

# District Accountability Guidance

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**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education

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# Introduction

This guidance document<sup>1</sup> describes the local education agency (LEA) and district accountability system mandated under the state’s Education Accountability Act of 2019 (Accountability Act).<sup>2</sup> The Guidance will be issued for informational purposes in the winter of 2020, with full implementation to occur in the fall of 2021.

The following information represents Rhode Island’s long-term plans for the district accountability model (see Box 1). RIDE acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may impact measures reported in the fall of 2021. Thus, RIDE is currently considering what adjustments to the system may be necessary throughout the 2020-21 school year. While individual measures may be adjusted due to COVID-19, the accountability system is still an important part of keeping education stakeholders informed. RIDE plans to release both individual school and district-wide accountability results in the fall of 2021.

This Guidance is intended for the benefit of LEA leaders, state and local policymakers, educators, the general public, and other key stakeholders of public education in Rhode Island. Its purpose is to provide key information regarding the district accountability model so that it is well understood, and results can be used to create plans that will tie resources to outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined under the state’s Administrative Procedures Act, R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-35-1(9).

<sup>2</sup> R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 16-97.1-1 and 16-97.1-2. Although the Guidance refers to a “district” accountability system, the Accountability Act applies to: (a) public school districts; (b) regional school districts; (c) state-operated schools; (d) regional collaborative schools; and (e) charter schools and mayoral academies. See R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-97.1-1(s).

## Key Terms

The following terms are used throughout this Guidance and are defined here as a reference.

- **District accountability model:** A model based on the Rhode Island State Accountability System that RIDE will use to determine star ratings for all LEAs, including charter schools. The results of the model will be used to align resources and supports to outcomes and guide strategic planning processes.
- **District action plan:** An annual plan that describes the specific activities, persons responsible, and timelines for action to be taken as a part of the strategic initiatives set for in the districts three-year improvement plan and identify the staff and financial resources allocated to support these activities.
- **District three-year improvement plan:** A comprehensive, three-year plan that includes an analysis of student and subgroup achievement gaps in core subjects, identifies specific improvement objectives and the strategic initiatives used to address them, how the effect of the initiatives will be evaluated, and the professional development activities that will support the initiatives.
- **State assessment success plan:** A plan submitted annually to RIDE by districts where more than twenty percent (20%) of students do not meet grade level expectations of at least proficient or its equivalent state assessments.
- **School improvement plan:** An annual plan that documents goals, strategies, and action items to lead to improved student achievement outcomes.
- **Equity profile:** A compilation of data and information from school and district report cards that are used to examine equity in student outcomes and to create equity profile cohorts.
- **Equity profile cohorts:** Collaborative networks of support in which LEAS with similar successes, challenges, and goals will work together on strategic planning processes.

Box 1



## Background

The district accountability model, which formerly only included school accountability, is based on the Accountability Act. The school accountability model that was first implemented in the 2017-18 school year included three components:

1. A prudent set of **measures** that differentiate school performance;
2. A **classification system** that places each school in one of five levels based on a set of rules that prioritizes proficiency and growth; and
3. A robust set of information within the state, LEA, and school **report cards** that further inform needs assessments and improvement planning.

The measures are organized by five indicators that are required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): **Academic Achievement, Growth, English Language Proficiency (ELP), Graduation Rate, and School Quality and Student Success (SQSS)**. Schools are awarded points for each of these measures<sup>3</sup>. Schools are then classified based on the points, using a rules-based system called the Star Chart, and the classifications are reported as ratings ranging from one to five stars. It is important to note that each of these measures—which are included in the district accountability model—have been interrogated previously and had some degree of broad consensus among a representative group of Rhode Islanders as they were first proposed and adopted by Rhode Island’s Committee of Practitioners during the agency’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan engagement process.

School performance across the six indicators are reported through a report card, which is publicly available online. Results are reported overall and disaggregated by student subgroups. In addition to the results for each indicator, the report cards also include information pertaining to assessments, i.e., the national Civil Rights Data Collection, educator data, finance, graduation rates, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and postsecondary participation.

The approach to district accountability is informed by the existing school accountability model, ESSA, and the Accountability Act. The Act requires that RIDE create a system for evaluating, on an annual basis, the performance of both LEAs and individual public schools. The models

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<sup>3</sup> See the 2019 [RI School Accountability Technical Report](#) for further information regarding the number of points allocated to each measure.

identify individual schools and LEAs that need comprehensive support and improvement. The requirements of the Act provided the impetus to develop the district accountability model.

RIDE developed the accountability model with input from national experts on assessment and accountability. RIDE also consulted other states' accountability systems to inform the components of this model, such as additional indicators that will be included in the district report cards.

