Executive Summary

Washington's New Accountability Index

Final Report to the State Board of Education

November 2009

Pete Bylsma, EdD, MPA
BYLSMAPJ@COMCAST.NET

The full report is available on the State Board of Education Web site at ***http://www.sbe.wa.gov/spa.htm.***

CREATING THE ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

The Legislature requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop a statewide accountability system to help improve academic performance among all students. SBE was required to "adopt objective, systematic criteria" to identify schools and districts for recognition and for receiving additional state support. The 2009 Legislature required the Board to develop an index for such purposes. To meet this requirement, the Board has developed a provisional Accountability Index to sort schools and districts into different "tiers" based on multiple measures. The Board believes the index plays a key role in providing feedback about the status of education reform in schools and districts and in supporting continuous improvement efforts. Schools and districts in most need will be eligible to receive more significant state support and will be required to participate in a state system of support if initial offers of more support are not accepted and substantial improvement does not occur after several years. The creation of the index comes at a time when changes in the state's assessment and data systems and at the U.S. Education Department provide an opportunity to consider new accountability ideas. However, the recommendations made under this index cannot be used by the state to identify struggling schools for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) until the U.S. Education Department approves it through either a waiver or through the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that allows this system.

Various principles guided the development of the index. The index needs to (1) be transparent and simple to understand, (2) use existing data, (3) rely on multiple measures, (4) include assessment results from all grades and subjects tested statewide, (5) use concepts of NCLB and its AYP system when appropriate, (6) be fair, reasonable, and consistent, (7) be valid and accurate, (8) apply to both schools and districts, (9) apply to as many schools and districts as possible, (10) use familiar concepts when possible, (11) rely mainly on criterion-referenced measures instead of norm-referenced measures, (12) provide multiple ways to reward success, and (13) be flexible enough to accommodate future changes.

The provisional index is based on how schools and districts perform on a set of five outcomes and four indicators. The five outcomes are the results of state assessments in four subjects (reading, writing, mathematics, science) and the "extended" graduation rate (for high schools and districts). These five outcomes are examined using four indicators: achievement of (1) non-low income students, (2) low-income students, (3) all students compared to those in similar schools/districts (controlling for the percentage of students who are learning English, have a disability, live in a low-income home, are mobile, and are designated as gifted), and (4) the level of improvement from the previous year. The results of the 20 measures form the 5x4 matrix shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Matrix of Accountability Measures

	OUTCOMES				
INDICATORS	Reading	Writing	Math	Science	Ext. Grad. Rate
Achievement of non-low income students					
Achievement of low income students					
Achievement vs. peers					
Improvement from the previous year					

Each cell of the matrix is rated on a 7-point scale (from 1 to 7) using fixed benchmarks. Each of the four subjects is rated using the same set of benchmarks across the entire school (i.e., all subjects have the same set of benchmarks, and the assessment results are the aggregate totals for students in all the tested grades). **The index is the simple average of all the ratings** and ranges from 1.0 to 7.0. High schools and districts have 20 measures, while elementary and middle/junior high schools have only 16 measures because they do not have graduates. Table 2 shows how each of the five outcomes are measured using the four indicators and the benchmarks that produce the ratings.

Table 2: Benchmarks and Ratings for Outcomes and Indicators

	READING	WRITING	MATH	SCIENCE	EXT. GRAD. RATE[1]
ACHIEVEMENT (NON-LOW INCOME)	% MET STANDARD / RATING 90 - 100% ..... 7 80 - 89.9% ..... 6 70 - 79.9% ..... 5 60 - 69.9% ..... 4 50 - 59.9% ..... 3 40 - 49.9% ..... 2 < 40% 1				RATE / RATING > 95..... 7 90 - 95% ..... 6 85 - 89.9% ..... 5 80 - 84.9% ..... 4 75 - 79.9% ..... 3 70 - 74.9% ..... 2 < 70%..... 1
ACHIEVEMENT (LOW INCOME)					
ACHIEVEMENT VS. PEERS[2]	DIFFERENCE IN LEARNING INDEX / RATING > .20..... 7 .151 to .20..... 6 .051 to .15 ..... 5 -.05 to .05 ..... 4 -.051 to -.15 ..... 3 -.151 to -.20 ..... 2 < -.20 1				DIFFERENCE IN RATE / RATING > 12..... 7 6.1 to 12..... 6 3.1 to 6..... 5 -3 to 3..... 4 -3.1 to -6 ..... 3 -6.1 to -12 ..... 2 < -12..... 1
IMPROVEMENT[3]	CHANGE IN LEARNING INDEX / RATING > .15..... 7 .101 to .15..... 6 .051 to .10..... 5 -.05 to .05 ..... 4 -.051 to -.10 ..... 3 -.101 to -.15 ..... 2 < -.15 1				CHANGE IN RATE / RATING > 6..... 7 4.1 to 6..... 6 2.1 to 4..... 5 -2 to 2..... 4 -2.1 to -4 ..... 3 -4.1 to -6 ..... 2 < -6..... 1

