

MCIEA Accountability Subcommittee
Final Recommendations on Identifying and Supporting Struggling Schools

We tackled the following question:

What is the role of the state once you have the data from the school quality measures data dashboard in identifying schools that are not doing well and need additional support?

While not in favor of rating schools, the federal ESSA requires that states identify the lowest performing 5% of schools, high schools with four-year graduation rates less than 67%, and schools with the lowest performing subgroups. The consortium recommends the following process for identifying the lowest performing 5% of schools and those schools with the lowest performing subgroups.

- Data on individual schools and districts should be reported every two years, with a more streamlined “thermometer check” in between for schools that have been identified as underperforming
- Every school’s data within all five SQM categories should be reported on and be public
- Each school’s report should include the data within each of the five SQM categories - Teachers and the Teaching Environment, Resources, Student Learning, Character and Well-Being, and School Culture and Safety, with the capacity to drill down to question-level data
- There should be two levels of ratings – 95% of schools and those schools in the lowest 5% of performance. Within the 95% of schools, there should be no ratings; rather, merely reporting on performance within each of the school quality measures
- Decisions to identify the lowest performing 5% of schools and schools with the lowest performing subgroups should be based on all of the school quality categories and measures (Teachers and the Teaching Environment, Resources, Student Learning, Character and Well-Being, and School Culture and Safety)
 - Establish benchmarks of high quality schools, as well as thresholds of acceptable performance, in each SQM category
 - Schools that fall below the threshold performance should be identified within each of the five SQM categories
 - Schools that fall below the threshold performance in three or more of the five SQM categories should be placed within the lowest performing 5% of schools list
- Once the lowest performing 5% of schools is identified, they should receive the following support:
 - **Emphasize support rather than punishment.** Build the accountability system on using evidence to direct relevant support to schools, with the goal of building capacity for improvement.

- **Identify Resources:** A resource bank of consultants, tools, materials, and schools that are excelling should be created for each of the five SQM categories. One possibility is to provide omnibus contracts to selected nonprofit organizations within each SQM category to work with identified low performing schools
- **Require Schools to Create Local Boards of Advisors:** Comprising representatives of DESE, central office, local teachers union, parents, students (high school), and community, these boards should provide recommendations on how to address the SQM gaps, approve local school plans once developed, and oversee progress
- **School Plans Based on Gap Areas:** Low performing schools should develop improvement plans based on their SQM gap areas and what needs to be done to attain the benchmarks in the target areas
- **Pair Schools:** Pair schools that are not doing well with schools that are high performers and/or are demonstrating growth in the same SQM categories. These pairings should occur with the overarching premise that each school can make valuable contributions to the conversations that will take place, rather than the notion that one school is coming in to fix another
- **Provide Adequate Funding:** Ensure that each identified low performing school has access to funds to acquire the resources identified in their plans, and that another pool of funds provides support to the paired high performing schools to work with the low performing schools
- **Exclude Teacher Evaluation from Student Learning Growth:** While teacher evaluation could be identified as a gap area to be strengthened, there should be no requirements to tie student learning growth to teacher evaluation
 - Take-over of schools
- The practice of take-over of schools and districts should be eliminated. We need to challenge the assumptions of the redesign efforts if progress has not been made, by rethinking the causes of the gaps that had been identified, and thereby designing new strategies to address them. The state role should be to help schools and districts with the assessment process, design of strategies to address them, and then providing financial and resource support.