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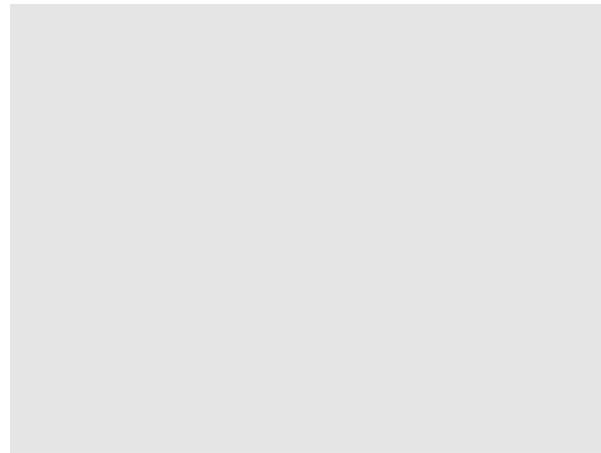
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After stakeholder input, state's 5-star rating system takes shape

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 7 hrs ago



Gary Houchens

Submitted

As Kentucky approaches the release of school assessment data for the 2018-19 school year, a new system that promises to offer a fresh look at school success is finally taking shape.

On Thursday, a sweeping panel made up of school principals, teachers, school district superintendents, state board of education members and other education stakeholders cleared one last hurdle in helping shape the new five-star rating system.

At the conclusion of a two-day meeting, the panel – tasked in part with helping set the cut scores for each star rating – submitted its recommendations to Education Commissioner Wayne Lewis, who accepted them without change.

Each school, school district and the state overall will receive a rating from one to five stars under the system. But despite the seemingly simplistic ratings, supporters say the accountability system is designed to capture more of the nuances that make for a great school.

“Some people will want to look at these star ratings as some sort of summative or definitive evaluation of the quality of a school,” but that would be a mistake, said Gary Houchens, a Western Kentucky University professor and state board of education member who served on the panel.

“Virtually every school is doing something well,” Houchens said.

More to the point, the focus of the panel was to help create a system that would drive individual school improvement, not comparison, he said.

Along with helping to determine the cut scores for each star rating, the panel of more than 20 stakeholders helped formulate performance descriptions for each of the individual indicators that will inform a school’s rating, according to the Kentucky Department of Education.

The various indicators include reading and math proficiency, proficiency in social studies, science and writing, student growth, transition readiness, graduation, quality of school climate and safety (which will be introduced later with 2019-20 data).

During the two-day meeting last week, Houchens said the panel had the opportunity to look at school profiles for 40 schools – uncoupled from any identifying information. The group was able to see proficiency rates, growth and other indicators, he said.

The group was then asked to assign each school a star rating based on the performance descriptions it had devised. It was able to see what percentage of schools would fall into each category, how precise the system was in practice and then discuss the results.

Asked to generally describe the criteria for the star ratings, Houchens said the rating for a five-star school aligns with schools where a vast majority of all students are performing at high rates of proficiency.



Similarly, a four-star school would also signify that most students are proficient, but not a vast majority, and a three-star school may be performing at higher levels in some areas and lower in others, Houchens said. He added that students' academic growth could drive a school's four- or three-star rating, as five-star schools have less room for growth.

A five-star school will also need to demonstrate no significant achievement gaps – meaning academic performance disparities – between student groups, such as black and white students. Narrowing those disparities is a major focus of the new school rating system. Any school that has such achievement gaps will be docked by one star – even if it would otherwise be a five-star or four-star school.

According to the Kentucky Department of Education, there will be no requirement for a specific percentage of schools to reach any star rating and the percentage of schools projected to be rated at the one-star and five-star levels based on 2018-19 data is likely to be relatively low.

Houchens stressed the collaborative process used to help develop the system and said it truly represents what the panel views as desirable school performance.

“It’s really about how students are doing in the school,” he said.

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

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