



Massachusetts Accountability System Review Advisory Committee Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An advisory group representing a broad range of education leaders and experts from across the Commonwealth participated in the Massachusetts Accountability System Review Advisory Committee between December 2023 and June 2024. Facilitated by external consultants, the advisory committee reviewed and discussed approaches to improve district and school accountability that promote the Commonwealth’s Educational Vision and comply with federal and state requirements. The advisory committee’s purpose was to provide feedback about the extent to which the current accountability system is supporting high-priority goals and recommendations to guide potential revisions. The committee was not charged with addressing all the technical or operational elements to fully implement a district and school accountability model. Rather, they focused on developing a conceptual framework that can inform subsequent decisions required for implementation. This report documents the process and recommendations produced by the advisory committee.

System Goals

The advisory committee emphasized that accountability systems are most effective when they

- provide information about inputs and outcomes that support the Commonwealth’s Educational Vision, and
- integrate with improvement systems that specify the conditions, resources, and supports that can help promote improved actions and outcomes.

Accordingly, the committee identified high-priority goals that the system should support for students, educators, and leaders in the Commonwealth.

Design Principles

Following the development of system goals, the advisory committee worked to identify design principles to guide the development of an accountability framework. The committee identified the following design principles:

- **Collect and report a broad range of indicators.**

The accountability system should include indicators that reflect the breadth and depth of the Commonwealth’s educational goals. This includes input and output measures that go beyond academic performance on state tests and address a broader range of the skills associated with success in college and careers and making positive contributions in their communities. It is important to ensure that indicators are valid for the intended uses and are incorporated into the system in a manner that minimizes unintended consequences.

- **“Right-size” federal requirements.**

Requirements from the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) specify that the accountability system must produce certain school designations, with certain indicators, and using certain methods. However, the indicators and classification methods used to produce these school designations can differ from other aspects, such as those used for optional designations or other purposes. Differentiating these elements of the system opens up the system to more opportunities for innovation and may help support utility and minimize unintended consequences.

- **Leverage flexibility where possible and where appropriate.**

While a degree of standardization is necessary to support federal and state requirements, other elements of the system can feature flexibility. For example, DESE might provide a menu of approved options from which districts can select for some indicators. By doing so, the system

can better address the context of districts, schools, and communities and provide more authentic and useful information.

- **Develop and integrate robust systems of support.**

A classification and reporting system alone is insufficient to promote improvement. It's important to describe how improvement occurs, including the conditions, resources, and interventions that are most effective. This involves the principle of reciprocity which acknowledges a shared responsibility between the state, districts, and schools to bolster capacity to help meet performance goals. While detailed specifications for these support systems are beyond the scope of the advisory committee, it's essential to identify this priority and provide system design recommendations that are compatible.

System Framework

Based on these design principles, the committee established a conceptual framework for the Commonwealth's district and school accountability system. Though the framework is not intended to provide the specificity needed to operationalize the model, the report provides suggestions to guide implementation throughout.

This framework recognizes that the single, coherent system must include core components to satisfy federal and state requirements and identify districts and schools in need of support. However, the system can also include supplemental indicators to incentivize and reward practices that more fully address the range of inputs and outcomes associated with district and school quality and student success. The framework includes three categories of indicators used to describe and differentiate district and school performance.

Category 1 refers to the subset of *core indicators* that satisfy ESSA requirements and are used to designate schools into required state and federal support categories (e.g., Comprehensive Support and Improvement).

Category 2 offers the potential for substantial flexibility and information on a range of inputs and outputs that goes beyond the requirements of ESSA. These *supplemental indicators* are used to further describe and differentiate district and school performance but are not constrained by ESSA requirements. The supplemental indicators can be used either to provide augmented reporting at the indicator level or levels of commendation for districts and schools that are not in support categories.

Category 3 reflects the range of *information the state will collect and report and any resources the state provides to help build capacity* (e.g., guidance, research). This information will not be used to differentiate district and school performance in a formal accountability system. Rather it will be disseminated by the state to a broad range of constituents to monitor and support district and school performance.

Indicator & System Design Recommendations

The advisory committee reviewed a range of potential indicators and made recommendations regarding whether they should be included in the system and, if so, which category was most appropriate. The committee also provided some guidance for the manner in which indicators should be combined and reported. For Category 1 indicators, a majority of the committee supports aggregation methods that produce a composite score based on weights that should be established through a separate process. For Category 2 indicators, a majority of the committee endorsed

methods that permit more flexibility (e.g., choice among options), and designations (e.g., districts or schools of recognition) would be based on establishing qualifying district or school profiles.

Next Steps

Additional indicator-level and system-level design specifications are needed to support implementation. Next steps should include at minimum:

- **Establish Operational Definitions and Business Rules:** The committee's recommendations address high-level features or criteria associated with the indicators and system design, but do not establish the operational definitions and business rules required to implement the system.
- **Establish Aggregation Rules and Performance Expectations:** Another key decision to prepare for implementation is determining how indicators will be combined and what performance standards are appropriate for identification and exit of state and federal designations.
- **Address Exceptions:** Every accountability system must address exceptional circumstances and conditions. For example, how are schools with unusual grade configurations (e.g, K-2), special student populations, and/or small student populations addressed? Determining business rules for these and other exceptional circumstances is an important part of the development and implementation process.
- **Examine and Refine:** Once additional specifications have been established, DESE and its partners should examine indicators (particularly novel measures) and other aspects of the system such as reporting to better understand the extent to which the system supports the intended interpretations and uses. Refinements to the indicators or overall design decisions may be necessary based on exploratory results.

INTRODUCTION

This document describes the work of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to engage with an advisory committee to develop a set of guiding principles and recommendations for the district and school accountability system. The goal of this initiative is to assist DESE in the development of an improved measure of district and school quality that complies with existing federal and state laws, as well as honors Massachusetts' [Educational Vision](#) and priorities. This report outlines the recommendations and design priorities developed by the advisory committee.

The remainder of this document is organized into five sections. The first section provides the project background and describes the advisory committee's membership and engagement process. The second section highlights grounding work on a theory of action for the state accountability system and critical design principles that guide recommendations. The third section focuses on important federal and state requirements that operate as system constraints. The fourth section provides more detailed information on the advisory group's recommendations both at the indicator level and for the overall system characteristics. The final section provides an overview of next steps and recommendations to help DESE move from design to implementation.

BACKGROUND

In Fall 2023, DESE staff identified and invited a broadly representative group from many organizations and stakeholder groups to participate in the Massachusetts Accountability System Review Advisory Committee, including:

- Student Advisory Council (SAC)
- Massachusetts Parent-Teacher Association (MPTA)
- National Parents Union - Massachusetts (NPU-MA)
- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA)
- District staff with specific accountability expertise
- Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC)
- Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS)
- Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA)
- Urban Superintendent Network (USN)
- Massachusetts School Administrators Association (MSAA)
- Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)
- Latinos for Education
- Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC)
- Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA)
- Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA)
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE)

The list of advisory committee members who accepted and participated is provided in [Appendix A](#).

