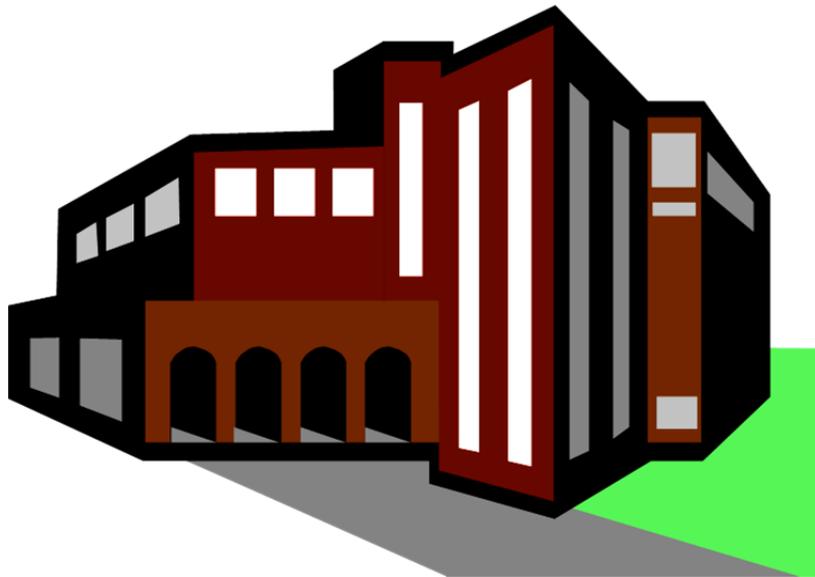


PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY HANDBOOK



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

The General Assembly is required by the Colorado Constitution to establish and maintain a thorough and uniform system of free public schools, where any person between the ages of 6 and 21 may be educated. At the same time, the constitution places control of public school instruction in locally elected boards of education. Under this system, the legislature provides financial support and establishes statutory guidelines applicable to all school districts, and local school boards determine curricula and instruction.

Statewide supervision of public schools is vested in an elected State Board of Education (SBE), whose duties include accrediting schools and districts, administering statewide assessments, and publishing information on school performance. The SBE appoints a Commissioner of Education who oversees the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The commissioner and department support the SBE in the conduct of their duties, and provide schools and districts with leadership, technical assistance, and administrative services.

Significant changes to federal and state law have shaped the scope and focus of reform efforts and accountability for Colorado's public schools. At the state level, education reform that began in the early 1990s has evolved into a system of state and local accreditation, with the requirement that schools both improve student academic performance over time, and ensure that students graduate from high school ready for postsecondary careers or further academic study.

This executive summary provides an overview of the public school accountability process, with additional details provided in the sections that follow.

The Education Accountability Act of 2009. State law outlines the system to hold the state, schools, and school districts accountable for student academic performance.¹ The accountability provisions in law aim to maximize academic achievement and track over time each student's progress toward postsecondary and workforce readiness. State law provides consequences for schools that fail to meet state performance standards, and assistance for schools and districts trying to improve.

Performance indicators. The state collects and reports student performance data and holds districts and schools accountable for performance on a common set of measures, called performance indicators, which include:

- student achievement levels on statewide assessments;
- student academic growth;
- closing achievement and growth gaps; and
- postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Standards and assessments. The school accountability process begins with the adoption of academic standards by the SBE. Standards are statements of the academic knowledge and intellectual skills students need to be successful at each grade level. The state

¹ Section 22-11-101, et seq. C.R.S.

academic standards, or an equally rigorous set of standards, must be adopted by each local school board.

Each spring, the state evaluates all students in grades three through ten using a common grade-level assessment. Students are also assessed once in high school, using a college aptitude assessment. From 1997 through 2011, the state's assessment program was known as the Colorado Student Assessment Program or CSAP. The CSAP served as the principal evaluative component of the state's educational accountability system during this time.

State academic content standards were originally adopted pursuant to House Bill 93-1313, and the test questions on the CSAP exam were designed to measure if students met those standards. School and district performance on standardized tests are typically expressed as the percentage of students who are proficient at meeting the academic content standards.

The adoption of new academic content standards in December 2009 required the development of new assessments capable of measuring the new standards. In response, the CDE designed transitional assessments, known as the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP), to replace the CSAP assessments during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. The TCAP was designed as a bridge assessment, meaning that the test was aligned both to the original standards adopted in 1994, and to the new academic standards adopted by the SBE in 2009. During the spring of 2014, TCAP assessments were administered in reading, writing, and mathematics, along with the newly developed Colorado Summative Assessments for science and social studies. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, new assessments measuring only the new content standards will be used. The state's new assessment program is known as the Colorado Measures of Academic Success, or CMAS.

Longitudinal growth. Assessment data and other test results are analyzed using the Colorado Growth Model, a statistical model capable of determining the rate of growth necessary for individual students to reach proficiency on the standards. Schools must use assessment results and growth model data to help students who are not proficient achieve proficiency within three years, or by grade ten, whichever comes first. The growth model is also used to evaluate the progress necessary to close achievement gaps between historically disadvantaged student groups and other students needing to catch up academically with their peers, and to evaluate teacher effectiveness.

