Understanding adequate yearly progress in Alaska public schools

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the cornerstone of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Under the law, schools and school districts are held accountable for showing progress in the percentage of students who score proficient on assessments in language arts and math. The national goal is that all students will be proficient by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

Who is tested?

Alaska students in grades 3 through 10 take the state's standards-based assessments in reading, writing and math. The reading and writing scores are combined to produce a single language arts score for NCLB.

About 75,000 of Alaska's 130,000 public school children are assessed each year for NCLB. More than 98 percent of students in grades 3 through 10 who are enrolled for the full year are assessed each year.

Students with disabilities take the same assessments as other children, although some children with disabilities receive accommodations such as having a scribe write the answers because the child can't hold a pencil. Up to 1 percent of children enrolled in grades 3 through 10 are allowed to take an alternate assessment. They are children with significant cognitive disabilities; teachers administer an assessment to them based on academic tasks.

Alaska students with limited English proficiency who are in their first year in the United States do not have to participate in the NCLB assessments in reading and writing; the results for math also can be excluded. After their first year in the United States, Alaska students with limited English proficiency must take the assessments. They may receive accommodations such as being allowed to ask for clarifications of directions.

How is accountability measured?

Schools and districts are held accountable for student scores in language arts and math and for their students' participation rate in taking the assessments. They also are held accountable in a category called "other," which is the graduation rate for schools with a 12th grade and the attendance rate for other schools.

Here is a breakdown of the 31 categories of accountability:

Assessed students are categorized in ten ways: schoolwide and in the nine subgroups of African-American, Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multi-Ethnic, Economically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, and Limited English Proficient Students.

Multiply the three fields -- language arts scores, math scores and participation rate -- by the ten ways to categorize students and you have 30 categories of accountability. The 31st category is the graduation rate for schools with a 12th grade and the attendance rate for other schools.

Subgroups in a school or district must be of a certain minimum size, known as the "N-size," to be included in NCLB accountability. The reason is that assessment scores of small enrollments aren't statistically significant. Schools and districts must have at least 26 students in a subgroup before that subgroup's scores are reported for NCLB.

The targets, which NCLB calls "annual measurable objectives," for the tests taken in April 2008 in Alaska are:

• 77.18 percent of assessed students schoolwide and in the nine subgroups must achieve a score of proficient in language arts.
• 66.09 percent of assessed students schoolwide and in the nine subgroups must achieve a score of proficient in math.
• 95 percent of eligible students schoolwide and in the nine subgroups must achieve a participation rate of 95 percent.
• 85 percent attendance rate, or, if a school includes a 12th grade, a 55.58 percent four-year cohort graduation rate.

Over time, the targets for language arts and math will go up, reaching 100 percent in 2013-2014. Note that the targets for 2007-2008 are an increase over the previous three years.

School Year	**Annual Measurable Objective for Language Arts**	**Annual Measurable Objective for Mathematics**
2001-02	64.03%	54.86%
2002-03	64.03 %	54.86 %
2003-04	64.03 %	54.86 %
2004-05	71.48 %	57.61 %
2005-06	71.48 %	57.61 %
2006-07	71.48 %	57.61 %

2007-08	77.18 %	66.09 %
2008-09	77.18 %	66.09 %
2009-10	77.18 %	66.09 %
2010-11	82.88 %	74.57 %
2011-12	88.58 %	83.05 %
2012-13	94.28 %	91.53 %
2013-14	100%	100 %

Schools can make AYP and yet not meet the target through a provision called "safe harbor." Under safe harbor, schools and districts make AYP if the percentage of students (schoolwide or in subgroups) who are nonproficient has declined by at least 10 percent from the previous year. This refers to percentage, not percentile points. An example: In a school, 60 percent of students last year were nonproficient. Ten percent of 60 percent is 6 percent. So if 54 percent (60 minus 6) of students this year are nonproficient, the school has made safe harbor, even if the proficiency target hasn't been met. Also, the school or district must meet the target for the attendance rate or graduation rate.

What is the growth method of measuring accountability?

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education has approved Alaska's proposal to add a growth model to demonstrate NCLB accountability. It was first implemented for assessments taken in April 2007. The growth model measures improvement in the same students from year to year.

Under the growth model, students who do not score proficient will still count positively for a school if they have met or exceeded improvement targets for their scores. The targets are based on improvement over a baseline year.

Such students are said to be "on track to becoming proficient." They are added to the proficient students in totaling a school's students who count positively in NCLB's accountability system.

A student will be considered on track to becoming proficient if he or she is on a trajectory to be proficient in four years or less, with proficiency demonstrated no later than 10th grade, because that is the last grade assessed under NCLB.

What are the consequences for not making adequate progress?

Under NCLB, schools on the "did not make AYP" list are said be needing improvement, or in "improvement status."

Schools on the list for the first time are called Level 1 schools; for the second consecutive year, Level 2; for the third consecutive year, Level 3; for the fourth consecutive year, Level 4; and for the fifth and further consecutive years, Level 5.

Consecutive years of failing to make AYP are based on not meeting the target in the same subject area (language arts or math) for consecutive years.

Once a school has reached Level 2, it must meet AYP targets for two consecutive years to be removed from the list of schools that need improvement.

The consequences for schools that need improvement depend on whether they receive Title I (federal anti-poverty) funds or not. Title I schools face more consequences than other schools. A chart that lists the consequences is at: http://www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/SchoolImprovement.html. It is also contained in the media packet.

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