## Highlights of the Accountability Model

- The school accountability model serves as the basis for the district accountability model in which the school ratings are aggregated to the district level.
  - The same indicators and measures are included.
  - The same cut scores, points, and star ratings are used—like schools, districts will be rated from one to five stars.
  - The star ratings are interpreted as defining the overall successes and challenges of a district.
- Star ratings are used to determine the level of support RIDE provides to districts for improvement efforts.
  - There are four levels of support: (1) General Support, (2) Targeted Support, (3) Comprehensive Support, and (4) Additional State Intervention.
- District star ratings provide potential to include additional students who may not have been included in school star ratings. For example, outplaced<sup>4</sup> students are included at the district level, but not the school level. Additionally, multiple schools in a district may not have enough students to report a measure or student subgroup, but when aggregated to the district level, could have enough data to hold the district accountable for student populations too small to count at the school level.

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<sup>4</sup> The term “outplaced” refers to students who are enrolled in an LEA and count there for all reporting purposes, but are placed in an educational setting outside of the LEA’s traditional schools. These are typically differently-abled students with an individualized education program (IEP) who have needs beyond what is offered in their home school setting.

## Purpose

The primary purpose of Rhode Island’s district accountability model is to support and ensure improvement in student outcomes. RIDE’s comprehensive system of supports and services focuses on improving school communities and aligning resources to the areas of most need. The district accountability model is a complement to the school accountability model, and together both models comprise a state accountability system that provides clear and actionable information to stakeholders. The district accountability model provides district leaders with information to help them:

- Establish clear expectations for growth and improvement for all students
- Develop three-year district improvement plans, annual action plans, and state assessment success plans
- Utilize funds and resources to support strategic actions articulated in the various improvement plans
- Monitor district progress and performance towards targeted areas of growth and improvement for all students and student groups, including multilingual learners and differently-abled students

When district leaders are able to accomplish these actions, the underlying intent for the accountability system posits that student outcomes will improve. Several guiding principles underscored the design of the district accountability system’s development (Box 2).

### *Guiding Principles Underlying the Design of the District Accountability Model*

**Transparency:** Provide transparency in the system’s purpose, use, and calculations

**Urgency:** Emphasize the urgency of improving schools and districts

**Clarity:** Ensure that all resources can be easily understood so communities, LEAs, and families clearly understand intent and outcomes

**Equity:** Ensure that resources and outcomes are equitable and reach all students and student groups

**Support:** Create a system of support rather than one of compliance.

**Box 2**



# Overview

## Accountability Indicators

The Rhode Island Accountability System includes six indicators, each consisting of one or more measures. The six indicators are Academic Achievement, Growth, English Language Proficiency, Graduation Rate, and School Quality and Student Success (SQSS). The same indicators and corresponding measures are used for both the school and district accountability models. The specific measures for SQSS are Exceeds Expectations in English Language Arts, Exceeds Expectations in Mathematics, Student Chronic Absenteeism, Teacher Chronic Absenteeism, Student Suspension, Commissioner’s Seal and Post-Secondary Success. The Commissioner’s Seal and Post-Secondary Success measures together are called the Diploma Plus measures (Table 2).<sup>5</sup>

Districts will be awarded points based on their performance on each measure within the accountability model. The points are a function of each measure’s scale and number of metrics in each indicator only. The points have no ‘weight’ relative to the other indicators in the model because they are never arithmetically combined. In other words, to calculate a school or district’s star rating one must use the system’s Star Chart; star ratings are not derived by summing up the points across all measures. The following table provides an overview of each of the indicators in the district accountability model and the number of points awarded for that indicator (Table 1).

*Table 1. Indicators and measures included in the school and district accountability models*

Indicator	Measure	Points	Data Source
	English Language Arts	1-4	State Assessment

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on each of these indicators and measures, see the Rhode Island State Accountability System Technical Report.



<b>Academic Achievement</b>	Mathematics	1-4	State Assessment
<b>Growth</b>	English Language Arts	1-3	State Assessment
	Mathematics	1-3	State Assessment
<b>English Language Proficiency</b>	Progress toward English Language Proficiency	1-4	WIDA ACCESS 2.0 Assessment
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	Composite Graduation Rate	1-5	Data collected from districts
<b>Diploma Plus<sup>6</sup></b>	Commissioner’s Seal	1-3	Assessment vendors and districts
	Postsecondary Success	1-3	Assessment vendors and districts
<b>School Quality and Student Success (SQSS)</b>	Student Chronic Absenteeism	1-3	Data collected from districts
	Teacher Chronic Absenteeism	1-3	Data collected from districts
	Student Suspension	1-3	Data collected from districts

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<sup>6</sup> For ESSA purposes, Diploma Plus is a subset of School Quality and Student Success (SQSS).

