

## *Can Michigan Meet the NCLB Challenge? Interpreting the 2004 Priority Schools List*

**Christopher B. Reimann, Policy Analyst  
Kwanghyun Lee, Research Analyst  
The Education Policy Center, Michigan State University**

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) recently released its second annual list of schools that have not met their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. Targets for AYP are established by the state in accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The list, also known as the priority schools list, identifies 896 schools in Michigan that did not reach their targets. This new list is more than four times larger than the 2003 priority schools list, which contained 216 schools. These 896 schools represent more than one in four schools in Michigan. These startling results deserve the attention of educators, policymakers and parents. They should provide a wake up call about the pace of improvement expected of schools and students under No Child Left Behind and the state's Education Yes! accreditation process.

### **More Standards to Meet**

There are several reasons why this year's list is so much longer than last year's. Some have to do with new criteria not in effect at the time of last year's assess-

ment. For example, the 2003 list did not include any high schools, because last year's goals were based solely on the test scores of elementary and middle school students.

Starting this year, however, other performance goals have come into effect, including an 80 percent graduation rate for high schools and an average daily attendance rate of 85 percent or better for elementary and middle schools. As Table 1 indicates, failure to meet these new standards put 23 schools on the list for the first time. Schools must also ensure that 95 percent of their students are tested for AYP purposes; in 164 schools, too few students took the MEAP to meet this standard.

### **Higher Standards to Meet**

A much more significant change is a higher standard for test score performance. Each school must now meet academic performance goals not just for its total student body, but also for each of several subgroups of students, including minority, low-income and special education students. (Schools in which

**Table 1. Reasons that Schools did not Meet AYP**

Reasons/AYP Phase	Total Number of Schools
Elementary or middle school did not meet 85% attendance rate	4
High school did not meet 80% attendance rate	19
School did not test at least 95% of students	164
At least one school subgroup did not meet AYP target in Math or Reading	310
Overall student body did not meet AYP target in Math or Reading	399
Total	896

subgroup populations have fewer than 30 members are exempt from subgroup AYP goals.) More than 300 schools whose overall test scores met AYP goals still appear on the MDE list of priority schools because one or more of their subgroups did not attain sufficiently high scores in either mathematics or reading.

### **No Child...**

Requiring adequate yearly progress for each subgroup captures one essential aspect of the federal policy: schools and districts must now provide quality education to every student they serve. This reflects the “No Child” aspect of No Child Left Behind. As such, it represents a fundamental change in the American vision of public schools. The promise of public schooling has always been that “any one can succeed;” equal educational opportunity has been a key goal for American schools for more than a century. This promise has not always been kept, largely because its fulfillment has depended upon the efforts of individual students to overcome inequitable educational opportunities.

No Child Left Behind changes that. It declares an ambitious attempt to realize the ideal of equal opportunity by shifting the responsibility for success from the student to the school. The bold new vision of education embodied by NCLB is the expectation that “everyone *will* succeed.”

### **...Left Behind**

As significant as it is, the lack of subgroup achievement is not the biggest reason for the four-fold increase in schools not meeting AYP in Michigan. Even without the additional subgroup criteria, nearly 400 schools failed to meet AYP goals for overall student academic performance. The near-doubling of the number of schools falling short of their achievement targets illustrates the other essential impact of NCLB and the ambitious nature of the performance goals it sets.

No Child Left Behind is unambiguous about increasing expectations for student scores, and rigorous about identifying schools that fail to meet these expectations. It gives states and schools 12 years to raise student

**Table 2. Demographics of Students Attending Schools on the Priority List**

	<b>% of Students Eligible for FRL</b>	<b>% of Students Enrolled Who Are Nonwhite</b>
Priority Schools	73%	85%
All Schools	39%	28%

proficiency as measured by state tests from their 2002 “baseline” scores to 100 percent proficiency in 2014. The federal guidelines provide some flexibility in how schools and states define interim performance goals, but they are highly prescriptive about how to deal with schools that consistently fall short of AYP goals.

