Summary of Massachusetts’ District and School Accountability System

# Introduction

State and federal laws require that all states implement a system of district and school accountability. The purpose of Massachusetts’ accountability system is to provide clear, actionable information to families, community members, and the public about district and school performance. Additionally, the accountability system helps the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to direct resources and assistance. The framework for the accountability system allows DESE to identify schools that require assistance or intervention, as well as schools that are demonstrating success. It maintains a single statewide accountability system that aligns with the Commonwealth’s priorities while meeting federal education requirements.

A description of each of the key elements of the Massachusetts district and school accountability system is included below. Sections highlighted in yellow represent areas of proposed change around which DESE is seeking public comment.

# Accountability Indicators

Annual performance determinations for districts and schools are calculated using the accountability indicators provided in the table below.

Table : Accountability Indicators

| Indicator | Measure |
| --- | --- |
| Achievement | * English language arts (ELA) MCAS average composite scaled score * Mathematics MCAS average composite scaled score * Science MCAS average composite scaled score |
| Student Growth | * ELA mean student growth percentile (SGP) * Mathematics mean SGP |
| High School Completion | * Four-year cohort graduation rate * Extended engagement rate (five-year cohort graduation rate plus the percentage of students from the cohort who are still enrolled) * Annual dropout rate |
| English Language Proficiency | * Progress made by students towards attaining English language proficiency (as measured by the ACCESS for ELLs assessment, the percentage of students meeting annual targets calculated to attain English proficiency in six years) |
| Additional Indicator(s) | * Chronic absenteeism (the percentage of students missing 10 percent or more of their days in membership) * Percentage of 11th & 12th graders completing advanced coursework (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Project Lead the Way, dual enrollment courses taken for post-secondary credit, Chapter 74-approved vocational/technical secondary cooperative education programs, and other selected rigorous courses) |

# Reported Measures

Accountability determinations consist of a normative component and a criterion-referenced component, which are used to classify districts and schools.

## Normative Component

The normative component, or accountability percentile, measures the performance of all students in a school compared to other schools in the state. This measure is reported as a percentile, from 1 to 99, which is calculated using all available accountability indicators for a school. Schools are grouped together based on the statewide assessments that they administer: *non-high schools*, serving a combination of grades 3 through 8; *middle-high and K-12 schools*, serving one or more grades 3 through 8 and grade 10; and *high schools*, where the only tested grade is grade 10. Within each grouping, each school’s performance on each indicator is ranked and weighted according to the weighting rules described below. The resulting accountability percentile provides information about how a school is doing compared to other schools administering similar assessments.

For the purposes of accountability reporting, the accountability percentile is calculated only at the school level, for the All Students group; it is not calculated at the district level.

### Weighting of Indicators in the Normative Calculation

Federal law requires that substantial weight be given to the achievement, growth, English language proficiency, and graduation rate indicators and that when taken together, these indicators should have much greater weight than the additional indicators.

In the calculation of the 2024 normative results, DESE continues to use a 3 to 1 ratio of achievement to growth and related indicator weightings that are consistent with those used in the calculation of accountability results in 2018 through 2023. The weightings are noted in the tables below.

Table : Accountability Indicator Weightings – Non-High School Gradespan, Normative Calculation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Measures** | **Weighting** | |
| **With EL** | **No EL** |
| Achievement | * ELA, mathematics, & science average composite scaled scores | 60% | 67.5% |
| Student Growth | * ELA & mathematics mean SGPs | 20% | 22.5% |
| English Language Proficiency | * Percentage of EL students making progress toward becoming proficient in English | 10% | -- |
| Additional Indicators | * Chronic absenteeism rate | 10% | 10% |

Table : Accountability Indicator Weightings – High School Gradespan, Normative Calculation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Measures** | **Weighting** | |
| **With EL** | **No EL** |
| Achievement | * ELA, mathematics, & science average composite scaled scores | 40% | 47.5% |
| Student Growth | * ELA & mathematics mean SGPs | 20% | 22.5% |
| High School Completion | * Four-year cohort graduation rate * Extended engagement rate * Annual dropout rate | 20% | 20% |
| English Language Proficiency | * Percentage of EL students making progress toward becoming proficient in English | 10% | -- |
| Additional Indicators | * Chronic absenteeism rate * Advanced coursework completion rate | 10% | 10% |

### Years Included

In the calculation of 2024 accountability percentiles, DESE uses the most recently available three years of data (i.e., 2022, 2023, and 2024). Data from each year is weighted in the overall percentile calculation, placing more weight on data from the most recent year (i.e., 15 percent for 2022 data, 25 percent for 2023 data, and 60 percent for 2024 data).

