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# API: Tracking the Growth in Test Scores

*Overall, California public schools heard good news with the October 2000 release of the state's first school ratings tied to financial rewards.*

**W**hen growth APIs were listed in October, 83% of the 6,206 California schools that were rated met their targets for improved test scores from 1999 to 2000. Each school had a growth target based on its 1999 base Academic Performance Index (API) score. Elementary schools were the most successful, with 89% meeting their targets. Almost three-quarters of middle schools met their targets, while 56% of high schools reached theirs. Index ratings of a few elementary, middle, and high schools actually declined. The growth for nearly 10% of the rated schools could not be reported. This was usually because the number of students tested dropped below 100 or the attendance boundaries changed, but some had problems with the data.

## The Stanford-9 test is the basis of the API

The API tracks the change in one measure of schools' academic performance—a standardized test—with the promise of financial rewards for high or improved performance and the threat of interventions for underperforming schools that stay the same or slip backwards. Almost 70% of elementary schools are eligible for awards, compared to just over half of middle schools and one-third of high schools.

The first APIs were released in January 2000, with much publicity about the results and what they mean for California students and teachers. The State Board of Education (SBE) set a performance target—800 on a scale of 200 to 1,000. Each school was expected to improve by at least 5% of the difference between its base API and the 800 target each year. That number is called the “growth target.”

When the growth target is added to the base API, it becomes the target growth API. Schools with a high base between 781 and 799 had to gain one point, and those at or above 800 had to stay above 800. Numerically significant subgroups (low-income, ethnic) had to reach 80% of the school's growth target.

These first APIs are based solely on students' scores on the state-mandated Stanford-9 test. The 1999 Public Schools Accountability Act lists other indicators that should be part of the API calculation, such as the upcoming high school exit exam and the results of additional questions based on California's content standards. When the information is considered valid and reliable, more indicators will be used.

## Anticipated annual timeline for the API

<b>January</b>	New base APIs and growth targets (based on the prior spring's test scores, with any changes in definitions or components)
<b>Spring</b>	Student testing (grades 2 through 11)
<b>July</b>	Release of test scores (for schools, districts, counties, state average)
<b>September</b>	Growth API results and eligibility for awards (same formula and groups of students as base API for that year)
<b>October</b>	Selection of underperforming schools (with below average APIs that did not meet their growth targets)
<b>December</b>	Awards announced (high performing and other schools that meet or exceed growth targets)

The SBE hopes to include results from the standards-based reading test in the 2001 base API (released in January 2002).

Given the system of financial rewards and interventions, the API—and therefore the Stanford-9 test scores—are for now the important measurement for schools.

## The state sets new APIs and targets

The California Department of Education (CDE) is responsible for calculating the API and disseminating the results. In January 2001 it will publish new base APIs and new growth targets, again based on the spring 2000 Stanford-9 scores. The new API growth targets will probably be set at 5% of the distance between the 2000 base API and the performance goal of 800. The necessary improvement by numerically significant subgroups will remain at 80% of the overall growth target.

For the new base API, the definition of which students are included will change slightly. High schools will now count the 9th grade scores of students who attended feeder elementary school districts. Further, the definition of “percent of students tested” has become the number tested divided by the number enrolled on the first day of spring testing; but the number does not include Special Education students exempted from the test and the students whose parents requested they not be tested.

## Another 430 underperforming schools will receive planning grants

Schools with base 1999 APIs in the bottom half of the scores and that failed to meet their growth targets are eligible for funds to create a plan for schoolwide improvement under the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools program (II/USP). In 1999–2000, 430 schools received these grants, and a second set of 430 will participate in 2000–01. More than 930 schools met the criteria.

### Some schools do not have growth APIs

For several reasons, some schools do not have growth APIs:

- ✓ A school may have closed or changed to a charter school.
- ✓ The number of students with Stanford-9 scores fell below 100, or less than 65% of students had valid scores in any tested subject.
- ✓ The school was county-administered or a community day, alternative, continuation, or independent study school.

Most of these schools will be eligible for an Alternative Accountability System approved by the SBE in July 2000. The new system should be phased in over three years.

If a school's student population changed substantially (for example, demographically or because of boundary changes), it would have a base API but not a growth API due to a lack of comparability between the two sets of students.

## Some schools will be rewarded

The growth results will also determine the recipients of three new award programs. In 2000–01, schools with substantial growth or high performance may qualify for the Governor's Performance Awards, the School Site Employee Performance Bonus, and the Certificated Staff Performance Incentive Act. The three programs were funded at a total of \$677 million for 2000–01, thanks to the healthy state economy.

To be eligible for these rewards, 95% of elementary and middle school students and 90% of high school students in the grades tested must have valid test scores, and the school must have met or exceeded its growth target. Subgroups of ethnic or socioeconomically disadvantaged students of "significant size" also must have met at least 80% of the school's growth target. Because more schools than expected met their targets, the

Governor's Performance Award (GPA) will drop from the anticipated \$150 to about \$68 per pupil.

The GPA award money is based on enrollment. Students whose parents requested an excuse from testing and those with Special Education exemptions are not included in the count. However, the count will include students enrolled in grades K–1 and 12, even though they were not tested.

For 2000–01 only, a second reward program has been added. The School Site Employee Performance Bonus allocates \$350 million to be divided between employee bonuses and schoolwide expenditures.

For the teachers' award, the school must have been in the lower half of the statewide API rankings (1 to 5) in 1999. It must also have achieved at least double its growth target (10% rather than 5% growth), and the subgroups must have doubled theirs also (8% rather than 4%).

## The API forms the foundation for accountability

Using the API, the CDE ranks schools statewide and also compares them to ones with similar characteristics. That similar schools ranking takes into account particular qualities of the school, such as student ethnicity and mobility, average class size, eligibility for free/reduced-price meals, parents' education, percent of English learners (EL), and percent of fully credentialed teachers. For the second round of comparisons, these items may or may not change. Many schools are proud of their rankings. Others may want to examine how they could change in order to match the better results of similar schools.

However, the API's current reliance on one measure limits its usefulness. Generally, experts strongly recommend using multiple measures, arguing that one national test is an insufficient, even misleading measure. Some also question the reliability of the test for English learners. Others say the awards are based on progress and may encourage educators to be attentive to the needs of EL students.

The immediate next step in January 2001 is the establishment of the 2000 base APIs, built on the spring 2000 test scores, plus new growth targets. The Stanford-9 and the standards-based questions will be given to second through 11th graders in spring 2001. The results will be released in July, with the API growth results coming in September as the cycle begins again.



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Details about the API and scores for each school are at [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov) and [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us). See also the Parent Guides in English and Spanish on the EdSource website.

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EdSource thanks the Stuart Foundation for investing in our work.

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