



SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Theory of Action for the Washington Achievement Index

Background:

Washington currently calculates an Achievement Index of school performance for the purposes of recognizing high-performing schools and to provide schools and districts an opportunity to self-reflect on their own performance trends. At the same time, Washington has operated under the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind. The opportunity to substitute a state-developed accountability system through the ESEA flexibility process makes this an opportune time to revise the existing Index. This theory of action articulates the rationale behind the revised Index.

The State Board of Education is charged with developing an accountability framework that “provides a unified system of support for challenged schools that aligns with basic education, increases the level of support based upon the magnitude of need, and uses data for decisions. Such a system will identify schools and their districts for recognition as well as for additional state support...” (RCW 28A.657.005)

This theory of action will guide the revision of the Index, as well as its implementation as a tool in an overall accountability framework that provides support to struggling schools and districts over the next three to five years. The Index will be revisited as needed.

Improving Student Achievement:

The revised Index is a central component of an accountability framework. It is aligned with the primary goal of the educational system - to ensure that all students are prepared for post-secondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship. The revised Index will drive improved student achievement in the following ways:

- **Informs school decision-making** -- School and district performance on key indicators will be calculated and reported through the Index. This likely will include aggregated information on individual student growth across years. The Index data will allow schools and districts the ability to analyze their own data, compared to other schools and districts, to inform curricular and instructional decision making.
- **Aligns incentives with goals** -- The incentive structures created through the revised Index will be aligned with goals that emphasize proficiency, as well as rates of growth necessary to get each child to standard. For the first time, ‘high-growth’ schools will be recognized for their efforts, even if achieving ‘proficiency’ is still a work-in-progress. By measuring and recognizing the right things, the Index incentivizes the right system behaviors and improves morale and productivity.
- **Values multiple content areas** -- The revised Index will include student proficiency and rates of growth in multiple content areas (at a minimum, reading, writing, math, and science) to provide a broad-based and equitable evaluation of school and district performance over time.
- **Drives resources and supports through an accountability framework** -- At the state level, the Index will identify high-performing schools for recognition and reward. The Index will also identify lower performing schools, including schools with low rates of student growth, for supports and interventions augmented with adequate expertise and resources at the state level.

Assumptions:

- The current Achievement Index has served as a helpful and informative look at school performance and is a strong basis from which to build a revised Index.
- State and federally funded interventions and supports will be allocated through a process that utilizes the Index in decision making. The effectiveness of the Index as a tool relies on a robust accountability system that includes state supports and technical assistance to schools in need of assistance.
- The goal is to prepare all students for post-secondary education and training, gainful employment, and citizenship. To that end, both student growth and proficiency serve as critical benchmarks. However, the Index must uphold growth measurements as a means to an end, not an end itself. All students deserve to achieve college and career readiness.
- To ensure all students have equal access to a high-quality education, data disaggregated by subgroups (e.g., racial/ethnic, students with disabilities, English Learners, and low-income students) will be included in the school and district performance calculations. Disaggregated data help schools identify and plan for the instructional needs of particular student groups that might not be apparent from aggregate data.