Accreditation. The school accountability process results in accreditation, or certification by the SBE that a district meets the requirements established in the Education Accountability Act and all related rules adopted by the SBE. Accreditation also indicates that a district is complying with all requirements for improvement planning, and is following state policies concerning financial operations, reporting, truancy, and school safety, among other requirements. The SBE annually reviews the performance of schools and districts in the state and, based on the level of attainment on the four performance indicators, enters into accreditation contracts with the districts based on one of five categories:

- **Accredited with distinction** means the district met or exceeded state expectations and is required to adopt and implement a performance plan;
- **Accredited** means the district met expectations on the performance indicators and is required to adopt and implement a performance plan;

- **Accredited with improvement plan** means the district has not met expectations and is required to adopt and implement an improvement plan;
- **Accredited with priority improvement plan** means the district has not met expectations and is required to adopt and implement a priority improvement plan; and
- **Accredited with turnaround plan** means the district has not met expectations and is required to adopt and implement a turnaround plan.

Districts may not remain accredited in the lowest two categories for longer than five consecutive years before the SBE removes accreditation altogether.

If the CDE recommends removing accreditation, the commissioner assigns the State Review Panel to critically evaluate the district's performance and advise the commissioner on accreditation decisions. Districts that lose accreditation may be required to reorganize or consolidate, accept management by a third-party private or public entity, have one or more schools converted to charter or innovation schools, or have one or more schools permanently closed. The current accreditation category for schools and districts may be found on the CDE website.

Performance reporting. CDE maintains an online data portal, SchoolView, which reports student achievement and school and district performance. On SchoolView, accessible through the CDE website (www.cde.state.co.us), the public may find the performance report, accreditation category, and school or district improvement plans for each public school and school district in the state, and for the Charter School Institute (CSI).

Improvement planning. Colorado schools and districts are required to continuously improve student learning and system effectiveness. To support this, the law requires that schools and districts prepare either a performance or improvement plan based on the accreditation category it receives from the CDE. For example, an accredited district is required to prepare a performance plan; a district accredited in the improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan categories is required to prepare a plan that aligns with that accreditation category.

The CDE maintains a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) template and planning process to assist schools and districts. Both performance and improvement plans begin with the same UIP template, which requires schools and districts to set targets, identify trends and root causes, specify strategies to address identified performance challenges, indicate available resources, and identify benchmarks and interim targets to monitor progress. Districts may also be required to provide certain addenda with their completed UIP form. For example, schools and districts with a turnaround plan must also identify one or more turnaround strategies from an approved list on the District Turnaround Status Addendum.

Accountability committees. Colorado's K-12 accountability system provides for district-level and school-level accountability committees to assist districts with the implementation of state requirements. Accountability committees are comprised of district officials, parents, and community members, and make recommendations to the local school board and to school-based administrators concerning accountability issues.

Other state education requirements. In addition to holding schools and districts accountable for student academic achievement, the state also has laws affecting the way schools and districts address early grade reading instruction (the Colorado READ Act), the assessment of English language learners (ACCESS for ELLs),² and the evaluation system for teachers and principals (Senate Bill 10-191).

Federal public school accountability. The state also holds districts and schools accountable through various program requirements under federal law, principally the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

² Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners

STATE K-12 ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Performance Indicators

The CDE reviews each district's performance based on four evaluative criteria, known as performance indicators:

- student achievement levels on statewide assessments;
- student academic growth;
- closing achievement and growth gaps; and
- postsecondary and workforce readiness.³

Academic achievement measures whether a district is meeting the state's proficiency goal, using a district's results on the statewide assessment.

Academic growth measures student academic progress using the Colorado Growth Model. The state evaluates a district's performance in two ways:

- how its students performed on state assessments compared to those in other districts, referred to as normative growth; and
- whether student achievement is sufficient for a typical student to reach proficiency in three years or by the tenth grade, whichever is sooner, referred to as adequate growth.

Academic growth gaps measure the academic progress of historically disadvantaged student populations and students who are below proficient on state assessments. This performance indicator examines normative and adequate growth of these specific student subsets:

- students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch as defined under the federal National School Lunch Act;
- minority students;
- students with disabilities;
- English language learners; and
- students scoring below proficient on state assessments.

Postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR) measures a student's preparedness for college or the workforce upon graduating from high school. A district's performance is rated based on its student graduation rates, dropout rates, and average Colorado ACT exam composite scores.

A PWR description was adopted in June 2009 by the SBE and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE). PWR is defined as the knowledge, skills, and behaviors essential for high school graduates to be prepared to enter college and the workforce and to compete in the global economy. To be designated as postsecondary and workforce ready, secondary school students must demonstrate that both academic content knowledge and

³ Section 22-11-204, C.R.S.

specific learning and behavior skills have been achieved without the need for remedial instruction or training.

Students must demonstrate content knowledge in literacy, math, science, social studies, and the humanities. Learning skills include critical thinking and problem solving, appropriate use of information and technology, creativity and innovation, cultural awareness, civic responsibility, work ethic, personal responsibility, communication, and collaboration.

Demonstration of students' achievement include the completion of increasingly challenging, engaging, and coherent academic work and experiences and the achievement of proficiency shown by PWR assessments and other relevant materials that document a student's PWR.

Standards and Assessments

Requirements for the adoption and implementation of academic standards signified an early phase in education reform undertaken in Colorado during the 1990s, and remain an important part of the state's accountability system.

New academic standards adopted by the SBE in December 2009 detail the broad themes, ideas, and concepts that the state expects students to learn, experience, and demonstrate for postsecondary success. The new standards replace the original content standards that were adopted in 1994 when the state first shifted to a common statewide understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level.

