

No Child Left Behind

Responding to the News Media: Questions and Answers for School Board Presidents

Newspaper reporters will likely contact your school district following release of the new state NCLB School Report Cards and 2003 test data. Whether your district has a number of schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act—or whether all your schools made AYP—you should be prepared to address the issue.

The following questions-and-answers address a wide range of situations. Not every one would apply to every school or district. However, the Q&As should provide direction in responding to questions from the news media.

REVISED 10/3/03

Q. A number of schools in your district have not made Adequate Yearly Progress. Can you explain why?

A. Our superintendent has briefed me on our schools' status under No Child Left Behind. In fact, the general student population in each of our schools attained Adequate Yearly Progress this year.

However, the law also requires that we track the progress of a number of subgroups of students. These subgroups are held to the same standards as the general school population. If any one of them does not make AYP, then the entire school is deemed not to have made adequate progress.

That's what happened here. One or more of these subgroups [*identify subgroup(s)*] did not make adequate academic progress in some of our schools.

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Our superintendent has briefed me on our schools' status under No Child Left Behind this year. The board is seriously concerned that [*number*] of our schools did not make adequate progress. New Jersey's current AYP targets will stay in effect for another year. The Board of Education is dedicated to applying any additional resources it has available to those efforts that will enable all of our schools to attain AYP by next year.

Q. What steps will your board take to help schools that did not make Adequate Yearly progress?

A. The Board of Education believes that, with the dedication of staff, the support of families and adequate resources, all children can succeed. The board remains committed to the goal of closing gaps in achievement among our students. And that's why our

school district has undertaken initiatives to help all children attain proficiency.

[*Your school administrators should be prepared to give an overview of current and planned initiatives.*]

Q. A number of your district's schools were "in need of improvement" last year. The Department of Education indicates that they are still "in need of improvement." Why?

A. To be removed from the "in need of improvement list," a school must make AYP for two consecutive years. We reached the adequate progress mark this year. Our goal for next year is to meet and exceed AYP standards, which will result in removal from the list.

- or -

Proficiency levels have increased for all of our students, but not rapidly enough to make AYP. Therefore, the state has kept these schools on the "in need of improvement" list.

-or-

Proficiency levels have increased for all of our students, but not sufficiently for some of the subgroups who must meet AYP targets. Therefore, the state has kept these schools on the "in need of improvement" list.

Our school district has been heavily involved with school improvement strategies. That focus will become even stronger in those schools that did not meet AYP targets. The board believes that the initiatives we have put in place will have a positive impact on student learning.

Q. What are you telling parents whose children attend schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress?

Our schools have taken initiatives to help our students make academic progress. This



means not only Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind, but also progress toward New Jersey's academic standards.

NCLB, in fact, bases academic progress solely on New Jersey state test scores in two areas: mathematics and language arts literacy. These are key areas, but they are not the only elements of our school programs. Nor are standardized tests the sole measure of school progress.

We assess our students' progress in a wide variety of academic subjects. To do this, we rely not only on state testing but also on other standardized tests and teacher evaluations of students.

[School district administrators should be prepared to explain how the district identifies and provides remediation to students in need of assistance. To put the AYP data in context, provide positive information about the district, such as the percentage of graduates continuing their education, the high school graduation rate, the number of Advanced Placement courses, and innovative programs.]

- Q.** *Will your district make any staff changes as a result of the schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress?*
- A.** Our efforts will focus on implementing and improving programs to help all of our children reach the state's Core Curriculum Content Standards. Along with budget data and other factors, these programming needs have always been a major consideration for our administration in developing its staffing recommendations. This process will continue.
- Q.** *Voters in your district just passed a large bond issue for new school facilities. What do you say to parents and taxpayers now that the state says that some district schools have not made Adequate Yearly Progress?*
- A.** Technology upgrades, health and safety improvements and modern science labs and classrooms can have a positive impact on achievement. The community's support for funding school facility improvements is critical to our school's success.

- Q.** *Every school in your district has made Adequate Yearly Progress. Why is your district doing better than many others?*
- A.** I only have first-hand knowledge of my own school district. By talking with school board members in other communities, I know that all schools face challenges academically, socially, or financially—whether they are located in an Abbott district, in a well-to-do suburb, or in between.
- Q.** *What does your board think of the process used to report Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind?*
- A.** Our Board of Education believes in accountability and in providing parents with clear and accurate information about their children's education progress.

No Child Left Behind, however, can label schools if just one of the student subgroups does not make the Adequate Yearly Progress targets. These subgroups include students with learning disabilities and students whose native language is not English. These students are placed in special programming because of the educational challenges they face.

Our schools have a large number of students of limited English proficiency. Yet, once these students make the cut score and are deemed proficient in language arts, they leave the subgroup. So, our school district cannot get credit for their success.

Our district has an excellent special education program. Families of students with disabilities have located to our school district because of the quality of our programming. However, these children traditionally do not do well on standardized tests. The very success we have with these students may be the basis for our schools being labeled as not making Adequate Yearly Progress.

If New Jersey's AYP results are like those of neighboring states, then about half of our schools will not have made Adequately Yearly Progress—most because of the test results for one of the student subgroups. We know our schools are better than that. This over-identification illustrates serious flaws in the NCLB reporting system.