The advisory committee meetings were facilitated by two staff from The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (the Center): Dr. Chris Domaleski and Dr. Carla Evans. The

Center engaged with the advisory committee to develop a set of guiding principles and recommendations for DESE to consider in the review of the district and school accountability system. The goal of the advisory committee and its recommendations was to assist DESE in the development of a revised state accountability system that complies with existing federal and state laws, as well as honors [Massachusetts' Educational Vision and priorities](#).

The advisory committee convened in person for full-day meetings six times and remotely for three hours one time between December 2023 and June 2024. Three optional one-hour remote feedback sessions occurred from the end of July to the beginning of August 2024 to solicit feedback on a draft of this report. The meetings were structured to lead the advisory committee through a process from foundations (theory of action and design principles) to accountability design recommendations (characteristics and features). This process is reflected in the approach the Center and DESE took across the advisory committee meetings. A list of meeting dates and focal topics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Advisory Committee Meetings

DATE	FOCAL TOPICS
December 8, 2023	Educational Vision in Massachusetts; advisory group purpose, process, norms, and scope; accountability overview and federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements; review of accountability in Massachusetts; accountability goals, uses, and design principles
January 31, 2024	Accountability goals, uses, and design principles continued; review of state ESSA models; review of broader “measures that matter” for districts and schools
February 15, 2024 (remote)	Introduction to system design considerations
March 15, 2024	Developing system design recommendations; review of graduation rate and academic achievement indicators
April 4, 2024	Continue system design recommendations and approaches; review of academic growth and progress in English language proficiency indicators
May 1, 2024	Returning to broader “measures that matter” for districts and schools; continue design decisions focusing on identifications, differentiation, and groups
Jun 13, 2024	Review and refine design and indicator recommendations

The advisory committee operated within certain parameters and was reminded at the beginning of each meeting about the topics considered within the committee’s scope and topics considered out of scope.

- Within scope: accountability indicators (e.g., student growth, achievement, high school completion), measures (e.g., student growth percentiles (SGPs), MCAS average scaled scores, graduation rates), the weighting of indicators, the number of years of data included in the system, performance categories, reporting/report design, connection to assistance work, and the community engagement process.

- Out of scope: The competency determination (CD), MCAS design, and the designation of underperforming or chronically underperforming schools and districts/receivership (MGL Chapter 69, Section 1J).

This report emphasizes recommendations that reflect areas of agreement among members of the advisory committee. However, there were multiple areas of disagreement; in some areas, disagreement was strenuous. In fact, an overarching area of disagreement pertains to the scope of the review and extent to which the recommendations will or should lead to substantial deviations from the state’s current approach. While most committee members viewed the resulting recommendations as an appropriate framework for strengthening the current district and school accountability model, others felt the recommendations were not sufficiently comprehensive. The committee members who supported the latter view expressed concern that the scope and nature of the recommendations in this report were inadequate. In these areas of disagreement, the report describes the nature and rationale for these alternative points of view.

Ultimately, the advisory committee’s recommendations are an important part of DESE’s efforts to improve the effectiveness of the accountability system in fulfillment of both federal ESSA and state requirements. Based on the recommendations provided by the committee in this report (along with other sources), DESE will develop the district and school accountability system, solicit public comment, and obtain the appropriate approval, in accordance with state and federal requirements. Any changes to the accountability system will likely be implemented no sooner than Fall 2025, depending on additional feedback from the Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council (AAAC), the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), DESE leadership, and other key stakeholders.

FOUNDATIONS

The advisory committee emphasized that accountability systems are most effective when they 1) provide information about inputs and outcomes that are valued the most and 2) integrate with improvement systems that specify the conditions, resources, and supports that can help promote improved actions and outcomes.

Accordingly, the committee clarified the high-priority goals that the system should support for students, educators, and leaders in the Commonwealth.

Goals for students included:

- Meet or exceed the Commonwealth’s expectations for academic performance in a range of content areas.
- Demonstrate problem-solving, ethical decision-making, critical thinking, and other 21st-century skills to solve real-world problems.
- Contribute to their communities and engage in our democracy.
- Be prepared and ready for college and career success.
- Cultivate a student’s sense of self and a feeling of value and belonging.
- Promote self-directed behavior, and exercise agency by their choice and expression.
- Develop an appreciation and respect for diversity and an ability to engage with and collaborate with others.

Priority goals for educators and leaders included:

- Effectively create safe and supportive schools and conditions for learning and growth.
- Demonstrate a wide range of skills and implement practices to promote student success.
- Place students' interest at the center of all decision-making and activity.
- Help create conditions for and an awareness of the value that districts and schools bring to communities.

Priority goals for communities included:

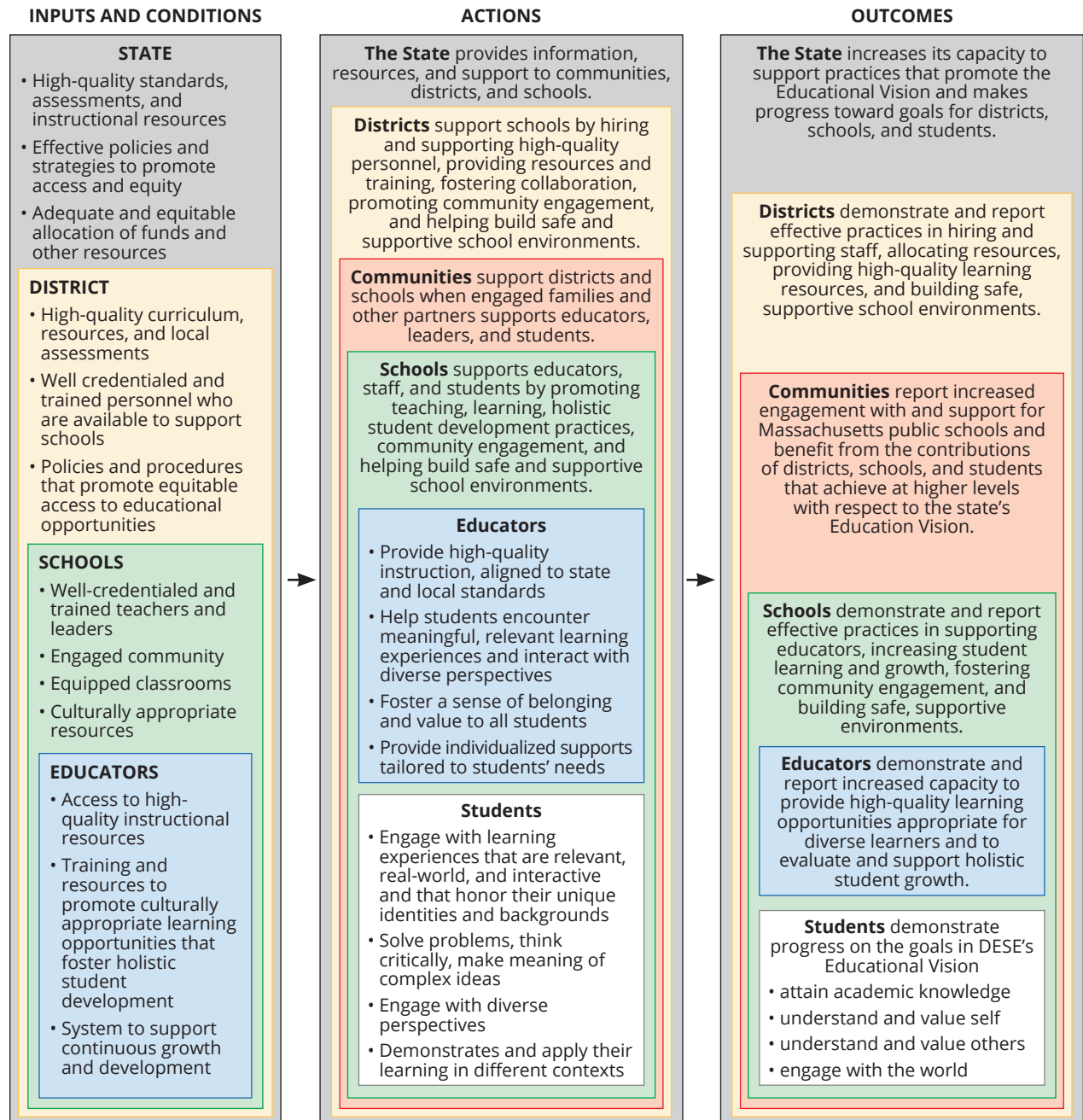
- Promote opportunities for engagement and support.
- Create systems that foster partnerships and allow communities to share in decision-making.

