



## **DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY OR BUST**

### **5 Proven Ways to Meet Accountability Standards**

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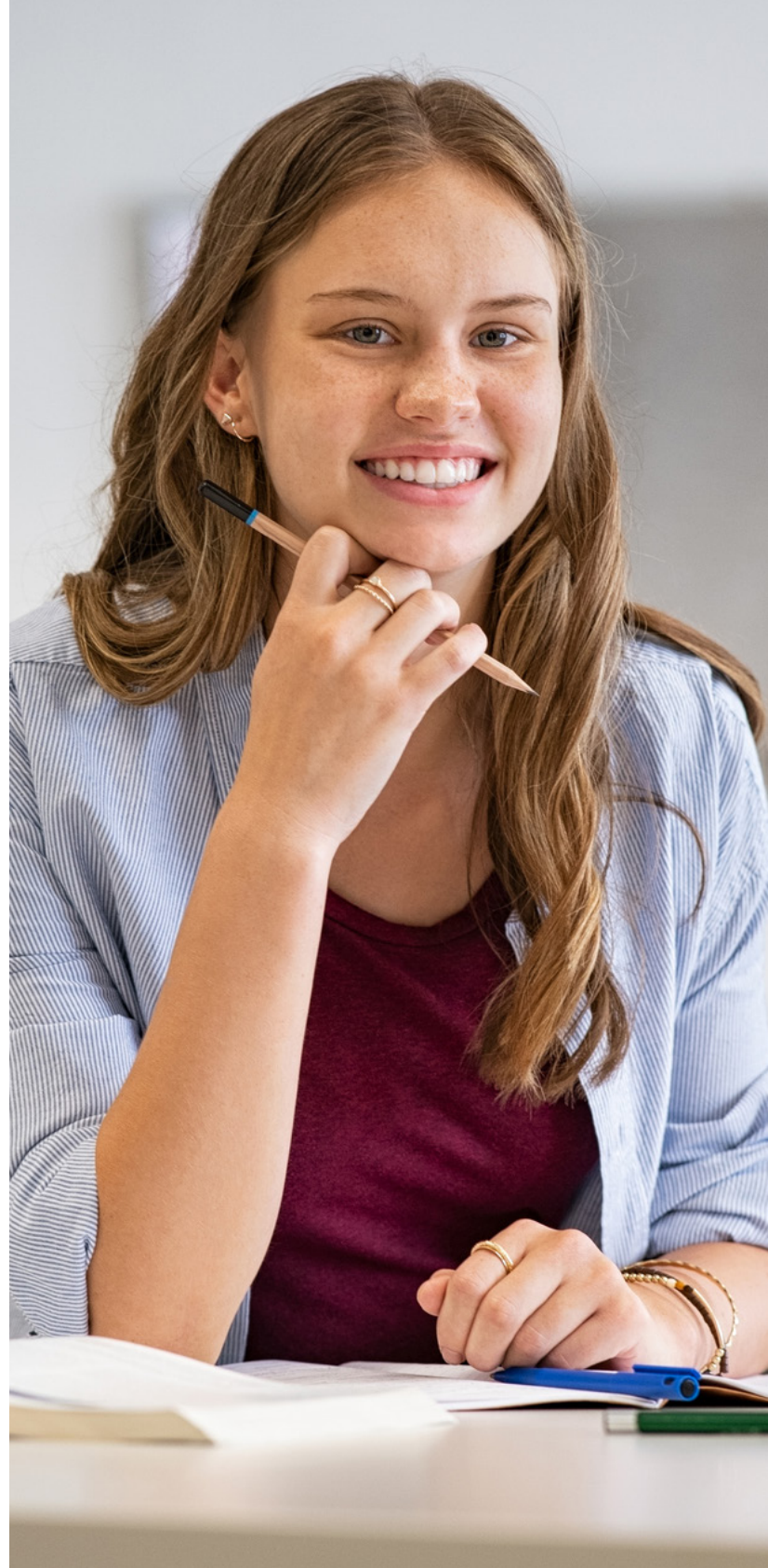
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# Executive Summary

This Success Guide presents insights, information, and leadership tips on how superintendents can turn district accountability standards from a source of stress into a safety blanket. It is inspired by a MasteryPrep webinar, “Meeting Accountability Standards in a Complex K-12 Environment,” sponsored by District Administration®.



