



# GOAL SETTING UNDER ESEA (1994-2007): HOW THE STATES RESPONDED

In the last two reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Congress gave states flexibility to set various kinds of goals. They were delegated responsibility to set, among other goals, improvement targets; criteria for ensuring that low-income students and students of color are not taught disproportionately by inexperienced, out-of-field, or unqualified teachers; criteria for defining highly qualified teachers; graduation rate goals; and English-language acquisition goals for English-language learners. Many states set no goals in several of these areas. Others set targets too low or too fuzzy to drive improvement for students.

## IMPROVING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS ACT (ESEA REAUTHORIZATION OF 1994)

**What the Law Required:** States were to set improvement targets for schools and districts that resulted in “continuous and substantial improvement” such that all children — especially low-income children and those with limited English proficiency — met state proficiency and advanced levels of performance.

### What States Did:

- Close to one third of the states (17) did **not** establish statewide accountability systems. Instead they relied on public reporting, local accountability systems, or no accountability system at all.
- Only **two states** included subgroup performance in their accountability determinations.
- Statewide accountability systems varied dramatically— from aggressive, measurable targets such as “100 percent of students proficient in 10 years” (Arkansas) to specific but too-low targets such as “improve mean performance level across grades by average of .05” (Tennessee) and imprecise, useless targets such as “decrease percentage of students scoring in the lowest quarter on state assessments” (Mississippi).

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (NCLB)

### Teacher Equity

**What the Law Required:** States must address patterns of inequity in the assignment of inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers to low-income students and students of color.

### What States Did:

- In 2006, only **three states** (Ohio, Nevada, and Tennessee) reported federally required data on the distribution of inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers in high and low-poverty, and high and low-minority schools, in Equity Plans these states submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.
- Twenty-seven states planned to meet the equity provisions using only Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) status, a measure that more than 90 percent of teachers — including those in high-poverty schools — met in 19 states during NCLB’s first year.
- Almost no states set a goal or metric for improving the distribution of inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.

### Graduation-Rate Accountability

**What the Law Required:** States must hold high schools accountable for graduation rates, but have discretion to set goals and improvement targets for meeting those goals.

### What States Did:

- **Almost half** the states set graduation rate goals below 80 percent.



- Six states set their goal below 60 percent (Alaska, Colorado, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York, and Virginia).
- More than half the states set goals far too low, with 28 states setting their improvement target at *any* progress over a year, meaning that an increase from 50 percent to 50.1 percent was acceptable.
- Two states (New Mexico and South Carolina) and the District of Columbia defined improvement as *not losing ground*.
- Some gamed the definition of a graduation rate: For example, North Carolina calculated graduation rates by excluding all students who dropped out of high school.

### English-Language Learner Accountability

**What the Law Required:** States must set annual targets for all ELL students, including goals for the percentage of ELL students making progress toward learning English (but not necessarily achieving proficiency).

#### What States Did:

- Within three years of NCLB's passage (2004-05), 10 states had not even set Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for progress learning English.
- Nine states set goals that expected *less than half* of their ELL students to make progress.
- All but three states expected fewer than 90 percent of their ELL students to make progress.

### Standards and Assessments

**What the Law Required:** States must develop standards and assessments in reading and math for measuring the goal of 100 percent of students achieving proficiency by 2014. But states were given discretion over the content of standards and cut scores for assessments.

#### What States Did:

- Set content standards and assessment cut scores far too low to generate honest information about student performance.
- Fourth-grade reading: *No states* set their proficiency standard at a level equivalent to the NAEP Proficient level, and 32 states set their proficiency standards below the NAEP Basic level.
- Eighth-grade reading: *One state* set its proficiency standard equivalent to the NAEP Proficient level, and 17 set their proficiency below the NAEP Basic level.
- Fourth-grade math: *One state* set its proficiency standard equivalent to the NAEP Proficient level, and 10 set their proficiency standard below the NAEP Basic level.
- Eighth-grade math: *Two states* set their proficiency standard equivalent to the NAEP Proficient level, and 10 states set their proficiency standard at a level below the NAEP Basic level.

### Student Achievement Goals for Schools Receiving SIG Funds

**What the Law Required:** Districts must set achievement goals for each school receiving SIG funds and states must approve these goals.

#### What States Did:

- Approved goals that varied dramatically *within the state*. For example, Wyoming approved a proficiency and graduation rate goal of 100 percent by 2014 for a school that, in 2008-09, had 13 percent proficiency in reading, 6 percent proficiency in math, and a 28 percent grad rate. But for another school, with 20 percent of students proficient in reading and 18 percent proficient in math, the state approved a goal of doing nothing more than "improvement in growth measures."