



### *AYP in Illinois and the Nation*

**Hazel E. Loucks and Eleanor G. Cameron**

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In the few short years since its passage in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has become the focus of many in education, from state superintendents to researchers to teachers. The massive bill contained many provisions designed to hold schools and districts accountable for student learning, with the goal of having 100% of students working at grade level by 2014. At the heart of the bill were the accountability provisions – schools and districts must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each year, increasing the percentage of students scoring at or above the “proficient” level, moving towards the goal of 100% proficient. Schools and districts that fail to make AYP face sanctions under the law.

A key goal of NCLB is to focus attention on subgroups that have traditionally been underserved by schools: ethnic and racial minorities, economically disadvantaged students, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. For a school or district to meet AYP, it must have all its subgroups also meeting the target.

In this *Issues in Education* we seek to give the reader a basic introduction to the way in which AYP works in Illinois, and to compare Illinois’ implementation of NCLB with that of other states. We provide a history of adoption of NCLB in Illinois, explain the nuts and bolts of AYP, and finish with conclusions and recommendations.

Overall, we found that Illinois’ approach to AYP is very similar to that of other states. The state has chosen to increase its AYP goals annually at a rate

similar to other states; it has elected to use similar “Ns” in reporting subgroup data; and while Chicago recently ran afoul of the rules when it used teachers at “failing” schools as providers of supplemental education services, Illinois, unlike a handful of states, has not openly challenged the rules of NCLB. While the US Department of Education has recently indicated that there is room for states to maneuver within NCLB, Illinois is generally trying to comply through standard approaches.

We make the following policy recommendations for Illinois and the nation, based on concerns raised by numerous state and national groups:

1. Push for the U.S. Department of Education to allow the use of value-added calculations for AYP at the state level – track cohorts, rather than comparing, for example, third graders one year to different third graders the next year. Give schools and districts credit for improvement, as well as measuring them against an absolute test score.
2. Work to further modify testing for special needs students. Students should be tested at the level of instruction they are receiving via their IEP, not their chronological age-grade. When NCLB and IDEA conflict, IDEA should take precedence.
3. Examine English Language Learner testing requirements and modify tests as needed to make them doable for students.
4. Illinois should continue implementation of its statewide database for tracking student information.

#### *About the Authors*

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) involved such change as to warrant a new name, becoming better known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The passage of NCLB marked a major shift in federal education policy from an emphasis on standards and assessment to an emphasis on accountability. The law is based on four major principles that are intended to provide a framework through which educators, communities and families can improve their schools. These principles are accountability for results; local control and flexibility; expanded school choice; and effective programs that reflect scientifically based research. At the heart of NCLB are provisions designed to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The law requires that each state develop a plan to enable all public school students to meet the state's academic achievement standards, while working toward the goal of narrowing the achievement gap among different subgroups of students. \* This part of the act was designed to change the culture of schools so that success is defined in terms of student achievement. NCLB focuses on raising student achievement through a complex, detailed and highly prescriptive accountability system, known as adequate yearly progress (AYP).

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Adequate Yearly Progress sets a common standard for all students in a state based upon statewide testing. By the 2005-2006 school year, each state is required to have in place a set of high-quality, yearly academic assessments for reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. In addition, by the 2007-2008 school year, each state must have an equivalent science assessment administered at least once during grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. States must ensure that 95% of all students enrolled are assessed.

The basic goal for AYP is that 100% of the students within a state will reach proficiency on the state exams by 2014. Each state has designed its own plan to attain this goal, which has been submitted for approval by the US Department of Education. States started with a base rate of achievement (in Illinois, 40% of students receiving scores of "proficient" or above in 2003), then determined a model for incremental improvement towards the goal of 100% proficient by 2014.

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\* Subgroups defined by NCLB are: Black, White, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Multi-racial/Ethnic; Economically disadvantaged (qualifies for free/reduced price lunch); Limited English Proficient; and Students with disabilities.

## A HISTORY OF NCLB IN ILLINOIS AND NATIONWIDE

### *The Transition from ESEA to NCLB*

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In implementing NCLB ... many states, including Illinois, decided to use their existing testing systems with accommodations.

