

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is important about the Iowa Department of Education new website?

- The interactive website provides a snapshot of how the state's public schools and districts are performing on two measures: student proficiency rates and growth toward college and career readiness.
- The site represents a first step toward meeting a legislative requirement that the Department develop a system to evaluate the performance of all public schools in Iowa on nine required measures and also to rank the schools based on their performance. This requirement is known as the Attendance Center Rankings system.
- It's important to note that the website rolling out in January ONLY represents a limited set of measures. The broader Attendance Center Rankings system remains under development.

2. What does the interactive website do?

- The website provides a look at any public school's performance on two of the nine required measures:
 - Student proficiency rates across grades 3-8 and 11 based on state assessment results in math and reading. Iowa's definition of "proficient" means performing at a basic level. Proficiency does not necessarily put students on the path to college and career readiness.
 - Growth toward college and career readiness (see question #5).
- Users will be able to choose public schools and districts and access an application that includes percentages at or above proficiency and at or above a growth target. Users also will be able to compare a school or district's performance to the state average and to the performance of other schools and districts across Iowa.

3. Isn't this data already available on the Iowa Department of Education's website?

- Data on growth toward college and career readiness are new.
- The new web-based tool is an efficient way of exploring growth and proficiency rate data at the same time. These data will be much easier to find, navigate and visualize for parents, educators, and other stakeholders.

4. Will this tool label schools based on their performance?

- Not at this time. When the full Attendance Center Rankings system is operational, schools will be grouped into categories based on performance. (See question #9.)

5. How do you measure growth?

- Growth is defined as the percentage of students who met an individual growth target needed to be college and career ready. The Department has worked with Iowa Testing Programs, our state assessment developer, to link the Iowa Assessments to the college and career readiness benchmarks as defined by ACT. ACT has extensive research about college and career readiness. This growth measure sets a rigorous

and attainable expectation that all students will make progress each year and will be ready for college by the end of 12th grade.

- Growth targets are calculated for each student and then compared to assessment results to determine whether a student met the target. The growth percentage represents the number of students in a district, school or subgroup that made progress toward college and career readiness. For example, if a school has 100 students and 50 students met their growth targets ($50/100=50\%$), 50 percent of students would be on track for college and career readiness.

6. Why can't I find data for a particular school, district or subgroup on the website?

- There are several possible explanations for missing or redacted data for a school, district or subgroup. Each school must have both proficiency rate and growth data for the period selected, as well as a large enough group to meet the minimum threshold for reporting. For example, in order to have growth data for a district, school or subgroup, two years of data are needed to calculate where a student performed one year to the next.
- A district, school or subgroup needs at least 30 students to meet the minimum threshold for reporting. For proficiency rate, this means there must be more than 29 students who were continuously enrolled (full academic year) in the year selected. For growth, at least 29 students must be continuously enrolled in a given district, school or subgroup to be able to calculate growth. For example, if a school has fewer than 30 students who are English language learners, these data would not appear on the website.

7. What specifically did the Attendance Center Rankings legislation require?

- House File 215, the education reform bill adopted during the 2013 legislative session, required the Iowa Department of Education to establish specific performance goals for Iowa's 1,300 public schools and to develop a system for grading each school's progress in meeting those goals. The legislation also required the Department to make this information available on the Department's website, educateiowa.gov.
- The legislation included specific measures, such as student proficiency rates, employee turnover, and parent engagement.

8. What are the nine required measures?

1. Student proficiency rates in math and reading
2. Academic growth
3. Attendance rates
4. Parent involvement
5. Employee turnover
6. Community activities and involvement
7. Closing achievement gaps score
8. Graduation rate
9. College readiness

9. How do you measure something like parent involvement or community activities/involvement?

- These required measures were given special consideration by an Iowa Department of Education work team, whose goal was to make sure the system uses valid, meaningful data that have an impact on student achievement. The team concluded that the parent involvement and community activities measures need more study and pilot testing before they become part of the Attendance Center Rankings system. As such, these two measures will be included in the full system in 2016.

10. How and when will schools be ranked?

- Rankings, which are required by law, will be included in the system starting this fall. Our goal is to fold the rankings into the larger context of improving schools. Rather a top-to-bottom ranking of schools from 1 to 1,300, the system will group schools into one of six categories: exceptional, high performing, commendable, acceptable, needs improvement, and priority. The categories will be based on each school's performance on the nine required measures listed in legislation. We anticipate there will be groups of schools in each category.

11. Which of the nine measures will have the greatest weighting in a school's ranking?

- Because the Department wants to establish a fair system of weighting, we have formed a stakeholder group to study this issue and provide recommendations. Representatives are from school districts, area education agencies, the Iowa Department of Education, and education associations.

12. When will the entire system be made public?

- The system will be launched using seven of the nine performance measures in the fall of 2015. The parent involvement and community activities measures will be added to the system in 2016.

13. Why is the Department rolling out part of this now? Why not wait until next fall?

- Rolling out the system in phases holds us accountable to our legislative charge while ensuring our approach to building the system is fair and meaningful. Rolling this out in smaller parts also will help Iowans understand how this complex system works.

14. What has been done so far?

- Timeline:
 - June 2013: Iowa Department of Education work team convened
 - July 2014: Work team's [report](#) to the Legislature
 - January 2015: Website displaying proficiency rates and growth toward college and career readiness
 - Winter and Spring 2015: Attendance Center Rankings system pilot

- Fall 2015: Attendance Center Rankings system operational and made public with seven of nine performance measures
- 2016: Full system operational with all nine performance measures

15. Is there concern that this new tool will present state assessment data that are not aligned to what is taught in Iowa classrooms?

- We support the work under way in Iowa to put in place a high-quality state assessment that reflects what is taught in Iowa classrooms. Legislative approval is needed before Iowa can transition to a new state assessment. Until that happens, school districts under current law must administer the Iowa Assessments to meet federal and state accountability laws. And those testing data must be used to calculate proficiency and growth rates.