Many of the schools on the list for missing overall test score targets are schools that missed their targets last year as well. However, the combination of higher goals and accountability for subgroup performances put an additional 385 schools on the priority schools list that were not on last year’s list.

### **Which Children Are Left Behind?**

More important than the growing number of schools now designated as failing to meet AYP goals is the growing number of students attending these schools. Equally disturbing – if not surprising – is the demographic composition of the schools on Michigan’s priority school list.

The “old news” is that the schools on the list serve students who are disproportionately poor and non-white. As was the case with the schools on last year’s list (most of which remained on the list), three-quarters of the students who attend schools that failed to make AYP are eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program (FRL), and 85 percent are minority students. By comparison, across Michigan about 39 percent of

students are FRL-eligible, and about 28 percent are nonwhite.

The “new news” is the size of the problem in terms of the number of children who now attend schools that are behind schedule in meeting student achievement goals. Table 3 displays the demographics of students who attend schools that have not met AYP goals for two to five years – nearly 120,000 students in all. How many students is that? More than the combined student enrollments of the Utica (28,700), Ann Arbor (16,600), Troy (12,100), Traverse City (10,700), Midland (9,600), Kentwood (9,200) Forest Hills (9,000), Grosse Pointe (8,900) and West Bloomfield (6,400) school districts. Nearly 50,000 students attend schools that have not met AYP goals for five years.

### **The Geography of AYP**

Of course, the vast majority of the schools on the priority schools list are not to be found in Utica, Ann Arbor, Troy, Traverse City, Midland, Kentwood, Forest Hills or Grosse Point. As the graph below illustrates, nearly nine out of ten of the schools can be found in Detroit or in a mid-size city or low-income suburb. Of the schools not meeting AYP for five years, almost all are located in these areas.

### **Origami and No Child Left Behind**

It is important to point out that not all children who attend schools on the priority schools list score below the standards set by

No Child Left Behind. Nor should it be surprising that, sooner or later, schools with relatively high student achievement on MEAP may appear on the priority schools list – either because of subgroup performance, or for missing overall performance goals.

Consider a simple analogy from origami, the art of folding paper. It is simple to fold a piece of paper in half, and to fold that in half a second, third and even a fourth time. Folding in half a fifth time, however, is much harder, and more than six “folds in half” of a single piece of paper is virtually impossible. Reaching the NCLB goal of 100 percent proficiency (by reducing the number of students scoring below proficiency) may be just as elusive for Michigan’s schools.

Until now, many Michigan schools and school districts have prided themselves on relatively high overall student proficiency levels as indicators of excellence. But it is not at all clear that these schools and districts are any better at helping “the last few kids” reach proficiency than low-performing

schools and districts are at helping their larger numbers of low-performing students. Sooner or later, even traditionally high-performing schools will be challenged by the proficiency targets set by NCLB.

### **NCLB - High Aspirations and the Bottom Line**

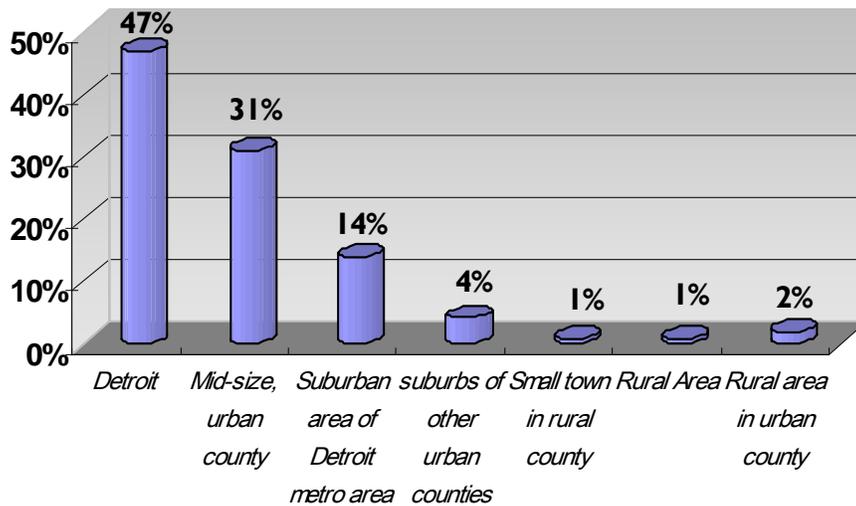
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 marks a new era in federal education policy. It clearly intends to hold schools, districts and states responsible for meeting increasingly higher standards of student achievement. Schools that miss their AYP targets for two or more years in a row are subject to an escalating set of sanctions that culminate with schools being shut down or handed over to third parties. This prospect now faces schools attended by more than 40,000 Michigan students, with schools enrolling another 30,000 students waiting in the wings. What will happen to these schools and their students is anything but certain.

