



Oct. 14, 2019

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Directors,

I want to thank all of you who took the time to send your thoughts, concerns, comments and suggestions to me or to your State Board of Education members regarding the changes to the elementary and middle school performance frameworks. I truly appreciate the thoughtful concerns you elevated, and I want to send a special thank you to the superintendents, staff, teachers and local board members who braved the snow and ice last Thursday to attend the state board meeting and share their thoughts at public comment. As I have said recently to many of you—the issues of motivation for educators and students is real, and I want to continue to work with the state board to understand these variables and try to find ways that our accountability system does not make educators feel undervalued—but instead can support and inspire them in their amazing work for students.

As you have probably seen from either our [news release](#) or several news stories, the board voted on Thursday to make some adjustments to the frameworks for elementary and middle schools. The board grappled with this decision for nearly a year, and you should know that they ended in a very different place than where they began their deliberations in large part because of the feedback you provided to CDE staff and directly to board members. Your feedback pushed them to keep growth as a large component of the system, slow down their decisions and the implementation timeline, and focus only on Performance and Improvement (not Priority improvement and Turnaround).

In the end, the board decided that the frameworks should be adjusted. The board did this through two decisions for elementary and middle schools:

1. The cut point between Improvement and Performance will be increased by 8 percentage points. Their rationale for this decision was based on the disconnect the board sees with the number of schools rated at Performance, the highest rating, and the achievement levels in some of those schools as well as overall for the state. With 72% of elementary and middle schools at Performance, but only 49% meeting or exceeding achievement expectations, the board believes that our current ratings are not accurately describing the performance of our state.
2. The board approved the addition of On-Track Growth as required by state law. The On-Track Growth measure will set an expectation that students scoring below “met expectations” show enough academic growth to advance one performance level on state assessments within two years. Students who are currently performing at grade level will be expected to show enough growth to maintain grade-level proficiency for three years.



While we'll be working with you and your staff over the coming months on the implementation of the board's direction, there are a few things I want to make sure you all know right away.

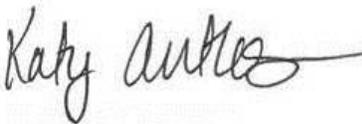
1. The board's decision won't go into effect until the fall of 2021. We'll show you what the new system will look like on the 2020 frameworks, but that will be for informational purposes only. The 2020 ratings will be based on the current cut points.
2. The decision affects only elementary and middle school ratings. The board will continue to discuss overall accountability issues during their deliberations about how the required On-Track Growth metric will be added into the high school and district frameworks, as well as other statutorily required post-secondary and workforce ready measures.
3. The board agrees that it's important to discuss the overall accountability system. They've been supportive of the work several of you are doing through the Student Centered Accountability Project (S-CAP) and they believe that innovation at the local level is an important part of this discussion. A Local Accountability Grant will be released very soon to support work in designing and implementing local accountability systems that complement the state system (SB 19-204). This will be a way for us all to explore and learn more about what is possible.

We know that many of you had concerns about the board making these changes. We hear your concerns and would like to work with you about how to implement these new changes in ways that can decrease the fears of negative consequences. For example, how can we communicate about the changes in expectations for earning a Performance rating so that communities don't feel like they are "falling backwards" when performance has not done so? If you have ideas, please feel free to reach out to me or Lisa Medler (medler_l@cde.state.co.us).

Lastly, I just want to thank you for your hard work and acknowledge that student performance is indeed on an upward trend in Colorado because of the deep commitment to students from you, your staff and your teachers. Despite all the challenges students and educators face in today's stress-filled world, CMAS scores, one indicator of student learning, are indeed going up. And, based on this year's preliminary ratings, only 144 schools earned priority improvement or Turnaround ratings, down from 202 schools in 2016. This upward trajectory is great news and due to your incredibly hard work.

Of course we all know we still have work to do to close achievement gaps and make sure all students can achieve, and I know doing this incredibly complicated work cannot be distilled in one performance framework. My goal is to continue these critical conversations over the long haul and find new ways to address these important issues.

Sincerely,



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner

