

Getting It Right

Crafting Federal Accountability for Higher Student Performance and a Stronger America



The Education Trust

TO THE POINT

- ▶ In reauthorizing ESEA, federal policymakers must fashion an accountability framework that responds to responsible criticism of the current law, but keeps schools moving *all* students forward.
- ▶ Federal policy should establish clear state-level goals for raising achievement and closing gaps.
- ▶ States need flexibility to devise systems that will prompt school and district improvement toward these goals.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No Child Left Behind has sparked intense controversy since its passage in 2001. Many see the law's accountability system as rigid and arbitrary, criticizing it for ignoring academic growth, for applying one-size-fits-all consequences, and for establishing goals that were not based on real data on school improvement. These critics readily acknowledge, however, that the law has drawn attention to the unacceptably low levels of achievement among low-income students, students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities. No federal law has ever so clearly demanded action on behalf of these students, whose success is crucial to our long-term prosperity, civic health, and national security.

As Congress moves toward revising the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, its challenge is to fashion an accountability framework that eliminates the counterproductive features of the current law, while prompting all schools to guide all their students toward academic success.

The good news is that this is not an all-or-nothing game. We can, in this reauthorization, recalibrate the law to better balance the federal/local responsibilities, while addressing the issues that educators and state leaders have been raising for nearly a decade.

Just this summer, the Council of Chief State School Officers laid out a strong, though incomplete, set of principles for the next generation of state accountability systems. Building these principles into a new, focused, and slimmer federal framework for accountability would be a strong start on righting federal accountability policies. This alone, though, is just not enough.

Congress must take an additional step and include what CCSSO did not: ambitious but achievable statewide goals for raising achievement for all groups of students.

States have consistently failed to set ambitious student achievement goals. Why? Because pressure from a host of interest groups simply makes setting big goals too daunting.

Federal policymakers must step in, not to dictate how states set goals for individual districts and schools, but to set expectations for statewide improvement on a small number of critical achievement and attainment

measures: statewide summative assessments and high school graduation rates.

The Education Trust recommends that, in exchange for Title I funds, states be held accountable for the following goals:

- Cut in half the percentage of students who do not meet standards, overall and by subgroup, within six years.
- After the transition to college- and career-ready standards, cut in half the difference between starting proficiency rates and the overall proficiency rate at the top 10 percent of schools in the state over the next six years, overall and by subgroup.
- Reduce by half, over six years, the difference between the current four-year cohort graduation rates and 90 percent, or, for extended-year cohort rates, the difference between current rates and 95 percent. These goals would apply to students overall and to each student subgroup.

In addition, Congress should require states accepting Title I funds to:

- Develop differentiated accountability systems that apply to all schools and districts, consider both overall and subgroup performance, and include a range of rewards and interventions targeted to the needs of schools and districts.
- Ensure that districts give priority assistance to the 10 percent of schools that are persistently lowest performing — and take responsibility for those schools that are not meeting meaningful improvement targets.

Accountability systems alone don't improve student achievement; only teachers and schools can do that. But well-designed accountability systems can and should create conditions for improving the quality of the education that all students receive. In reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress has an opportunity to do just that. The stakes couldn't be higher: America's future, its economic growth, its democratic vitality, and its security all depend on the education we offer our young people now.

Getting It Right

Crafting Federal Accountability for Higher Student Performance and a Stronger America

BY NATASHA USHOMIRSKY, DARIA HALL, AND KATI HAYCOCK

Ask most educators about the No Child Left Behind Act and you'll get an earful. Many will rail about the 2001 legislation's "awful accountability system." But if you ask a simple follow-up question — "Did the law accomplish anything useful?" — almost all agree that it did. NCLB shined a bright light on the underperformance of low-income students and students of color, and it directed energy and attention to doing right by them.

Even people outside education circles share this mixed assessment of NCLB. The law's rigid approach to accountability is deeply unpopular. But in poll after poll, the vast majority of Americans express profound worries about threats to our long-term economic security posed by weak overall education results and yawning gaps between groups. They also voice strong support for holding schools accountable for swift improvement.

When it reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress must face this conundrum head on. The challenge is a big one: to fashion an accountability framework that removes the most hated and, dare we say, counterproductive features of current law, but keeps schools moving all their students, not just some, toward academic success.

What's Wrong With NCLB Accountability?

The purpose of accountability isn't to label schools or districts as good or bad. It's to send a clear signal about what we expect of our education system; to provide information to parents, educators, and community members about how their schools are doing; and to prompt improvement where improvement is needed. Accountability systems don't improve student achievement; only teachers and schools can do that. But well-designed accountability systems can and should create

conditions for improving the quality of the education that all students receive.

Of course, some people just don't want to be accountable for anything. But responsible critics of NCLB focus on four dimensions of the law:

- A school's accountability determination is based mostly on how many students perform at the proficient level on reading and math exams. No matter how much students grow academically, that growth doesn't count, which hurts schools where students enter far behind.
- By focusing on reading and math tests, the law has sometimes driven other subjects, like social studies and science, out of the curriculum, narrowing what we are teaching our children.
- Schools that miss targets are treated exactly the same, whether they missed one target slightly for one group of children or missed all their targets by a mile. When schools don't meet their targets, instead of asking states and districts to figure out how best to improve them, the federal government prescribes one-size-fits-all interventions.
- The goals and targets set by NCLB were not based on real data on school improvement; as such, they feel arbitrary and unattainable. States have responded to this in two ways. A few set high standards and risked demoralizing schools and the communities they serve for not being able to reach those standards fast enough. Most, however, set low standards that made everyone look pretty good, essentially deceiving their schools, and most importantly, the students they serve.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan characterizes NCLB as being loose where it should be tight and tight where it should be loose. He says the federal govern-

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ment should have gotten the goals right and held to them, but left the strategies for improvement to the states and local school districts.

State Leaders Put Forward a 'Next Generation' Alternative

For years, the nation's Council of Chief State School Officers has worked to develop standards that would help schools prepare students for college and career, and that could help move us toward clear, high expectations for student learning. CCSSO then turned its attention to a next-generation accountability framework that could help reach those new standards. In June 2011, the group put forward a set of accountability principles that crafts a very different federal-state partnership¹. At its core, the CCSSO proposal calls for accountability systems that:

- Are built around college- and career-ready standards.
- Make annual accountability determinations for each school and district, based on both overall performance and the performance of student groups.
- Focus on student outcomes, including both status and growth toward college and career readiness, but collect and report important contextual information to help improve efficiency and effectiveness, as well as to tailor supports and interventions for schools and districts.
- Build school and district capacity for sustained improvement, and intervene aggressively to turn around the lowest performers.

These principles offer the promise of removing the counterproductive features of the current law, while simultaneously keeping schools moving ahead. Enshrining CCSSO's principles into a new, focused federal framework for accountability would be a major step toward righting the federal-state balance.

This alone, though, is not enough. Congress also must include what the chiefs didn't: ambitious but

achievable goals for raising student achievement and closing gaps.

The Need for Ambitious But Achievable Goals

Too many of our nation's schools aren't doing the job we need them to do:

- A third of our nation's fourth-graders, including half of our low-income students, lack even basic reading skills.²
- On the most recent PISA examinations, America's 15-year-olds ranked 12th among 34 developed nations in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in mathematics.³
- Roughly 25 percent of ninth-graders won't graduate within four years. Among African-American and Latino ninth-graders, more than a third won't graduate on time.⁴

These low levels of achievement and high dropout rates hobble our efforts to build a strong, productive, and competitive workforce. They also hurt our military. In fact, 23 percent of recent high school graduates who express interest in joining the U.S. Army don't meet the minimum standards. Among Latino applicants the ineligibility rate is 29 percent, and among African Americans it is 39 percent.⁵

It would be nice to believe that, left to their own devices, states would set ambitious goals to get their students fully ready for the challenges they will face after high school. But decades of experience tell us that is too much to expect. Why? Because an overwhelming bevy of forces — from recalcitrant educators to self-protecting bureaucrats and political officials who want to show their constituents progress, no matter how meaningless the goal — makes setting big goals simply too daunting. History shows that when it comes to setting goals, states too often succumb to these pressures and aim low:

- Under NCLB's predecessor, the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act, states were expected to establish their own accountability systems to promote "continuous and substantial improve-

¹ Council of Chief State School Officers, "Roadmap for Next-Generation State Accountability Systems," June 2011.

² National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.

³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, "Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2008-09" May 2011.

⁵ Christina Theokas, "Shut Out of the Military: Today's High School Education Doesn't Mean You're Ready for Today's Army." The Education Trust, December 2010.

ment,” particularly among low-income students and students with limited English proficiency. In response, 17 states did not build statewide accountability systems at all, and only two states included the performance of different groups of students in their accountability determinations. Those that did establish goals often set them too low.⁶ Indeed, it was this experience that led Congress to take back the reins in 2001.

- When NCLB charged states with establishing goals for improving high school graduation rates, the vast majority took a pass. All too many told their schools that “any progress” in improving their graduation rate — including 0.1 percentage points per year — was good enough.⁷ To understand the impact of these decisions in one state, take a look at “The High Price of Low Expectations” below.
- More recently, the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program allowed districts and states to set their own goals for persistently low-performing schools undergoing turnaround. Once again,

turnaround plans in many states reveal a hodgepodge of improvement targets, with goals ranging from unrealistic to nonexistent.⁸

Federal policy shouldn’t dictate how states set goals for *individual districts and schools*. But the federal government must set expectations for *statewide* improvement on a small number of achievement and attainment measures: statewide summative assessments in elementary through high school, and high school graduation rates. And it must hold states accountable for meeting these expectations.

What Are Ambitious But Achievable Goals?

When the architects of NCLB did their work, scant data were available to answer the question of how much progress we can make and how fast. Not wanting to write off any child, the policymakers picked 100 percent as the goal for student proficiency. And they attached a 14-year timeline to reach that goal.

To many educators, especially those in the handful of states that set their proficiency standards high, the resulting annual performance targets for schools seemed arbitrary

and unachievable. Moreover, these uniform targets did not take into consideration the huge differences in starting points among schools and student groups.

Today, we have lots of historical data on school performance that can help us understand what kind of progress is possible. The Education Trust has spent the last year analyzing data from current state assessments, as well as available data on college and career readiness, and testing possible goal frameworks against the results. The scale of the analysis was, we think, unprecedented.

We coupled that analysis with numerous, wide-ranging conversations with leading school and district practitioners, state policymakers, researchers, and advocates about what’s working and what’s not within NCLB.

Our conclusions are that, in addition to the CCSSO principles mentioned earlier (*see page 3*), Congress should adopt the following policy framework for raising achievement and closing gaps:

- In exchange for Title I funds, states must adopt and agree to be held accountable for the following goals:
 - o While current standards are in effect, halve the percentage of students who do not meet standards, overall and by subgroup, within six years.
 - o After the transition to college- and career-ready standards, halve the difference between starting proficiency rates and the overall profi-

The High Price of Low Expectations

What does an improvement target of 0.1 percentage points mean for students? Consider the situation in North Carolina: In 2006, the Tar Heel State reported an overall graduation rate of 70.3 percent. If the state actually moved at the languid pace of 0.1 percentage point every year, it would take nearly a century for the state to reach its goal of 80 percent graduation. And that is just for the overall graduation rate. It would take two centuries or more for North Carolina’s African-American and Latino students to reach the state’s goal.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Policy and Program Studies Service, “State Education Indicators with a Focus on Title I 2000-01, 2004.”

⁷ Anna Habash, “Counting on Graduation: An Agenda for State Leadership,” The Education Trust, October 2008.

⁸ Education Trust analysis of School Improvement Grant fund applications, available on state education agency websites.

ciency rate at the top 10 percent of schools in the state over the next six years. These goals would apply to students overall and to each student subgroup.

- o Reduce by half, over six years, the difference between the current four-year cohort graduation rates and 90 percent, or, for extended-year cohort rates, the difference between current rates and 95 percent. These goals, too, would apply to students overall and to each student subgroup.
- In addition to adopting these goals, as a condition of receiving Title I funds, states must agree to do the following:
 - o Develop differentiated accountability systems that apply to all schools and districts, consider both overall and subgroup performance, and include a range of rewards and interventions targeted to the needs of schools and districts.
 - o Ensure that districts give priority assistance to the 10 percent of schools that are persistently lowest-performing — and take responsibility for those schools that are not meeting meaningful improvement targets.

This framework was developed and tested using data from 10 states — states that together educate one-third of our children. In every case, the goals require states to accelerate the pace of improvement. We don't believe that Americans would or should be satisfied with anything less. We also know these improvement rates are achievable because they're already being met by a substantial number of schools.

Our recommendations, like those proposed by CCSSO, aim to keep Congress squarely focused on the most critical outcomes: whether students are completing school, and that they are demonstrating, on some combination of statewide assessments, that they are ready for college and career. This is exactly where Congress should concentrate its efforts.

Certainly, some have proposed alternatives that would expand federal accountability to encompass far more, including parent and student satisfaction, student engagement in school, teacher characteristics, opportunities to learn, and the like. But our experience with previous attempts at federal accountability — which decreed how children should be served, specified which expenditures were legitimate and which ones weren't, and then sent auditors in to make sure every

dollar was spent exactly right — have convinced us that this kind of micromanagement is decidedly not the way to go. Federal energy should be directed toward the goals.

The remainder of this paper details our recommendations, along with the logic and data that undergird them. We believe these recommendations show a viable path forward for a strong, thoughtful accountability policy that fixes what current law got wrong, while salvaging what it got right: a focus on improving achievement and closing gaps for all groups of students.

GOALS AND PROGRESS TARGETS

Good accountability systems begin with clear, measurable goals that people can rally around — goals that are meaningful, challenging, and achievable. As mentioned earlier, federal policy should not set goals for individual schools and districts. However, to counteract the myriad forces that push states to aim low, the federal government must establish expectations for statewide improvement.

To be crystal clear, our ultimate goal is to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or learning needs, receive an education that will prepare them for the opportunities and demands of college, the workplace, and life beyond high school. But without a clear road map that signifies how to get from where we are to where we all know we need to be, we'll never get to this ultimate goal. In reauthorizing ESEA, Congress has the opportunity to create such a roadmap by setting short-term interim goals for states that are ambitious but achievable during the lifetime of the next reauthorization; and will facilitate, rather than impede, the transition to college- and career-ready standards and assessments.

To explore what such a federal goal framework could look like, we went straight to the data. Using school-level achievement data, we examined the following factors:

- The recent improvement trajectories for schools that started out at different levels of achievement, with a focus on those schools that started in the bottom of statewide achievement;
- The range of improvement across schools, with a particular focus on those schools that are making the most and least improvement over time; and
- The achievement and improvement trends of specific groups of students, including low-income

students, students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities.

These analyses, some of which are detailed in our reports, “Stuck Schools”⁹ and “Stuck Schools Revisited,”¹⁰ clarified a few key points:

- State context varies, with big differences in the rigor of standards and assessments as well as in patterns of achievement and improvement. Setting realistic goals demands accounting for state context.
- In all states, there is a lot of variation in improvement among schools. And if more schools in each state were making the kinds of gains that the top quartile of improvers is making now, states would be well ahead of where they are. For example, average proficiency rates at Pennsylvania elementary and middle schools improved by 1.6 percentage points per year between 2008 and 2010. During the same period, schools in the top quartile of improvement gained more than 2.9 percentage points annually.
- Even among schools that appear to be doing just fine based on overall averages, low-income students and students of color too often lag behind. In “Stuck Schools Revisited,” we found that although 12 percent of Indiana’s low-income elementary and middle school students attended schools that were high performing based on overall scores, only 1 percent attended schools that were actually high performing for their subgroup. We absolutely must continue to focus on the performance of all groups of students.

Put another way, goals should take into account where systems start out and map a clear path forward. They should be ambitious and achievable, characteristics that aren’t mutually exclusive. They should expect improvement for all groups of students and demand greater gains for those who begin farther behind. Moreover, because communication is essential to generating buy-in and urgency, goals should provide a clear, compelling way for state and district leaders to talk about expectations.

Achievement Metrics

We recommend that statewide achievement goals and progress targets be based on a “subject composite” proficiency rate. The composite is a weighted average of student proficiency rates on statewide summative assessments in, at minimum, English/language arts and math. This approach gives states the flexibility to incorporate the results of student performance in other academic subjects (such as science and social studies) into their accountability system as they see fit, without increasing the number of targets the states are required to meet.

The subject composite for elementary/middle schools (typically grade three-eight assessments) should be calculated separately from the subject composite calculated for high schools. When calculating composite proficiency rates, states should have the flexibility to include measures of student growth to standards.

While accountability determinations should be based on the subject composite, states should publicly report student performance in each individual subject included in that composite to parents and community members. Moreover, status performance and student growth should be reported separately.

Achievement Goals for Current State Assessments

With this in mind, we recommend that, as a condition of receiving Title I funds, federal policy require states to adopt the *statewide* goals and progress targets outlined below, and to develop accountability systems for their schools and districts that will enable the state to, at minimum, meet these goals.

STATEWIDE GOAL: Cut in half the percentage of students not meeting standards, overall and by subgroup, within six years. Set separate goals for elementary/middle schools and for high schools (see “Achievement Metrics” box above).

⁹ Natasha Ushomirsky and Daria Hall, “Stuck Schools: A Framework for Identifying Schools Where Students Need Change – Now!,” The Education Trust, February 2010.

¹⁰ Natasha Ushomirsky, “Stuck Schools Revisited: Behind the Averages,” The Education Trust, April 2011.

STATEWIDE PROGRESS TARGETS:

These targets should require annual improvement toward the state’s six-year goal. Targets should be set at the same time as the goals, and should remain unchanged for six years, or until the state implements new assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards, whichever is sooner.

Our analysis suggests that to meet our proposed goals, states around the country will need to improve faster than they’ve improved in recent years. But everywhere we looked, the gains states would need to make were well within range of those demonstrated by the fastest improving schools, showing that such gains are, in fact, attainable. And because our goals require

bigger gains for students who are farther behind, they promote substantial gap closing. In fact, if states meet their progress targets each year, in six years they will cut achievement gaps in half.

Table 1 uses 2008-2010 data from California to show how our proposal would have played out had this framework been in place during those years. As the table shows, in 2008 the average math and English-language arts proficiency rate across all elementary and middle schools in California was 51 percent. Based on this starting point, California’s six-year goal for all students would have been to reach a proficiency rate of 75 percent in six years. This interim goal, in turn, would require the state to improve

its overall performance by 4.1 percentage points per year. When we look at the gains schools actually made between 2008 and 2010, we see that, on average, they improved by 3 percentage points per year, less than required by our proposal. But look at the improvement rate of the 75th-percentile school.¹¹ That school, along with the quarter of California schools that improved even faster, gained over 4.6 percentage points per year — far more than required by our proposal.

To meet its interim goals, California would also need to make bigger gains among students who start out farther behind. For example, the proficiency rates of California’s white students started out at 67 percent, on average. These students

TABLE 1 – CALIFORNIA
Six-year current assessment goal modeling:
elementary and middle schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	50.9	75.4	4.1	3.0	4.6	6.7		
White	66.9	83.5	2.8	2.5	4.5	6.8		
African American	36.5	68.3	5.3	3.0	5.9	9.0	30.4	15.2
Latino	38.3	69.2	5.1	3.7	5.6	7.9	28.6	14.3
Asian	76.8	88.4	1.9	2.1	4.0	6.5		
Low-income students	37.8	68.9	5.2	3.7	5.7	8.1		
Students w/ disabilities	27.4	63.7	6.1	4.3	7.7	11.2		
English-language learners	35.3	67.6	5.4	3.7	5.9	8.6		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

Source: California Department of Education. 2008-2010 AYP Data Files. Available at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ay/aypdatafiles.asp>

DATA NOTES: Adequate Yearly Progress data files include school-wide proficiency rates for full academic year students. School-wide proficiency rates (for elementary and middle schools) include California Standards Tests (CST), California Alternate Performance Assessments (CAPA) and California Modified Assessments (CMA, phased in during 2008-2010). We excluded all schools with high school grades from the dataset. Data for some ethnic subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

Note that trends based on AYP data may be affected by changes in state AYP policies. Furthermore, in 2010, California changed its reporting rules for student ethnicity in accordance with new federal requirements. This change may have affected trends reported for African-American, Latino, white and Asian students.

¹¹ Ranked by improvement.

would need to improve by 2.8 percentage points per year. The state's Latino students, meanwhile, who started out at only 38 percent proficient, on average, would need to rise by 5.1 percentage points annually. If California successfully met its six-year interim goals for both groups, the achievement gap between white and Latino students would shrink from nearly 29 percentage points to just over 14. And while the state would need to ramp up improvement efforts on behalf of both groups, these gains are well within range of improvement shown by the highest improving quartile of schools.

