

The Future of **California's** School Accountability System



With technical system design support from the Center for American Progress

Center for American Progress





Executive Summary

California's new school rating system, as designed by the State Board of Education, has taken important steps forward for California schools. The new system centers on six state indicators, increases the state's focus on equity, and includes valuable measures of both academics and a school's learning environment. However, without some sort of overall quality rating for all schools, this system will remain incomplete, and fail to provide all families, educators, and other stakeholders with the information they need to engage in school improvement efforts. Overall school quality ratings provide several critical benefits - enabling families to navigate their public school options, helping all families find value from the system, recognizing excellence and helping to catalyze improvement efforts, and enabling future policymakers to target programs and funding towards the schools that need them most based on a holistic assessment of school quality. Crucially, an overall school quality rating can be easily added to the state's existing system by building off the work that has already been completed - it would not override or eliminate any of the progress made by the State Board of Education.

This report outlines several different methods by which this could be accomplished - creating either three or five summative classifications of school quality that could be assigned to every school annually. This summative school quality rating would sit side-by-side on the same page with the full dashboard currently being completed by the State Board of Education so that all families have access to both the comprehensive data dashboard and the guidance provided by a summative rating. Furthermore, by building off the current system and using a small number of broad summative classifications, this particular approach addresses many of the critiques offered against other types of school quality ratings that compare every school against one another or give every school a single number like California's old Academic Performance Index (API) system. This report includes perspectives from both families and educators on the value of this "third way" approach to evaluating school quality in California.

Why are **School Ratings** Important?

In almost all aspects of our society, there are shortcuts that help people to quickly get a high-level summary of an issue. Every email has a subject line to go along with the body; every restaurant in most counties has an A-F grade for food safety posted on the front window; every student gets a GPA summarizing their overall academic performance. In each case, this headline information is not a substitute for a more robust set of information, but provides important additional guidance to users.

Most school quality rating systems follow this format, for good reason. Summative school quality ratings serve several important roles for families, educators, and members of the public:



Enable school comparisons

Families in many districts throughout California often have a plethora of public school options to choose from, including magnet schools, charter schools, and traditional district schools. Families in Los Angeles, for example, receive a magnet school handbook with over 200 options every year. For any family that is trying to sort through more than a very small number of options, it is tremendously valuable to have an overall school quality rating as a shortcut to help them determine which schools are worth researching more thoroughly.



Help all families, especially those with fewer resources

Parents and guardians are almost by definition extremely busy people. This is particularly true for families in low-income communities, who are often burdened by long and inflexible work schedules and the countless time burdens that come with poverty. Families across California will of course vary in their time and resources to research school quality. Having both a summative school quality rating and a high-quality dashboard laying out more detailed school performance information allows a system to work for all families, not just some. Without a summative quality rating, more California families will wind up attending a low-performing school without knowledge of that fact, which is not in the interest of California students.



Recognizing excellence and catalyzing improvement

It is generally accepted that recognizing the highest performing schools is a valuable thing to do – it rewards the hard work of those educators, provides role models to other schools looking to improve, and signals that excellence is possible in every single community. An overall summative school quality rating ensures that California will consistently recognize its highest performers and look to these schools to learn more about the different improvement strategies being implemented. Similarly, it sends a clear signal to families, educators, and policymakers in lower performing schools that the school is in need of new or focused approaches to improve student learning and engagement, which serves as an important check on subjective measures of school quality that are not based on absolute performance against a standard.



Policymaking

In a limited resource world, programs must often be targeted to specific schools, either to implement supports and interventions in low-performing schools or to scale practices that are working in high-performing schools. California’s current education code contains dozens of references to California’s old school quality rating system, the Academic Performance Index. In the absence of any overall school quality rating, this may be impossible to do in the future. Policymakers will only be able to tie new programs or funding to individual aspects of school performance, such as test scores, rather than to a robust holistic measurement such as the overall quality rating, based on the multiple measures in California’s new system, proposed in this report. Part of the goal of this new system is to move California’s policymaking past its previous overreliance on test scores, but without a overall summative rating based on multiple measures, the system may inadvertently force policymakers to default to reliance on test score indicators as the proxy for school performance when aligned with programs and resources.

