

Editorial: Changing how Calif. grades its schools

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The Academic Performance Index, by which California schools have been judged over the last 14 years, is about to get an overhaul. That's fine; the index basically boiled down standardized test scores to a single number. As a result, it overemphasized testing in math and English while giving short shrift to whether students were learning to write well or to do research. It downplayed science, history, arts and physical education.

Two years ago, Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation to beef up the API by including some of the important measures of education beyond math and English scores. High schools, for example, would be judged by graduation rates and by how prepared their students were for college or jobs. Whether other measures should be added was left to the state Board of Education; possibilities included how many students take Advanced Placement courses and how many pass the AP tests, adjusted for the demographics of the school. Schools might be judged in part on portfolios of students' work or the depth of their science instruction.

At the moment, the API is on hiatus; the state will not be using it for a couple of years while California schools introduce an entirely new English and math curriculum based on the Common Core standards that have been adopted by about 40 states. Common Core will bring major change, and it would be unfair to judge schools during the early years as students take unfamiliar tests and get used to a new way of learning. The hiatus offers the state a good opportunity to rethink how the API is calculated.

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