

Michigan's Approach to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

JANUARY 10, 2017

1 OUTLINE OF BIG IDEAS

Michigan has been working on our Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan for nearly eight months. This process involved participation of [numerous groups and organizations](#), represented by the hundreds of external stakeholders who served on ESSA Action Teams and external committees, and the several thousand individuals (parents, educators, and other stakeholders) who responded to one of the online surveys, attended a regional feedback forum, or otherwise provided input on the plan. In that time, we have reached many areas of consensus and agreement, and have narrowed down to several outstanding topics that require more discussion prior to a decision. The federal context has changed a great deal as well, leaving Michigan (and all states) with some uncertainty about the future. However, Michigan's plan was not built primarily to meet federal requirements, but rather to enact key goals of Michigan's Top 10 in 10 strategic plan.

This paper outlines two things:

- 1) Areas of consensus/decision and areas that require further discussion
- 2) Components of this work that are driven by Michigan's strategic plan (and thus need to move forward regardless of federal context) and components that are more federally dependent (and potentially up for revision with a new administration).

We have also begun writing the actual plan. However, that document is very much a working draft, as we finalize decisions in the areas outlined below and also await further federal guidance in the areas that are federally driven. We will have a final draft ready by February.

2 MICHIGAN'S EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT PLAN: AREAS OF CONSENSUS

In the interest of brevity, details will not be included in this paper around these areas of consensus. Those details can be found in the plan itself, as well as in the accompanying [PowerPoint](#). Please also note, consensus does not mean “ready for implementation immediately.” While we have agreement on these big areas, work still remains to develop the actual tools and systems, all of which we intend to do in partnership with stakeholders.

2.1 USING ESSA TO FOCUS ON THE WHOLE CHILD; REVISING OUR COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR DISTRICTS

- Michigan needs to expand our focus and ensure that we address the needs of the whole child, providing a well-rounded education
- Through the ESSA process, we worked with myriad groups across the whole child spectrum to understand those needs, which range from health and physical education, to school climate and safety, access to special services (counselors, nurses, social services, librarians, etc.), services for special populations (including English Learners, migrant students, gifted and talented students, students with IEPs, etc.), access to early childhood education, and more.
- A key lynchpin activity is a redesigned comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) that takes the multiple needs assessments used by various initiatives and integrates those, along with additional questions, into one, truly comprehensive, whole child focused needs assessment. The redesigned CNA will be developed during the next 12 months, and our goal will be to make it efficient and effective.
- The CNA is the mechanism by which districts and schools will understand their strengths and areas of need, be able to appropriately target funds from various funding streams, and work to integrate their programming toward a well-rounded, whole child education.
- Partners, both at the state and local level, will be critically important in this process, including partnerships with ISDs and education organizations, as well as those who may be considered “non-traditional” (social workers, counselors, community members, civil rights and school justice organizations, community-based organizations, foundations, employers, parents of children across the continuum of ages).

2.2 DRIVING DISTRICTS TOWARD EVIDENCE-BASED 10 IN 10 PRACTICES, WHILE ALLOWING SPACE FOR INNOVATION

- Michigan needs to focus on certain high-leverage, evidence-based practices. In order to do that, we can use our 10 in 10 strategic plan and the evidence base behind those strategies to drive schools and districts toward rigorous solutions to the needs they identify in their comprehensive needs assessment as necessary to improve children’s outcomes.
- We will create a “super-highway” of approval for those evidence-based 10 in 10 practices within the various grant applications.

- We will also allow districts space to provide their own strategies, but the burden of proof of an evidence base would be on the districts.
- Districts and schools will need to show results. By focusing on not only the use of evidence-based practices, but also implementation and a regular cycle of evaluation, districts and schools will be supported in doing more of what works and less of what does not.

2.3 MORE FLEXIBILITY FOR DISTRICTS, BASED ON RESULTS OF CNA

- We know that the solutions to district needs are not one size fits all. We will work to create a system that helps districts correctly identify their needs across the “whole child” and then craft a plan meeting identified, unique needs.
- Once districts know their needs, they will have the ability to create more responsive and focused school improvement plans and spend funds more flexibly to support the implementation of those plans, as long as they are showing impact on student achievement and showing progress in closing subgroup gaps.
- The MDE will reshape its response, so that not all districts receive the same things—some districts will receive intensive supports, others targeted assistance, and others will simply receive support from MDE with minimal monitoring.

2.4 REDUCED REPORTING BURDEN AND ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR DISTRICTS

- One comprehensive CNA that happens less frequently (3 or 5 year cycle)
- Less frequent submission of school and district improvement plan
- Revised and streamlined grant processes

2.5 SUPPORTS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

- Special Populations needs assessment must be included in the district’s Comprehensive Needs Assessment
- Districts are required to provide equitable access to Title I, Part A funding and supports and increase access to early childhood programs
- Proposed strategic supports for special student populations include:
 - Academic achievement
 - Teacher preparation/effectiveness
 - Transitions at various stages in the P-12 pipeline and beyond
 - Parent and community engagement
- MDE/ISDs will offer professional development, technical assistance, and differentiated supports to meet unique needs of students and their families.

