Children Left Behind in AYP and Non-AYP Schools: Using Student Progress and the Distribution of Student Gains to Validate AYP

CSE Report 637

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CRESST / UCLA

September 2004

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Project 3.1 Methodologies for Assessing Student Progress, Strand 1
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The work reported herein was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305B960002, as administered by the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education.

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Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) establishes ambitious goals for increasing student learning and attaining equity in the distribution of student performance. Schools must assure that all students, including all significant subgroups, show adequate yearly progress toward the goal of 100% proficiency by the year 2014. In this paper, we wish to illustrate an alternative way of measuring AYP that both emphasizes individual student growth over time, and focuses on the distribution of student growth between performance subgroups. We do so through analyses of a longitudinal dataset from an urban school district in Washington. We also examine what these patterns tell us about schools that meet their AYP targets and those that do not. This alternative way of measuring AYP helps bring to light potentially important aspects of school performance that might be masked if we limit our focus to classifying schools based only on current AYP criteria. In particular, we are able to identify some schools meeting the Washington state criteria for AYP, for example, that have above average students making substantial progress but below average students making little to no progress. In contrast, other schools making AYP have below average students making adequate progress but above average students making little gains. These contrasts raise questions about the meaning of "adequate" progress – and to whom the notion of progress is referring. We believe that closely examining the distribution of student progress may provide an important supplementary or alternative measure of AYP.

Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) establishes ambitious goals for increasing student learning and attaining equity in the distribution of student performance. Schools must show they are making "adequate yearly progress," or AYP, toward the goal of all students achieving proficiency in mathematics and reading/language arts by the year 2014. In addition, schools must assure that all subgroups of students make such progress, including students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency. As such, the NCLB not only requires AYP, but also an equitable distribution of student learning.

Attending to the relationship between where students start (i.e., initial status) and how rapidly they progress (i.e., their rates of change) can provide us with an indicator of whether such equity goals are being achieved and whether particular subgroups are being left behind. In other words, examining the relationship between initial status and rates of change provides insight into how equitably student achievement is distributed within a school (Seltzer, Choi & Thum, 2002, 2003). If a school's average growth rate is high, and the relationship between initial status and growth over time is strongly positive, we know that children are being left behind. In this case, lower achieving students are making less progress than their higher achieving peers. As a result, initial gaps in achievement among students become magnified over time. This inequity in growth patterns is masked by the high overall growth in the school. On the other hand, if a school's average growth rate is low, and the relationship between initial status and growth over time is negative, or even weakly positive, this would be an indication that the school is doing a reasonable job of leaving no child behind, despite the low overall gains. In this case, progress is being underestimated by the low overall growth rate in the school.

The methodology for measuring growth and the equitable distribution of progress proposed in this paper pertains to estimating not only school mean growth, but also the expected growth or progress of certain subgroups. Our subgroups are defined by their initial performance status rather than by their ethnic, language, disability, or income levels. For example, we provide expected growth patterns for students who perform at a school's mean initial starting value, as well as for students performing 15 points above and below the school's average starting point.

In our analyses, our criteria for adequate progress is defined by, and driven by, individual students' gains over a two-year period. This notion of adequate progress, though different from AYP in NCLB, still addresses many of the underlying goals and tenets of NCLB. In the state of Washington, for example, the AYP decision is currently made based primarily on the performance of fourth graders on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). AYP in Washington and elsewhere is defined as a change in the percent proficient from year to year for different cohorts of students as they pass through the same grade level (fourth grade). This is often called a multiple-cohort design. Similarly, the definition of AYP that most states currently employ focuses on school-level progress—in the form of percent of students meeting proficiency in a particular grade—instead of individual-level progress (Thum, 2003). Our notion of adequate growth, by contrast, emphasizes monitoring each individual student's progress longitudinally. For example, we measure growth over two subsequent years, using students' test scores at Grade 3 in 2001, and at Grade 5 in 2003. This is an example of a longitudinal panel data design. In this type of design, it is possible to examine how much an individual student progresses each year, or over a span of 2 or 3 years, as well as whether there are differences in progress across different subgroups.

We first classified schools based on the AYP criteria used by Washington (see, Washington State Department of Education website: http://www.k12.wa.us/ESEA/presentations.aspx) in the 2001-2002 school year. "AYP Schools" are those that met Washington state's AYP targets; "Non-AYP Schools" are those that did not. We re-evaluated each of the AYP and Non-AYP schools based on our alternative framework of measuring progress. Our analysis leads us to see that our alternative measure of progress can compensate for some of the drawbacks of the current AYP measure.

Research Questions

We address the following questions in this study:

1. Are there schools that meet AYP yet still have children who are not making substantial progress? That is, are some schools classified as AYP leaving some children behind?
2. Are there schools that do not meet AYP yet still enable students to make substantial progress?
3. Do AYP schools achieve a more equitable distribution of student growth in achievement than Non-AYP schools? In other words, are schools that meet AYP enabling students at all ability levels to make substantial progress?
4. Are there Non-AYP Schools that are reducing the achievement gap and essentially acting to leave no child behind?

Data

Our study draws on elementary school data from a large, racially diverse, urban school district in the state of Washington, where required testing includes the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in Grades 3 and 5 and the WASL in Grade 4. While determinations of AYP are based on the WASL, the ITBS results provided us with the data needed for analyzing student growth. The difference in the tests, between the one used to measure progress in our analysis and that used by AYP criteria, is admittedly a limitation in our comparisons, particularly given differences in the tests' respective alignment with state standards. However, in order to show growth over time for individuals in elementary schools, we relied on the measure that was used in more than one elementary grade, the ITBS. In addition, equating the WASL and the ITBS in order to use adjacent grade levels was not an option with the data provided.

We used the ITBS reading scale scores for the longitudinal analysis. These scale scores are vertically equated developmental scores and thus are appropriate for examining student change over time. The test scores for third graders in 2001, and the test scores for these students when they were in the fifth grade, provided the basis of estimating gains in achievement between Grades 3 and 5 for each student in our sample. The analysis includes only students who had test scores in both Grades 3 and 5. In all, there are 2,524 students in this sample nested within 72 schools. The number of students in each school ranges from 13 to 87. The average number of students in this sample per school is approximately 35.

Among the sample of 72 schools, 51 are AYP schools (or met the AYP criteria) and the remaining 21 are Non-AYP schools (or did not meet the AYP criteria). As mentioned earlier, in the state of Washington, decisions regarding AYP are based on the state's standards-based test, the WASL. At the elementary school level, the WASL is administered only at Grade 4. Decisions whether each elementary school met AYP in the baseline year (2001-02) and during the second year (2002-03) were made based on fourth grade WASL test scores. In this study, the AYP and Non-AYP grouping is based on the baseline year (2001-02), when our sampled students were in the fourth grade.

Note importantly that we used standard errors of measurement (SEs) connected with students' ITBS test scores in our analysis. The SE for various ranges of test scores was obtained from the technical manual of the ITBS test booklet. As will be seen in detail in the following section, the SE information is incorporated into our analyses in order to estimate the true initial status and the true gain score for each student in each school, by accounting for measurement error.

Estimating True Gain Based on Two-Time Points with the Standard Errors of Measurement: Latent Variable Regression Hierarchical Model (LVR-HM_Gain)

We use an advanced two-level hierarchical modeling technique in a fully Bayesian framework (Choi & Seltzer, 2003; Seltzer, Choi & Thum, 2003; see also Raudenbush &

Bryk, Chpt. 11, 2002 for a maximum likelihood based approach). This modeling methodology incorporates latent variable regression techniques into two-level hierarchical models. In a Level-1 (within-individual) model, time-series observations are modeled as a function of a time metric, and we obtain estimates of initial status and rates of change for individual students. In a Level-2 (between-individual) model, rates of change for each student are modeled as a function of their initial status. The coefficient capturing the relationship between initial status and rates of change represents an expected increase (in the case of a positive coefficient) or decrease (in the case of a negative coefficient) in rates of change when initial status increases one unit.