Supporting these ambitious goals will require more than collecting and reporting information on a wide range of valued outcomes. The advisory committee emphasized the importance of developing a system that both holds districts and schools accountable for student outcomes and clearly communicates high-leverage practices that will promote district and school improvement. Failure to address the full range of inputs and outcomes elevates the risk of contributing to deficit narratives about districts, schools, and communities.

Theory of Action

A theory of action can be a useful tool for clarifying the key conditions and actions that are thought to promote the goals of the state accountability system. While a fully specified model is beyond the scope of the advisory committee, Figure 1 provides a high-level illustration of the prominent components.

Figure 1. High Level Theory of Action



The far left column shows a sample of the **inputs and conditions** necessary to support the priority **outcomes** shown in column 3. These are shown separately for the state, district, school, and educators. For example, the state plays an important role in establishing academic standards and assessments, which is distinguished from the district's role in developing curriculum and hiring and training educators.

The key **actions** are shown in the middle column, distinguished by different groups. These groups are nested to show the interrelationships among important actors or participants in the system: communities, districts, schools, educators, and students. For each group, a sample of prominent actions thought to have a positive impact on the system outcomes are shown in the right-hand column. For example, one role of educators is to help students encounter meaningful, relevant learning experiences and interact with diverse perspectives. The corresponding role of districts and schools is to support educators with training and resources.

Accountability implies reciprocity or shared responsibility. For example, one aim of the accountability system is to incentivize and reward improved academic achievement. Therefore, it's important to identify how this will be measured and the conditions, resources, and actions that are thought to produce this outcome (e.g., high-quality instruction based on a strong curriculum to create meaningful, relevant learning experiences).

The accountability system alone is insufficient to promote the inputs, actions, and outcomes specified in the model. Moreover, components in the Educational Vision that are not directly measured in the accountability system are no less important. However, broader elements in the Theory of Action can be used to help evaluate the extent to which the accountability system supports DESE's Educational Vision and can inform ongoing efforts to grow and improve the system (see Domaleski, 2020).

Design Principles

Following the development of system goals, the advisory committee worked to identify design principles to guide development of an accountability framework. The committee discussed the desired characteristics and features of a revised system, which involved addressing some tradeoffs associated with competing priorities. Ultimately, the committee identified the following design principles.

- **Collect and report a broad range of indicators.**

The accountability system should include indicators that reflect the breadth and depth of the Commonwealth's educational goals. This includes input and output measures that go beyond academic performance on state tests and addresses a broader range of the skills associated with success in college and careers and making positive contributions in their communities. It is important to ensure that indicators are valid for the intended uses and are incorporated into the system in a manner that minimizes unintended consequences.

- **"Right-size" federal requirements.**

Requirements from the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) specify that the accountability system must produce certain school designations, with certain indicators, and using certain methods. However, the indicators and classification methods used to produce these school designations can differ from other aspects, such as those used for optional designations or other purposes. Differentiating these elements of the system opens up the system to more opportunities for innovation and may help support utility and minimize unintended consequences.

- **Leverage flexibility where possible and where appropriate.**

While a degree of standardization is necessary to support federal and state requirements, other elements of the system can feature flexibility. For example, DESE might provide a menu of approved options from which districts can select for some indicators. The options would be determined by a thorough review process to select alternatives that are appropriate and defensible. By doing so, the system can better address the context of districts, schools, and communities and provide more authentic and useful information.

- **Develop and integrate robust systems of support.**

A classification and reporting system alone is insufficient to promote improvement. It's important to describe how improvement occurs, including the conditions, resources, and interventions that are most effective. This involves the principle of reciprocity which acknowledges a shared responsibility between the state, districts, and schools to bolster capacity to help meet performance goals. While detailed specifications for these support systems are beyond the scope of the advisory committee, it's essential to identify this priority and provide system design recommendations that are compatible.

ESSA REQUIREMENTS

A state's accountability system is a crucial lever for district and school improvement and improving student outcomes as described in state plans for implementing Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The purpose of ESSA Title I, Part A is to provide all students with access to fair, equitable, and high-quality education and to close achievement gaps (§1001). The purpose of a state's accountability system under Title I of the ESSA is to improve student achievement and school success (§1111(c)(4)).

ESSA puts forward several requirements for states to ensure they are meaningfully differentiating school performance. Section 1111 of ESSA specifies the requirements for state plans, which are submitted to the United States Department of Education for review and approval. ESSA establishes the basic framework for the following:

- State standards,
- Academic assessments,
- Statewide accountability and reporting system,
- Approach to school improvement and support, and
- The state's support for evidence-based district program strategies, fiscal flexibility, and transparency.

This report addresses the advisory committee's recommendations specific to ESSA's statewide accountability and reporting system requirements: (1) District and school accountability determinations and (2) Reporting. Below are important federal and state requirements related to these two main components that operate as system constraints.

District and School Accountability Determinations

States are required to establish long-term goals and measures of interim progress for academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency. States are also required to specify the following indicators as part of their Consolidated State Plan:

- Academic Achievement
- Another valid and reliable academic indicator (e.g., academic growth)
- Graduation rate
- Progress in attaining English language proficiency
- School quality/student success

These indicators are used by states to make accountability determinations. ESSA further specifies that states must identify schools in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), schools in need of Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), schools in need of Additional Targeted Support (ATSI), and any additional state-determined categories of schools. The three federally required categories are defined below.

