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**Michigan's School Accreditation System:
From Education YES! To MI-SAS**

Background

In March 2002, the State Board of Education approved "Education YES!—A Yardstick for Excellent Schools" as the state's accreditation system to provide a means of setting standards for continuous school improvement and measuring the need for support and intervention for schools. Michigan's initiation of this accreditation system was concurrent with passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which required states to have an accountability system. As a result, Education YES! has been Michigan's method to align state and federal requirements by blending state accountability and adequate yearly progress (AYP) reporting for NCLB.

Since 2002, the State Board has made significant policy changes that resulted in the Michigan Merit Exam, expanded indicators for the School Improvement Framework self-assessment, MI-Access for students with special needs, testing in grades 3-8, and inclusion of a growth model. In addition to policy changes, educators, parents, and employers have identified concerns with the system and made numerous recommendations to make it more understandable and transparent.

As a result, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) staff determined a major redesign of the current system was needed. A stakeholder group was convened to evaluate the current system, review the statutory basis for school accreditation, and make recommendations for a redesigned system of state school accreditation.

The redesign team, which met regularly for over a year to complete its work, analyzed the current system and identified the following concerns with Education YES!:

- Consequences of Michigan accreditation and NCLB AYP are not aligned.
- It shifts emphasis from Michigan to federal requirements.
- Its grading structure uses the federal AYP status to lower the Michigan accreditation status.
- It needs additional clarity, usefulness, and credibility.
- Educators, parents, and employers want and deserve an understandable one-stop information system.

In analyzing NCLB requirements, the team determined that Education YES! failed to distinguish between schools making progress by missing one or two of the 40-plus requirements from those not making progress and missing many or most of the requirements. The team concurred that Michigan needed a system that could make

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such distinctions as a means to identify schools most in need of interventions and support services.

The proposed redesign, the Michigan School Accreditation System (MI-SAS), addresses these concerns. It makes Michigan standards the primary determinants for the state's accreditation system. It recognizes academic progress in all core subjects, recognizes fifth and sixth year graduation rates as successes, and enables schools to calculate their own accreditation status. Using a "dashboard" display rather than a single letter grade, MI-SAS provides greater credibility, more transparent accountability, and increased usefulness to those interested in the continuous improvement of Michigan schools. The MI-SAS will include a school's accreditation status, as well as its AYP status as required by NCLB. This will provide both state and federal data to identify those schools that merit the highest priority for support and intervention.

PROPOSED REDESIGN: MICHIGAN SCHOOL ACCREDITATION SYSTEM (MI-SAS)

The MI-SAS is based on student achievement and compliance with Michigan statute. These components are combined to assign an Annual State Accreditation Status to each school. To provide educators, parents, and employers with a complete picture of the school, additional information about the school and its district, community, and the state is included as part of the "dashboard" display.

Each of these four elements is described below:

- 1) Student Achievement,
- 2) Compliance with Michigan Statute,
- 3) Annual State Accreditation Status, and
- 4) Additional School, District, Community, and State Information.

1. Student Achievement.

MI-SAS sets standards for accreditation that demonstrate students are achieving at appropriate levels. Measurement of student achievement includes three components:

- Proficiency (elementary, middle, and high schools)
- Performance Level Change (elementary and middle school with annual grades 3-8 assessments)
- Provisionally proficient on the Michigan Merit Exam (high schools with 11th grade assessment)

Proficiency.

State standards for proficiency in core curriculum subjects are used to determine the accreditation status for all elementary, middle, and high schools. Based on assessment data for the four core subject areas of English language arts (reading and writing), mathematics, science, and social studies, a school's accreditation status is determined to be "summary accredited," "interim status," or "unaccredited" (Section MCL 380.1280 of the Revised School Code).

MI-SAS establishes the following proficiency standards to determine a school's accreditation status:

- ACCREDITED: No more than one subject below 60% proficient and no subjects below 35% proficient.
- INTERIM STATUS: Two or more subjects lower than 60% proficient but not lower than 35% proficient.
- UNACCREDITED: One or more subjects lower than 35% proficient.