Note: Assessment results are the combined results from both the state content assessments (e.g., WASL) and the WAAS (assessments for students with disabilities) from all grades.

[1] This outcome only applies to schools and districts that are authorized to graduate students.

[2] This indicator adjusts the outcomes using statistical methods (multiple regression) to control for five student characteristics beyond a school's control: the percentage of low-income, ELL, special education, gifted, and mobile students. (Mobile students are those who are not continuously enrolled from October 1 through the entire testing period.) Scores are the difference between the actual level and the predicted level of the Learning Index. Scores above 0 are "beating the odds" and negative scores are below the predicted level. Separate analyses are conducted for schools for each of the four assessments for each type of school (elementary, middle, high, multiple grade levels). District calculations also control for the level of current expenditures per pupil (adjusted for student need).

[3] Measured in terms of the change in the Learning Index from the previous year.

The proposed system holds *districts* accountable using the same indicators, outcomes, and criteria that are used for schools. The results are based on districtwide data for all grades rather than being

disaggregated by grade bands (elementary, middle, high). In addition, financial data are used in the "peers" analysis to control for the amount of total operating expenditures per pupil (adjusted for student need).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Schools and districts fall into five tiers based on the index score. In-depth analyses of the data and conditions occurs for schools and districts that do not make AYP two years in a row to see if they merit further support.

Table 3 shows the ranges for the tier assignments and the number of schools and districts that would have been placed in each tier in 2007 using the above criteria. Schools show a greater range than districts—far fewer districts were in the top and bottom tiers compared to the school results. The 228 schools in the Struggling tier enrolled 74,000 students (1 in 14 students statewide). Of the schools in this tier, 98 (43%) were alternative schools or served other special populations, and enrolled a total of 12,400 students. The 130 "regular" schools in the Struggling tier enrolled 61,600 students. Over the 2-year period, 149 schools (7.4%) had an average index below 2.50, and 89 were regular schools that enrolled approximately 39,000 students (roughly 4% of statewide enrollment). The 17 districts in the Struggling tier in 2007 tended to be rather small, averaging roughly 1,000 students. However, some larger districts had many schools in a struggling tier—17 districts had at least two regular schools and four districts had at least five regular schools with a 2-year index average below 2.50.

Table 3: Tier Ranges and Preliminary Results (2007)

Tier	Index Range	# of Schools	% of Schools	# of Students[1]	# of Districts	% of Districts	# of Students[1]
Exemplary	5.50 – 7.00	81	4.0%	28,650	1	.3%	360
Very Good	5.00 – 5.49	131	6.5%	64,500	9	3.1%	31,500
Good	4.00 – 4.99	591	29.4%	314,700	87	29.9%	278,500
Fair	2.50 – 3.99	980	48.7%	523,000	177	60.8%	692,500
Struggling	1.00 – 2.49	228	11.3%	74,000	17	5.8%	17,500

[1]Approximate number (some schools did not provide enrollment data).

