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Understanding Adequate Yearly Progress

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What exactly is AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress)?

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates that all states develop an accountability system that measures student achievement every year. The method states must use to measure achievement is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). States must agree to bring all students to proficient academic performance levels in reading and math by 2014 in order to continue receiving Title I funds, a federal funding program that commits \$12 billion per year to help lower-income children. In Arkansas, the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) serves as the basis for determining AYP and incorporates the mandates of NCLB.¹ According to a 2004 report by The Education Trust, determining AYP is a five-step process. The following article outlines the five steps and describes Arkansas' approach to determining AYP.

Step 1: States determine what all students should know and be able to do.

This process begins with each state setting standards for what skills and concepts K-12 students should master at each grade level and in each subject area.

In Arkansas: The Arkansas Department of Education website provides curricular frameworks in all subject areas as well as a sample model

curriculum at <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/curriculum/frameworks.html>.

¹ For a comprehensive explanation of ACTAAP and how to read the multiple reports of test scores, see http://arkedu.state.ar.us/pdf/ReportInterpGuide_FNL_Mar_2004.pdf.

Step 2: States calculate the starting point for AYP.

The state then sets a specific score that will indicate whether a student is proficient. The beginning targets need to be set at least as high as the greater of:

- 1) the percent proficient in the lowest performing group of students in the state (e.g. low-income students, limited-English proficient (LEP) students, students from one of the major racial or ethnic groups); or
- 2) the percent proficient in the school at the 20th percentile of student enrollment within the state.²

In Arkansas: States had the option of computing one baseline for all grades or calculating different baselines for elementary, middle, and high schools. Arkansas chose to calculate separate baselines for different groups, each one indicating the standard score that defines the proficiency level for each group. (See Table 1 below)

Step 3: States set specific targets to measure whether all groups of students are making AYP in language arts and math.

² "To find this number, the state first ranked all schools according to the overall percentage of students meeting proficiency on the state assessment—from the highest achieving to the lowest. Then, starting with the school at the bottom of the list, they moved up, adding the number of students in each school along the way, until they had counted 20% of the state's students enrollment. The performance of students in this school represented the performance of the school at the 20th percentile of student enrollment" (Education Trust, 2004).

After establishing the baseline, states then determine targets for increasing the number of proficient students over time. These increases must be established in equal increments and occur no more than three years apart. In the first year, only schools where the student population as a whole or within subgroups did not meet the baseline failed to make AYP. The subgroups that schools must ensure make AYP independent of the school population as a whole are economically disadvantaged students, LEP students, students with disabilities, and major ethnic and racial groups. The

first increase needs to occur by 2004-05.

In addition to the measures of performance in language arts and math, states also chose another indicator (e.g. attendance) to measure overall performance. Secondary schools must use graduation rates as the additional indicator. Unlike the academic subject indicators, the additional indicator does not need to increase over time.

In Arkansas: The table below shows Arkansas's incremental increases, which culminates in 100 percent proficiency by 2014.

Table 1: Arkansas State Baseline Scores for Proficiency and Targets for Increasing Proficiency Levels

Grade Level	Baseline Scores	Targets for Increasing Proficiency Levels
Kindergarten - Fifth Grade Literacy	31.8%	5.68
Kindergarten - Fifth Grade Mathematics	28.2%	5.98
Sixth - Eighth Grade Literacy	18.1%	6.83
Sixth - Eighth Grade Mathematics	15.3%	7.06
Ninth - Twelfth Grade Literacy	19.0%	6.75
Ninth - Twelfth Grade Mathematics	10.4%	7.47

Step 4: States measure the performance of students and schools to determine whether schools meet AYP goals.

A school makes AYP if:

- the school as a whole has met or exceeded the statewide goal in math or language arts;
- each subgroup within the school has met or exceeded the statewide goal;
- 95 percent of all students and 95 percent of the students in each subgroup took the tests; and
- the school met the goal for the additional academic indicator.