Figure 1: Current "Top-Level" View in California's School Dashboard: The Equity Report

Sunshine Elementary

Performance Levels: Blue (Highest) Green Yellow Orange Red (Lowest)

State Indicators	All Students Performance	Total Student Groups	Student Groups in Red/Orange
Chronic Absenteeism		11	7
Suspension Rate (K-12)		11	3
English Learner Progress (K-12)		1	0
Graduation Rate (9-12)	N/A	N/A	N/A
College & Career	N/A	N/A	N/A
English Language Arts (K-8)		5	1
Mathematics (K-8)		5	4
Local Indicators	Ratings		
Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)	Met		
Implementation of Academic Standards	Not Met		
Parent Engagement	Not Met for Two Years		
Local Climate Survey	Met		

Different Types of School Quality Ratings

For the last fifteen years, summative school quality ratings in California have taken the form of a single number on a 200-1000 scale called the Academic Performance Index (API). API scores were based almost exclusively on Math and English test score performance. Currently in California the CORE districts continue to give a 0-100 rating to every school, based on multiple measures. States and districts like New Mexico, New York City, Ohio, and others have used an A-F grading system to rate schools.

Accordingly, when many parents and policymakers think of summative school ratings, they envision one of these two systems – a single number or letter grade intended to summarize school performance. There are, however, other ways of summarizing school performance. This report proposes an alternative approach that will still give families vital overall information about school quality while avoiding some of the potential pitfalls and concerns that California leaders have raised about other types of summative ratings.

When evaluating schools, there is a growing recognition that while the highest and lowest performers can be consistently and credibly identified, it can be difficult to accurately distinguish small differences in performance across a broad middle.

That is why this report proposes using the CA School Dashboard that California is already building to create either three or five categories of school performance that would be clearly communicated to all families, educators, and the public. This would allow the state to broadly identify the highest and lowest performers without trying to parse out smaller distinctions in school performance that are difficult to reliably assess. This new, "third way" of providing summative ratings would build off the positive work that has already been done by the California State Board of Education and would allow parents and policymakers to easily and quickly identify the highest and lowest performers.

There are many different ways this could be done – this report outlines a few potential paths later on. The two most important components are that the system must:

- **Use data from California's new state indicators to put every school into one of three or five categories, helping to consistently distinguish both the highest and lowest performers**
- **Put each school's overall quality rating at the top of the complete top-level CA School Dashboard so families can quickly and easily get a sense of overall school performance**

Addressing the **Concerns** about Overall Quality Ratings

Critics of developing a overall summative rating for California schools have offered two broad critiques against the idea.



Critique #1: A summative score inherently masks the specific strengths and weaknesses of a school

Summative rating critics accurately note that different strengths and weaknesses of a school can be cancelled out by one another – a school can be strong in some areas, such as academic performance, while weak in another, like academic growth. By averaging performance into a single score or grade, the overall summative rating will inherently mask these strengths and weaknesses, denying parents, educators, and the public valuable information needed to understand and improve schools.

This critique could be true in some summative classification system designs, but California’s current approach, if augmented by this report’s recommendations, provides clear safeguards against this risk. The design proposed in this report is supplemented by information on various aspects of school performance while also providing an understanding of overall performance. Families and educators would receive both a summative quality rating as part of a multiple measure dashboard for their school, ensuring that the different strengths and weaknesses of every school are not hidden or lost. California’s current approach will, when fully implemented, provide a rich data set to educators and district leaders charged with analyzing school performance and devising improvement plans, but it falls short of helping families understand how the overall school is doing. In the same way that a GPA need not mask individual grades on a transcript, or an overall rating on Yelp.com does not mask different great or mediocre dishes served at a restaurant, this proposed design maintains transparency on detailed aspects of student outcomes, such as how student subgroups are faring.