2.6 TITLE IV BLOCK GRANT:

- ESSA supports the well-rounded education for students through Title IV. Forty-nine former individual grant opportunities in ESEA are being replaced with a “block grant system” that LEAs may use along with other titled program funds to support strategies in three areas: well-rounded educational opportunities, safe and healthy students, and effective use of technology.

- LEAs may use Title IV, Part A in coordination with other state, local, or grant funds to address the unique needs identified in the CNA.
- Through the ESSA process, MDE worked with different groups who were formerly served by the 49 various line items; explained how schools now have to identify that as a need and then spend appropriately. Those groups are helping with the comprehensive needs assessment and with the evidence-based practices work so that districts can identify need in those areas and have access to evidence-based strategies. Examples include: school librarians; math/science centers; arts educators, gifted/talented educators, and others.

2.7 EDUCATOR QUALITY

- Reminder: not all of the work we want to do with educators will be enacted through ESSA. Therefore, this work aligns with the 10 in 10 priority area and moves forward certain pieces of it.
- Agreed on four overlapping priority areas with a focus on equity:
 - Cultivate high-quality educator preparation provider/P-12 partnerships
 - Establish a system of supported transitions from pre-service to the profession
 - Develop and utilize teacher-leadership roles
 - Establish and support a pipeline of high-potential aspiring and highly effective practicing principals.
- We have reached agreement that we will develop our Educator Equity Plan to identify and report on the federally-required metrics of teacher effectiveness (as identified by local evaluation systems), teachers out-of-field, and teacher (in)experience while using a broader set of data points to identify root causes of educator workforce challenges and strategies to support equitable and effective teaching environments.
- We have also reached agreement that we will provide intensive support to our partnership districts (see below for more information) as our “equity districts,” focusing educator workforce interventions to ensure that students in partnership districts have equitable access to teachers who are effectively developed, supported, and evaluated.
- We have achieved broad agreement on these goals. Now we need to figure out the details and implementation steps.

2.8 ACCOUNTABILITY TO DRIVE SUPPORTS TO SCHOOLS; PROVIDE TIERED SUPPORTS IDENTIFIED BY NEED

- Partnership districts (most intensive supports). Partnership districts are a concept/structure of support that is not required by ESSA, but that aligns with key pieces of the ESSA work.
 - Partnership districts are those with low academic performance, as well as other areas of need.
 - The MDE will work with a limited number of districts in the partnership model.
 - Identify holistic needs using the whole-child comprehensive needs assessment; craft a plan with all partners at the table (the ISD, the board, the education organizations, community organizations, foundations, other state agencies); include clear benchmarks for 3 months, 18 months and three years.

- MDE supports the enactment of a partnership district plan, helping bring together the supports, brokering strategic investments, and generally holding the district accountable for the plan while ensuring they have the tools needed to succeed. If the district does not make progress, the superintendent will indicate to the SRO that they need the next level of accountability for the schools in the district that have not made progress.
- Not all districts need comprehensive supports like the partnership districts, but may need specialized assistance in specific areas like achievement gaps, early childhood, school climate/culture, or school finance. MDE would provide targeted supports for these districts.
- Move beyond labeling and into collective accountability and supports. The purpose of accountability is not to simply label schools or districts, but instead to drive supports to those most in need, and to hold all of us accountable for the outcomes of all of Michigan’s children. When schools are failing, we are all responsible to change that situation.

2.9 THE IMPORTANCE OF A TRANSPARENCY DASHBOARD

- There is agreement that, in support of collective accountability for all of us as well as easily accessible information for parents, that a transparency dashboard is an important accompaniment to any accountability system.
- This ESSA-related dashboard should be aligned with the 10 in 10 dashboard, so we have one unified dashboard.
- Michigan has excellent longitudinal data and the opportunity to make use of all of our information in new ways by reporting on metrics that matter to parents, community members, stakeholders, and educators.

2.10 AN ALTERNATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

- There are a certain number of schools—alternative high schools, center-based programs—for whom the main accountability system does not provide meaningful information.
- MDE has been developing an alternate accountability system that schools with certain characteristics can apply in lieu of the main system.
- This will hold these schools accountable on measures that are more relevant to their stated purpose.
- We plan to propose this in ESSA and roll it out concurrently with new systems.

