



FLORIDA

NCLB WAIVER SUMMARY: ACCOUNTABILITY

PROMISING ASPECTS OF THE PLAN:

- Florida's school-grading system provides clear incentives for improving learning gains by the lowest performing students in each school.
- The state has a strong plan for intervening in Priority (F) schools, with attention to staffing, professional development, and curriculum alignment. Focus (D) schools that do not improve within three years have to undergo turnaround, a level of intervention usually reserved for the lowest performing schools.

AREAS OF CONCERN:

- School grades are the core of Florida's accountability system. Because the performance of individual student groups — low-income students, students of color, English-language learners and students with disabilities — is not a factor in these grades, there is little incentive for schools to close their achievement gaps. While the state has set gap-closing goals, and pledged to require schools and districts that don't meet them to improve, a school's grade drives the majority of rewards, supports, and consequences that it receives. Schools are likely to pay attention, first and foremost, to indicators that contribute to the grade.

What indicators are used to measure school performance?

- Proficiency in reading, math, writing, and science for students overall
 - Proficiency rates for student groups are reported, but are not part of Florida's school grades.
- Learning gains in reading and math, for students overall and for the lowest performers (the bottom 25 percent of students in the school)
 - Learning gains are defined as increasing achievement levels; remaining at the same achievement level (for students at Levels 3 or 4); or making at least one year's worth of growth, defined as a set number of scale score points in each grade (for students at Levels 1 or 2).
- Graduation rates, for students overall and for at-risk students
 - At-risk students are defined as those who entered high school below grade level based on eighth-grade FCAT reading and math.
- Participation and success in advanced coursework, such as AP/IB, dual enrollment courses and industry certification
- Postsecondary readiness based on the ACT, SAT, or the state's Common Placement Tests

What are the expectations for performance on these indicators?

- Indicators are combined into an index, with schools earning A-F grades depending on their index score.
- Proficiency Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs): For reading and math, the goal is to reduce by half the difference between current proficiency rates and 100 percent in six years, overall and for student groups. Goals will be set individually for each school and group.
- Learning gains AMOs: For learning gains, the goal is that at least half the school's lowest performers make gains in reading and math.

- Schools that show learning gains for 40-49 percent of low-performing students can meet this AMO by making any progress since the prior year.
- Schools that show learning gains for less than 40 percent of low-performing students can meet this AMO by increasing the percentage of low-performing students making gains by five points or more.

How are student groups included?

- Reading and math proficiency AMOs are established for each student group. Schools that miss these AMOs for two years and districts that miss them for three years must incorporate research-based interventions for improving student performance into their improvement plans.
 - Groups include Asians, Latinos, African Americans, American Indians, whites, English-language learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities.
- Grade A, B, or C schools where the performance of any student group is lower than in D schools must revise their school improvement plans to develop and implement interventions to reduce or eliminate the gaps. The regional-accountability team reviews and monitors these plans, as well as provides support.
- The lowest performing students must meet learning-gains AMOs in reading and math. Otherwise, schools that would receive a C or higher are rated one letter grade lower. Learning gains for this group also account for part of a school's index, which determines its grade.
- For high schools, the graduation rate of at-risk students contributes to school grades.

How are overarching school determinations made?

- School grades are assigned to elementary and middle schools based on performance overall, and the learning gains of students overall and the lowest performing students.
- School grades are assigned to high schools based on performance overall, the learning gains of students overall and the lowest performing students, graduation rates overall and for at-risk students, participation and success in advanced coursework, and college readiness.
- Additional criteria:
 - Grade A schools must assess at least 95 percent of students; others must assess 90 percent of students.
 - Grade A schools must also meet learning-gains AMOs for their lowest performing students.
 - Grade B and C schools must also meet learning-gains AMOs for the lowest performing students in the school in either the current or previous year.

How are Priority Schools identified?

- All F schools

How are Focus Schools identified?

- All D schools

What happens to Priority Schools?