- **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI):** These include at least the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools overall and high schools with graduation rates less than two-thirds of its students (or 66.7 percent).
- **Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI):** These include schools with a consistently underperforming student group, which is defined by the state.
- **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI):** These include schools with the lowest performing student groups. That is, any group in a school, on its own, that would be identified as performing lower than the 5th percentile Title I school (i.e., performing below the CSI cut point).

Reporting Requirements

In addition to the design of the accountability system and making determinations, states must also report annually on the indicators used to make accountability determinations by all required disaggregated student groups, including but not limited to:

- Students from low income families,
- Students from major racial and ethnic groups,
- Students with disabilities, and
- English learners.

Furthermore, states must establish a minimum number of students to report on disaggregated student groups.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

System Framework

Based on the design principles, the advisory committee established a conceptual framework for the Commonwealth's district and school accountability system. Though the framework is not intended to provide the specificity needed to operationalize the model, the advisory committee provided recommendations and suggestions to guide implementation.

The accountability framework recognizes that the system must include core components to satisfy federal and state requirements and identify districts and schools in need of support. However, the system can also include supplemental indicators to incentivize and reward practices that more fully address the range of inputs and outcomes associated with district and school quality

and student success. To be clear, the committee did not advocate for multiple accountability systems (federal and state) that would provide different information about districts and schools based on different sources of evidence. The committee recommended one coherent federal and state accountability system.

Categories 1-3 address indicators used to describe and differentiate district and school performance.

Category 1 refers to the subset of *core indicators* that satisfy ESSA requirements and are used to designate schools into required state and federal support categories (e.g., Comprehensive Support and Improvement).

Category 2 offers the potential for substantial flexibility and information on a range of inputs and outputs that goes beyond the requirements of ESSA. These *supplemental indicators* are used to further describe and differentiate district and school performance but are not constrained by ESSA requirements. The supplemental indicators can be used either to provide augmented reporting at the indicator level or levels of commendation for districts and schools that are not identified for support (Category 1). For example, Category 2 may be used in combination with Category 1 to designate exemplary districts and schools (though, if there is a system to designate exemplary schools, there should not be a systemic bias – such as size of school or demographics that is extraneous to school quality and student success).

Indicators in Category 2 may also help address the conditions or inputs associated with promoting improved outcomes. For example, the committee discussed postsecondary readiness as an important outcome aligned with DESE’s Educational Vision. Category 2 would allow local flexibility to identify a range of experiences that promote readiness that go beyond advanced coursework options in Category 1 (e.g., multilingual certificates, industry credentials, CTE coursework completion, work-based learning experiences). The purpose of providing local flexibility in Category 2 is a recognition of the diversity of ways in which districts and schools can support the desired student outcomes represented in Massachusetts’ Educational Vision. The advisory committee recommended that local flexibility is allowed with certain indicators as long as all choices/flexibilities are equally appropriate and defensible. The section under “Broader Measures of School Quality and Student Success” goes into more detail about potential Category 2 indicators. Finally, approaches for aggregation and establishing performance descriptions will differ for this category which is addressed in a subsequent section.

Category 3 reflects the range of *information the state will collect and report and any resources the state provides to help build capacity* (e.g., guidance, research). This information will not be used to differentiate district and school performance in a formal accountability system. Rather it will be disseminated by the state to a broad range of constituents to monitor and support district and school performance. To be most useful for district and school improvement initiatives, Category 3 indicators should:

- Address inputs and outcomes
- Extend beyond measures of academic achievement (e.g., an adequate arts program)
- Include measures of progress and attainment
- Demonstrate accessibility to a wide range of constituents
- Contain features and supports to help promote interpretation and use
- Adjust as needs and contexts change

The state already collects and reports on a broad range of information about district and school quality that could fulfill these purposes.

Indicator Recommendations

A state's accountability system must include a minimum number and certain types of indicators, which are the data and information used to measure district and school performance and reflect priorities within each state. In the ESSA accountability context, the word indicator is used to describe any valid and reliable measure that can meaningfully differentiate school performance across the state. As a reminder, school identification refers to the specific requirement for states to identify low-performing schools that need additional support to improve student learning and close performance gaps. The school identification categories are Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI), which were described earlier in this report.

The required indicators under ESSA include the following:

1. **The academic achievement indicator**, as measured by proficiency on the required annual reading / language arts and mathematics, and science assessments that are a) the same for all schools; 2) aligned to the state's content standards; and 3) of adequate quality as operationalized by peer review requirements.
2. **The other academic indicator**, for elementary and middle schools, student growth as measured by approved state assessments or another valid and reliable statewide academic indicator that allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance. For each public high school in the state, at the state's discretion, student growth as measured by approved annual assessments.
3. **Graduation rate indicator**, for high schools, as measured by the four-year adjusted-cohort graduation rate (ACGR) and, at a state's discretion, one or more extended-year rates. Extended year graduation rate may be used in addition to but not in place of the four-year rate.
4. **Progress in achieving English-language proficiency (ELP) indicator**, as defined by the state and measured by the statewide ELP assessment. Progress is based on a state determined timeline.
5. At least one **indicator of school quality or student success (SQSS)** that allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance and is valid, reliable, statewide, and comparable. Examples of possible SQSS indicators include chronic absenteeism, student and/or educator engagement, student access to and completion of advanced coursework, postsecondary readiness, and school climate and safety.

The advisory committee did not recommend DESE include only the minimum ESSA-required indicators in the accountability system. Rather, the committee endorsed a model that includes a broad range of indicators to more fully describe district and school performance. The following sections outline the advisory committee's recommendations for each of the required indicators and components of Massachusetts' accountability system, as well as indicators that they would recommend for Categories 2 (supplemental indicators) and 3 (state-reported only).

Academic Achievement

Under ESSA, the academic achievement indicator is a measure of proficiency collected through the administration of mathematics and reading/language arts exams in grades 3-8 and once in high school and science once per grade span to no less than 95 percent of enrolled students in those grades. States have the flexibility to include other tested grades and subjects, but those other than mathematics, reading/language arts, and science would be included in the Other Academic or School Quality/Student Success indicator. While states are required to report percent proficient, ESSA allows states to determine how to incorporate assessment results in their systems of differentiation for school accountability determinations.

The academic achievement indicator is important because it communicates student performance against grade-level expectations across all school levels (including high schools). Proficiency, while a snapshot of performance, provides an important signal of whether students are on track to meet career- and college-readiness goals as specified in state standards. However, flexibility in the design and operationalization of the academic achievement indicator under ESSA requires a state to consider its intended purpose and ensure the indicator meets the state's policy objectives and aligns with the state's accountability system's theory of action (see D'Brot, LeFloch, English, & Jacques, 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The advisory committee supports the following recommendations for academic achievement indicator:

1. Use MCAS average scaled scores in ELA, mathematics, and science in the aggregate and for student groups in Category 1.
2. Report district and school proficiency rates in Category 3.

