

ESEA Flexibility Talking Points Provided by the Arkansas Department of Education

- States were offered the opportunity to seek waivers from some of the provisions of the No Child Left Behind legislation in September 2011, after Congress failed to reauthorize the legislation. Arkansas sought a waiver in an effort to move away from a narrowly defined accountability system that gave a limited and often misleading view of a school or district's success in improving student achievement.
- The approval of the state's ESEA Flexibility request does not eliminate accountability measures for improving student achievement, but it does allow us to implement an accountability system that will provide a more meaningful measure of the success and progress of Arkansas students and schools.
- Schools will no longer have to focus on meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – a single measure, assigned arbitrarily that was the same for everyone regardless of where they were starting from or the challenges in their student population. Instead, we'll be able to look at performance, growth and graduation rate for high schools and establish Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs) that are unique to each school.
- The new accountability system maintains a focus on helping students achieve proficiency in both literacy and math, but also gives credit for improving performance along the way. The system provides a more accurate and fair view of performance among students.
- We'll begin using the new accountability system in the 2012-2013 school year.

The Old Accountability System

- One-size fits all; miss one, miss them all
- Blanket sanctions imposed on schools in improvement status; no discretion on how set-aside funds were spent
- Overly focused on standardized test scores
- Focused schools' efforts on students close to meeting proficiency instead of improving all students

The New Accountability System

- Arkansas's accountability system designed by Arkansas stakeholders
- Maintains focus on most at risk student populations – will continue to report disaggregated data
- Focused on performance and growth for all students

State assessments remain the standard by which school and district performance is measured, however we'll now be looking at that data in three different ways— student achievement, student growth and graduation rate at high schools.

Each school and school district is assigned AMOs based on student growth, student performance and graduation rate. By looking at the data in different ways, schools gain clarity regarding the areas in which improvement efforts should be focused.

In the new accountability system, schools and districts will no longer be required to offer school choice or supplemental educational services.

The state will, however, identify low performing schools based on student achievement and the achievement gap and provide those schools with technical assistance to help implement improvement plans. These are Needs Improvement Priority and Needs Improvement Focus.

If your school was designated a "priority or focus" school, which is one of three new designations required to be used by states that received flexibility from No Child Left Behind accountability mandates, there are a few additional things you need to know.

Priority schools are among the lowest five percent across the state struggling to deliver outcomes or adequate growth to most students. Those schools will join the existing School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools in working with ADE and experts to create an extensive plan for improvement and support.

Priority schools will be required to develop plans tailored to their individual situation and needs. Supports and programs will be evidence-based and school specific.

Focus schools are making progress generally in terms of student achievement and may have high percentages of proficient students, but have a population of at risk students that are not performing. Educators in focus schools are expected to concentrate school improvement efforts on closing achievement gaps in order to help all children reach their learning potential.

Priority and Focus schools across Arkansas will receive increased resources and technical assistance to affect positive change in the classroom for all students.

Identified schools will partner with ADE to implement action plans that consist of appropriate interventions and technical assistance based on the results of a comprehensive needs assessment. The progress of identified schools will be monitored and evaluated.

Schools exit Priority and Focus status by meeting their AMOs two consecutive

years.

The new system also provides an opportunity to recognize schools for high performance and high levels of improvement and to reward those schools for their efforts. These schools are designated as “Exemplary.”

The Arkansas plan is one of shared responsibility in which the state provides leadership and direction to school districts, which then give leadership and direction to the schools, which are then responsible for building the capacity of the school staff to meet the needs of all learners. In this way, effective interventions can occur at all levels to ensure improved student learning.

The schools in the middle are designated as Achieving or Needs Improvement. Please don't think of a school designated as Needs Improvement as a failing school. It is not. It means the school missed its targets. It means school leaders and teachers need to look at the data to find out which students are not making gains and why.

This is a new accountability system and the old school improvement labels—year 1, 2, 3 and on—no longer apply. The system is transparent and provides schools and parents the information they need to help students succeed.

This Flexibility will be in place through the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years. If Congress fails to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Action before the Flexibility expires, states may be given the opportunity for an extension of its plan.