## Criterion-Referenced Component

The criterion-referenced component measures a district’s or school’s progress towards improvement targets. In the accountability system, DESE uses data from all students in the district or school and the lowest performing students in the district or school to determine overall progress towards targets.

### Weighting of Indicators in the Criterion-Referenced Calculation

Federal law requires that substantial weight be given to the achievement, growth, English language proficiency, and graduation rate indicators and that when taken together, these indicators should have much greater weight than the additional indicators.

In the calculation of the 2024 criterion-referenced results, DESE uses a 2.3 to 1 ratio of achievement to growth, consistent with the weightings shown in the tables below. By using this approach, DESE can ensure that the ratio of achievement to growth remains consistent across gradespans, but allow for flexibility in the actual percentages where necessary (e.g., to accommodate districts and schools that have data for the English language proficiency indicator and those that do not). At the high school level, the high school completion indicators are considered part of achievement when calculating the ratio of achievement to growth.

Table : Accountability Indicator Weightings – Non-High School Gradespan, Criterion-Referenced Calculation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Measures** | **Weighting** | |
| **With EL Group** | **No EL Group** |
| Achievement | * ELA, mathematics, & science average composite scaled scores | 45% | 52% |
| Student Growth | * ELA & mathematics mean SGPs | 20% | 23% |
| English Language Proficiency | * Percentage of EL students making progress toward becoming proficient in English | 10% | -- |
| Additional Indicators | * Chronic absenteeism rate | 25% | 25% |

Table : Accountability Indicator Weightings – High School Gradespan, Criterion-Referenced Calculation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Measures** | **Weighting** | |
| **With EL Group** | **No EL**  **Group** |
| Achievement | * ELA, mathematics, & science average composite scaled scores | 35% | 42% |
| Student Growth | * ELA & mathematics mean SGPs | 20% | 23% |
| High School Completion | * Four-year cohort graduation rate * Extended engagement rate * Annual dropout rate | 10% | 10% |
| English Language Proficiency | * Percentage of EL students making progress toward becoming proficient in English | 10% | -- |
| Additional Indicators | * Chronic absenteeism rate | 20% | 20% |
| * Advanced coursework completion rate | 5% | 5% |

### Lowest Performing Students Group

To control for student transiency, DESE measures the performance of each district’s and school’s lowest performing students who have been enrolled for multiple years. Districts and schools are still responsible for the annual performance of all students, as aggregate and student group results include all students enrolled in the school since the beginning of the school year. However, results for the Lowest Performing students group include only those students who have been enrolled in the same district or school for two consecutive years.

If a district or school does not have MCAS results for enough students to establish a reportable Lowest Performing students group, the district’s or school’s accountability determination is based on the performance of all students.

### Target-Setting

For each district or school as a whole and for its Lowest Performing students group, improvement targets are set for each accountability indicator as shown in the table below.

Table : Accountability Indicator Targets

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Non-High School Gradespan** | | **High School Gradespan** | |
| **All**  **Students** | **Lowest Performing Students** | **All**  **Students** | **Lowest Performing Students** |
| ELA achievement | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Math achievement | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Science achievement | ✔ | - | ✔ | ✔ |
| ELA SGP | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Math SGP | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Four-year cohort graduation rate | - | - | ✔ | - |
| Extended engagement rate | - | - | ✔ | - |
| Annual dropout rate | - | - | ✔ | - |
| EL progress | ✔ | - | ✔ | - |
| Chronic absenteeism | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Advanced coursework completion | - | - | ✔ | - |

In 2024, achievement targets are set using the general approach established by DESE in 2023, where each student group, school, and district is assigned to a “path” based on how their 2022 achievement compared to their achievement in 2019:

* **Recovery Path:** The MCAS average scaled score for the given group and subject was higher in 2019 than in 2022. These groups experienced declines in student achievement and are expected to improve achievement in a specified number of years to return to (and ultimately surpass) 2019 achievement levels.
* **Path Forward:** The MCAS average scaled score for the given group and subject was higher in 2022 than in 2019, *or* the improvement increment calculated using the recovery path for the group and subject is less rigorous than that assigned in 2019. These groups experienced little to no decline in achievement from 2019 to 2022 and are expected to continue to improve achievement.