2.11 EQUITABLE SERVICES TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

- Hiring an ombudsman to support this work

2.12 GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT CONSULTANT WITH MICHIGAN’S 12 TRIBAL NATIONS

- Michigan has begun this ongoing consultation and has committed to quarterly meetings to identify work plans and ensure that Michigan’s Native students are appropriately identified and served.

2.13 ASSESSMENTS

- Eighth grade test: PSAT 8/9 for ELA and Math or M-STEP
 - Summary of discussion: There has been great interest expressed by some stakeholders (the Education Alliance in particular) in replacing the 8th grade M-STEP content test with the PSAT 8/9 for ELA and math. The rationale is that it provides that early alignment to career and college readiness, and allows schools to begin working with students even sooner to help them be on track to be successful on the SAT in grade 11. There has also been great concern over this option from some stakeholders (namely, the ESSA Assessment Action Team and various content specialist organizations). Their concerns are that the PSAT 8/9 is not an 8th grade content test; it does not cover Michigan's 8th grade standards well, and potentially leads to a narrowing of the curriculum, particularly in math. Recall that in 8th grade, we are required to offer tests based on that grade level's content for ELA and math.
 - Both views on this matter are "right" in the sense that they identify a true benefit and a true detriment.
 - At this point, the superintendent has decided that we will put forward a plan to move toward PSAT 8/9 as our ELA/math test in 8th grade, with the M-STEP continuing in science and social studies. The questions now become those related to implementation:
 - the contractual vehicle to do this
 - alignment of the PSAT 8/9 to our content standards and the potential necessity of supplemental questions
 - evaluation of the readiness for a statewide rollout of the required test, etc.

3 MICHIGAN'S EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT PLAN: AREAS FOR CONTINUED DISCUSSION AND DECISION

3.1 MICHIGAN'S ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

3.1.1 Summary of discussion to this point:

When Superintendent Whiston began his work as state superintendent in the summer of 2015, he began outlining an assessment vision. On his listening tour with the 10 in 10, and with an assessment vision group, as well as with his own ongoing conversations with a variety of stakeholders, he shared thoughts on what an assessment system should be able to do, and garnered feedback from the field. In May 2016, Superintendent Whiston issued a memo outlining this vision, which is attached.

In support of becoming a Top 10 state in 10 years, we want our students (and eventually, our employees) to be curious; be problem solvers; be able to work independently and in teams; be able to communicate well, set and achieve goals, and be critical thinkers. In order to do this, we need classrooms that create these types of learning opportunities; we need educators who are prepared to support students in learning those skills; and we need assessments that measure whether or not students are ready for success in those areas.

At this point in time, Michigan has rigorous career and college ready standards, adopted by our State Board of Education, in support of Michigan being nationally and internationally competitive, and those are a core component of becoming a top 10 state in 10 years. We must build on that solid foundation by focusing our instructional model on deeper learning and ensuring that our assessments encourage and support deeper learning, and ask students to demonstrate a broader range of skills.

Broadly speaking, we want an assessment system that provides timely, meaningful and useful information to teachers, parents, students, and taxpayers. Some key components of a system like this include; multiple points of feedback throughout the year, the ability to measure growth within the year, and immediate feedback for educators that can support individual goal setting for students. An additional goal is to reduce overall testing time within the *system*, shifting some of the time spent on local assessments to a more consistent state assessment, while also providing that meaningful information throughout the year to educators and parents.

The vision that Superintendent Whiston initially issued had benchmark assessments (assessments that occur multiple times per year over "chunks" of content) in most elementary and middle school grades, with a longer, more summative type of assessment once per grade band level. That assessment would also include a problem-solving and teamwork component. There would then be the PSAT/SAT suite in high school (see attached chart outlining vision).

Once the vision was solidified, the MDE issued a Request for Information (RFI) to assessment providers. We received responses from ten vendors, and invited seven in to do oral presentations to a group that included external representatives from various organizations (superintendents, principals, teachers) as well as internal MDE experts. What we found through the RFI process were three things:

1. **Readiness:** Most vendors are not ready for a potential Fall 2017 launch of a new assessment model for Michigan. This was particularly apparent to the vendors that historically have not provided statewide summative assessments in the past.
2. **Accommodations:** There was a spectrum of accommodation availability across the vendors. Again, the vendors who historically have not administered state tests have never had to create and provide accommodations before. Most vendors were not ready with a sufficient number and type of accommodations.
3. **Overall approach:** This was perhaps the most interesting finding. What we asked vendors to show us was a way to have a three-times-a-year benchmark test “add up” to a summative score at the end of the year. What every vendor recommended was something different—the use of some sort of summative test in the spring (although some called it a “spring comprehensive benchmark”). In short, no one was selling us exactly what we said we wanted to buy, although most were willing to work to build us something that would work for our needs. One reason that no one had a product that summed three benchmarks up into one summative score is that no one is really sure how to do this at this point in time, from a measurement sense. National opinion and expertise on this is suggesting that we have more work to do to understand how this does or doesn’t work in terms of producing valid and reliable scores.