The advisory committee supports using average scaled scores in Category 1 in lieu of proficiency, as it better describes and differentiates school and group performance. This method is consistent with the one currently used in the district and school accountability system, and the advisory committee agrees that it should be continued.

However, reporting proficiency rates is important to both comply with federal regulations and to provide more transparency about district and school performance. For example, average scaled scores can mask low performance for some students or groups if offset by higher scores from others. For this reason, proficiency rates provide another important view of district and school performance and should be explicitly reported in Category 3 (DESE currently reports district and school proficiency rates and the advisory committee agrees this approach should be continued).

Growth

Under ESSA, a state's accountability system must include a valid and reliable "other academic indicator" for elementary and secondary schools that are not high schools beyond the academic achievement indicator. The law requires the other academic indicator to include either a measure of student growth or another valid and reliable statewide academic indicator that allows for meaningful differentiation. While challenges exist with these other academic indicators, ranging from accuracy and precision to understandability and access, the familiarity and usefulness of other academic indicators currently used in states may be an essential factor in selecting appropriate measures for this indicator category.

The growth (or other academic) indicator is important because it allows states to expand conceptualizations of academic performance. Different views of performance (see Carlson, 2001 or

Castellano & Ho, 2012) can provide a more complete portrayal of academic performance to support improvement efforts. These views of performance are:

- **Status:** The academic performance of a student or collection of students at a single point in time.
- **Improvement:** The change in performance over time within grades or across grades, without following the same student or collection of students.
- **Growth:** The academic performance of the same student or same collection of students over two or more points in time.
- **Acceleration:** The differences in growth rates across schools or groups of interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The advisory committee did not discuss growth at a level of specificity to prescribe the selection or detailed specifications of a particular analytic model. Rather, the committee developed criteria to signal their priorities, reflected in the following recommendations.

1. Prioritize approaches that minimize correlations with school characteristics or demographics. In other words, a school shouldn't be advantaged or disadvantaged on the growth metric based on the school's achievement results in the previous year, percentage of English learners served, percentage of students from low income families, or percentage of students from certain racial and ethnic groups.
2. Identify solutions that are easy to understand and communicate.
3. Include a meaningful definition of growth to standard, such as the amount of growth required to reach proficiency within a certain amount of time.
4. Ensure the approach produces results that are reliable, accurate, and fair across grade spans.

Recommendation 1 received strong support from the committee and reflects the value placed on ensuring growth detects a distinct aspect of student progress rather than simply amplifying the influence of status (i.e., scaled scores or proficiency rates) that is already in the accountability model.

Although a majority of the advisory committee supported Recommendation 2, others noted some disagreement or pointed to the need to qualify this statement. Those supporting models that are easier to understand and communicate pointed out this makes the results more useful and actionable. When models are overly complex, constituents may not fully benefit from the information. On the other hand, some committee members pointed out that overly simplistic models may lack accuracy, sensitivity, or otherwise be less valid to support important interpretations and uses. For this reason, some members of the committee advocated for technical defensibility over simplicity, if the two are in conflict.

Recommendation 3 reflects the committee's desire to ensure that growth information can be used to understand the degree to which a student is 'on track' to reach a meaningful outcome. Such information is essential to support the committee's emphasis on promoting equity, particularly for students from underserved communities. This information is not necessarily in conflict with relative growth – both views can work together to provide a more complete picture of student progress. One answers the question, "Is the student growing at a rate to attain proficiency?" The other answers the question, "Is the student growing at a rate comparable to academic peers?" The growth approach selected for the state's accountability system should address both questions.

Finally, there was strong support for Recommendation 4, reflecting the committee's desire to ensure growth can be meaningfully compared within and across years and that growth is as precise and unbiased as possible.

Graduation Rate

States have some flexibility in how they operationalize the graduation rate indicator for their state accountability systems under ESSA. However, all states must use the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), and may also use, at their discretion, one or more extended-year rates as the measures for the indicator (ESSA, Section 1111(c)(4)(B)). The ACGR is calculated as the percent of students in a ninth-grade cohort that graduate with a regular high school diploma in a specified number of years or less (i.e., four-year and, at a state's discretion, one or more extended years) consistent with the definition of the four- and extended-year rates in ESSA section 8101(25). School graduation rates must be part of the state's accountability system for high schools that is used for identifying schools for CSI, TSI schools, and ATSI. Additionally, states must separately identify any school that graduates fewer than two-thirds of its students as CSI.

The graduation rate indicator is important because it allows states to communicate different value statements around ensuring students have met K-12 expectations under different time frames using four-year and extended-year rates. Graduation rates are likely familiar to educators but may require additional communication to the public, especially when considering the use of the graduation rate. It is imperative that practitioners and educators understand the link between the lagged nature of graduation rate with leading indicators like instructional decisions, professional development selection, program implementation, progress indicators, and earlier outcome indicators (both for and beyond accountability). That is, graduation rates represent delayed markers of performance which can be influenced by more proximal data (e.g., achievement data, academic progress, and decisions that improve those outcomes).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Review and discussion of the graduation rate indicator surfaced the following priorities for how the state should incorporate this indicator into the accountability system.

1. Meet federal requirements, but add additional information that recognizes schools who support students to graduate or stay in school beyond four years.
2. Use a five-year (or beyond) extended engagement rate.
3. Consider using an annual dropout rate measure.
4. Report additional measures of postsecondary readiness (e.g., enrollment in college, workforce, or enlistment in military) in Category 3.

The advisory committee acknowledged the importance of keeping the four-year graduation rate in the system, while emphasizing the importance of incentivizing student persistence beyond four years. For this reason, the advisory committee supports including a five-year graduation rate at a minimum; some members proposed including the rates for longer time frames.

As required by ESSA, four-year and extended rates should be included in Category 1. The committee did not discuss how much weight should be given to four-year versus extended year rates, but acknowledged this is an important consideration and merits additional review. Indicator weighting is addressed more fully in a subsequent section of this report.

Some members of the advisory committee were opposed to using an annual dropout rate in addition to the graduation rate; others supported it. More discussion is likely required to determine if and how dropout rate is included in the model.

Finally, the committee discussed the importance of reporting additional indicators of post-secondary readiness to more fully account for a range of meaningful student accomplishments after high school. Ideally such indicators would address a broad range of post-secondary pursuits related to college, career, and/or citizenship, consistent with the goals of the system. However, the committee also recognized that the availability and reliability of such data is uncertain. For this reason, available indicators should be included in Category 3 and expanded as more information may be available.

Progress in English Language Proficiency

Progress in achieving English language proficiency (ELP) is another required accountability indicator under ESSA. Previously required under Title III, moving this requirement to Title I has facilitated a more widespread focus on supporting students as they make progress toward achieving ELP. States have the flexibility to determine the definition of English proficiency, its statewide ELP assessment, and how ELP progress is included in its accountability system. However, all states must include a Progress in achieving ELP indicator for all schools, given they meet inclusion requirements (i.e., minimum n-size).