- Supports and Interventions:
 - The district performs a diagnostic needs assessment and submits an Intervene Option Plan to the state for approval. The plan must identify one of five intervention options for the school: closure, education management organization control, charter conversion, district-managed turnaround, or a "hybrid" model. The hybrid model may be a combination of the other options (e.g., a district-managed charter school), or "another option altogether, as long as an LEA demonstrates that the option is as, or more, likely to turn around the school in the same, or in less, time than the current four options."

- The district’s plan must address, among other things, “leadership quality improvement, educator quality improvement, professional development, curriculum alignment, and pacing.”
 - The principal must have “a record of turning around a similar school,” and both the principal and assistant principals must have a record of increasing student achievement.
 - The district cannot employ teachers at the school with less than satisfactory ratings on the new teacher evaluation system. Teachers who did not contribute to “increased learning gains of 65 percent or greater in reading and mathematics, and those teachers who did not contribute to improving the school’s performance” must be replaced.
 - The district must give the school enough operating flexibility, “such as staffing decisions, calendars/time, and budgeting,” to improve student achievement.
- The state has set up five regional differentiated accountability teams to support and oversee turnaround efforts. The state will continue to monitor Priority schools until they receive a C grade or higher for three consecutive years.
- Exit Criteria and Consequences:
 - Criteria for exiting Priority status: Earn at least a C and improve achievement in reading and math to a level designated by the State Board. (Note: The Board is set to vote on these performance thresholds in February 2012.)
 - Schools that do not improve their grade and do not meet at least one of the exit criteria by the end of the second year must select a new intervention option. Schools that improve their grade to a D or higher, or “meet achievement targets in mathematics and reading,” enter a “hold” status and may continue to implement their chosen intervention option for two more years. The plan states that “beyond the four years, an LEA could continue the option and interventions if they demonstrated to the State Board of Education that the school is likely to improve enough to exit the Priority/Intervene category with more time.”

What happens to Focus Schools?

- Supports and Interventions:
 - Along with the district and regional differentiated accountability team, the school reviews its prior-year data and revises its SIP. The SIP is reviewed monthly to evaluate implementation effectiveness.
 - The district develops a District Improvement Assistance Plan (DIAP) that examines the use of Title I and Title III funds to ensure they are aligned with school-level interventions.
 - The state monitors school and district progress using compliance checklists and interim assessments.
- Exit Criteria and Consequences:
 - Criteria for exiting Focus status: receive a C within three years.
 - Focus Schools that receive a third consecutive D are placed into district-managed turnaround.

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

- Any school that misses its proficiency AMOs for any student group for two years in a row will receive support from the Differentiated Accountability Regional Team.
 - The region’s Response to Intervention and content-area specialists will help these schools develop, implement, and monitor their SIPs.
 - If student performance is rising but is not doing so quickly enough to meet reading and math proficiency AMOs for three consecutive years, the district must include in its district-improvement plan strategies for supporting the identified schools.
 - School staff must attend the summer differentiated accountability academies that focus on implementing best practices.

- Grade A, B, or C schools where the performance of any student group is lower than in D schools must revise their SIPs to develop and implement interventions to reduce or eliminate the gaps. The regional-accountability team reviews and monitors these plans, as well as provides support.
- Grade A, B, and C schools with overall graduation rates among the lowest in the state, or with group graduation rates substantially lower than the overall state, district, or school rate, must include in their SIPs specific strategies to increase the graduation rate of those student groups and the school overall.
- Grade C schools must implement interventions related to leadership, educator quality, professional development, Florida's continuous improvement model, and monitoring. The district will monitor and support these schools.
- Grade B schools must have a School Improvement Plan in place.

Will the state continue to offer public school choice?

- Public School Choice is listed as a component of the School Improvement Plan, which all schools are required to update annually. No further information is provided, however.

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

- All A schools and schools that improve their grade by one or more levels.
- Reward Schools receive recognition, more autonomy, and financial rewards.