One other event occurred between the time the vision was issued and now: the passage of the “third grade reading” bill, which puts additional high-stakes on that third grade test. The initial vision will need to be updated based on that new reality.

3.1.2 Remaining areas for discussion and decision points:

3.1.2.1 *The exact design of the system*

- Spring comprehensive benchmark/summative each year?
- Still certain grades with only benchmark?
- Third grade?

3.1.2.2 *Required versus optional on the benchmark assessments*

- This relates to design of the system
- If Michigan uses a longer spring test that covers the standards in a satisfactory way, we could have more flexibility in the other test administrations and could make them optional.
- **Pro:** Districts choose and are not forced into a product they don’t like; more flexibility in how the administration could occur.
- **Con:** we could potentially not have growth data on every student in every district.

3.1.3 ESSA/Federal Context Note:

The ESSA Plan Template that we have now does not actually require us to specify our assessment system in great detail. USED issued regulations recently; we would expect those to be pulled back given the discussion at the national level.

What will be required in a testing system at the federal level is still an unknown.

However:

- Michigan has NOT built our assessment plan to what federal Department of Education will or will not approve. Superintendent Whiston laid out a plan that fits his vision for Michigan's progress to becoming a Top 10 state.
- If the federal regulations around assessment disappeared entirely:
 - We still have Michigan law that requires testing in all the grades and subjects we currently test.
 - Yes, Michigan law could be changed, absent federal requirements for assessments.
 - If given free rein, what would MICHIGAN want to do with its assessment system?
For example: There is interest in only testing in certain grades
 - **Pro:** Less time testing; use state assessments to certify learning, while formative assessments used locally to drive learning
 - **Con:** We won't know objectively how students are doing relative the standards for 2-3 years at a time; accountability would only be based on certain tested grades; possibility for achievement gaps to grow undetected
- Michigan needs to continue having a conversation about what we would do if there were no federal regulations regarding assessment, and ask ourselves hard questions like:
 - How frequently should all Michigan students be assessed? On what subjects?
 - Would we support a sampling method (where not all students are assessed each year, or not all students are assessed on all content)?
 - How often do we want to be able to run school accountability and what assessment data should go in that system?
 - How is Michigan going to address its persistent achievement gaps and overall low performance on national comparisons, and how does or does not the assessment system support that work?
 - What change to existing laws or policies would be required to implement this desired system?

3.2 MICHIGAN'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The current proposal put forward through ESSA, at the request of Superintendent Whiston, is an A-F school grading system, with multiple components (and grades in each of those components), along with a transparency dashboard.

We reaffirm our commitment to the following here:

- The purpose of accountability is to help identify schools in which there are needs and then *drive supports to those schools*. While an accountability system must provide fair and appropriate labels to schools, what needs to change is our *response*. Labeling alone will not change outcomes. Nor will changing labels in order to mask low performance.
- It is about collective accountability within the entire system—if a school is not performing well, what are WE all going to do to ensure that those children have a better educational opportunity than they are currently having?
- Our accountability system needs to incentivize the things that are important in the 10 in 10, so we have alignment between what we are driving toward and what we are measuring.
- We can and should use the results of the accountability system to make strategic investments where necessary.
- The system should be as transparent and simple as possible, yet also be fair.

3.2.1 Brief History of A-F Grading for Schools

There has been interest in adopting an A-F grading system for schools, particularly from the Governor's team and the legislature, for a number of years. They have had Foundation for Excellence in to testify about Florida's A-F system, and in the spring of 2015, wrote an A-F system into the Detroit legislation ([P.A. 192 of 2016](#), Section 390 (3)(a)). Therefore, as we began the ESSA process, Superintendent Whiston instructed the ESSA Action Team to use this opportunity to design an A-F system that was fair, met our strategic needs as a state, had as much buy-in as possible, and that included a transparency dashboard along with the A-F (see attached letter from Superintendent Whiston regarding A-F system).

Superintendent Whiston had also convened an accountability vision committee in the fall of 2015, and that committee agreed on two things: 1) that there is a point at which the state should be actionable in terms of accountability, and that is when there is a school in which students are not proficient AND they are not growing, and 2) that we need to provide information to parents and community members because much of the accountability is local—parents making judgments about their own schools. From those discussions, we retain the concept of the quadrant model, as well as the transparency dashboard.

There has been and will always be much discussion over the pros and cons of an A-F system. As recently as December 2016, Superintendent Whiston and MDE took a "temperature check" to see where opinions lie with the A-F grading system. People are either for it or against it, and there is no in between—AND there are people and groups expressing strong opinions on both sides of the issue.

