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Recommendation Eleven Accountability

Accountability is achieved when a school system's policies and operating practices work both to provide good education and to correct problems as they occur. An effective accountability system is designed to increase the likelihood of successful practices, ferret out harmful practices, and provide internal self-correctives—feedback, assessments, and incentives—that support continual improvement. Assessment data are helpful in this regard, to the extent that they provide relevant, valid, and useful information about how individual students are doing and how schools are serving them. But this is only a small part of the total process. Accountability encompasses how a school system hires, evaluates, and supports its staff; how it makes decisions; how it acquires and uses the best available knowledge; how it evaluates its own functioning; and how it safeguards student welfare.¹

Recommendation 11 — Accountability. Organize all district, school, and community stakeholders to hold high academic and behavioral expectations for all middle grades students. Provide sufficient time, talent, training, and resources to support student learning and rigorous standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Analyze data on student progress on an ongoing basis. Be accountable for moving all students toward proficient performance levels and closing the achievement gap.

Accountability is one of the Recommendations in the Focus Area on [Organizational Structures and Processes](#).

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Footnote

¹Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997, 245.

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Accountability for learning

Accountability is the quality or state of being accountable; especially an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.¹

Every middle grades student has a right to learn. Although teachers are the primary ones held responsible for student learning, they cannot close the achievement gap by themselves. To do so, all stakeholders (school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, students, and others) must be accountable for results. In addition, the state and the federal government are accountable to provide schools with the fiscal support and resources needed to comply with state and federal mandates.

A results-oriented accountability system depends on data and on the professionals who understand the implications of the data and how to use the data to achieve learning outcomes. Middle grades educators must help adolescents adjust to their rapidly changing emotional, physical, and social worlds while academic rigor significantly increases. At the same time, these educators face the challenges posed by reporting achievement under two different accountability systems:

- State [Academic Performance Index](#) (API— a growth model)
- Federal [Adequate Yearly Progress](#) (AYP— a status model)

Both the state and federal accountability systems track California's huge middle grades student population—grades six through eight that consist of nearly 1.5 million students. According to the California Department of Education's *Fact Book 2010*, approximately 17 percent of California's over 1.4 million English learner students are in grades six through eight.² In 2008-09, there were 1,286 middle schools, 37 junior high schools, 671 K-8 schools, and many others that include students in any of grades five through eight.³

Years of research and effective middle grades practice indicate that results do not happen *to* students, they happen *with* students who are motivated, excited to attend school, and encouraged by people who care. Students who struggle do not give up; they know that the adults in their school will give them the support they need to succeed. Likewise, effective schools provide gifted students as well as those "in the middle" with access to a rich, challenging, and engaging learning environment that invites them to help create meaning and develop a lifelong love of learning.

Related Links

- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#), Recommendation 11—Accountability, TCSII.
- [Adequate Yearly Progress \(AYP\)](#), Recommendation 11—Accountability, TCSII.
- [Reciprocal Accountability Model for Stakeholders in the Middle Grades](#), 2001, Document Library, TCSII.
- [The Roles of Stakeholders in a Middle Grades Accountability System](#), 2001, Document Library, TCSII.

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Footnotes

¹ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

² [Statewide English Learners by Language and Grade, 2009-10](#), California Department of Education.

³ [Enrollment/Number of Schools by Grade Span & Type - CalEdFacts](#), California Department of Education.

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California's Public Schools Accountability Act

The primary goal of California's accountability system is to measure and help improve the academic achievement of California's 6.3 million public school students who are enrolled in nearly 10,000 schools in more than 1,000 local educational agencies. California's content standards, describing the knowledge and skills that students should master at each grade level, are among the most rigorous in the nation. California has designed an equally rigorous growth model of accountability to measure the academic growth of a school based on how much student achievement improves. The growth model acknowledges the reality that not all schools start at the same place and that some can subsequently take longer to reach the final goal.¹

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¹Jack O'Connell, "A California Perspective on Growth Models and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)." Written testimony submitted to the Aspen Institute—Commission on No Child Left Behind, May 22, 2006.

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Academic Performance Index

The Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 established the Academic Performance Index (API) to measure how well schools are performing in helping students learn grade-level content standards. The API is a numeric index ranging from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. A school's API score is an indicator of its performance level based on results of statewide, standards-aligned tests at grades two through eleven. The state API performance target for all schools is 800, and schools are measured by how well they are moving toward (or past) that goal.

Public schools receive two APIs during the year. The Base API shows a school's current level of academic performance (or rank). It also serves as the basis for setting goals (or targets) for growth for the following school year. The California Department of Education (CDE) releases Base API reports after the start of the calendar year. The Growth API shows if schools met those targets. The CDE releases Growth API reports in the fall. The state subtracts the Base API from the next year's Growth API to determine how much each school grew from one year to the next. Schools must meet both schoolwide targets as well as targets for each numerically significant subgroup to meet state API growth targets.

Related Links

- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Public Schools Accountability Act PSAA](#), California Department of Education.

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Numerically significant subgroups

Both the state and federal accountability systems track the progress of "numerically significant subgroups" in addition to general schoolwide progress. Under the state Academic Performance Index (API) system, schools and significant subgroups are required to meet 5 percent of the difference between the school or subgroup's API and 800 or grow a minimum of five points, whichever is greater. A "numerically significant subgroup" has:

- 100 or more students with valid Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test scores;
- or
- 50 or more students enrolled with valid test scores who make up at least 15 percent of the total valid test scores.

In determining percent proficient calculations under Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the definition of numerical significance is the same as the API definition. However, in determining participation rate calculations under AYP, the definition is based on enrollment rather than the number of valid scores.

Subgroup results are reported in both API and AYP for the following groups if their numbers qualify them as numerically significant:

- African American (not of Hispanic origin)
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- English learners
- Filipino
- Hispanic or Latino
- Pacific Islander
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged
- Students with disabilities
- White (not of Hispanic origin)

Related Links

- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Adequate Yearly Progress \(AYP\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [California STAR Program](#), California Department of Education.
- [Subgroups](#), Recommendation 7—Access, TCSII.

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The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) yearly benchmark accountability system

The federal accountability criteria under the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) (ESEA, 1965) (amended and reauthorized in 2001 as No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act) are based on a "status model" that presumes that all local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, and student subgroups should meet common minimum targets that are set higher over time. The goal is that by 2014, all schools will improve performance so that every student is proficient. Proficiency, however, is a relative term. The national system compares states' progress using the same system, but each state establishes its own "proficient" level of performance and its own academic content standards. California's definition of "proficient" sets a tougher standard than many other states. As a result, state-to-state comparisons are often misleading, particularly when California results are compared with those of states with less rigorous standards and a lower bar for proficiency. Reaching proficiency for California students is a rigorous challenge, especially with the large English-language learner population (approximately 24 percent).

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Adequate yearly progress (AYP)

The [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#), ESEA, (Outside Source) (also known as No Child Left Behind, NCLB) measures the academic success of a school or local educational agency (LEA) according to how well it meets common performance targets—reported in terms of adequate yearly progress (AYP). NCLB requires that all schools or LEAs of the same type must meet the same academic achievement levels statewide, and schools must make their AYP targets for all numerically significant subgroups.

Under federal requirements, the Academic Performance Index (API) is one of the indicators for AYP performance targets, but the use of the API differs in state and federal criteria. Under California requirements, a school must increase its API score by 5 percent of the difference between the school API and 800 or maintain a score of 800 or above. Under federal requirements, a middle school or local educational agency must have a minimum API of 590 or have at least one point growth in the schoolwide API in addition to numerous other federal AYP targets.



In the Spotlight

Robert A. Millikan Middle School, Los Angeles Unified School District, a 2005 California Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

In spite of serving a diverse student population (2,098 students; 42.16 percent in poverty, 18 percent English learners, and five statistically significant student subgroups for accountability purposes: African-American, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic or Latino, and Pacific Islander), Millikan Middle made AYP in all 29 of its targets in the 2005-06 school year. The school supported rigorous academic course work with a fine arts program and with extensive use of technology, field trips, and project-based learning. In addition, the school supported healthy adolescent development through the following strategies:

1. Team collaboration used in an Intervention Pyramid to identify at-risk students and provided focused support in helping those students achieve proficiency in grade-level content standards.
2. Special-interest groups (for example, Impact, Innocence, peer mediation teams, the Rainbow Council, and others) provided social-emotional support and assisted students in developing their own identity and resolving disputes and disagreements through discussion.
3. There were collaborative working relationships between special education and regular education students and teachers to ensure inclusion is equitable and successful.
4. Student voice and accomplishment were valued and recognized through a variety of activities sponsored by Millikan's student leadership organization.

