



## *More Information or More Paperwork? Reporting Requirements for Michigan's Schools under No Child Left Behind*

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### **Introduction**

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires school districts in every state to publish and disseminate annual report cards with information on district performance. Schools are required to report similar information. These report cards must include not only information on overall student achievement, but also on the performance of measurable subgroups, including economically disadvantaged students, special education students, and students from major racial and ethnic groups. (In Michigan, student achievement for this purpose is measured by the MEAP.) Districts are also required to report the state's annual achievement goals for each subgroup of students, the district's high school graduation rate, adequate yearly progress status, and information about the professional qualifications of the district's teachers in the aggregate and for high and low poverty schools. In addition, the two-year trend in achievement must be reported.

It is unclear whether these extensive reporting requirements will improve the information parents and taxpayers across the country receive about their local schools and districts. If schools and districts failed to inform the public about their performance prior to NCLB, the new regulations may have a salutary effect. The public deserves to know what is happening in state supported schools and, if this information has not been readily available in the past, the new requirements fill an important need. If, on the other hand, most of this information was already made available to the public, the new requirements may have simply created yet another layer of bureaucratic reporting that does little for the public and less for the schools and districts that must comply with them.

In the case of Michigan, state law has required schools and districts to report most of this information for nearly a generation.<sup>1</sup> Along with provisions for several curricular reforms and new

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<sup>1</sup> Michigan was not alone in requiring schools to prepare school report card prior to passage of NCLB. Quite a few other states had also passed laws requiring schools to publicly report data on student assessment results, including data disaggregated by student group.

school programs, Public Act 25 of 1990 included a statewide requirement for a school report card. Under P.A. 25, school districts in Michigan are required to report annually on student test scores, school accreditation status, retention/dropout rates, and several other types of information for each of their schools and for the district overall. In addition, districts are required to report on the progress each school is making on implementing the state's core curriculum, as well as progress on the federal Goals 2000 initiative. These reports are to be made publicly available and also presented to the State Department of Education.

Thus, the reporting requirements of NCLB would seem to be superfluous for the state of Michigan. But before judging the value of the NCLB reporting requirements, we should ask, have schools and districts complied with existing state law?

Using data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) for the 1999-2000 school year, we looked at the district and school production of performance reports in Michigan, and at the information contained in those reports. NCES is considered one of the most unbiased and trustworthy sources of education data. Our analysis includes the responses of 143 Michigan school districts and 297 schools, and is weighted to be representative at the state level. These data were collected prior to the 2002 passage of NCLB and provide information about the types of reports that were available to the public before the new reporting requirements were even under serious discussion.

### **The Devil and the Details**

Unfortunately, the data do not include information related to all the reporting requirements in NCLB. Districts and schools were not asked about the reporting of teacher qualifications. Anecdotally, it does not appear that districts and schools were providing the

public with very much information about the qualifications of their teaching force prior to NCLB's passage. The Lansing School District, for example, prepared a 100-page report in **2000 [check date]** on the performance of students and schools and their participation in various academic programs, including disaggregated data for many measures, but did not provide teacher qualification information on their report cards.

The NCES survey also did not ask districts and schools about whether they reported two-year trend information. Many of them probably were reporting some sort of progress information; 94.8% of districts indicated they used progress reports to evaluate student progress, and it is likely that many of them include at least some of this progress information in publicly available reports. Again, **in 2000** the Lansing School District reported achievement data for three to five years. It is unlikely that all districts report this information in the format mandated by NCLB, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. While school and district administrators are unlikely to seek an unflattering way to report progress, there can be more than one legitimate way to measure change. The method prescribed by NCLB may not be best for everyone. Small schools and districts are likely to experience wild swings in scores if they report a straightforward two year trend, swings that may have more to do with an ill timed flu epidemic in the fourth grade one year than any substantive changes in quality.

Another limitation of the data is that individual schools were not asked detailed questions about the types of performance information they made available to parents and the community. For purposes of this analysis, we will assume that schools that report performance information to the public generally provide the same type of information as their districts, as applicable to their situation – elementary and middle schools do not

have graduation rates to report, and small schools will not have sufficient numbers of diverse students to disaggregate their data while maintaining student privacy and statistical significance.

**District Performance Reports**

Table 1 looks at the types of information reported by school districts and schools to the public they serve. Almost all of Michigan’s districts and schools were making performance reports available to the public prior to the passage of NCLB. With the exception of performance by demographic group, almost all districts were including the information required by NCLB such as test results, graduation rate and student progress. We show later in this report that the districts disaggregating data tend to be urban and have greater ethnic and socioeconomic diversity than those that do not. With the exception of separate reporting of achievement for special education students (which is proving problematic in practice and was rarely done prior to NCLB), achievement may well have already been reported in a disaggregated manner in the most diverse Michigan districts.

