

# Communications *Toolkit*



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## Introduction

Iowa legislators in 2013 directed the Iowa Department of Education through House File 215 to develop a system for evaluating the performance of all public schools in Iowa on certain measures and ranking the schools according to their results. The system is known as the Attendance Center Rankings system.

The Department believes this system can be developed in a positive and useful way to help Iowans better understand how schools are doing and to enhance community conversations about improving schools. The Department has taken a thoughtful and inclusive approach to building this type of system, which remains under development and is scheduled for a more complete release in the fall of 2015. On January 30, the Department will launch a [website](#) that provides a snapshot of performance based on two of the nine measures required by law. It is important to note that this website represents a limited set of measures, not a complete system. Rankings, which are required by law, will be included in the system this fall. At that time, schools will be grouped into one of six categories: exceptional, high performing, commendable, acceptable, needs improvement, and priority.

This toolkit is intended to help educators in communicating about the first phase of the Attendance Center Rankings system. More resources will be provided this fall.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: All communications materials in this toolkit are for optional use and are customizable to fit the needs of individual communities. These materials are EMBARGOED until the website is made public on January 30, 2015.**

## 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: System fully operational with all nine performance measures



### Progress report for legislators

- The new website serves as an update for Iowa legislators and other stakeholders on the Iowa Department of Education's work to develop a system for evaluating the performance of public schools as required by law.
- The 2013 education reform law (House File 215) directs the Department to develop a system for evaluating and ranking schools based on their performance on nine measures: student proficiency rates, academic growth, attendance rates, parent involvement, employee turnover, community activities and involvement, closing achievement gaps score, graduation rate, and college readiness.
- In legislation, this system is known as the Attendance Center Rankings system.
- This system is under development and is scheduled for a more complete release in the fall of 2015.
- In the meantime, many months were invested into the planning and development of the new website.
- The new website allows users to look up public school and school district performance on two of the nine measures required by law:
  1. Student proficiency rates in 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.
  2. Growth toward college and career readiness.
- This website represents a limited set of measures, not a complete Attendance Center Rankings system. No rankings are included at this time.

### Transparency and accountability

- Student data are essential in our efforts to drive improvement in classrooms, and we support making this information easier for the public to find and understand.
- This new website can help Iowans better understand how their schools are doing and to enhance conversations in local communities about how to improve schools.
- Rolling out the Attendance Center Rankings system in phases holds the Department accountable to our legislative charge while ensuring our approach to building the system is fair and meaningful. It also will help Iowans understand how this complex system works.

### Fair and thoughtful approach

- School report cards and rankings are not uncommon nationally. Iowa has learned from other states that the best approach to building this type of system is to be inclusive, fair

and to use data in a positive way – to improve and support schools that are struggling, as well as to celebrate schools that are showing progress.

- The Iowa Department of Education has used a thoughtful, inclusive approach to developing the Attendance Center Rankings system.
- Rankings, which are required by law, will be included in the system starting this fall. The goal is to fold the rankings into the larger context of improving schools. Rather than a top-to-bottom ranking of 1 to 1,300, schools eventually will be grouped into one of six categories: exceptional, high performing, commendable, acceptable, needs improvement, and priority.
- The Department is seeking input on, among other things: how to define some performance measures so that they're meaningful and how to weight performance measures appropriately.

## Supporting Iowa schools

- Our schools have dedicated education professionals who are working hard for kids every day. These professionals deserve our respect and support.
- This website, and the broader Attendance Center Rankings system, tell part of the story of how Iowa schools are doing, but there are individual narratives behind student performance data.
- Parents and other Iowans are encouraged to connect with their local schools. We all have a shared responsibility to improve our schools and prepare every student for success after high school.



## Answers to questions from the public

### 1. What is rolling out in January?

- The Iowa Department of Education is launching an interactive website that 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.
- This 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 specifically 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 collected and 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.
- Our hope is that these data can help Iowans understand how their schools are doing and enhance communication in local communities about how schools can improve.

### 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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.





## Sample Letters

### From School Administrator to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I'm writing to make you aware of a new state website that provides Iowans a snapshot of how our public schools and school districts are performing in two areas: student proficiency rates and growth toward college and career readiness.

This website will enable users to look up this information for any public school or district, including ours. You may find the new website, <http://reports.educateiowa.gov/acr>, a good source of information.

The website was developed by the Iowa Department of Education as a first step in meeting a requirement of the 2013 education reform law. This law requires the Department to evaluate and rank schools based on their performance on nine specific measures and to post this information on its website.

This evaluation system is under development, and we expect to see a more complete system this fall. According to the Iowa Department of Education, the system will be rolled out in phases this year and next year. It's important to note that the new website available now does not represent the complete evaluation system. Instead, it represents the performance of each public school and district on two of the nine measures required by the law:

- Student proficiency rates: The percentage of students proficient in math and reading in grades 3-8 and 11 based on state assessment results. 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: The percentage of students who met a growth target needed to be college and career ready. The Department has worked with our state assessment developer to link the Iowa Assessments to the college and career readiness benchmarks defined by ACT. The growth measure sets an expectation that all students will make progress each year and will be ready for college by the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The other seven performance measures are: Attendance rates, parent involvement, employee turnover, community activities and involvement, graduation rate, college readiness, and closing achievement gaps.

We believe this information can complement conversations in our community about our work to provide students a great education. However, student performance data only tell part of the story about how our schools are doing. To get the full story, I encourage you to stay connected with our schools as much as possible. Thanks for all you do for our kids.

Sincerely,

NAME



## From School Administrator to Staff

Dear Staff,

I want to make you aware that the state is launching a new website that provides a snapshot of how Iowa public schools and districts are performing in two areas: student proficiency rates and growth toward college and career readiness.

This website will enable users to look up this information for any public school or district, including ours.

The new website, <http://reports.educateiowa.gov/acr>, was developed by the Iowa Department of Education as a first step in meeting a requirement of the 2013 education reform law. This component of the law, known as the Attendance Center Rankings system, requires the Department to evaluate and rank schools based on their performance on nine required measures and to post this information on its website.

The Attendance Center Rankings system is under development, and we expect to see a more complete system this fall. According to the Iowa Department of Education, the system will be rolled out in phases this year and next year. It's important to note that the new website available now does not represent the complete evaluation system. Instead, it represents the performance of each public school and district on two of the nine measures required by the law:

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The other seven performance measures are: Attendance rates, parent involvement, employee turnover, community activities and involvement, graduation rate, college readiness, and closing achievement gaps.

I believe this information can be useful in our work to provide students a great education. However, student performance data only tell part of the story about how our schools are doing. I know how hard all of you are working for our kids, and I see the success stories every day. Let's work together to provide the full story by connecting with our parents and stakeholders as much as possible. You have my respect and support. Thank you for your commitment to our ongoing improvement.

Sincerely,

NAME



## From School Administrator to School Board Members

Dear Board Members,

I want to make you aware that the state is launching a new website that provides a snapshot of how Iowa public schools and districts are performing in two areas: student proficiency rates and growth toward college and career readiness.

This website will enable users to look up this information for any public school or district, including ours.

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