- [Robert A. Milikan DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Robert A. Milikan Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Robert A. Milikan Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

Related Links

- [A comparison of the API and AYP Systems](#), Recommendation 11—Accountability, TSCII.
- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Adequate Yearly Progress \(AYP\)](#), California Department of Education.

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Performance levels

The State Board of Education adopted five student performance levels for the Standardized Testing and Reporting System. The designated performance levels are:

- Advanced
- Proficient
- Basic
- Below Basic
- Far Below Basic

The State Board of Education targets for Adequate Yearly Progress are that all students should score at the level of proficient or above on the following middle grades California Standardized Tests:

Grades 6, 7, and 8	English-Language Arts
Grade 6:	Mathematics
Grade 7:	Mathematics or Algebra I
Grade 8 (Based on course completion)	General Mathematics
	Algebra I
	Geometry
	Integrated Math 1, 2, and 3
Grade 8	History-Social Science
Grade 8	Science

Related Links

- [About STAR 2006](#), California Department of Education.
- [Adequate Yearly Progress \(AYP\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Standardized Testing and Reporting System \(STAR\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [STAR Help](#), California Department of Education.

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Program Improvement (PI)

Title I funds help schools improve services to disadvantaged students. The California Department of Education (CDE) may designate a school or local educational agency (LEA) that receives federal Title I, Part A, Basic funds as being in Program Improvement if it does not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) criteria for two consecutive years.

The table below shows the types of services and/or interventions that a school in PI must provide each year that it remains in PI.

Program Improvement Option and Services

Categories of Federal Title I Schools	NCLB Options and Services for Students and Parents/Guardians ¹
Receives Title I funds, Not in PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School provides support programs to eligible Title I students.
Year 1 in PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents or guardians are eligible to send their children to a non-PI school in the LEA and to receive transportation at school district expense. School must revise its school plan within three months.
Year 2 in PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same services as Year 1 PI school are offered. Supplemental services, such as tutoring, are available for all eligible students.
Year 3 in PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same services as Year 2 PI school are offered. School district provides corrective action to improve the school.
Year 4 in PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same services as Year 3 PI school are offered. School must develop new alternative governance plan.
Year 5 in PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same services as Year 4 PI school are offered. School must implement its alternative governance plan.

Schools and districts in PI may conduct an extensive review of their policies and programs using one of two instruments:

- The Academic Program Survey (APS)—Middle School Level. The CDE recommends that any school in Program Improvement should complete an APS. The APS guides schools and districts in collecting and analyzing disaggregated data to highlight the achievement gaps that require strategic interventions. The following CDE Web pages provide more details about the survey:
 - ❖ APS Introduction
 - ❖ State Program Assessment Tools
- The District Assistance Survey (DAS). Districts in PI and those at risk of being placed in PI can use the DAS to assess district-level support for schools and areas needing improvement.

Based on findings from the APS or DAS and the recommendations of any external assistance provider, the school or district team develops an action plan to raise the academic achievement of students. Setting academic objectives for a two-year period helps the school staff members to work toward making adequate progress on growth targets. The school action plan focuses on:

- Improving student academic performance
- Improving the involvement of parents and guardians
- Improving the allocation of resources and management of the school
- Identifying and developing solutions that take into account the underlying causes of low student performance
- Providing high-quality staff development for its teachers

A school or local educational agency is eligible to exit PI if it makes adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years.

Related Links

- [Academic Program Survey Introduction](#) (DOC; 42KB; 4pp.), California Department of Education.
- [Academic Program Survey \(APS\)—Middle School Level](#) (DOC; 669KB; 39pp.), California Department of Education.
- [District Assistance Survey \(DAS\)](#) (DOC; 388KB; 21pp.), California Department of Education.
- [Program Improvement](#), California Department of Education.
- [Program Improvement Status Determination](#), California Department of Education.
- [State Program Assessment Tools](#), California Department of Education.
- [Title I](#), California Department of Education.

