## Background

Senate Bill 175 (2019) requires that the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) convene a committee to analyze assessment results and the expected impacts and unintended consequences of the state’s accountability system, and report the results of these analyses to the Interim Joint Committee on Education by December 2019 and again by December 2020.

According to SB 175 (2019):

Following the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years, the commissioner of education shall convene a committee each year that includes but is not limited to school superintendents, school administrators, district assessment coordinators, a member of the Council on Postsecondary Education, a career and technical education educator, and a member of the business and industry community. The committee shall analyze state assessment results and examine and consider the expected impacts, unintended consequences, and potential for all schools to reach the highest ratings in the state accountability system. The Kentucky Department of Education shall report to the Interim Joint Committee on Education by December 1, 2019, and by December 1, 2020, regarding the findings of each committee.

In compliance with this requirement, the Kentucky Department of Education established a committee of 28 members drawn from a wide range of responsibilities throughout the state. In compliance with the statute, the committee included school superintendents, school administrators, district assessment coordinators, a member of the council on Postsecondary Education, career and technical education educators, and members of the business and industry communities. In addition, the committee also included directors of special education and English Learner and Federal programs, higher education representatives, parents, and members of community advocacy groups.

The committee was comprised of the following members:

* Lisa Allen, Dean, School of Education, Campbellsville University
* Charles Aull, Public Policy Manager, Greater Louisville Inc.
* Melissa Bell, Vice President Academic Affairs and Student Success, Council on Postsecondary Education
* Jay Box, President, KCTCS
* Travis Burton, Director, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
* Nick Carter, Superintendent, Breckinridge County Schools
* DeAnna Crump, Director of EL and Federal Programs, Warren County Schools
* Ron Jones, Teacher, Jefferson County Public Schools
* Cornelius Faulkner, Superintendent, Caverna Independent Schools
* Jim Flynn, Executive Director, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents
* Monica Heavrin, Director of Special Education, Grayson County Schools
* Kaysin Higgins, National Board Certified Teacher, Calloway County Schools
* Tharon Hurley, District Assessment Coordinator, Laurel County Schools
* Jonathan Jett, Superintendent, Perry County Schools
* Patty Johnson, District Assessment Coordinator, Pike County Schools
* Catrina Mcdermott, K-12 Pineville Independent, Pineville Independent Schools
* Deanna Miller, Superintendent, Fulton Independent Schools
* Todd Neace, Principal, Bath County Middle School, Bath County Schools
* Autumn Neagle, Parent, Kentucky Parent Teacher Association
* Susan Readnower, Teacher, Harrodsburg Area Technology Center
* Timothy Simpson, Chair and Professor, Morehead State University
* Mike Stone, Executive Director, Kentucky Association for Career & Technical Education
* Erica Thompson, District Assessment Coordinator, Jefferson County Schools
* Amy Tracy, Principal, Lincoln County Area Technology Center
* Adrian Wallace, Parent, Kentucky Parent Teacher Association
* Susan Weston, Data and Policy Analyst, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
* Kimberly White, District Assessment Coordinator, Henderson County Schools
* Shelli Wilson, District Assessment Coordinator, Campbell County Schools

## Procedures

The work of the committee was focused in a meeting held on October 22, 2019 in Frankfort, Kentucky. To prepare for the meeting, an online survey was sent to all committee members. The purpose of the survey was to orient the committee members to the focus topics required by the statute, and to help KDE prepare for the meeting.

In the survey, the following questions were asked:

* Role on committee (i.e., superintendent, district assessment coordinator, teacher, post-secondary representative, etc.)
* What are the most positive aspects of the 5-star accountability system?
* What component(s) of the accountability system would be more effective with revision?
* Do you believe implementation of the accountability system has resulted in unintended consequences?
* If you answered yes to the previous question, please describe the unintended consequences.

The survey responses were used to identify several topics for discussion by the committee.

The committee convened in Frankfort, Kentucky at 8:30 a.m. and concluded at 4:30 p.m. The meeting was facilitated by Brian Gong from the Center for Assessment and began with a review of the state’s most recent assessment and accountability results.

Each of the three areas included in the statute regarding the state accountability system—expected impact, unintended consequences, and potential for all schools to reach the highest ratings—were discussed both as a topic in itself and in conjunction with several specific topics that had been raised in the committee members’ surveys. In addition to the three areas, the committee was asked to recommend possible actions to improve the accountability system in relation to the topic. An example of a form used to guide and record committee discussion is shown below.

Figure: Sample form used for committee discussion and notes



Specific topics included: measurement and evaluation of equity, reporting of equity results, measurement and evaluation of student growth in Reading and mathematics, measurement and evaluation of growth of English Learner students, and Transition Readiness.

In the course of the meeting, committee members worked individually, in small groups, and as a whole to discuss issues and make recommendations.

Following the meeting KDE staff and Brian Gong summarized the discussion and recommendations for the report to the Interim Joint Committee on Education.

## Discussion of Committee and Findings

The main results of the committee meeting are reported in four sections:

* **Statutory Charge 1 - Expected results**
* **Statutory Charge 2 - Unintended consequences**
* **Statutory Change 3 - Potential of all schools to reach the highest rating**
* **Statutory Change 4 - Recommendations to improve specific aspects**

### Expected Results

In fall 2019, state accountability results in Kentucky’s 5-star accountability system were reported for the first time, and accountability results for the federal school identifications were reported for the second year. The main results were that the accountability system was calculated and reported as expected.

* The assessment and accountability systems were reported as negotiated via Kentucky’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plan.
* Administration and reporting were completed well without any major incidents.
* Schools’ performance on multiple measures were reported, and overall performance reported in a simple 5-star rating. There was a range of scores, with most in the middle (3-star).
* Schools and districts received detailed data to help them identify areas of strength and where they could improve.
* Lower-performing schools were identified to receive state and district support.
* Statewide analysis showed that in general:
* Some schools performed well, even with challenging circumstances.
* Achievement is lower than desired and has not improved much on most indicators.
* There are large achievement gaps between groups.

The committee expressed a desire to maintain stability and not to make large changes to the system and acknowledged the positive impact of the growth measure for low performing schools. Support for the change from a projected to a categorical growth model was unanimous.

Several members recognized that raising the education levels in Kentucky is the responsibility of the greater community, not only P-12 education. Including the the larger education community, business, parents, postsecondary, and other stakeholders is needed to advance education in Kentucky.

The group recommended clear statements of goals for the system. Multiple goals are included in the system and have been shared. Communication on the goals will continue.

KDE will partner with education stakeholders on improvement of enriching education in the state. Additional resources, training and guides will continue to be developed as the system matures. The School Report Card (SRC) will be enhanced in future years.

### Unintended Consequences

The committee agreed that it was very important to monitor for unintended consequences, both positive and negative. One type of unintended negative consequence would be changes in practice that are inconsistent with the intended theory of action of the accountability system. The committee indicated the accountability system was so new, and results so recently published that they were not aware of any indications of unintended negative practices to game the system. The committee agreed it would be important to monitor for those types of unintended negative consequences in the future.

One concern voiced by the committee was that the 5-star rating is easy to understand and has increased community engagement; however, the oversimplification of the star rating may lead to misinterpretation of results. For example, a committee member was concerned that if a school were not explicitly identified for having a statistically significant achievement gap, educators or community members might assume that there were no performance gaps in the school to be concerned about. That would be an unintended, negative consequence. The committee had strong recommendations to increase communication and training to help people better understand the accountability system.

The committee spent the majority of its time discussing how some definitions and rules in the current accountability system might not produce the expected results, and therefore might need to be modified or otherwise improved. An example was how growth was defined for schools with a large majority of students who scored Proficient or higher. These discussions are summarized in the section, *Recommendations to Improve Specific Aspects of the Accountability System*.

Another topic of discussion was to incentivize closing achievement gaps. The suggestion was made to give a bonus or extra recognition to schools that are increasing the performance of students. The group would also like the sufficient size group of 10 students to be reviewed. KDE will continue to analyze data for impact on the overall system.

There was a desire to include a gap to goal or proficiency measure in the system with the reasoning that there is a fairness of having the same target (proficiency) for each school. However, including the goal of proficiency does not take into consideration where the student groups begin.

Within this committee and others, there is a request for expanded and quicker reporting to support instructional decisions. KDE is committed to working with assessment vendors on faster reporting of student assessment results.

**Transition Readiness**

In negotiation with USED, the ESSA State Plan will need to be amended for the 2019-2020 school accountability. The calculation will need to include EL 12th grade non-graduates. The amendment will be revised as follows: “Transition readiness shall be calculated by dividing he number of high school graduates plus 12th grade non-graduates who have met measures of transition readiness plus the number of English learners who have achieved English language proficiency by the total number of graduates plus 12th grade non-graduates plus the number of graduates who have received English language services during high school.”

