

Framework for The Academic Performance Index

Introduction

The Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 requires that by July 1, 1999, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) develop, with the approval of the State Board of Education (SBE), an Academic Performance Index (API) to measure the performance of California public schools. The Act also provides for the formation of an Advisory Committee to assist in this process. In the discharge of its duties, the Advisory Committee in turn consults with a Technical Design Group.

The Advisory Committee's work on this framework has just begun, and there are many areas requiring additional technical work. Further clarification and recommendations to the SPI and SBE will be presented as the Committee's work unfolds. However, to meet the statutory deadline for API development, the Committee presents the following framework for consideration. The adoption of this framework will allow the Committee's work to proceed under three primary organizers to define specific yearly API's. These organizers are:

- Guiding Principles
- Design Features
- Use of the API

Guiding Principles

In order to ensure an orderly development of the Academic Performance Index (API), it is important to begin with a statement of core beliefs about the API. At times certain of these principles may come into conflict. Ultimately, it will be the role of the SPI and SBE to resolve these conflicts by establishing policy priorities. These policies should be informed by the biennial evaluations required by Education Code Section 52058(b), (c), and (d), which should include validity studies on the API and the API components. These guiding principles are intended to provide a foundation for development of the API and to minimize the possibility of adverse effects related to implementation of the API and its component indicators.

1. The API must be technically sound.

Comparable, valid, and reliable measures must be used to the greatest extent feasible in order to maximize the validity of the API for its intended purposes. Given the high-stakes nature of the API, the many well-meaning educators, parents, and students who will be affected by the API will lose heart if it is not accurate or if it does not evolve in an orderly fashion from year to year. Decisions in developing the API will involve trade-offs between technical soundness and efficiency, but fairness must not be sacrificed. The challenge will be to balance these issues while also considering legal requirements, data availability, and sound education policy.

2. The API must emphasize student performance, not educational processes.

As important as it is to focus on the many central features of schooling that might be considered as indicators (e.g., teachers, instructional resources, curriculum, and school organization), the primary emphasis of the API is student performance.

3. The API must strive to the greatest extent to measure content, skills, and competencies that can be taught and learned in school and that reflect the state standards.

The matter of validity in measurement must be a continuing interest and focus in the development of the API. Adequate research and exploratory studies will need to be conducted to investigate and verify that the API accurately represents what it is intended to measure. Likewise, the API should incorporate and consolidate (where feasible and appropriate) statewide assessments as they become aligned to statewide content and performance standards. Achievement of state education goals--state content and performance standards--must be the framework for the focus on student performance.

4. The API must allow for fair comparisons.

The API must give all students a fair chance to show what they know and have learned. Given differences in student backgrounds and the resources available to schools, not all schools and students start out the same. Therefore, it is important that any comparisons be made and reported fairly. The challenge is to reflect differences among schools and students fairly without institutionalizing lower expectations for some. More specifically, the API should reflect changes across the distribution of scores, and it should value growth among low-achieving, average, and high-achieving students. It should also be constructed in such a way that improvement is possible regardless of current level of performance (i.e., schools with high-achieving students and schools with low-achieving students can both receive rewards).

5. The API should include as many students as possible in each school and district.

The API should reflect the achievement and the growth of all students, including English language learners and those with special needs, except students who are legally exempted from testing, who are at grade levels for which appropriate testing instruments are unavailable, or for whom available test results do not reliably and validly measure their achievement. All schools should apply common standards of pupil participation in assessments (i.e., inclusion criteria) to enable valid comparisons among schools.

6. The API must measure school performance and growth as accurately as possible.

Changes from the base year to the growth year within each overlapping two-year API cycle should reflect actual changes in school performance, not changes in testing procedures, inclusion criteria, or other variables.

7. The API should strive in the long-term to measure growth based on student-level longitudinal data.

As California transitions to the implementation of the California School Information Services (CSIS), the API should accommodate indicators emanating from CSIS.