We apply this modeling technique to settings where we have observations for individuals at two points in time, and the corresponding standard errors of measurement for both observations. In the following Level-1 model, ITBS test scores at Grades 3 and 5 for each of N students (i = 1, …, N) (Y_{ti}) are modeled as a linear function of time ($Time_{ti}$). $Time_{ti}$ takes a value of 0 for Grade 3 and a value of 1 for Grade 5.

$$Y_{ti} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}\, Time_{ti} + \varepsilon_{ti} \qquad \varepsilon_{ti} \sim N(0, [SE(Y_{ti})]^2) \qquad (1a)$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} Y_{1i} \\ Y_{2i} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \pi_{0i} \\ \pi_{1i} \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} \varepsilon_{1i} \\ \varepsilon_{2i} \end{pmatrix} \qquad \varepsilon_{ti} \sim N(0, [SE(Y_{ti})]^2) \qquad (1b)$$

By virtue of our time metric, π_{0i} represents initial status for student i, and π_{1i} captures gain or change during the span of time. Note that ε_{ti} are residuals assumed to be normally distributed with a mean of zero and variance represented by $[SE(Y_{ti})]^2$.

To incorporate the standard errors of measurement (SEs) into our model, we re-pose a Level-1 model of the following form:

$$Y^*_{ti} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}\, Time^*_{ti} + \varepsilon^*_{ti} \qquad \varepsilon^*_{ti} \sim N(0, 1) \qquad (2a)$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} Y_{1i} / SE(Y_{1i}) \\ Y_{2i} / SE(Y_{2i}) \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1/SE(Y_{1i}) & 0/SE(Y_{1i}) \\ 1/SE(Y_{2i}) & 1/SE(Y_{2i}) \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \pi_{0i} \\ \pi_{1i} \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} \varepsilon_{1i}/SE(Y_{1i}) \\ \varepsilon_{2i}/SE(Y_{2i}) \end{pmatrix}, \qquad (2b)$$

where we scale the left and right hand sides of Equation 1 by the inverse of the SEs for student i such that ε^*_{1i} and ε^*_{2i} are both assumed to be normally distributed and have a mean of zero, but their variance is now 1 ($\varepsilon^*_{ti} \sim N(0, 1)$. By re-scaling outcomes and the time metric based on an estimate of the precision associated with each test score, (1/

SE(Y_{ti})), it is possible to estimate true initial status (π_{0i}) and true gain (π_{1i}) for student *i* (see Bryk, Thum, Easton & Luppescu, p. 135, 1998). Note here that both π_{0i} and π_{1i} are latent variables, not observed variables.

We now pose the following Level-2 (between student) model:

$$\pi_{0i} = \beta_{00} + r_{0i} \qquad r_{0i} \sim N(0, \tau_{00}) \qquad (3a)$$
$$\pi_{1i} = \beta_{10} + b(\pi_{0i} - \beta_{00}) + r_{1i} \qquad r_{1i} \sim N(0, \tau_{11}) \quad Cov(r_{0i}, r_{1i}) = 0 \qquad (3b)$$

In Equation 3a, β_{00} represents the population mean initial status and r_{0i} a random effect capturing deviations in the initial status of students from β_{00}. In Equation 3b, true gain for student *i* is modeled as a function of true initial status. Thus, the latent variable regression coefficient *b* captures the relationship between initial status and amount of gain. In other words, *b* captures the expected increase or decrease in the amount of gain (π_{1i}) when initial status (π_{0i}) increases one unit (see for example, Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Seltzer et al., 2003). β_{10} now represents the expected gain for student *i* whose initial status value (π^{*}_{0i}) is equal to the mean initial status (β_{00}) for that student's school. As for variance components, τ_{00} captures the extent to which students vary in initial status, and τ_{11} represents a residual variance in gain after taking into account differences in initial status.

Including initial status as a predictor for the gain helps address an important question on how student growth is distributed within a school (Seltzer et al., 2003). The questions are as follows: Does a student who starts out with higher scores gain more than a student who starts out with lower scores? Is the gap among students diminishing or increasing over time? As mentioned above, the latent variable regression coefficient, *b*, gives us a sense of the patterns underlying the relationship between expected gain and initial status. By attending this *b* coefficient, we can address a question on what the expected gain would be for students at different levels of initial status. More specifically, we examine the expected gain for: 1) a student whose initial status value is equal to the school mean initial status, 2) a student who is initially starting 15 points below the school mean initial status, 3) a student who is initially starting 15 points above the school mean initial status.

Estimating the expected values at different levels of initial status based on the LVR-HM_Gain

We fit each school's data to the model described in Equations 2a, 3a, and 3b. Note that all analyses of the LVR-HM_Gains presented in this paper are conducted using the software program WinBUGS1.4 (i.e., the Windows version of Bayesian Analysis Using the Gibbs Sampler developed by Spiegelhalter et al, 2002). WinBUGS provides a fairly easy means of implementing the Gibbs sampler in a wide range of modeling settings. Upon convergence, the Gibbs sampler essentially provides us with an accurate approximation of the marginal posterior distribution for all of the parameters in our model. Using the resulting marginal posterior distributions, we can obtain the posterior mean, median, standard deviation, and 95% interval based on the .025 and .975 quantiles of the marginal posterior distribution.

Using the resulting estimates after fitting the model depicted in Equations 2a, 3a and 3b, we first estimate the expected scores of students in Grades 3 and 5, depending upon three sets of student initial status: equal to the school mean, 15 points below the school mean, and 15 points above the school mean. Then we estimate the expected gain by subtracting the expected value at Grade 3 from the expected value at Grade 5.

1. Expected gain for students initially starting at school mean initial status

We pose equations for the mean initial status and the mean gain as follows:

$$E\,(Y_{t0\_M} \mid t=0, \pi_{0i} = \beta_{00}) = \beta_{00} \qquad (4a)$$
$$E\,(Y_{t1\_M} \mid t=1, \pi_{0i} = \beta_{00}) = \beta_{00} + \beta_{10} \qquad (4b)$$

The expected value at $t = 0$ is equal to the school mean initial status (i.e., β_{00}), and the expected value at $t = 1$ is equal to the mean initial status plus the mean gain (i.e., $\beta_{00} + \beta_{10}$), since the second part in the right hand side of Equation 3b involving the b coefficient is equal to 0 (i.e., $(\pi_{0i} - \beta_{00}) = 0$, thus $b \times (\pi_{0i} - \beta_{00}) = 0$). As a result, for a student who starts at the school mean initial status, the expected gain is obtained by subtracting Equation 4a from Equation 4b, and it is equal to the mean gain (i.e., β_{10}) as in the following equation:

$$Gain\_mean = E\,(Y_{t1\_M}) - E\,(Y_{t0\_M}) = (\beta_{00} + \beta_{10}) - \beta_{00} = \beta_{10} \qquad (4c)$$

2) Expected gain for students initially starting 15 points below the school mean initial status

The expected values at Grades 3 and 5 for students starting out 15 points below the school mean initial status are specified in the following Equations 5a and 5b:

$$E\ (Y_{t0\_L} \mid t=0, \pi_{0i} = \beta_{00} - 15) = \beta_{00} + (-15) \quad (5a)$$
$$E\ (Y_{t1\_L} \mid t=1, \pi_{0i} = \beta_{00} - 15) = (\beta_{00} + (-15)) + (\beta_{10} + b \times (-15)) \quad (5b)$$

Where the expected value at $t = 0$ can be obtained by subtracting 15 points from the school mean initial status (β_{00}). In Equation 5b, we estimate the expected value at t =1. In this equation, $b \times (-15)$ captures the extent to which we expect an increment or decrement from the mean gain (β_{10}) when the initial status is 15 points below the mean initial status. This quantity is then added to the expected initial status 15 points below the mean initial status. If the coefficient b has a positive value, for example, the expected gain is smaller than the mean gain. In contrast, if the coefficient b has a negative value, the expected gain becomes larger than the mean gain (β_{10}), since the magnitude of ($b \times$ (-15)) is added to the mean gain. After estimating expected values at $t = 0$ and t =1, we next estimate the expected gain for students starting out 15 points below the school mean in the following equation:

$$Gain\_15\ pts\ below\text{-}avg = E\ (Y_{t1\_L}) - E\ (Y_{t0\_L})$$
$$= [(\beta_{00} + (-15)) + (\beta_{10} + b \times (-15))] - (\beta_{00} + (-15) = (\beta_{10} + b \times (-15)) \quad (5c)$$

Where the expected gain is obtained by subtracting Equations 5a from Equation 5b. Since the first quantity in the right hand side of Equation 5b is equal to the quantity in the right hand side of Equation 5a, this value cancels out and we end up with the second quantity in Equation 5b.