Achievement patterns are different in every state, yet across the variety of states we've examined, these goals meet the criteria of ambitious but achievable. As another example, in Minnesota, our proposal would require statewide overall improvement of 2.5 percentage points annually, higher than the average 1 percentage point the state actually gained, but less than the 3 percentage-point gains made by the top 25 percent of improvers. For the state's low-income students, our proposal would expect 4.1 percentage points of improvement annually. This is more than double the 1.8 points low-income students are gaining each year now, but less than the gains of the top-improving 25 percent of schools,¹² which improved this group's achievement by more than 4.7 percentage points per year. (For more examples, see Appendix).

Of course, when it comes to state standards and assessments, big changes are underway as states across the country are working to

align their K-12 expectations with the demands young people will face after high school. Any new federal goal framework must also reflect these changes. A growing number of states have incorporated the ACT into their high school assessments. Others, such as Massachusetts, currently hold elementary and middle school students to very high standards. For those states that now have rigorous standards and assessments, and the many more that will implement them in coming years, we propose a different goal framework, which is outlined in the next section of this report.

Achievement Goals for College/Career-Ready Assessments

States are leading the way in developing new assessment systems aligned to college- and career-ready standards. These assessments will provide all of us — parents, students, educators, and taxpayers — with more honest information on how our schools are doing when it comes to preparing students for success beyond high school, be it in college, the military, career training, or the workforce.

When these assessments come online, however, student proficiency rates will drop. That's because to pass these new tests, students will need to demonstrate much higher levels of skill and knowledge than most current assessments demand. As an example of what we can expect, Tennessee, which once had some of the lowest standards in the country, dramatically raised the rigor of its standards and assessments in 2010. After Tennessee implemented its new tests, eighth-

grade math proficiency rates plummeted from 90 percent to 26 percent.¹³

Once states shift to new, more rigorous standards and assessments, accountability goals will need to be reset to reflect the new performance patterns. If they aren't adjusted, we'll be right back where we started, with goals that appear unachievable and unfair, or, even worse, with standards that seem unachievable and unfair. This would be a huge step backward.

A revamped ESEA should support state efforts to prepare students for success beyond high school by resetting six-year interim goals when states move to college- and career-ready tests. Specifically, we recommend the following revised goals and progress targets.

STATEWIDE GOAL: Cut in half the difference between the baseline composite proficiency rates on statewide college- and career-ready assessments and the baseline overall proficiency rate at the top 10 percent of schools in the state over the next six years. These goals would apply to students overall and to each student subgroup. Results from the first year of administering the assessment should serve as the baseline for setting these goals, and the goals for elementary/middle schools should be set separately from those for high schools. (See "Achievement Metrics," p. 6.)

STATEWIDE PROGRESS TARGETS: These targets should require annual improvement toward the six-year goal. Progress targets should be set at the same time as the goals, and should remain unchanged for six

¹² Ranked by improvement of low-income students.

¹³ Tennessee Department of Education. 2008-09 data available at <http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us/pls/apex/f?p=200:30:2925398641889453::NO::> and 2009-10 data available at <http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us/pls/apex/f?p=200:30:1036117262081093::NO::>

years, or until the next reauthorization, whichever is sooner.

While we do not yet have data from the new tests states are developing, existing data from ACT's college-readiness benchmarks can inform policy. These data suggest that our proposed goals will promote improved achievement for all students without setting unreasonable expectations.

Each year, ACT calculates the percentage of students in each school and state that meet these benchmarks in reading, English, math, and science. At our request, ACT used their data to model how our proposed goals might play out on their assessments. To do so, they looked only at schools where all or virtually all graduates take the ACT test. Then they calculated how much these schools would need to improve over six years in order to cut in half the difference between their current (2008) college-readiness rates and college-readiness rates at the 95th-percentile school, which is a proxy for the average college-readiness rate at the top 10 percent of schools. Their analysis shows that although states would need to substantially ramp up improvement to meet their six-year goals, for most groups these gains fall within range of those demonstrated by top-improving schools.¹⁴ (See page 23)

Setting Goals to Raise Graduation Rates

The economic, societal, and personal costs of dropping out of high school are staggering. Many policymakers, educators, and community members agree that in addition to improving student achievement, we must make reducing dropout rates and closing gaps in graduation rates a top priority. Indeed, at the high school level, this is the foundation of an honest accountability system. Otherwise, there will always be questions about whether improvements in assessment results are obtained by pushing weaker students out.

Federal policy should solidify this priority by making the following statewide goals and progress targets a condition of receiving Title I funds:

STATEWIDE GOAL: Cut in half the difference between current four-year cohort graduation rates and 90 percent, overall and for each student subgroup, over the next six years. States that choose to use an extended-year cohort graduation rate should reduce by half the

difference between current graduation rates and 95 percent, both by subgroup and for students overall.¹⁵

STATEWIDE PROGRESS TARGETS: These targets should require annual improvement toward the six-year goals. Progress targets should be set at the same time as the goals, and should remain unchanged for six years, or until the next reauthorization, whichever is sooner.

High school graduation data from Massachusetts for 2008-10 illustrate how these goals might play out. In 2008, 83 percent of all students in the state and only 69 percent of low-income students graduated from high school in four years. Overall rates improved by only 0.4 percentage points annually between 2008 and 2010, and the rates of low-income students improved by 1.2 percentage points annually.

To meet its six-year goals, Massachusetts would need to improve its overall graduation rate by 0.6 percentage points per year, while low-income students' graduation rates would need to rise by 1.8 percentage points annually. To be sure, the state would need to ramp up improvement for both groups. But these goals are lower than the gains actually made by schools in the top quartile of improvement for each group.

It's important to note that these goals do not reflect the graduation rates we know we need from our schools. Rather, they reflect ambitious but achievable interim benchmarks that, if met, would change the life trajectories of hundreds of thousands of young people and position states to meet even higher goals under future reauthorizations.

HOLDING STATES ACCOUNTABLE

What states do and don't do makes a huge difference in whether schools and students reach standards, so getting the state goals right is critical. States provide guidance and resources to teachers and principals. They also sponsor professional development and lend support to the districts, especially those with the lowest capacity to support their schools.

Congress has a responsibility to support state capacity for school and district improvement through resources and, where appropriate, flexibility. At the same time, Congress must hold states accountable.

¹⁴ Special analysis prepared by ACT, Inc. based on methodological guidelines established by the Education Trust. All rights reserved.

¹⁵ Graduation rates should be calculated per the definition in 34 CFR Part 200.19.

The 10 Percent Approach to Reaching More Struggling Schools and Students

You may be wondering why we've chosen to focus federal attention on the bottom 10 percent of schools that are not meeting goals, rather than the bottom 5 percent that, it seems, everyone is talking about these days. The truth is that while there is broad agreement among federal lawmakers and state chiefs about the need to turn around the bottom 5 percent of schools, there is also broad consensus that more schools need aggressive intervention. Too many of the students that federal dollars are meant to help are stuck in schools that are unacceptably low performing, either for all students or for their subgroup, even if they are not in the bottom 5 percent of schools.

