

California Accountability Model and School Dashboard: Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we have a new accountability system?

- The Dashboard is a key part of California's commitment to transparency and continuous improvement. California's future success depends on tapping into the potential of *all* students, so they graduate ready for college, careers, and life. For schools to reach this goal, teachers, parents, and the community need clear and useful measures of progress. As an accountability tool, the Dashboard will help the state identify schools (including charter schools) and districts needing targeted assistance.

What's different about this new accountability system?

- In the past, accountability systems for districts and schools relied solely on test scores. But one test taken on one particular day does not provide a complete picture of all the ways schools are helping students succeed.

Think of it this way: You can't drive a car by only watching the speedometer. You also keep your eye on the road, check the mirrors, monitor the gas tank and pay attention if the engine light comes on. Similarly, the Dashboard provides information on different aspects of student performance, which will give a more complete picture of a school's progress. The Dashboard also reports on growth to show a school's trajectory over time.

What does this mean for my school?

- Each year, school administrators will review the updated dashboard for their school along with a wide variety of timely, locally provided information to assess student and school outcomes. Administrators will discuss these findings with their staff and integrate them into their ongoing planning efforts to continually improve teaching and learning at their school.

Where do I go to ask more questions?

- Your local school administrators will be pleased to discuss their results and how this accountability system works. The California Department of Education's Academic Accountability Team can answer technical questions at (916) 319-0863.

How can I tell if my child attends a good school?

- A quick way to locate a school's strengths is to check for green or blue state indicators. For yellow indicators, check the Status and Change Report for Change levels of "Increased" and "Increased Significantly"—these indicate that the school is demonstrating progress in improving these areas.

What do the colors mean?

- The colors show how well the school, district, or subgroup performed on the state indicators; blue represents the highest performance while red represents the lowest. More generally, blue and green indicate good performance, yellow is the color where most schools fall, and orange and red indicate performance in need of improvement.

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What's a good color?

- Green is the target or goal color for the state indicators, and blue is the highest level.

What do the pie icons mean?

- While the indicators may resemble pies, they are not intended to indicate a percentage or fraction like a pie chart. The indicators use both color and shape to display performance to ensure that the information is accessible to people with visual disabilities that may prevent them from distinguishing different colors.

For the suspension indicator, does green/blue mean a high suspension rate, or a low suspension rate?

- For the suspension indicator, green/blue performance generally indicates a small number of students were suspended and/or the school is suspending fewer students than in the previous year. While some suspensions are mandatory to ensure school safety, a high number of suspensions is undesirable because suspensions exclude those students from instruction. Schools that consistently manage student behavior through positive reinforcement and other, non-exclusionary methods tend to have fewer major behavior problems and keep kids in classrooms where they can learn.

Why are some indicators blank?

- The chronic absenteeism indicator and the college and career indicator are blank because the state is not yet ready to report them during the dashboard field test period. The local indicators will remain blank during the field test period and then districts will upload them to the dashboard in the Fall.

What is a subgroup?

- A subgroup is a group of students who share a common demographic like ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status, and English language ability.

What are the criteria for the performance categories for the state indicators?

- For the state indicators, performance is determined by how well a school is doing now (status), and how much the school improved (change). The State Board of Education determined cut-points for status and change for each indicator to make an objective categorical determination of how favorable or unfavorable the combination of status and change is. More information can be found on the CDE's Dashboard website at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/DASHBOARD>

How can I compare this information with other/similar schools?

- The dashboard website does not currently allow side-by-side comparisons with other schools.