Note that when implementing the Gibbs sampler, the quantity of *Gain_15 pts below-avg* is simply accomplished by subtracting the deviates for $Y^{(k)}_{t0\_L}$ from $Y^{(k)}_{t1\_L}$ in each iteration of the algorithm (i.e., $Y^{(k)}_{t1\_L} - Y^{(k)}_{t\,0\_L}$). As such, we can obtain the estimate as well as the 95% interval based on the .025 and .975 quantiles of the marginal posterior distribution of *Gain_15 pts below-avg* .

3) Expected gain for students initially starting 15 points above the school mean initial status

Similar to the equations above, for a student whose initial status is 15 points above the school mean, we pose the following equations:

$$E\ (Y_{t0\_L} \mid t=0, \pi_{0i} = \beta_{00} + 15) = \beta_{00} + 15 \quad (6a)$$
$$E\ (Y_{t1\_L} \mid t=1, \pi_{0i} = \beta_{00} + 15) = (\beta_{00} + 15) + (\beta_{10} + (b \times 15)) \quad (6b)$$

The expected value at $t = 0$ is equal to the mean initial status plus 15 points. Similar to Equation 5b, the expected value at $t = 1$ is equal to the expected value at $t = 0$ plus the expected gain (i.e. ($\beta_{10} + (b \times 15)$)). We next estimate the expected gain for students starting out above the school mean in the following equation:

$$Gain\_15\ pts\ above\text{-}avg = E\,(Y_{t1\_H}) - E\,(Y_{t0\_H})$$
$$= [(\beta_{00} + (15)) + (\beta_{10} + (b \times 15))] - (\beta_{00} + 15) = \beta_{10} + (b \times 15) \quad (6c)$$

As above, the expected gain is accomplished by subtracting the expected value at $t = 0$ from the expected value at $t = 1$.

Results

Descriptive statistics of data. The district in our sample is a diverse, urban district with several schools that do not meet AYP criteria. As mentioned earlier, of the 72 schools in our sample, 51 are AYP schools and 21 are Non-AYP schools. As can be seen in Table 1, the percent of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch in AYP schools is 24.7% (c.f. district average = 36.4%). In comparison, 69.6% of students in Non-AYP schools are eligible for free/reduced price lunch, which is almost double the district average. In terms of racial composition, more than half of the students in AYP schools (56.5%) are White. In contrast, African American (38.5%) and Asian students (33.4%) together compose the majority of the population in Non-AYP schools.

Table 1

AYP schools vs. Non-AYP Schools on Measures of the Mean ITBS Reading Scores, the Percentage of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch, and Ethnic Composition

	AYP school (N = 51)			Non AYP school (N = 21)		
	# of Students	Mean	SD	# of Students	Mean	SD
ITBS reading at						
Grade 3	1866	196.2	21.1	658	176.5	16.4
Grade 5	1866	226.7	23.9	658	203.9	20.8
% eligible for free/reduced price lunch	24.7%			69.6 %		
Ethnic composition	White: 56.5%, Afr Am: 11.9% Hispan: 9.0%, Nativ Am.: 3.1% Asian: 19.7%			White: 12.9%, Afr Am: 38.5% Hispan: 12.5%, Nativ Am.: 2.7% Asian: 33.4%		

As to the outcome variable, the district means of ITBS reading scores at Grades 3 and 5 are 191.0 and 221.8, respectively, and the corresponding standard deviations are 21.7 and 25.2. The district average gain between Grades 3 and 5 is approximately 30 points, which is larger than one pooled standard deviation.

When looking at the AYP schools and Non-AYP schools separately, AYP schools have higher mean scores than Non-AYP schools at Grade 3 by approximately 20 points, and their mean gains are slightly larger than the mean gain for Non-AYP schools. On this superficial level, judged by the different mean scores, we might at first glance tend to agree with the AYP classifications made by the state. However, when looking more closely at student growth trajectories of students staring out at the school mean, 15 points below the school mean, and 15 points above the school mean, we find patterns of growth that might call those classifications into question.

Comparisons between AYP schools and Non-AYP schools. In our final analysis, we compare the state's AYP classifications against the results that we obtained by fitting each school's data to the expected gains described above (e.g., LVR-HM_Gain presented in Equations 4c, 5c, and 6c). Specifically, the comparison is made based on the expected gains for each of the three different levels of initial status. First, for each of the 72 schools, we compare AYP and Non-AYP schools' average expected gains. This comparison provides us with information on a.) whether there are AYP schools that, on average, *are not* making substantial yearly progress against our measures, or b.) whether there are Non-AYP schools that, on average, *are* making substantial yearly progress against our measures. Second, we compare AYP schools and Non-AYP schools based on the magnitude of the expected gain for students 15 points below the school mean. By conducting this comparison focusing on those students starting below the school average, we clearly see whether those that need the most help are being left behind in schools that have been classified as having met AYP criteria. In addition, we can see whether there are exceptional Non-AYP schools that are reducing the achievement gap and moving all children forward at a substantial rate. Finally, we also compare AYP and Non-AYP schools based on the expected gains for students starting out 15 points above the school mean. Looking at growth trajectories of students starting above the school mean allows us to see if students that are above average are accelerating at different rates than others in the school; that is, if students that started out above average are languishing in certain schools.

1) The expected mean gain (AYP schools vs. Non-AYP schools)

As can be seen in Table 2, we tabulate expected gains for AYP and Non-AYP schools. Note importantly that we classify schools depending upon whether each school's 95% interval of expected gain is above or below the district average gain. In other words, our classification is based on not only the point estimate of the expected mean gain, but also the estimation error around this point estimate, as can be clearly seen in Figures 1a through 3b. In these figures, the horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools, and the bars represent each school's expected mean gain and its 95% interval. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the upper bound, mean, and lower bound (or the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile) of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected mean gain for a given school.

Care needs to be taken in interpreting results presented in the figures in this paper. Suppose that we want to make a hypothetical test on whether the expected mean gain for a school is higher than the district average gain (i.e., *Gain_mean* ≥ 30). Consider, for example, school #19 in Figure 1a: The 95% interval around this school's expected mean gain spans a 21-point range (23 to 44), which overlaps with the district average. This means that we fail to reject the original hypothesis under a traditional two-tail test at p =.05 that this school's expected mean gain is greater than (or less than) the district average of 30. However, given a traditional one-tail test at p = .05 of the hypothesis that the school's expected mean gain is greater than the lower bound of its confidence interval, 97.5% of the mass of the posterior distribution is greater than 23 points. Thus, we can make a statistical statement with 95% confidence that the expected mean gain is greater than 23. As such, the .025 quantile value, or the lower bound of the interval in these figures (1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b), is the lower bound value we can use to make a statistically significant statement about the expected value for any given school.

Table 2

Cross Tabulation of AYP Schools Vs. Non-AYP Schools with Respect to the Amount of Expected Gain* at Different Levels of Initial Status

	AYP school (N= 51)		Non-AYP school (N= 21)	
Student Initial Status Values	≥ 30[a]	< 10[a]	≥ 30[a]	< 10[a]
School mean	12 schools (7, 8, 9, 10, 22, 25, 29, 32, 34, 45, 68, 72)	1 school (15)	2 schools (23, 55)	1 school (50)
15 points above the school mean	9 schools (7, 8, 9, 25, 28, 32, 34, 65, 68)	3 schools (15, 19, 43)	5 schools (6, 23, 38, 55, 64)	3 schools (17, 27, 50)
15 points below the school mean	7 schools (8, 19, 22, 25, 45, 63, 72)	4 schools (9, 15, 42, 44)	0 schools	5 schools (37, 38, 40, 48, 50)

[a]n =Lower bound of 95% interval of gain.

Note. The classification of the schools is made based on the lower bound of 95% interval (i.e., .025 quartile of the posterior distribution of the expected gain), not based on the estimate of the expected gain (i.e., posterior mean of the expected gain).

As can be seen in Figure 1a, 15 schools among 51 AYP schools have a point estimate of expected mean gain that is smaller than the district average gain. Furthermore, among the rest of the 36 schools, only 12 have a 95% interval situated above the district mean gain. In other words, the low end of the 95% interval for these 12 schools does not cross the district average gain line. Note that we see one AYP school (#15) that has an expected mean gain of approximately 13 points, but its 95% interval captures a value of 0, even though this school is labeled as "a school meeting adequately yearly progress." This school has the smallest sample size (the number of students is 13) among our sampled schools, which is reflected in the largest band of error.

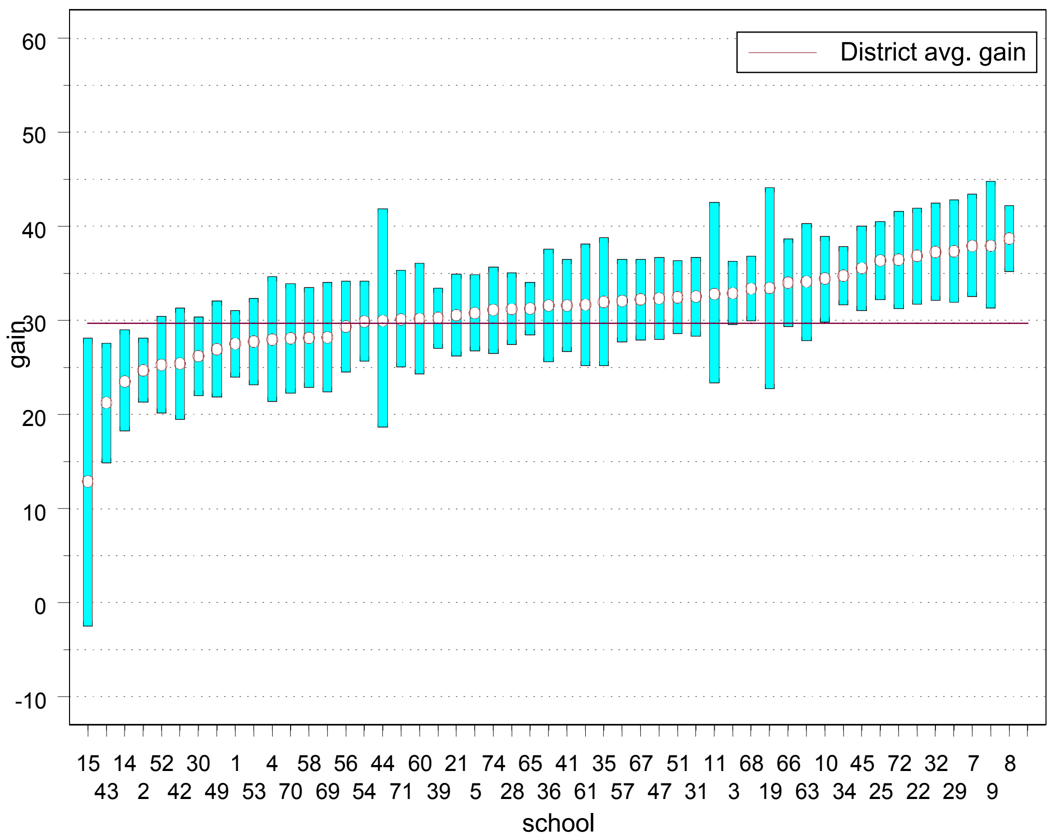

Figure 1a. Expected mean gain in ITBS reading scores for AYP schools.
The horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile, of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected mean gain for a given school.

Almost half of the Non-AYP schools (in Figure 1b) have point estimates of expected gains that are higher than the district average. Among those, we have two exceptionally well-performing schools. Schools #23 and #55 have a higher expected mean gain than the district mean gain by approximately 5-10 points, and the lower bound of their 95% intervals are above the district average gain. Only one Non-AYP school has an expected mean gain interval that captures a value of 10. Note that 10 points is approximately one standard deviation smaller than the district average gain. As such, we clearly see that there are remarkably large numbers of Non-AYP schools making sizable (and close to district average) gains.

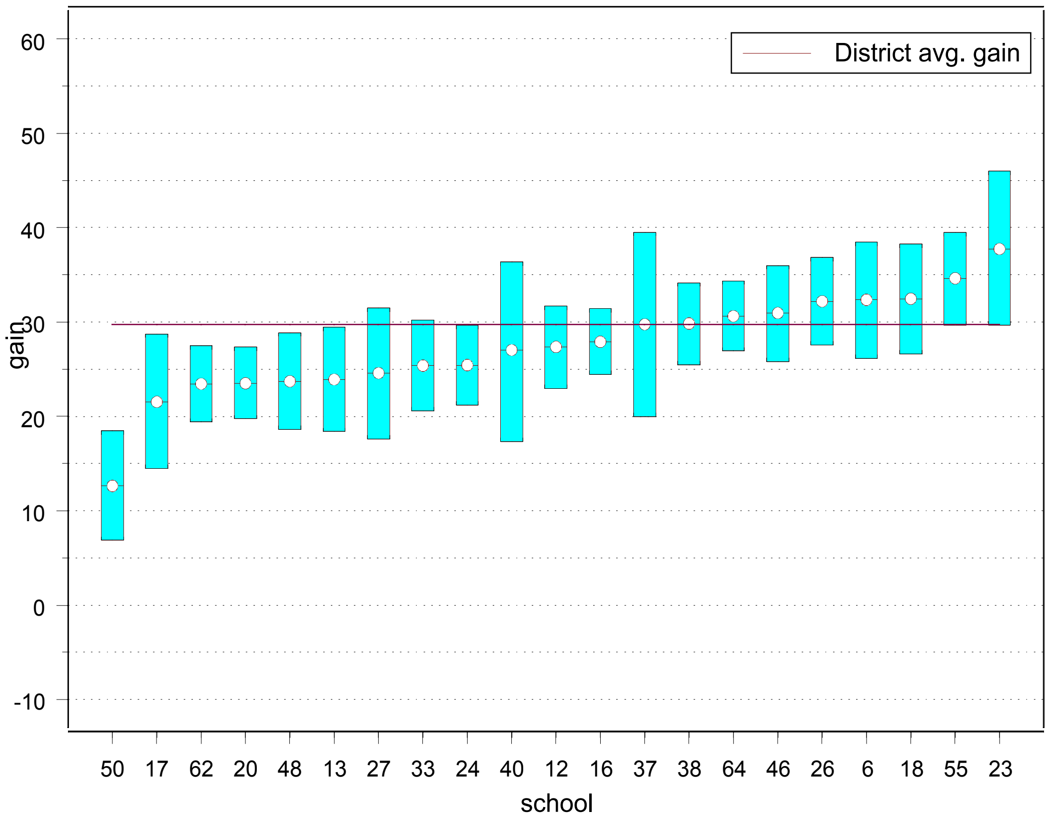

Figure 1b. Expected mean gain in ITBS reading scores for Non-AYP schools. The horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile, of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected mean gain for a given school.

2) The expected gain for students starting out 15 points below the school mean (AYP schools vs. Non-AYP schools)

For each school, we also examine how much gain is expected for students starting out 15 points below the school mean. The lack of adequate growth for students that start out 15 points below the school mean is a problem for both AYP and Non-AYP schools. As can be seen in Figure 2a, approximately half of the AYP schools (i.e., 25 schools) have point estimates of expected gains that are greater than 30 points. However, there are four AYP schools (#s 15, 42, 44, and 9) where their 95% intervals capture a value of 10. Among these four schools, two schools' intervals (#s 15 and 9) include a value of 0, which strongly indicates that students starting out below the mean in these schools made no gains, and that children who need the most help are being left behind in these schools.

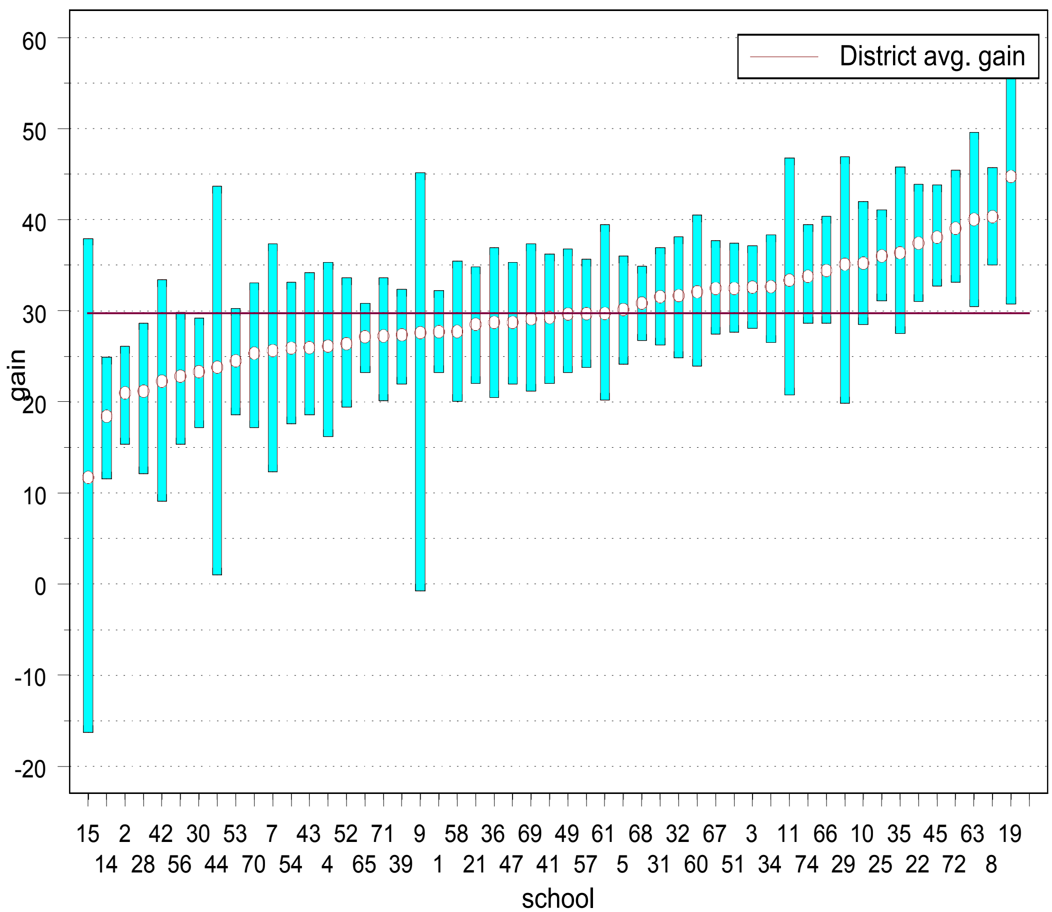

Figure 2a. Expected gain in ITBS reading scores for a student whose initial status value is equal to 15 points below the school mean initial status (AYP school). The horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile, of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected gain for a given school.

Many of the Non-AYP schools in Figure 2b have point estimates (for students starting out below the mean) that are slightly below the district average; however, 16 of 21 Non-AYP schools have intervals that include the district average of 30. We can see that some of the Non-AYP schools are doing a decent job for students starting out below the school mean. The point estimate of expected gain is larger than the district average gain in 5 schools (#s 23, 46, 27, 26, and 18). In addition, for five Non-AYP schools (#s 16, 46, 27, 26, and 18), the expected gain is significantly larger than 20 points. However, below average students in five of the Non-AYP schools (#s 50, 48, 40, 38, and 37) had less than a 10-point gain (see Table 2), indicating that students below the mean in these schools are being left behind as well.

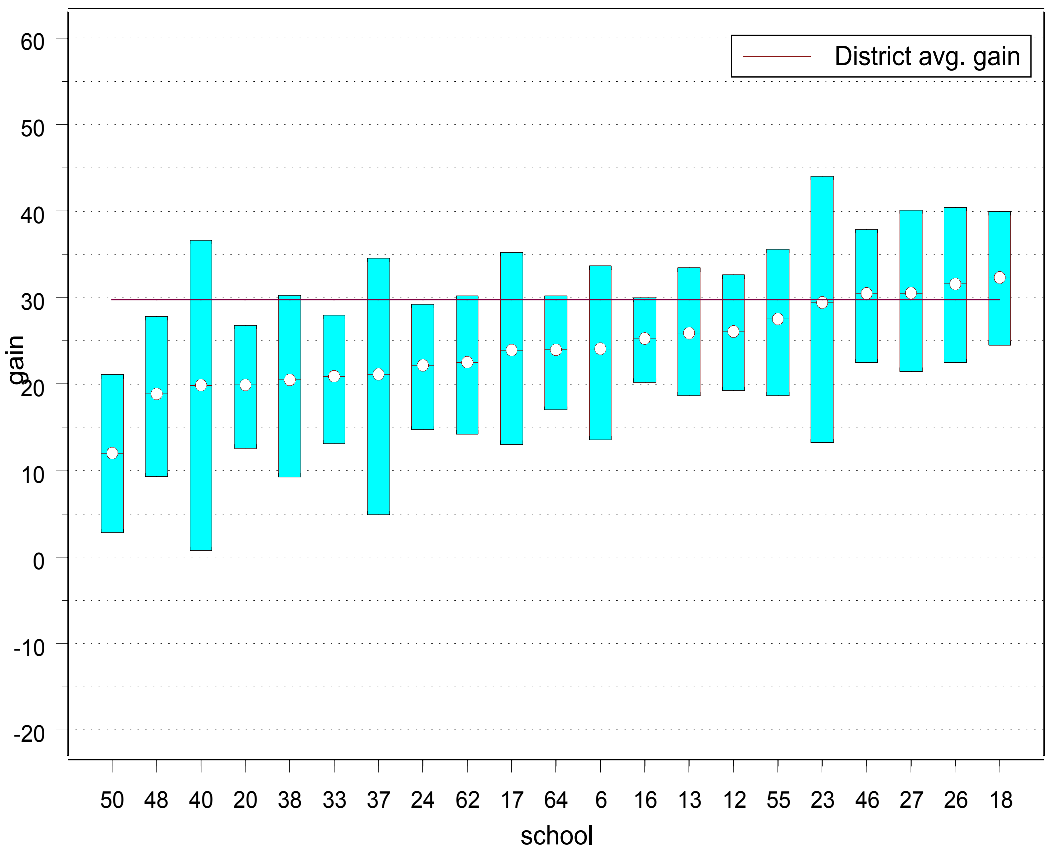

Figure 2b. Expected gain in ITBS reading scores for a student whose initial status value is equal to 15 points below the school mean initial status (Non-AYP school). The horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile, of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected gain for a given school.

3) The expected gain for students starting out 15 points above the school mean (AYP schools vs. Non-AYP schools)

Figures 3a and 3b display each school's expected mean gains for students starting out 15 points above the school mean. These figures clearly illustrate that a substantial proportion of schools—both AYP (69%) and Non-AYP (57%)—have point estimates for the expected gain for their above average students that are higher than the district average gain. This implies that students who initially start higher than the school average in a given school are very likely to make adequate gain, regardless of whether they are in AYP or Non-AYP schools.

