

THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Accountability | World-Class Math and Science Standards | Meaningful Diploma/CORE 24



**The Washington State Board of Education:
Accountability Index
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The No Child Left Behind Act: A study in unintended consequences

No federal law has a nobler purpose than the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Its goal is to ensure that all American children get the quality education they need to thrive and to sustain the democracy and prosperity of our country.

More specifically, NCLB was designed to hold public schools accountable for doing a better job of educating children of color, children from low-income families, children who are English language learners, and children with disabilities. These are the groups of children who have most often been left behind in the past. For far too long, these children have been trapped in a system and in schools that are under-resourced and unprepared to meet their educational needs.

To hold schools accountable for improving the education of all children, NCLB created a system of quality ratings for schools and sanctions for schools that do not meet specific goals for student achievement. This rating system sets a very ambitious goal: by 2014, all U.S. students would pass state tests in reading and math.

NCLB requires that schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) towards this goal by scoring at progressively higher levels in a complex matrix of categories that includes reading and math scores for nine groups of students (five ethnic groups, low-income students, English language learners, and students in special education). The matrix also includes additional factors, such as high school graduation rates and the number of unexcused absences. For each of the student groups, scores are generated whenever there are 30 or more students in that subgroup in a school.

When schools that receive federal Title I funds do not meet the AYP goals established by NCLB, they enter a “step of improvement.” (Title I funds are directed to schools with a large proportion of low-income students.) This means that schools are required to take certain actions, such as giving all students the opportunity to transfer to other schools or providing extra tutoring at no cost to students’ families. If schools still aren’t able to make improvements and raise their scores, more drastic sanctions are required, including state intervention in persistently low-achieving schools.

This system of quality rating and progressive sanctions was intended to focus schools on meeting the educational needs of all students. But critical flaws in the complex system of ratings and sanctions produce misleading results and unintended consequences. Specifically, the flaws of the AYP system include:

- Where there are fewer than 30 students in a measured sub-group, that group’s educational progress is not counted. This often means small schools are excluded, as well as small or isolated groups of students of color, English language learners, and students in special education.
- Sanctions apply only to schools receiving federal Title I funds.
- Sanctions are not tailored to address the specific needs of local schools and districts and do not result in needed improvements.
- The system is so complex that educators, parents, and the public are often confused rather than informed.

- The current federal system only measures student achievement in reading and math.
- The current system does not recognize or reward improvements in student achievement.
- Washington has higher academic standards than many other states, so the bar is higher for our schools. As a result, the current federal system classifies too many of our schools as “in need of improvement” and subject to sanctions.

Creating a new and better quality rating system for schools

There is growing momentum all across the country for substantial change to the accountability provisions of NCLB. Pending Congressional reauthorization of the NCLB Act presents an opportunity for change. At the same time, the Obama administration has signaled its understanding of the need for change by proposing regulations requiring a vastly simpler set of metrics that schools must meet to win federal “Race to the Top” grants for school improvement efforts.

The Washington state Legislature directed the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop a simpler, fairer, more informative accountability index to identify schools that deserve recognition and those that need additional support or intervention to improve.

This new Accountability Index could, if approved by Congress, replace the current NCLB requirements. The federal Department of Education could also grant a waiver that allows Washington state to use this system in place of the one required by NCLB.

The SBE and the Office of Superintendent of Instruction (OSPI) intend to use this new, locally created Accountability Index to assess the quality of our state’s schools beginning in 2010. Even though this system cannot yet be used in place of federal requirements, it is needed to give us a more accurate picture of how our schools are progressing and where improvement is needed.

Washington’s Accountability Index

Principles that guided the development of the Accountability Index:

- Use existing data.
- Rely on multiple measures.
- Include assessment results from all grades and subjects tested statewide.
- Be fair, reasonable, and consistent.
- Be valid and accurate.
- Use consistent rules for both schools and school districts.
- Apply to as many schools and districts as possible.
- Use familiar concepts when possible.
- Provide multiple ways to reward success.
- Be flexible enough to accommodate future changes.

The Accountability Index is based on a set of *five outcomes* and *four indicators*. The outcomes are the *results of state tests in reading, writing, math, science, and the extended graduation rate*.

These five outcomes are examined using four indicators:

- Achievement of non-low income students.
- Achievement of low-income students.
- Achievement of all students compared to those in schools or districts with similar demographic characteristics.
- Improvement in student achievement compared to the previous year.

Matrix of Accountability Measures

INDICATORS	OUTCOMES				
	Reading	Writing	Math	Science	Ext. Grad. Rate
Achievement of non-low income students					
Achievement of low income students					
Achievement vs. peers					
Improvement from the previous year					

How the rating system works

Ratings used in the index range from 1 to 7 and are based on a school’s performance on each of the outcomes and indicators. The average of the ratings is the Accountability Index.

