

Differentiated Accountability: A More Nuanced System to Better Target Resources

March 2008

“The goal is to help educators act now to help schools in every stage of improvement. We must take dramatic action to improve our lowest-performing schools.”

-- U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

In January 2007, Secretary Spellings announced *Building On Results: A Blueprint for Strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, designed to provide additional resources and flexibility to our schools and educators to help achieve NCLB’s goal of every student reading and doing math at or above grade level by 2014. As part of this Blueprint, the Department called for differentiated accountability to allow states to distinguish between those schools in improvement that are just missing the mark and those that need significant reform.

After six years of NCLB implementation, we have data illustrating that the extent of the academic achievement problems leading to a school’s identification differ widely within states. **Differentiated accountability will allow states to vary the intensity and type of interventions to match the academic reasons that lead to a school’s identification.** In addition, some states and districts have a large percentage of their schools identified, impacting capacity to provide meaningful, intensive reforms. **Differentiated accountability will assist those states by targeting resources and interventions to those schools most in need of intensive interventions and significant reform.**

In return, states must commit to: **build their capacity** for school reform; **take the most significant actions** for the lowest-performing schools, including addressing the issue of **teacher effectiveness**; and use data to determine the method of differentiation and categories of intervention.

What is differentiated accountability?

- Differentiated accountability means creating a more nuanced system of distinguishing between schools in need of dramatic intervention, and those that are closer to meeting goals.
- This flexibility will help states do what is necessary to enable all students to read and do math at grade level or better by 2014 in a more effective and efficient manner.
- Differentiated accountability is not about lessening the focus on all students reaching grade level in reading and mathematics or lessening the imperative to fix struggling schools.

Core Principles of Differentiated Accountability Models

A state’s proposal must address the core principles of NCLB, which are organized around **four key areas: accountability, differentiation, interventions for schools, and schools in restructuring.**

1. **Accountability:** The state maintains its current practice for determining AYP and identifying schools as in need of improvement.
2. **Differentiation:** The state clearly defines its process for categorizing schools.
3. **Interventions:** The state clearly defines its system of interventions.
4. **Restructuring (or alternate label):** The state clearly defines the interventions for the lowest-performing schools.

Who is eligible to apply?

- ☑ As part of the new pilot program, states that meet the **four eligibility criteria** may propose a differentiated accountability model. These eligibility criteria are based on the “bright line” principles of NCLB.
 - 1) The state’s standards and assessment system be **fully approved** as administered in the 2007-08 school year.
 - 2) The state must have **no significant monitoring findings** related to provisions NCLB. We will also take into consideration significant monitoring findings related to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
 - 3) The state must have an **approved highly qualified teacher plan**.
 - 4) The state must **provide timely and transparent adequate yearly progress (AYP) information to the public**. States that have more than one non-approved occurrence of late AYP in the past two years are not eligible.
- ☑ Additionally, the Department will give **priority to states** that have relatively **high percentages of their Title I schools (at least 20%) identified for improvement**, proposals that combine innovation with a **rigorous approach to reform**, and states that propose to take the most **significant and comprehensive interventions** for the lowest-performing schools earlier in the improvement timeline.

Approval Process

Outside peer reviewers will evaluate state proposals against the core principles and priorities. Up to 10 states will be approved for differentiated accountability in the first year of the pilot.

- States that wish to apply and meet the eligibility requirements should submit their proposals to the Department by May 2, 2008 to allow sufficient time for review.
- State proposals will first be reviewed internally by U.S. Department of Education staff to ensure that the state meets the eligibility criteria.
- For states determined to be eligible, outside peer reviewers with technical expertise in accountability and school improvement will evaluate the proposals and provide recommendations to the Secretary.
- The Secretary will approve states to participate in the pilot before the start of the 2008-09 school year so that states may implement the model based on results from tests administered in 2007-08.

Evaluation

The Department will rigorously monitor and evaluate States that receive approval under this pilot.

- A pilot project on differentiated accountability will provide the Department with an opportunity to rigorously evaluate how to design better models of customized and meaningful accountability, and ultimately inform NCLB reauthorization and school improvement in general.
- States approved to use a differentiated accountability model must agree to provide data to the Department comparing its model to the existing accountability system, the interventions applied to schools, and the effects of differentiating accountability on student achievement and school reform.