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Footnote

¹ [Overview of the 2005-06 Accountability Progress Reporting System](#) (PDF; 168KB; 4pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2006, 4.

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Federal requirements for English learners

Title III is a federal program that allocates funding to schools that provide language instruction for limited-English-proficient and immigrant students. Local educational agencies receiving funds under Title III must meet certain targets for English learners. The CDE Web site includes a page on [Title III](#) annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) and the Title III accountability reports for English learners. Separate from the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report, the Title III Accountability report provides data on whether LEAs met the Title III accountability targets. Those targets include making annual progress in learning English and attaining English-language proficiency on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT—the test used in California to measure progress toward English proficiency).

Related Links

- [California English Language Development Test \(CELDT\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Title III Accountability Requirements](#), California Department of Education.

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A comparison of the API and AYP Systems

Both the state and federal accountability systems focus on how well students are learning. However, the approaches are quite different and cause some confusion at the local level. Comparison results show the difficulties inherent in reporting on two different accountability systems. From the data, it is difficult to determine if California middle schools are improving or not. Many schools reach their Academic Performance Index (API) targets, but not Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Few schools do just the opposite. For example, one school may have exceeded the 800 API growth target for all schools along with meeting all the subgroup growth targets, but not met subgroup growth targets for AYP. If the school is a Title I school, they could possibly be in Program Improvement yet perform exceedingly well for the State. However, whenever a school misses its AYP or API target, leaders in the school and district must review the data and devise plans for how to address the learning needs of the subgroup(s) that did not meet yearly targets.

Differences Between API and AYP

API (State)	AYP (Federal)
Indicator for state intervention programs for schools (no local educational agencies)	Indicator for PI (Title I schools and local educational agencies only)
Growth model	Status model
Based on API growth from one year to the next	Based on four sets of requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Student participation in testing ■ Percentage of students proficient in English language arts and mathematics ■ API ■ High school graduation rate

Related Links

- [2009-10 Accountability Progress Reporting System—2010 Adequate Yearly Progress Report Information Guide](#), California Department of Education. pp. 32-43.
- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Adequate Yearly Progress \(AYP\)](#), California Department of Education.

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State test results used in API and AYP calculations

California's middle grades students are tested annually under the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. The following STAR tests results determine Academic Performance Index (API) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations.

California Standards Test (CSTs)

The CST in history-social science is administered only at grades eight through eleven. The CST in science is administered only at grades five and eight through eleven.

API	AYP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language arts, mathematics, history/social science, and science Grades two through eleven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language arts and mathematics Grades two through eight

California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA)

The CAPA is a standards-based test for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to take the CSTs, even with accommodations or modifications.

API	AYP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language arts and mathematics Grades two through eleven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language arts and mathematics Grades two through eight and ten

California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)

All high school students must pass the CAHSEE to earn a high school diploma. The test helps to ensure that students graduate from high school with grade level skills in reading, writing, and math.

API	AYP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language arts and mathematics Grades ten (and eleven and twelve if the student passed) Passed = Score of 350 or higher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language arts and mathematics Grade ten Proficient = Score of 380 or higher

If a school meets specific participation and growth criteria, it may be eligible to receive recognition under one of the following programs:

- [California Distinguished Schools Program](#), California Department of Education.
- [California Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#), California Department of Education.
- [National Blue Ribbon Schools Program](#) (Outside Source).
- [Title I Academic Achievement Awards Program](#), California Department of Education.

Related Links

- [About STAR 2006](#), California Department of Education.
- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#) , California Department of Education.
- [Adequate Yearly Progress \(AYP\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [California Alternate Performance Assessment \(CAPA\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [California's assessment system](#), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- [California High School Exit Examination \(CAHSEE\)](#), California Department of Education.

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Compliance reviews—Categorical Program Monitoring (CPM)

State and federal laws require the California Department of Education to monitor categorical programs operated by local educational agencies (LEAs). The California Department of Education does so with Categorical Program Monitoring.

Each LEA is monitored once every four years by knowledgeable state staff. California *Education Code* Section 64001 permits the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to differentiate monitoring reviews based on student academic achievement, the Academic Performance Index, and on the status of compliance with state and federal categorical programs.

Related Links

- [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#) , California Department of Education.
- [Categorical program monitoring](#), Recommendation 9—Leadership, TCSII.
- [Compliance Monitoring](#), California Department of Education.