Currently, the state has developed or adopted academic content standards for English language competency, comprehensive health and physical education, mathematics, science, social studies, performing and visual arts, and world languages.⁴

State law requires that local education providers adopt academic standards that meet or exceed the state standards, and adopt standards in at least the subject matter areas that are included in the state standards.⁵ Local education providers are charged with developing and implementing curricula and assessments that are aligned with the standards adopted by the local education provider.⁶ In addition to assessments developed and administered by the local education provider, every student enrolled in a public school is required to take the annual state assessments in the grade level in which the student is enrolled.⁷

Common core state standards. Common core state standards (common core) represent a multi-state effort to establish a set of common expectations for the knowledge and skills that students need in order to graduate from high school prepared for a career or to enter college. The common core standards establish what students need to learn, but do not prescribe how the standards are to be met. States may voluntarily adopt and implement the standards; to date, the District of Columbia and 42 states, including Colorado, have adopted the common core.

⁴ Section 22-7-406, C.R.S.

⁵ Section 22-7-1013, C.R.S.

⁶ Section 22-7-1013 (2) and (3), C.R.S.

⁷ Section 22-7-409 (1.2)(d)(I)(A), C.R.S.

Through the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, governors and education commissioners from multiple states have led the development of the common core standards. Following a comparison of common core standards with similar state standards, the SBE adopted the common core state standards in mathematics and English language arts in 2010; however, the state also continues to maintain "unique to Colorado" standards in those content areas.

Student assessments. The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), implemented through statute beginning in 1997, served as the principal evaluative component of the state's accountability system through the 2011-12 school year.⁸ The primary purpose of the student assessment program is to determine the level at which Colorado students meet the academic standards in the content areas assessed (mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies). The data are used to track individual student, school, and district progress toward attaining higher student academic achievement.

The adoption of new academic standards in December 2009 required the development of new assessments capable of measuring the new standards. The prior CSAP assessments were aligned only with the original, older standards. The CDE designed a transitional assessment — the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) — to replace the CSAP during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. During the 2013-14 school year, the TCAP was administered along with newly developed summative assessments in science and social science.

The TCAP allowed schools and districts the opportunity to adapt curriculum and instruction to the new standards, and gave the state time to adopt new English language arts and mathematics assessments aligned only with the updated academic and common core standards. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, new assessments measuring only the new content standards will be used. The state's revised student assessment program is known as the Colorado Measure of Academic Success, or CMAS.

PARCC developed assessments. States that have adopted the common core are currently collaborating to develop assessments that will be aligned to those standards in mathematics and English language arts. States may participate in the assessment development process through one of two consortia: the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Colorado joined PARCC in 2010 and became a Governing Board member in 2012. Governing board states in PARCC make the largest commitment to the consortia and its activities, and retain the most decision-making authority among participating states. The assessments developed by PARCC in mathematics and English language arts will be ready for incorporation into the CMAS program beginning with the 2014-15 school year. These new computer-based assessments will be administered in grades 3 through 11 for English language arts and in grades 3 through 8 plus three high school assessments for mathematics. Assessments in each content area will be administered in two components: a performance-based assessment administered after approximately 75 percent of the school year has been completed, and an end-of-term assessment administered after 90 percent of the school year has been completed.

⁸ Section 22-7-409, C.R.S.

Colorado-developed assessments. New state science and social studies assessments were administered online in Colorado for the first time during the 2013-14 school year. These assessments were developed collaboratively between the CDE, Colorado educators with subject matter expertise, and an assessment contractor. During the spring of 2014, the state began assessing social studies in fourth, seventh, and twelfth grade, and science in fifth, eighth, and twelfth grade.

Assessing students with special needs. The CMAS provides for the participation of nearly all special education students by allowing accommodations for test administration. Federal law requires that state policymakers and local educators assess the individual needs of special education students through an individualized education program (IEP). The IEP helps determine whether a student requires testing accommodations. Accommodations are meant to give special education students an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, while retaining the integrity of the assessment. Accommodations could include "presentation accommodations," such as a qualified person reading questions aloud to a student or providing large print editions of tests and instructional materials to students with visual impairments. "Response accommodations" may allow the use of a dictionary or of a scribe to record the student's response in written form.

Students who are unable to participate in the general assessments may be assessed in literacy, math, and science skills through the Colorado Alternate exam, or CoALT. As a performance-based assessment, the CoALT allows students to demonstrate their skills, which are observed by the test administrator. For example, a student participating in the CoALT may listen to a story and be asked to respond to reading comprehension questions. According to the CDE, performance indicators for the CoALT are intended to measure how independently a student is able to perform each activity.

Longitudinal Growth

The Colorado Growth Model is the statistical tool the state uses to calculate growth in student achievement, as measured by performance on statewide assessments. The growth model is used to estimate student, school, and school district performance on state accountability goals.⁹ Starting with the 2014-15 school year, teachers and principals will also be evaluated on student academic performance and growth, as part of the teacher and principal evaluation system.

The growth model allows the CDE to provide educators with two important measures of student achievement. The first measure, the student growth percentile (SGP), describes the change in an individual student's academic achievement relative to his or her academic peers – those students who have demonstrated identical prior achievement on statewide assessments. The SGP is a normative measure, where a student's growth is only meaningful in the context of his or her academic peers. The SGP thus provides a context for discussions about whether student progress is or is not "normal".

