
Identification of the Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools Policy

The Background:

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, formerly known as No Child Left Behind or NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) model of accountability, some schools that were consistently struggling were not identified to receive the most rigorous interventions. President Obama and Secretary Duncan endeavored to address this inconsistency in the accountability model. To do this, they defined the most struggling Title I schools as “persistently lowest-achieving” through Race to the Top and the school improvement grant programs. In 2011, the President and Secretary refocused efforts on the “persistently lowest-achieving” schools. The TN State Board of Education approved at that time that “persistently lowest-achieving” schools could be either:

Tier I – Any Title I high priority school (a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring as defined in ESEA) that is either in the lowest five percent of all Title I high priority schools in the ALL subgroup for math and reading/language arts combined achievement or is a Title I secondary school (defined as a high school in TN) with a graduation rate of less than 60% (for two out of the last three years).

Tier II – Any Title I secondary school eligible but not “served” by Title I that is either in the lowest five percent of these schools in the ALL subgroup for math and reading/language arts combined achievement or has a graduation rate of less than 60% (for two out of the last three years).

In the summer and fall of 2011, Governor Haslam and Commissioner Huffman sought relief from the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) model. In February 2012, TN was awarded Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waivers. Under the waivers, Tennessee is allowed to modify the definition of “persistently lowest-achieving” to be defined as Title I “priority” schools. The definition of “priority” schools was approved by United States Department of Education in the waiver. This policy aligns our state policy with the approved “priority” definition.

The approved flexibility waivers and the previously approved definition of “persistently lowest-achieving” were inconsistent on the use of at least two and up to three years of data as available to identify “priority” schools. This technical correction updates the previous approved definition.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends adoption of the policy on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.

Policy on the Identification of Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools:

Tennessee's definition of priority schools as approved by the US Department of Education through the state's ESEA flexibility waiver identifies Title I schools defined as "priority schools" to be "persistently lowest-achieving".

Tennessee's approved ESEA flexibility waiver adhered to the United States Education definition of a "priority school" by identifying a number of lowest-performing schools equal to at least five percent of the State's Title I schools as priority schools based on the proficiency and lack of progress of the "all students" group.

To identify priority schools Tennessee calculates a composite proficiency rate (success rate) for all students in a school. The data inputs for the calculation of the success rate include at least two and up to three years* of data for all of the following indicators for each school where applicable based on the assessments administered by the school.

- 3-8 Math
- 3-8 Reading/Language Arts
- 3-8 Science
- Algebra I
- English I
- English II
- Biology I
- Graduation Rate

The success rate equals:

$$\frac{\# \text{ Proficient/Advanced Students in Math + Reading/Language Arts + Science + Algebra I + English I + English II + Biology + \# HS Graduates}}{\# \text{ Tested Students in Math + Reading/Language Arts + Science + Algebra I + English I + English II + Biology + \# Students in HS Graduation Cohort}}$$

Note:

*Tennessee TCAP cut scores were recalibrated in 2009-10, which mean 2008-09 data is not comparable. The success rates used for determining the list of priority schools submitted with Tennessee's ESEA flexibility waiver were limited to 2009-10 and 2010-11 data. However, beginning with availability of 2011-12 data Tennessee will use at least two and up to three years of data.