

August 28, 2015

Mike Kirst, President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Via email only (sbe@cde.ca.gov)

Re: SBE September 2015 Agenda Item #14 – Evaluation Rubrics/Accountability System

Dear President Kirst:

We represent a coalition of civil rights, advocacy, community, parent, student and other organizations who have worked diligently on passage and implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). LCFF creates an historic opportunity to focus resources on helping California's neediest students overcome the barriers they face in closing the achievement gap and graduating college and career ready. It also promises a new level of transparency and local engagement for parents, students, and community members in the design of their local schools. As you know, in an effort to give life to these objectives, we have commented jointly multiple times over the last year regarding the State Board of Education's LCFF regulatory proposals and evaluation rubrics/accountability system items.

With these comments, we wish to (a) reiterate our coalition's design principles for a new public school accountability system consistent with LCFF and its principles of equity, gap-closing for high need elementary, middle and high school students, transparency, local engagement and subsidiarity, (b) comment on the gaps between our principles and the State Board's and (c) respond to the WestEd draft rubric attached to item 14 and propose improvements to the framework reflected in the item and solutions to key challenges that the item has surfaced.

I. LCFF Equity Coalition's Design Principles for Accountability & Perceived Gaps in SBE Principles

We agree that the current API is no longer aligned to California's emerging accountability system and that it is appropriate to recommend that the legislature amend the *Education Code* to replace the API.¹ That said, it continues to be important for parents, the public and state and local policymakers to be able to easily assess the quality of their local schools and LEAs. It is also important that all stakeholders understand how that assessment of quality might trigger technical assistance or interventions.

¹ We note, however, that the agenda item and the August memo appear to undersell this undertaking and the far-reaching implications on other provisions of the Education Code, including entire systems of the existing accountability system, that would flow from repealing the API. As the Board noted only a few months ago, "[b]ecause the API is deeply embedded in many sections of the California *EC* and impacts other programs, such as, open enrollment, charter revocation, and parent empowerment, the transition to a multiple measures accountability system will require subsequent changes in *EC*." SBE March 2015 Meeting Agenda, Item 6. Indeed, although the current agenda item observes that the *Williams* settlement legislation is fully aligned with the new accountability system, it glosses over the fact that schools are selected for county office of education site visits and misassignment monitoring based on their decile ranking, that is, based on the API. In sum, although the staff recommendation to repeal API makes sense in concept, there is much more thought and attention to the implications of such a change that are required before taking such action would be appropriate.

As such, it is imperative that—within the timeline being contemplated by the SBE—the SBE’s proposals for replacing the API and developing and proposing a new accountability framework (and the significant legislative changes necessary to accomplish this) address the following design principles from the LCFF Equity Coalition. Similarly, while we agree with much that is found in the SBE’s design principles, we note below where we perceive real or potential gaps.

The LCFF Equity Coalition’s design principles believe that California’s new public school accountability system should:

1. Establish Uniform and Meaningful Statewide Standards for Both “Performance” and “Expectation for Improvement”
2. Where Standards are Locally Determined, Be Research-Based, Aligned with SBE-approved Parameters, and Set Through Community Stakeholder Processes
3. Maintain an Equity Focus on Closing Achievement Gaps and Addressing Disparities
4. Prompt Reflection and Responsive Action in Ways that Link to Continuous Improvement in Actual Practices reflected in the LCAP Annual Update and Revisions
5. Support Shared-Decisionmaking of all Local Stakeholders, Including Parents and Students, through Information-Sharing, Capacity-Building and Ensuring that Opportunities for Input are Available in a Timely Manner.
6. Be Transparent with Information in a Way that is Both Comprehensive and Accessible
7. Trigger Action in a Timely Manner with Clarity of Who is Responsible for Action, Prioritizing Supports for Low-Performing Districts, Charters, and County Offices.

Coalition Comments on Aspects of the SBE’s Design Principles:

Articulate the state’s expectations for districts, charter schools and county offices of education. (COMMENT: Good—but the expectations need to be meaningful, not simply affirming the status quo, and where locally established must be aligned to SBE parameters and subject to a local stakeholder engagement process.)

Foster equity. (COMMENT: We strongly agree. Improved equity performance by LEAs should be a major purpose of the accountability system and will be fostered by a rubric design that honestly identifies achievement gaps and disparities.)

Provide useful information that helps parents, districts, charter schools, county offices of education and policymakers make important decisions. (COMMENT: Good—but parents and other stakeholders need more than just information to make important decisions; see next comment.)

Build capacity and increase support for districts, charter schools and county offices. (COMMENT: Good—but parents and students and teachers (not just districts, charters, and COEs) need increased capacity and supports to be enabled as true partners in LCFF’s new local decision-making processes.

Encourage continuous improvement focused on student-level outcomes, using multiple measures for state and local priorities. (COMMENT: It is not clear at all if technical assistance from the county offices and/or CCEE is all that is meant here or if it is also an SBE priority to ensure that the new accountability system also triggers more serious interventions for seriously low-performing LEAs.)

Promote system-wide integration and innovation.

II. Solutions for Key Development Issues of the Evaluation Rubrics

We appreciate and acknowledge the significant amount of thought and hard work invested into this effort by staff at the SBE, CDE and WestEd and the progress made to date. We offer these recommendations in the spirit of further advancing the conversation.

A. Restructure the “SBE Policy Statements” that Will Drive the Rubrics Design

In the WestEd attachment, three key categories—Access and Opportunity, Graduation, and College and Career Readiness—are identified as “SBE Policy Statements” that will drive the overarching design of the proposed evaluation rubrics and propose a structure for organizing the 8 state priorities and the associated metrics. Those three statements are:

- All students are provided with access and opportunities that support learning;
- All students are college and career ready, exhibiting early and continuing signs of college and career readiness;
- All students graduate from high school.

We think this structuring is problematic for various reasons. Chief among them, it communicates that a key objective of our education system is simply to graduate students *no matter what* knowledge, skills or abilities they may possess. Secondly, this framing conflates the *process* of receiving an education throughout one’s years in schools that prepares one ultimately to graduate college and career ready with the actual *outcome* of graduating college and career ready.

We proposed the following revisions to this foundational set of statements:

- All students are provided with access and opportunities that support learning;
- All students are on track to graduate college and career ready, exhibiting early and continuing signs in elementary, middle and high school of college and career readiness;
- All students graduate from high school college and career ready.

This restructuring accomplishes the following:

- It avoids communicating that the purpose of our public school system is to simply graduate students, devoid of any connection to possessing a meaningful set of skills and abilities.
 - It signals instead that the standard for graduation is one by which we expect students to graduate college and career ready.
- Organizing on-track/early warning indicators together—rather than dividing them between the graduation and college and career readiness categories—places appropriate emphasis on early warning (and success) signs, particularly at elementary and middle schools, instead of focusing on after-the-fact high school graduation-related indicators (e.g., graduation rate, percentage of graduates who complete A-G requirements or CTE pathways). These latter “lagging” indicators “may be too late to assist with struggling student or schools.”²
 - As the Board materials for the May meeting provided, “The state priorities and identified metrics are overwhelming related to high school. Metrics that focus on elementary and intermediate grades are needed.” Combining on-track/early success and warning

² WestEd and SBE Staff, June 24, 2015 Memorandum, “Research to Inform the Development of Local Control Funding Formula Evaluation Rubrics.”

indicators into a broader category that includes lagging indicators like graduation is unwise because it would dilute the significance of the early indicators.

- Providing a separate category for early indicators while combining graduation and college and career readiness outcomes would avoid arbitrary distinctions between which indicators under both of our proposed categories are related to graduation and which are for college and career readiness.
- This restructuring also aligns with the Conley/Darling-Hammond recognition that accountability must address *inputs*, processes, and outputs.
 - The first policy objective and associated metrics would address key inputs like the *Williams* factors (teacher quality, instructional materials, and facilities) and course access, including at the elementary level.
 - The second policy objective and associated metrics would address the *process and progress* measures needed to assess whether LEAs are on track to eventually graduate students college and career ready. Thus, this objective would include both leading achievement indicators illuminating whether students are on track to graduate college and career ready and key process indicators that indicate whether appropriate supports are in place to produce positive outcomes (e.g., school climate and student engagement indicators such as parental perceptions of safety and receptivity, suspensions and expulsions, attendance, etc.).
 - The final policy objective and associated metrics would focus on the lagging indicators or *outcomes* (e.g., graduation rates, students completing A-G and/or CTE pathways, AP participation and passage, etc.) indicating college and career readiness.

B. *Establish Meaningful Performance and Growth Standards that Drive Continuous Improvement Rather than Aspire to the Status Quo.*

We have continued to remind the State Board of its statutory obligation to establish “standards for school district and individual schoolsite performance” and standards for district and schoolsite “expectation for improvement.” *Cal. Educ. Code Sec. 52064.5(c)*. We are concerned that if the SBE adopts the draft proposal to establish “quality” standards by defining “quality” as simply *average* performance—that the system as a whole will simply regress to the mean. In other words, by building a system that defines as “acceptable” performance as the middle 50% of the distribution (e.g., a graduation rate as low as 83%), then LEAs will become comfortable with maintaining the current status quo, including with respect to sub-group performance.

This would be the antithesis of a continuous improvement model. Instead, consistent with this coalition’s March 6, 2015 SBE letter (and attached February 24, 2015 letter), we believe that **the SBE should establish quality standards that are aspirational yet achievable, i.e., that are above the median level of performance and which will, accordingly, spur LEAs to improve their performance.** As LEAs increasingly achieve the established performance standard—as occurred, for example, with the 800 API—the SBE should periodically recalibrate the standard.³

³ Note, this suggestion is not meant to equate the failure to obtain the aspirational standard with intervention and adverse consequences. The most serious interventions and consequences should be reserved for those LEAs that are the furthest from the quality performance standards and have the most issues of concern for multiple subgroups. The remaining LEAs who have yet to achieve a standard should be focused on what they need to do to improve to attain that level of performance.

C. *Identify Key Indicators/Metrics within Grade Spans that Prompt Further Inquiry through Linkages to Other Indicators/Metrics*

We appreciate the work that WestEd and staff have done to map the interrelationship among various metrics and to begin framing a method for presenting data. The WestEd attachment has labelled certain indicators/metrics as “key indicators;” as distinguished from related or “associated indicators,” a term used by WestEd in a recent presentation to LCFE stakeholders. In the example included in the materials (graduation and attendance as key indicators, and middle school dropout, chronic absence, and suspension and expulsion rates as associated/related indicators), only the “key indicators” are presented in the summary display, relative to the standards, suggesting that the key indicators will be the primary basis for setting standards for performance and expectations for improvement.

Conceptually, we are generally supportive of this approach and recognize the need to narrow or prioritize focus, particularly when it comes to the self-assessment process for LEAs and when identifying areas where technical assistance, support, or intervention should focus, among the many metrics that should ultimately be included in the evaluation rubrics. We believe that developing the rubrics, and the top-level display within the rubrics, to help focus attention within the LEA’s or school’s overall education program is the real value-added that the rubrics can provide, particularly as they interact with the annual LCAP and Annual Update process.

In essence, the key indicators would help flag relative strengths and whether more attention is needed in a particular aspect of the LEA’s program and, in that scenario, connect to related indicators that can help the LEA understand the “why” behind the concern or issue on the key indicator. Because data is insufficient in itself to explain the why, the rubrics would ideally include a narrative inquiry that helps guide the LEA through possible reasons—grounded in the actual practices—as to why the key indicator and one or more associated indicators are what they are.

That said, we do not necessarily agree with the preliminary identification of which indicators/metrics are “key” and which are associated/related. For example, although the item reflects the categorization of only a handful of indicators, the recent WestEd presentation labeled parent involvement as an associated indicator within the “Access and Opportunity” policy statement. The Alberta Model, however, on which the current proposal is largely based, lists parent involvement as a top-line area of focus in its summative data display, which we believe more accurately reflects the importance of this indicator. Similarly, progress toward language proficiency should be in consideration as a key indicator for English learners. There are and will be other such points of difference as to designation of key indicators. We recommend particular attention be paid to vetting the selection of key indicators with the policy stakeholders and affected constituency groups.

Moreover, for this approach to work, we believe that the key indicators must encompass the full range of the LEA’s education program, i.e., that they are developed to flag issues and identify strengths *at each relevant grade span*. Additionally, we believe, consistent with the design principle of a multiple measures system, that the rubrics must include multiple key indicators for a particular grade span and that the key indicators applicable to each grade span measure different aspects of what student success looks like. For example, our proposed category/policy statement “All students are on track to graduate college and career ready” would include additional key indicators beyond the three identified by WestEd in the presentation to LCFE stakeholders—basic attendance rates and 3rd grade reading and 8th grade math assessment scores—such as suspension rates, chronic absence rates, English Learner reclassification rates, dropout rates and/or measures for parental involvement.