The measures of student achievement include the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), the Michigan Merit Examination (MME), and MI-Access (Michigan's alternate assessments for students with disabilities). The assessment data used to determine a school's accreditation status will use only the scores of students at the school for a full academic year prior to the assessment. Since the MEAP assessment (elementary and middle school) is given in the fall and covers content learned the previous year, feeder codes will be used to attribute the students' scores to the school attended during the prior school year. In contrast to federal AYP requirements, MI-SAS does not cap the number of students with proficient scores on the MI-Access assessments. All proficient scores on MI-Access will be included in the achievement calculation.

Performance Level Change.

Performance level change (PLC) is a new component for assessing student achievement that was approved for Michigan's use by the United States Department of Education for compliance with NCLB. PLC is important because it provides information about increases in student academic achievement that are greater than expected for one year of school. Because achievement "growth" can be calculated only for subject areas where students are tested in consecutive years, PLC is calculated only for English language arts and math for students in grades 3-8.

Students are counted as proficient if they show more than the expected improvement in their achievement level. This measure is based on the PLC model using scores that fall into the Improvement or Significant Improvement range. PLC allows schools to demonstrate increases in pupil achievement, the result of intensive efforts of students and staff, even though a student is not yet scoring in the proficient range on the MEAP assessment.

PLC enables schools to show their students may not yet be proficient, but achievement is improving. To determine the PLC for elementary and middle schools, the achievement levels (Not Proficient, Partially Proficient, Proficient and Advanced) for all grades for the four core subjects are totaled and students in the top two levels (proficient and advanced) are counted as proficient. Then for English language arts (ELA) and math, the following number of students is totaled:

- Students testing proficient but not improving
- Students improving but not proficient
- Students who are both proficient and improving.

Since Social Studies and Science are not tested annually, the PLC calculation cannot be used for these subjects and student test scores are simply proficient or not proficient. The totals of students in each category of proficient or not proficient are

divided by the total number of students tested to arrive at the percentage of students proficient in each subject area.

Proficient or Provisionally Proficient on the Michigan Merit Exam.

At the high school level, no subject area for any student is tested at consecutive grade levels. Therefore, PLC cannot be measured for high schools. Instead, the MI-SAS determines the number of students, based on the Michigan Merit Exam (which includes the ACT, Michigan Content Expectations, and WorkKeys), who are proficient or provisionally proficient. Provisional proficiency uses a standard error measurement to provide greater reliability and to eliminate any false negatives. This is similar to polling data that makes reference to "a margin of error of + or – 4%." The margin of error is applied to student scores that are just below the cut score.

Student achievement is based on the total of achievement levels for English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Then, for each subject, the following number of students is totaled:

- Students testing proficient
- Students provisionally proficient (within a margin of error).

These totals are divided by the total number of students tested to determine the percent proficient.

2. Compliance with Michigan Statute.

The second core element for accountability in the MI-SAS is a school's compliance with Michigan statute. For schools to be accredited, they must comply with basic accreditation requirements in MCL 380.1280 and with the requirement to employ only teachers who hold a valid teaching certificate (MCL 380.1233). The eight statutory requirements appear below.

The MI-SAS will measure compliance by evaluating schools on the following eight questions:

- Do 100% of the school's staff, as required, hold Michigan certification? (MCL 380.1233)
- Is the school's annual School Improvement Plan published? (MCL 380.1204a)
- Are required curricula offered (MCL 380.1204a):
 - Grade Level Content Expectations in grades K-8?
 - Michigan Merit Curriculum in grades 9-12?
- Is a fully compliant Annual Report published? (MCL 380.1204a)
- Have the Performance Indicators or equivalent been submitted through the School Improvement Framework or AdvancED Standards and Assessment Report? (MCL 380.1204a)
- Are literacy and math tested annually in grades 1-5? (MCL 380.1280b)
- If the school was designated for participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), did the school participate? (MCL 380.1280b)
- Is the high school sixth year graduation rate 80% or above? (MCL 380.1280b and MCL 388.1619)

If the answer to **any** one of these questions is “no” for two consecutive years, its accreditation status is lowered one level even if the “no” is for a different question each year.

