



**To:** Kentucky Board of Education  
**From:** Laura Pinsonneault, Chris Domaleski, and Kyla McClure, Center for Assessment  
**Re:** Process to Identify a Growth Indicator for Kentucky's Accountability System  
**Date:** May 11, 2026

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## **Background**

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has a rich history of wide-reaching and transparent constituent engagement activities to inform the department's activities. Recently, the Kentucky United We Learn (KUWL) initiative focused on redesigning assessment and accountability in the state has garnered interest in changing indicators in the Commonwealth's ESSA accountability system.

This memo includes information about the process to gather input on the incorporation of student growth into Kentucky's school accountability system. It also includes some early priorities and considerations identified by key shareholders and KDE staff.

## **Growth Measures in Kentucky Accountability**

As a starting point, it may be useful to distinguish growth from change, terms that are sometimes used interchangeably but represent different concepts. Change typically refers to year-to-year differences or trends in performance for the same grade level and content area. For example, did proficiency rates improve in grade 4 mathematics between 2024 and 2025? Growth, by contrast, follows the same cohort of students over time and describes how much academic progress those students make as they advance across grades. For example, do results from grade 5 mathematics in 2025 reflect progress compared to their scores in grade 4 in 2024?

Including growth in accountability represents an important opportunity to more fully reflect school contributions to student learning and to recognize progress over time, particularly for students who may begin below proficiency. It also involves myriad, interrelated decisions that impact what information is produced by the growth model, who that information is most useful for, and what inferences users will be able to make from the information. Because there is no single "right" growth model, these decisions - which are often both technical and policy in nature - should be grounded in the commonwealth's and its shareholders' vision and priorities for accountability and the use of data to inform school improvement.

To that end, staff from The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (the Center) are facilitating a process to engage with a group of Accountability Thought Partners - educational leaders from across the commonwealth - to clarify and confirm



priorities for including growth in accountability. That process and key outcomes to-date are described below.

### **Process and Key Outcomes**

Equally important to the technical design of a growth model is the process used to identify the appropriate model and key features or characteristics for Kentucky. The Center has worked with KDE to empanel broad-based groups of constituents to support this work - the Accountability Thought Partners advisory group. This group is helping KDE (1) articulate key design priorities for academic growth, and (2) providing feedback on growth model approaches that are most promising given Kentucky's policy goals, assessment system, and data context.

The Accountability Thought Partners group comprises eight educational leaders, including district superintendents, directors of curriculum and instruction, and district assessment coordinators. These leaders are well positioned to inform important decisions related to interpretation, use, implementation, and design. The group first convened for an in-person meeting on April 17th. That meeting included accountability background covering federal requirements, key features of Kentucky's accountability system, and the implications of recently-passed House Bill 257. It also included an overview of different growth models and the opportunities and challenges of each. The group discussed priority users for information produced by a growth model and helped identify acceptable trade-offs for features of a growth model (e.g., a simple model may be easier to understand but less comprehensive).

Priorities and intended uses for growth model information elevated by the Thought Partners in April helped narrow options of appropriate growth models for Kentucky. The group convened remotely on May 11th to delve into more specific examples of growth models. Feedback in response to these models will help identify key features of each approach, which Center staff will then use to model out and better understand impact.

### **Next Steps**

In accordance with its rich history of extensive shareholder engagement to inform accountability system decisions, KDE is consulting with additional advisory bodies - such as the Local Superintendents Advisory Council - and shareholders to inform recommendations that will come to the Board later in 2026.