



Washington's K-12 Education Accountability System for Low-Performing Schools

A report from the Washington State Auditor's Office - June 27, 2013

One in four K-12 students attends a low-performing school

Of Washington's roughly 2,650 K-12 schools, about 470 are "low performing" according to the Washington State Achievement Index set out by the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Low performing schools accounted for around 18% of Washington's schools and almost a quarter of all students for the 2012-2013 school year. State law requires that Washington have a system to hold all schools accountable for improving academic achievement.

267,000 Washington students attend low-performing schools

The relatively high percentage of students attending a low-performing school and new federal requirements for Washington prompted us to conduct a performance audit of the state's system to hold schools accountable.

New law acts on criteria identified in our performance audit

During the course of our audit, we presented to SBE and OSPI national leading practices that would serve as our criteria. The agencies agreed that the standards identified were leading practices. Representatives from SBE and OSPI also testified before the Legislature as it considered changes to the state's school accountability system.

The Legislature then passed Senate Bill 5329, called "Transforming persistently failing schools." This new law takes effect on July 28, 2013, and defines a statewide system to hold all schools, including low-performing schools, accountable for the academic improvement of their students.

LEADING PRACTICES

NEW STATE LAW

Performance goals

Requires needs assessments, academic performance audits, and improvement action plans that are explicitly tied to the assessments

Implement strategies

Requires use of research and evidence-based school improvement models in improvement action plans; action plans must specify improvement strategies and assets required

Measure performance

Requires use of Washington Achievement Index to identify low-performing schools; performance measures to be from multiple outcomes and indicators

Monitor/manage performance

Creates the Education Accountability Oversight Committee to monitor and manage performance of the accountability system

Report performance

Requires school boards to hold public hearings for improvement action plans

Create incentives

Requires strategy to recognize schools; OSPI extended authority to withhold funds from schools and districts failing to properly implement improvement action plans

Washington's accountability system for improving low-performing schools

Our audit was prompted in part by changes in funding for low-performing schools

From 2001 to 2010, the state provided funding for voluntary improvement programs for all low-performing schools. In 2010, the Legislature cut this funding, while the federal Department of Education awarded stimulus funds to OSPI for improving persistently low-performing schools. However, only Title I schools are eligible for these funds; Title I schools have high numbers of students from low-income families. Non-Title I schools do not receive state assistance for improvement efforts, even if they are low-performing.

Also in 2010, the Legislature passed a law requiring the SBE and OSPI to develop a system to hold schools accountable for student academic achievement. Funds remained unavailable to non-Title I schools.

The legislation passed in 2013 explicitly calls for funding improvement efforts at both Title I and non-Title I low-performing schools. As of the time of publication, a final state budget has not been approved.

Our emphasis was on the accountability system

Our scope was limited to the roles of OSPI and SBE in developing and implementing a system to hold low-performing schools accountable for student academic achievement. Our objectives were to answer the following questions:

- Does the state use leading practices in its K-12 education accountability framework for improving academic achievement at low-performing schools?
- Can the state more closely align its K-12 education accountability framework to leading practices?

The new law directly addressed our audit objectives

The new law suggests that Washington will use leading practices in its education accountability system for all schools, including Title I and non-Title I low-performing schools. Because the Legislature has already enacted these leading practices into law, we are terminating our audit and issuing this short report. We may return to this important topic in the future.

In the 2012-2013 school year, 18% of all schools were deemed low-performing