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The 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act stipulated that states have a single statewide accountability system for Title I and Non-Title I schools. Many states were still working on meeting the requirements of the 1994 law at the time NCLB was passed. Only seventeen states were in full compliance, and nine states were under sanctions for lack of compliance. Illinois was making progress but was not yet in full compliance with ESEA.<sup>1</sup> While NCLB contained many of the requirements of ESEA, states had to change course somewhat to be in compliance with the new law. Many states enacted new legislation to meet the requirements of NCLB, such as Illinois Public Act 093-0470. These laws established the standard of annual testing and levels of proficiency (basic, proficient, advanced), and created annual objectives moving toward 100% proficiency by the 2014 school year. According to the federal Department of Education, by March 2004 forty-one states appeared to be on track in meeting the requirements of NCLB.<sup>2</sup>

Illinois already had in place a state-designed school improvement plan under ESEA, prior to the passage of NCLB. Schools were placed in Academic Early Warning Status (AEWS) if fewer than 50% of students scored at the proficient level for two consecutive years. Title I schools were also placed in School Improvement Status under the 1994 ESEA federal legislation. In order for a school to make AYP, it had to meet a 50% proficient goal within five years.

### *Selecting the tests for NCLB*

In implementing NCLB, the US Department of Education allowed states to use a combination of state and local tests and off-the-shelf tests to fulfill the testing requirements, provided the state could show that the tests were aligned with their state standards. Some states such as California, Florida, Louisiana and Illinois decided to use their existing testing systems with accommodations.

Under the 1994 ESEA guidelines, Illinois was using the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) at grades 3, 5, 8; the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) at 11th grade; the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) for English Language Learners; the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA) for special needs students; and the grade 2 assessment (Terra Nova) for Title I schools that had grade 2 as the highest grade level. Illinois has maintained each of these tests for determining AYP under NCLB. Illinois was already testing in science. Therefore the 2006 requirement for science testing will not be as problematic for Illinois as some other states. (Science will not be included in AYP calculations.) Prior to 2004, Illinois students were being assessed in various areas through the ISAT, including writing, social studies, the arts and physical education and health. Illinois Public Act 093-0838, passed in July 2004,

limited standardized testing in the state to just those subjects mandated by NCLB – English, math and science.

### *Determining the base level for AYP*

Each state, using data from the 2001-2002 school year as the baseline data, established the starting point for measuring student progress. At a minimum, the starting point had to be based on the higher percentage of students at the “proficient” level either in the lowest achieving subgroup in the state or in a school in the 20th percentile of all schools in the state (ranked by students at the proficient level). Illinois found that its subgroup data was the lowest, and in 2002, set the bar at 40% proficient as a starting point for all subgroups and schools in both reading and math.

### *Defining “N”*

NCLB mandates various types of data reporting by schools, districts and states, including disaggregating data by subgroups. This raised the issue of privacy, as some schools and districts may have only a few students in a particular subgroup, and to publish these data would make them identifiable. Furthermore, a particularly high or low achieving student in a subgroup could skew the data for that subgroup if the group was small enough in number.

To deal with these problems, NCLB asked states to determine their own “Ns” for each subgroup – the minimum size of a subgroup for it to be included in reporting (to ensure privacy), and the minimum size of a subgroup for it to have its own AYP subgroup (to ensure reliability). In Illinois, a subgroup with fewer than 10 students at a school cannot be mentioned in reporting of that school’s disaggregated scores, to ensure privacy. To address reliability concerns, a subgroup of fewer than 40 students in a school in Illinois will not have its own AYP calculation for that school.

For reporting purposes, other states use numbers similar to Illinois: Indiana and Ohio each use an “N” of 10 to protect the privacy of their students. New York uses an “N” of 5, while Colorado uses an “N” of 16. For reliability purposes, Illinois chose a large number, 40 students, on which to base determination of subgroup AYP. Elsewhere, many other states also settled on 40 as a good number. Nationwide, AYP “Ns” for determining reliability range from 5 in Utah to 200 in Texas. Several states, including Indiana and New Hampshire decided to base their reliability N on the use of statistical confidence intervals, believing that this method can be used to determine both achievement and progress and reduce the likelihood of falsely identifying school as failing to meet AYP.<sup>3</sup> Illinois is currently considering using confidence intervals.

A third type of “N” is the proportion of students that must participate in the test in order for AYP to be met. Nationally that figure is set at 95% by the NCLB legislation. Chicago Public Schools requested a waiver for a

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Minimum - N	Number Set by Illinois
For reporting (to ensure privacy)	10
For AYP determination (for reliability)	40
For participation	95%

Source: *Approved Accountability Workbook for Illinois*, ISBE, rev. Feb. 2004, p. 9.

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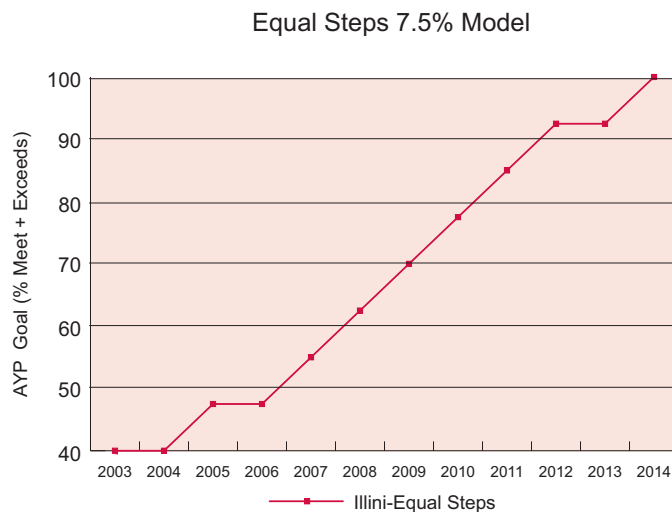
The goal of NCLB is that student growth will be continuous and substantial such that all students will be proficient by 2014.

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lower rate of participation but their request was not granted. One of the national criticisms of NCLB is that small schools and rural schools can have difficulty meeting AYP due to the random variations in student attendance. Also at issue is the requirement that 95% of each of the subgroups must take the assessment.

### *Trajectory Differences*

The goal of NCLB is that student growth will be continuous and substantial such that all students will be proficient by 2014. While states have to ensure that their intermediate goals increase in equal increments over the NCLB timeline, states have a great deal of flexibility in determining how often their intermediate goals increase. States also have the flexibility to set different trajectories for different grade levels. Illinois has opted to make the same trajectory for all their schools. Illinois' goals increase in 2005, 2007 and then annually until 2014, increasing 7.5% each time (the exception is 2013, when the goal of 92.5% remains unchanged from the previous year).



Source: [http://www.isbe.net/ayp/equal\\_steps\\_chart.htm](http://www.isbe.net/ayp/equal_steps_chart.htm)

A number of states back loaded their AYP increments with a significant amount of growth in the final years of the law. States like Ohio, Alaska and Arizona set their trajectory to be more aggressive the second half of the 14 years. New Jersey, on the other hand set its trajectory to increase by equal amounts every three years, the maximum allowed by NCLB regulations. Arkansas and Washington set their trajectory to increase every year in equal increments. These plans were all accepted by the U.S.

Department of Education. Additionally, states can petition to Department of Education to revise their AYP timeline. Missouri, for instance, reduced its target percentage of proficient students for 2005 from 38.8% in language arts to 26.6%, and will have to revise its model to demonstrate how all students will be proficient on schedule.

## THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF AYP TODAY

### *Calculating AYP*

While meeting proficiency goals for all subgroups of students lies at the heart of AYP calculations, there are additional factors to be considered. As mentioned above, a school, district or state must also meet the participation goal of 95% of students tested in order to meet AYP.

