

Minnesota's ESEA Flexibility Request

Minnesota's ESEA Flexibility Request will cause the following No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provisions to be waived:

- 2014 goal of 100 percent proficiency
- Sanctions on schools resulting from not making AYP
- Mandatory financial set-asides for School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services
- Sanctions for districts resulting from not making AYP
- Identification of schools as in need of improvement, corrective action and restructuring
- Identification of districts as in need of improvement or corrective action

In order to have these provisions waived, Minnesota's application had to meet four principles:

- College- and career-ready academic standards
- State-developed system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support
- Supporting effective instruction and leadership
- Reducing unnecessary administrative burdens

Minnesota was well-positioned in three of these four principles to the extent that the application only had to describe what we're already doing in the area of standards, teacher and principal evaluation, and streamlining of reporting. The accountability system was the principle for which Minnesota had to do the most work, and therefore it is the area of the application that has drawn the most attention.

Essentially, the application describes a new accountability system for the state. At the core of the new system is the use of multiple measurements for accountability. Unlike AYP, which is mostly centered around proficiency, Minnesota's proposed Multiple Measurements Rating (MMR) uses four ratings, weighted equally, to measure school performance:

- **Proficiency**- Schools earn points in the MMR by meeting AYP proficiency goals in individual student subgroups. The percentage of subgroups that make AYP determines the percentage of points a school receives.
- **Growth**- Students are measured by their performance on the MCAs relative to their performance in the most recent year they took the test. Schools get a growth score based on the average growth of all students in the school.
- **Achievement gap reduction**- This measurement answers the question, "Is the growth of my lower-performing students such that it is reducing the achievement gap?" Schools are measured based on how the growth of their students from the seven lower-performing subgroups (Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, English Learners, students in poverty, and special education students) compares to the statewide average growth of higher-performing subgroups. Schools earn MMR points based on their ability to reduce the achievement gap.
- **Graduation rate**- Schools earn points based on their statewide percentile ranking for four-year, on-time graduation rates.

Using these four measurements, schools earn up to 100 points. MDE then looks at the percentage of possible points that each school earned to generate an MMR.

Using the results of the MMR, schools can fall into three groups:

- **Reward Schools-** These schools are the top 15 percent of Title I schools in the MMR. They represent the highest-performing schools on the four measurements. Currently, the reward for these schools mainly comes through public recognition. These schools are identified annually.
- **Focus Schools-** Using just the proficiency and achievement gap reduction measurements from the MMR, each school receives a Focus Rating that measures their contribution to the state's achievement gap. The 10 percent of Title I schools with the lowest Focus Ratings are identified as Focus Schools, and must work with MDE and their district to implement serious interventions aimed at improving the performance of the school's lowest-performing subgroups. Essentially, Focus Schools are designed to attack the achievement gap head on. These schools are identified every three years.
- **Priority Schools-** These are the 5 percent most persistently low-performing Title I schools. Just less than half of these schools are identified through their participation in the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. The remaining schools in this group are the Title I schools with the lowest percentages in the MMR. These schools will implement turnaround plans to drastically change the way the school operates.

To encourage continuous improvement in all schools, MDE has proposed the creation of two additional groups. Title I schools in the 25 percent of schools directly behind the Reward School cutoff may apply to be Celebration Schools. These schools can show both quantitative and qualitative results in making their case. MDE will select a total equal to 10 percent of Title I schools so that when combined with the Reward Schools, we are recognizing the top 25 percent of Title I schools. On the other end of the spectrum, the bottom 25 percent of Title I schools will be identified as Continuous Improvement schools if they are not already Priority or Focus Schools. These schools will work with their districts to create improvement plans. MDE will audit a percentage of these schools' plans to ensure fidelity.

Finally, in order to ensure that all schools are being held accountable, MDE will annually publish two measurements so that the parents, teachers and the public as a whole can see how every school is performing. First, MDE will continue to report AYP results but with new targets and no sanctions for not making AYP. The new targets will reduce the achievement gap by half within six years. Starting in 2012, every subgroup will have a different proficiency target based on the subgroup's statewide average in 2011. From there, the targets of lower-performing groups will rise more quickly so that the non-proficiency of every subgroup will be cut in half. This has the effect of cutting the difference between the highest- and lowest-performing groups in half in the six-year period.

MDE will also report the MMR of every school in the state through a Multiple Measurements Chart. The Chart will show the results in each of the four categories and schools' total percentage of points earned. Using the MDE website, parents can compare the performance of schools in every category and in the total percentage of points earned.