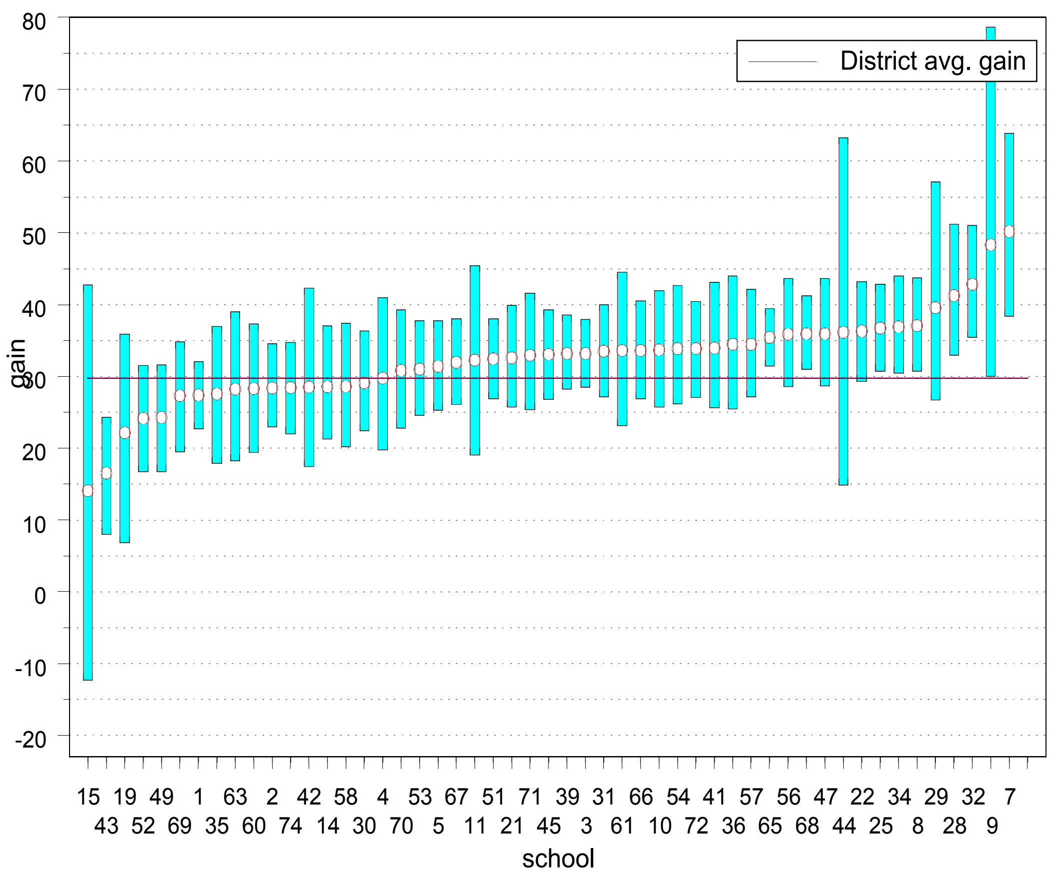

Figure 3a. Expected gain in ITBS reading scores for a student whose initial status value is equal to 15 points above the school mean initial status (AYP school). The horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile, of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected gain for a given school.

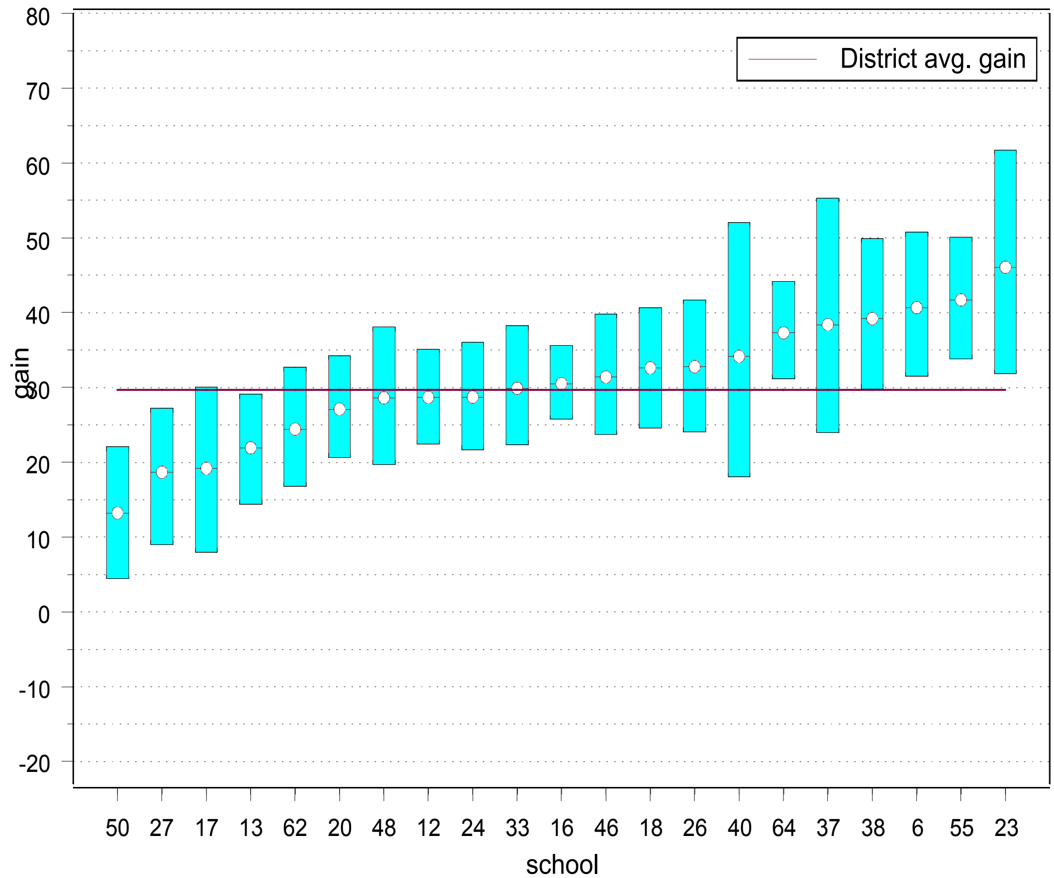

Figure 3b. Expected gain in ITBS reading scores for a student whose initial status value is equal to 15 points above the school mean initial status (Non-AYP school).
The horizontal line represents the district average gain for our sampled 72 schools. The top line, middle circle, and bottom line of each bar correspond, respectively, to the .975 quantile, mean, and the .025 quantile, of the marginal posterior distribution of the expected gain for a given school.

It is noteworthy that there are several AYP and Non-AYP schools in which students with high initial status make large gains. In AYP School #7, for example, the estimate of expected gain is approximately 51 points and the low end of its 95% interval is close to 40 points. Likewise, in three Non-AYP schools (#s 6, 55, and 23), the estimates of expected gains for above average students are greater than 40 points and the corresponding 95% interval falls above the district average gain.

A more interesting finding, however, is that above average students in one AYP school made no gains. We can identify this type of school by looking at whether the

95% interval of the expected gain captures a value of 0 (see school #15). Three AYP schools (#s 15, 43, and 19) and three Non-AYP schools (#s 50, 27, and 17) also have intervals that include 10 points or less. These findings beg the question of whether classifications such as AYP are sufficient if above average students do not experience any changes or little gains.

The distribution of student gain in AYP schools and Non-AYP schools. In the above sections, we compared AYP schools with Non-AYP schools in terms of the expected mean gain, and the expected gains for below average and above average students. These analyses show that examining the expected mean gain alone does not provide a complete picture of whether schools may be leaving children behind. Examining the expected gains by different levels of initial status helps us understand how progress varies by performance levels. In this section, we re-examine the distribution of student gains by combining the three performance levels into one picture of school growth. As can be seen in Figure 4, we bring the three expected gain trajectories into one picture. This figure combines Figures 1a, 2a, and 3a in the sense that the circle, triangle, and box lines, respectively, correspond to expected gains for above average, average, and below average students in a given school. Note also that the dotted line (with a diamond icon) represents the district average gain.