Targets for the non-MCAS achievement indicators are set based on an analysis of past improvement using data that DESE has collected and reported for several years.

Based on each target and actual performance, DESE assigns points for each indicator as shown in the table below.

Table : Point Assignments

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Declined** | **No Change** | **Improved** | **Met Target** | **Exceeded Target** |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

For the district or school, the actual points earned and the total possible points are reported for each indicator. The points earned are combined, weighted according to the weightings described above, and calculated into a percentage of possible points for the All Students group. The same is done for the Lowest Performing students group. The two percentages of possible points values are then averaged, resulting in the district’s or school’s annual criterion-referenced target percentage. The goal is to earn 75 percent or higher, which represents meeting targets.

### Years Included

For 2024 reporting, the calculation of the cumulative criterion-referenced component includes two annual criterion-referenced target percentages, based on three years of data. By combining annual criterion-referenced target percentage data from 2023 and 2024, DESE can produce a single, final percentage that represents overall progress towards targets. Within this calculation, the annual percentages are weighted, giving more weight to the most recent year (i.e., 40 percent for 2023 data and 60 percent for 2024 data).

# Student Group Reporting

While a district’s or school’s accountability determination is primarily based on the performance of the district or school as a whole and its lowest performing students, DESE also reports accountability results at the student group level.

## Accountability Student Groups

In addition to reporting results for each district or school as a whole, accountability results are reported for the following 11 student groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; African American or Black; Hispanic or Latino; Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; White; students from Low-Income families; Students with Disabilities; English learners (ELs) and former ELs; and High Needs students (an unduplicated count of students from Low-Income families, Students with Disabilities, and/or ELs and former ELs). To report data for a student group, there must be results for at least 20 students.

## Student Group Results

For each student group in a district or school, performance against improvement targets is reported using the criterion-referenced component described above. The overall accountability determination for a student group is reported as the degree to which targets have been met.

In addition to the criterion-referenced component, each student group also receives a student group percentile. The student group percentile measures the student group’s relative standing compared to like student groups in the same gradespan grouping statewide (e.g., by comparing results from the students with disabilities student group in one high school to all other students with disabilities student groups in high schools statewide). The student group percentile is calculated using the same process as the normative accountability percentile described above: by ranking data from all available accountability indicators for each student group and combining them into a single, final percentile value, from 1 to 99. This allows DESE to identify schools in which the overall performance of all students in the school may be masking the performance of one or more low performing student groups.

# Assessment Participation

State and federal laws require high levels of student participation in statewide assessments. For each district and school as a whole, assessment participation rates are calculated separately for ELA, mathematics, and science. At the student group level, assessment participation is calculated for the group with all subjects combined (e.g., measuring the percentage of individual ELA, mathematics, and science tests combined taken by the group). This approach minimizes the effect of a small number of non-participants in small student groups.

Regardless of the reporting level (e.g., overall district or school rates or student group rates), participation is calculated two ways for use in accountability determinations. First, the 2024 participation rate is calculated. If the actual 2024 participation rate is lower than 95 percent, that rate will be compared to most recent two years of assessment participation data for the group or subject. The higher of the two resulting rates will be factored into the district’s or school’s overall accountability determination. This two-step approach further minimizes the impact of a small number of non-participants in small student groups.

# Graduation Rates

Federal law requires states to identify any school that does not graduate two-thirds of its students. Therefore, any district or school in which the most recent four-year cohort graduation rate is below 66.7 percent is identified as requiring assistance or intervention.

# Categorization of Schools

Overall school results are reported in two categories: schools *requiring assistance or intervention*, and schools *not requiring assistance or intervention*.

