

# Overview of School Accountability

What is an “accountability system,” and why do we need one?

The term “knowledge is power” has existed for about 500 years, and never has it been more relevant than today. Not long ago, parents had no clear way of knowing how well schools were serving their children. Teachers and principals relied solely on local gauges of school performance, while parents only received information on their children, based on local measures. Equity advocates did not know whether disadvantaged students were receiving the learning opportunities and resources they needed, and how those students were performing. School boards, superintendents, and states had no consistent way of identifying schools that needed support to improve and setting them on a course to do so, celebrating exceptional schools.

Enter the “accountability system.” Maryland began looking at school and system performance in 1993, and in 2002 federal legislation required that school performance be gathered and reported in every state. An accountability system helps to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, home language, disability status, or where they live, get the education they need and deserve. It is also designed to ensure that all schools, regardless of where they are located and the students they serve, provide that education. And finally, the goal is to identify schools that need support, and prompt action to improve them, in a way that is understandable, transparent, and uniform. Accountability systems measure a variety of aspects of school performance--the same aspects at every school, for all students--and report the results to the public.

While all this knowledge can be empowering, too much information can be overwhelming. Important details may be lost in a flood of data, and a large amount of information can make it difficult to make decisions. The Maryland Accountability System not only gives stakeholders and leaders data about their schools, but also brings together that data in a usable way to help them ask questions, find answers, make decisions, and act.

How did Maryland develop its new accountability system?

The latest federal legislation about school accountability is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law in 2015. Under ESSA, each state is required to submit a plan detailing how the law will be implemented, including how it will hold schools accountable for student performance. Some parts of the accountability system are required by law--for example, all high schools, nationwide, are accountable for their graduation rate. The law also allows states to choose components of the accountability system that are important to its students and stakeholders.

Maryland created its accountability system over the past 18 months. The State Board of Education, MSDE staff, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, community leaders, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders around the State worked together to create an accountability system that measured relevant, actionable aspects of school performance. The State plan was approved by the U.S. Department of Education in early 2018.

What does Maryland's accountability system measure?

How is that information reported?

The Maryland accountability system includes multiple ways to describe student and school performance. The major components of the accountability system are called "indicators." The indicators are: Academic Achievement, Academic Progress, Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency, and School Quality and Student Success at the Elementary and Middle School Levels; Academic Achievement, Graduation Rate, Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency, Readiness for Postsecondary Success, and School Quality and Student Success at the High School Level.

Each school's results on the Maryland accountability system are compiled and reported on the Maryland Report Card website. The individual School Report Cards are designed so parents, educators, stakeholders, and others can easily understand how their schools are performing, just as traditional report cards help parents understand how their students are performing academically in their classes and in other important ways.

The Maryland Report Card website and the School Report Cards are designed to spark conversation, ideas, and solutions for Maryland schools. Teachers and administrators should use these tools to inform and target improvements. The Report Card can help parents and stakeholders ask questions of school and district leaders, especially about their plans to improve the results. For state and district leaders, the Report Cards for schools and districts provide information about where resources and supports are most needed.

We encourage educators, parents, and others to dig deeper by visiting the Maryland State Department of Education's Report Card website, [MDReportCard.org](https://www.mde.org/MDReportCard.org).