The ELP indicator is important because it represents an indicator of academic success focused on students' acquisition of the English language. Inclusion of this indicator in the accountability system is intended to help ensure districts and schools are supporting students throughout their ELP development, acquisition, and when meeting expectations set by the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through review and discussion of the ELP indicator, the advisory committee developed the following recommendations. These recommendations describe priorities for the manner in which ELP should be incorporated in the system.

1. Ensure the selected approach represents the non-linear path students take to achieve English language proficiency.
2. Minimize the impact of disparate results for high schools that receive newer English learners into the system who do not have six years to progress before matriculation.
3. Include more reporting categories (e.g., ever EL) to better contextualize the effect of students who exit on longitudinal performance.

The advisory committee recognized that the growth patterns for language learners can vary based on factors such as starting level, grade, and time receiving language support services. Moreover, growth is rarely linear; students progress at different rates based on these and other factors. Accordingly, committee members placed a high priority on ELP approaches that best account for these factors in establishing expectations for demonstrating language proficiency and describing progress toward proficiency.

Supporting high school students who are working to achieve language proficiency was a particular concern for many committee members. Results in Massachusetts and nationwide show that fewer high school students, particularly those new to U.S. schools, meet progress or exit targets compared

to elementary and middle school students. The challenge is compounded by the fact that such students often have a shorter time frame to reach proficiency. The committee acknowledged that ELP solutions should neither lower the bar nor mask low performance. However, the state should prioritize solutions that provide more context to understand and address these unique challenges. Such solutions will necessitate more nuanced reporting and efforts by the state to provide guidance and support. Additional measures of EL progress and evidence that districts and schools are implementing promising practices to support ELs could be considered for Categories 2 and 3. Such solutions must be carefully developed and vetted by appropriate experts, leaders, and practitioners. This work is beyond the scope of this accountability advisory committee.

The third recommendation addresses a related issue – appropriately understanding ELP performance over time. Because students who exit EL services are no longer included in reports it can be difficult to meaningfully interpret trends. For this reason, the committee recommended the state support reporting categories beyond current ELs, such as former ELs (e.g., EL anytime in the last four years) and ‘ever EL,’ which is defined as any student ever designated as an EL (Thompson et al, 2017).

Broader Measures of School Quality and Student Success

In this section, the advisory committee’s work to identify and prioritize broader measures of school quality and student success (SQSS) are summarized. This section is intended to address both the ESSA requirements for SQSS, addressed in Category 1, and additional accountability, reporting, and/or support initiatives in Categories 2 and 3.

These broader measures are important because they can deepen or expand conceptualizations of district and school quality and more fully represent the breadth and depth of the system’s goals. It is particularly important to determine the intended purpose, use, and design of any selected indicators. For example, some indicators may be used to influence school support designations in Category 1 and should conform with ESSA requirements to be valid, reliable, and comparable statewide. Other indicators may be incorporated in Category 2 to more fully describe the range of district and school performance and to incentivize promising practices. Still other indicators may be collected and reported in Category 3 to inform district and school support initiatives. Different uses are associated with distinct criteria for acceptability, approaches for supporting appropriate interpretation, and efforts to minimize unintended consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The advisory committee prioritized eight potential indicators in this category. These indicators primarily, but not exclusively, emerged from a review of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report, *Monitoring Educational Equity* (2020a). The prioritization of these eight indicators should not be interpreted as a lack of support for other potential indicators from the NASEM report or otherwise. Rather, time constraints simply limited the scope of the committee’s review.

Additionally, the advisory committee did not define the indicators or identify what could or should be measured. Descriptions of what could be measured were primarily pulled from the NASEM *Guidebook for States* (2020b). The committee reacted to a presentation about these indicators using descriptions from the NASEM report. The committee was then asked to categorize the indicators. Attention to definitions and how to measure these indicators will be important in future work.

The recommendations that emerged from the review of these priority indicators are first summarized in Table 2. This is followed by additional context to convey the key points raised by the committee in their review.

Table 2. Prioritized Measures

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	CATEGORY
Chronic absenteeism	Typically defined as missing 10 percent or more of the instructional days in a year.	2
Advanced coursework in grades 11 and 12	Participation and/or performance in coursework such as, dual-enrollment, AP, IB, or similar.	1
Access to effective teaching*	Exposure to novice, experienced, and certified teachers. Racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching force.	2
Curricular breadth*	Availability of and enrollment in coursework in the arts, social sciences, sciences, technology, and world languages.	2
School climate*	Perceptions of safety, academic support, academically focused culture, and teacher-student trust.	1
Educator absenteeism	Educator absenteeism rates. Degree to which districts and schools have consistent adults working with students daily.	2
Access to high-quality academic supports*	Access to and participation in formalized systems of tutoring or other types of academic supports, including special education services and services for English learners.	2
9th grade persistence/promotion	Percent of 9th graders attaining credit accumulation target or passing selected courses.	2

Note. Asterisks (*) indicates indicators from the NASEM report and guidebook (2020a; 2020b). These are a subset of indicators proposed for the model.

While a majority of the committee supported placing **chronic absenteeism** in Category 2 (supplemental indicators used to further describe and differentiate district and school performance), some members advocated for Category 1 (core indicators used to identify CSI and TSI schools). Proponents of Category 1 emphasized the extent to which attendance influences many other important outcomes and pointed to growing concerns about increased absenteeism rates. Those supporting Category 2 expressed concern about giving chronic absenteeism too much influence given its perceived association with demography and uncertainty about the extent to which districts and schools have substantial influence on attendance. Some members also worried that an overemphasis could be unduly burdensome or misdirect resources.

The committee's support for placing **advanced coursework** in Category 1 reflected an emphasis on promoting equitable access to rigorous and meaningful learning experiences. Moreover, committee members felt this indicator can be influenced by leaders in districts and schools. Some committee members suggested that DESE review advanced coursework alternatives to ensure the list is appropriate and equitable.

Access to effective teaching was prioritized as a Category 2 indicator. Committee members recognized access to effective teaching is important for student success and to promote equity.

Many committee members emphasized it is critical to determine how 'effective' is operationalized. Credentials and number of years teaching do not necessarily correlate to teaching effectiveness and there were some concerns about unintended consequences if the indicator is too influential. Moreover, attracting highly qualified educators remains a challenge for many districts, as does recruiting racially and ethnically diverse educators. Future work could explore how to define and operationalize this indicator to maximize the value and importance of this information, while minimizing unintended consequences

The committee was almost evenly split on how to categorize **curricular breadth**. All agreed that course offerings are important, high-leverage, and within the control of districts and schools. Moreover, promoting curricular breadth supports hiring and retaining a broad pool of educators in critical speciality areas (e.g., arts, music). A concern of the committee, however, is that curricular breadth is challenging to operationalize and could lead to unintended consequences if it is given too much influence in the system.

