
The NCLB Fix

THE LAW

To make what NCLB considers adequate yearly progress (AYP) each year, schools need to have a specific percentage of students score at the proficient level on state standards tests. Elementary and secondary schools have different “annual measurable objectives” for the first few years, but all require steep progress after 2007.

THE PROBLEM

NCLB’s “all-or-nothing” approach in judging school success ignores the progress individual students make and unfairly identifies schools as failing even though they raise student achievement significantly from one year to the next. The law’s sole emphasis on meeting “cut scores” is a problem because it overlooks a key indicator of student achievement — academic growth. Growth is a more accurate measure for success, particularly for students who are traditionally low performing or face challenges in language and special needs. Students and schools should be credited for progress made toward the goals when determining AYP.

NCLB does not consider whether students make academic gains as long as they meet the proficiency target. The law generates disproportional attention to the students who are just below the proficiency level, in order to make AYP. Information generated by growth systems helps schools make data-driven decisions that impact all students, which NCLB cites as key to improving student performance.

Finally, California’s Academic Performance Index (API) system more carefully examines schools and districts that are struggling, allowing the state to focus resources on those schools that need the most help. AYP is often arbitrary in identifying which schools/districts are in crisis, making it less accurate in determining which schools are actually in academic trouble.

THE NUMBERS 26

Percent of schools that met AYP but failed to make growth targets on their API.

THE FIX

The AYP measurement system needs to be expanded to provide states with greater flexibility in using alternate methods of measuring AYP, such as growth or indexing, as long as schools and districts are making progress towards the goals of NCLB.

** The “NCLB Fix” is a series outlining the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act and the reasonable solutions sought by the California School Boards Association — November 2006.*