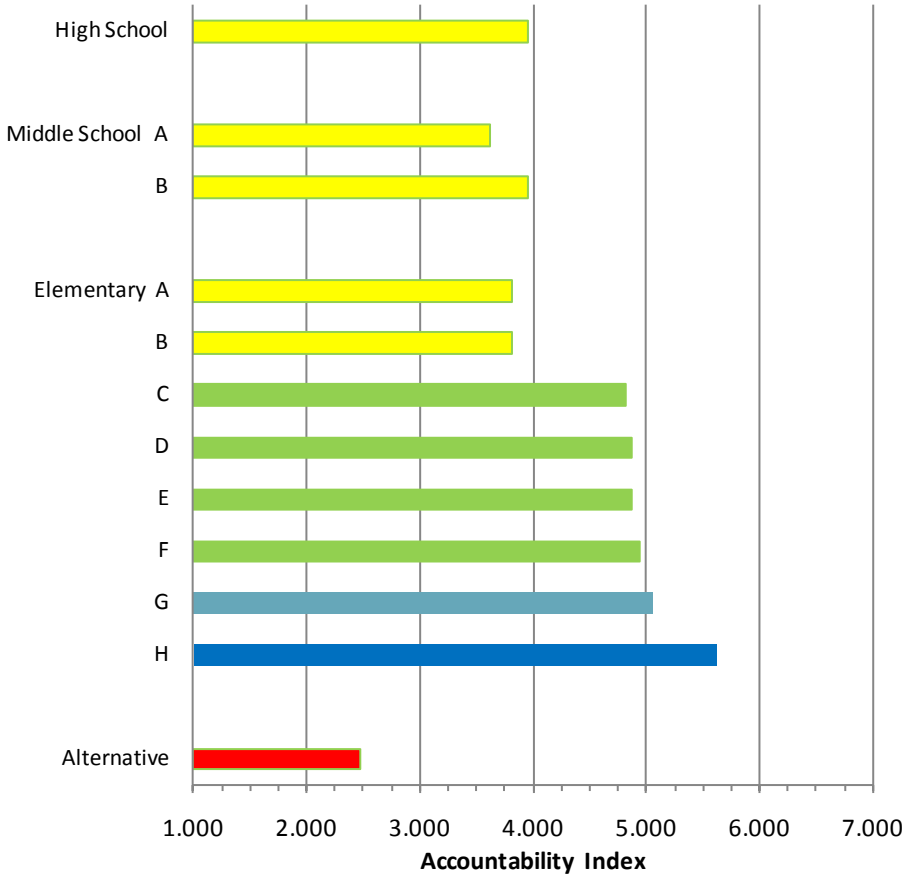
Table 4 provides an example of the ratings for an actual high school and how the average of the individual ratings generates the index/tier assignment. The school's average rating of 3.40 is the index score, which puts the school in the middle of the Fair tier. The average ratings have been color-coded so the overall results can be seen at a glance. These types of results should be made public on the state Web site (the format for presenting the results must be determined). Results presented in this "dashboard" give policymakers, educators, and the public a quick snapshot of where a school is strong and weak, and it provides transparency about how the index is determined.

Table 4: "Actual" High School, 2007

Indicator	Reading	Writing	Math	Science	Grad Rate	Average
Non-low inc. ach.	5	6	3	1	5	**4.00**
Low-inc. ach.	4	4	1	1	7	**3.40**
Ach. vs. peers	2	2	2	2	6	**2.80**
Improvement	1	4	1	4	7	**3.40**
Average	**3.00**	**4.00**	**1.75**	**2.00**	**6.25**	**3.40** ← **INDEX**

Various charts can illustrate district results as well. Figure 1 shows an example of how the index could be shown for each school in a district. In this example (an actual district), one school reached the Exemplary tier.

Figure 1: Accountability Results in "Actual" District, 2008



HANDLING SPECIAL CASES

The accountability system needs to be flexible enough to accommodate some special situations. These include holding alternative schools accountable using additional data, excluding some ELL results from the index calculations, and not counting the improvement cells when achievement is at very high levels.

Holding **alternative schools** accountable poses unique challenges. Many alternative schools exist in the state, and they vary greatly in their focus, structure, and clientele. Most are relatively small (total enrollment is less than 4% statewide), and more than half serve at-risk students in grades 9-12. Some believe these schools have taken on more challenging students while allowing traditional schools to generate better outcomes with their remaining students. On the other hand, some alternative schools offer special programs for students who are not at-risk and who meet rigorous academic requirements for admission. Some are considered "alternative" because they do not use a normal school approach, and a growing number of schools serve students through digital learning via the Internet. Parent Partnership Programs are a type of "school" where parents are the primary instructor and the district provides instructional support. Some target special student populations (e.g., special education, gifted, ELL). Given this variation, no "peer" indicator is computed for these schools.