## THREE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERS ARE FEATURED HERE:



**Matt Byrnes**  
*Director of Secondary Education*  
Rapides Parish School District  
Rapides Parish, Louisiana



**Dr. Adam Clemons**  
*Principal*  
Piedmont High School  
Piedmont, Alabama



**Dr. Meri Kock**  
*ACT Coordinator*  
Metro Nashville Public Schools  
Nashville, Tennessee

These leaders have made impressive gains in meeting and exceeding elements of their accountability standards. The strategies and approaches they share can be adapted by superintendents across the nation to help prepare students to meet state accountability standards.

With high-stakes testing impacting the success of both students and superintendents, the five proven strategies shared in this guide can help administrators meet their accountability standards while also fulfilling their highest priority — providing the leadership to ensure students are learning and thriving as they prepare for their lives ahead.

# The Challenges of Accountability

Major gatherings of superintendents with members of Congress have brought widespread attention to the challenges facing district leaders across the country, as K-12 school systems struggle to recover from the trauma and losses of recent years.

The issues that are highlighted are familiar to superintendents everywhere. They include the student mental health crisis, school safety concerns, teacher and staff shortages, and the looming funding crunch caused by the ESSER deadline.

Compounding all these challenges, however, are school accountability systems that present steep obstacles for many students and teachers and exacerbate the pressures faced by district leaders. With test scores declining even as accountability targets continue to climb, there is an ominous gap ahead for many superintendents, with a lot on the line to succeed.


# 52%

**Superintendents cited accountability requirements as a top source of stress**

The complexities of accountability are more intricate than ever, with learning recovery, grade inflation, and access to resources all playing a role. Most assessments do not account for the experiences of the whole student, including race, poverty, disability, English-language learning, and trauma.

The impact of these challenges on district accountability scores, however, is clear.

# 4



**POINT DROP**

Reading test scores in 13-year-olds, [2022 NAEP](#)

# 9



**POINT DROP**

Math test scores in 13-year-olds, [2022 NAEP](#)

ALMOST

# 70%

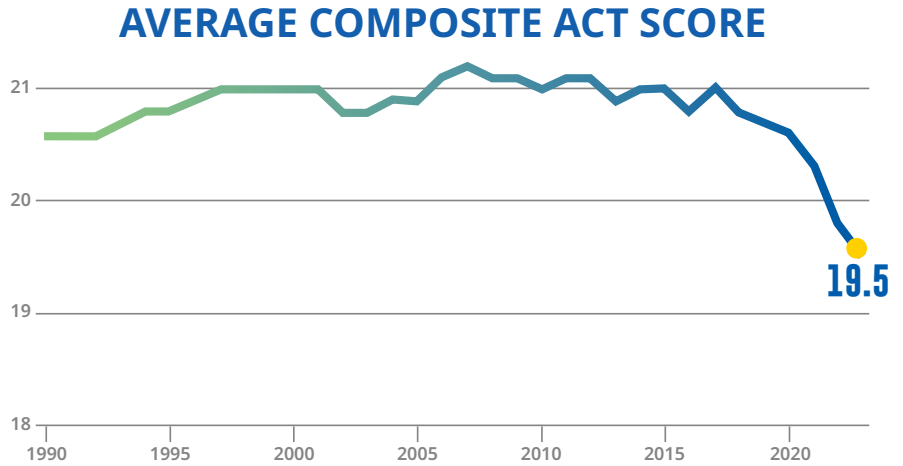


**POINT DROP**

Percentage of 8th graders considered not proficient in reading, [2022 test scores](#)

# The Challenges of Accountability

High school students' ACT scores in 2023 **dropped to their lowest in more than three decades**, showing a lack of student preparedness for college-level coursework.



Data: NCES and ACT; Chart: Axios Visuals

**90%**

+

**81%**

=



**Leaders who heard staff concerns** about students meeting standards

**Leaders who heard parent concerns** about students meeting standards

**NO WONDER SUPERINTENDENTS ARE STRESSED**

Yet accountability frameworks serve as the primary vehicle for setting expectations and motivating action across districts and states. They set our criteria for success and define high-performing schools. Moreover, they can — and should — send clear signals to states, districts, and schools that they must raise academic performance for all student groups, especially those that are at risk of falling behind.