8. The API should be flexible and its component indicators should be stable.

The API should be flexible to accommodate incorporation of future indicators or components and should evolve in an orderly fashion as additional indicators become available and are incorporated over time. Within each overlapping two-year API cycle, all component indicators should be the same, with common definitions from year to year.

9. The API should be understandable, particularly to educators and parents.

The API is intended to give parents a picture of schools' status and growth based on a limited set of indicators. Reports about the API should communicate clearly and simply. Explanations about what should and should not be inferred should accompany the release of the data. The API is also intended to provide clear guidance for teachers and administrators about the progress of their schools and lead to appropriate actions to improve the performance of students. Both the general public and education stakeholders must trust the API and believe it is serving its intended functions. Therefore, a concentrated effort will be needed to communicate well to the entire public, including the parents of English language learners.

10. The API is part of an overall accountability system that must include comprehensive information which incorporates contextual and background indicators beyond those required by law.

While the API itself must emphasize student performance measures, other descriptive contextual and background information about schools and districts should be utilized as part of the entire accountability system. No matter how valid and reliable any single indicator may be, it should not be interpreted independently of other indicators and environmental factors that reflect the larger context of learning. The accountability system should strive to provide an integrated and comprehensive picture of the schooling enterprise that allows users to determine the reasons for low performance as well as solutions.

11. The API should minimize burden.

Minimizing the burden requires designing the API so that it can be implemented within given cost constraints; does not strain current levels of state and local expense in data collection, analysis, and use; and creates a limited respondent burden. Burdens can be reduced by coordinating state and local accountability efforts to minimize the amount of instructional time devoted to testing and other data collection, while ensuring that the information needs of the state, local districts, and schools are met.

12. The API should support local accountability systems.

The API should be the foundation of a statewide accountability system that serves as a model for local accountability systems. The use of local indicators, systems, and reporting for local uses should be encouraged in order to augment statewide comparative and longitudinal information.

13. The API must conform to the requirements and intent of the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 as well as related legislation.

§52052 (a). The index shall consist of a variety of indicators currently reported to the State Department of Education including, but not limited to:

- The results of the achievement test administered pursuant to Section 60640 (STAR Program),
- Attendance rates for pupils and certificated school personnel for elementary schools, middle schools, and secondary schools, and
- Graduation rates for pupils in secondary schools.

Before including high school graduation rates and attendance rates in the index, the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall determine the extent to which the data are currently reported to the state and the accuracy of the data. If the Superintendent of Public Instruction determines that accurate data for these indicators are not available, the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall report to the Governor and the Legislature by September 1, 1999, and recommend necessary action to implement an accurate reporting system.

§52052 (b). Pupil scores from the following tests, when available and when found to be valid and reliable for this purpose, shall be incorporated into the API:

- (1) The assessment of the applied academic skills matrix test developed pursuant to Section 60604.
- (2) The nationally normed test as augmented pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (f) of Section 60644 (augmented STAR).
- (3) The high school exit examination.

§52052 (a). Only the test scores of pupils enrolled in a school district for one year or more may be included in the test results reported in the API.

§52052 (a). Results of the achievement test and other tests specified in 52052 (b) shall constitute at least 60 percent of the value of the index.

52052 (e). Beginning in June 2000, the API shall be used for both of the following:

- (1) Measure the progress of schools selected for participation in the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program pursuant to Section 52053.
- (2) Rank all public schools in the state for the purpose of the High Achieving/Improving Schools Program pursuant to Section 52056.

52056.5. Commencing with the 2000-01 fiscal year, a school that fails to meet annual state growth targets established pursuant to Section 52052 may, as determined by the Superintendent of Public Instruction with the approval of the State Board of Education, be subject to the Immediate Intervention/

Underperforming Schools Program pursuant to subdivisions (e) and (f) of Section 52053, and Sections 52053.5, 52054, 52054.5, 52055, and 52055.5.

52057 (a). The State Board of Education shall establish a Governor's Performance Award Program to provide monetary and nonmonetary awards to schools that meet or exceed API performance growth targets established pursuant to Section 52052, and demonstrate comparable improvement in academic achievement by all numerically significant ethnic and socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroups within schools.