

How Might California's Accountability System be Better?

- Establish standards and measures of the resources, conditions, and opportunities that teaching and learning require, as well as for learning outcomes.
- Use standardized tests as only one piece of comprehensive and authentic assessment of student learning.
- Hold district and state officials accountable for providing equitable resources, such as appropriate instructional materials, qualified teachers and adequate facilities.
- Use accountability information to trigger comprehensive improvement to curriculum and teaching and to direct resources where they are needed most.
- Withhold “high stakes” consequences of tests (e.g., denying the diploma to students who fail the High School Exit Exam) until adequate opportunities to learn are established.
- Create legitimate roles for local communities, parents, and students in holding the system accountable. Non-profit, community-based organizations, supported by the state, can help develop informed, engaged, and powerful communities.



California's Crisis of Education Accountability

What is Accountability?

When education officials and schools provide a detailed, understandable account or explanation to justify their actions or decisions to others. Accountability's real task is not to assign blame for failure or dispense punishment or rewards, but to trigger better opportunities and outcomes.



What Should Education Accountability Do?

- Make the goals of schooling clear.
- Define who is responsible for what (where the “buck stops”)—from the Governor to students.
- Report easy-to-understand information so that the public can judge whether the educational system and the schools are fulfilling their obligations to every student, including all racial, ethnic, linguistic groups,
 - whether all students are achieving at a common standard;
 - whether all students have conditions, resources, and opportunities to learn;
 - whether teachers have conditions, resources, and opportunities to teach;
 - whether district and state officials are providing the resources and support that schools, teachers, and students need;

- Set benchmarks that trigger sanctions, resources, and interventions that make things better—create better opportunities and outcomes for students;
- Change power relationships so that *all* communities can demand high quality and serve as watchdogs.

California Accountability Fails the Test

California's *Public School Accountability Act (PSAA)* creates an *Academic Performance Index (API)* and provides rewards, sanctions, and interventions based on whether schools' API score improves. This system fails the test of good accountability because it:

- Relies exclusively on tests. Schools often seek to boost their scores in counterproductive ways—e.g., “teaching to the test,” getting rid of low-scoring students, outright cheating.
- Tests English Language Learners in a language they do not know. Their scores, and the scores of their schools, do not reflect their real learning, engagement, or potential.
- Sets standards for content, but **NO** standards for resources, conditions, and opportunities for teaching and learning.
- Provides no information that helps explain *why* students succeed or fail and that could help schools improve —e.g., access to basic tools, like books and qualified teachers.
- Punishes students without opportunities to learn by labeling them “low-performing.” The negative impact is felt most strongly by low-income students of color.
- Goes only one-way. The *PSAA* holds principals, teachers, and students accountable to the state. **NO** district or state official is held accountable.