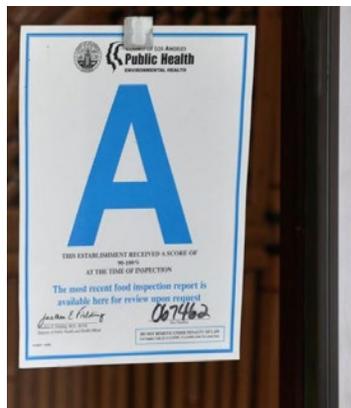
Critique #2: An overall rating gives an inaccurate picture of school performance

Critics say that because overall summative ratings combine scores from different measures, for example, combining test scores with measures of school climate, they will give an inaccurate picture of school performance. However, there are other areas of education policy where multiple different measures are regularly combined into some type of overall rating or score. California students, for example, take a Smarter Balanced assessment in English Language Arts that includes different components of that subject (reading comprehension, writing, critical thinking, etc) and use different versions of the same test in the same year, but still gives students an overall score on English Language Arts.

An 85, for example, means the same thing on one version of the test as that same score means on another version of the test. Middle and high school students get individual grades in each of their classes – each of which represents a judgment on completely different sets of tasks – but each of them also gets an overall GPA that summarizes their overall performance in an academic semester or year. The question about summative scores is not whether they have some sort of perfect precision, but how they can be designed to be as precise as possible.

Of equal importance is the question of weights—or providing different numerical values for each indicator. Giving appropriate weights to each measurement requires judgment calls, and these judgments can be based on what a state values. California’s work thus far to select a limited number of indicators for school performance and create a consistent summative rating for each indicator provides a strong framework to develop an overall summative rating based on these multiple measures. This report offers ways to calculate a summative quality rating either with or without using weights for each measure, and includes proposed options for possible designs created by the Center for American Progress showing that there are several different methods by which California’s current indicators could be translated into an overall summative rating.

Even if some minor imprecision is necessarily part of any summative rating system, that potential small cost must be weighed against other considerations. As outlined throughout this report, there are many important reasons that families and educators need summative quality ratings. Refusing to provide those scores will make it much harder for families to find the right school and to engage in school improvement efforts.



Subject	Grade
Biology 1	A-
Algebra 2	B+
English 2C	B-
Physical Education	A
Total GPA	3.4



What Happens **Without** Overall Quality Ratings?



Prudence Sampson
Los Angeles

“My daughter Zamorah struggled for her first few years in school. She was a good student and a quick learner, but her first two schools were both low-performing with chaotic and unfriendly learning environments. After engaging the school without much success, I had to find a better school for her. When I began to look for new schools, however, it was a very frustrating process. There were so many options, but it was very hard to figure out which ones were good and which ones weren't. I didn't have time to visit 10 or 20 different schools, but since API scores were gone, I didn't have an easy way to narrow down the best schools that I should visit. Luckily I was able to find a program called Choice4LA that helped me navigate this system and find a great new school. Without this support or an easy to find overall rating for each school, I don't think I would have been able to find the great new school that my daughter now attends.”

Impact on Families

The lack of a summative school quality rating will have real negative consequences for countless California families. Families who need to explore public school options outside of their assigned school will find it very difficult to do so without a shortcut to help them separate out the schools that are worth examining in more detail. The Los Angeles Unified School District sends a magnet school brochure every year to every family with over 200 different options – it is difficult to imagine where most families would even start exploring these options, particularly in that they had limited internet access for research. As **Prudence's** story illustrates, navigating the school choice process is intimidating in general, and becomes much more so in the absence of summative quality ratings.

Furthermore, more families will wind up attending a low-performing school without knowledge of that fact. As described in **Erica's** story and in the experiences of countless other families, low-performing schools too often avoid telling families the truth about their performance. When another entity (like the state) gives families clear, unambiguous information (like a summative quality rating), it reduces the ability for local administrators to emphasize less important data or interpret data for them in a misleading way. This dynamic will lead to a greater problem – with less families aware of the performance of their schools, less families will become engaged in school improvement efforts, leading to reduced grassroots pressure on schools and districts to improve. As **Erica's** story illustrates, there is great value in being able to quickly and clearly communicate school performance amongst families.