Below, this paper will lay out some alternative models, but at the time of the writing of this paper, we are moving ahead with a school-level A-F grade as originally planned. Within that discussion, there are some outstanding decisions that need to be made as well, so we will focus on those now.

3.2.2 Remaining Areas for Discussion/Decision:

- Weighting of each component
- How to treat subgroups
- Graduation rates
- Participation consequences
- The additional indicator (school quality/student success)

3.2.2.1 *Weighting for each component*

Currently, the proposed components are:

Proficiency	29%
Growth	29%
Graduation Rate	15%
English Learner Progress	14%
School Quality/Student Success	10%
Participation	3%

Some proposed options include:

- Weighting growth more than proficiency in elementary school
- Weighting the school quality/student success indicator higher (to have more of the grade based on non-test based measures) AND lower (this is too much on non-academic measures)
- Graduation rate should be less since it does not necessarily mean a student is “ready” for career/college
- English learner progress is something moved into the A-F system due to a change in federal regulations; it is the progress of English learners toward English language proficiency. There is also additional discussion to be had about how to most appropriately have high standards for Michigan’s English Learners with the elimination of a separate accountability system, ensuring that students do not get lost in the system.
- One aspect of the proposed A-F system that has been agreed to is that proportional “credit” will be given to schools that don’t meet targets vs. all or nothing – which will benefit those that are close to, but not quite meeting participation, etc.
- The Superintendent has flagged this as an area in which he wants to have more discussion, but we need to see the results of the current round of feedback and then evaluate changes from there.

3.2.2.2 *How to treat subgroups*

In the current system, each of the components listed above includes calculations for each of the nine subgroups (the six racial/ethnic subgroups, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged). In other words, a component like proficiency includes calculations for all of the nine subgroups. Schools would also be able to see an overall subgroup grade based on all the components. Therefore, a school is held accountable for the performance on all of their subgroups in all categories. However, the introduction of a partial credit model (where schools get credit for each student who meets the threshold, rather than an “all or nothing” points approach) gives a more accurate depiction of progress and performance than previous systems.

Michigan is also currently maintaining its use of an n-size of 30 for subgroup size. This gives us a higher n-size than many states, near the national average. The higher the n-size, the fewer schools held accountable for subgroup performance.

Discussion at this point:

- Does this method appropriately hold Michigan accountable for the performance of all of its students? Are subgroups visible enough?
- How do we find a balance between maintaining high standards for all students, while still recognizing impact of various risk factors?

3.2.2.3 Graduation Rates

In the current proposal, schools get credit for meeting the graduation rate threshold on either their four, five or six year graduation rate—this accounts not only for students who simply take longer to graduate, but also those who participate in things like early middle colleges and graduate on time in five years. The proposed alternate accountability system will also help in situations where schools have low graduation rates but where this is not considered a negative outcome. For example—a student who enrolls in an alternative high school in 12th grade with little to no credits cannot “graduate” reasonably within the time left with the Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements. However, the alternative high school helps them earn a GED. This is a positive outcome for the student (as opposed to simply being a “dropout”) but they are not counted as a graduate in the graduation rate, as they did not earn a diploma.

Discussion at this point:

- One proposal has been to weight graduation rate less in the A-F system.
- Another has been to calculate the “career and college ready” graduation rate—the proportion of graduates who were considered career and college ready on the 11th grade SAT.

Federal context note: USED requires graduation rate to be weighted more than English learner progress and school quality indicators, which makes this particular weighting something that does relate to federal rules. We need to ask the question: what does Michigan think graduation rate should be weighted as in the accountability system?

3.2.2.4 Participation Consequences

Currently, participation factors into the system in two ways: 1) a student who does not participate is counted as non-proficient and 2) if a school misses its participation rates, they lose up to 3% of their points toward A-F. This makes a “softer” impact in terms of the calculation than previous years—for example, under AYP, if a school missed participation in one subgroup, the entire school failed. The question remains: what happens if a school misses its participation target?

Superintendent Whiston has been interested in exploring consequences that impact the adults in the system, not the students. For example, if a school misses their participation rate for multiple years, should there be a financial penalty to the school?

Discussion at this point:

- Reactions to the current calculation method (in the ESSA feedback, we have not heard negative reactions to the proposed method) and
- Appropriate consequences for missing the participation targets.

3.2.2.5 *The Additional Indicator: School Quality/Student Success*

There has long been interest in including factors in the accountability system that are not test-based achievement factors. ESSA brought us an opportunity to have this discussion—and actually required that a portion of school accountability be based on measures that are not based on test scores alone.

The ESSA Action Team tasked with coming up with possible indicators went through a process to identify the universe of indicators, and then find ones that met the following criteria:

- Available on all students currently in our data
- Able to be reported and disaggregated at the subgroup level
- Had a research base behind them
- Aligned with 10 in 10 initiatives

Based on those criteria, the following components are proposed for the additional indicator of school quality/student success:

- Teacher and school administrator longevity: how long teachers and administrators stay in their current school.
- Student chronic absenteeism: the proportion of students who are chronically absent, defined as more than 10 days per year.
- Completion and passing of advanced college and career coursework (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, and Career Technical Education).