Some committee members supported adding a separate measure of **curricular quality** because educator access to high-quality instructional materials is a key lever to improve student achievement outcomes. However, the committee noted that it is a challenge to operationalize how high-quality curriculum or instructional materials is determined other than using EdReport ratings or another state-determined system.

The advisory committee did not define **curricular breadth or quality** beyond what is in the NASEM report - future work could build and expand upon this committee's contributions. The committee did note, however, that there are many ways for districts and schools to demonstrate curricular breadth and quality, and any measure used should allow flexibility for the diversity of district and school contexts and settings across the Commonwealth. There was a slight majority favoring assigning these indicators in Category 2; however, many supported Category 1.

There were a range of views about how to incorporate adult and/or student perceptions about **school climate** in the system but a majority supported assigning it to Category 1. Most agreed that it is an important indicator and is under the control of district and school leadership. Moreover, if measured well, it can address a wide range of factors that are included in the system goals (e.g., fostering community and engagement). Committee members emphasized that school climate measures should include feedback from students and families, however some disagreed that educator or staff feedback should be included – at least not in Category 1. This point of view was based on the concern that staff members are in a distinct role compared to students and families. For example, if staff feedback reflects a negative reaction to high expectations then results may contribute to system incoherence. There was some disagreement among the committee members regarding the extent to which school climate measures are sufficiently valid and reliable for more consequential uses in accountability. Others contended that well-designed instruments are sufficiently trustworthy and meaningful for inclusion in Category 1.

A majority of the committee assigned **educator absenteeism** to Category 2. Those who disagreed advocated for either assigning this indicator to Category 3 (state reporting) or excluding it from the system. This point of view was primarily motivated by concerns that educators may be absent for defensible reasons such as illness or family care. Advocates for Category 2 noted the important influence that educators have on factors such as attendance and helping students feel a sense of engagement and belonging. Proponents also noted that educator absenteeism should not be considered less important than student absenteeism.

Access to high-quality academic support was assigned to Category 2 by a majority of committee members. Some proposed Category 1 citing the leverage that this indicator may have on promoting improved support for multi-language learners among other groups. Others expressed concern that an overemphasis in the system could lead to unintended consequences, such as increasing the breadth of support without appropriate attention to quality.

Finally, a slight majority of the committee assigned **9th grade persistence and promotion** to Category 2. This decision was influenced by a recognition that 9th graders who are on-track are much more likely to graduate. Moreover, many committee members expressed a desire to include more information that could serve as an 'early warning' to stimulate intervention. Those disagreeing favored an assignment to Category 3 or excluding it from the system. They expressed concern that it is manipulable and subject to corruption (e.g., may place undue pressure on grade 9 teachers to pass students who are not academically prepared). Some proposed including it in Category 3 to explore the impact and potential consequences more fully before considering more influential alternatives.

Summary of Indicator Recommendations

Table 3 provides a summary of the recommendations and implications for each of the current indicator categories in the accountability model.

Table 3. Summary of Indicator Recommendations

INDICATOR	SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS / IMPLICATIONS
Academic Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to use MCAS scaled scores in ELA, math, and science (Category 1). • Continue to report proficiency rates outside the system (Category 3).
Student Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore improvements to the model that (a) minimize relationship with school demographics, (b) promote clarity in communication, and (c) include information about growth to standard (Category 1). • Continue to produce results that are consistent, accurate, and fair.
High School Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue using federally required 4-year graduation rate and 5-year extended graduation rate (Category 1). • Explore including measures of persistence beyond 5 years (Category 1). • Further evaluate whether and how dropout rate should be included (Category 1). • Report additional measures of postsecondary readiness in Category 3.
Progress in English Language Proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the selected approach represents the non-linear path students take to achieve English language (EL) proficiency (Category 1). • Include more reporting categories (e.g., ever EL) to better contextualize the effect of students who exit on longitudinal performance (Category 1). • Consider adding additional measures of EL progress and evidence that districts and schools are implementing promising practices in Categories 2 and 3.
School Quality Student Success/ Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move chronic absenteeism to Category 2. • Continue to include advanced coursework and completion in Category 1; further review and define qualifying courses. • Include a measure of school climate in Category 1. • Explore approaches to include the following measures in Category 2: access to effective teaching, curricular breadth, educator absenteeism, access to high-quality academic supports, and 9th grade persistence/ promotion.

System Design Recommendations

The advisory committee considered how the system should describe district, school, indicator, and group performance with respect to the framework. A summary of the committee's recommendations follow:

- For Category 1, the advisory committee recommends including only the minimum required school support designations required by state and federal law and policy (i.e., CSI, TSI, and ATSI).
- Category 2 could be used to provide additional classifications beyond support (e.g., districts and schools of recognition).
- Most advisory committee members support creating a system that produces performance thresholds at the overall and indicator level. These thresholds would specify adequate performance at the overall and indicator level to support appropriate interpretation of the data.
- The committee was open to and supportive of the use of both criterion-based and norm-based (percentile) approaches to establish performance expectations for Categories 1 and 2.¹ While a majority of the group agreed that the use of both was a thoughtful approach to a complicated problem, others disagreed, noting that such information is not meaningful and can lead to unintended consequences.
- The committee reviewed several methods for combining or aggregating indicators for Categories 1 and 2. Accountability indicators must be combined or aggregated using some method to identify, at minimum, the bottom 5 percent of schools in the state as per federal requirements. While it was not a unanimous recommendation, most committee members support using a composite score to describe performance for Category 1. Those dissenting objected to methods that facilitate ranking and sorting of school performance and pointed out that other approaches, that do not require a composite score, can be leveraged to identify the federally required school classifications.
- Overall, the committee recognized that decisions about weighting have substantial influence on the credibility of the system and scores. The committee did not make recommendations about specific indicator weights, in part because it would have been premature to assign weights before more details are available about the indicators. However, the committee emphasized the importance of careful review of weights by a broad-based group of stakeholders before any weighting decisions are finalized.
- The committee supports using an alternative aggregation approach for Category 2, particularly one that is based on a profile or filter approach. This may be better suited to account for the broader range of indicators included in Category 2 and the more flexible methods used to establish acceptable performance (e.g., 'menu approaches').
- In general, the committee supports providing performance information to reflect both district and/or school status and progress whenever possible.

