

NCLB WAIVER SUMMARY: ACCOUNTABILITY

PROMISING ASPECTS OF THE PLAN:

- Tennessee views the district as its primary point of intervention and will intervene if districts are not meeting their goals for raising overall achievement or closing gaps. Districts, in turn, are expected to intervene if their schools are not meeting their goals. This approach reflects the key role of districts in creating the conditions for school success, but advocates will need to closely monitor the system to ensure that districts are, in fact, pushing all of their schools to raise achievement for all groups of students.
- The state has a multi-pronged approach for intervening in its lowest performing (Priority) schools, which includes a state-run school turnaround district, district-run innovation zones, and the four intervention models required under the School Improvement Grant program. Priority schools that do not improve under their district's supervision will become part of the state-run turnaround district.

AREAS OF CONCERN:

- The state has set fairly ambitious goals for both raising achievement and closing gaps between groups. Districts and schools will get overall improvement goals and targets for narrowing within-district or within-school gaps between poor students and non-poor students, ELL and non-ELL and the like. In order to meet achievement and gap closure goals, however, a district or school only has to reach half of the targets in each category. This means that a district or school could make little to no progress in one subject area and still remain in good standing under the state's accountability system. It also means that a district or school could make no progress in closing one or more of its achievement gaps and remain in good standing, as long as all groups are making even the smallest of gains.
- Tennessee has set statewide goals for achievement and gap closing, but the state plans to establish district and school improvement targets via a negotiated goal-setting process. In the aggregate (across all schools and districts) these goals will need to be at least as ambitious as the statewide targets. However, advocates will need to monitor this process to ensure that schools and districts that need to make the most improvement to catch up with the rest of the state do not end up with too modest goals.
- The state will not guarantee students even in its lowest performing schools the right to choose to attend a higher performing school. Rather, that decision is given to each individual district.

What indicators are used to measure school performance?

- The percent of students proficient in third-grade math and reading/language arts (RLA), seventh-grade math and RLA, third-to-eighth-grade aggregate math and RLA, Algebra I, and English II, overall and by group
- Graduation rates overall and by group
- Student growth relative to other students with similar academic histories is used for Reward School identification

What are the expectations for performance on these indicators?

- The state has set two types of statewide Annual Measurable Objectives: Achievement and Gap Closure
 - Achievement: Increase the overall proficiency rate by 3-5 percentage points annually.
 - Gap Closure: Reduce achievement gaps in reading and math by 6 percent annually, which amounts to a 50 percent reduction in the achievement gap over eight years. This applies separately to gaps between:
 - Racial and ethnic groups currently performing below the state average and all students
 - Economically disadvantaged students and non-economically disadvantaged students
 - English-language learners and non-ELLs
 - Students with disabilities and non-SWDs
 - Graduation rates: by 2014-15, 90 percent for students overall, with roughly consistent gains from year to year. After 2015, overall goals increase incrementally to 90.8 percent by 2018. The state also set graduation rate goals for each student group, but these do not count for accountability.
- The state will work with districts to develop district-level goals, which will have to, in the aggregate, meet or exceed state-level goals. Districts will develop goals for schools that will have to meet or exceed district-level goals. The state approves district and school-level goals and will submit them to the U.S. Department of Education.
 - Safe Harbor: Districts and schools can also meet their AMOs by reducing the percent of students not proficient by 10 percent in a single year, 19 percent over two years, or 27 percent over three years. The plan says that student growth may also be used as a safe harbor mechanism, but provides no further details.
- Districts and schools can meet or miss each category of AMOs. To meet their overarching AMOs the district or school has to reach more targets than it misses in each respective category. Additionally, if any group does not improve on the majority of its indicators, the school or district will miss its Gap-Closure AMO.

How are groups included?