NCLB’s goals are clear – and also complex. The provisions concerning the achievement

**Table 3. Number of Students by Race and Free/Reduced Lunch Program Enrollment in Schools that Failed to Meet AYP for 2, 3, 4 and 5 years.**

	2 Years		3 Years		4 Years		5 Years		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hispanic	579	4.2%	1,265	5.9%	3,768	10.2%	3,202	6.8%	8,814	7.4%
African American	11,053	79.6%	13,242	62.0%	27,967	75.6%	37,403	79.6%	89,665	75.2%
White	2,016	14.5%	6,132	28.7%	4,583	12.4%	5,495	11.7%	18,226	15.3%
FRL	7,369	71.2%	13,684	67.7%	24,561	73.1%	33,325	74.7%	78,939	72.6%

**Location of Schools that did not Meet AYP in Math and Reading for 2, 3, 4 or 5 years.**



of student subgroups are essential to those goals, but they bring a spreadsheet complexity to the task schools face in meeting those goals. It is possible to create a 40-cell matrix of AYP criteria and subgroups; with few exceptions, schools must fill every cell satisfactorily in order to meet adequate yearly progress. Success in 39 of the cells is not enough. Because of this complexity, every school in Michigan could appear on the priority schools list by the year 2014.

**The Promise and the Challenge**

The demographic data clearly indicate that poor and minority students have the most to gain – and the largest gains to make – under No Child Left Behind. On behalf of those students and their families, federal policymakers have set clear, ambitious goals

for local and state education officials to meet. Michigan’s priority schools list brings into sharp focus the persistent inequity in educational opportunity that still exists across the state, and the size and nature of the challenge that the NCLB goals represent. As the nation commemorates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Michigan policymakers have no better way to honor its meaning than to rise to the challenge that NCLB places before them.

## **Selected Publications List for The Education Policy Center at Michigan State University**

### **Major Publications**

Public Policy and Teacher Labor Markets: What We Know and Why It Matters, 2004  
Michigan School Finance Under Proposal A: State Control, Local Consequences, 2003  
Meeting the Accountability Challenge: A Handbook for Michigan Educators, 2002  
Turning Around Underperforming Schools, 2001  
The School Choice Debate: Framing the Issues, 2000  
School Choice Policies in Michigan, The Rules Matter, 1999

### **Policy Reports**

PR20: Teacher Recruitment and Teacher Quality? Are Charter Schools Different? , 2004  
PR19: Michigan Residents Grade Their Schools: Results from the 2003 State of the State Survey, 2004  
PR18: Declining Public Support for Charter Schools Results from the 2003 State of the State Survey, 2003  
PR17: Who's Teaching in Michigan's Traditional and Charter Public Schools, May 2003  
PR16: No School Left Behind? The Distribution of Teacher Quality in Michigan's Public Schools, 2003  
PR15: Michigan's Role in Monitoring Home Schools, 2003



The Education Policy Center at Michigan State University  
201 Erickson Hall , Easting Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034  
[www.epc.msu.edu](http://www.epc.msu.edu)