



Missouri's Public School Accountability System

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All public schools in Missouri are evaluated through an accountability system. However, the accountability system for school districts differs from the system for charter schools. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) calculates an annual performance report (APR) for both school districts and charter schools. For school districts, the APR is the primary factor in accreditation classifications under the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) that are made by the State Board of Education; for charter schools, the APR is used in renewals and identification as "high quality" per state law. Charter school sponsors have the responsibility for holding charter schools accountable to performance standards in their performance contract. The differences in how the APR is used spotlights the problems for an APR for charter schools with limited grade ranges. DESE will soon be launching a revision to MSIP which will bring with it a revision to the APR.

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Special points of interest:

- School districts are accountable under MSIP; charter schools are accountable under the performance contract with their sponsor.
- The SBE determines accreditation classifications of school districts; charter school sponsors make renewal, probation, and closure decisions for charter schools.
- MSIP accountability is for school districts; the federal accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is for individual schools.
- Under the current MSIP system, a district could have low achievement in academic standards, but through other standards could still have an overall annual performance report (APR) that puts them well into the accredited range.

Introduction

All public schools in Missouri are accountable for performance, but accountability systems differ for school districts and charter schools. School districts are accountable under the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) with oversight from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Charter schools are accountable under performance contracts entered into with their sponsors. The performance contract must include state assessments and may include other criteria determined by the sponsor.

Two often misunderstood aspects of accountability are the use of the annual performance report (APR) in the evaluation of school districts and charter schools and the role of the State Board of Education (SBE) in oversight of charter schools.

Annual Performance Reports

Both school districts and charter schools receive an APR. There are separate formulas for K-12 and K-8 school districts. As described in the September 13 PRiME Center blog post, the APR includes academic achievement (status and growth metrics), academic achievement of student subgroups, and attendance. A K-12 district APR also includes college and career readiness and graduation rate, and a K-8 district APR includes high school readiness. For school districts, the APR is the primary determinant for accreditation classification.

For charter schools, intervention by the sponsor is required if the school's APR is below the APR of the applicable grade levels of the school district in which it is located for three of the last four years. Other circumstances requiring sponsor intervention are when schools are identified by DESE as persistently lowest-achieving or have a graduation rate

below 70% for three of the last four years for charter schools that include grade 12.

The APR is designed for evaluation of a K-12 or K-8 system. Comparison of a school district APR to a charter school with less than a K-12 or K-8 grade span is problematic because not all components of the APR will be included. Per state law, sponsors may compare a charter school's performance to applicable grade levels of the local school district.¹

However, other sections of law on charter school performance do not address using the APR to evaluate a charter school with less than a K-12 or K-8 grade configuration. When sponsors are considering renewal, they must determine if the charter school has an APR "consistent with a classification of accredited for three of the last four years." To be identified as a high-quality charter school, the charter school must have 85 percent of APR points in three of the last four years. For example, a charter school with a K-5 grade configuration will have an APR based on state assessments in grades 3 through 5 (all students and subgroups), growth in achievement in grades 4 and 5 (all students and subgroups), and attendance. Their APR would not include state assessments and growth for grades 6 through 8 and End-of-Course assessments, college and career readiness or high school readiness, or graduation rate.

Role of the State Board of Education

The SBE has the authority for accreditation of school districts but does not have as direct of a role in the accountability of charter schools. The primary role for the SBE is with the charter school sponsors, not directly with the charter schools. The SBE votes to approve or deny applications for sponsorship and evaluates the performance of charter school sponsors for renewal.

The role of the SBE with charter schools themselves is more nuanced. The SBE approves new charter school applications brought forward by the sponsor. They may only deny a new charter school that has been approved by the sponsor if the application does not meet the requirements of state law. By contrast, the SBE may approve a new charter school that has been denied by the

sponsor if they determine the charter proposal meets all requirements of the law. Charter school renewals are also brought before the SBE by the sponsor, but state law requires the SBE to renew any charter school that has met the requirements of the law and of the sponsor. Additionally, the SBE may hear an appeal from a charter school when the sponsor has recommended revocation.

State versus Federal Accountability

Like so many aspects of state-to-state comparisons in education policy, accountability approaches vary substantially across states. Many states rely heavily on the federal accountability system (Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA) as a basis for state accountability. Some states have extensive ESSA plans encompassing the requirements of the law and go above and beyond to detail additional requirements and sanctions. When an ESSA plan is submitted and approved by the U.S. Department of Education, any revisions or substantive modifications must also be submitted and approved. For nearly 30 years, Missouri has used its own system, MSIP, for school district improvement and accountability. Missouri is compliant with the requirements from ESSA but has a succinct ESSA plan on file with USED. Missouri then uses ESSA as a complement to MSIP rather than the driver of accountability. Additionally, ESSA accountability is evaluated at the school level, and MSIP accountability is at the district level. With this, there are different thresholds for underperforming under ESSA that are tailored to the school level. ESSA requirements ensure that states address how they will support their most vulnerable populations of students. However, ESSA requirements also direct focus and resources to the lowest performing five percent of schools. Missouri's MSIP is designed for all students and for all districts--the lowest five percent and the other 95 percent.

Is There Accountability in APR?

Part of Missouri's accountability system is to determine whether schools and districts are serving their students. As we have discussed, failure to meet certain performance measures can result in consequences, which vary by school type. Traditional public school districts can lose their

accreditation, resulting in students being able to voluntarily transfer to a new district or the district merging with another district. Public charter schools that fail to meet APR performance are at risk of being closed. However, it is unclear the degree to which APR is holding schools accountable for their academic performance. As shown in table 1, district APR scores show that fewer than half of districts met the “On Track” or “Target” levels in their achievement Status. However, most districts are offsetting poor test performance and growth with their performance in Standards 3 through 5. In fact, most districts are receiving the full points possible in these standards through their Status scores alone. It is important to note that some districts make up for poor achievement levels through their year-to-year student growth. Still, districts with mediocre growth are undoubtedly offsetting that performance through their status in Standards 3, 4, and 5 in the current APR system.

Table 1: Districts Meeting "On Track" or "Target" Status, 2019

APR Standard	On Track	Target	On Track + Target
Std. 1 - ELA Achievement	30.8%	6.7%	37.5%
Std. 1- Math Achievement	35.1%	4.6%	39.7%
Std. 3 - College and Career Assessment	22.7%	41.9%	64.6%
Std. 3 - College Credit	6.6%	68.8%	75.3%
Std. 3 - Placement	28.4%	63.1%	91.4%
Std. 4 - Attendance	12.1%	83.0%	95.1%
Std. 5 - Graduation Rate	23.8%	73.4%	97.2%

* Author's calculations based on data available through Missouri DESE

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Looking Ahead to MSIP 6 and a Revised APR

With MSIP 6 in the final stages of development, Missouri will soon have a new APR. Based on recent presentations DESE has made to the SBE, the new APR may have different metrics that take into account resources and processes in addition to student outcomes. The new APR may report district and charter school performance differently by replacing a percentage score with descriptions of performance within a range. How these changes will impact the way that the APR is used for statutory requirements for charter school evaluation and renewal has yet to be determined. Given the patterns in performance observed in the current APR system, it will be important for Missouri’s approach to accountability to show a stronger connection between performance, growth, and outcomes.

References

- ¹ Section 160.405.8(1)(a) and 160.405.9(2)(a), RSMo
- ² Section 160.405.9(2)(d), RSMo
- ³ Section 160.408(1), RSMo
- ⁴ Section 160.405, RSMo
- ⁵ Section 167.895, RSMo
- ⁶ Section 162.081, RSMo