**THE TASK ISN'T TO ELIMINATE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES. IT IS TO ENSURE MORE STUDENTS ACHIEVE THEM.**



We need accountability measures to know where we stand — and how to move forward. And here's the good news: **A number of superintendents are driving clear and consistent improvements across their districts in test scores and accountability measures.**

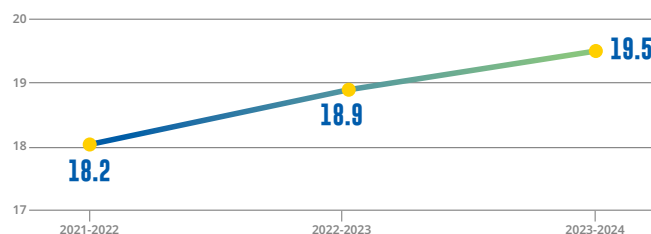
**They are leading more. And stressing less.** The question is: How are they doing this? And what strategies can superintendents across the country adopt to meet their own accountability standards?

# Leading the Way Forward

Meet three school and district leaders who are not only hitting their state requirements — they are closing the gap in their schools between curriculum, standards and assessment. They have found proven strategies and approaches that enable them to meet their accountability standards.



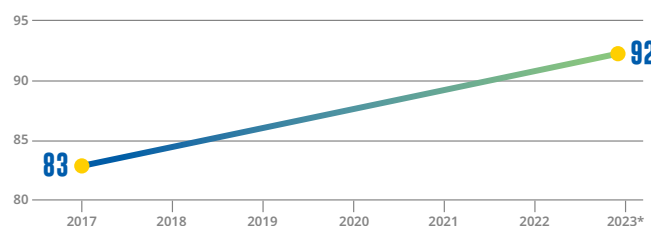
**SUCCESS METRIC:**  
Composite ACT Scores



**Matt Byrnes** began his career as a teacher in Rapides Parish, Louisiana, where he now serves as the district's Director of Secondary Education. Prior to this position, he served as an assistant principal and principal, and was twice named Principal of the Year. Under his leadership, Rapides Parish has seen an increase in all School Performance Score components, especially in the ACT index.



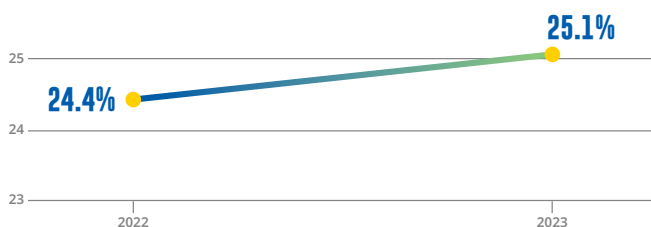
**SUCCESS METRIC:**  
State Report Card Scores  
*\*With significantly more stringent scoring*



**Dr. Adam Clemons** has been the principal of Piedmont High School, in Piedmont, Alabama, since 2013. Selected as the 2020 Alabama Secondary Principal of the Year, he was a 2021 Finalist for National Principal of the Year. Under his leadership, Piedmont has become one of the top high schools in Alabama for ACT achievement, state report card scores, graduation rates, and college and career readiness indicators.



**Success Metric:**  
ACT Composite Scores  
of 21 or Higher



**Dr. Meri Kock** serves as the ACT Coordinator for Metro Nashville Public Schools in Nashville, Tennessee. In this role, she facilitates the implementation of the district's PreK-12 ACT strategic plan, which includes school support for ACT preparation programs at the high school level, expanding ACT awareness, knowledge, and skills into elementary and middle schools, and delivering professional development programs for district educators.

# 5 Key Tips for Superintendents to Achieve Accountability Success

## Across all districts in the country, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

- Requires states to establish student performance goals
- Holds schools accountable for student achievement
- Mandates that accountability systems include a broad measure of student performance beyond test scores (e.g., use of advanced AP/IB tests or rates of chronic absenteeism)

Based on the insights, expertise, and approaches shared by Matt, Adam, and Meri, and validated by their results across multiple schools, five strategies have proven to be effective and actionable for achieving ESSA accountability goals.

