

The Top Ten Myths about the Colorado Growth Model & State Accountability

Accountability & Data Analysis Unit



COLORADO
Department of Education

The purpose of this fact sheet is to address the most common misunderstandings that CDE staff have encountered from education stakeholders in regards to the Colorado Growth Model and the state educational accountability system.

Background

The Colorado Growth Model and state accountability system have been part of the Colorado educational landscape since 2009. CDE continues to deliver webinar, training, and technical support related to each of these topics on an annual basis. That being said, many misunderstandings continue to persist related to each of these topics. Here are the top ten myths that we have heard along with our response to each claim.

Growth Myths

MYTH 1: A student growth percentile of 50 means the student made one-years growth.

A student growth percentile (SGP) describes the normative growth of a student compared to an academic peer group. The SGP is not based on progress towards grade level standard. So, a growth percentile of 50 only indicates that a student performed better than 50 percent of his or her academic peers.

MYTH 2: High achieving students are unable to receive high growth scores.

The Colorado Growth Model is a normative statistical model in which individual student growth scores are based on comparison to similarly scoring students (i.e., academic peer groups). The statistical methodology ensures that all students are eligible to receive a low, typical, or even high growth percentile each year, regardless of starting or ending test score. The only exception to this is any student that receives the maximum test score for their grade/content in the current year. These students are automatically assigned a student growth percentile of 99.

MYTH 3: A median growth percentile of 50 means the students are on-track to reach grade level expectations.

As defined by Colorado State Board of Education rule, a student growth percentile for a single child that falls within the 35th-65th percentile range reflects typical growth. It is important to recognize that this rate of growth may not be sufficient to move students to proficiency. The context of achievement is important when understanding the degree of growth required for each student to meet grade level expectations. For students with lower achievement scores a higher level of growth is likely required to move them to grade level expectations.

MYTH 4: If a school receives a high MGP one year it makes it impossible to achieve a high MGP the next year.

Schools are able to achieve high median growth percentiles (MGPs) during consecutive years. Statistical analysis has shown positive correlations between-years for CMAS English Language Arts and Math median growth percentiles.

Colorado Educational Accountability Myths

MYTH 5: Some districts and schools always have to be labeled as poor performing within our accountability system.

During 2009-2010, approximately 15% of schools and districts were identified with a priority improvement or turnaround ratings. During 2018, those numbers had declined to 4% for districts and 9% for schools. In effect, no school or district is required to be assigned to one of the lowest two ratings; most rating cut points and expectation levels have remained unchanged for a number of years. The exception is for growth measures, while they're not benchmarked to a prior year, analysis has shown that such a change would have minimal impact on the assigned ratings.

MYTH 6: State Accountability exists to punish low performing schools and districts. CDE is going to close or takeover my school.

The state accountability system was put in place to identify the lowest performing schools and districts in the state in order to help better direct state resources for support. While our state system does assign consequences for continued low performance; the State Board of Education, CDE, and local education agency work together to plan the best pathway to create and sustain performance. It should be recognized that the most immediate consequence of low performance is the availability of additional state resources and supports to improve the educational outcomes for students. During the past two years, only a single school has been closed as a result of sustained poor performance as related to the state accountability system. The closure of this on-line school resulted from discussion between the authorizing district and the State Board with the conclusion being reached that this was for the benefit of its students.

MYTH 7: State accountability frameworks are biased against ethnically diverse and impoverished students.

The current Colorado educational accountability system has been designed to describe school and district performance on objective academic measures related to standards-based achievement, observed normative student growth and post-secondary and workforce readiness outcomes. Differences in outcomes between ethnically diverse and impoverished student groups have been documented both in Colorado and nationally. A large body of research indicates that these performance gaps may be caused by many factors that are unrelated to the frameworks¹.

MYTH 8: State accountability expectations for charter schools are different from those of traditional schools.

All public schools, including both charter schools and traditional schools, are evaluated within our state accountability system using the same set of performance criteria. In both cases, the school performance framework is used to assign the school plan type rating. In addition, the same request to reconsider appeal process is made available to traditional and charter schools.

MYTH 9: ASCENT participants negatively impact the points that can be earned within the postsecondary and workforce readiness indicator.

Accelerating students through concurrent enrollment (ASCENT) participants are included within both multi-year graduation rates and matriculation rates once they are flagged as graduates. So, points have been assigned to the framework results to account for their participation and don't negatively influence results. In future years, per a 2018 statute change, ASCENT students will be included within four-year graduation rate calculations.

MYTH 10: Our state accountability system doesn't accurately reflect the performance of small districts/schools.

Performance framework calculations for small systems may be impacted due to limited data. In order to address this challenge, CDE calculates a multi-year framework report that reduces instances of insufficient state data. In addition, the request to reconsider process allows local education agencies to appeal assigned ratings based on the representativeness of the presented data and other objective criteria.

Where can I learn more?

- ¹For examples, see: <https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/cme/docs/pdf/DiversityUnity.pdf>
- For Colorado Growth Model resources, visit: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/coloradogrowthmodel>
- For accountability resources, visit: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/performanceframeworksresources>
- For questions and/or to schedule a training related to state accountability or the Colorado growth model contact Dan Jorgensen, PhD at: Jorgensen_d@cde.state.co.us.