**Growth of English Learner (EL) students**

Much discussion occurred on the inclusion of English Learners (ELs) into state accountability. ELs are included in the growth and transition readiness indicators twice. In the growth indicator, ELs are included once for progress on reading and math and once for progress of English proficiency. In the transition readiness indicator ELs are included once for attainment of transition readiness measures and once for attainment of English language proficiency. The including ELs twice is a requirement of ESSA. Another option would be to remove EL progress from Transition Readiness and include a separate EL indicator to measure English Language proficiency. The committee was not receptive to having a separate indicator.

Additional conversation included the need to accurately reflect EL growth for students who enter public schools with consideration of a) initial age entering public school, b) language level, and c) degree of interrupted schooling. KDE continues to give consideration to these students.

### Potential of All Schools to Reach the Highest Rating

The committee agreed that the accountability system was designed so that logically there was the potential that all schools could reach the highest rating (5 stars). This is because the 5-star system is criterion-referenced, meaning that if a school achieved the required performance, it would receive the corresponding rating. Kentucky’s 5-star rating accountability system differs notably from the federal school identification system, which is normative, or based on how one school does relative to other schools. The federal system requires that “the lowest 5%” of schools be identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement, so that there will always be at least 5% of all schools identified for CSI no matter how high (or low) they perform in an absolute sense. Because the state’s 5-star system is totally independent from the federal system, federal identifications do not affect state ratings.

One question raised by the committee was whether schools with very high percentages of their students scoring Proficient or Distinguished could achieve a 5-star rating. This is because such schools cannot earn as many points in Growth as can schools whose students are growing from lower levels of Novice or Apprentice. However, it was shown mathematically that if there were an elementary or middle school with all its students Proficient on average, and all the students maintained Proficiency from year to year, that school would earn a 5-star rating. (This issue was not raised for high schools because there is no Growth indicator in high school.). So, with the current points and cutscores it is mathematically possible for all schools to reach the highest rating.

Another topic discussed extensively by the committee was the accountability rule that if a school had a statistically significant achievement gap for at least one student group in the school, that school would be lowered one star rating if it otherwise would have been designated a 5- or 4-star rating. The question was whether it were possible for schools to receive 5- or 4-star ratings, or whether all or most would have such achievement gaps that relatively few schools would reach the highest rating. An examination of the data for the 2018-2019 rating showed that over 75% of the schools at 4- or 5-star levels did not have a significant achievement gap. Further analysis showed that the schools achieved high ratings while being accountable for student groups of students with IEPs, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and every racial/ethnic student group. This indicates it was certainly possible for the large majority of schools to earn the highest possible rating, even while serving traditionally less advantaged or lower-performing student groups.

### Recommendations to Improve Specific Aspects of the Accountability System

While recognizing the strength of the current accountability system, the committee was very interested in possible modifications to specific aspects of the accountability system—primarily the details of how various aspects were defined and/or calculated. In some of these, the committee was generally supportive of KDE pursuing investigation of such changes. For example, based on further analysis, Kentucky may modify the value table and its use to reflect factors that may impact English learners’ progress toward language proficiency, including age upon entry to U.S. schools, initial English language proficiency level, and degree of interrupted schooling.

For many of the topics discussed, the committee was split. Some committee members favored making changes while others did not. For example, there was much discussion on achievement gap identification. The question was if *more* or *fewer* schools should be identified as having an achievement gap significant enough to warrant a change in its 5-star rating. Some committee members felt strongly that more schools should be identified and therefore the rules and calculations regarding achievement gap should be adjusted, while other committee members felt strongly that achievement gap should play a reduced role in accountability ratings.

**Next Steps**

Discussions and recommendations from the committee will be shared with various advisory groups such as the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council (SCACC), Local Superintendent Advisory Council (LSAC), and other advisory groups.

In addition, with recent feedback given on the Transition Readiness Indicator in Kentucky’s Consilidated State Plan by the U.S. Department of Education (USED), it is necessary for the agency to amend 703 KAR 5:270, Kentucky’s Accountability System. The federal requirement is that the calculation must include all students, not only those that graduated.

The first reading of the regulation will go before the Kentucky Board of Education in December, with a second reading in February. After the second reading, a sixty day public comment period will be open and the general public will be allowed to make comments and suggestions to the regulation. Once the public comment period ends, a Statement of Consideration will be written to summarize comments and to provide a response from the KDE. At that time, any additional changes will be made before the regulation goes through the legislative committees in Summer 2020.