

# 2009-10 STATE TOOLS FOR ASSESSING SCHOOL AND DISTRICT STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTS FOR STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

## Purpose of Tools

Achievement and program data are essential if school and local educational agency (LEA) plans are to be meaningful and lead to improved student achievement. Student achievement data should include locally collected, formative data on student achievement, as well as summative data. For district and school level information, see data on the California Department of Education (CDE) Accountability Progress Reporting (APR) Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ar/>.

While systematic program evaluation data on individual instructional programs are frequently not available, the state has developed four state tools, which together present a large picture of a school's or LEA's instructional program and the degree of coherence and effectiveness of this program.

## The Four State Program Self-Assessment Tools

The four state tools are designed to function as a group, providing insight on school and district structures and supports for English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). Together, they assess the coherence of school-level instructional programs, the capacity of the district to build and support this coherence, and the support services it provides to ELs and SWDs beyond the basic instructional program.

### Academic Program Survey

The Academic Program Survey (APS) is the foundational document of this set of tools and should be administered in any under performing school to help identify resources and structures needed for instructional improvement. For LEAs failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) at the aggregate (or district) level, the APS is recommended for all schools in the district. It is organized around nine essential program components (EPCs) found to be associated with improved student achievement in underperforming schools (HTA Associates/2008).

### District Assistance Survey

The District Assistance Survey (DAS) is designed to guide LEAs and their technical assistance providers in assessing LEA capacity to support a coherent instructional program at all schools and for all students. It is organized around the seven areas of district need, codified in the California *Education Code (EC)*, Section 52059(e)(1). Prior to completing the DAS, it is essential for the LEA to carefully examine and discuss all AYP data.

### English Learner Subgroup Self Assessment

The English Learner Subgroup Self Assessment (ELSSA) is a needs assessment tool that focuses exclusively on the needs of ELs. While EL needs are addressed in both the APS and the DAS, the ELSSA assists the LEA in identifying the root causes for academic underachievement among ELs and sets direction for improving services for these students.

### Inventory of Support and Services

The Inventory of Support and Services (ISS) is a needs assessment tool and designed to help a district assess its programs and services for SWDs. While the needs of SWDs are explicitly included in the APS and DAS, the ISS provides a more targeted and in-

## **2009-10 STATE TOOLS FOR ASSESSING SCHOOL AND DISTRICT STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTS FOR STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS**

depth analysis of program elements that can guide actions for increased student achievement results for students with disabilities. .

### **Underlying Assumptions in All Four Tools**

Embedded in all four tools are several basic assumptions about school-level implementation of the EPCs and district-level support for classroom instruction and school operations.

#### **Assumptions about School-Level Effectiveness**

- High quality "first instruction" is pivotal. This includes teachers' knowledge about the California standards and their focus on delivering effective subject-specific teaching, learning, and assessment activities in ways that promote mastery of the standards.
- Not all students progress at the same rate; some need additional support and interventions. A tiered approach to intervention, described in the frameworks and recently-posted CDE descriptions of Response to Intervention (RtI), includes three levels:
  - Benchmark (or early) interventions for students who are satisfactorily achieving grade-level standards, but who on occasion may require additional assistance and support for particular standards and concepts.
  - Strategic interventions for students no more than two years below grade-level standards. Strategic students are supported both within and beyond the basic core program through additional instructional time and differentiated instructional materials. Quick-time, classroom reteaching is an important element of the dedicated instructional time set aside for English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics.
  - Intensive interventions for students who are working more than two years below grade level. These students have the greatest need and are usually at high risk for retention or later failure to meet proficiency standards on the California Standards Tests (CSTs) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Intensive intervention is typically delivered as an accelerated replacement curriculum. Students attend intensive intervention classes until they are ready to return to the regular core curriculum with strategic support, unless alternative placements have been deemed appropriate. No student should be placed in a special education class until he/she has been appropriately assessed/diagnosed and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been developed to document the need for an alternative educational setting.
- SWDs should participate in the core program as much as possible. However, if students are not academically successful in the core program, strategic or intensive support should be available to them.
- By definition, ELs require English language support in order to be fully successful in the core curriculum. Their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in both English and their primary language need to be carefully assessed in order to provide appropriate English Language Development (ELD) support.