One potential justification for NCLB reporting requirements would be selective reporting – that certain types of districts might choose to

keep the public uninformed about their progress. If this is the case, the public’s right to know would justify the additional requirements. Table 2 looks at reporting by a variety of district characteristics – size, urbanicity, degree of poverty and minority enrollment. The data clearly show that school districts in Michigan of all types were already making public reports, including test results and graduation rates, prior to NCLB. The lowest compliance rates were in districts with the lowest total enrollments, poverty rates and minority enrollments – small, relatively affluent, homogeneous districts in a state with a long and deep tradition of local control.

Although the reporting of subgroup data is significantly lower across the board, urban, higher poverty and high minority districts were much more likely to report the performance of student subgroups than their suburban counterparts. Because subgroup reporting was not required by P.A. 25, the surprise in the percentage of districts providing this information is perhaps not that it is so low – but that it is so high. The NCES data on public reporting at the school level parallel those at the district level. Overall, 93 percent of the schools in Michigan were producing public performance reports prior to No Child Left Behind. Charter schools and suburban schools were

| <b>Table 1: Publicly reported district and school information</b>       |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| Percentage of districts making performance reports publically available | 98.6              |
| Percentabe of schools making performance reports publically available   | 93.0              |
| Percentage of districts reporting test results                          | 94.1              |
| Percentage of districts reporting graduation rates                      | 94.1 <sup>2</sup> |
| Percentage of districts reporting performance by demographic group      | 57.8              |

<sup>2</sup>This includes districts reporting graduation rates and those reporting dropout rates.

**Table 2: Reporting by a variety of district characteristics**

| Sample Type                              | % Making Public Reports | % Reporting Test Results | % Reporting Graduation Rates | % Reporting Subgroup Data |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Size</b>                              |                         |                          |                              |                           |
| < 2,000                                  | 9.2                     | 91.7                     | 90.2                         | 55.6                      |
| 2,000 - 9,999                            | 99.0                    | 97.5                     | 100.0                        | 59.6                      |
| 10,000+                                  | 100.0                   | 100.0                    | 100.0                        | 58.9                      |
| Totals                                   | 98.6                    | 94.1                     | 94.1                         | 57.8                      |
| <b>Urbanicity</b>                        |                         |                          |                              |                           |
| Urban                                    | 92.6                    | 100.0                    | 100.0                        | 100.0                     |
| Suburban                                 | 100.0                   | 96.9                     | 98.6                         | 49.0                      |
| Rural                                    | 97.4                    | 90.0                     | 88.0                         | 64.1                      |
| Totals                                   | 98.6                    | 94.1                     | 94.1                         | 57.8                      |
| <b>Students Eligible for FRL Program</b> |                         |                          |                              |                           |
| < 10%                                    | 100.0                   | 87.7                     | 82.6                         | 43.0                      |
| 10% - 40%                                | 98.8                    | 97.1                     | 98.8                         | 54.5                      |
| 40% +                                    | 97.4                    | 92.6                     | 92.6                         | 71.7                      |
| Totals                                   | 98.6                    | 94.1                     | 94.1                         | 57.8                      |
| <b>Minority Student Population</b>       |                         |                          |                              |                           |
| < 10%                                    | 98.5                    | 93.0                     | 93.0                         | 52.9                      |
| 10% - 40%                                | 98.8                    | 96.3                     | 96.3                         | 69.7                      |
| 40% +                                    | 100.0                   | 100.0                    | 100.0                        | 70.6                      |
| Totals                                   | 98.6                    | 94.1                     | 94.1                         | 57.8                      |

slightly less responsive to the P.A. 25 requirements, as were schools with lower minority or FRL enrollments.

### **Conclusion**

Nearly all Michigan schools and districts were reporting performance data to parents and the community prior to the report card requirement of NCLB. While some differences in their likelihood of making performance information public are based on differences in the community in which the school or district is located, it does not appear to be the case that schools that are traditionally thought to be poorly performing are failing to report this information. Rather, schools and districts in smaller, more homogeneous communities appear less likely to have reported performance information publicly prior to NCLB.

The data do suggest that reporting requirements do make a difference: reporting rates for information not specified by P.A. 25 were much lower than for information included in

the legislation. In important ways, however, the issue of reporting requirements will soon be eclipsed by a larger, related component of No Child Left Behind – that of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). NCLB has set 2014 as the year by which all students in every school and district must be performing up to high standards set by the state. Schools and districts must meet AYP goals in areas included in the public reporting requirements discussed above. The consequences of failing to meet these AYP goals go far beyond the public embarrassment of lackluster report cards: final sanctions include turning schools and districts over to third-party providers or even closing them completely. One way to look at the NCLB reporting requirements, then, is as a report card not to the public, but to the federal government – a far more demanding audience than most local parents.

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