Discussion at this point:

- Are these the appropriate indicators?
- We are already working with the Special Education Advisory Committee to make sure that we have the appropriate indicators for students with disabilities, particularly in terms of the completion/passing of advanced college and career coursework indicator.
- What should the weight of these indicators be?
- There has been some discussion of these indicators also being correlated with poverty—like achievement scores can be. This is likely true. What is the solution to this? Are there indicators that are not correlated with poverty? Conversely, if we agree that these are things that can negatively impact a student’s outcome, then including them becomes important regardless of correlation with poverty.

3.2.3 **Alternatives to A-F Grading**

There are myriad alternatives to A-F grading—both in terms of other types of overall indicators, as well as avoiding one overall indicator and using multiple indicators instead of one final grade or label. In discussions with the accountability vision group over a year ago, that group favored descriptive labels—

“high proficiency, low growth”—to a letter grade or a color. The discussion essentially boils down to one question: do we need a final, overall indicator for a school?

For those who advocate one final indicator, the key point is simplicity and transparency to parents and stakeholders. It also allows us to understand how every school is doing in a simple summary—how many of each category.

For those who advocate against a final indicator, the key point is that school performance cannot be summarized in one letter grade; that parents think they know what a grade means but they might not; and that we should provide more information rather than boiling it down to one letter grade.

The bottom line is this: we will either produce a final label (in this case, a grade) or we will not. The MDE is well aware of the debate on either side of this issue, and is capable of producing one label (a grade, a color, a rank, a pass/fail, or any other label) as well as producing a system of multiple indicators. What is far more important to the MDE is that, whatever the system, we make sure that the response to those who are low-performing is more structured, more immediate and more effective—across the entire system.

At the present time, the Superintendent’s charge to the MDE team is as follows:

- An A-F grading system with one final summative grade AND
- Components of the system that each have a letter grade attached to them as well.

This is similar to the Ohio system (see link below for an example):

<http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/School-Report.aspx?SchoolIRN=001693>

3.3 MICHIGAN'S STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

This component of the system is federally driven; these categories and funding streams are specified in the federal law. Unlike some of the other points above, this will be more impacted by any possible changes at the federal level. At this point, we plan to continue moving forward in defining these schools and developing the supports, assuming no change in the federal law, but if a change occurs, we will shift accordingly.

There are two aspects to this: the additional labels for schools, and the funding to support those schools.

3.3.1 Additional Labels for Schools

At present, our plan calls for our Title I Statewide System of Support to include the following types of schools:

1. **Comprehensive Support Schools:** Bottom 5% of schools or graduation rate below 67% or an additional targeted support school that did not exit that status in a state-determined timeframe.
2. **Targeted support schools:** schools in which any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming.
3. **Additional targeted support schools:** schools having a subgroup of students performing like the bottom 5% of schools.

Discussion/Decisions Needed:

- What identification method do we wish to use for each of these categories? There are some early proposals on the table, and the State School Reform Office has proposed some ideas, but we need to further discuss, particularly the targeted support and additional targeted support schools.
- What are the exit criteria for these schools?
- How often do we name these schools? MDE has proposed that these labels are only applied once every three years, while the A-F grades are issued yearly. This allows for programming to occur with each cohort over several years, in order to see the impact of plan implementation, without continual renaming. We follow the example of many other states in this, including Massachusetts.
 - How does this interact with our state law for 1280c?
 - There has been opposition/insistence on yearly naming along with the grades.

3.3.2 Supports for Those Schools

Through the Title I funds, there is a pot of funds that are used to serve these schools alone—comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted. Those funds can only be used to serve those schools. The MDE has proposed a blended system of grants to ISDs with LEA sign-off on the plans for support, and a statewide technical assistance grant to provide support.

Discussion/Decisions Needed:

- How do we best deploy these funds in our statewide system of support? How do we ensure that service plans reflect the needs of the LEAs and maximize ISD supports?

- What will we do with the funds in the 2017-2018 transition year while we are transitioning between the old system and the new?

3.4 INTEGRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

This topic does not have the same history in the ESSA plan development as some of those listed above, but is an area of our ESSA plan that needs further discussion and decision making. ESSA provides us with opportunities to integrate early childhood work with the K-12 work more efficiently. The MDE plans to bring forward these proposals in the month of January for discussion.

3.5 TRANSPARENCY DASHBOARD

Similarly, the transparency dashboard is a topic that simply requires more discussion, as less time has been spent on it up to this point. A transparency dashboard is not required for ESSA, but instead is a key component of Michigan's implementation of the 10 in 10 and the accountability system, so it has been developed concurrently. MDE is gathering input on the proposed indicators now and will bring it back for feedback.