We present three different types of AYP schools in Figure 4 (also see Table 3):

a. Type I: Substantial gain across all performance subgroups, i.e., No Child Left Behind (School #8). We define this Type I school as having the lower bound of the 95% interval around the expected gain for each of the three different performance subgroups all greater than the district average gain of 30 points.

b. Type II: No adequate gain for above average students; substantial gain for below average students (school #19). In Type II schools, the lower bound of the 95% interval around the expected gains for above average students and average students is less than 30, while the lower bound for below average students is greater than 30.

c. Type III: No adequate gain for below average students; substantial gain for above average students (School #28). In contrast to Type II schools, Type III schools are defined as having the lower bound of the 95% interval around the expected gain for average and below average students that is less than 30, while the lower bound for above average students is greater than 30.

Table 3

Distribution of Student Gain for AYP Schools

	15pts > school mean		Equal to the school mean		15pts < school mean	
	Estimate	95% interval	Estimate	95% interval	Estimate	95% interval
Type I						
School #08	37.1	(30.7, 43.8)	38.7	(35.2, 42.2)	40.3	(35.0, 45.7)
School. #	36.3	(30.0, 43.2)	36.9	(31.7, 42.0)	37.4	(31.1, 43.9)
School. #	37.7	(30.8, 42.8)	36.4	(32.2, 40.5)	36.0	(31.1, 41.1)
Type II						
School #19	22.1	(6.9, 35.9)	33.5	(22.8, 44.1)	44.8	(30.7, 60.3)
School #63	28.2	(18.2, 39.0)	34.1	(27.8, 40.3)	40.0	(30.5, 49.6)
Type III						
School #28	41.2	(33.0, 51.2)	31.2	(27.4, 35.1)	21.2	(12.1, 28.7)
School #65	35.4	(31.4, 39.5)	31.3	(28.5, 34.0)	27.1	(23.7, 40.4)

Note. Expected gains for students whose initial status value is equal to the school mean initial status, at 15 points above the school mean initial status, and at 15 points below the school mean initial status.

These categories of school growth allow us to note another trend in the growth patterns of these schools, one that involves the closing or widening of achievement gaps in these schools. In Type I schools, the growth trajectories for the three performance subgroups are parallel, while the other types of schools have growth trajectories that either converge or diverge. In Type II schools, the initial gap between above average and below average students in the school closes over time, while the initial gap gets magnified in Type III schools. Much attention is paid to the closing of the achievement gap, and while this phrase is most often used to refer to the racial gap in achievement that exists in many schools, Type II schools in our sample are making progress in closing the gap between an important pair of subgroups—those that start out below average and those that start about above average. When evaluating a school's effectiveness or quality, it is difficult from an ethical point of view to choose the better of Type II or Type III schools. However, from a policy point of view, more resources and sanctions are levied against schools in the Type II category, e.g., through Title I (i.e., No Child Left Behind) funds.

First, consider the distribution of student gains for the exemplary AYP schools presented in Figure 4. We see the distribution of student gains for School #8 as an example of the Type I schools. In this school, it can be clearly seen that all three expected gain trajectories are parallel to each other, and steeper than the district mean gain trajectory. Note that this school has only 5.7 % of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch. Two other AYP schools (#22 and #25) are classified as Type I schools (see Table 3).

Type II AYP schools (#19 and #63) do not seem to be making substantial progress with their above average students, but are succeeding with their below average students. In school #19 (featured in Figure 4), the point estimate of the expected gain for above average students is 22.1 and the 95% interval ranges from 6.9 to 35.9. In contrast, for below average students, the estimate of the expected gain is equal to 44.8 and its 95% interval ranges from 30.7 to 60.3. Given this large difference between above and below average students in their expected gain, the initial gap is substantially diminished over time. Closing the gap among students is very important in addressing equity concerns; however, this exemplary Type II growth pattern presents problems around the lack of progress for above average students.

Type III AYP schools (#28 and #65) demonstrate a reverse growth pattern of that found in Type II schools. As can be seen in Figure 4, the gap in school #28 is magnified in this school, since below average students are making far slower progress than above average students. In school #28, the estimate of the expected gain for above average students is 41.2 (its 95% interval ranges from 33.0 to 51.2), which is approximately double the expected gain for below average students (expected gain = 21.2; 95% interval = [12.1, 28.7]). While both schools (#28 and #65) met current AYP criteria, these schools are not adequately, or equitably, distributing gains among their student subgroups. Those that need the most help in these schools seem to be struggling more. Thus, while these schools have been identified as making adequate yearly progress, this analysis raises the question: Adequate progress for whom?

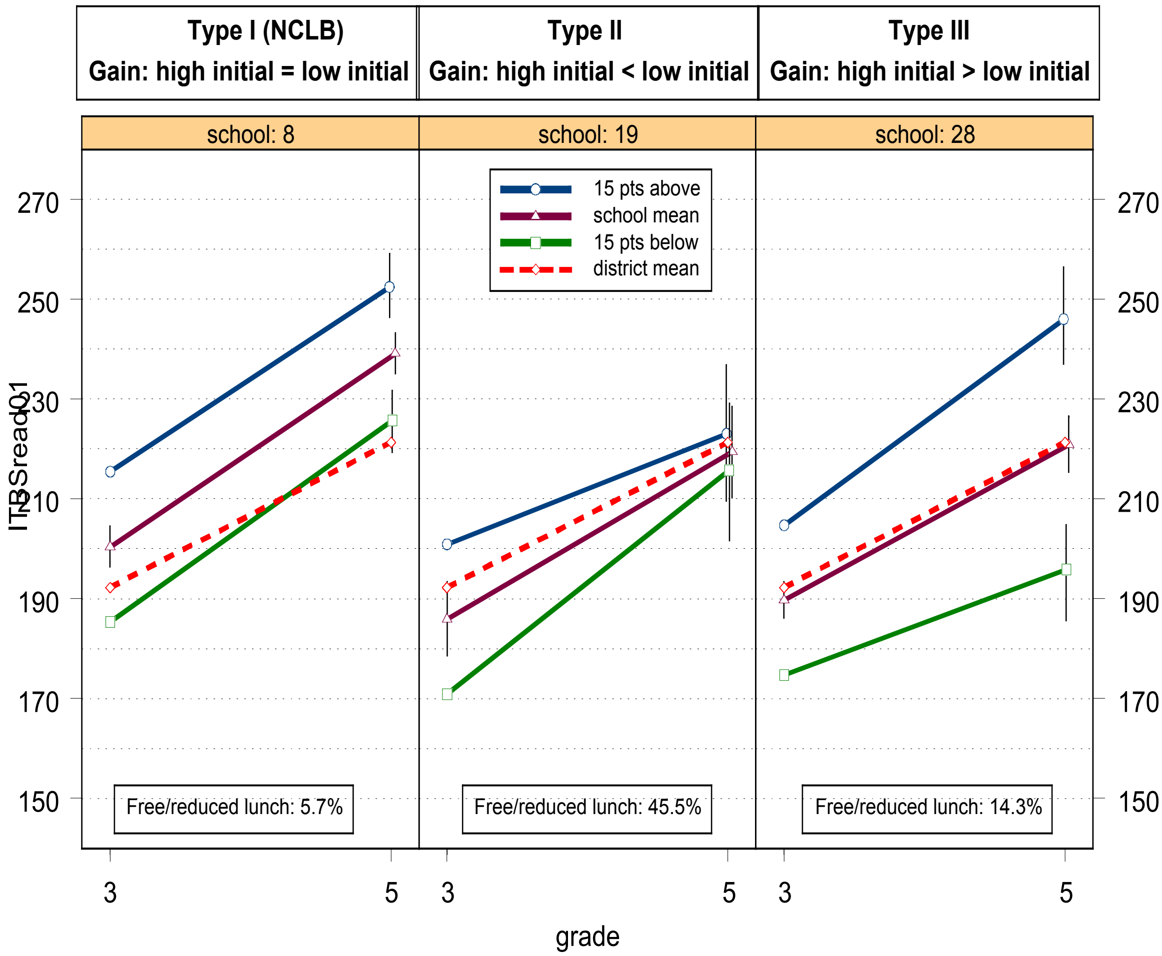

Figure 4. Distribution of student gain for AYP schools. Type I School: No Child Left Behind School with a substantial gain of more than 30 points across all performance subgroups. Type II School: No adequate gain (less than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 points above the average, while substantial gain (larger than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 point below the average. Type III School: No adequate gain (less than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 points below the average, while substantial gain (larger than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 point above the average.

