



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education  
Commissioner of Education

201 East Colfax Avenue  
Denver, CO 80203-1799

Aug. 15, 2019

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Directors,

Hello! I hope you are all doing well as you prepare to go back to school! It is such an exciting and busy time. I know you all are working so hard to make sure the return to school is fun, exciting, safe and positive for all our students. Thank you for what you do every day.

Today the department released our state-, district- and school-level assessment results as well as academic growth information from the 2019 administration of statewide assessments. The release culminates months of work by department staff to validate and prepare the data, but more importantly, it marks the results of your hard work last year. I know you and your teams worked incredibly hard to support your students last year, and we should take moment to celebrate the fact that thousands of students across the state are meeting or exceeding the high bar we set with our rigorous academic standards. We still have work to do to raise achievement for all students and narrow our historic gaps, but today I'm reflecting on the success that we see in the results and thank you for your incredible dedication to our state's children.

Next week we'll be sending you the preliminary frameworks for your schools and districts, and as we have done for the last couple of years, those preliminary frameworks will be publicly available on our website on Aug. 26.

I know that some of you have had concerns with two changes to the frameworks that were announced earlier this summer. Now that our assessment results are publicly available, I'd like to provide some additional context for those changes. Please know that the changes we made to the frameworks were intended to ensure fairness and consistency in the system. Each year we look at assessment results and determine if any adjustments need to be made to the frameworks to ensure fairness and consistency. After receiving the assessment results this summer, we saw some differences that we believe required two adjustments to the frameworks.

1. We removed growth from eighth-grade CMAS English language arts to ninth-grade PSAT Evidence Based Reading and Writing, and
2. We renormed SAT achievement cut scores.

Again, we made these two changes to the 2019 School and District Performance Frameworks for technical reasons after we received the 2019 assessment results. We apologize for not providing full context for these changes earlier, but unfortunately, we could not fully explain how these changes would ensure fairness and consistency until we could publicly discuss the assessment results.

#### **Growth from eighth-grade CMAS ELA to ninth-grade PSAT EBRW**

We should acknowledge that the transition to the PSAT/SAT assessments was intended, in part, to encourage high school student participation in state assessments. At the same time, the change brought a reduction in the alignment to our state content standards. This was a necessary tradeoff to meet the



legislative requirement to use a nationally recognized college entrance examination for grade 11, and the precursor assessments for grades 9 and 10. Following a staggered transition for grades 10 and 11, PSAT 9 was administered for the first time in spring 2018 and the results were incorporated into the fall 2018 performance frameworks. In preparation for the 2019 growth calculations, additional analyses were run, and we found that the constructs underlying the CMAS ELA and PSAT Evidence-based Reading and Writing (EBRW) do not align sufficiently to provide meaningful inferences about growth for continued use in state accountability.

The PSAT assessment taken in grade 9 does not include a substantial writing component while the grade 8 CMAS ELA assessment includes explicit text-based writing tasks. This difference results in lower scale score correlations between CMAS ELA and PSAT EBRW than the other grades and content areas. The relative student rankings for each assessment differ enough that when run through the Colorado growth model, they may result in less accurate inferences of aggregate school and district performance.

The state's Technical Advisory Panel recommended preserving growth as much as possible, and after additional review of the PSAT grade nine assessments from both a content and a statistical perspective, excluding ELA growth while maintaining math growth in the frameworks was the best supported position. Recognizing this as a change from the previous year and following historical practice, CDE will be identifying any districts that would have received a higher rating from the inclusion of grade 9 EBRW growth in 2019 and offer an expedited request to reconsider process to remove any negative impact.

#### **SAT achievement cut-scores**

The decision to renorm the SAT achievement cut-scores was also made this summer based on unexpected shifts in the statewide 2019 SAT results which were compounded in the accountability achievement calculation. Following our commitment to fairness and comparability, as well as the state board's priorities for performance framework results, the achievement cut-scores for SAT were renormed at the 15th, 50th and 85th percentiles based on the 2019 state data. Renorming of sub-indicator cut-scores has been done on occasions when technical qualities of a metric have shifted unexpectedly.

CDE's assessment unit took additional data validation steps for the PSAT/SAT this spring and summer to ensure that all processes and procedures had been followed, and our decision to renorm was communicated with you as quickly as possible after those steps were taken.

#### **Timing of communications**

I know it would have been better fully explain the rationale for these changes earlier this summer, but the timing of our receipt of the assessment data, our validation of the data, and the opportunity to publicly discuss the data made that challenging.

Whenever possible, the Accountability office consults with the Technical Advisory Panel and other stakeholder groups about any framework changes in order to inform and gather feedback from the field. However, to meet the framework release deadline and districts' desire to have ratings as quickly as possible, we proceeded without having stakeholder meetings. Given the impact of the change on comparability for the frameworks, we decided to move forward before conversations could take place about the assessment results.

We have worked to build better systems to consult with the field and we truly value the feedback we receive from you. This is an ongoing process and something we strive to continually improve. There are some cases when the department needs to move forward under tight timelines and may not have time to



gather extensive stakeholder input. In these cases, the department considers state board priorities and past advice from the field to shape decisions.

#### State Board of Education conversations about frameworks

In addition to the changes above, I want to make sure you're aware of the ongoing State Board of Education conversations around revising the underlying structure of the School and District Performance Frameworks. The state board has the statutory responsibility to decide how the performance frameworks are calculated and school and district ratings are assigned. The board has considerable latitude for making changes and last fall requested that CDE's Accountability office start exploring potential revisions to the frameworks that would result in fewer schools identified for Performance Plans. This discussion has continued at nearly every subsequent state board meeting, which are [archived on our website](#) and highlighted in our [news releases](#). You should also know that implementation of the board's decisions about the structure of the frameworks will take at least a year.

I hope that this information provides useful context and background information to you.

I am thinking about you as you dive into the new school year and sending you good wishes for joyful and successful year.

Sincerely,



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.  
Commissioner

