

To: Colorado State Board of Education
From: A+ Colorado
Date: September 23, 2019
Subject: **Accountability Framework Decisions**



As members of the State Board debate a final decision around adjustments to the Colorado Accountability Frameworks we believe it is important to hearken back to a conversation the Department and Board delved into a year ago around the purpose of an accountability system. At A+ Colorado we believe that our accountability system serves more than the purpose of helping the state identify and direct resources to the lowest-performing 5% - 10% of schools.

We believe that the accountability system sets public expectations of the academic outcomes our students deserve and communicates whether schools and districts are supporting students to reach those academic outcomes. We have spent years as a state developing a set of standards that we believe are critical for students in Colorado to master. The accountability system should not only signal places where students are the farthest from being supported to reach those standards, but should also signal places where students are more or less likely to reach those standards.

This was critical in the State Board's decision to incorporate a growth-to-standard model that measures whether students are on-track to move up a performance level within 2 years, rather than 3. We still are concerned that the reality of the progress we see students make, and schools and districts' ability to support students to make that progress, is far from what we expect of our public education, but find it important to signal urgency for catching students up to grade-level expectations. Thank you for your decision to measure catch up within two years.

As the Board approaches the final conversations around adjustments to the system we strongly advocate for the following principles to guide the decision.

Meaningful Standards: Current cut scores for individual measures are based on a normative ranking of school performance, but signal little about whether that normative distribution is rigorous enough for what we expect for students. It is important that when these measures are rolled up that they signal something about the school's success in supporting students to learn. We hope that the state's discussion about increasing the cut scores for overall school ratings takes into consideration what we signal to families and communities through the ratings.

As a note, at A+ Colorado we are deeply concerned over the decision to shift the cut scores down for SAT this year. Students continue to face high standards, and the validity of this year's scores could not be debunked. Yet because across the state students fared worse compared to the previous two cohorts of Colorado students, the state made the decision to make the cut scores for schools and districts less rigorous. Rather than asking schools and districts what went wrong? Why were last year's 11th graders less successful than their peers? The state

shifted the scores down, effectively lowering the expectations that we have for education systems.

Differentiation: A school that performs in the 80th percentile is supporting students to reach fundamentally different outcomes than a school in the 45th percentile. We strongly support a system that better differentiates schools and district performance to help communities, educators, and policymakers understand where we could look for best practices, as well as be clear about how far our system has to go to truly support every student. We believe a distinction category could move us in this direction.

Relevance and Actionability for Families: To reiterate, we believe the state's accountability system is to both identify and direct resources to the lowest-performing schools *and* to signal to the public successes and opportunities for improvement in our education system. The state needs to be honest and transparent with families and with communities. The accountability system should be one way in which the state helps families make sense of the information about schools; the state needs to also focus on providing the underlying information about academic outcomes for students to families.

A+ Colorado is grateful that the Board has engaged deeply on the accountability system.