Executive Summary Explaining the Academic Performance Index (API)

This executive summary provides an overview of the state accountability system or the Academic Performance Index (API). The API was established by the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA), a landmark state law passed in 1999 that created a new academic accountability system for kindergarten through grade twelve public education in California. California's comprehensive accountability system monitors the academic achievement of all the state's public schools, including charter schools, and local educational agencies (LEAs) that serve students in kindergarten through grade twelve. (An LEA is a school district or a county office of education.)

What is the API?

The API is a single number, ranging from a low of 200 to a high of 1000, which reflects a school's, an LEA's, or a student group's performance level, based on the results of statewide assessments. Its purpose is to measure the academic performance and improvement of schools. The state has set 800 as the API target for all schools to meet. Schools that fall short of 800 are required to meet annual growth targets until that goal is achieved. API targets vary for each school and student group.

The API is calculated by converting a student's performance on statewide assessments across multiple content areas into points on the API scale. These points are then averaged across all students and all tests. The result is the API. An API is calculated for schools, LEAs, and for each student group with 11 or more valid scores at a school or an LEA.

The key features of the API include the following:

- The API is based on an improvement model. The assessment results from one year are compared to assessment results from the prior year to measure improvement. Each school has an annual target, and all numerically significant student groups at a school also have targets.

- The API requires student group accountability to address the achievement gaps that exist between traditionally higher- and lower-scoring student groups.

- The API is a cross-sectional look at student achievement. It does not track individual student progress across years but rather compares snapshots of school or LEA achievement results from one year to the next.

- The API is used to rank schools. A school is compared to other schools statewide and to 100 other schools that have similar opportunities and challenges.

- The API is currently a school-based requirement only under state law. However, API reports are provided for LEAs in order to meet federal requirements under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Assessment Results Used in the API

California's accountability system measures the performance and progress of a school or an LEA based on results of statewide assessments at grades two through twelve. Currently, the statewide assessments are the Standardized Reporting and Testing (STAR) and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). A school or an LEA's API is a composite number representing the results of these assessments. More information about these testing programs is located on the CDE Testing and Accountability Web page at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/. Currently, statewide assessments constitute 100 percent of the API. The table below shows the assessment results used in API calculations.

State Assessment Results Used in API

California Standards Tests (CSTs)

- English-language arts, mathematics, history-social science, and science
  - Grades two through eleven

California Modified Assessment (CMA)

- English-language arts, mathematics, and science
  - Grades three through eleven

California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA)

- English-language arts and mathematics
  - Grades two through eleven

California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)

- English-language arts and mathematics
  - Grade ten (and eleven and twelve if the student passed)
  - Passed = score of 350 or above

API Reporting Cycle

Each annual API reporting cycle includes a Base and a Growth API. The Base API starts the reporting cycle and is released approximately a year after testing. For example, the 2012 Base is calculated from results of statewide testing in spring 2012 but is released in May 2013. The Growth API, released after the Base API, is calculated in exactly the same fashion and with the same indicators as the prior year Base API but from assessment results of the following year. For example, the 2013 Growth is calculated from results of statewide testing in spring 2013 and is released in September 2013. In order to measure the academic improvement of a school, academic results in the form of the API are compared from year to year. Improvement (or change) in the API is the difference between the Base API and Growth API within a reporting cycle.
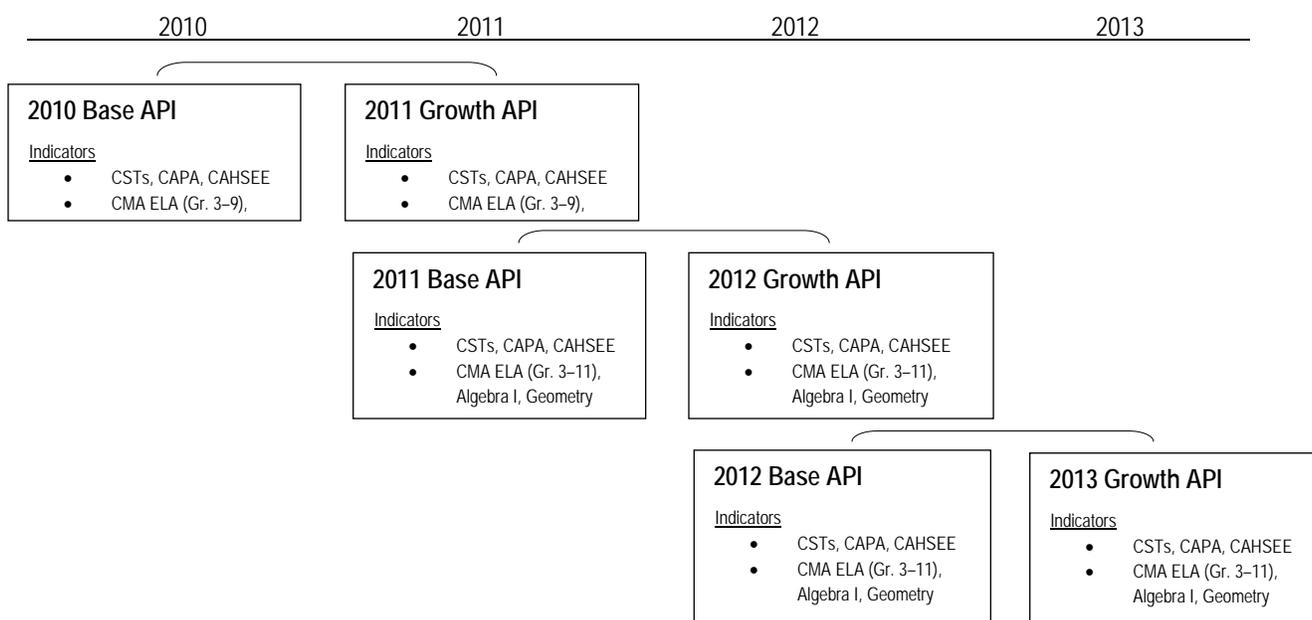
Comparability and Changes to the API