Achievement is measured using the percentage of students who meet the state’s academic standards in reading, writing, math, and science. The highest rating (7) applies to schools or districts where at least 90% of students meet academic standards; the lowest rating (1) is applied to schools where fewer than 40% of students do so. Separate ratings are given for non-low income and low income students. Ratings are also given for the extended graduation rates of these two student groups.

A separate “Learning Index” is used to calculate the *Achievement vs. Peers* and *Improvement* indicators. This index is a more refined measure of student achievement in reading, writing, math, and science because it is based on the percentage of students who score at each proficiency level on Washington’s standards-based tests:

- 4 = exceeds standards
- 3 = meets standards
- 2 = partially meets standard
- 1 = well below standard

The Learning Index is a weighted average for all the student results and is similar to a grade point average that uses a 4-point scale. A distinctive feature of this index is that it includes students who exceed standards. In the federal AYP system, there is no recognition or reward for having students meet the highest level of achievement.

The *Achievement vs. Peers* measure is determined by predicting the average level of achievement that would occur in schools and districts with similar student characteristics – that is, similar percentages of students who are from low income families, are English language learners, are highly mobile, or who are in special education or gifted programs. Ratings are based on how far a school or district is above or below the predicted level. Thus, if a school’s Learning Index is *above what is predicted* by .20 (similar to a difference in grade point average of 2.50 and 2.70), the school receives a rating of 7. This score recognizes that the school outperformed those with similar student characteristics. Scores in the middle of the range (-.05 to .05) show that a school or district is performing on par with its “peers.” Scores at the bottom of the range indicate that a school or district has fallen behind its peers.

The Learning Index is also used to measure *Improvement*. The score is the amount of change that took place in the Learning Index from the previous year. Higher ratings are given when the Learning Index increases, and lower ratings are given when it declines.

Rating System

	READING	WRITING	MATH	SCIENCE	EXT. GRAD. RATE
ACHIEVEMENT FOR NON-LOW INCOME STUDENTS	<u>% MET STANDARD</u>		<u>RATING</u>		<u>RATE</u>
	90 - 100%.....		7		> 95%.....
	80 - 89.9%.....		6		90 - 95%.....
	70 - 79.9%.....		5		85 - 89.9%.....
ACHIEVEMENT FOR LOW INCOME STUDENTS	60 - 69.9%.....		4		80 - 84.9%.....
	50 - 59.9%.....		3		75 - 79.9%.....
	40 - 49.9%.....		2		70 - 74.9%.....
	< 40%.....		1		< 70%.....
ACHIEVEMENT VS. PEERS¹	<u>DIFFERENCE IN LEARNING INDEX</u>		<u>RATING</u>		<u>DIFFERENCE IN RATE</u>
	> .20.....		7		> 12.....
	.151 to .20.....		6		6.1 to 12.....
	.051 to .15.....		5		3.1 to 6.....
	-.05 to .05.....		4		-3 to 3.....
	-.051 to -.15.....		3		-3.1 to -6.....
	-.151 to -.20.....		2		-6.1 to -12.....
	< -.20.....		1		< -12.....
IMPROVEMENT	<u>CHANGE IN LEARNING INDEX</u>		<u>RATING</u>		<u>CHANGE IN RATE</u>
	> .15.....		7		> 6.....
	.101 to .15.....		6		4.1 to 6.....
	.051 to .10.....		5		2.1 to 4.....
	-.05 to .05.....		4		-2 to 2.....
	-.051 to -.10.....		3		-2.1 to -4.....
	-.101 to -.15.....		2		-4.1 to -6.....
	< -.15.....		1		< -6.....

¹ This indicator controls for five student variables beyond a school’s control: the percentage of low-income, ELL, special education, gifted, and mobile students. Scores are the difference between the actual level and the predicted level of the Learning Index, which accounts for the performance of students who have not yet reached state standard and those who exceed state standards. Scores above 0 are “beating the odds” and negative scores reflect performance below the predicted level.

High schools and school districts have 20 measures, while elementary and middle or junior high schools have only 16 because they do not have graduates.

School districts are assessed using the same indicators, outcomes, and criteria as schools. The results are based on district-wide data for all grades. Financial data are used in the peers analysis to control for the total amount of funding available per student.

School Assessment via the Accountability Index and tiers

The following table gives an example of how the ratings generate the Accountability Index. In this example, the school has an Index of 3.40. The details and averages in the matrix provide essential information about student achievement and school performance. The matrix shows educators, parents and the public where the school is strong and where improvement is needed. For example, the difference between the achievement of non-low income and low income students represents one measure of the achievement gap. Tables like this can be made public on OSPI’s Report Card website.

INDICATORS	OUTCOMES					AVERAGE
	READING	WRITING	MATH	SCIENCE	EXTENDED GRADUATION RATE	
Achievement of non-low income students	5	6	3	1	5	4.00
Achievement of low income students	4	4	1	1	7	3.40
Achievement vs Peers	2	2	2	2	6	2.80
Improvement from the previous year	1	4	1	4	7	3.40
AVERAGE	3.00	4.00	1.75	2.00	6.25	3.40

Once the Accountability Index is computed, schools and districts are sorted into five tiers with descriptive labels.