However, NCLB allows for exceptions and unique circumstances. Schools and districts may exempt up to 1 percent of all students with serious cognitive disabilities from grade-level tests; this cap does not apply to schools specifically intended to serve severely cognitively disabled students. Newly

arrived LEP students also do not factor into determining AYP. LEP students will only be counted in AYP measures after they demonstrate full proficiency in English.

The “Safe Harbor” provision also offers an alternative way for a school to make AYP. If a school does not meet the statewide goal in a given year but reduces the percent of students who are not proficient by 10 percent from the previous year and makes progress on the other academic indicator, the school will still make AYP. This provision ensures that schools receive credit for year-to-year improvement, putting them on a trajectory toward achieving the 100 percent proficiency goal.

A number of provisions also address the calculation of AYP based on scores in order to ensure fairness and accuracy:

- **Averaging scores:** States can average scores from the current year with scores from either the previous year or the previous two years. Schools can average scores across all grades within a school.
- **Full-year students only:** Schools are accountable for the performance of students who have been enrolled in the school for at least one academic year.
- **Minimum number of students for subgroups:** For a subgroup to affect a school’s results, the group must be large enough to reveal “statistically valid and reliable” data.
- **Confidence intervals:** States can implement this statistical technique, which may increase the reliability of determinations particularly for smaller groups of students, in order to minimize the chances of not making AYP.

In Arkansas: A three-year model is being used to determine AYP in Arkansas. The percent proficient for each school will be determined by taking the sum of all eligible students that were tested and scored above or at proficient in each grade tested for three consecutive years and dividing it by the total number of students enrolled for each of the three years. Each year, the oldest year of data will be replaced with the new year of scores. However, schools or districts may choose to use just current year data instead of the three-year model if the current year data is more favorable for the school. Whichever formula is used must be applied to all accountability determinations for that year.

Step 5: Steps are taken to help students in schools that do not make AYP.

While the federal legislation encourages the states to adopt one accountability system for all public schools, only schools that receive Title I funds must face the following consequences according to NCLB.

Table 2: Consequences for Schools That Do Not Make AYP

Year	Actions
One	None
Two	A school is notified that it did not make AYP for the previous year. There are no consequences; the school should use the information to identify areas for improvement.
Three: In Need of Improvement	If a school does not make AYP for two years in a row, it is labeled as “in need of improvement”. A group of administrators, teachers, parents, and outside experts must develop a two-year plan for improvement. Parents will receive notification that their students are eligible for transferring to a high-performing school in the district; the lowest achieving low-income students will receive priority for a transfer.
Four: Supplemental Services	If a school fails to meet AYP again, supplemental services like tutoring must be made available to students in that school. Parents will again receive notification of their student’s eligibility for transferring.
Five: Corrective Action	If a school fails to make AYP for four consecutive years, it is identified as needing “corrective action”. In addition to transfers and supplemental services, the district and school must implement one of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Appoint an outside expert to advise the school.

- 2) Institute a new curriculum.
- 3) Restructure the school's internal organizational structure.
- 4) "Significantly decrease management authority" at the school level.
- 5) Replace the school staff who are "relevant to the failure to make AYP".

Six: Develop
Alternative
Governance Plan

The school must prepare an alternate governance plan that includes one of the following:

- 1) Reopen the school as a charter school.
- 2) Replace all or most of the staff responsible for the lack or progress.
- 3) Enter into a contract with a private company to operate the school.
- 4) Turn over the operation and management of the school to the state.
- 5) Implement other fundamental reforms approved by the state.

Seven: Restructuring The school must implement the alternate governance plan.

In order for a school to be taken off the "in need of improvement" list, the school must make AYP for two years in a row.

THE ROLE OF AYP IN IMPROVING SCHOOLS

For many states, the collection and interpretation of data is daunting (Olson, 2004). The requirements have resulted in the modification of state criteria for AYP and the fluctuation of the number of schools reported as not meeting AYP in each state. The disparities and deficiencies revealed in the first few rounds of calculations create cause for concern, but these revelations are the goal of AYP. The mandates force educators, parents, and the public to carefully examine equity and quality in their schools.