“Three of my children have attended 24th Street Elementary in South Los Angeles. I knew that our school had problems, but my daughter Ashley tested as gifted and seemed happy there, so I didn’t ask too many questions. Then, one day, another parent invited me to a meeting at a local park to discuss our school’s performance. At this meeting, parents discussed the school’s report card, which included test scores, suspension rates, and the overall API score. I was troubled to see that we had high suspension rates and that our school had one of the worst API scores in the district. I had attended most of the school’s parent meetings over the years, and nobody had ever shown me this data before. Knowing that our school’s overall score was very low helped me and many other families to have the confidence to demand improvements from our school. We didn’t want to argue anymore about whether there were problems at the school – we wanted to talk about what changes were going to happen. Because of our efforts, our school district eventually made major changes at our school. I am not sure if this would have happened if we didn’t have such a low overall API score at our school, which allowed us to clearly communicate to all families that something needed



Erica Valente
Los Angeles

Impact on Educators

For educators, the lack of a summative score hinders transparency by making it difficult to compare achievement between schools. While the CA School Dashboard is being approved by the State Board of Education helps schools identify specific areas to target for improvement, the complex system makes it difficult to understand a school’s overall performance. Because of the differences in the student population across California, teachers and administrators need to be able to compare their school’s performance to schools with similar demographics. An overall summative rating allows school leaders to easily identify high performing schools that could collaborate to share best practices.



“As a parent and teacher, a summative school rating is necessary for me to clearly understand a school’s overall performance. As a parent, I need to be able to easily compare schools in order to identify the best fit for my son. As a mentor teacher, I need to see how the school is generally doing in specific indicators so I can tailor the coaching for the teachers on my team. The report card is like an email. The subject line is the overall summative rating, and indicators are the email body. Most people only have time to read the subject line, but can open the email if they want more information.”

William “Kip” Morales
12th grade AP Language & Composition teacher at Alliance Susan and Eric Smidt Technology High School. Kip is also an “ALLI Coach”, where he regularly observes, collaboratively evaluates, and guides fellow teachers to increase the effectiveness of their teaching.

California School Classification System Proposal

from  Center for American Progress

California's new school accountability system displays a set of information on a range of state and local performance indicators. State indicators are identified as one of five performance levels (blue, green, orange, yellow, red) and local performance indicators as either met, not met, or not met for two or more years. The state intends to use these data indicators to identify school strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, but not to assign overall summative school ratings. The goal of this proposal is to design a system that classifies overall school performance using either three or five broad categories of performance and to do so by building on California's current system with minimal modifications.

In general, there are multiple approaches to designing summative classifications, including indices, matrices, and decision rules. Each method takes a different technical approach and has unique benefits and drawbacks. Careful development of any of these models can offer meaningful information about school performance for school staff, policymakers, and families. As a result, there is no one way that a state interested in designing a rating system should design its system, but rather has several options to consider.

For example, a state using a performance index would assign a weighting, or percentage, to each indicator to calculate a single score or letter grade. The state would then sum the points for each indicator to determine a school's total score, which can be translated into a letter grade, color, or symbol, or kept as a number score. This approach allows states to place greater emphasis on some indicators and is often straightforward to understand. However, by combining indicators, indices may mask low performance on one indicator with high performance on another.

Matrices, on the other hand, use two or more dimensions of performance, such as status and growth, for each indicator. States would then assign school classifications based on how schools perform on each dimension. This approach allows states to determine a school's rating using a more robust consideration of performance on a single indicator. However, the process of rolling up indicators into a single classification is not as clear-cut as an index.

Finally, in a decision rules-based system, a state would set a threshold for performance on each indicator and a "yes" or "no" response would lead to a subsequent question, and ultimately, a school classification. This process may improve transparency by not mathematically combining indicators, but it may be difficult to understand as they can be more complicated systems.

States may also consider creating a hybrid approach by combining components of each model to fit their needs. For example, states could classify the performance of each indicator using a matrix and then use decision rules in determining overall school classifications. This strategy may be promising for California's accountability system, as it uses performance matrices to classify the performance levels of state indicators as blue, green, orange, yellow, or red.

Accordingly, one approach to designing summative ratings is to build on the state's matrix methodology. In doing so, this proposal uses only state indicators to classify schools; it would be at the state's discretion to use local performance indicators to adjust school classifications.