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Local Accountability Systems

An accountability system not only gives state and federal policymakers an accounting of how well schools and groups of students are doing, but it also provides data to shape local decisions about what will help all students learn grade-level content. An effective accountability system is closely tied to a belief that failure is not an option. One important consideration for district administrators is to ensure that data based on the growth model is used to help prepare all students. Schools that serve large populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, transient students, or English learner (EL) students should not face penalties for taking on subgroups known to face challenges in meeting growth targets.

Accountability results are tools for improvement rather than reasons for blame in an effective local accountability system. For example, if a middle grades school does not meet state and federal targets for student achievement, the stakeholders can analyze the data by asking the following questions:

- Which groups of students did not reach proficiency?
- Did the identified groups make progress from the previous year?
- In which specific courses or subject matter do they need remediation and interventions?
- What types of supports do these students need to reach the standards?
- What help do teachers need so they are more effective in differentiating instruction?
- How will the school community provide the needed supports and interventions to help students achieve proficiency? For example, is there a process to identify roles, responsibilities, and funding sources for:
 - ❖ Tutors
 - ❖ After-school academies
 - ❖ Professional development to help teachers improve instructional skills in particular areas identified by testing results (for example, training on how to improve literacy for EL students in all subject areas)
 - ❖ Additional technology or instructional materials

Given the demands of NCLB, especially for schools in program improvement, how do the middle grades stakeholders hold themselves accountable for helping every student achieve academic literacy and grade-level proficiency? How do districts provide adequate funding and support to help teachers analyze assessment data and improve middle grades instruction? How do school and district personnel ensure that all eighth graders are well prepared to pass the California High School Exit Exam in high school and to take algebra? These are just a few of the questions that grow out of the spirit of using accountability data as a tool for success.

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Accountability for providing fiscal support

In the past, state and federal resource allocations often favored elementary schools (for class size reduction) or high schools (for the California High School Exit Exam [CAHSEE] preparation and small learning communities). However, state and local leaders now recognize the critical role of the middle grades in preparing students to succeed in high school and in reducing the dropout problem. To that end, effective districts seek to ensure equity in funding at all levels of the educational system.

When the school community has developed a response plan to address the Academic Performance Index or Annual Yearly Progress missed targets, the school and district leaders take responsibility for finding ways to support implementation of the plan. For example, the district and school leaders are accountable for providing standards-aligned instructional materials and safe facilities. The State Board of Education has found that student success in English-language arts and mathematics is made possible by a school with essential program components. Essential Program Component number nine calls for adequate fiscal support for English-language arts and mathematics program goals in the school plan.

Related Links

- [21st Century Learning Community Learning Centers](#), California Department of Education.
- [Administrator Training](#), California Department of Education.
- [California Fresh Start Program \(CFSP\) Evaluation Report](#), California Department of Education.
- [California Mathematics and Science Partnership](#), California Department of Education.
- [Curriculum Frameworks & Instructional Materials](#), California Department of Education.
- [Education Technology K-12 Voucher Program](#), California Department of Education.
- [Essential Program Component](#), California Department of Education.
- [Math and Reading Professional Development Intro](#), California Department of Education.
- [Safe Schools](#), California Department of Education.
- [School Improvement Program](#), California Department of Education.
- [School Nutrition](#), California Department of Education.
- [Williams Settlement and the SARC](#), California Department of Education.

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Accountability for providing support for teachers

Middle grades teachers need support to help adolescents who are expected to write more, read more, and think more than they have before. Teacher support includes:

- Education about the unique developmental needs of adolescents and how to tailor instruction to meet those needs.
- Subject matter training.
- Coaching on differentiated instruction.
- Guidance on using the assessments included in state-adopted instructional materials as the basis for continuous progress monitoring.
- Professional learning opportunities that help all grade-level and subject-matter teachers [articulate](#) lessons to ensure that all students have access to the same rigorous content.
- Accelerated-remediation strategies for students who have learning deficits.
- Classroom management training.
- Counseling support for students.
- Immediate intervention strategies and placement options for students with below-basic performance levels.
- Specialized support for students with disabilities.
- Time-out support for students with behavior problems.
- Targeted professional development.
- Collaborative professional work and planning time.
- Class-size reduction.
- Assistance with scoring written performance tasks.