	ELA Exceeds Expectations	1-3	State Assessment
	Mathematics Exceeds Expectations	1-3	State Assessment

*Other Indicators*

In the future, district accountability may include other indicators such as indicators relating to a district’s financial health and facilities. However, as RIDE implements a new aspect to accountability statewide, any new indicators will not impact the district star ratings. The purpose of new indicators will be to inform strategic plans and local decisions.

*LEA Calculations and Classification*

All students within a district will be included in the calculation of the district star ratings. Just like traditional districts, also referred to as LEAs,) charter LEAs will include the one or more charter schools in their LEA as well as any outplaced students.

The district accountability model will use the same business rules as the school accountability model. The calculations, points allocated to each indicator, and rules for determining the star ratings will all be the same.<sup>7</sup> Outplaced students who are not assigned to a traditional district school will count in district accountability, which is consistent with how district data are reported throughout RIDE data reporting.

Like school accountability, district accountability results will be provided for each measure at the full district level as well as for ten student subgroups. The student subgroups are defined by race and ethnicity, economically disadvantaged status, differently-abled students, and multilingual learners.

*Star Ratings*

Like the school ratings, district classifications are presented as star ratings (★). Each district will be awarded a rating from one star (★) to five stars (★★★★★) based on their overall

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 3 of the Rhode Island State Accountability System: Technical Report for an explanation of the business rules used to determine the star rating system.

performance across all of the indicators in the accountability model, with five stars indicating the highest level of performance. The star rating performance level descriptions used in the school accountability system are the basis for the district performance level descriptions (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Star Rating Descriptors*

Star Rating	Means an LEA has...
★★★★★	Strong performance on all indicators
★★★★	Generally strong performance
★★★	Some areas of weakness
★★	Weaknesses at the overall LEA level
★	The lowest performance in terms of achievement and growth or graduation

Each fall, districts will be awarded a rating of one to five stars based on their performance on each of the indicators in the most recent reporting year. For most measures, districts are evaluated based on the previous academic year. However, the Graduation and Diploma Plus measures are calculated on a one-year lag due to the additional time needed for collecting and validating these data; for example, the 2019 accountability results for these measures were based on 2018 graduates.

Charters will participate in district accountability with all of the same parameters and accountability implications as traditional LEAs. However, RIDE’s Charter Office will continue to monitor and support charters, and RIDE’s Charter Office and the Division of System Transformation will collaborate to support charters within the parameters and requirements of both offices.

Some measures will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the lack of 2020 assessment results impact all of the assessment measures in the 2021 accountability data. RIDE released a [FAQ document](#) for Fall 2021 school accountability in September of 2020, and will

adjust the document as the state adapts to new information throughout the 2020-21 school year. Any changes to measures in the school accountability model also will be applied to the district accountability model.

The table below (Table 2), which is used to determine a school’s Star Rating, also will be used to determine a district’s star rating. As in the school accountability model, a district’s star rating is determined by its performance on each indicator, and whichever indicator has the lowest value determines the rating. To calculate a district’s star rating, one must first calculate the number of points earned in each column and circle that cell in the table. The lowest row with a cell circled is the district’s star rating.

*Table 2. Star Chart*

Star Rating	Achievement – ELA and Math (Max. 8 Points)	Growth – ELA and Math (Max. 6 Points)	English Language Proficiency (Max. 4 Points)	Graduation Rate (Max. 5 Points)	Diploma Plus (Max. 6 Points)	Exceeds Expectations, Absenteeism, & Suspension (Max. 15 Points)	# of Low-Performing Subgroups
★★★★★	6-8 points (3-4 per subject)	4-6 points (2-3 per subject)	3-4 points	4-5 points	5-6 points	12-15 points**	None
★★★★	5-6 points (2-4 per subject)		2 points		4 points (2+ per indicator)	10-11 points**	1 subgroup
★★★	7-11 total points*			3 points	3-4 points	7-9 points**	More than 1 subgroup
★★	5-6 total points*		1 point	2 points	2 points	5-6 points**	
★	2 points	2 points		1 point			

\* Schools and districts missing growth have alternate cut points for levels 2 and 3, using only achievement points. Those are: 3-star level: 4 points, 2-star level: 3 points

\*\* Schools and districts missing one to three ‘School Quality and Student Success’ measures have alternate cuts for the second to last column. Those are:

- 4 indicators available: 5-star level: 10-12 pts, 4-star level: 8-9 pts, 3-star level: 6-7 pts, 2-star level: 4-5 pts
- 3 indicators available: 5-star level: 8-9 pts, 4-star level: 7 pts, 3-star level: 5-6 pts, 2-star level: 3-4 pts
- 2 indicators available: 5-star level: 5-6 pts, 4-star level: 4 pts, 3-star level: 3 pts, 2-star level: 2 pts

As shown in Table 2, performance on the two Diploma Plus measures is combined in a single column. Similarly, performance across the five other School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) measures is also combined in a column. In those columns, higher performance in one or more of the measures may make up for lower performance in another. Additionally, as shown in the chart, at the 2- and 3-star levels, performance across achievement and growth is combined to determine a rating. This means that at the 2- and 3-star levels higher growth can compensate

for lower achievement and vice versa, but to reach 4 or 5 stars a district must be strong in both achievement and growth.

The ‘number of low performing subgroups’ column represents the number of student groups—including by race and ethnicity, economically disadvantaged status, differently-abled students, and multilingual learners—performing at the 1-star level. This means that a district cannot earn a 5-star rating if even one of these student subgroups is performing at the 1-star level.

## *Use of District Star Ratings*

At its core, the district accountability model promotes information-sharing and support. District star ratings will be shared directly with districts and also available publicly on the RIDE website through district report cards. Similar to Rhode Island’s school report cards, the district report cards will provide useful information to education stakeholders, including students, families, educators, and community members. In turn, stakeholders will be empowered to hold districts responsible for student success.

RIDE will use the district star ratings to determine the level of support it provides to districts. Only the star ratings will determine the level of support districts receive, which is an intentionally simple model. However, districts will work through strategic planning processes in cohorts, referred to as *equity profile cohorts*. In this context, an equity profile is a compilation of data and information from school and district report cards that are used to examine equity in student outcomes. RIDE will support collaboration among LEAs in the cohorts through sharing of resources, best practices, and evidence-based tools to address identified areas of need.

The model includes four levels of support: (1) General Support, (2) Targeted Support, (3) Comprehensive Support, and (4) Additional State Intervention (see Table 3).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In addition, a 1 Star Rating could lead the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to authorize the “progressive levels of control” by RIDE “over the school and/or district budget, program, and/or personnel,” as well as potentially, reconstitution under the Crowley Act. *See* R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-7.1-5(a).

*Table 3. Overview of star ratings and accompanying potential RIDE supports*

Level of Support	Criteria	Example RIDE Supports	Requirements for LEAs
Not identified for support	3-5 Star Rating	Regular monitoring, and technical support as needed/requested by LEA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LEAs in equity profile cohorts engaged in collaborative networks of improvement</li> </ul>	Create a 3-year strategic plan, annual state assessment plan, and other mandated plans. Monitoring rotation with RIDE.
Identified for support - cohort districts with RIDE support	2 Star Rating	LEAs in equity profile cohorts collaborate <i>with support from RIDE</i> on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data analysis</li> <li>Strategic planning</li> <li>Analysis of resources and outcomes</li> </ul>	Create a 3-year strategic plan, annual state assessment plan, and other mandated plans.  Cohort support and monitoring with RIDE technical assistance.
Identified for comprehensive support	1 Star Rating	Technical Assistance from RIDE and strategic planning support, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1:1 Superintendent coaching model</li> <li>Data analysis</li> <li>Strategic planning</li> <li>Analysis of resources and outcomes</li> </ul>	Create a 3-year strategic plan, annual state assessment plan, and other mandated plans.  Minimum of two years of support from RIDE, or until acquiring a 2 Star Rating. District will then be added to 2-Star Equity Profile Cohort.
Additional State	1 Star Rating AND	Supports are designed in	Monitoring and support

Intervention: Financial/Academic	decision made by the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Commissioner as empowered by the Crowley Act.	accordance with contextual needs.	are also determined based on contextual needs.
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### *Moving Ahead*

The district accountability model advances the Commissioner’s vision to transition RIDE from an agency concerned chiefly with compliance to one primarily interested in providing support, while also meeting the requirements of the Accountability Act. This model provides information for district leaders to make informed decisions in their efforts to improve student outcomes. Additionally, education stakeholders can use the information to hold districts accountable for the student outcomes observed in their communities.

In December of 2020 RIDE shared star ratings with district leaders for informational purposes. These results reflect data from the 2018-19 school year (and one-year prior for the graduation indicator). Due to the lack of state testing in the spring of 2020, this data reflects the most recent available. Full implementation of District Accountability--where results are shared publicly, and RIDE provides support to districts based on district ratings--is planned for the fall of 2021, pending administration of the 2021 spring state assessment.

RIDE plans to pilot the supports it offers to districts with a cohort of several LEAs during the 2020-21 school year. RIDE will undertake cycles of continuous improvement to make refinements to the model prior to its full implementation in the 2021-22 school year. RIDE will also research finance and facilities indicators that will eventually be part of district report cards. Updated guidance that reflects these refinements and additions will be released prior to the 2021-22 school year. RIDE will provide training on the district accountability model to district leaders and other stakeholders accordingly.

RIDE looks forward to working with districts to establish more effective partnerships focused on continuous improvement and shared responsibility. While we shift systems to serve communities more equitably, let us root ourselves in a belief in what is possible for youth across Rhode Island and reflect the boundless sense of hope for which our Ocean State is known.