3.6 ATTACHMENTS

- PowerPoint Presentation from Nov.-Dec. 2016 Feedback Forums
Available for view on the ESSA "State Plan" page:
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MDE-ESSA_FEEDBACK_FORUMS_547654_7.pdf
- Superintendent Whiston's Assessment Vision
- Assessment Vision Chart
- Superintendent's 4/20/16 Memo to Governor re: A-F Grading System



A STUDENT TESTING VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Michigan is embarking on a student testing system designed to increase academic achievement and produce the highest-skilled employees and entrepreneurs for Michigan's 21st Century success.

GOALS

This updated testing system will:

- Align with Michigan's high academic standards
- Help Michigan become a Top 10 education state in 10 years
- Reduce Overall Testing in Schools
- Provide a Road Map to Success for Students, Parents, & Teachers – Leading to Student Goal-Setting
- Provide Grade-Level Progress of Students for Parents and Teachers
- Respond to the Needs of Michigan's 21st Century Job Providers

STUDENT VISION

Using this new testing system will lead to classrooms that prepare students for success, as defined by them being:

- Curious
- Problem Solvers
- Able to Communicate Clearly and Effectively
- Work Both Independently and in Groups
- Able to Set and Achieve Goals
- Critical Thinkers

TESTING VISION

This new testing system being proposed would be sustained over 10 years and provide:

- A focus on growth and proficiency, with Benchmark Tests, including a writing component, given in fall and spring, with an optional winter assessment – to measure benchmark progress throughout the year
- The ability to provide immediate reporting to inform educators and parents
- A stronger, year-long student growth measure on which to base Teacher Evaluations
- The foundation of an easy-to-understand A-through-F School Accountability Grading System
- An age-appropriate Kindergarten English language arts (ELA) and math assessment in the spring.
- An age-appropriate Fall and Spring assessment for ELA and math in Grades 1-2
- Benchmark Tests in Grades 3-8, with a writing component
- Traditional M-STEP state test – once in elementary and once in middle school
- Individual, and team, problem-solving exercises (with writing) – once in elementary and once in middle school
- PSAT, SAT, and the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) for the upper grades



Superintendent Whiston's Assessment Vision

Grade	Test name/type	Subjects	Timing	Purpose
3	Benchmark	ELA, math	Fall, (optional Winter), Spring	Shorter-cycle feedback
4	Benchmark	ELA, math	Fall, (optional Winter), Spring	Shorter-cycle feedback
5	Innovative assessment (M-STEP like) w/team problem solving	ELA, math, science, social studies	Spring	Standards/proficiency measure, soft skills measure
6	Benchmark	ELA, math	Fall, (optional Winter), Spring	Shorter-cycle feedback
7	Benchmark	ELA, math	Fall, (optional Winter), Spring	Shorter-cycle feedback
8	PSAT 8/9 (ELA and math); M-STEP for science and social studies	ELA, math, science, social studies	Spring	Standards/proficiency measure (science/social studies) On track for SAT/college and career readiness (ELA/math)
9	PSAT 8/9	ELA, math	Spring	On track for SAT/college and career readiness
10	PSAT 10	ELA, math	Spring	On track for SAT/college and career readiness
11	Michigan Merit Exam (SAT, WK, "M-STEP" Sci/SS)	ELA, math, science, social studies	Spring	College and career readiness



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

BRIAN J. WHISTON
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

April 20, 2016

Dear Governor Snyder,

I am writing in regard to the future of school and district accountability here in Michigan. There has been significant interest from you and from the Legislature in pursuing an A-F grading system in Michigan. This letter is to state that the Michigan Department of Education intends to develop and implement an A-F grading system as part of our Top 10 in 10 efforts, and specifically in conjunction with our work regarding Michigan's plan to implement the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Transitioning to a new accountability system requires stakeholder feedback, buy-in, and careful consideration of many factors. If a system is not understandable and usable to the public, it does not help inform parents, educators, or policymakers, so discussions with those groups in the development phase is key. Additionally, in developing Michigan's ESSA plan, I have committed to work with a broad and diverse coalition of stakeholders to ensure that Michigan's system meets our needs as a state, while simultaneously helping prepare Michigan students to be globally competitive. Workgroup meetings will begin in May, and we encourage the involvement of the Executive Office and other relevant state agencies.

