

# INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** December 10-11, 2003

**TO:** MEMBERS, STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

**FROM:** Geno Flores, Deputy Superintendent  
Assessment and Accountability Branch

**SUBJECT:** The Academic Performance Index (API) Growth Report: Moving the Release Date to August

Currently the API growth report is released in October of each year. On November 13, 2003, the State Board of Education requested that the Program and Evaluation Division (PED) of the California Department of Education (CDE) consider the feasibility of moving the API release date so that it would occur on or before the release of the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report. The attached issue paper is in response to that request.

Attachments:

[Attachment 1](#): The Academic Performance Index (API) Growth Report: Moving the Release Date to August (Pages 1-4)

## **The Academic Performance Index (API) Growth Report: Moving the Release Date to August**

**Purpose:** Currently the API growth report is released in October of each year. On November 13, 2003, the State Board of Education requested that the Program and Evaluation Division (PED) of the California Department of Education (CDE) consider the feasibility of moving the API release date so that it would occur on or before the release of the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report. This paper is in response to that request. It is in four parts:

- First, it considers the background to the question, including the current AYP and API release schedule
- Second, it explores the feasibility of moving the date, including the conditions under which an August release would be possible
- Third, it reports the position of the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) Advisory Committee on the question
- Fourth, it summarizes the position of the CDE on the question

**Background:** In 2003, districts and schools received Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Reports on August 15, prior to the beginning of the traditional school year. As part of its assessment contract, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) generated the data used in the reports. The AYP reports included the percentages of students proficient in English language arts and mathematics as well as the participation rates of students in the assessments used to derive the percentages.

The AYP reports were released in August so that schools could be identified for program improvement prior to the beginning of the traditional school year. The intent was to afford parents the opportunity to exercise choice, i.e., move their children from a PI school to a non-PI school, before the start of the school year. Because of the early release, the Policy and Evaluation Division (PED) did not have the chance to conduct any type of data review process beforehand. Districts and schools had no chance to inform the PED of obviously erroneous data. As a result, there were errors in the reports that could have been prevented with a later release. Also, about 400 schools did not receive a complete report because of missing test results or demographic data.

On the same date, August 15<sup>th</sup>, the PED received the STAR data files necessary to produce the 2003 Growth API. In accord with past practice, PED released the 2003 Growth API in October, only after an intensive internal and external data review process. The October release gave districts the opportunity to review the demographic data that went into the calculation of district, school and subgroup APIs and to correct any erroneous data through the test publisher. This ensured a high degree of data quality for the October release, in contrast to the earlier August AYP Report. About 900 schools did not receive APIs in October 2003 because of data corrections. These schools will receive APIs in December 2003.

The AYP and API reports offered two very different pictures of school performance. In 2003 only about 55% of schools met the AYP criteria, while 78% of schools met their annual API growth targets, both school wide and subgroup, and more than 90% of schools made some gain in their API scores. As noted, the AYP reports included many more omissions and errors relative to the API reports. The AYP reports also included anomalous results, particularly in the area of participation rates. For example, a school could miss AYP because one or two students from a student subgroup did not take a test, even though the school more than met its annual measurable objectives (percent proficient or above) and the absence of two students had no impact on the determination whether or not the subgroup had met the same objectives.

As a result, many districts and schools questioned the validity of the AYP results. They instead preferred to rely on the more familiar API, considering it to be a far superior indicator of their performance. However, because the AYP release occurred in August 2003 and the API in October, the AYP release was given more coverage by the media. Schools that missed AYP, for whatever reason, had to bear the stigma of failure, despite having met their API growth targets. In the future, this discrepancy between API and AYP results will only increase, as the status bars for AYP increase.

### **Feasibility of an August release:**

To generate the API, the PED requires three data files: STAR, CAHSEE, and CAPA. In considering whether an August API release date is feasible, this paper assumes that the basic structure of the assessment system will remain the same. Schools will continue to administer STAR as late as June, in accord with current STAR regulations as well as other procedures that were implemented to accommodate the needs of districts. In view of this, the Standards and Assessment Division has informed the PED that it is unrealistic to expect the contractor, ETS, to make the STAR data files for 2004 available to CDE any earlier than it has in the past.

