

Setting Targets for Education Performance Measures

Targets are relevant for measuring performance of Alberta's education system, including school, jurisdiction and provincial levels of performance. However, caution is advised when there is considerable variability in results from year to year due to small numbers (small schools, classes, even jurisdictions). The information provided below relates specifically to jurisdiction target-setting.

Definition

A target is a desired level of performance to be attained by a specified time. Targets are a commitment to improvement.

Purpose

Targets support continuous improvement and are used to assess and report achievement in relation to the desired level of performance. Targets indicate the extent of improvement the organization is striving to achieve by a point in time (e.g. by a certain year), and provide a focus of efforts to achieve improvement, including resource allocation, staffing and strategy development and implementation.

Principles

1. Targets for performance measures are a valuable part of planning, assessment and reporting.
2. Targets should be meaningful, achievable and challenging.
3. Targets should benefit students and help improve student learning.
4. Target setting should be an interactive process that takes a variety of qualitative and quantitative information into account. Jurisdiction targets, along with other components of the jurisdiction plan, provide a frame of reference for school planning.
5. Targets should be communicated to parents and the public so that Albertans are part of the system-wide efforts to improve education for students.

Guidelines for Setting Targets

1. Consider a wide variety of information in setting targets: past performance, including the Accountability Pillar evaluation for the measure and trends over time, as well as related measures (e.g. using prior years' Grade 3 achievement test results to set Grade 6 achievement test results), student or school characteristics, resources, both financial and human, that can be applied to achieve improvement, etc.
2. Target setting should be consistent with data collection methods. Data reliability and variability should be considered in target setting.
3. Involve stakeholders in setting targets at each level. Schools and jurisdiction staff and community representatives should have input to jurisdiction targets. Parents and school staff should have input into school targets.
4. When setting targets, prioritize to focus on areas needing improvement, and ensure organizational capacity and resources are in place, including budget, staff and concrete actions of benefit to student learning that will be taken to improve results and achieve the targets.
5. Visual displays, such as trend-line graphs and projections, aid in illustrating results and in setting targets. Trend lines based on at least five years of historical data or rolling three-year averages to smooth out year-to-year variability (particularly evident in smaller jurisdictions), shift the focus from smaller, year-to-year changes to providing information about the longer term direction of the data, including estimates of future results.
6. Professional judgment that takes the local context, as well as results, measure evaluations and additional data analysis into account is needed for setting targets. In other words, trend data, graphs, projections and measure evaluations are an aid in target-setting – they do not in themselves determine the targets.