Over the past couple of years, various proposals have arisen suggesting an additional group or groups of schools that federal policy should target. Some of these proposals have focused on schools with the biggest achievement gaps, others on schools with the lowest performing subgroups. Each of these proposals has merit. Suburban schools with huge achievement gaps must be forced to better serve the students they've historically ignored. And no child should have to attend a school that is as low performing for her subgroup as a turnaround school is for all kids.

After spending many hours plowing through state and school achievement data, we concluded that federal policy would accomplish the most for the largest number of students by targeting both the schools that were in the bottom 5 percent of overall performance, and those in the 5 percent immediately above. In most states, targeting schools with the biggest achievement gaps would result in reaching only a small percentage of our most vulnerable students. And though targeting schools with particularly low subgroup performance would reach substantially more children, many of these schools are nearly as low performing for students overall as those in the bottom 5 percent. By targeting schools in the bottom 10 percent of overall achievement, federal policy will reach many of the schools where subgroup performance is particularly low. This broader approach would foster the interventions most likely to bring about real change for the students who most need help.

There are a variety of ways in which both incentives for meeting and consequences for not meeting state goals can be put into federal policy. For example, states that are on track to meet their six-year goals should be eligible for additional funding, such as competitive grants. And since adopting the six-year goals and progress targets is a condition of accepting Title I funds, states that persistently fail to meet their targets should lose part or all of their Title I set-aside.

STATEWIDE SYSTEMS OF DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

With NCLB, Congress took a critical step on behalf of America's students by establishing a nationwide expectation that to be considered successful, a school must successfully serve all of its student groups. But the either-or nature of Adequate Yearly Progress determinations doesn't reflect the range of performance across schools. And the federally required improvement activities for schools that don't make AYP are too often ill suited to the needs of these schools and their students.

CCSSO has committed to establishing more sophisticated, responsive accountability systems. The new systems will be based on key outcome measures that generate annual determinations of how well schools are performing in serving subgroups as well as students overall, and that prompt action when schools underperform.

These are important commitments, and in reauthorizing ESEA, Congress must reaffirm them and give states the flexibility they need to fulfill them. To ensure that states make good on their improvement and gap-narrowing goals, federal policymakers should require that state accountability systems:

- Establish improvement goals for all districts and schools on statewide summative assessments in elementary through high school in at least reading/language arts and mathematics, as well as cohort graduation rates for high schools that are aligned with the state's six-year gap-closing goals described earlier (*see p. 6-9*).
- Make annual accountability determinations for all schools and districts that categorize schools based on overall and subgroup performance. One category must identify the state's lowest performing schools that require immediate turnaround. This category of schools should include, at

minimum, the lowest performing 10 percent of schools that are not meeting their annual achievement progress targets, as well as all high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent (see “The 10 Percent Approach” p. 10).

- Establish a system of differentiated rewards, supports, and interventions for all schools tied to the determinations mentioned above. Interventions and supports for schools in the lowest performing (turnaround) category must incorporate the requirements outlined in “Turning Around the Lowest Performing Schools” (see below).

These parameters provide wide latitude for state variation and innovation. For example, states may choose to include additional indicators of college and career readiness in their systems — such as credit accumulation, college entry, or college remediation rates — on top of state summative assessment results and graduation rates. They can look at these indicators separately or combine them in an index, as do such states as California and Oklahoma. They can establish a school grading system, as Florida and several other states have done in recent years. They also can craft targeted supports and interventions based on a range of outcome indicators and diagnostic data. This kind of innovation should be encouraged, as long as all schools and districts are held accountable for raising achievement and closing gaps so that the state will meet its six-year gap-closing goals for achievement and graduation rates.

TURNING AROUND THE LOWEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Across America, lots of schools are falling short of serving all their students well. Many of these schools have both the willingness and capacity to improve, but they need crystal-clear goals and targeted support from their district and state. Federal policy should make sure that states set these goals and have the flexibility to tailor interventions to school needs.

But we also know that thousands of students are trapped in a worse group of schools, the lowest performers in their states, which have proven either unwilling or unable to improve on their own. These are schools where most of the students can’t read, where less than half of all high school freshmen actu-

ally graduate — deeply dysfunctional schools to which we’d not send our own children, but that we, as a country, tolerate for other people’s children.

In the face of such persistent low performance, states and districts have generally chosen to take the easy way out, providing money (sometimes enormous sums of it) and tinkering at the margins. Why? Because big change, especially change that involves people, is hard. And let’s be honest: Too many decision makers still believe that students couldn’t do much better even with these tough changes. As a result, thousands of young children continue to attend schools that don’t provide them with even minimal academic skills, much less the rigorous preparation they need to succeed beyond high school. Federal policymakers have an obligation to help halt these damaging local dynamics.

By requiring states to identify and take swift action in their lowest performing schools, the Obama administration took a major step toward ensuring that these students get the education they deserve.¹⁶ But the administration’s four turnaround models are simultaneously insufficient and too prescriptive.

The models stress the required processes rather than the required outcomes. In fact, they ignore outcomes almost entirely. The models put in place some basic operational structures: new governance, new leadership (and in one case, new staff), a longer school day, and so forth. But they stop short of requiring *quality* leadership or staff, the most critical ingredients to any school improvement effort. And they once again put the onus of improvement on the schools and ignore the district’s role in creating conditions under which low-performing schools improve or stagnate.

New federal action must improve on current efforts. Specifically, federal policymakers must demand that, as a condition of receiving Title I funds, districts with schools that the states identify as needing turnaround (see “Statewide Systems” p. 10), commit to the following actions:

- Ensure that the school is led by a principal with a track record of raising student achievement in Title I schools or schools with similar demographics.
- Allow the principal to build her team. This means

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Final Requirement for School Improvement Grants, October 2010, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/2010-27313.pdf>.

enabling the principal to replace staff as necessary to swiftly improve student learning.

- Give the principal significant autonomy over the school's budget, staff assignments, scheduling, and instructional program.
- Give the principal the support she needs to turn the school around. Turnaround schools should get top priority in and assistance with hiring, maintenance requests, data analysis, and professional development.
- Ensure that parents and community members throughout the district are consulted and informed early about decisions concerning the turnaround school and the rationale for these decisions.
- Give students in turnaround schools the option to attend other, higher performing schools. These students should be prioritized in any district school-choice programs.

These requirements are far more flexible than the current approach. That flexibility must come with strong accountability for meeting ambitious progress targets for achievement and graduation rates aligned with statewide gap-closing goals. Moreover, to exit turnaround status, schools should have to demonstrate consistent, sustained improvement by meeting their goals not just once, but for three consecutive years.

Districts are and should be the first responders in school improvement efforts. But if a district fails to live up to its responsibilities and its lowest performing schools do not improve, the state must step in and take responsibility for these schools. For example, a state may decide to establish a recovery district or turnaround zone, to build a pool of charter organizations to take over such schools, or to manage the schools directly.

As a condition of accepting Title I funds, states should commit to assuming responsibility for turnaround schools that fail to reach their achievement goals for three consecutive years for elementary and middle schools, or four consecutive years for high schools. We would urge one exception to this condition: In cases where the district has a track record of turning around its lowest performing schools, as shown by high percentages of such schools meeting ambitious improvement targets, the state should have the discretion to leave a school that is not meeting its goals under district control for an additional two years.