## 2009-10 STATE TOOLS FOR ASSESSING SCHOOL AND DISTRICT STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTS FOR STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

- “High priority students” is a generic term that describes students who need additional support to meet grade-level standards. The term includes a wide range of students at all ages and across all groups whose needs have not been met due to challenging academic, social, or life circumstances. The first steps in addressing their needs are proper assessments and careful attention to their instructional setting.

### Assumptions about District-Level Effectiveness

At the district level, it is critical that every district has:

- A shared vision that begins at the top of the system and can be seen throughout the system. This vision reflects a commitment to the academic achievement of all students and is supported through district resources and supports, including appropriate interventions, supplemental materials, additional learning time, additional diagnostic and support resources, ongoing monitoring, and careful program evaluation to ensure that interventions and other critical educational programs are working.
- Well planned systems to support schools around effective and rigorous implementation of the State Board of Education (SBE)-adopted/standard-aligned instructional programs.
- A coherent district-wide professional development plan focused on the implementation of the LEA-adopted instructional materials and on the analysis of data to inform instruction.
- A robust data system that provides timely and useful formative and summative assessment data to inform instruction and improve learning.

Taken together, these programmatic and systemic features will go a long way to help all students, particularly high priority students, to achieve at higher levels and to help schools and district build greater systemic capacity over time.

### Tool Use

Any of the four assessment tools *could* be used in isolation and/or by individuals working alone. However, the intention is that they be used collectively and with an inclusive group of stakeholders in order to provide a more complete picture of district-wide efficacy to ensure that school and district plans reflect a common understanding of student achievement data and tool results.

With the exception of the ELSSA, which is primarily a diagnostic tool based on the cycle of inquiry approach, each tool provides statements of full implementation to assist an LEA or technical assistance provider to gauge implementation of a particular standard and consider the “next steps” to strengthen implementation.

In the APS, there are four distinct levels of implementation for each standard: full, substantial, partial, and minimum. Full implementation represents 100 percent of the population measured in that standard (e.g., students, teachers, principals); substantial implementation represents at least 75 percent; partial implementation represents at least 50 percent; and minimal implementation represents anything less than 50 percent.

The DAS assesses broad, but critical, district structures and support systems that play out across schools and district operations. As such, it does not lend itself to discrete

## **2009-10 STATE TOOLS FOR ASSESSING SCHOOL AND DISTRICT STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTS FOR STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS**

measurements of implementation. Instead, the DAS and the data derived from it are intended to be used as a catalyst for conversation about the current overall system capacity to support the full implementation of the California standards-based adopted curriculum and the necessary district-level activities to build this capacity. For this reason, users are asked to gauge district implementation of a standard across three broad categories: full, partial (defined as 'in progress'), and minimal. The intent is that district will engage in substantive and open conversations about the DAIT standards, the implementation statements, and their systems to support these standards. At the same time, the standards and implementation statements may serve as a blueprint to guide districts in developing the district-level policies, structures, and supports to improve their capacity.

The ISS is intended to foster dialogue about services and supports for SWDs. It assists the district and district leadership team in assessing its structures and support to SWDs in the general education classroom and in any support services identified in their IEPs. Ideally, the ISS should be administered subsequent to the administration of the APS and DAS and to the examination of the data emerging from these two tools. Like the other tools, the ISS is a guidance document only.

The four state tools are complemented by a toolkit developed by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) in concert with the CDE under the District Intervention and Capacity Building Initiative, a project funded by the Gates Foundation. This toolkit, like the DAS, is organized around the seven areas of district work. It is available at the CCSESA Web site at <http://www.ccsesa.org/> (Outside Source).

### **Next Steps in Tool Refinement**

Each of the four state tools was revised in 2008-09. Well over a hundred people were involved in their revisions, but it is understood that the changes will only be judged to be successful when they are applied in real schools and districts. Thus, 2009-10 will be seen as a "pilot" year for these tools. During the next year, the CDE will work with the Comprehensive Center (CA CC) and others to assess their utility and construct validity. We encourage your feedback as this pilot proceeds.