**Take a close look at these five success tips and consider adapting them to your district to help prepare students to meet your state accountability standards.**



### 01. PERSONALIZATION

Customize your test prep system to your students' needs.



### 02. COMPREHENSIVE ALIGNMENT

Make sure the curriculum across your whole district is aligned with state standards.



### 03. WHOLE-YEAR PREP

Don't try to cram months' worth of learning and test preparation into last-minute sessions before or during your district's test seasons.



### 04. EQUITABLE ACCESS

District-wide access to high-quality prep help is essential for equitable results and accountability success.

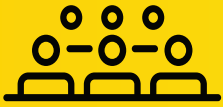


### 05. TEACHER BUY-IN

Empower teachers with resources, tools, and test prep strategies to help students boost test scores.



## Personalization



A single classroom may now contain students who achieve at 7 different grade levels

### CHALLENGE

Student math and reading test scores are now more variable than they were prior to the pandemic. This means that teachers must meet the test prep requirements of students who may be in the same grade but can differ by up to 7 grade levels in terms of learning needs.

### SOLUTION

Personalized learning enables teachers to tailor their test prep experiences to focus on student needs. For example, customizable resources for ACT preparation can offer personalized learning paths for students. Initial assessments can diagnose student learning at the start of a test prep program to deliver effective courses of study. These types of learning pathways can adapt to each student to help them where they need support most and familiarize them with test formats, reducing test-day anxiety and improving accuracy.



We wanted to make test preparation more intentional and customized in our district. By integrating the use of **MasteryPrep** in every high school and implementing boot camps tailored to students' needs, we saw significant growth in test scores. It's about giving each student the tools they need to succeed, and **MasteryPrep** has been instrumental in achieving that goal.

**Matt Byrnes**, Director of Secondary Education,  
Rapides Parish School District, Rapides Parish, LA





## Comprehensive Alignment

# 78%

Teachers reported using partially aligned materials, materials not aligned with standards, unrated materials, or no curriculum materials at all

### CHALLENGE

There is a sharp disconnect between state standards and instructional practice. Teachers' curriculum materials — the textbooks and other materials that drive lesson content — are frequently not aligned with state standards and therefore fail to prepare students for assessments.

### SOLUTION

Embedding aligned test prep into a district's curriculum, including regular use of these materials in daily schedules and organizing boot camps, helps prepare students more effectively. Superintendents should seek out preparation resources that can be used across all core classes in the district. These resources should also be aligned to high school curriculums, not just standardized tests, so they can be used by teachers to support their regular classroom instruction.



When the state mandated the ACT for all juniors in Alabama, it became imperative to find the most effective test prep program. With such a significant portion of our state report card tied to ACT performance, it became clear that a one-size-fits-all approach wouldn't suffice. We discovered that a program with actual workbooks, coupled with actionable data from assessments, revolutionized our approach. We could monitor student progress, adjust instructional practices, and tailor support where needed.

**Dr. Adam Clemons**, Principal Piedmont, High School, Piedmont, AL



## Whole-Year Prep

# 62%

Teachers reported spending too much time readying students for state-mandated exams

### CHALLENGE

The value of test season preparation has been called into question by critics who argue that these assessments hijack student learning and only capture a snapshot of student achievement at a specific moment in time. Decades of research have, in fact, demonstrated that spacing out study sessions over a longer period of time improves long-term memory.

### SOLUTION

Instead of relying on last-minute preparation right before or during testing seasons, successful superintendents advocate for continuous use of test prep materials throughout the school year. When utilized consistently throughout the year and conducted multiple times, assessments can inform instruction and enable teachers to track student progress. And taking a mastery-based approach to year-round prep ensures students are truly learning and retaining information, rather than just teaching to the test through rote memorization.



Challenges arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the ongoing implementation of test prep due to our sudden shift to online learning. But since then, we have been able to reinvigorate our year-round implementation of test prep by providing strategic guides and addressing ongoing learning success across the school year.