Additionally, states were required to designate “other indicators” that must also be met for AYP, usually graduation or attendance rates. “Other indicators” can also include decreases in grade-to-grade retention rates, and increases in the percentages of students completing gifted and talented, advanced placement, and college preparatory courses. Currently 37 states use attendance and graduation rates as their indicators. Illinois uses both of these common methods – attendance rate for elementary schools, and graduation rate for high schools. The attendance rate goals range from 80% in Maine to 95.8 % in Iowa. Illinois used 88% as a starting point for attendance with a goal of 92% in 2014. States using graduation rate for the other indicator reported a range of 50% in Nevada and 95% in Rhode Island. Illinois used a starting point of 65% with a goal of 85% in 2014.<sup>4</sup>

A final factor in determining AYP is the so-called “safe harbor” rule. This was designed to help schools that are improving rapidly, but whose students still score below proficient. Schools that achieve “safe harbor” are designated as making AYP, even though their proficiency rates may still be below the state goal. In Illinois, schools in which *all* subgroups have improved their proficiency rate by at least 10% over the previous year (or are performing at or above the state proficiency goal) can receive “safe harbor” if they have met all the other requirements for AYP besides the statewide proficiency level. For example, if all the subgroups in a school except students with disabilities are meeting the AYP proficiency goal, and the percentage of disabled students scoring at the proficient level has improved by 12% over the past year, then the school may be said to be making AYP, assuming all other requirements are met.

### *Sanctions Under NCLB and the Illinois Accountability System*

In 2003, the Illinois state legislature passed Public Act 093-0470, aligning state and federal accountability requirements. All schools in Illinois (whether receiving Title I money or not) that do not make AYP for two consecutive years are placed in Academic Early Warning Status (AEWS). Each subgroup of 40 or more students in a school or district must reach the performance targets for increasing proficiency in reading and math for the school or district to make AYP.

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Academic Early Warning Status (AEWS) schools that make AYP for two consecutive years are then removed from AEWS. Schools that do not make AYP for four consecutive years are placed in Academic Watch Status, and must make AYP for two consecutive years to have that status removed. State consequences for AEWS schools include the presence of an external support team, and revisions to the school's School Improvement Plan, subject to approval by the State Superintendent. Schools on AWS status face oversight by a state-appointed School Improvement Panel, and a district/state performance agreement. Schools that have missed AYP for six years are in State Intervention Status (SIS). Those schools are subject to state takeover, including replacement of administrators, and possible dissolution of the school.

Federal school improvement status designations apply only to Title I schools. Title I schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years are placed in School Improvement Status and must offer public school choice. Title I schools that do not make AYP for three consecutive years must offer both choice and Supplemental Educational Services (SES). If those schools miss making AYP for a fourth consecutive year, they are designated as being in Corrective Action and must choose among several remediation strategies outlined in federal law. A fifth year of missing AYP means that the school or district must restructure. The fifth year is dedicated to designing and planning that restructuring, which is implemented in the sixth year, should the school or district fail again to meet AYP. Schools can have their names removed from federal Title I warning lists, as with the state warning lists, by making AYP for two consecutive years.

### ***Supplemental Educational Services***

Supplemental Education Services are tutoring services that must be provided without charge to students at their request if their Title I school does not meet AYP for 3 consecutive years. Each state must approve SES providers and make this information available to districts and families. The federal Department of Education recently ruled that Chicago Public Schools could not be a designated SES provider since the district is designated as needing improvement. The city argued it had done so because other providers did not have sufficient capacity and were more expensive. Today, many of the approved SES providers in Illinois, as well as in other states, are online programs, available everywhere.

Kentucky currently allows school districts to become approved SES providers, in addition to private and nonprofit organizations, primarily because there are no providers to offer services in remote areas. Pennsylvania has a program that offers SES grants to parents allowing the parents to select the tutoring program of their choice.

### ***School Choice***

School Choice must also be provided as an option for families whose children attend Title I schools that fail to make AYP for two or more years. At an April 2003 conference co-sponsored by the Thomas Fordham Foundation and the American Enterprise Council, large urban districts



were invited to speak about Choice and Supplemental Educational Services issues. Many of them, including Baltimore and Washington D.C. said they had to return most of the 20% set aside dollars from Title I due to the fact that their states had not identified SES providers nor were they prepared to offer transportation to another school. School districts and states have cited a variety of reasons why school choice is difficult to implement in certain areas:

- Other districts are not mandated to accept students from failing schools
- Students in urban areas may not have a non-failing school anywhere near them
- Students in rural areas often cannot reasonably be transported to another school due to geographical distance between schools
- Transportation of individual students to other schools is costly and difficult to coordinate

Additionally, some have observed that there is little incentive for higher performing schools to accept students from lower performing schools, given that those students will likely enter with lower test scores, and may therefore hurt the receiving school's ability to meet AYP.

