

Federal Accountability and the No Child Left Behind Act Waiver

The No Child Left Behind Act seeks to improve the education outcomes of disadvantaged students

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the federal law that seeks to ensure that all students and specific subgroups of students achieve state reading and math proficiency by 2014. NCLB school improvement requirements apply to high-poverty schools receiving federal Title I funds. The act imposes increasingly severe consequences and redirects the resources of those Title I schools that fail to sufficiently improve students' reading and math proficiency according to a time line. The act also focuses attention on the poor educational outcomes of disadvantaged students.

States were granted federal waivers in exchange for implementing specific reforms

The U.S. Congress has not yet amended and reauthorized the act, which was anticipated to be reauthorized in 2007. In the meantime, and because the need to improve school effectiveness remains, the U.S. Secretary of Education offered to waive certain federal requirements for states, including Minnesota, if those states agreed to implement specific federal reforms.

In 2012, Minnesota was granted a two-year waiver after it agreed to implement the following federal reforms:

- implementing college and career-readiness standards and assessments to measure student achievement and growth
- recognizing high-achieving and high-growth schools and supporting chronically low-achieving schools
- using teacher and principal evaluation and support systems to improve instruction
- reducing duplication and other similar burdens

In exchange for implementing the federal reforms, Minnesota schools do not need to provide supplemental education or transportation services for intradistrict transfers, are not sanctioned for failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), and have greater flexibility in allocating Title I funds. The state's NCLB waiver was extended through the 2014-2015 school year.

Minnesota's waiver uses a multiple measures rating (MMR) to focus on the academic achievement gap

Minnesota's waiver replaces the original NCLB goal of achieving 100 percent student proficiency in reading and math by 2014 with a goal of reducing Minnesota's student achievement gap between all students and certain historically underperforming groups of students by 50 percent by 2017. The waiver also replaces the federal AYP measure with an annual multiple measures rating (MMR), based on student academic proficiency and growth measures, school success in reducing the achievement gap for specific student groups, and student graduation rates. The federal MMR measures are distinct from the educational accountability measures—coursework completion, rigorous course taking, student

engagement and connection at school—found in Minnesota Statutes.

MMR divides student test data into four proficiency categories

Under the waiver, the MMR ratings divide students' performance on statewide tests into four proficiency categories: does not meet, partially meets, meets, and exceeds standards. Statewide reading and math proficiency targets are set for all students and particular student groups: American Indian; Asian; Hispanic; Black; White; limited English proficiency; special education; and free and reduced price lunch. A school's **proficiency index** is determined by comparing the performance of particular student groups within a school to the established statewide proficiency target for that student group. A school earns points based on the ability of student groups within the school to meet reading and math proficiency targets.

The MMR academic growth score compares students' actual and expected test scores

To determine a school's focus rating, students receive an **academic growth score** based on a comparison between students' actual and expected test scores in reading and math. Students are expected to meet or exceed their expected score, which is based on their test score in the previous school year. Students' individual growth scores in a school are averaged to determine a school growth score. A school earns points based on its success in accelerating students' academic growth.

The MMR focus rating measures a school's ability to close growth and achievement gaps among typically low-performing student groups

The **achievement gap measure** looks at schools' success in accelerating the academic growth for seven typically low-performing student groups: Black; Hispanic; Asian; American Indian; free and reduced price lunch (FRP); limited English proficiency (LEP); and special education. The academic growth for each student group at the school is compared to the statewide average for that student group. The academic growth for the four student groups of color is compared to the statewide average for white students. The academic growth of the three remaining student groups (FRP, LEP, special education) is compared to the statewide average for all students not included in the particular student group. A school earns points based on its success in accelerating the academic growth of these student groups and thereby closing the academic achievement gap among student groups.

The MMR 90 percent graduation rate is the target for all students

The **graduation rate** for all student groups within a school with at least 40 students is compared to a 90 percent high school graduation rate target for all students and particular student groups. A school earns points by demonstrating its ability to meet the 90 percent target graduation rate or by annually improving its graduation rate.

Minnesota must continue to implement specific reforms under its extended waiver

Minnesota applied to renew its federal waiver in February 2014. The extended waiver requires Minnesota to continue to implement specific testing, accountability, and school improvement reforms including, among other items, career and college-ready standards by the 2013-2014 school year, teacher and principal evaluation and support systems by the 2014-2015 school year, and interventions aligned with turnaround principles for schools in the bottom 5 percent of most persistently low-performing schools. If the U.S. Congress reauthorizes NCLB before the waiver period ends, the reauthorization may affect the status of Minnesota's waiver.

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