

Questions to ask about NCLB reports

Public reporting of school, district, and state data is one of the cornerstones of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Armed with data about the achievement of all students relative to state standards, educators, parents, advocates, and policymakers can identify successes as well as areas in need of improvement in their schools. They can then use this information to engage in the hard work of raising achievement for all and closing gaps between groups. This process, of course, is dependent on the availability, accessibility, and accuracy of public data.

Over the upcoming months, states and districts will be releasing assessment and accountability results for the 2003-04 school year. It is their responsibility to ensure that public reporting is clear and complete. And it is the responsibility of every one of us who is concerned with the state of public education to hold states and districts to this obligation. To assist in this, we've compiled a list of questions that you should be able to answer easily when looking at school, district, and state NCLB reports.

Achievement

- How many students overall are meeting state standards in reading and math?
- How many students in each major racial/ethnic group, low-income students, students with disabilities, and limited-English proficient students are meeting state standards in reading and math?
- What are the statewide achievement goals in reading and math for the current year? Which groups of students met the statewide goals, and which groups did not?
- What are the trends? How does the achievement of all students and all groups of students this year compare to the achievement of all students and all groups of students last year? Are the groups that were behind last year narrowing the gaps, are gaps getting wider, or are they just about the same?
- How does the achievement of all students and all groups of students at the school, district, and state levels compare? What about at different grade levels? Is student achievement the same across grades, or is there a difference in achievement between elementary, middle, and high schools?

Participation

- What percent of students did not participate in reading and math assessments?
- What percent of students from each group did not participate in reading and math assessments?

- How do participation rates for all students and all groups of students at the school, district, and state levels compare?

High School Graduation

- What is the overall high school graduation rate?
- What is the high school graduation rate for different groups of students?
- What is the statewide graduation rate goal?
- How does the state calculate graduation rates?*
- How do graduation rates for all students and all groups of students at the school, district, and state levels compare?

Additional Indicators for Elementary and Middle Schools

- What additional indicator has the state selected to assess the progress of elementary and middle schools (e.g., many states use attendance rates as their additional academic indicator)?
- What is the performance of all students on the additional indicator?
- What is the performance of different groups of students on the additional indicator?
- What is the state-defined performance goal on the additional indicator?
- How does the performance of all students and all groups of students on the additional indicator at the school, district, and state levels compare?

Adequate Yearly Progress

- Has each school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)? For each school that did not make AYP, what is the reason (e.g., student achievement in reading, participation rate on the math assessment, or high school graduation rate)? For each school that did make AYP, did they make it with Safe Harbor?*
- What number and percentage of schools within the district and state have not made AYP?*

Schools in Need of Improvement

- Which schools are in "In Need of Improvement" status? How many years have each of these schools been in "In Need of Improvement" status?
- What number and percentage of schools within the district and state are "In Need of Improvement"?
- What are the state and school district doing to provide additional assistance and support to schools that are "In Need of Improvement"?

Qualified Teachers

- What are the professional qualifications of teachers?
- What percentage of teachers hold emergency or provisional credentials?
- What percentage of classes overall are not taught by teachers who meet the state's "Highly Qualified Teacher" definition?
- What percentage of classes in the highest and lowest poverty schools are not taught by teachers who meet the state's "Highly Qualified Teacher" definition?
- Has the state measured and publicly reported the disproportionate assignment of inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers to poor and minority students? Has the state implemented a plan to address this disparity? Has the state evaluated and publicly reported its progress with respect to this issue?*

The answers to these questions should be clear from school, district, and state NCLB reports. These answers will help to develop a deeper understanding of the state of achievement in our schools. And this understanding is the first step toward high achievement for all students.

*These items are not specifically required to be included in state, district, and school NCLB reports, but they are major elements of the accountability plans that states have developed and submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. More importantly, they are critical pieces of information about the problems facing our public schools and the steps that districts and states are taking to address them. As such, no district or state can, in good faith, fail to provide these pieces of information to the public.

**Districts and states are not required to publicly report a school's AYP status until the school is "In Need of Improvement," that is, it has not made AYP for two consecutive years. But AYP is a signaling device to inform educators, parents, and community members when a school is falling behind in a particular area or with a particular group of students. As such, a school's AYP status for every year is important information for those looking to identify and take action on problems in their schools.