API comparisons must be based on the same tests with the same test weights. If the API indicators and methodology remained the same from year to year, there would be no need for two API reports. However, complication arises in year-to-year comparisons of the API when changes to the API must be made. From one year to the next, assessments may be added or taken away from the set of API indicators, or API rules may change. Also, the test weights (relative emphasis on each test) or rules for inclusions/exclusions in the API can also change.

Any changes in the API calculations, such as adding a new assessment, new indicators, and changes in methodology begin with the Base API. Therefore, the calculation methods for the Base API might not be the same across years. However, the Base API and Growth API within a reporting cycle must use the same calculation method and weights. Detailed information about the API calculation is provided in the *2012–13 Academic Performance Index Reports Information Guide* and in the "Calculation Spreadsheets Base and Growth," which allow users to estimate the APIs of their schools. These documents are located on the CDE API Web page at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/.

The graphic below illustrates why two API reports are required:

Two API Reports to Maintain Comparability and Allow Changes

2010	2011	2012	2013

2010 Base API

Indicators
- CSTs, CAPA, CAHSEE
- CMA ELA (Gr. 3–9),

2011 Growth API

Indicators
- CSTs, CAPA, CAHSEE
- CMA ELA (Gr. 3–9),

2011 Base API

Indicators
- CSTs, CAPA, CAHSEE
- CMA ELA (Gr. 3–11), Algebra I, Geometry

2012 Growth API

Indicators
- CSTs, CAPA, CAHSEE
- CMA ELA (Gr. 3–11), Algebra I, Geometry

2012 Base API

Indicators
- CSTs, CAPA, CAHSEE
- CMA ELA (Gr. 3–11), Algebra I, Geometry

2013 Growth API

Indicators
- CSTs, CAPA, CAHSEE
- CMA ELA (Gr. 3–11), Algebra I, Geometry

API Growth Targets

State API growth targets are set for each school as a whole and for each numerically significant student group in the school. The annual API growth target for a school or

student group is five percent of the difference between the school's API and the statewide performance target of 800 with a five point minimum. Schools or student groups that meet or exceed an 800 API are expected to maintain that level of achievement and to continue working to improve the academic performance of all students.

Although LEAs receive APIs for federal accountability purposes, they do not receive API growth targets.

API Ranks

API ranks are provided in the Base API reports. Schools are ranked in ten categories of equal size, called deciles, from 10 (highest) to 1 (lowest). A school's **statewide** rank compares its API to the APIs of all other schools statewide of the same type (elementary, middle, or high school). A school's **similar schools rank** compares its API to the APIs of 100 other schools of the same type that have similar opportunities and challenges.

Statewide and Similar Schools API Ranks

Statewide Ranks	Similar Schools Ranks
■ Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, or high school) ■ School's API compared to all other schools in the state of the same type	■ Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, or high school) ■ School's API compared to 100 other schools of the same type that have similar opportunities and challenges

A description of the similar schools ranks is:

Rank	Description
	This school's API is:
9 or 10	Well above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar opportunities and challenges
7 or 8	Above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar opportunities and challenges
5 or 6	About average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar opportunities and challenges
3 or 4	Below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar opportunities and challenges
1 or 2	Well below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar opportunities and challenges

LEAs, schools with an approved Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) application, and special education schools do not receive API ranks. A small school with between 11 and 99 valid scores receives an API and a statewide rank with an asterisk but no similar schools rank. (Asterisks denote APIs and ranks that are based on small numbers of test results. These APIs and ranks are less reliable and, therefore, should be carefully interpreted.)

How API Results are Used

The API is used in meeting state requirements under the PSAA and federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements under the ESEA. Under state requirements, if a school meets certain API participation and growth criteria, it may be eligible to become a California Distinguished School, National Blue Ribbon School, or Title I Academic Achievement Awards School. If a school does not meet or exceed its growth targets and is ranked in the lower part of the statewide distribution of the Base API, it may be identified for participation in state intervention programs which are designed to help the school improve its academic performance. Under federal ESEA requirements, the API is one of the additional indicators for AYP.