CONCLUSION

The future of our nation depends on the education we provide to our children today. If we continue to graduate students who lack the reading and math skills employers need, sit by as hundreds of thousands of young people drop out each year, and tolerate schools for other people's children that we'd never tolerate for our own, we won't regain our economic footing. And we'll fail to live up to our national value of opportunity for all. Our economy, our democracy, and, indeed, our very security requires us to turn around these patterns of low performance.

Accountability systems don't improve student achievement on their own; only teachers and schools can do that. But well-designed accountability systems can and should create conditions for improving the quality of education that all students receive.

In reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress has an opportunity to do just that. Indeed, our lawmakers can strike a new federal-state balance and fix what NCLB got wrong, while keeping what it got right. A new ESEA must continue to demand improvement for all students, and to hold states accountable for ensuring that this improvement takes place. Furthermore, it must require districts to make real change in persistently low-performing schools.

But a reauthorized law must also give states and districts the flexibility they need to improve their schools. States need to decide how they will hold schools and districts accountable for raising student achievement and attainment. They should determine how they will reward schools that improve and, in most cases, how they'll intervene in those that do not.

By holding states accountable for improving critical student outcomes, the federal government can stay out of day-to-day school and district operations while fulfilling its role as the steward of taxpayer dollars and the champion of disadvantaged students.

APPENDIX

Our recommendations for ambitious but achievable statewide goals for raising achievement and closing gaps are the result of extensive data analysis.

Looking at achievement data in a variety of states — large and small, urban and rural, those with high standards and those with less rigorous ones — we examined patterns of achievement and improvement for students overall and for student groups. Knowing what’s happening in schools now gave us a way of testing both the ambitiousness and the feasibility of multiple goal frameworks.

The tables that follow present data based on the statewide goals we recommend:

- While current standards and assessments are in place, cut in half the percentage of students not meeting standards, overall and by student group, within six years.
- After the transition to college- and career-ready standards and assessments, halve the difference between starting proficiency rates and the overall proficiency rate at the top 10 percent of schools in the state over the next six years. These goals would apply to students overall and to each student subgroup.
- Reduce by half, over six years, the difference between the current four-year cohort graduation rates and 90 percent, or, for extended-year cohort rates, the difference between current rates and 95 percent. These goals, too, would apply to students overall and to each student group.

Table 1 (California) and tables 2-9 reflect the patterns we would have seen had the goals for current assessments gone into effect during the 2007-08 school year. They present the following data:

- Average composite (reading/language arts and math) proficiency rates for each group in 2007-08;
- The six-year goal for each group;
- The amount of annual progress each group would need to make to meet its six-year goal;
- The amount of annual progress that the state actually made between 2007-08 and 2009-10; and
- The amount of progress that top-improving schools for each group (schools at the 75th and 90th-percentile of improvement) made between 2007-08 and 2009-10.

Table 10 presents results of an analysis that ACT conducted at our request to see how our proposed post-transition goals might play out on their assessments. This table presents college-readiness rates and improvement on these rates by subject, rather than as a composite. Furthermore, these data include schools where all or virtually all graduates take the ACT, not schools in a single state.

Finally, tables 11 and 12 model how our graduation rate goals would have played out had they gone into effect in 2007-08 in Massachusetts and in 2006-07 in North Carolina.

SOME DATA CAVEATS

It’s important to note here that we’re presenting data from multiple states to give readers an understanding of the way our proposed goals would play out across states. Because of big differences in the quality and rigor of state standards and assessments, we cannot use these data to make any cross-state comparisons.

Likewise, it’s important to note that, as with all of our analytic work, this analysis was limited by the availability and quality of publicly available data. Different states make very different decisions about data reporting. Some, for example, report only the data used for AYP determinations. Others report straightforward assessment results. Some report grade-level data only, while others report school-level data only. Some have stringent suppression rules while others make more data available.

These state decisions undoubtedly have an impact on the results of our analysis, and we make note of important reporting decisions, as well as data sources, for each state. We did not attempt to standardize all of the state data. Rather, other than basic data cleaning protocols (*see Data Notes accompanying state tables*), we worked to keep the data in our analysis as close to what’s publicly reported for each state as possible. These state differences are another reason to avoid cross-state comparisons.

Furthermore, while we checked multiple sources to ensure that the assessment and graduation rate data in our analyses are comparable over time, we cannot be 100 percent certain that states did not make policy changes that could affect trends. Due to variations in state reporting, as well as the complexities of the

analyses, we urge readers to interpret the results with caution. Special care should be used when interpreting results for English-language learners and students with disabilities, since some states have changed assessment and accountability policies pertaining to these subgroups in recent years. And in many states, the data analyzed here do not include results of modified or alternate assessments.

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

To the extent possible, we relied on the same consistent approach to analyzing the data from each state. The Data Notes attached to each table detail state data sources and caveats, as well as analytic decisions unique to a given state. General analytic steps used across all states are summarized below.

Analyses of trends in proficiency rates overall and by subgroup (Tables 2-9 in appendix and Table 1 on p. 7 of main report)

1. Create a dataset with 2008-2010 counts of students tested and counts of students proficient in reading/language arts and math, by school and subgroup. For elementary and middle school analyses in states where data are available by grade only, aggregate grade-level results to the school level by summing the number of students proficient and tested, excluding any data that are suppressed.
2. Limit the dataset only to those schools that have three years of reading and math data for students overall.
3. Calculate the number of students across the state who test proficient in reading and math, respectively, for each subgroup and year by summing these data across all schools in the dataset. Calculate the number of students tested statewide for each subgroup and year by summing these data across all schools with proficiency rate data for that group.
4. Calculate statewide composite proficiency rates for each subgroup and year as follows:
 - a. Composite proficiency rate = (number proficient in reading + number proficient in math)/(number tested in reading + number tested in math).
5. Calculate a statewide improvement rate for each subgroup as follows:
 - a. Improvement = (2010 composite - 2008 com-

posite)/2.

6. Calculate the state goal and gains needed for all students and each subgroup as follows:
 - a. Goal = (100 percent-2008 composite)/2+2008 composite
 - b. Gains needed = (goal -2008 composite)/6.
7. Calculate annual composite proficiency rates and improvement rates for each school, as well as for each subgroup within a school. Only calculate composite proficiency rates and improvement rates for a subgroup in schools with 20 or more students in that subgroup tested in each subject each year.
8. Calculate the improvement rate at the 75th-percentile and 90th-percentile schools for students overall and for each subgroup, respectively.

Analyses of trends in graduation rates by subgroup (Tables 11 and 12)

Graduation rate analyses follow the same steps described above with a few obvious exceptions:

1. The dataset is limited to schools with graduation rate data for students overall in each of the years analyzed.
2. Instead of calculating state and school-wide composite proficiency rates, we calculate graduation rates by dividing the number of graduates by the number of students in the cohort.
3. Statewide graduation rate goals and gains needed are calculated as follows for each subgroup:
 - a. Goal = (90 percent - 2008 statewide graduation rate)/2+2008 statewide graduation rate.
 - b. Gains needed = (goal - 2008 statewide graduation rate)/6.
4. For North Carolina, we use 2007-2009 data because 2010 data were not available for download.