To create either three or five categories of school quality classifications, this methodology uses four steps. First, using California’s current methodology, it classifies each indicator as one of five colors. Second, it classifies each state indicator as either academic or non-academic. Third, it creates an overall academic and an overall non-academic quality classification for each school. Fourth, it uses the academic and non-academic ratings to create an overall school quality classification for every school.

This system recognizes that both a rich data dashboard and summative classifications are useful in determining school quality and to help schools improve. It also gives parents and other stakeholders the ability to drill down into each indicator’s performance and the performance of subgroups. Building on the current California dashboard design, there are several ways to calculate a summative rating. Two options considered by this proposal are to summarize overall performance into either three or five categories, referred to as Proposal A (three categories) and Proposal B (five categories).

Figure 2: Our Proposal: A New "Top-Level," With the Addition of Overall Academic and Non-Academic Ratings and an Overall School Quality Rating

Sunshine Elementary

Overall School Rating



Academic



Non-Academic



Performance Levels: Blue (Highest) Green Yellow Orange Red (Lowest)

State Indicators	All Students Performance	Total Student Groups	Student Groups in Red/Orange
Chronic Absenteeism		11	7
Suspension Rate (K-12)		11	3
English Learner Progress (K-12)		1	0
Graduation Rate (9-12)		N/A	N/A
College & Career	N/A	N/A	N/A
English Language Arts (K-8)		5	1
Mathematics (K-8)		5	4
Local Indicators	Ratings		
Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)	Met		
Implementation of Academic Standards	Not Met		
Parent Engagement	Not Met for Two Years		
Local Climate Survey	Met		

Figure 3: California’s Accountability System Indicators

State Indicators
Student test scores in reading and math for grades 3-8
An indicator that combines grade 11 reading and math test scores with college and career readiness measures
Graduation rates
Progress of English language learners toward English proficiency
Chronic absenteeism
Suspension rates
Local Performance Indicators
Basic conditions at school
Progress in implementing the state academic standards
Parent Engagement
School Climate

Step 1: Maintain California’s current process for classifying each state indicator

State indicators in California’s accountability system are classified as blue, green, yellow, orange, or red using two dimensions – performance the previous year (status) and change in performance over time (change). Take, for example, the new measure of English Learner Progress. Using Figure 4 below, if this indicator is rated “High” but has declined somewhat from the previous year, it is classified as yellow. The State Board of Education defines the cut points that determine these colors. For example, to be rated “High,” the percent of a school’s English learners progressing towards proficiency must be between 75 and 85 percent. Declining performance means that the percent of students is 1.5 to 10 percent less than the previous year. ¹

Figure 4: English Learner Indicator Performance Categories Matrix, as designed by California Department of Education

		Change				
		Declined Significantly	Declined	Maintained	Increased	Increased Significantly
Status	Level					
	Very High	Yellow	Green	Blue	Blue	Blue
	High	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue
	Median	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green
	Low	Red	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
	Very Low	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red

The state has developed similar matrices for the college and career ready indicator, graduation rate, and math and reading test scores in grades 3-8. The matrix for suspension rates, on the other hand, reverses the scales for change and status, as low suspension rates are more desirable than high suspension rates. The state plans to design a similar matrix for chronic absenteeism.

Step 2: Classify all state indicators as academic or non-academic.

Classifying the seven state indicators into their appropriate categories will allow families, educators, policymakers, and the public to see overall academic and non-academic ratings for every school. This is consistent with California’s vision for a new system that takes into account multiple measures, inclusive of non-academic indicators.

To categorize state indicators, this proposal assumes that academic indicators are test scores in grades 3-8; the composite college and career readiness measure, as it includes grade 11 test scores; graduation rates; and English Learner Progress.² Non-academic indicators are suspension rates and chronic absenteeism. This proposal also assumes that data for all indicators are collected and ready to use.