In summary, we appreciate the work reflected in the item and believe the conceptual framework being proposed has the potential to make the rubrics a truly useful tool to LEAs and stakeholders to help

understand *why* the outcomes are what they are. We look forward to working with you and staff to refine the framework and the metrics and their summary in the indicators so as to best help guide self-assessment and support for all aspects of LEAs' educational programs.

D. Equity Considerations Should Be Reflected in the Summary Display at the LEA and School Level.

We believe equity is a critical component of district-level or school-level performance and should therefore be incorporated into the summary display format. Put differently, we believe that "equity" considerations must be incorporated into the high-level reflection of overall performance at the LEA and school level, not simply "outcome" and "improvement". **No LEA's overall performance should be deemed acceptable if it is masking significant inequities in subgroup outcomes or growth.**

Some members of our coalition raised this issue following the policy stakeholder input session last week in Sacramento. We understand that WestEd and staff have not completed the analysis for subgroups for the example reflected in the item and therefore could not model the numbers to incorporate them into the example. We appreciate the response and agreement that equity should be reflected in this summary display. Our coalition is working on the possible approaches for doing so and looks forward to sharing those with staff soon.

E. Where Standards are Locally Determined, They Should be Research-Based, Aligned with SBE-approved Parameters and Set Through Community Stakeholder Processes.

We believe that locally-determined metrics that measure progress on the eight state priorities and are used to satisfy the statutory requirement for district and schoolsite standards in those areas should meet a uniform standard, both in terms of the types of metrics approved and the process by which they are determined. Specifically, we propose that such metrics should be selected by LEAs from a list of metrics which the SBE has certified for use by LEAs as sufficiently research-based. LEAs, in choosing which metrics to adopt and where to set their performance and growth expectations, should be required to consult with the same set of stakeholders the LEA consults with in developing its LCAP, including Parent Advisory Committees, ELACs and DELACs. Also, LEAs should be required to track performance on their adopted metrics over time and should be required to maintain adopted metrics for a minimum of five years so as to assure that local metrics are not changed out so often as to prove unhelpful and to help build evidence and experience across the state of useful locally-determined metrics. In addition, LEAs may adopt additional metrics to measure progress in priority areas that are entirely at the discretion of the local LEA and local stakeholders.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to continue working with the State Board of Education to realize the full promise of LCFF.

Sincerely,

[signatories on following pages]

John T. Affeldt
Managing Attorney
Public Advocates Inc.

Marvin H. Andrade
Director of Leadership Development
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles

Kevine Boggess
Director of Policy
Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth

Rev. Samuel Casey
Executive Director
Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement

Oscar E. Cruz
President and CEO
Families In Schools

Laura Faer
Education Rights Director
Public Council

Roberta Furger
Director of Research and Writing
PICO California

Jan Gustafson Corea
CEO
California Association for Bilingual Education

Bryan Ha
Director of Government Affairs
United Ways of California

Taryn Ishida
Executive Director
Californians for Justice

Brian Lee
State Director
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California

Jennifer B. Lyle
Executive Director
Building Blocks for Kids Collaborative

Dr. Ken Magdaleno
Executive Director
Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research

Luis Santana
Executive Director
Reading and Beyond

Dave Sapp
Director of Education Advocacy
ACLU of California

Gloria Scoggins
President
The BlackBoard of West Contra Costa

Ryan J Smith
Executive Director
The Education Trust - West

Shelly Spiegel-Coleman
Executive Director
Californians Together

Samantha Tran
Senior Managing Director, Education Policy
Children Now

David Valladolid
President & CEO
Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)

Debra Watkins
President/Executive Director
California Alliance of African American Educators

Jennifer Weiser Bezoza
Director, Education Advocacy
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

Dr. Judy White
President
California Association of African-American Superintendents and Administrators

Geoffrey Winder and Ginna Brelsford
Co-Directors
Gay Straight Alliance Network

Jackie Wong
Director, FosterEd: California
National Center for Youth Law

Arturo Ybarra
Executive Director

Watts/Century Latino Organization

cc: Members, California State Board of Education
Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director, California State Board of Education
Judy Cias, Chief Counsel, California State Board of Education
Brooks Allen, Deputy Policy Director and Assistant Legal Counsel, California State Board of Education
Nancy Brownell, Senior Fellow, Local Control and Accountability
Michelle Magyar, Local Control Funding Formula
Jeff Bell, Department of Finance
Cathy McBride, Governor's Office
Jannelle Kubinec, Director of National, State and Special Projects, WestEd