Some alternative schools intentionally target student populations facing significant challenges and therefore are more likely to be in the Struggling tier. These schools should receive the normal index score based on calculations used for all schools. Alternative schools that do not make AYP in two consecutive years should be examined more closely to determine if they are using research-based best practices and showing progress. Areas for improvement should be identified and should be the focus of analysis if the alternative school does not make AYP again in the future.

Results for ELL students are currently included in AYP calculations in the student's second year of enrollment in a U.S. public school. OSPI has asked the U.S. Education Department to exclude ELL results until a student has been enrolled in a U.S. public school for three years or until the student achieves an advanced level of English proficiency on the Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT), whichever comes first.[1] This request is based on research that shows it takes many years for an ELL student to acquire "academic" proficiency in English and because the student must be able to read and write English to understand and respond to each test item. Moreover, testing students who do not understand English violates widely-adopted testing standards because of threats to validity and mistreatment of human subjects. However, the Department has denied OSPI's repeated request to use this policy.

Nevertheless, to improve the validity of the accountability system, computing the index should exclude the results for ELL students who are in their first three years of enrolling in a U.S. public school for any test that requires reading and writing in only English.[2] Most ELL results would still be included in the accountability index, even with this "extended exclusion," because most ELLs enter school in kindergarten and have attended school for three years before taking state assessments for the first time in grade 3. In addition, OSPI should begin reporting WLPT results on its Report Card in a way that allows educators, parents, and other stakeholders to monitor the progress ELLs make in terms of learning English and meeting state content standards. Finally, all ELLs should be required to take the state assessments after their first year of enrollment, and OSPI should analyze the various content assessments and WLPT results to determine the extent to which ELLs are on track to meet state standards. (These results may be used to determine AYP, as discussed below.)

Schools and districts that perform at very high levels are not able to improve much from the previous year. To avoid "penalizing" these schools for a lack of improvement, the ratings for this indicator should not be included in the index calculations under certain conditions. Without this policy, schools/districts with nearly all of their students achieving Level 4 on an assessment and graduating nearly all their students would not be able to achieve a rating above 4 (little or no improvement). Specifically, the improvement indicator should be excluded when computing the index whenever a Learning Index reaches 3.85 out of 4.00 and remains at or above that level for two consecutive years. (A school or district needs to improve by more than .15 to receive a rating of 7,

[1] The composite score from the annual Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT) reflects proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The three-year exemption period reflects the views of most stakeholders and is the average time required for ELL students to exit the program.

[2] The math and science tests were available in Spanish and Russian for the first time in 2009 but responses must still be made in English. There is no requirement to include the results of ELLs in their first three years if they reach Level 3 (advanced English) on the WLPT because data show these students do not yet know enough English to meet standard on the content assessments. When data become available on ELLs' initial English level, the exclusion period should vary based on their incoming English ability. The recommended exclusion period is 2 years for students with advanced English (Level 3), 3 years for students with intermediate English (Level 2), and 4 years for students with limited/beginning English (Level 1).

which is impossible when their Learning Index reaches 3.85.) The first year the Learning Index falls above 3.85, a school/district would get a rating based on its improvement. If the Index stays at or above 3.85, the maximum rating is not possible and the indicator should not be calculated.[3] The same policy applies to the extended graduation rate outcome (when the rate reaches or exceeds 94% in two consecutive years.[4]

INTEGRATING THE FEDERAL AND STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

No Child Left Behind requires accountability for nine groups of students in reading, math, and one more indicator.[5] Accountability for performance at the student group level is widely viewed as a positive feature of the law. Federal law also requires states to have a single accountability system. However, stakeholders across Washington believe the current federal system is overly complex and that the AYP results do not provide an accurate picture of school and district quality. As a result, stakeholders have provided advice on how elements of the provisional Accountability Index could be used to make AYP decisions. They also suggested changes in the consequences schools and districts face when they do not make AYP and when they make AYP while in improvement status.

Determining AYP

The following rules are recommended to hold schools and districts accountable for performance of various student groups.