The US Department of Education has encouraged states and districts to be creative in their approach, such as creating charter schools or schools-within-schools. Illinois currently has a law that limits the number of charter schools allowed in the state. Chicago has proposed legislation asking to double the number of charter schools in Chicago, but that legislation has failed so far. Other states have been able to increase the number of charter schools due to an absence of restrictions on charter school growth. A variety of solutions from other states have been forwarded for approval to the federal Department of Education, and many have been approved.

### ***Special Education Students and English Language Learners***

One of the most controversial areas of NCLB is the way in which students with disabilities and English Language Learners are assessed. The U.S. Department of Education states that approximately 9% of public school students receive special education services. The Department of Education estimates that 9% of this group (or about 1% of the total school population) have the most significant cognitive disabilities.<sup>5</sup> While the initial NCLB legislation called for accommodations for students with disabilities, a December 2003 decision by the U.S. Education Department declared that special education students can take alternative assessments, but proficient scores on these tests can only account for 1% of the total test scores for a school or district. Generally alternative assessments such as the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA) are only administered to students with the most severe cognitive disabilities. The remaining 90% of students receiving special education services must take the standard test for their grade. Accommodations can be made for them in accordance with their IEPs, such as longer test time. In disaggregating scores by subgroup, all special education students, whether taking a standard or alternative assessment, are counted in the "students with disabilities" subgroup. In 2004, according to ISBE, 201 districts in Illinois (more than half of those

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who did not make AYP) failed to meet AYP standards solely due to the test scores of special education students.

Texas has taken the position that their state law, which required that special education students be tested according to the recommendations of their IEP, takes precedence over NCLB. In 2005, the Texas Education Agency took the bold step of granting AYP status to 1312 schools that had been previously declared failing due to the test scores of their special education students. By ignoring the so-called “1% rule,” Texas may be setting itself up for a battle with the U.S. Department of Education. Thus far, Illinois education officials have expressed discontent at the assessment rules for special education and English language learners, but have not openly challenged the rules.

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The Department of Education has recently indicated a willingness to provide additional flexibility on the issue of testing special education students. In April 2005, the Department announced it would allow an additional 2% of students (those receiving special education services) to be counted as proficient in the short run even if their scores are below proficient, and for the creation of a new assessment tool for these students in coming years. This new policy should boost the number of schools whose special education student subgroup makes AYP. However, states have to apply to be eligible for this new rule change to affect them.

English Language Learners (ELL) pose another issue for AYP over which states have expressed concern. In Illinois, students receiving Title III services, i.e. those classified as “Limited English Proficient,” can take the IMAGE test instead of the ISAT. Under NCLB regulations, however, students must take the standard ISAT test two years after becoming “English language proficient” (i.e. no longer receiving Title III services). ISBE points out in its 2004 *Snapshot of School Report Cards* that ELL is the only subgroup where the most capable members are automatically removed from the group.<sup>6</sup> A second concern is the difference in education levels of recent immigrants. Older students especially may have difficulty adjusting to American educational expectations, if they have received a less-advanced education in their native countries. While most make sizable educational gains, many still do not perform as well on standardized tests as their American-born peers.

The testing of special education students and English Language Learners remains a major hurdle in attaining AYP in Illinois and elsewhere. In 2004, 69% of districts in Illinois that failed to make AYP did so due to the scores of these two subgroups, according to ISBE’s *Snapshot of School Report Cards*.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Student Mobility and a Full Academic Year***

The NCLB requirement to test all students raises the issue of student mobility. For instance, a school ought not be held responsible for the performance of a student who enrolls a week before the test. Student scores can only count for a school, district, or state if that student has been enrolled there for a “full academic year.” To clarify this issue, Illinois

provides a definition of the term: if students have enrolled in the district prior to October 1 and have attended school in the district (maybe not the same school) those students must be included in the district composite. If they remained in the state but were attending school in different districts, their score will be included in the state composite. Students enrolling on or after October 1 are still tested, but their scores are not counted in their new school, district or state that school year. ISBE recently proposed pushing the enrollment date back to May 1 of the previous school year. It remains to be seen whether the U.S. Department of Education will approve this change, which could significantly reduce the number of student scores reported in districts with mobile populations.