COLORADO

Colorado Elementary and Middle School Analysis

Colorado Department of Education. 2008-2010 Colorado Student Assessment Program District and School Disaggregated Summary Results. Available at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/csap_disag.html

DATA NOTES: Data are reported by grade; results for grades three through eight were aggregated to the school level. Results are based on the percent of students scoring at the proficient level or higher, and do not include

students who are partially proficient. Since data for small subgroups (such as Native-American students or students with disabilities) are frequently suppressed, we report data for the state's largest ethnic subgroups only. Furthermore, Colorado reports data for students qualifying for free lunch and reduced-price lunch separately, and data for students who receive reduced-price meals are often suppressed. To maximize consistency in proficiency data over time, we report data for students that qualify for free meals only.

TABLE 2 – COLORADO
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
Elementary And Middle Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	64.6	82.3	2.9	0.5	2.2	4.0		
White	75.4	87.7	2.1	0.4	1.9	3.6		
Latino	41.6	70.8	4.9	1.3	3.5	5.4	33.7	16.9
Students qualifying for free lunch	40.1	70.0	5.0	1.7	3.5	6.0		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.



FLORIDA

Florida Elementary and Middle School Analysis

Florida Department of Education. 2008-2010 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test Student Performance Results: Demographic Report. Available at: <https://app1.fldoe.org/FCATDemographics/Default.aspx>

DATA NOTES: Data are reported by grade; results for grades three through eight were aggregated to the school level. These data do not include alternate assessment results for students with disabilities. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 3 – FLORIDA
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
Elementary And Middle Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	65.3	82.7	2.9	1.0	2.4	4.3		
White	76.0	88.0	2.0	0.7	1.9	3.4		
African American	47.2	73.6	4.4	1.2	3.5	5.9	28.8	14.4
Latino	59.4	79.7	3.4	2.2	4.0	6.2	16.6	8.3
Low-income students	53.5	76.8	3.9	2.1	3.7	5.6		
Students w/ disabilities	35.7	67.9	5.4	1.0	3.6	6.1		
English-language learners	34.2	67.1	5.5	1.2	4.5	7.3		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

MARYLAND

Maryland Elementary and Middle School Analysis

Maryland State Department of Education. 2008-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress Data Files. Formerly available at <http://mdreportcard.org/> (Accessed Fall 2010).

DATA NOTES: Adequate Yearly Progress data files include school-wide proficiency rates based on (for elementary and middle schools) the Maryland State

Assessment (MSA), Alt-MSA and Mod-MSA (Maryland's modified assessment; phased in during the time period analyzed). Data are for full academic year students only. We excluded all schools with more than one student enrolled in any high school grade (9-12), as well as those with no grade 3-8 enrollment.

Note that changes in state AYP policies may affect trends in AYP data. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 4 – MARYLAND
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
Elementary And Middle Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	81.1	90.5	1.6	1.1	2.2	3.7		
White	89.4	94.7	0.9	0.7	1.5	2.8		
African American	69.6	84.8	2.5	1.8	3.3	5.6	19.8	9.9
Latino	73.0	86.5	2.2	2.1	4.9	7.6	16.4	8.2
Asian	93.5	96.7	0.5	0.5	1.5	2.9		
Low-income Students	68.2	84.1	2.7	2.3	4.1	6.3		
Students w/ disabilities	57.4	78.7	3.6	2.4	5.8	9.8		
English-language learners	65.1	82.6	2.9	4.1	7.8	10.2		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.



MINNESOTA

Minnesota Elementary and Middle School Analysis

Minnesota Department of Education. 2008-2010 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments Series-II (MCA-II) Tab-Delimited Data Files. Available at: http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Data/Data_Downloads/Accountability_Data/Assessment_MCA_II/MCA_II_Tab_delimited_files/index.html

DATA NOTES: Data are reported by grade; results for grades three through eight were aggregated to the

school level. Minnesota has a modified math test for English Language Learners (Mathematics Test for English Language Learners, or MTELL). Because our analysis is based solely on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments Series-II (MCA-II) results, and substantial percentages of Latino, Asian and English-language learner students take the MTELL, we present data only for all students, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

TABLE 5 – MINNESOTA
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
Elementary And Middle Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)
All students	69.4	84.7	2.5	1.0	3.0	5.0		
Low-income students	50.3	75.2	4.1	1.8	4.7	7.5		
Students w/ disabilities	34.6	67.3	5.5	1.3	4.4	7.8		

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Elementary and Middle School Analysis

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2008-2010 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Data. Available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/mcas.aspx

DATA NOTES: Data are based on school-wide proficiency rates for full academic year students. We

excluded schools with grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results for any of the years analyzed. The English-language learner subgroup includes both limited-English proficient (LEP) and formerly limited-English proficient (FLEP) students. These data do not include alternate assessment results for special education students. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 6 – MASSACHUSETTS
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
Elementary And Middle Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	59.7	79.8	3.4	1.4	3.5	5.6		
White	65.9	83.0	2.8	1.5	3.4	5.6		
African American	34.9	67.5	5.4	1.7	4.8	8.0	31.0	15.5
Latino	32.1	66.0	5.7	2.2	4.9	8.1	33.9	16.9
Asian	71.8	85.9	2.4	1.6	3.8	7.1		
Low-income students	36.0	68.0	5.3	2.3	4.6	7.7		
Students w/ disabilities	22.9	61.5	6.4	0.5	2.7	5.3		
English-language learners	27.7	63.8	6.0	2.1	5.0	8.0		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania Elementary and Middle School Analysis

Pennsylvania Department of Education. 2008-10 School Level Math and Reading PSSA Results — School Totals. Available at: http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school_assessments/

DATA NOTES: Data include full academic year students only. We excluded all schools with grade 11 PSSA results for any of the years analyzed, as well as any non-public schools. These data do not include alternate assessment results for students with disabilities. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 7 – PENNSYLVANIA
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
Elementary And Middle Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	74.1	87.0	2.2	1.6	2.9	4.8		
White	80.3	90.1	1.6	1.3	2.6	4.5		
African American	50.4	75.2	4.1	2.9	5.7	8.3	29.9	14.9
Latino	52.0	76.0	4.0	2.9	5.5	9.0	28.3	14.1
Asian	86.1	93.0	1.2	1.3	2.8	5.0		
Low-income students	57.0	78.5	3.6	3.1	5.1	7.7		
Students w/ disabilities	37.6	68.8	5.2	3.1	6.5	9.6		
English-language learners	31.7	65.9	5.7	1.6	6.1	9.3		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

ALABAMA

Alabama High School Analysis

Alabama Department of Education. 2008-2010 Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE). <http://www.alsde.edu/Accountability/preAccountability.asp>