A student's SGP is determined by comparing his or her assessment score with the range of scores posted by peers. For example, if a student's SGP is 82, the student's growth is determined to be as good or better than 82 percent of that student's academic peers. Using the

⁹ Section 22-11-202, C.R.S.

SGP, the CDE is able to project the range of a student's achievement for the following year based on high, typical, and low growth. Table 1 shows which percentile ranges correspond with the growth levels.

**Table 1
Percentile Ranges by Growth Level**

Growth Level	Percentile Range on Statewide Assessment
Low	Below 35%
Typical	35 - 65%
High	Above 65%

The second measure is known as the adequate growth percentile (AGP). In addition to the normative information provided by the SGP, the AGP calculates the amount of academic growth necessary to reach Colorado's accountability standard: subject matter proficiency in three years' time, or by the tenth grade, whichever comes first.

Essentially, the AGP predicts the amount of sustained academic growth necessary for a student to achieve proficiency in three years. While the SGP is a measure of observed growth, the AGP is a measure of aspirational growth. Both measures are reported to Colorado schools and districts for each individual student. Comparisons of these two metrics allow educators to determine whether a student is on track to reach the standard within the required time frame.

For students with valid statewide assessment scores in a content area for two consecutive years, the department calculates longitudinal growth for each student to determine if the growth is enough for the student to be:

- "catching up," if the student was in the unsatisfactory or partially proficient category and demonstrates enough academic growth to reach proficiency within three years or by grade ten;
- "keeping up," if the student was in the proficient or advanced category and maintains adequate growth to stay within the proficiency rating over the next three years or by grade ten; or
- "moving up," if the student was in the proficient category and shows enough growth to move up to the highest proficiency rating.

Students who are proficient or advanced for two years are automatically deemed as achieving adequate growth. Students with an achievement level of unsatisfactory or partially proficient in their first year may demonstrate proficiency in two ways:

- attain an achievement level of proficient or advanced in the second year of statewide assessment scores, which places a student in the keeping up or moving up categories; or
- demonstrate that they are on track to be proficient within three years or by tenth grade, whichever comes first.

Accreditation

The CDE is responsible for holding all districts and schools accountable for quality performance. The department formally details how districts are performing through the accreditation of local school districts.¹⁰ Accreditation confirms that the district is in compliance with all state laws governing public K-12 education, and whether or not the district is meeting performance targets set by the state. Each year, the SBE enters into accreditation contracts with every school district and the Charter School Institute (CSI). The department determines accreditation categories based on student performance on statewide assessments, and on the degree of improvement toward academic achievement goals, as measured by the Colorado Growth Model.

Accreditation contracts. All school districts are required to have an annual accreditation contract with the SBE. At a minimum, each plan must address the district's:

- level of attainment on four key performance indicators;
- adoption and implementation of its performance, improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan;
- implementation of its system for accrediting the schools within the district; and
- overall compliance with state and federal law.

The CDE evaluates performance under the accreditation contract terms and recommends to the SBE what kind of plan should be implemented by a school district or the CSI in order to meet the goals in the contract. The department monitors performance on the plans and updates its annual accreditation recommendations accordingly. The accreditation contracts for districts deemed as meeting the state's performance indicators can be renewed automatically, but school districts with performance issues must have their contract reviewed and agreed upon annually.

State review panel. The commissioner appoints a state review panel to assist in implementing the state's accountability law, and to assist the SBE in determining accreditation categories. The review panel assists in evaluating improvement and turnaround plans and provides recommendations for corrective actions that a school district or the CSI must undertake when they are at risk of losing accreditation. State law requires that panel members be selected on the basis of demonstrated expertise in the education field, but does not set a specific size for the panel.

Accreditation categories. School districts and the CSI are assigned one of five accreditation categories based on its attainment on the performance indicators and its accreditation contract. Table 2 describes the five accreditation categories.

¹⁰ Section 22-11-101, *et seq.*, C.R.S.

Table 2
School District Accreditation Categories

Accreditation Category	Definition
Accredited with Distinction	The district meets or exceeds state expectations for attainment on the performance indicators and is required to adopt and implement a performance plan.
Accredited	The district meets state expectations and is required to adopt and implement a performance plan.
Accredited with Improvement Plan	The district has not met state expectations and is required to adopt and implement an improvement plan.
Accredited with Priority Improvement Plan	The district has not met state expectations and is required to adopt and implement a priority improvement plan.
Accredited with Turnaround Plan	The district has not met state expectations and is required to adopt and implement, with the commissioner's approval, a turnaround plan.

Source: Colorado Department of Education

If a school district disagrees with the initial accreditation assignment, it may submit additional performance data by October 15 for the department's consideration. The department assigns a final accreditation category by November 15. A district with an accreditation category tied to either a priority improvement or a turnaround plan for more than five consecutive school years will lose accreditation.

Removal of accreditation. The department may recommend that a school district or the CSI lose its accreditation if it:

- is accredited with a turnaround plan and the department determines that the district or the CSI has failed to make substantial progress under the plan;
- has been accredited with a priority improvement plan or lower for five consecutive school years; or
- has failed to comply with state laws pertaining to budget, financial, and accounting policies within 90 days of being notified of noncompliance, and the loss of accreditation is required to protect the interest of the students enrolled in the district schools or institute charter schools and their parents.