### ***Late Reporting***

Twenty states have been criticized for the late notification of school AYP status. In 2004, *Education Week* reported that states were having difficulty with timeliness of returns and errors in their AYP calculations. Illinois was included in that report for late reporting and for calculation errors.<sup>8</sup> Recently, Illinois provided test results from its early spring 2004 tests in December 2004, with corrections in January 2005. According to ISBE, new testing contracts beginning in 2006 will specify score returns in early June, only a few months after students take the tests.

Some states are legislating when test scores must be released. Arkansas requires that schools identified in need of improvement be reported annually by May 1. Oklahoma passed legislation to require test results to be delivered to the school districts before the beginning of the new school year.<sup>9</sup> Many states are now testing students earlier in the year in an effort to meet NCLB deadlines.

## **CONCERNS AND PROPOSED CHANGES TO AYP**

### ***Concerns about AYP***

A major component of AYP is based on a single test, a snapshot, of the student achievement continuum – the percent of students who were present and scored at proficient or at a higher level on one particular day. This is commonly referred to as the “status” model of measuring student achievement. Such a measurement fails to acknowledge achievement gains by students who are still below proficient but have moved from below basic to basic or for those students who have moved from proficient to advanced.

A major criticism of AYP is that it compares, for instance, the third grade class of 2004 to the third grade class of 2003. It does not reveal anything about individual students, or cohorts, advancing over time. Dr. Robert Brennan in his paper, “Revolutions and Evolutions in Current Educational Testing” states, “Cohort-to-cohort analyses are essentially evaluations of changes in teacher/school performance, without any direct evidence about the progress of individual students. Furthermore, in cohort-to-cohort analyses teachers and schools are

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evaluated against a moving target of different cohorts of students, which makes year-to-year comparisons both ambiguous and highly suspect.”<sup>10</sup> The mobility rate in our nation’s large urban centers is as high as 50%, making this statement quite notable.

Another issue is that since states set their own definition of adequate yearly progress and create their own assessment tests, AYP results do not allow for state-to-state comparisons. Depending on the tests they chose, states may be setting the student achievement bar quite differently from one another.

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Some complain that the AYP formula is too restrictive, and does not reflect student progress. When the AYP formula was applied to states like Texas and Connecticut, which, according to most observers, were making progress in closing the achievement gap between student groups, large numbers of the schools in those states failed to meet AYP. Another key example is Florida, where 827 schools given an “A” rating by Governor Jeb Bush failed to make AYP. In North Carolina, 155 schools designated as “Schools of Excellence” or “Schools of Distinction,” suffered the same fate. In Arizona, 40 of the state’s top schools received federal failing labels due to the absence of a few students on the day the test was given.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, data analyses have found that large achievement gaps may still exist in schools and districts that have made AYP. On the other hand, award-winning schools such as those in Florida and North Carolina may have been failing some subgroups and are now going to have to provide more help to these groups of students.

### ***Is AYP do-able?***

Independent studies in at least five states (California, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana and Minnesota) have shown that as the AYP bars rise higher and higher, schools and districts will find it increasingly difficult to meet AYP, and more and more will be labeled as failing. These studies project that *by the year 2014*—the year all students are required to be proficient in reading, math and science—*between three quarters and 99 percent of all schools will be found failing to meet AYP.*<sup>12</sup>

Yet a look at the number of schools making AYP in recent years seems to show some hope – fewer schools entered the 2004-05 school year under NCLB sanctions than the previous year. In the 49 states and the District of Columbia reporting the number of schools not making AYP for at least one year in 2004-05, a total of 20,948 schools failed to make AYP. This compares to 26,896 schools in those 49 states and D.C. in the 2003-2004 school year. Of these 49 states and D.C., 38 saw more of their schools making AYP, including Illinois, while 11 states saw their number decrease, and one stayed the same. However, there are various factors involved in this apparent improvement – namely, federal rule changes to better accommodate IEP and ELL students. Additionally, many states revised their accountability plans, making it easier for their schools and districts to achieve AYP. Thirdly,

all states kept their percentage proficient goals at the same level as the previous year.<sup>13</sup>