Teachers and counselors at destination high schools have a stake in how well the middle grades have prepared entering students. As a result, yearly consultations with high school staff members will help middle grades teaching team members when they discuss content, common benchmark assessments, and goals for students.

Related Links

- [Assessment for continual progress monitoring](#), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- [Common benchmark assessments](#), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- [Transitions](#), Recommendation 6—Transitions, TCSII.

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Accountability in preparing students for all course work

Effective middle grades leaders help teaching teams develop strategies for raising the achievement of all students. Those who do not have grade-level proficiency in English-language arts and mathematics need accelerated interventions. However, they also need opportunities—before and after school if necessary—to prepare for high school and beyond.

To eliminate the achievement gap, students must be prepared in all academic subject areas when they exit middle school. Content areas in the API include English-language arts (norm-referenced and standards-based) in grades six through nine, mathematics (norm-referenced and standards-based) in grades six through nine, and history–social science and science in grade eight. For admission to the University of California and California State University system, students must be prepared to succeed in courses that meet the "a-g requirements" in high school, which include a foreign language, visual and performing arts, mathematics, science, English-language arts, and history–social science. For those students who do not have access to technology at home, schools have a responsibility to provide students with the technological skills required in high school, college, and the global economy.



In the Spotlight

Alvarado Intermediate School, Rowland Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

To ensure team meetings are effective and focus on specific goals and strategies, the principal requires that teams submit their common (team) lesson plans each Friday. Like many other middle school principals, Alvarado's principal requires each team to submit team agendas and minutes.

Kennedy Middle School, El Centro Elementary School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

The school faculty keeps a close watch on API results. The breakdown of the student population is 88 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged and 48 percent English learners. Team members track the API growth and implement a wide variety of interventions to help the students who are not making adequate progress.

- [Alvarado DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Alvarado Intermediate School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Alvarado Intermediate School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
- [Kennedy DataQuest School Profile](#)

- [Kennedy Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Kennedy Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

Closing the achievement gap is complicated because of differing local board policies, the number of feeder districts, and lack of opportunities for administrators and teachers at all schools to meet together. However, effective articulation models exist for both unified and non unified school districts.

Related Links

- ["a-g" Subject Area Requirements](#), (Outside Source), University of California.
- [Transitions](#), Recommendation 6—Transitions, TCSII .

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Accountability through student-led parent conferences

Many middle grades teachers find that student-led parent conferences are a powerful tool for helping students become engaged by taking responsibility for making progress toward grade-level standards, as well as helping to reengage families. When students take more responsibility for preparing for the conferences, they typically find that they have a higher stake in having their family members come to see their portfolios and to hear about their progress. Students also gain confidence in being able to articulate how they are doing in working toward proficiency on grade-level standards.

Student-led conferences usually entail the following steps:

- Students and parents/guardians learn about the conferences at the beginning of the semester.
- Using exemplars, students learn how to score their work based on a grade-level, standards-based rubric.
- Teachers use the exemplars and rubrics to grade student assignments and provide information to help parents/guardians and students understand how to interpret the teacher feedback, grades, and scores.
- Teachers help students collect work samples that have been scored using a standards-based rubric.
- Teachers send a letter home that explains the student-led conference and provides parents/guardians a variety of times to choose from in scheduling their appointment.
- Students rehearse how to explain the standards-based report card and then the work samples and rubrics with their parent to show how well they are working toward the proficient level and above.
- Teachers coach the student/parent teams in setting short- and long-term achievement goals, including options for higher education.

Stiggins described the student-led conference model in his book *Student-Centered Classroom Assessment*.¹



In the Spotlight

Castaic Middle School, Castaic Union Elementary School District, a 2003 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

Every spring for over ten years, Castaic Middle School has hosted an eighth-grade "Portfolio Day," one of the culminating events of their middle school years. Students work hard all year preparing standards-based portfolios that demonstrate their achievement in the eighth-grade language arts content standards. Community members volunteer to participate as evaluators in mock job interviews, scoring small

groups of students as they present their portfolios. Not only do students organize and share their work, but they also gain public speaking skills as they present their portfolios during a community ceremony for board members, parents, and classmates. Students can present their work in groups of three and may include topics related to outside interests. The portfolios are cumulative, showing work collected at the end of every trimester. Community members enjoy helping to prepare students for future careers.