- Both districts and schools have to meet Gap-Closure AMOs, but the state will only intervene at the district level. Missing Gap-Closure AMOs because a group didn't make progress in a majority of its targets places a district on the Needs Improvement List and requires the district to meet with the state to create an aggressive plan for corrective action.
- Focus Schools identification (see below)
- Schools that would otherwise qualify for rewards will be disqualified if any of their four achievement gaps is larger than the corresponding median gap at the state level and has not narrowed.

How are overarching school determinations made?

- Like districts, schools will have Achievement and Gap-Closure AMOs. The state will engage with districts that miss either of these AMOs. However, the state will only engage directly with Priority, Focus, and Reward schools.
- The state will also use an A-F grading system, but provides no further details.

How are Priority Schools identified?

- Priority schools are the lowest performing 5 percent of all schools in the state and will be identified every three years based on a three-year composite index including:
 - For high schools: graduation rates, and proficiency on end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, English I, English II and Biology I
 - For elementary and middle schools: proficiency on state assessments in math, RLA, and science.

How are Focus Schools identified?

- Focus schools constitute 10 percent of all schools in the state and will be identified once every three years as follows:
 - High schools with an overall graduation rate below 60 percent that are not Priority
 - Schools where the composite proficiency and graduation index for any group is below 5 percent. For elementary and middle schools, this index includes math, RLA and science proficiency; for high schools, it includes Algebra and English proficiency rates, and graduation rates. The 5 percent threshold will increase to 10 percent in the next identification cycle, and will continue to increase by 5 percent each time focus schools are identified.
 - Schools with the largest aggregate achievement gap: The size of each of the four achievement gaps is calculated using a three-year composite of graduation rates, Algebra I and English II results in high school, and math, RLA and science results in elementary and middle schools. The four gaps are weighted based on the number of students in the lower performing group and aggregated to get a single school gap score. Schools with the largest gaps are Focus. The following schools are excluded from Focus identification:
 - Schools reducing each of their gaps by 6 percent from the prior year
 - Schools where all groups are performing above the state proficiency and graduation rates for all students.

What happens to Priority Schools?

- Supports and Interventions:
 - Before 2015, Priority schools may: 1) Enter into the state-run Achievement School District (ASD); 2) Enter a state-approved, but district-run innovation zone; 3) Apply to implement one of the School Improvement Grant intervention models; or 4) Undergo district-led improvement planning, with ASD takeover if results do not improve. The fourth option will not be available after 2015.
- Exit Criteria and Consequences:
 - Criteria for exiting Priority status: School must not be identified as Priority in the next cycle, or must meet its achievement AMOs for two years in a row.
 - Schools that start in SIG turnaround or district-run innovation zones and don't improve in two years will be absorbed into the ASD. Schools in district-led improvement will be absorbed into the ASD if they don't achieve their AMOs for two years in a row on their own.