While the number of schools failing to meet AYP for at least one year fell somewhat over the past year, the number of schools failing to make AYP for two or more years has almost doubled. Of the 50 states and D.C. reporting the number of schools not making AYP for two or more years in 2004-05, a total of 10,991 schools failed to make AYP for at least two years. This compares to 6,256 schools in those 50 states and D.C. in 2003-2004. Of these 50 states and D.C., 7 had the number of schools not making AYP for at least two years decrease (fewer schools in need of improvement) and 44 had the number of schools in this category increase.<sup>14</sup>

### *Consequences for Opting Out*

As NCLB enters its fourth year, some Title I schools are beginning to face more severe sanctions as they are unable to meet AYP. Some states have explored the idea of opting out of NCLB and foregoing Title I money. Utah formally proposed this idea to the federal Department of Education in 2004, and learned that if they did not comply with NCLB, they would forfeit other formula and categorical funds for such programs as after school, drug free school and literacy, as well as their Title I funds.<sup>15</sup>

Another strategy being considered is for a school or district to opt out of receiving Title I funds for one year, then receive them again. The US Department of Education has indicated that states can set their own guidelines for dealing with this situation. In a policy statement released in February 2005, ISBE took the position that if a district takes a school out of Title I status for a year, then when it resumes receiving Title I funds its status will be reset, and it will approach AYP with a clean slate.<sup>16</sup> How widespread this practice will become remains to be seen.

### *Value Added – A Better Way to Measure AYP?*

The fundamental idea behind NCLB and AYP is that all students should be held to the same standards, and that there should be consequences for schools that are not effective in helping students learn. A problem many have with current methods of calculating progress (AYP) is that it ignores the fact that students start at very different academic levels. Tests at higher grade levels can be affected by gaps in a student's learning in prior years. As the Bush administration considers expanding NCLB at the high school level, some have argued that it is unfair to hold high schools accountable for poor student performance when some students enter ninth grade unable to read.

An alternative that has been suggested is the use of value added data analysis. In this model, student performance is evaluated in comparison to how the student scored in previous years – student growth is rewarded, whether that student meets the “proficient” score or not. A school that started off with most fourth graders reading at a first grade level, and brought them up to a third grade level would be rewarded for

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In the value added model, student performance is evaluated in comparison to how the student scored in previous years – student growth is rewarded, whether that student meets the “proficient” score or not.

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this progress, even though student test scores may not meet the state goal. It makes sense that if students do not start equally they cannot reach a common goal at the same time. In a 2002 report commissioned by the US Department of Education, John Bishop states that “school accountability systems need to measure value added and to give indicators of value added a central place in the definition of school quality.”<sup>17</sup> He recommends that NCLB provisions be altered to allow states to develop value added indicators. However, while the federal Department of Education has recently indicated a willingness to provide more flexibility in calculating AYP, even suggesting that it may be open to a “growth” model, it has not approved of the use of value added data at this time.

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“It’s important to remember that AYP and accountability aren’t reforms: they are intended to *cause* reforms.”

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Calculating value added is a complicated task, requiring data analysis that tracks students over time. This in turn requires states to keep central databases of student data, currently not a common practice. Some states, such as Tennessee and Rhode Island, are already supplementing their NCLB state report card data with value added information. Illinois is laying the groundwork for such analysis by creating a statewide student database, which is scheduled to be fully implemented by 2007.

## CONCLUSION

Many in the education world continue to feel negatively about No Child Left Behind in general, and AYP in particular. However, as the Education Trust comments, “It’s important to remember that AYP and accountability aren’t reforms: they are intended to *cause* reforms.”<sup>18</sup> And early results seem to indicate that many schools are meeting the challenge of NCLB – more schools and districts in Illinois and nationwide are meeting AYP goals. The US Department of Education’s recent effort towards mediating its differences with educators and states is a positive sign. If states are given the flexibility to create and implement high quality tests to measure student progress, while still being held to the goal of leaving no child behind, all may make the goal of 100% proficient by 2014.

### *Recommendations for AYP – In Illinois and Nationwide\**

1. Consider using value added calculations for AYP at the state level – track cohorts, rather than comparing third graders one year to third graders another year, and give schools and districts

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\*It should be noted that in April 2005, ISBE submitted to the U.S. Department of Education a proposal for several key changes to its NCLB accountability system. As of publication of this *Issues in Education*, the outcome of these proposed changes is unknown. The changes include: increasing the minimum “Ns” for reporting subgroup scores, using confidence intervals to determine the “N” for readability, and redefining the “full academic year.” ISBE is also proposing to create a new test with “modified readability level.” A May 2005 Chicago Tribune article provides a useful assessment of the impact of the proposed changes on the AYP status of schools and districts. See Banchemo, S. (2005, May 16). Educators ask U.S. for Break on No Child. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0505160168may16,1,605879.story>.

credit for improvement, as well as measuring them against an absolute test score. This type of analysis for AYP is not currently allowed by the U.S. Department of Education, but is under consideration as of Spring 2005.

2. Further modify testing for special needs students – test them at the level of instruction they are receiving via their IEP, not their chronological age-grade. When NCLB and IDEA conflict, IDEA should take precedence. This is not currently permitted by the U.S. Department of Education, but further clarification of the “2%” rule (pg. 10) may allow for more flexibility in regards to students with disabilities.
3. Examine English Language Learner testing requirements and modify tests as needed to make them doable for students.
4. Illinois should continue implementation of its statewide database for tracking student information.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Seven years and counting. (2001, November 28). Education Week, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro).

<sup>3</sup> Pierce, Jason. (2003, September). Minimum size of subgroups for AYP. ECS State Notes. Retrieved from [www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/49/76/4976.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/49/76/4976.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Education Commission of the States. (2004). ECS report to the nation: State implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act; respecting diversity among states. Retrieved from [www.ecs.org/html/ReportToTheNation/docs/Report\\_to\\_the\\_Nation.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/html/ReportToTheNation/docs/Report_to_the_Nation.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2003, December 9). Retrieved from [www.ed.gov/print/news/pressreleases/2003/12/12092003.html](http://www.ed.gov/print/news/pressreleases/2003/12/12092003.html).

Illinois State Board of Education. (2004, December). Snapshot of school report cards 2003-2004. Retrieved from <ftp://help.isbe.net/webapps/ReportCard/SnapshotRpCrds.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Olson, Lynn. (2004, January 7). Data doubts plague states, federal law. Education Week, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Oklahoma School Testing Program Act, Article V. §70-1210.507, (2003). Retrieved from [www.lsb.state.ok.us/](http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/).

<sup>10</sup> Brennan, Robert. (2004, June). Revolutions and evolutions in current educational testing (Occasional Research Paper #7). Retrieved from The Iowa Academy of Education Web site: [www.finefoundation.org/IAE/iaw-z-op-brennan-1.pdf](http://www.finefoundation.org/IAE/iaw-z-op-brennan-1.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Packer, Joel and Kaufman, Dan. (2004, November). NCLB testing results offer 'complex, muddled' picture. NEA Issues in Education. Retrieved from [www.nea.org/esea/ayptrends1104.html](http://www.nea.org/esea/ayptrends1104.html).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. (2005, February). Taskforce on No Child Left Behind final report. Retrieved from [www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/nclb\\_report.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/nclb_report.htm).

<sup>16</sup> Illinois State Board of Education. (2005, February 25). Policy statement regarding the application of NCLB sanctions. Retrieved from [www.isbe.net/sos/pdf/policy\\_statement\\_nclb.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/sos/pdf/policy_statement_nclb.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Bishop, John. (2002, April). What should be the federal role in supporting and shaping development of state accountability systems for secondary school achievement? Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education web site: [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hs/bishop.doc](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hs/bishop.doc).

<sup>18</sup> The Education Trust. (2004, August 27). The ABCs of 'AYP' beyond any doubt: we can do this. Retrieved from <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/new+ayp+abc.htm>.

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