



# WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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## Frequently Asked Questions and Responses on The State Board of Education's Accountability Work December 10, 2008

### Background

All students deserve a quality education and there is an urgent need to strengthen a system of continuous improvement in student achievement for all schools and districts. Today, one in every 14 Washington State students attends a low performing school. The State Board of Education (SBE) has been charged by the legislature with creating a statewide system of accountability. The Board has worked on concepts for an accountability index and a state and local partnership for continuous school improvement for the last two years, with the assistance of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), consultants, education stakeholders and community members across the state. The Board has received input at its work sessions, Board meetings, public outreach, as well as the educator and school board conferences around the state.

The Board reviewed a draft resolution at its December 10 special meeting based on the Board's discussion at its November meeting. The Board welcomes comments from educators and the public. It plans to take action on the resolution at its January meeting. The Board believes this Accountability Framework needs to be a part of the revisions made to the basic education funding system and that the legislature will need to provide the Board and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction with the appropriate legal authority and resources to implement the new system.

A work plan will be presented at the January Board meeting to continue refining the details of the accountability system by working with its education, parent, business and community partners over the next year.

The resolution on accountability, as well as the work of the Board and its consultants, may be found at: [www.wa.sbe.gov](http://www.wa.sbe.gov)

As Board members and staff travel around the state, we have received questions on our accountability work. In an effort to continue to share information more widely, Board staff has prepared answers to these questions.

## **General Questions**

### **1. Why is the SBE doing this, given NCLB?**

As discussed above, the legislature has charged the SBE with creating a statewide accountability system. The Board believes that it can create a better accountability system than the one under NCLB, with the help of its stakeholders. The Board wants one unified system. We plan to work with the new Superintendent of Public Instruction to request that the federal law allow the proposed system to be used in place of the current system. We are hopeful that the new federal administration may provide more flexibility to states to design alternative accountability systems and approve them if they meet certain requirements.

SBE's accountability system provides a more complete picture of student achievement, which includes improvement over time and a peer comparison of schools with similar demographics. It will be more inclusive than NCLB as it includes writing and science, extended graduation rates, and the results of all students, not just those who are continuously enrolled. The Board strongly believes that all students must have the opportunity for a high quality education.

### **2. One of the things that happen when we're thrown into a crisis mode is that it makes it harder to get tools to dig ourselves out of the hole. We need SBE assistance.**

We agree. We want to work to build long term capacity with our partners that are proactive rather than reactive.

### **3. What are you seeking funding for?**

We want to see a revised and improved basic education funding package. After that is put in place, we will seek funding for the Innovation Zone and other ways to support continuous improvement in all districts.

## **Accountability Index**

### **4. What determines a "severe" problem?**

Schools with the lowest index average scores, based on their total performance on the accountability matrix's outcomes and indicators, would be the ones of most concern. Those schools would be placed in the tier currently called "struggling" and be reviewed through a deeper analysis of their local conditions, as well as student achievement data over several years.

**5. Could you comment on your thinking about improvement for high performing schools—are you sure they won’t be penalized?**

SBE’s accountability system isn’t about penalizing schools – it’s about providing those schools that are struggling with targeted assistance to help improve student learning. Additionally, the system is set up to recognize exemplary schools that are achieving results for their students.

We are aware that there is a “ceiling effect” for high-performing schools and that they cannot improve any more when they reach the highest levels of student achievement. Our consultant and advisors are working on a method to ensure schools and districts are not penalized with lower rankings when all of their students perform at the highest possible level.

**6. Are students that don’t speak English still going to be required to take the test?**

OSPI and federal policies require 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELL students to take the math WASL, even if it is their first year in a Washington public school. However, the results are not counted in AYP calculations. These students are not required to take the other WASL tests until their second year. While ELL students may be required to take the various WASL tests, we are discussing the possibility of excluding their results from accountability calculations until they have achieved a designated level of English proficiency.

**7. ELL hampers us with AYP because the same students are counted in multiple categories—would ELL students be counted once or several times?**

ELL students are not a separate category for accountability. Since most ELL students are also from low-income families, many would be included in the “achievement of low-income students” indicator, just like other students who are considered low income.

**8. If the Accountability Index contains any of the components of NCLB that are unfair measures (e.g., testing children who don’t speak English), it will be hard to garner state support.**

We agree. We aim to have a fairer, more valid system than what is required under NCLB. That means not including invalid results when calculating school and district results, such as those for ELL students who cannot read English (see response to #6 above).

**9. Has there been consideration of a different scale? A 4-point scale doesn’t give a lot of spread.**

The current proposal uses a 5-point scale (from 0-4), but based on feedback like yours, we will likely move to using a larger point spread (e.g., from 1 to 7).

**10. Will there be an opportunity to look at similarities in schools that are in the same category on the index—e.g., what three areas of concern do they all have?**

We plan to work with OSPI in the coming months to create new parts of the Report Card that will provide more information about the accountability results, including ways to look at results for schools with similar student characteristics and the characteristics and results for schools that fall into the same tier.

## **State and Local Partnerships for Low Performing Schools**

### **11. Did researchers report successful approaches in other states?**

Yes. Much of the research from Mass Insight's prior work was used to develop their final December 1, 2008 report to the Board (see pages 20-27 of that report on the Board's Web site: [www.sbe.wa.gov](http://www.sbe.wa.gov)). For more reports, go to the Mass Insight Web site at [www.buildingblocks.org/micontent/annotated.aspx](http://www.buildingblocks.org/micontent/annotated.aspx).