- Hold the **All students** group accountable using the Accountability Index when there are at least 4 rated cells in the matrix.[6] Specifically, *schools and districts with a 2-year average Accountability Index below 3.00 AND an index that declines two years in a row do not make AYP*. Using the Index in this way for AYP provides consistency in the accountability measure, and the required level is easy to understand and identifies a reasonable number of schools.
- Hold **subgroups** accountable using a separate modified matrix that uses the same concepts as the Accountability Index. Two more subgroups (Pacific Islanders, multi-racial) should be added to provide more complete coverage. However, only the outcomes used for federal accountability—reading, math, and the extended graduation rate—should be used, and the two income-related indicators should be combined. A "row average" should then be calculated for each subgroup. *Schools and districts do not make AYP if any row average declines two years in a row.*

  Table 5 gives an example for a hypothetical high school with at least 10 students in each subgroup (very few schools have at least 10 students in every group). Ratings are based on the performance of each group in three outcomes (reading, math, extended graduation) and three indicators (achievement of all students, achievement vs. peers, and improvement).[7] In this

[3] Of the schools and districts with reportable data (at least 10 students assessed), two schools reached this level on the Learning Index in 2006 (one in both reading and writing and the other in writing), but no district reached this level in 2006 and no school or district reached this level in any subject in 2007.

[4] Of the schools with graduation data, 11% had a rate that was at least 94% in two consecutive years.

[5] The nine groups are "all" students, five race/ethnic groups, two program groups (students with disabilities and English language learners), and students from low income families. In Washington, the unexcused absence rate is the additional indicator at the elementary and middle school levels, and the extended graduation rate is the additional indicator for high schools.

[6] Schools with fewer than 4 rated cells should submit an improvement plan to OSPI for review.

[7] The current AYP system requires the use of unexcused absence rates at the elementary and middle school levels. Data for these rates are not included because they are not part of the index system, and nearly all schools meet the required goals.

example, six groups had a row average in 2009 that was less than the row average in 2008. If the row average in 2010 declines again for any of these groups, the school would not make AYP in that group. Colors are used to highlight ratings that are better or worse than the previous year.

Table 5: 2009 Results, Hypothetical High School

	READING			MATH			EXT. GRAD. RATE				
Subgroup	Met Std. (All stud.)	Peers	Improve.	Met Std. (All stud.)	Peers	Improve.	Met Std. (All stud.)	Peers	Improve.	Average rating	Change from previous year
American Indian	4	4	4	1	5	4	1	4	4	3.44	0.33
Asian	6	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	6	4.78	0.56
Pacific Islander	4	4	4	1	5	4	1	4	4	3.44	0.22
Black	3	3	3	1	3	5	1	3	2	2.67	-1.00
Hispanic	3	4	4	1	4	4	1	4	4	3.22	-0.11
White	5	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	3.78	-0.22
Multi-racial	4	4	4	2	4	4	2	4	4	3.56	-0.22
Special education	2	4	4	1	4	4	1	2	1	2.56	-1.22
ELL	1	5	5	1	4	4	1	3	3	3.00	-0.11
Low income	4	5	5	1	5	4	1	4	4	3.67	0.22
Average	3.6	4.1	4.2	1.6	4.2	4.1	1.7	3.6	3.6	3.41	-0.16

NOTE: Ratings in **red** are less than the previous year, ratings in **green** are more than the previous year.

Using this modified matrix has a number of benefits. It preserves the simplicity of the Accountability Index matrix, uses the same metrics as the provisional Index to provide greater simplicity,[8] provides more detailed information about subgroups, focuses on improvement from each group's baseline, relies on multiple cells when computing row average to reduce fluctuations in averages from year to year, and treats every group with equal weight regardless of the size of the group.

- Create **an alternate method for the ELL group to make AYP** by linking the results of the Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT) to the content assessments. *Schools and districts do not make AYP if the percentage of ELLs in WLPT Levels 2 and 3 who are on track to meet standard in the content areas (i.e., reading and math) when they become proficient in English declines two years in a row.* OSPI has developed a method to calculate the percentage of ELLs who are on track to meet the content standard when they become proficient in English.[9] This alternative method is a fairer way to hold this group accountable because it emphasizes improvement in both English proficiency and academic performance and considers English language ability when examining students' performance in the academic subjects.