After the department issues a recommendation to remove accreditation, the state review panel evaluates the school district's or CSI's performance. The panel may recommend a number of actions depending on whether it is a school district or a charter school under review. The review panel may recommend that a school district:

- reorganize, which may result in consolidation with another school district;
- allow a private or public entity, with the agreement of the school district, to take over the management of the entire district or of one or more district schools;

- convert one or more district schools into a charter school;
- grant one or more district schools innovation school status or designate a group of schools as an innovation school zone; or
- close one or more schools.

For the CSI, the state review panel may recommend that:

- the CSI board be abolished and that the Governor appoint a new board;
- a private or public entity take over the management of the CSI or one or more CSI schools; or
- one or more CSI schools be closed.

Based on the recommendations of the CDE, the state review panel, and the commissioner, the SBE makes a final determination of accreditation. If the SBE removes a district's or the CSI's accreditation, the SBE must inform the respective entity of its decision and the actions it must take in order to regain accreditation. If the school district or CSI takes the required corrective actions, the SBE may reinstate its accreditation at the level it deems appropriate. A school district and the CSI have the right to appeal to the SBE before any final action is taken to remove the school district's or the CSI's accreditation.

Performance Reporting

CDE maintains an online data portal, SchoolView, which reports student achievement and school and school district performance. On SchoolView, accessible through the CDE website (www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview), the public may find the performance report, accreditation category, and school or district improvement plans for each public school and school district in the state and for the CSI.

Performance reports. On SchoolView, the department publishes a performance report for each school, school district, the CSI, boards of cooperative educational services (BOCES), and the state as a whole. Each of the reports must contain the following information:

- the level of attainment on each of the performance indicators, including whether the targets set for the applicable school year were met;
- a comparison of how each school, school district, and the CSI performed in relation to its counterparts across the state;
- information comparing student performance over time, and among student groups; and
- the rates of completion, mobility, and truancy.

State law further requires that school performance reports provide the following information concerning the operation and environment of the public school:

- the percentage of students not tested or not included in determining attainment on the performance indicators;
- the rate of incidence of violations of the school's conduct code;
- data on student enrollment;
- employment data pertaining to the school staff;
- the availability of courses and programs not tested on the statewide assessment; and
- the availability of student health and wellness supports and programs.

In addition to the school performance reports being available online, every school must notify the parent or legal guardian of each student enrolled in the school of the availability of the performance report on SchoolView. The school must also ask parents if they would like a paper copy of the report and provide it upon request.

Improvement Planning

District improvement plans. School districts and the CSI are required to prepare a performance, improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan.¹¹ School districts and the CSI develop these plans based on the accreditation category they receive from the department. For example, a district accredited with distinction may be required to adopt and implement a performance plan; a district accredited with an improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan must adopt and implement an improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan. The CDE maintains a unified improvement planning template and process designed to meet state, federal, and program accountability requirements. All performance improvement plans must contain the following information:

- **targets:** ambitious but attainable targets that the district will meet on the four key statewide performance indicators;
- **trends:** positive and negative trends in the levels of attainment by the district on the performance indicators;
- **priority needs:** a prioritized list of needs in each performance indicator area where the school did not meet state performance expectations;
- **root causes:** root causes for each identified priority need for the district that must be addressed to raise the levels of attainment on the performance indicators and, if the district's schools serve students in preschool and kindergarten, to improve school readiness;

¹¹ Section 22-11-403, et.seq., C.R.S.

- **strategies:** specific, research-based, major improvement strategies that are appropriate in scope, intensity and type to address the district's root causes of any low performance;
- **resources:** identification of local, state, and federal resources that the district will use to implement the identified major improvement strategies; and
- **interim measures and implementation benchmarks:** assessment of whether the identified strategies are having the desired performance results.

For schools accredited with a turnaround plan, the district performance improvement plan must incorporate one or more of the following elements:

- employing a lead turnaround partner that uses research-based strategies and has a proven record of success working with districts under similar circumstances;
- reorganizing the oversight and management structure within the district to provide greater, more effective support for district schools;
- recognizing individual district schools as innovation schools or clustering district schools with similar governance or management structures into one or more innovation school zones and seeking designation as a district of innovation pursuant to state law;
- hiring an entity that uses research-based strategies and has a proven record of success working with districts under similar circumstances to operate one more district schools pursuant to a contract with the local school board or the CSI;
- converting one or more district schools to charter schools;
- renegotiating and significantly restructuring a charter school's charter contract; or
- other actions of comparable or greater significance or impact.

All districts must submit their plans to the CDE in January. Those districts that have been accredited with a turnaround plan must have the plan reviewed by the state review panel. The panel may provide recommendations to the commissioner for modifying the plan.

School accreditation and school plans. Each local school board is required to adopt a district-level accreditation system for its schools. A district issues an accreditation category to schools after the department issues an initial recommendation for which plan each school in the district should implement. From that information, the school district submits to the department the accreditation category it has issued for each school. If the district disagrees with any of the initial recommendations of the department, it may submit a statement explaining the difference. The department reviews what the school district submits and makes a final recommendation to the SBE, which the state board uses to issue final determinations for each school. The school's performance or improvement plan is then posted to the CDE website. At a minimum, a district's accreditation policies must include:

- the use of accreditation contracts that are comparable to the state accreditation system for school districts and the CSI;
- accreditation categories that are comparable to those used by the state in accrediting school districts;
- determination of a public school's accreditation category based on the public school's level of attainment on the state's performance indicators; and
- adoption and implementation of school performance, improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plans as required by the SBE.