**Dr. Meri Kock**, ACT Coordinator,  
Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, TN



## Equitable Access

# 90%

Students from low-income areas graduate high school without a college-ready ACT or SAT score

### CHALLENGE

Research shows that standardized test scores do predict college grades, chances of graduation, and post-college success. However, children of the wealthiest 1% of Americans are 13 times likelier than the children of low-income families to score 1300 or higher on SAT/ACT tests. This is, in part, because parents of high socioeconomic status can pay for high-quality test prep classes and for their children to take the tests multiple times.

### SOLUTION

The solution is to ensure more students from lower socio-economic areas can do well on high-impact tests through equal access to high-quality prep materials. Superintendents can help drive equitable success with the mandated use of district-provided, high-quality test prep materials in every school. This type of accessibility, which should include both online resources and hands-on workbooks, ensures all students have access to test prep, regardless of their background, and boosts their chances of success in college and in life.



“

As educators, we need to ensure that all students, regardless of their background or financial situation, have access to quality test preparation materials. It's not just about teaching to the test; it's about providing our students with the tools they need to succeed, whether they're aiming for college or entering the workforce directly. We've seen firsthand the impact of equitable access to resources like MasteryPrep, especially in high-poverty schools like ours. Every student deserves a fair shot at reaching their full potential, and it's our responsibility to provide them with the support they need to get there.

**Dr. Adam Clemons**, Principal,  
Piedmont High School, Piedmont, AL



## Teacher Buy-In

# 148

Number of edtech tools educators used on average in 2022

### CHALLENGE

Despite the vast array of systems, programs and edtech tools that fill schools today, teachers are the single most important resource available to any district. For district accountability initiatives to lead to better outcomes, teachers must work to improve their instruction. Only 34% of teachers in a national survey report that their curriculum is well aligned to learning standards and only 29% say they have high-quality formative assessments to measure student learning. Teachers also need to buy into the belief that their efforts can raise achievement and narrow performance gaps among groups.

### SOLUTION

Just as students need to learn strategies to improve their test scores, teachers need training and resources that will allow them to help their students improve. Superintendents can support this growth by empowering teachers with mastery-based resources — from printables to skills training to subject-specific agendas for ELA, math, and science teachers — that bring their curriculum in line with state standards. Fully packaged, turnkey materials allow teachers to take the curriculum and implement it from day one. And buy-in grows when teachers see that high-quality test prep not only helps boost student scores, but also helps them be successful overall in the classroom.



“

When we introduced and implemented our test prep program district-wide, the response from the principals across our 11 high schools was exceedingly positive, and this sentiment has endured over time. But what has proven to be especially important is that this program buy-in has cascaded down to the teachers within each school. The feedback from teachers has been consistently positive, as the program aligns with existing educational objectives. Furthermore, witnessing the tangible growth in student scores has reaffirmed the efficacy of our approach and strengthened buy-in.

**Matt Byrnes**, Director of Secondary Education,  
Rapides Parish School District, Rapides Parish, LA

# Every Student Deserves College-Ready Scores

High-quality test prep programs help schools across the board improve their accountability scores — and they are especially transformative in districts serving families with fewer socio-economic resources. With district-provided, mastery-based materials, students are able to boost their scores and overcome obstacles to greater success in school and life. Targeted, engaging test-prep resources and professional development also help teachers guide students not only to higher scores but also to greater confidence on state-mandated tests. And by activating the proven tips shared in this Success Guide — personalization; comprehensive alignment; whole-year prep; equitable access; and teacher buy-in — superintendents are positioned to close the gap between curriculum, standards and assessment, to lead their districts to success, and to turn accountability from a source of stress into a safety blanket.

## LEAD MORE. STRESS LESS.

Learn more about how a comprehensive approach to improving test scores can take your district to new heights of student achievement and accountability.

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**[www.masteryprep.com/curriculum](http://www.masteryprep.com/curriculum)**

## ABOUT MASTERYPREP

Founded in Baton Rouge, LA, in 2013, MasteryPrep levels the standardized assessment playing field and provides mastery-based college readiness services and resources for the SAT®, ACT®, TSIA2, EOC, and WorkKeys®, impacting 400,000+ students a year through partnerships with 625 school districts and institutions across the United States. The company delivers a mastery-based learning system for school districts with a data-driven, purpose-built approach, and turnkey embedded teaching curriculum that positively impact student achievement on required assessments and accountability ratings.

This paper was authored by MasteryPrep with contributions from:

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