Hence, the system is "compensatory" in nature—having one low rating in a matrix does not automatically result in a school/district not making AYP. The index blends performance across multiple ratings, and low ratings are compensated by higher ratings, a concept similar to how a GPA works. This is different from the "conjunctive" model now used to determine AYP. In a conjunctive model, a single missed target results in a school/district not making AYP. This is analogous to labeling a student as a failure when a single low grade occurs. The increasing level of proficiency

[8] The modified matrix relies on the same rules as the Accountability Index. For example, the results for all grades are combined, there must be at least 10 students to report results, there is no margin of error, the percent meeting standard is used for achievement indicator, the Learning Index is used for the peers and improvement indicators, and the same rating system is used.

[9] ELLs should be counted in WLPT Level 1 for only one year to provide an incentive to help new ELLs as much as possible.

currently required to make AYP will make it even less likely a school/district will meet the target. So in this analogy, a student would have to get higher and higher grades in all subjects to avoid being labeled a failure.

Consequences

State law currently prohibits the use of some consequences authorized by NCLB. For example, the state has no authority to require schools/districts to accept state help, and it has no authority to require corrective action or restructuring (e.g., remove staff, change curriculum, change governance). NCLB currently requires schools and districts to undergo increasing levels of "sanctions" if they do not make AYP over an extended period of time. NCLB also requires schools and districts that are in an improvement step to make AYP two years in a row in order to exit improvement status.

Many stakeholders believe these sanctions have flaws that need to be corrected. For example, students must be allowed to transfer to another school before their current school is required to provide additional services to help these students. Schools must also allow all students to transfer, including those performing well. Even when a school in "improvement" status makes AYP, all the sanctions must remain in effect. Finally, the consequences do not apply to non-Title I schools that do not make AYP, even though in Washington these schools outnumber Title I schools, enroll more students, and are more likely to have low index results (see Table 6). In fact, almost half the students in the state attended non-Title I schools that did not make AYP in 2008, and a large number of these schools are in "improvement" status but evade the teeth of the accountability system because they are not required to face any of the NCLB sanctions.

Table 6: Index Results for Schools Not Making AYP in 2008

	Title I Schools		**Non-Title I Schools**	
Tier	**Number**	**Students enrolled**	**Number**	**Students enrolled**
Exemplary	5	2,445	8	4,973
Very Good	27	13,211	31	30,637
Good	165	82,518	217	184,184
Fair	326	157,312	333	227,112
Struggling	56	19,184	83	24,388
Total	**579**	**274,670**	**672**	**471,294**

As a result, Washington proposes using a different set of consequences that reflect common sense changes to the current NCLB rules. These consequences should apply to all schools and districts, not just those receiving federal Title I funds.[10]

- Schools/districts not making AYP for the same reason (e.g., same subgroup) in consecutive years move into "improvement" unless there is a compelling reason not to, based on the results of a deeper review (see below).
- If the reason for not making AYP is due to the performance of a different group than a group responsible for not making AYP in the previous year, the school/district does not move to the next step of the process.

[10] This should occur as long as the state does not lose any Title I funding due to federal "supplant" rules.

- School choice and supplemental educational services must be made available to the students in the subgroup(s) whose results are responsible for the school not making AYP. (Currently it applies to all students in the school, even if they are in a group that has performed well.)
- Those in improvement status that make AYP move back a step (e.g., from Step 2 to Step 1). Those making AYP two years in a row exit improvement status. This allows a gradual withdrawal of state support over time. (Under the current AYP rules, schools and districts in "improvement" must make AYP in two consecutive years to exit this status entirely, and no credit is given for making AYP in one year.)

Identifying Schools and Districts Needing Improvement

Each fall OSPI will compute the accountability index and apply the rules for making AYP. All schools and districts in all tiers will be given an AYP status, not just those receiving Title I funds. The first time a school or district does not make AYP, it is in a "warning" year. Schools and districts that do not make AYP two years in a row should not automatically fall into "improvement" status. Instead, they should undergo an in-depth review. The results of this review would determine if the school/district should move into an "improvement" step and be required to take certain actions.

The data to be reviewed fall in five general categories. The list below provides examples in each.

