Assessment and Accountability Policy Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary & Recommendations
September 21, 2020

The Assessment and Accountability Advisory Committee (AAPAC) met on September 16, 2020 to discuss several assessment and accountability issues exacerbated by the pandemic and related changes to instructional services being provided to Utah students. These included a preview of the known threats to completion of state assessments in 2021, an alternative student growth calculation method, implications for school accountability in 2021 and potentially beyond, the need for collecting "opportunity to learn" data, revision of the rounding rules for Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) and Targeted School Improvement (TSI) identification, and changes to the TSI identification of the EL student group to include English language proficiency progress. The following information is designed to provide the Board the high-level details of each topic discussed, and specific recommendations made by the committee.

Assessment Prognosis for 2021

There are many challenges in moving forward with "status quo" approach to administering statewide summative assessments in 2020-2021 that may create validity threats. The first is logistical, ensuring participation in state assessments can be completed safely, feasibly, and in a practical way. Next, considerations of utility must be addressed in determining if the results are accurate, fair, and provide a useful measure of student achievement. Given the limited resource of time, do the benefits of state assessments justify the time and resources required to support it? Finally, will all students have equitable access or legitimate opportunity to participate and meaningfully engage in the assessments, potentially under a wide range of assessment and learning scenarios? Despite these risks the committee felt that the need for academic achievement and growth data, to help understand and respond to the academic impacts of COVID-19 is very high and supports continued efforts to deliver state assessments. Recommendations around the use of the results for accountability purposes will be addressed below.

Calculating Student Growth

The calculation of student growth provides valuable information to educators and the public regarding the impacts of curriculum, instructional programs, and teacher practices in the content areas of English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science in grades 4-10. Due to the suspension of state assessment in the Spring of 2020, the single year-to-year method of calculating student growth percentiles (SGP) will not be available in 2021. The committee discussed a possible substitute method of utilizing a skip-year calculation (i.e. calculating student growth from 2019 to 2021) and the feasibility of including that data in 2021 accountability determinations. While skip-year growth calculations are common and have been used in some other states, switching to this method creates several challenges. These include the loss of growth scores for fourth grade students in ELA and mathematics and fifth grade students in science. In addition, a reduced correlation to prior achievement for all students due to the additional gap year. This was especially evident in math. The Center for Assessment conducted a skip-year growth analysis using the 2017 to 2019 Utah data. The resulting analysis found differences between skip-year and one-year median growth percentiles (MGP) vary significantly for individual schools and that the difference in mean/median SGPs for schools are likely large enough to impact accountability growth scores for schools. Considering the 2019 to 2021 conditions are expected to be much different than 2017 to 2019 skip year analysis used for comparison, it is unadvisable to substitute skip-year growth calculations for one-year growth calculations for school accountability purposes.

Recommendation: The Board does not calculate skip-year growth for accountability purposes.
Vote: Unanimous

Implications for Accountability
Implementing the school accountability system in 2021 will be challenging, even if the associated assessments are administered as "usual." This is particularly true given that it is unadvisable for Utah to substitute a one-year growth calculation with a skip-year calculation method. The committee discussed both state and federal accountability requirements as well as the differences between an amendment and an addendum to Utah's consolidated plan. While the U.S. Department of Education has communicated that they expect states to administer assessments in 2020-2021, they have remained silent regarding the use of those results for federal accountability.

Recommendation: The Board should take steps to relieve schools from federal and state accountability determinations based on 2020-2021 assessments.
Vote: Unanimous

Opportunity to Learn
Opportunity to learn (OTL) data can help contextualize assessment results and has been recommended by many national educational measurement experts given the wide variations in student instructional experiences since March 2020. OTL data includes student access to devices, adequate bandwidth, school schedules, school setting, interactions with teachers, academic rigor, parental support, attendance, engagement, etc. The committee discussed the value of these types of data and the challenges in collecting and analyzing it. Currently available OTL data was discussed, including what is collected in UTREx, the school climate survey scheduled for administration in the spring of 2021, and UETN's Utah School Technology Inventory Project that was published in January 2020. In addition, the committee discussed the viability of adding a few, targeted OTL questions to each state assessment, which could utilize a matrix-sampling approach and seemed favorable to the committee.

Adjustments to CSI and TSI
USBE staff reviewed the current rounding practice used when identifying Targeted School Improvement and Comprehensive School Improvement which currently rounds accountability results to the thousandth place (0.000). A concern was raised by the Utah Association of Assessment Directors (UAAD) that this level of rounding implies a level of precision that doesn't detect meaningful differences between similarly performing schools. Staff recommended changing the rounding business rules to the tenth place to address this concern and the committee supported that decision. Additionally, UAAD previously requested that EL progress be included in calculations when determining TSI identification for the student group of English learners. Both staff and the committee supported that change.