TIER	INDEX RANGE
Exemplary	5.50 – 7.00
Very Good	5.00 – 5.49
Good	4.00 – 4.99
Fair	2.50 – 3.99
Struggling	1.00 – 2.50

Special features of the Accountability Index

The Accountability Index builds in flexibility to account for special cases and circumstances:

- Alternative schools, which often help students with the greatest need and therefore often have lower overall student scores, will receive additional scrutiny to ensure they are using best practices.

- Results for English language learners can be excluded for three years (rather than the federal requirement of only one year) to give these students a realistic amount of time to acquire the language skills necessary for tests that require reading and writing in English. To provide more information about how quickly student are learning English, OSPI will include test results from the Washington Language Proficiency Test on its Report Card website.
- Schools that perform at very high levels, and therefore don't have room for significant improvement on the Index, will not be penalized because the "improvement" rating won't be counted for them.

Measuring progress in closing achievement gaps

For subgroups of students that are of special concern, a simplified matrix measures achievement in reading, math, and the extended graduation rate (which includes students who take more than four years to graduate). This matrix uses the same concepts as the Accountability Index to measure achievement and improvement among English language learners, students in special education, African-American, Latino, Native American, Asian, and low-income students. The Washington state accountability index adds two more subgroups to make the system more comprehensive: Pacific Islanders and multi-racial students.

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE OF A SCHOOL'S SUBGROUP RESULTS

Ratings in **red** represent declines in student achievement from the previous year; ratings in **green** represent improvements over the previous year.

Subgroup	READING			MATH			EXT. GRAD. RATE			Average rating	Change from previous year
	Met Std. (All stud.)	Peers	Improve.	Met Std. (All stud.)	Peers	Improve.	Met Std. (All stud.)	Peers	Improve.		
American Indian	4	4	4	1	5	4	1	4	4	3.44	0.33
Asian	6	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	6	4.78	0.56
Pacific Islander	4	4	4	1	5	4	1	4	4	3.44	0.22
Black	3	3	3	1	3	5	1	3	2	2.67	-1.00
Hispanic	3	4	4	1	4	4	1	4	4	3.22	-0.11
White	5	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	3.78	-0.22
Multi-racial	4	4	4	2	4	4	2	4	4	3.56	-0.22
Special education	2	4	4	1	4	4	1	2	1	2.56	-1.22
ELL	1	5	5	1	4	4	1	3	3	3.00	-0.11
Low income	4	5	5	1	5	4	1	4	4	3.67	0.22
Average	3.6	4.1	4.2	1.6	4.2	4.1	1.7	3.6	3.6	3.41	-0.16

How the Accountability Index can identify schools and districts that deserve recognition for excellence and those that are not making adequate yearly progress (AYP)

If the Accountability Index is approved by a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education or incorporated into the NCLB when it is reauthorized by Congress, it could guide both the classification and the remedies for low-performing schools and districts.

Even without such approval, OSPI and SBE intend to use the Accountability Index to generate more accurate information about how Washington's schools are performing and to identify schools that deserve special recognition for excellence.

Each fall, OSPI will compute the Accountability Index and sort all schools and districts into the five tiers. Awards and recognition will be bestowed on our best schools and districts, including those who "beat the odds" by narrowing the achievement gap.

If federal approval is obtained, the Accountability Index will guide what all persistently low-performing schools (not just those that receive federal Title I funds) must do to improve.

The first time a school or district does not make AYP, it will be considered a "warning" year. Schools and districts that do not make AYP two years in a row will undergo an in-depth review to more closely identify trends, resource and staffing issues, and other data that will determine whether they should move into "improvement" status and be required to take certain actions.

When a school or district has not made AYP for four years, the state may determine that it would benefit from a significant amount of additional support and classify it as in need of "Voluntary Action." This status will offer – but not require – the school or district to participate in OSPI's School and/or District Improvement Program, which provides outside consultants, professional development, coaching, and other evidence-based assistance to accelerate improvement.

If improvement does not occur after two more years (regardless of whether the school or district participates in offered state programs), it will move to "Required Action" status, and a binding corrective action plan will be established between the school or district and the SBE. (This step will require legislative approval, since current state law does not allow required state intervention in local schools or districts.)

Creating a system of excellent and equitable education for all students

Washington's Accountability Index is one part of an emerging state system that can end the persistent low performance of some schools and ensure a focus on improved performance for all schools and districts. It will provide accurate, fair, easy-to-understand information on school and district performance and progress. That information can guide local efforts to improve and target customized state assistance and intervention when local efforts don't produce the needed results.

Most important, the Accountability Index, combined with a new system for state intervention and OSPI's well-regarded School and District Improvement Programs, can change the future of students who are languishing in schools that are not providing them with the education they urgently need.