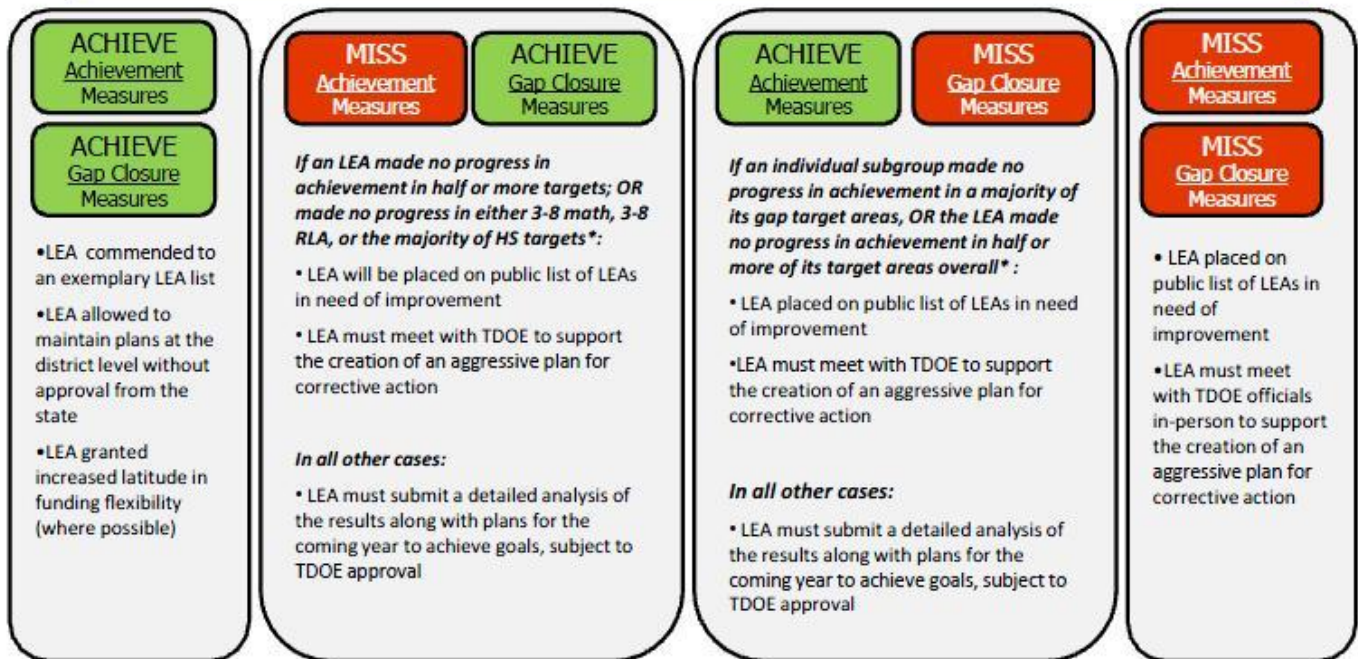
What happens to Focus Schools?

- Supports and Interventions:
 - Districts, with help from state Field Service Centers, will conduct root-cause analyses of achievement gaps in Focus schools and in districts as a whole. They will identify schools with similar populations but better results, including Reward Schools, to learn from, and will submit to the state one district-wide plan that includes improvement plans for all their Focus Schools.
 - Districts will have the opportunity to compete for grants of about \$100,000 to implement specific initiatives in Focus Schools, such as time on task, cultural competency education, and inter-school strategic staffing.
- Exit Criteria and Consequences:
 - School must not be identified as Focus in the next cycle or must meet Gap-Closure AMOs for two consecutive years. The school also must make achievement progress with the group(s) that led to its Focus identification. Criteria for exiting Focus Status: School must not be identified as Focus in the next cycle or must meet Gap-Closure AMOs for two years in a row.
 - Districts where Focus schools do not improve sufficiently will meet with the state in person to review and revise improvement plans.

What happens to schools that are not Priority or Focus? Does underperformance against goals trigger action?

- Tennessee views the district as the point of intervention, and will intervene if districts are not meeting their Achievement or Gap-Closure AMOs. The diagram below, taken from the state's approved application, outlines how the state will hold districts accountable:

AMO Interventions



*SAFE HARBOR: If a District has a "green" TVAAS score on a measure (i.e. demonstrating a positive threshold of growth), then this will stand as goal achievement for that measure

PARTICIPATION RATE: A 95% participation rate in the required TCAP accountability tests for all students and for each student subgroup; If an LEA does not meet this participation rate, the LEA will automatically fail both its achievement and gap closure measures

Will the state continue to require public school choice?

- No. Tennessee will allow each district to decide whether to continue to offer choice.

How are Reward Schools identified, and what incentives are provided?

- There are two types of Reward Schools: Achievement-based and Progress-based. To qualify, schools must have smaller gaps than the state median, or, if gaps are larger, they must be narrowing.
 - Achievement-based: top 5 percent of schools in state based on the same composite index used to identify Priority schools
 - Progress-based: top 5 percent of schools with the highest growth based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System
- Reward Schools will receive public recognition, have the chance to compete for funds to share best practices, and may be called upon to share best practices with other schools by hosting visits, creating mentorship opportunities, and the like. The state will provide funds to support this work.