- **Contextual Data**
  Type of school
  Changes in student population
  Programs served by the school
- **Assessment Results (State content assessments/WAAS/WLPT)**
  Trends over multiple years for each subject area
  Subgroup trends (e.g., race/ethnicity, ELL, special education)
  Results for students who have been enrolled for at least two years
- **Teaching and Learning Issues**
  Teacher education and experience levels
  Student/teacher ratio
  Recent changes in leadership (key central office staff and principals) and teachers
  Alignment of curriculum and materials across grades and with state standards
- **Other Data**
  Graduation and dropout rates for subgroups
  Funding from local levies/bonds and outside sources
  Problems with data that generate the index (e.g., reporting errors related to graduates)
  Participation rates for all subgroups
  Other indicator data (unexcused absence and graduation rates) for all subgroups
  Perception survey results

Data will be closely reviewed for schools and districts that have not made AYP four years in a row, or meet other federal or state criteria. The state may determine that a school/district would benefit from a significant amount of additional support and move it to Voluntary Action for at least two years. If extra assistance is not accepted and significant improvement does not occur during the two-year period, the school would move to Required Action and a binding corrective action plan should be established between the district and the state, if authorized by the Legislature.[11] SBE and OSPI

[11] ESHB 2261, passed by the 2009 Legislature, contains language on this issue.

are working together to develop a process to identify schools that would move into Voluntary and Require Action in a way that conforms to newly emerging federal regulations. Moreover, the details of what assistance would be provided are still being developed.

When the details of the proposed system are finalized in the coming months, SBE and OSPI will submit a unified accountability plan to the U.S. Education Department that will recommend using the state accountability system for federal accountability purposes. A new administration may provide more flexibility to states that design alternative systems that provide more rigorous and valid accountability. All the current data reporting requirements of NCLB would continue to be met (i.e., making public the disaggregated data for the assessments, participation, and "other indicators" for the various student subgroups). Moreover, new data elements would be made public to further increase the rigor of the system.

Advantages Over the Current System

The proposed accountability system has many desirable features that make it a better alternative to the current rules used to measure AYP. The proposed state accountability system increases the system's validity and rigor, reduces volatility and unintended consequences, makes the system easier to understand, supports the continued use of high standards and expectations, and provides more appropriate consequences when performance falls short of expectations.

- The Index is a *more valid* measure of school and district performance because it is based on the performance of all students in more subjects, is more nuanced than a Yes/No (pass/fail) system, and addresses several unintended consequences created by the current AYP system (e.g., narrowing the curriculum, focusing on students performing close to meeting standard).
- The Index is *more inclusive/comprehensive* because it uses a smaller minimum number for reporting (10 students across the entire school/district), includes the results of all students (not just those continuously enrolled through the testing period), includes both writing and science (this helps prevent a narrowed curriculum), and uses the Learning Index to measure performance across the range of assessment results (reduces the focus on "bubble" students who perform close to the proficiency cut point at the expense of students who are farther above and below that level).
- The Index is *less volatile* over time because assessment results are combined across all grades in a school and district (which raises the N) rather than using results for individual grades where students change from one year to the next.
- The Index is *more transparent/easier to understand* because it does not include a margin of error, the benchmarks are the same over time and among the different subjects for both schools and districts, there are fewer rules and "cells" to examine, and schools and districts have the same minimum number required for reporting the results.
- Using the Index to determine AYP helps the state *maintain high performance standards.* Two recent studies found that Washington has some of the nation's toughest AYP requirements, resulting in a high percentage of schools not making AYP.[12] Using the index in a compensatory manner reduces the incentive for the state to lower its standards so all students can be counted as proficient by 2014, a target viewed as unrealistic if standards are kept high.

[12] See "*The Accountability Illusion*," Thomas B. Fordham Institute (February 2009) and "*Schools Struggling to Meet Key Goal on Accountability*," Education Week (January 7, 2009).

- The proposed system has *more appropriate consequences* and provides *stronger intervention* measures when improvement does not occur.

RECOGNITION

Index results can be calculated retroactively and used for recognition purposes. Providing recognition based on 2009 results would be considered "Phase I" in the implementation of the accountability system, with full implementation contingent upon the provision of adequate funding. Using the index in this way will provide a more valid picture of school/district performance than AYP results, and it will introduce the concepts to the various stakeholders prior to its full implementation.

