to meeting absolute targets.

With a Performance Index framework each measure contributes points to an index score. Districts and campuses are required to meet one accountability target on the total index score. Performance on all measures is included, but stronger performance in some areas can compensate for weaker performance in other areas. With a Performance Index, the resulting rating reflects overall performance rather than the weakest areas. Many variations are possible such as weighting the measures to reflect state goals. Combining performance into an index would be a new model for Texas.

Among the members of both advisory committees (ATAC and APAC) there was general favor for a Performance Index system. Members also agreed with using weights within the index to place appropriate emphasis on certain measures to reflect state goals. However, discussion of other ways of separating indexes such as by school type or major indicator (assessment versus graduation) demonstrated that several approaches to index construction would not require emphasizing one over the other.

Rationale for Performance Index System Preferences

A Performance Index system is preferred because its features address some of the biggest concerns with a Separate Indicator system. For example, there is concern with the single lowest performing measure

determining the rating label. With an index, any number of indicators and student groups can be added without creating additional state targets for campuses and districts to meet.

The overall 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. This compensatory nature of an index system can also be viewed as its greatest weakness. Without safeguards, unacceptable performance of one student group, one subject, or one performance level could be masked by higher performance in other areas.

Members agreed that safeguards should be applied including the use of minimum performance floors, applying different values to different measures within the index (weights), and/or including student progress measures. These safeguards can be used alone or in combination with one another. The use of separate indexes that evaluate performance, progress, post-secondary success, and/or closing achievement gaps can also address concerns about the compensatory nature of a single index. Further, well-designed and understandable reporting tools help mitigate concerns with the potential of the index masking problem areas (i.e., student group performance).

Performance index systems can also be combined with the evaluation of other stand-alone indicators that are outside the index. Members had mixed reactions to this hybrid approach of index and separate indicators.

Next Steps

A Performance Index working group was formed as a subcommittee of the full ATAC. This group will review the use of performance index systems in other states and will address options for specific details of an index system in Texas. The workgroup will report back to the full committee on May 30, 2012.

Issues for the Performance Index workgroup to consider include how many indexes should be in the system and which indicators should be in each index. Details about the definition or calculation of the component indicators that make up the index/indexes are not part of the charge for this workgroup. Also, how performance on the index or indexes will be evaluated to determine an accountability rating and whether any additional indicators (beyond those that are required) that may be included in the index/indexes will not be addressed. All these issues will be resolved as separate topics in the accountability development calendar.