3. Annual State Accreditation Status.

Student achievement and compliance with Michigan statute are combined to annually assign a state accreditation label for each school. A school cannot be fully accredited if it does not make AYP. As illustrated below, accreditation status will be lowered from accredited to interim for any school year in which the school does not make AYP.

<i>Preliminary Accreditation Status</i>	<i>Final Accreditation Status</i>	
	Makes AYP	Does not make AYP
Accredited	Accredited	Interim
Interim	Interim	Interim
Unaccredited	Unaccredited	Unaccredited

With the closer alignment of accreditation and AYP, schools may be sorted into three categories:

- School is accredited and is making AYP.
- School is in interim status and may or may not be making AYP.
- School is unaccredited and may or may not be making AYP.

Note that state accreditation status is not related to federal Title I funding. A school in need of support and intervention should be treated the same regardless whether:

- It receives Title I funds or not.
- The standards it doesn’t meet are federal or state.

4. ADDITIONAL SCHOOL, DISTRICT, COMMUNITY, AND STATE INFORMATION.

In the same way that a car’s dashboard provides gauges with a variety of helpful information, MI-SAS displays various data elements to create a more complete picture of the school. These data elements are clustered into four areas: District Context, People/Programs, Success Indicators, and NCLB Performance. These elements are not included in the accreditation status calculation in the interests of credibility and transparency. That is when a school is unaccredited, it is because of achievement and compliance with statute, not due to other variables. MI-SAS also includes space for the school or school district to report its own “points of pride.”

The District Context shows financial data comparing the district’s per pupil funding with the state average, the average teacher salary, the percent of funds spent on instruction as a percent of operating costs. Enrollment trends for both the building and district are displayed, along with the percentage of students in the building from various feeder schools in the district and their annual state accreditation status.

People/Programs section shows the teacher/student ratio and percent of teachers receiving professional development. The percentage of students enrolled and participating in Career and Technical Education programs is displayed, as well as the percentage of who are “concentrators” (i.e., a secondary student who has completed at least six of the twelve segments and is enrolled in the next segment). Finally, the different student populations served in the building are reported: English Language Learners, students eligible for Free and Reduced Price meals, and students with Special Needs.

The Success Indicators include post-secondary readiness (for high schools) to report the percentage of students who applied to post-secondary institutions, the percent who achieved a college ready score on the ACT, and the percent who achieved a workforce ready score on the WorkKeys assessment. Completion-success rates for high schools are reported for the percentage of students dually enrolled, graduated within six years, or dropped out of school. Schools also show the percentage of students making progress as English Language Learners and the ninth grade promotion rate. Schools may choose other data to report, such as the Title I Distinguished Schools Award or the Blue Ribbon Schools Award. If a school is accredited through AdvancED (parent organization of North Central Accreditation), the accreditation logo appears in this section.

The NCLB Performance section displays required data such as: the percentage of teachers who are highly qualified, the four-year graduation rate for high schools, the attendance rates for elementary and middle schools, whether the building made AYP and its phase (if applicable), whether the building receives Title I funds, and the percentage of students tested.

NEXT STEPS

The process for changing accreditation standards is specified in the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1280(3)). The steps are:

- Distribute proposed standards – an official memo will notify all school districts and public school academies about the proposed new system and a description of MI-SAS will be on the MDE web site.
- Public hearings – public input will be gathered via web-based commentary and presentations at state-wide conferences or meetings.
- Review testimony, revise the standards, and resubmit to Superintendent and State Board – the stakeholder group will be reconvened to recommend changes.
- Submit to House and Senate Education Committees.
- Distribute to all public school districts and public school academies.

The MDE plans to develop the report format for the accreditation system and implement MI-SAS in the 2009-10 school year.