Figure 5:

	State Indicators	All Students Performance
Non-Academic	Chronic Absenteeism	
	Suspension Rate (K-12)	
	English Learner Progress (K-12)	
Academic	Graduation Rate (9-12)	
	College & Career	
	English Language Arts (K-8)	
	Mathematics (K-8)	

Step 3: Classify a school’s overall academic and non-academic performance

Next, give every school an academic performance rating based on its academic indicators and a separate non-academic rating based on its non-academic indicators. This approach will help policymakers, staff, and families parse a school’s overall rating and provide a more nuanced perspective of school performance. The Every Student Succeeds Act also requires states to assign greater weight to a school’s academic indicators, and this system creates a clear way for the state to comply with this requirement.

This step can be done two different ways, with either three classifications (Proposal A) or five classifications (Proposal B).

Proposal A (three categories): This method uses a set of decision rules to classify a school’s academic and non-academic indicators as either red, yellow, or blue. For example, if all academic indicators are red or orange, a school receives a red academic rating. If all academic indicators are blue or green, a school receives a blue academic rating. Schools with different color combinations of academic indicators receive a yellow academic rating. The state would then use the same decision rules to classify a school’s non-academic indicators. The state could also design decision rules at their discretion to ensure that there are the appropriate number of schools in each category.

Proposal B (five categories): Using decision rules to classify a school’s academic and non-academic indicators as one of five colors would become overly complex. Instead, one possible approach is to translate the colors of the state indicators into numbers. For example, first assign a number 1-5 to each corresponding color rating. Then, in separate processes for academic and non-academic indicators, sum the indicator scores, take a simple average and apply rounding rules. Next, translate each average back into a color for the overall academic or non-academic rating.

Figure 6a: Equity Report: Proposal A (Three Categories)

Sunshine Elementary

Performance Levels:  Blue (Highest)  Yellow  Red (Lowest)

	Rating	State Indicators	All Students Performance
Non-Academic		Chronic Absenteeism	
		Suspension Rate (K-12)	
Academic		English Learner Progress (K-12)	
		English Language Arts (K-8)	
		Mathematics (K-8)	

Figure 6a: Equity Report: Proposal B (Five Categories)

Sunshine Elementary

Performance Levels:  Blue (Highest)  Green  Yellow  Orange  Red (Lowest)

	Rating	State Indicators	All Students Performance
Non-Academic		Chronic Absenteeism	
		Suspension Rate (K-12)	
Academic		English Learner Progress (K-12)	
		English Language Arts (K-8)	
		Mathematics (K-8)	

Step 4: Classify a school's overall performance level

Finally, use the academic and non-academic ratings to create an overall performance rating for every school.

To create a three-category rating system (Proposal A), this approach uses a simple school classification matrix. Using Figure 7a below, for example, an elementary school with yellow academic indicators and red non-academic indicators is classified as a yellow school. However, if a high school's graduation rate is less than or equal to 67 percent, the school is automatically classified as red.

Figure 7a: School Classifications Matrix for 3 Categories (Proposal A)

Non-Academic Indicators	Academic Indicators		
	Red	Yellow	Blue
Blue	Yellow ³	Yellow	Blue
Yellow	Red	Yellow	Blue
Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow

A matrix is also suitable for a five-category system (Proposal B). See below for one example.

Figure 7b: School Classifications Matrix for 5 Categories (Proposal B)

Non-Academic Indicators	Academic Indicators				
	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue
Blue	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue
Green	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue
Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green
Orange	Red	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Red	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow

This classification system can also be augmented by any number of business rules to ensure maximum accuracy and a focus on equity.

Figure 8: Our Proposal: A New "Top-Level," With the Addition of Overall Academic and Non-Academic Ratings and an Overall School Quality Rating

Sunshine Elementary

Overall School Rating



Academic



Non-Academic



Performance Levels: Blue (Highest) Green Yellow Orange Red (Lowest)

State Indicators	All Students Performance	Total Student Groups	Student Groups in Red/Orange
Chronic Absenteeism		11	7
Suspension Rate (K-12)		11	3
English Learner Progress (K-12)		1	0
Graduation Rate (9-12)		N/A	N/A
College & Career	N/A	N/A	N/A
English Language Arts (K-8)		5	1
Mathematics (K-8)		5	4
Local Indicators	Ratings		
Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)	Met		
Implementation of Academic Standards	Not Met		
Parent Engagement	Not Met for Two Years		
Local Climate Survey	Met		

Ensuring Equity

Building on this foundation, there are additional considerations to keep in mind. First, this system should factor in the performance of student subgroups to ensure that school classifications represent all students, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and English language learners. If any subgroup of students qualifies as a red school on its own for two or more years, the state could adjust a school's color classification. A blue school with at least one struggling subgroup for two or more years, for example, would become a yellow school, and a yellow school would become a red school.

