ESSA Listening Sessions
Accountability Summary

In an effort to inform stakeholders and gather feedback, DPI held a series of listening sessions on the updated ESEA, known as ESSA. Educators, parents, and other stakeholders were briefed on ESSA and the potential for change going forward. As part of the presentation, they were asked a series of questions, five of which related to the state-issued school and district report cards. The following is a collection of the feedback they offered.

1. Who are report cards for and how should they be used?

Participants identified a wide-ranging set of targets and use-cases for the report cards. These can be grouped into six inter-related categories: schools and districts, parents, taxpayers and community members, media and realtors, the state, and legislators.

In the aggregate, listening session respondents said the following:

Schools and districts use the information in the report cards to examine their data, inform programming, and to market their schools. Parents use the report cards to compare districts and shop for schools. Taxpayers and community members consult the report cards to stay apprised of school effectiveness and to hold schools accountable. The media and realtors use the report cards as a means to rank-order schools. The state produces the report cards to comply with statutory requirements. Legislators cite the report cards to further their political motivations.

Participants cautioned that while the possible use-cases may or may not be intentional, the report cards are too prone to misuse and misinterpretation to be a quality tool for parents; too narrow in scope but too difficult to understand and explain; and too punitive and do not incentivize school improvement efforts.

2. What measures of the report cards do you find informative and in what way?

Listening session participants identified five main components of the report cards that they find informative: gaps, growth, absenteeism, disaggregation of the data by subgroup, and the front page design/layout. In particular, increased emphasis on growth was a focus for many. Participants cited the desire to be able to act upon the data in the report cards, recognizing absenteeism and disaggregated data by subgroup as a means to do so. They also want the report cards to reflect the progress of the school, hence the inclusion of gaps and growth. Participants

highlighted the need to keep the report cards easily understandable and concise while containing the necessary and proper information. The current layout was recognized by some as fulfilling these tasks (others disagreed).

Participants requested more emphasis on growth and post-secondary readiness measures. They suggested that because it is more difficult for students at the lower proficiency levels there should be an increased value placed on moving students from Below Basic to Basic. In addition, they offer that post-secondary indicators should incorporate non-test-based factors such as problem-solving, communication, and citizenship.

3. What do you see as the primary shortcomings of the report cards?

Participants identified a number of areas where they believed the report cards fall short. Their responses generally focused on the report cards' utility or comparability. Some respondents saw the report cards utility as limited because they are primarily punitive, possibly misleading, and do not encourage school improvement. Others believed the report cards to be of limited value for inter-scholastic/district comparisons due to different schools'/districts' populations of students, varying levels of funding, and ability to attract and retain educators.

- Comparisons between different schools, represented by report card scores and ratings, are unfair/difficult to make due to the following: student demographic characteristics, expenditures/funding, school size, school location, facilities conditions, access to technologies, staffing characteristics, student mobility, teacher/principal retention, parent/community engagement.
- Report cards are punitive—no rewards for positive outcomes, especially for schools with more challenging circumstances. They should better reflect the good work of schools.
- Report cards are blunt tools. The process of aggregating and averaging renders them not specific enough for school improvement and fails to highlight successes. Comparisons among schools is hard to make. Local data is more useful for improvement.
- Schools are unfairly "punished" twice (in different indicators) for areas such as attendance and low ELL-performance.
- Students who have been in a particular school for a shorter period of time should be evaluated differently. Schools are interested in data for students they have had a longer period of time to impact.
- Overall score is seen as a percentage and can be misinterpreted by stakeholders. For example, an overall report card score of 65 falls into the "Meets Expectations" category but may be wrongly perceived as a "D" by some stakeholders.
- Test participation is out of the control of schools given parental opt-out laws and is not a true indicator of "student engagement." The issue is unfair and must be reconciled or removed from the report card.

- Remove overall score and rating. This would allow for focus on more meaningful and representative data. Ranking and rating forces competition, creating more problems than solutions. Labels and current terminology reinforce negative stereotypes. "*We always tell our teachers 'A student is not a score,' but we're telling the public that a school is a score.*"
- Schools/districts should be able to add their own "summary narratives" to the report cards.
- More focus on trend data would be welcome.
- More focus on postsecondary success would be welcome.

4. What indicators are missing from the report cards? What part of schools' and districts' stories don't the report cards tell?

Responses to this question ran the gamut from school climate to innovative school practices to per-pupil funding, while generally avoiding test-based metrics. Participants expressed a desire for the report cards to tell a more complete picture of a school and to encourage schools to place additional focus on course offerings, school services, and school climate.

Participants commonly cited the following areas as missing from the report cards:
- AP/IB/advanced coursework (availability and participation rates)
- School climate—students, teachers, parents
  - Satisfaction
  - Safety
  - Student/teacher/parent engagement
- How student mobility affects scores
- Per-pupil funding/school expenditures
- Community supports and offerings for students, including internships, dual-enrollment, and youth options
- Coursework other than ELA and math
- School-based program/services
  - Before/after school care
  - Dual-immersion
  - STEM
  - Clubs/sports/co-curricular activities
  - Transportation
- Educator retention, training, degree-attainment, diversity
- Post-secondary tracking
- Innovative practices
- Inclusion of school/district-authored narrative

5. If you could direct DPI to focus on including one new indicator in report cards, what would that indicator be?

Responses to this question tended to overlap with the prior question. Nearly all of the participants' suggestions related to measures other than those that are test-based. It is important to consider that based on the transcriptions, it is unclear as to the participants' idea of "indicator" or if they were aware of the distinction between data that are measured, scored, and influence the overall report card score and data that are simply reported for informational purposes. If informed of this distinction, stakeholders may have different responses to what is scored and what is simply reported.

Frequently participants hedged their suggestions by stating the potential pitfalls of including a measure in the report cards. For example, "*Include the rate of turnover for teachers, but it may not be fair due to comparison of pay and benefits with other districts."* Some respondents, concerned about how a metric is measured and may be perceived, (especially relating to safety, climate, and post-secondary measures) suggested the production of two report cards—one for internal use only and one for the public at-large.

Commonly proposed indicators to include in the report cards:
- School climate—students, parents, educators, community members
- Student engagement—emotional, behavioral, cognitive—Social-emotional learning
- Educator engagement—retention/turnover, absence, satisfaction
- Advanced coursework offerings and completion rates
- Further disaggregation of student groups in achievement and growth
- Funding
- School/district narrative/information/highlights written by the school/district
- Inter- and Intra-district transfers
- Educator belief systems
- Services provided
  - Trauma-informed care/mental health services
  - Community schools
- Community-based information
  - Wealth/income/tax base
  - Stability of living situations
  - Crime rate
- District-by-district-chosen indicators (in addition to state-mandated indicators)

As a whole, listening session participants expressed a desire for the next iteration of the report cards to include a much broader array of indicators, especially those that describe a school/district in terms other than as a collection of scores from standardized exams. They value data that reflect the good work of the school/district as well as that

which allows for comparisons to others and encourages and assists in school improvement efforts. They are cognizant of the socio-political implications that accompany the report cards and stress the need for a fair and comprehensive product.