



STATE OF WISCONSIN

Legislative Audit Bureau

Joe Chrisman
State Auditor

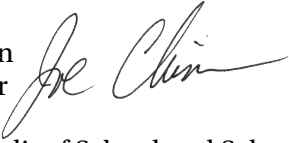
22 East Mifflin Street, Suite 500
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Main: (608) 266-2818
Hotline: 1-877-FRAUD-17

www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab
AskLAB@legis.wisconsin.gov

DATE: February 26, 2025

TO: Senator Eric Wimberger and
Representative Robert Wittke, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

FROM: Joe Chrisman
State Auditor 

SUBJECT: Proposed Audit of School and School District Accountability Reports—Background Information

At your request, we have gathered some background information that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee may find helpful in considering an audit of school and school district accountability reports, which are prepared by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Wisconsin Statutes require DPI to annually publish by November 30 a school and school district accountability report that includes multiple measures to determine a school's performance or a school district's improvement. Wisconsin Statutes require DPI to annually assign to each school or school district one of the following performance categories:

- five stars out of five—significantly exceeds expectations;
- four stars out of five—exceeds expectations;
- three stars out of five—meets expectations;
- two stars out of five—meets few expectations; and
- one star out of five—fails to meet expectations.

School and school district accountability reports include outcomes in four priority areas:

- achievement, which measures the level of knowledge and skills among students in the school;
- growth, which describes how much student knowledge of English language arts and mathematics in the school changes from year to year;
- target group outcomes, which demonstrate outcomes for students with the lowest test scores in their school; and
- on-track to graduation, which indicates the success of students in the school in achieving educational milestones that predict postsecondary success.

Although assessment data from the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) are a component of the school and school district accountability report, DPI indicates that the reports are scored using multiple additional nonassessment-based measures, including attendance, chronic absenteeism, and graduation. DPI describes WSAS as a comprehensive statewide program designed to provide information about what students know in core academic areas and whether they can apply what they know. The Wisconsin Forward Exam, PreACT Secure, and ACT assessments are each included in WSAS.

In June 2024, DPI announced it would update the terminology used to describe student performance levels on statewide standardized assessments in WSAS. DPI also indicated it collaborated with a team of Wisconsin educators to establish updated cut scores. The cut scores are used to separate students into one of four performance levels. As a result of the activities in summer 2024, assessment cut scores were updated for Wisconsin Forward Exam, PreACT Secure, and ACT assessments. The 2023-2024 assessment data used in the November 2024 school and school district accountability report reflect these cut score updates for one of the up to three years of achievement data used in the report.

An audit of school and school district accountability reports could evaluate:

- the written policies and procedures DPI has implemented to govern its process for developing the annual report and for updating assessment cut scores, whether these written policies and procedures comply with statutory and administrative rule requirements, and the extent to which these policies and procedures were changed in recent years;
- the extent to which DPI consistently followed its policies and procedures when developing the report and updating assessment cut scores in recent years;
- the process used by DPI to solicit input from educators, school administrators, and parents in developing the report and updating assessment cut scores in recent years, including how DPI identified and selected the individuals as well as the guidance and instructions DPI provided to them;
- the extent to which DPI relied on assistance from outside entities or hired outside vendors to develop information that contributed to the report and led to updated assessment cut scores;
- the extent to which the process used by DPI to develop the November 2024 report and update the assessment cut scores was similar to and different from processes used in the past and describe why the process was changed; and
- the changes in the distribution of schools and school districts in the performance categories assigned by DPI.

I hope you find this information helpful. Please contact me with any questions.

JC/ag

cc: Senator Chris Kapenga
Senator Howard Marklein
Senator Robert Wirsch
Senator Melissa Ratcliff

Representative Dan Knodl
Representative Mark Born
Representative Francesca Hong
Representative Sequanna Taylor

Dr. Jill Underly, State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction