

What is the Accountability Clock?

In 2009, Colorado’s legislature passed the Education Accountability Act that created a system to hold the state, school districts and schools accountable for student academic performance on specific indicators and measures, including performance and growth on state tests and graduation rates.

Every year, schools and districts receive performance ratings. Those that don’t meet expectations are assigned a rating of “Priority Improvement” or “Turnaround.” The state’s “Accountability Clock” only allows schools and districts to receive these low ratings for five years in a row. After that, they must come before the State Board of Education, which is required to direct a course of action designed to dramatically increase student achievement.

Actions the State Board of Education can direct

The Education Accountability Act gives the board the following options when deciding on a course of action for chronically low-performing schools and districts:

- Grant innovation status to provide flexibility from certain state and local rules
- Require a charter school to replace its operator or governing board
- Require a district or school to work with an external management partner
- Convert a district-run school into a charter school
- Close a school
- Initiate the district reorganization process.

How the State Board of Education determines course of action

When deciding a course of action for a low-performing school or district, the State Board of Education acts in a quasijudicial role. The board cannot be lobbied or communicated with by the school, district or advocates outside of the official processes at the accountability hearing. In the public accountability hearing, the board hears pathway recommendations for schools or districts that will bring about dramatic change. The board considers:

- **State Review Panel** – education experts visit the school or district, review documents and issue a written recommendation regarding which action will best improve student outcomes.
- **School District** – each district can provide a recommendation for which course of action it believes would best improve student achievement.
- **Education Commissioner** – The Commissioner and CDE staff provide relevant data and background information to support the hearing.
- **Community input** – Comments, feedback and testimony submitted in advance of the hearing by parents, community members, local officials and others are an important part of the review process.

How school and district performance ratings are determined

Every year a rating is created for each school and district based on a variety of measures factored together. CDE refers to these ratings as School Performance Frameworks (SPF) or District Performance Frameworks (DPF). The frameworks are based on the following:

- **Academic performance:** Achievement on statewide assessments, including average scores on CMAS tests in English language arts, math and science as well as the PSAT tests in the ninth and 10th grades.
- **Postsecondary readiness (high schools and districts only):** This includes graduation rates, dropout rates, matriculation rates and college entrance exam (SAT) scores.
- **Academic Growth:** This is the progress students make in their achievement on assessments from one year to the next. Growth is calculated on CMAS assessments in English language arts and math; the PSAT and SAT and ACCESS tests for students who are still learning the English language.

What are the possible performance ratings?

Every year Colorado public schools and districts receive a rating, referred to as a “plan type,” according to the metrics on the performance framework.

- **School plan types:** Performance Plan, Improvement Plan, Priority Improvement Plan and Turnaround Plan.
- **District plan types:** Accredited with Distinction, Accredited, Accredited with Improvement Plan, Accredited with Priority Improvement Plan, Accredited with Turnaround Plan.

What happens after five years on the Accountability Clock?

In 2018, House Bill 18-1355 was passed to modify the state’s accountability law to ensure school districts continue to receive the proper support and oversight even after five years on the Accountability Clock.

If student academic performance continues to put a school or district in Priority Improvement or Turnaround beyond Year 5 on the Accountability Clock, then the state board may in any year—and must every two years—require the district to continue the previously directed action or undertake additional or different actions. The state board will consider the State Review Panel’s recommendation and the length of time a district has had to implement the previously directed action, whether that was enough time and whether the action was implemented with fidelity.

Other changes to the Accountability Clock process

The legislation made other changes to the state’s accountability system. Beginning in Fall 2019, “Performance Watch” will replace the term “Accountability Clock.” A school or district in Priority Improvement or Turnaround will be considered to be on Performance Watch. Schools and districts that for two or more consecutive years received a rating of Priority Improvement or Turnaround must receive an Improvement rating or higher for two consecutive years to exit Performance Watch. For example, if a school is on Year 2 on Performance Watch and receives an Improvement rating, it will be given a “hold year” and will still be on Performance Watch. If the school receives another Improvement rating or higher the following year, it will be off Performance Watch. But if it receives a rating of Priority Improvement or Turnaround that following year, it will be back on Performance Watch.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

- **More about Performance Frameworks:** <https://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/>
- **More about the Education Accountability Act:** <https://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/accountabilityoverviewfactsheet>