DATA NOTES: Datasets include separate results for grades 11 and 12. We used grade 11 reading and math-

ematics results, since these are the data that the state uses in its Adequate Yearly Progress calculations. These data do not include alternate assessment results for students with disabilities. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 8 – ALABAMA
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
High Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	82.7	91.4	1.4	0.2	1.8	4.3		
White	88.5	94.2	1.0	0.0	1.7	3.7		
African American	72.6	86.3	2.3	0.8	3.7	6.9	15.9	7.9
Low-income students	73.0	86.5	2.2	0.9	3.5	7.2		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico High School Analysis

New Mexico Public Education Department. New Mexico Standards Based Assessment Proficiencies State, District and School, by Grade 2008-2010. Available at <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/AssessmentAccountability/AcademicGrowth/NMSBA.html>

DATA NOTES: Data are for grade 11 students. They do not include alternate assessment results for students with disabilities. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 9 – NEW MEXICO
Six-Year Current Assessment Goal Modeling:
High Schools

Student Groups	2008 Composite Proficiency Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Achievement Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)*	Achievement Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)*
All students	41.9	71.0	4.8	1.8	5.0	9.7		
White	59.3	79.7	3.4	1.7	5.8	8.9		
Latino	34.3	67.1	5.5	2.1	4.2	9.1	25.0	12.5
Low-income students	30.1	65.0	5.8	2.5	5.6	9.2		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting proficiency rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

*Red-shaded cells indicate that we could calculate subgroup improvement rates for only 50-100 schools. 75th and 90th percentile improvement rates for these groups should be interpreted with caution.

ACT College Readiness Benchmarks Analysis

DATA NOTES: Each year, ACT calculates the percentage of students in each school and state that meet college-readiness benchmarks in reading, English, math, and science.¹⁷ At our request, ACT used their data to model how our proposed post-transition goals for states might play out on their assessments. To do so, ACT researchers selected only schools where all or virtually all graduates take the ACT test. They then calculated:

- The percentage of students in each groups' 2008 cohort meeting the college-readiness benchmark.
- The six-year goal for each group, assuming schools are expected to cut in half the difference between 2008 (baseline) college-readiness rates and overall college-readiness rates at the 95th-percentile school, which is a proxy for the average college-readiness rate at the top 10 percent of schools.
- How much schools would need to improve annually and how much they actually improved between 2008 and 2010.
- How much the 75th-percentile and 90th-percentile schools (for each respective subgroup) improved annually between 2008 and 2010.
- ACT only calculated improvement rates for a group of students (all students and each student subgroup) for schools where 20 or more students in that group were tested in a given subject each year.

TABLE 10
Post-Transition Goal Modeling: ACT College Benchmarks¹⁸

Student Groups		Percent of students college ready on ACT, 2008	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)
English Percent meeting College Readiness Benchmark at 95th-percentile school in 2008 = 91.9	All students	61.4	76.6	2.5	-0.1	2.3	5.0
	White	70.2	81.0	1.8	0.5	2.9	5.7
	African American	32.7	62.3	4.9	-0.4	2.5	5.8
	Latino	41.7	66.8	4.2	-0.8	2.4	6.2
	Low-income students	41.4	66.7	4.2	0.3	4.0	7.4
Mathematics Percent meeting College Readiness Benchmark at 95th-percentile school in 2008 = 71	All students	36.7	53.8	2.9	0.7	2.6	5.1
	White	44.0	57.5	2.2	1.1	3.6	6.3
	African American	8.9	39.9	5.2	0.5	1.7	4.4
	Latino	18.7	44.8	4.4	0.7	3.2	7.4
	Low-income students	17.2	44.1	4.5	0.6	3.0	6.0
Reading Percent meeting College Readiness Benchmark at 95th percentile school in 2008 = 76	All students	45.5	60.8	2.5	0.4	2.4	5.2
	White	53.9	65.0	1.8	0.7	3.2	5.8
	African American	17.3	46.7	4.9	0.4	2.2	4.8
	Latino	26.0	51.0	4.2	1.2	4.4	7.4
	Low-income students	27.0	51.5	4.1	0.5	3.7	6.7

¹⁷ According to ACT, "Students who meet a Benchmark on the ACT ... have approximately a 50 percent chance of earning a B or better and approximately a 75 percent chance of earning a C or better in the corresponding college course or courses" (ACT, 2010. "What are ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks?" Available at: <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/benchmarks.pdf>)

¹⁸ Special analysis prepared by ACT, Inc. based on methodological guidelines established by the Education Trust. All rights reserved.

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Graduation Rate Analysis

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2008-2010 4-year Graduation Rate Reports. Available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/gradrates.aspx

DATA NOTES: Graduation rates are calculated using four-year longitudinal cohort method. Non-graduate

completers and students in GED programs are not counted as graduates.

Since we are basing our analysis on four-year graduation rates rather than extended rates, alternative schools and schools where more than 50 percent of students qualify for special education services are excluded. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 11 – MASSACHUSETTS
Six-Year Goal Modeling:
High School Graduation Rates

Student Groups	2008 Graduation Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Graduation Rate Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)	Graduation Rate Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)
All students	83.3	86.7	0.6	0.4	2.0	3.4		
White	88.0	89.0	0.2	0.6	1.8	3.1		
African American	71.6	80.8	1.5	0.2	2.8	4.9	16.5	8.2
Latino	61.3	75.6	2.4	1.0	3.6	7.5	26.7	13.4
Low-income students	68.6	79.3	1.8	1.2	4.2	7.5		
Students w/ disabilities	68.9	79.4	1.8	0.0	3.2	6.7		

*Gaps are calculated by subtracting graduation rate of the subgroup in a given row from that of white students.

*Red-shaded cells indicate that we could calculate subgroup improvement rates for only 50-100 schools. The 75th-percentile and 90th-percentile improvement rates for these groups should be interpreted with caution.

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Graduation Rates Analysis

Public Schools of North Carolina. Longitudinal Cohort Graduation Rates; 2006 through 2009. Available at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/cohortgradrate>

DATA NOTES: Graduation rates are calculated using a four-year longitudinal cohort method. Since we are basing our analysis on four-year graduation rates rather than extended rates, alternative and special education

schools are excluded, as are schools that do not have a 12th grade. The downloadable data file does not include graduation rate data for white students, and only includes graduation rates for low-income students for 2008 and 2009. As such, these groups are not included in this analysis. Furthermore, data for some subgroups are suppressed due to small subgroup size.

TABLE 12 – NORTH CAROLINA
Six-Year Goal Modeling:
High School Graduation Rates

Student Groups	2008 Graduation Rate	Six-Year Interim Goals	Gains Needed (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 Average Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 75th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	2008-2010 90th-Percentile Annual Gains (Percentage Points)	Graduation Rate Gap, 2008 (Percentage Points)	Graduation Rate Gap If Six-Year Goal Is Met (Percentage Points)
All students	76.1	83.0	1.2	-0.5	1.7	3.9		
African American	69.9	80.0	1.7	-0.7	2.8	6.0		
Latino	60.0	75.0	2.5	0.8	4.9	10.6		
Students w/ disabilities	55.3	72.7	2.9	3.1	7.4	13.5		

**Red-shaded cells indicate that we could calculate subgroup improvement rates for only 50-100 schools. The 75th-percentile and 90th-percentile improvement rates for these groups should be interpreted with caution.*

ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.



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