## Schools Requiring Assistance or Intervention

Schools *requiring assistance or intervention* are identified as:

* In need of broad/comprehensive support, if they are designated *underperforming* or *chronically underperforming*, at the discretion of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or
* In need of focused/targeted support, if they have not been identified as in need of broad/comprehensive support, and:
  + Are among the lowest 10 percent of schools statewide, as measured by the accountability percentile,
  + Have one or more low performing student groups, as measured by the student group percentile,
  + Have low graduation rates (below 66.7 percent), and/or
  + Have low assessment participation (below 95 percent) in the aggregate or for one or more student groups.

## Schools Not Requiring Assistance or Intervention

A school that does not meet the criteria listed above is identified as *not requiring assistance or intervention*. The Department reports results for these schools based on their overall performance against improvement targets, using the criterion-referenced component of the system. In 2024, schools are reported as either *meeting or exceeding targets*, if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage of 75 percent or higher, *substantial progress towards targets* if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage from 50 to 74 percent, *moderate progress towards targets* if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage from 25 to 49 percent, or *limited or no progress towards targets* if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage below 25 percent.

## Schools of Recognition

A subset of schools that are classified as *not requiring assistance or intervention* are recognized for their academic accomplishments. Schools of recognition are identified for demonstrating success or improvement in achievement, growth, and other areas, based on criteria established by DESE.

The figure below shows how schools are placed into accountability categories.

Figure : Accountability Categories for Schools

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Not requiring assistance or intervention** | | | | | **Requiring assistance or intervention** | |
| **Schools of recognition**  Schools demonstrating high achievement, significant improvement, high growth | **Meeting or exceeding**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced  target percentage  75-100 | **Substantial progress toward**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced  target percentage  50-74 | **Moderate progress**  **toward**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced target percentage  25-49 | **Limited or no progress toward**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced  target percentage  0-24 | **Focused/**  **targeted**  **support**   * Schools with percentiles 1-10 not already identified for broad/ comprehensive support * Schools with low graduation rate * Schools with low performing student groups * Schools with low participation | **Broad/**  **comprehensive support**   * Underperforming schools * Chronically underperforming schools |

# Categorization of Districts

Each district is classified based on the results of the district as a whole and its lowest performing students, essentially treating the district like one large school. Overall district results are reported in two categories: districts *requiring assistance or intervention*, and districts *not requiring assistance or intervention*.

## Districts Requiring Assistance or Intervention

A district *requiring assistance or intervention* is identified as:

* In need of broad/comprehensive support, if it is designated *underperforming* or *chronically underperforming* by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, upon the recommendation of the Commissioner, or
* In need of focused/targeted support, if it has not been identified as in need of broad/comprehensive support, and has:
  + Low graduation rates (below 66.7 percent), and/or
  + Low assessment participation (below 95 percent) in the aggregate or for one or more student groups.

## Districts Not Requiring Assistance or Intervention

A district that does not meet the criteria listed above is identified as *not requiring assistance or intervention*. The Department reports results for these districts based on their overall performance against improvement targets, using the criterion-referenced component of the system. In 2024, districts are reported as either *meeting or exceeding targets*, if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage of 75 percent or higher, *substantial progress towards targets* if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage from 50 to 74 percent, *moderate progress towards targets* if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage from 25 to 49 percent, or *limited or no progress towards targets* if they have an overall criterion-referenced target percentage below 25 percent.

The figure below shows how districts are placed into accountability categories.

Figure : Accountability Categories for Districts

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Not requiring assistance or intervention** | | | | **Requiring assistance or intervention** | |
| **Meeting or exceeding**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced  target percentage  75-100 | **Substantial progress**  **towards**  **targets**  Criterion-  referenced  target  percentage  50-74 | **Moderate progress**  **towards**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced  target  percentage  25-49 | **Limited or no progress towards**  **targets**  Criterion-referenced  target percentage  0-24 | **Focused/**  **targeted**  **support**   * Districts with low graduation rate * Districts with low participation | **Broad/**  **comprehensive support**   * Underperforming districts * Chronically underperforming districts |