A local school board may adopt more rigorous accreditation standards than those required by the state accreditation system for school districts.

Accountability Committees

District-level accountability committees. Under state law, each local school board is required to appoint, or establish a process to elect, a school district accountability committee. While the local board determines the number of people on the district accountability committee, it must include, at a minimum:

- at least three parents of students enrolled in a district school;
- at least one teacher who is employed by the school district;
- at least one school administrator who is employed by the school district; and
- at least one person representing the business community within the school district boundaries.

The district-level accountability committee is charged with:

- receiving input from each school-level accountability committee concerning each school's principal evaluation;
- providing input concerning the creation and enforcement of a school district's conduct and discipline code; and
- assisting in publicizing opportunities for parental involvement with the district-level accountability committee.¹²

School-level accountability committees. Each district public school must also have an accountability committee, comprised of at least seven members as follows:

- the principal of the school or the principal's designee;
- at least one teacher who provides instruction at the school;

¹² Section 22-11-302, C.R.S.

- at least three parents or legal guardians of students enrolled in the school;
- at least one adult member of an organization of parents, teachers, and students that is recognized by the school; and
- at least one person from the community.

The school-level accountability committee is charged with:

- recommending priorities for spending school moneys;
- advising school officials in the preparation and implementation of a school performance or improvement plan;
- providing recommendations to district accountability committees and district administrators concerning the development of principal evaluation systems;
- publicizing and holding a public school accountability committee meeting when discussing a priority improvement or turnaround plan, or reviewing a written plan; and
- publicizing opportunities for parental involvement and soliciting parents to become members of the school's accountability committee.¹³

¹³ Sections 22-11-401, and 22-11-402, C.R.S.

OTHER STATE EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Colorado READ Act

Adopted during the 2012 legislative session, the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (Colorado READ Act) targets the development of reading skills during students' early school years.¹⁴ The READ Act repealed, reenacted, and renamed the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA), and replaced the principal component of the CBLA (the Read-to-Achieve Grant Program) with the Early Literacy Grant Program. The READ Act differs from the CBLA by focusing on students identified as having a significant reading deficiency, outlining the requirements for parental involvement, and providing targeted funding to support interventions.

Each local education provider (LEP, i.e., school districts, BOCES, charter schools) must provide to students in kindergarten through third grade the instruction and evidence-based interventions necessary to ensure to the greatest extent possible that early-grade students develop the reading skills necessary for success in later grades.

LEPs must report to the CDE the number of early-grade students with significant reading deficiencies as defined in SBE rules. Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, each LEP must measure reading competency for early-grade students using a combination of assessments approved by the CDE. The department is required to maintain a list of approved instructional programs and professional development tools for LEPs to use to improve reading instruction. The department also provides regional training, technical assistance, and coaching as necessary.

When a student with a significant reading deficiency is identified, the law creates a process for teachers, parents, and other personnel to create a Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) plan. The READ plan is part of the student's academic record until the student achieves reading competency, and must follow the student if he or she enrolls in another school or district. The SBE has adopted additional rules to integrate READ plans with other individualized education plans and special education programs required by federal law.

The act creates the Early Literacy Grant Program in the CDE to provide funding to LEPs for literacy assessment, instructional support, and appropriate interventions for early-grade learners. The CDE evaluates grant applications, and the SBE awards the grants from the Early Literacy Fund to support the implementation of the act. The act requires that the CDE annually spend \$1.0 million to provide literacy support on a regional basis; \$4.0 million for Early Literacy Grant Program awards to LEPs; and the remaining money to fund LEPs directly based on the number of early-grade students identified as having a significant reading deficiency. A LEP that receives per-pupil intervention monies (PPIM) may use the funding to provide full-day kindergarten, operate a summer school literacy program, purchase tutoring services, or to provide other targeted interventions.

Each LEP must report specific information concerning reading deficiencies in early-grade students, instructional interventions, and student progress toward reading competency. LEPs that receive grants have additional reporting requirements.

¹⁴ Section 22-7-1201, et. Seq., C.R.S.

English Language Assessment Program

State law requires the assessment of English language learners in order to determine their level of English proficiency and to inform their appropriate placement in language instruction programs. The state uses diagnostic and evaluative assessments to assist in the identification and instruction of students that qualify for English Language Acquisition (ELA) programming. School districts are required to use the tests to screen new students and to measure existing students' progress in acquiring academic English skills.

Measuring Educator Effectiveness

In 2010, the General Assembly enacted legislation that impacts the way principals and teachers are evaluated.¹⁵ Through Senate Bill 10-191, a uniform framework was created for evaluating licensed educators across the state. Based on recommendations from the State Council for Educator Effectiveness and rules adopted by the SBE, each school district in Colorado was required to develop and implement a personnel performance evaluation system that aligns with or exceeds state requirements by July 2013. Statewide implementation of the evaluation system is expected to be finalized during the 2014-15 school year.

State Council for Educator Effectiveness. The State Council for Educator Effectiveness, originally established by executive order and codified into law during the 2010 legislative session, was required to make recommendations to the SBE concerning the implementation and testing of the new personnel performance evaluation system. The council was required to:

- define teacher and principal effectiveness;
- establish levels of effectiveness and performance standards;
- develop guidelines for a fair, rigorous, and transparent evaluation system; and
- recommend state policy changes to prepare, evaluate, and support teachers and principals.

In 2012, the SBE adopted new rules for the personnel performance evaluation system, supplanting existing rules; the General Assembly has reviewed and approved the rules.

State Model Evaluation System. To assist with implementation of the licensed personnel evaluation system, the CDE has developed the State Model Evaluation System which meets the requirements for personnel performance evaluation systems outlined in SBE rules. During the 2012-13 school year, the State Model Evaluation System for teachers and principals was piloted in 27 school districts throughout Colorado. During the 2013-14 school year, every school district in Colorado was required to provide annual assurance that they are implementing the model evaluation system, or a locally developed system that meets state statutory and regulatory requirements. State-approved evaluation systems must be implemented in all school districts beginning with the 2014-15 school year.

¹⁵ Section 22-9-101, et.seq., C.R.S.

Required program elements. Under the new personnel performance evaluation system, educators will be rated on quality standards that measure student learning over time, and on the educator's professional practice. All evaluation systems must include the following elements:

- teachers and principals are evaluated using multiple fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, and valid methods;
- at least 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation is determined by the academic growth of the teacher's students; and
- at least 50 percent of a principal's evaluation is determined by a combination of the academic growth of the students and the demonstrated effectiveness of the teachers in the principal's school.

In addition to being evaluated on student academic growth, both principals and teachers will also be assessed on quality standards that measure professional practice. For teachers, professional practice will be measured based on five quality standards, including: content knowledge, established classroom environment, ability to facilitate learning, reflection on practice, and ability to demonstrate leadership. Principals will be evaluated on six quality standards measuring professional practice, including: strategic leadership, instructional leadership, school cultural and equity leadership, human resource leadership, managerial leadership, and external development leadership.

Evaluator training. SBE rules state that all evaluators must be trained in the specific personnel performance evaluation system that they will be implementing. Any person who conducts an evaluation of school licensed personnel must either hold an administrator's license or go through a state-approved training program. State-approved programs include any authorized educator preparation program for administrators and the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) series of workshops. If a district chooses to use the Colorado State Model Evaluation System, evaluators must receive additional training to learn the technical requirements of the new system by attending a CDE training course, or a session that is led by someone in the district who has been trained in a CDE "train-the-trainer" session. If a district uses its own evaluation system, evaluators complete an approved supervision and evaluator course, and the district is responsible for any additional training required to implement the system.

School district personnel performance evaluation councils. Each school district and board of cooperative educational services (BOCES) required to implement a personnel performance evaluation system is also required to have an advisory school district personnel performance evaluation council, consisting of, at a minimum:

- in the case of a school district: one teacher, one administrator, and one principal representative from the school district; one resident from the school district whose child is a student at a school within the district; and one resident who does not have a child who is a student in the school district; or
- in the case of a BOCES: one teacher, one administrator, and one principal representative of the school district or districts participating in the BOCES; one person employed by the BOCES who is defined as licensed personnel; one resident

from the school district whose child is a student within the district or districts; and one resident of the district or districts who is not a parent of a child attending school within the district or districts.

The advisory council is required to consult with the school district board or BOCES as to the fairness, effectiveness, credibility, and professional quality of the licensed personnel performance evaluation system and its processes and procedures. The council must evaluate the system on an ongoing basis.

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the principal federal law affecting public education from kindergarten through twelfth grade. NCLB contains many provisions, chief among them a requirement that states administer annual standardized tests, collect and report test scores by school, separate data by subgroups of students, and impose corrective actions for schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward proficiency on state assessments. Specific requirements for how states defined AYP were also included in the reauthorization. By 2014, the law required that all students test proficient in their grade level for English language arts and math. The law's other main provision is the requirement that states employ only "highly qualified" teachers, defined as licensed professionals with demonstrated subject competency.

Colorado's NCLB waiver. In 2011, the state applied to the federal Department of Education for a waiver from the federal law. Once the waiver was approved, Colorado was given the authority to use a single accountability system to meet many of the NCLB requirements, including the requirement that districts annually measure school and district progress in meeting performance targets. In the past, the state used two different accountability systems: a state and a federal system. With approval of the waiver, Colorado now has one, unified accountability system.

Title IA, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. Title I, Part A (Title I) of the ESEA provides supplemental financial assistance to schools and school districts with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families. Title I is the largest ESEA program supporting K-12 education. The program distributes federal funding for schools to provide additional instruction time in reading and math to students most at risk of failing to meet academic content standards. Additional instruction often takes the form of before- and after-school programs or summer school. Schools and districts may also use Title I funds to help increase parental involvement, provide professional development for educators, or to support scientifically based programs and strategies.

Eligibility for Title I funds is determined through statutory formulas based primarily on census poverty estimates, and the cost of education in each state. Even though the amount of funding provided is based on poverty rates, not all students who benefit from Title I programs are necessarily students of poverty.

Title IIA, Preparing, Training and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals. Title II, Part A (Title II) is intended to increase student academic achievement by improving teacher and principal quality. This includes increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in classrooms, improving the skills of principals and assistant principals, and increasing the overall effectiveness of educators. School districts use Title II funds to recruit, hire and retain qualified staff and to provide quality professional development. School districts that receive Title II funds and have been assigned to either of the two lowest state accreditation categories are required to outline how their Title II allocation will be leveraged in the upcoming school year to address performance challenges and root causes identified in the district's improvement plan.