The recognition system should (1) be transparent and simple to understand, (2) rely mainly on criterion-referenced measures, and (3) provide multiple ways to demonstrate success. The recognition system is based on the belief that people are motivated more by success than by blame or guilt, and they need clear, challenging, and attainable goals.

SBE and OSPI are working together to create a unified recognition system based on the index results. SBE should give recognition for "Outstanding Overall Performance" while allowing OSPI to develop forms of recognition of their own. For example, OSPI could recognize a certain percentage of schools in math and science. Monetary compensation is not recommended, although matrix data could be used to generate schoolwide bonuses if the Legislature includes these as part of any law or reforms of the basic education finance system in the future.

Outstanding Overall Performance (7 types)

SBE has approved using the results from the Accountability Index to provide recognition when performance is very high. To ensure only truly outstanding performance is recognized, schools and districts must meet certain conditions. Theoretically all schools should be able to achieve recognition because it is a criterion-referenced system. Seven areas will be recognized for "Outstanding Overall Performance" using the following criteria.

(1) For the **index**, the 2-year average was at least 5.50, at least 10 cells of the matrix were rated each year, and there were fewer than 10% students designated as gifted each year.

(2-5) For **language arts** (reading and writing combined)**, math**, **science**, and the **extended graduation rate**, the overall (column) 2-year average was at least 6.00, at least 2 of the 4 cells in the column were rated each year, and there were fewer than 10% students designated as gifted each year.[13]

(6) For the **achievement gap**, there were at least 10 students in at least 2 of the 5 outcomes (columns) in both of the income-related cells (non-low income and low income), there was no rating of 1 in any income-related cell or peer cell, there was no more than a 1-point difference in the rating between the two income-related cells,[14] and there were fewer than 10% students designated as gifted each year. Each of the above criteria had to be met two years in a row.

[13] For language arts, both reading and writing must have a 2-year average of at least 6.00 and at least 2 of the cells rated each year.

[14] For example, if the reading non-low income cell is rated 5, the reading low-income cell could be rated no lower than 4 and no higher than 6.

Each of the above six recognition areas requires fewer than 10% of the students to be gifted each year. Statewide approximately 3% of all students received this designation in 2008, so schools with 10% or more gifted students have unusually high concentrations of the most capable students. The exclusion criterion prevents a school from receiving recognition because it will likely have much higher than normal ratings. To ensure these types of schools are eligible to receive recognition, a seventh recognition area was established.

(7) For **schools with gifted programs**, the top 5% of schools in grade band—elementary, middle, high, and multi-level—that have at least 10% gifted students should receive this type of recognition, based on the 2-year average peer ratings in all four subjects.[15]

Table 7 shows the number of schools that would have been recognized by SBE in 2008. In all, 99 schools would have been recognized in 2008 if these criteria were in effect at that time, which is nearly 5% of all schools statewide. Of the 99, there were 8 alternative schools represented among the four school types.

Table 7: Distribution of Schools Meeting Recognition Criteria, by Grade Type (2008)
(Number of alternative schools in parentheses)

	Elementary	**Middle/ Jr. High**	**High**	**Multiple Levels**	**Total**
Total Recognized	52 (1)	8 (3)	23 (0)	16 (4)	99 (8)
Number of All Schools	1,059	359	400	298	2,116
Percentage of All Schools Recognized	4.9%	2.2%	5.8%	5.4%	4.7%

CONCLUSION

President Obama has cited his concerns about the current AYP system, such as its failure to acknowledge when significant improvement has taken place. The President believes we can improve and evolve in all aspects of education, including how AYP decisions are made. We join him in his desire to change NCLB and the current AYP system in order to hold our schools and districts accountable in a more rigorous, more valid, and more transparent way. Washington has taken the initiative to lay out a new accountability model using a new index. Use of the index for making AYP decisions addresses fundamental weaknesses in the existing system and encourages the state to maintain rigorous content and performance standards. Stakeholders in Washington believe this new system and the use of the new index paves a way forward to increased clarity and accuracy in assessing our education system, thereby offering educators and stakeholders a transparent means to ensure each and every student receives an excellent and equitable education.

[15] Results for the peer indicators control for the types of students attending the school (the percent gifted, low income, ELL, special education, and mobile). This ensures schools with the highest concentrations of gifted students do not automatically receive this form of recognition.