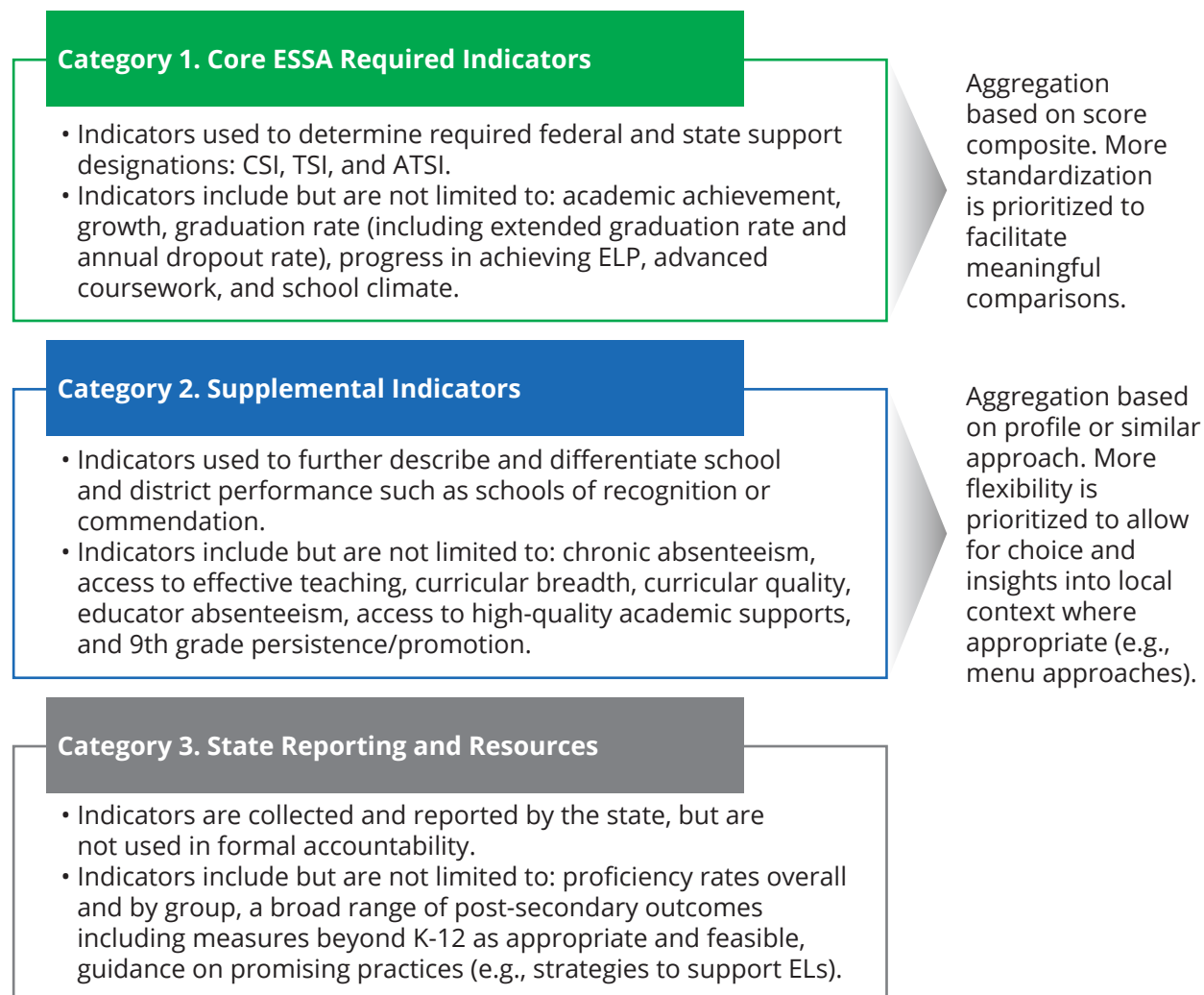
A majority of the committee supports identifications based on one or more student groups for Categories 1 and 2. For example, the committee was not opposed to including separate

¹ Criterion-based approaches refer to establishing standards based on a predetermined goal, which can be influenced by judgment or policy. Norm-based approaches compare performance based on all scores in the distribution and are often reported as a percentile.

performance for the lowest performing 25 percent of students. This may help spotlight the need for targeted improvement and support for historically disadvantaged students.

Figure 2 illustrates the system framework populated with recommended indicators and with notes about the key design attributes associated with Category 2 indicators. The advisory committee did not discuss Category 3 in detail and the state currently collects and reports a wide range of information that was not disputed by the committee.

Figure 2. System Framework with Recommended Indicators



NEXT STEPS

The recommendations outlined in this report are intended to establish a design framework for the Commonwealth's district and school accountability system. This advisory committee's purpose was to provide conceptual advice about the current accountability system. Further operationalization of the system and indicators is needed. Moving from design to implementation, DESE should consider the following next steps:

- **Establish Operational Definitions and Business Rules:** The committee's recommendations address high-level features or criteria associated with the indicators and system design, but do not establish the operational definitions (e.g., If a high-quality academic supports indicator were added to Category 2, how would it be defined and measured across districts and schools in ways that are appropriate and defensible?) and business rules (e.g., minimum number of students needed to report an indicator at the district and/or school level) required to implement the system. That is understandable given that the advisory committee was formed as a policy advisory group not a technical advisory group. In subsequent phases, DESE should work with subject matter experts (e.g., experts in supporting English language learners), technical advisors, practitioners, and other constituents to further specify and implement the system.
- **Establish Aggregation Rules and Performance Expectations:** Another key decision to prepare for implementation is determining how indicators will be combined and what performance standards are appropriate for identification and exit of state and federal designations. As noted in prior sections, the advisory committee prioritized some approaches deemed promising, but did not provide detailed guidance on aggregation procedures and weights. This would have been premature given the lack of specificity on the nature of the indicators. However, the advisory committee emphasized the importance of these activities and urged DESE to convene appropriate partners and constituents to develop specifications building on the framework described in this report.
- **Address Exceptions:** Every accountability system must address exceptional circumstances and conditions. For example, how are schools with unusual grade configurations (e.g, K-2), special student populations, and/or small student populations addressed? Determining business rules for these and other exceptional circumstances is an important part of the development and implementation process. The advisory committee was not able to have an in-depth discussion about exceptional circumstances and conditions that affect some schools. There were nascent conversations that signaled the advisory committee's interest in exploring options for exceptional circumstances and conditions. These conversations could be part of a subsequent design phase.
- **Examine and Refine:** Once additional specifications have been established, DESE and its partners should examine indicators (particularly novel measures) and other aspects of the system such as reporting to better understand the extent to which the system supports the intended interpretations and uses. Refinements to the indicators or overall design decisions may be necessary based on exploratory results.

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APPENDIX A: ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

MEMBER	INSTITUTION
Noah Berger	Massachusetts Teachers Association
Sherley Bretous	Benajmin Banneker Charter Public School
Erica Brown	Massachusetts Charter Public School Association
Erin Cooley	Democrats for Education Reform
Jason DeFalco	Blackstone-Millville Regional School District
Kimberley Dickson	Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators
Madison Estes	Massachusetts Parent-Teacher Association
Matthew Fox	Massachusetts School Administrators Association
Monica Hogan	Boston Public Schools
Sarah Kent	Urban Superintendents Network
Ed Lambert	Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education
Dan Murphy	American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts
Tim Piwowar	Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
Keri Rodrigues	National Parents Union – Massachusetts
Paul Schlichtman	Massachusetts Association of School Committees
Jack Schneider	Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment



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