Title IIIA, Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. Title III, Part A (Title III) is intended to improve the education of limited English proficient students by helping them learn English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards. School districts that receive Title III funds are required to demonstrate that they are meeting their Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). The AMAO is a performance objective, or target, for English language learners. The state defines two English language proficiency AMAOs and a third academic achievement AMAO that Title III recipient districts must meet.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Originally enacted in 1975 by the U.S. Congress and most recently reauthorized in 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law mandating that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs. Under IDEA, a child with a disability is guaranteed access to public schools and related services until the age of 21.

The federal government provides funds to assist states in the education of students with disabilities, but it does not cover the full cost of providing these services. According to CDE estimates, federal and state funding represents about 35 percent of reimbursed expenses for special education services, with school districts contributing the remaining 65 percent of funding.

Individualized education programs. IDEA requires school districts to develop an individualized education program (IEP) for each child with a disability. The specific special education and related services outlined in each IEP reflect the individualized needs of each student and must be developed by a team of people, including the child's teacher, the parents, and the child, if appropriate; an agency representative who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education; and other individuals at the parents' or agency's discretion. Through Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act and its implementing regulations, the state imposes additional IEP requirements not covered by IDEA. Every IEP must be reviewed at least annually, and if there are decisions that either the parent and student or the school district feels are inappropriate, or if the family is dissatisfied with any aspect of the educational program, IDEA guarantees access to due process to ensure fair application of the law to all children with disabilities.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accountability Committees: All public schools are required to have a school-level accountability committee (SAC) made up of parents, school employees and community members. The SAC advises the school administration concerning budgets, curriculum, accountability issues and improvement strategies, among other topics. Districts are also required to have a district-level committee to make recommendations to the district board of education.

Accreditation Category: A state measurement rating a school district's overall academic performance based on four performance indicators.

Accreditation Contract: An annual contract between the State Board of Education and a local school board of education delineating the goals and requirements for the school district over the course of the contract. Mandatory inclusions in the contract are set forth in statute and SBE rules.

Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES): Colorado BOCES supply educational services to two or more school districts that alone cannot afford the service, or find it advantageous or cost effective to cooperate with other districts. Examples of services provided by BOCES include special education services, curriculum/staff development, standards and assessment support, cooperative purchasing, technology support, and data management such as human resources and student information systems.

Charter Schools: Tuition-free public schools that enter into a charter contract with a school district or the Charter School Institute to operate a school without certain restrictions and policies that govern other public schools.

Charter School Institute (CSI): An independent state agency created by the General Assembly in 2004 to authorize charter schools as an alternative to obtaining authorization from a school district.

Colorado Alternate Assessment (CoAlt): The alternate, performance and demonstration based assessments for students with special needs who are unable to participate in the general CMAS assessments.

Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) Program: A state program to assess the English language skills of English language learners and to inform appropriate instructional placement in compliance with federal and state law. The program includes both a placement test for enrolling students with a primary language other than English and a proficiency test for those receiving English language support services.

Colorado Growth Model: A statistical model to calculate each student's progress on state assessments, and to display student, school, and district performance results to educators, policy makers, and the public.

Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS): The state testing program for students in grades three through ten in reading, writing, and math, as well as a computer-based science assessment for students in grades five, eight, and eleven, and a social studies assessment for students in grades four, seven, and eleven.¹⁶

English Language Learner (ELL): A student whose dominant language is not English. For purposes of receiving language services, the student may be determined to be limited-English proficient or non-English proficient.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A federally and state-required written plan for a student with a disability that is developed and reviewed in accordance with statutory and regulatory guidelines.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A federal law mandating that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs.

Individual Literacy Plan (ILP): An individualized plan for a student in kindergarten or in grades one through three whose reading readiness or literacy and reading comprehension skills are assessed at below grade level. The plan specifies strategies for improving a student's literacy skills and remains in place until the student is reading at or above grade level.

Innovation Schools/Innovation Districts: Schools and districts that receive flexibility from certain state and district policies or requirements in order to attempt new or innovative educational strategies.

Model Academic Standards: State academic standards adopted by the State Board of Education for specific academic content areas. Academic standards provide benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do in each content area at different grade levels. Under state law, each school district must adopt content standards that meet or exceed state standards.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act: The federal law that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001 and set new accountability provisions for states and school districts. Each state seeks federal approval of its state accountability plan in order to receive federal funding for NCLB programs.

SchoolView: An online portal that reports student achievement and school and school district performance data. On SchoolView, which may be accessed through the CDE website, the public may find the performance report, accreditation category, and school or district plans for each public school and school district in the state and the Charter School Institute.

Student Academic Growth Calculation: State-required calculation of each student's individual academic growth over one year's time based on performance on state assessments, and which includes an evaluation of whether the growth is adequate for the student to reach the performance level of "proficient" within three years or by grade ten, whichever comes first.

¹⁶ Editor's Note: From 1997 to 2011, the state's assessment program was referred to as the Colorado Student Assessment Program, or CSAP. From 2011 to 2014, the state's program was referred to as the Transitional Student Assessment Program, or TCAP. Beginning with the fall administration of statewide assessments in 2014, the state's assessment program will be known as the Colorado Measures of Academic Success, or CMAS.

Title I Program: A federal program that provides funding through four types of grants that flow through the state to school districts and schools with high percentages of students from low-income families.

Unified Improvement Planning: A tool used to streamline the improvement planning components of state and federal accountability requirements.