ESSA requires that states run their new accountability systems for the first time using data from the Spring 2017 state assessments, meaning identifications from that system would be in effect during the 2017-2018 school year. Therefore, the MDE would like to continue to work with you, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, our current accountability vision group, and an expanded group of diverse stakeholders to develop an A-F grading system for schools in the coming months. We will have a final proposal ready by the fall, which allows schools to have the information about how they are to be graded before the school year begins, and we will implement the system using the data from the 2016-2017 school year. We also would like to work directly with the Legislature to modify necessary state law to enact this system, creating strong alignment between state and federal law and

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ensuring Michigan has one consistent system. In the interim, we will use the data from the 2016 M-STEP to run the Top-to-Bottom ranking and the School/District Scorecards, and make that information publicly available to ensure transparency and accountability through the transition.

Taking this approach allows us to develop a comprehensive accountability system that reflects of all of the new flexibilities offered in the ESSA, as well as to ensure that we have a system that meets Michigan's needs. It also allows us to transition between systems in an orderly way.

I wanted to provide a bit more information about some early concepts that can be incorporated into an A-F grading system (basic diagram included). Based on work with a large group of stakeholders around our accountability vision moving forward, we would like to develop a quadrant-based identification system that grades all schools based on a combination of proficiency and growth on state assessments. High proficiency/high growth schools would be labeled "A" schools; schools in the low proficiency/high growth and high proficiency/low growth quadrants would be labeled "B" and "C" schools (further work is required to decide on how those designations will be made); and schools with low proficiency and low growth will be labeled D and F schools—again, based on further data analysis and definition. This system also will incorporate graduation/dropout information, as well as attendance information; will be differentiated for the different grade levels (elementary school, middle school and high school); and will include "non-academic" indicators that we will identify in conjunction with stakeholders. Participation rates will be important, but will be used in different ways and with different consequences than in the past. This system is meant to be simple and intuitive, and also will utilize a separate transparency dashboard to report on factors that are important to parents, although not necessarily appropriate for the calculation of an overall letter grade. Over the coming months, we will further define this accountability system in greater detail. More importantly than the system itself, we also will define the supports and interventions that occur for schools that are not performing well, asking ourselves the question, "What can we do to truly improve student learning and overall experience in schools where both proficiency and growth are low?"

I look forward to partnering with you and your team, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, the professional associations, educators, business community, and the community at-large to craft an ESSA plan and an A-F accountability system that meets Michigan's needs.

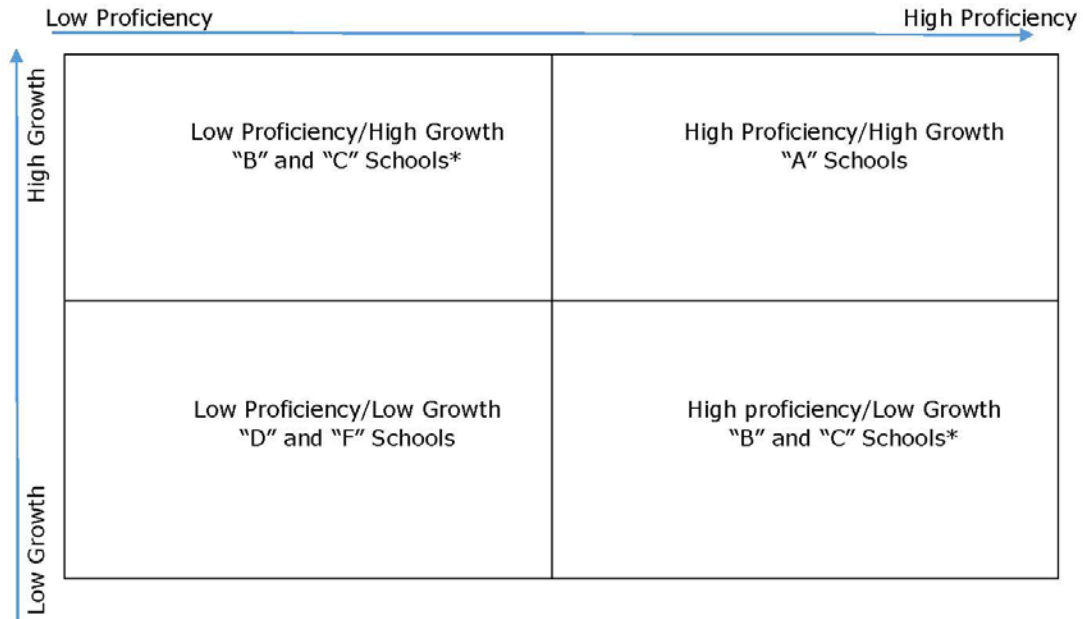
Thank you,



Brian J. Whiston
State Superintendent

Attachment

Working Concept for Quadrant-Based Accountability



**Further discussions needed to define rules for "B" and "C"*

Other Factors to Be Integrated:

- Graduation/attendance rates
- Subgroup performance
- Participation
- "Non-Academic" Factor
- Separate calculations for high school, middle school, and elementary school (greater focus on growth at the younger grades)