Every Student Succeeds Act – Ensuring Alignment

There are three additional considerations for policymakers to consider in regards to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). First, this proposal assumes that California's accountability system meets the Every Student Succeeds Act's requirements. The new law requires states to include the following indicators in their accountability systems:

- Student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics
- A second academic indicator, such as growth in ELA and mathematics
- English language acquisition
- Graduation rates, which take the place of a second academic indicator for high schools
- At least one measure of school quality or student success

California's data dashboard includes six state indicators and four local performance indicators. (see Figure 3) As noted earlier, this proposal uses only California's state indicators to classify schools in order to build on the state's performance matrix methodology. These indicators also meet ESSA's requirements – with one potential exception. According to the California Department of Education, the academic achievement indicator will eventually include a measure of individual student growth. Until then, the state plans to measure the change in the percent of students who meet or exceed standards from year to year.⁴

Second, the Every Student Succeeds Act requires schools to test at least 95 percent of all students each year and for the state to factor this requirement into the statewide accountability system. If a school does not meet this requirement, the state could adjust the color classification of the school's academic achievement indicator, overall academic rating, or summative rating.

Third, the Every Student Succeeds Act requires states to identify low-performing schools for improvement. Specifically, states must identify the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools, high schools with graduation rates of less than 67 percent, and schools with chronically low-performing subgroups for comprehensive support and improvement. States must also identify schools with consistently underperforming or low-performing subgroups for targeted support and improvement. The proposed system's red and yellow school classifications intend to align with these requirements, capturing the lowest performing schools and schools with struggling subgroups.

Conclusion

California should be applauded for transitioning to a new, more robust accountability system that gives families, educators, and policymakers a much richer dataset to evaluate and improve our public schools. That system will not fulfill its potential, if it continues to lack an overall school quality rating that helps families and other stakeholders to quickly ascertain overall school performance. The current CA School Dashboard can be improved to ensure that families, educators, and the public have access to the necessary data to know how their school is doing overall and, in turn, have more ability to exercise local control.

As this report illustrates, it is possible to create a system that reports on multiple measures of school performance and provides an overall summative school quality rating. California could keep every aspect of its current system in place while also incorporating a thoughtful summative quality rating that would be invaluable to families, educators, and other stakeholders. California should seize this opportunity to create a unique 21st century school accountability system that works for all stakeholders.

¹ California Department of Education, “The English Learner Indicator (ELI),” Presented at California Practitioners Advisory Group, June 22, 2016, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/cc/cp/documents/cpagjun16item02slides4.pdf>.

² California State Board of Education, September 2016 Agenda, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr16/documents/sep16item01.doc>

³ The U.S. Department of Education’s accountability regulations state that a non-academic indicator cannot be used to change the identity of a school that would otherwise be identified for improvement unless that school made significant progress in the prior year for all students on the academic achievement indicator, second academic indicator, or graduation rate. Accordingly, if a yellow school with red academic indicators and blue non-academic indicators has not shown progress on one of the indicators that the regulations identify, it would be a red school. Graduation rate, however, cannot meet this criterion based on the indicator’s performance matrix – to be a red indicator that has shown improvement, the rate must be less than 67 percent, which automatically identifies a school for comprehensive support and improvement under ESSA. This proposal assumes that achievement can be a red indicator that has shown improvement, as California has yet to release the performance matrix for its academic indicator. The Department’s accountability regulations, however, may be rescinded as a result of congressional review. In this case, the Department may issue additional, non-binding guidance on how performance on the non-academic indicator is to affect a school’s classification.

⁴ California State Board of Education, November 2016 Agenda, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr16/documents/nov16item01.doc>.