Edna Hill Middle School, Brentwood Union Elementary School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

The Edna Hill staff members designed an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for every student. Students use the ILP as a guide for leading their parent conferences.

McKinleyville Middle School, McKinleyville Union Elementary School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

Twice-yearly student-led conferences focus on the California standards in oral and written language. Students present accomplishments and future goals to their families, supported by work samples. Together they evaluate performance according to a rubric based on standards for each of their courses.

Rancho Milpitas Middle School, Milpitas Unified School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School, and a 2005 California Distinguished School Every February, students at Rancho Milpitas conduct student-led conferences. They keep portfolios of their work that they present to their parents during the February conference. Parents have an opportunity to ask their children questions.

- [Castaic DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Castaic Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
[Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Castaic Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
- [Portfolio Day](#), Recommendation 4—Relevance, TCSII

- [Edna Hill DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Edna Hill Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Edna Hill Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

- [McKinleyville DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [McKinleyville Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: McKinleyville Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

- [Rancho Milpitas DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Rancho Milpitas Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School—Visitor's Guide: Rancho Milpitas Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
- [California Distinguished Schools](#)

Related Links

- [2009 Distinguished Middle and High Schools](#), California Department of Education.
- [Assessing and Reporting Progress Through Student-Led Portfolio Conferences](#)

(Outside Source), National Middle School Association.

- [Educating students and parents/guardians about standards](#), Recommendation 1—Rigor, TCSII.
- [Grades and effective standards-based reporting](#), Recommendation 1—Rigor, TCSII.

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Footnote

¹R. J. Stiggins, *Student-Centered Classroom Assessment*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994.

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Accountability for parents/guardians

Parents, guardians, extended family members, and adults who care share a responsibility to hold students accountable for applying themselves to the business of learning.

Recommendation 12— Partnerships, includes several discussions about how middle grades educators can help parents learn to support their young adolescents as they make the transition from childhood to puberty.

One strategy that many middle schools have employed is to develop a parent compact or parent contract. These documents are short and outline the key expectations that parents will uphold during the school year, including the agreement to:

- Make daily school attendance a family priority.
- Check on completion of homework assignments each day.
- Turn off the television, music devices, or cell phones if the student has not completed homework.
- Discuss teacher comments on student assignments and grade reports.
- Set student learning goals based on grade reports and assignments.
- Set expectations for student behavior at school.
- Attend parent conferences.

Parents/guardians sign the compact or contract, which helps them to remember the responsibility they share for student success. If a student is having difficulties at school, the contract is a good starting point for discussions about how to help the student get back on track for success.

Related Links

- [Getting Ready for Middle School: A Guide for Parents 2008-2010](#), Los Angeles County Office of Education, (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Helping Your Child through Early Adolescence: For Parents of Children from 10 through 14](#), U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Partnerships](#), Recommendation 12, TCSII.

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A standards-based accountability system holds all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, principals, district administrators, policymakers, and state officials) accountable for helping all students achieve proficiency on State Board of Education-adopted content standards. Stakeholders know if they have met that responsibility after examining the data on student achievement and behavior. They discuss the following questions:

- Are all student subgroups reaching proficiency on grade-level content standards?
- Are all students skilled in all domains of the English-language arts standards (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)?¹ Can they read, comprehend, and use the information in complex texts on middle grades subjects?
- Do students behave in a civil and democratic fashion in classroom discussions, campus organizations, and sports?
- Are students able to develop respectful, caring relationships?
- Are students able to engage in subject-matter discussions?
- Are students able to make wise personal choices for health and safety?

As the frontline workers, middle grades educators hold themselves accountable by reflecting on daily work, guiding students to make wise choices, and evaluating and revising instructional methods. Both the school and district examine their practices based on the success or failure of students in grasping the material. Middle grades practitioners throughout California need to share positive results and to learn from one another about how to meet the challenges they face.

Appendixes at the end contain a recommendation and various resources on the topic of accountability.

Related Links

- [Academic discourse](#), Recommendation 1—Rigor, TCSII.

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Footnote

¹ [English-Language Arts Content Standards for Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve](#) (PDF 548KB; 92pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1997, iv.

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