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that in 2004 the PED will receive STAR data files at approximately the same time as in 2003, about August 15, and in approximately the same condition. Based on our experience with 2003, the PED anticipates little problems with receiving CAHSEE and CAPA data files by August 15.

Moving the date of the growth release to August is not an easy task from an operational standpoint. It would involve stretching the resources of the units involved in the production of the API and AYP reports to the limit, because of the almost simultaneous release of the API and AYP reports. **Despite these concerns, an August release of the API is feasible, but only under certain conditions:**

- **The CDE should continue to perform the API calculations in house.** Besides eliminating the need to amend the ETS contract with the attendant increase in costs, keeping the API in-house would reduce the possibility of production delays and reporting errors, since PED has considerable experience in calculating APIs for the last five years.

In considering this question, data quality must be a paramount consideration. If the public begins to view the API as error-prone, an early release will produce exactly the opposite of the desired effect by undermining public confidence in the accuracy of API reporting.

- **The August growth API release should only include district level and school wide APIs.** These are the only APIs required for determining whether or not a district or school made AYP. Subgroup APIs would be released in December after the usual data review process and data corrections. This would dramatically reduce the possibility of faulty reporting in an August release because of data errors. The only demographic factor that would impact results would be errors in mobility coding, i.e., whether or not the student has been continuously enrolled in the district or school since the CBEDS date. Errors in coding ethnicity, free and reduced lunch status, or parent education would not impact the August release.
- **The release of the 2004 API and AYP Report should be moved to August 26.** It simply is impossible to ensure a reasonable degree of quality by immediately releasing the API without any type of internal checks. Both releases would still appear prior to the beginning of the traditional school year (the day after Labor Day).

An August 26 release would avoid releasing STAR results, API results, and AYP results simultaneously. From an operational standpoint, it would enable CDE to avoid serious questions about whether or not it has the Internet resources to accommodate the massive public demands for access to the data. It also follows a more logical sequence: the release of STAR results followed about two weeks later by API and then the AYP results.

Moving the AYP release would necessitate an amendment of the California accountability workbook with the U.S. Department of Education (USED). The workbook presently sets August 15 as the AYP release. In its communications with USED, the CDE should emphasize that such a schedule would enable it to release all components at the same time, rather than in a phased release as occurred in 2003. This would mean that the August 2004 Program Improvement (PI) list of districts and schools would be comprehensive in scope.

- **A STAR pre-edit process must be implemented for 2004.** The Standards and Assessment Division is pursuing the feasibility of a STAR pre-edit process. STAR demographic data would be edited prior to the submission of test results to ETS. Implementation of this process for next year's STAR administration is vital to the success of an earlier API release. It would at once reduce the burden of data review on the PED and enhance the quality of an August 2004 API release.

**The PSAA Advisory Committee:** The Subcommittee for API/AYP and Interventions considered the question of an early API release date in its meeting of November 17, 2003. The Subcommittee supported an August release of the 2004 Growth API Report, prior to the release of the AYP Report.

**Summary:** The CDE shares the position of the Subcommittee that an August release of the API Growth Report is desirable, particularly from a policy standpoint. An August release would:

- Prompt the media to give the API growth results proper consideration
- Give the public a context within which to interpret district and school AYP results, particularly in instances where a district or school made substantial growth on the API, but still missed the AYP status bar
- Enable the CDE to prepare an August AYP report which would include not only the annual measurable objectives and participation rates but also school wide APIs and graduation rates, the “other indicators” under the California accountability plan

On the other hand, an August release has serious implications from an operational standpoint. It would:

- Increase the possibility of mistakes in calculations by reducing the time that the PED has to run data checks
- Preclude a review of demographic data and API results by districts prior to a public release of the 2004 Growth API
- Impact the capacity of the PED to respond to inquiries from the media, districts and schools

These negative effects could be considerably mitigated if the conditions listed earlier are met.

Finally, the CDE urges that moving the AYP release to the last week of August be only a temporary solution. With a view to 2005 and beyond, the CDE proposes a review of the current schedule of test administration by local educational agencies, the transmittal and scoring of test documents, and the transmittal of data files by the contractor to the CDE. Such a review would identify the changes that would have to take place to accommodate a mid-August release of API growth reports and AYP reports.