Similarly, we present Non-AYP schools with the same three types of distribution of student gain in Table 4 and Figure 5. Though the amount of gain is slightly smaller than for Type I AYP schools, one Non-AYP school (#26) displays the most equitable Type I growth pattern (all subgroups growing in parallel). As we can see in Figure 5, school mean initial status for School 26 is approximately 20 points below the district average mean initial status, and even the above average subgroup starts out slightly below the district average. However, all three expected trajectories are, by and large, parallel to—or slightly steeper than—the district average trajectory. Specifically, the estimates of expected gain are 32.8, 32.2, and 31.6, respectively, for above average, average, and below average students. Given the higher proportion of low SES students in this school (66.0% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch), the amount of expected gain and the distribution of student gains that this school achieves would seem to merit special attention, despite the fact that this school did not meet AYP criteria.

Table 4

Distribution of Student Gain for Non-AYP Schools

	15pts > school mean		Equal to the school mean		15pts < school mean	
	Estimate	95% interval	Estimate	95% interval	Estimate	95% interval
Type I						
School #26	32.8	(24.1, 41.7)	32.2	(27.6, 36.9)	31.6	(22.5, 40.4)
Type II						
School #27	18.7	(9.0, 27.2)	24.6	(17.6, 31.5)	30.5	(21.5, 40.1)
Type III						
School #06	40.7	(31.5, 50.8)	32.4	(26.2, 38.5)	24.1	(13.6, 33.7)
School #38	39.2	(30.0, 49.9)	29.9	(25.5, 34.2)	20.5	(9.3, 30.2)
School #64	37.3	(31.2, 44.2)	30.6	(26.9, 34.4)	24.0	(17.0, 30.2)

Note. Expected gains for students whose initial status value is equal to the school mean initial status, at 15 points above the school mean initial status, and at 15 points below the school mean initial status.

In addition, School #27 represents a Type II Non-AYP school that appears to be struggling. Almost all students in this school are eligible for free/reduced price lunch. The mean initial status is 25 points below the district average. However, this school is doing a reasonable job of making progress with many students, particularly the below average students: the estimate of the expected mean gain is close to 25 points and the expected gain for below average students is greater than 30 points. As a result, the gap between above and below average students is closing. In fact, the intervals for the expected gains of the three performance subgroups are overlapping in Grade 5, indicating that the gap remaining between the subgroups is fairly negligible.

Finally, School #6 represents our Non-AYP Type III School, where above average students are progressing at a faster rate than are others in the school. Again, however, this school is another struggling school, as demonstrated by the higher performing students in this school starting out below the district average. Those students near the district average, however, made the steepest gains (i.e., estimate = 40.7, 95% interval = [31.5, 50.8]), with those students starting below the school mean gaining far less (i.e., estimate = 24.1, 95% interval = [13.6, 33.7]).

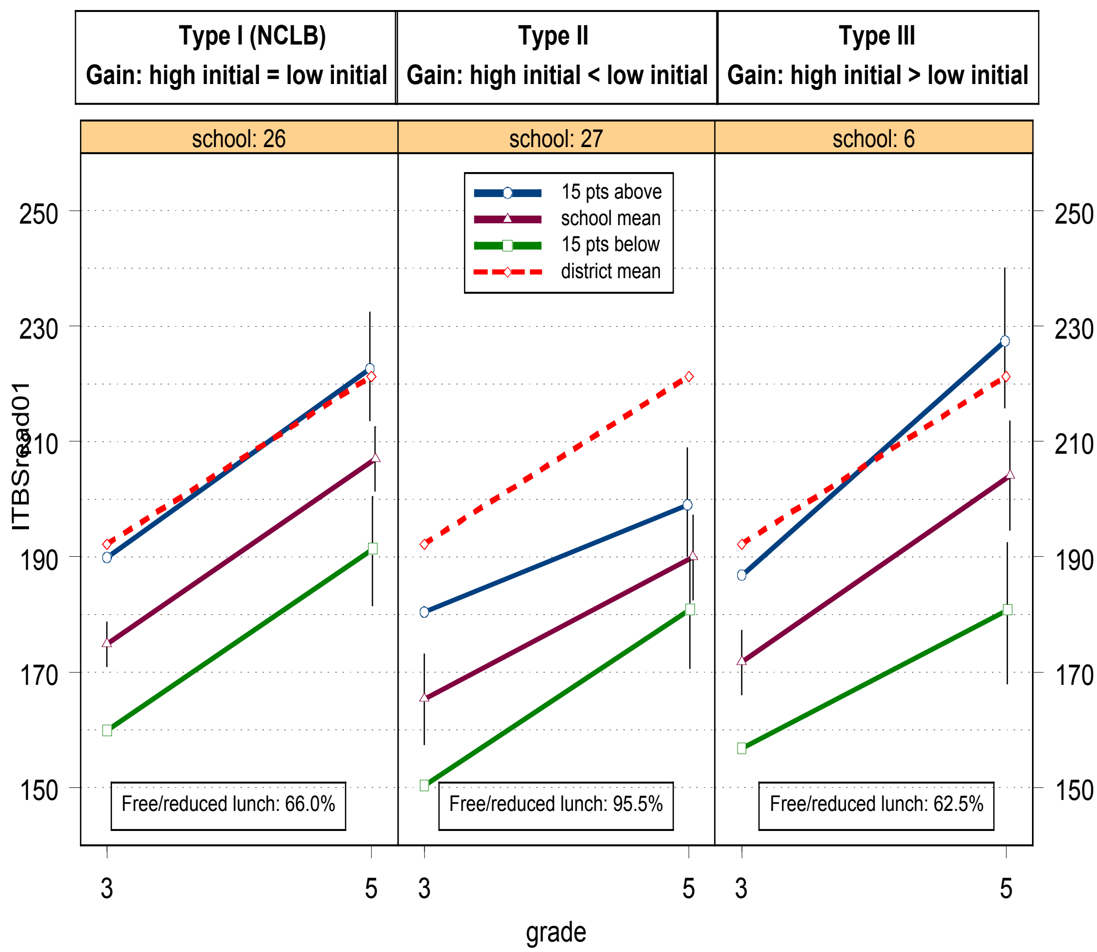

Figure 5. Distribution of student gain for AYP schools.
Type I School: No Child Left Behind School with a substantial gain of more than 30 points across all performance subgroups. Type II School: No adequate gain (less than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 points above the average, while substantial gain (larger than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 point below the average. Type III School: No adequate gain (less than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 points below the average, while substantial gain (larger than 30 points) for students initially starting 15 point above the average.

Discussion

Our analyses of estimating the expected gains across different performance subgroups provides an informative picture of how student gain is distributed within a school. This alternative way of measuring progress helps bring to light potentially important aspects of school performance that might be masked if we limit our focus to classifying schools based on a single schoolwide measure, or measure that focuses on changes at a cut-point. In particular, we are able to identify some AYP schools in which above average students hardly make any progress but low-performing students make substantial progress. This kind of AYP school may be closing the achievement gap by helping their below average students, but they are doing little for their higher performing students. One might say the above average students are being left behind. In contrast, we also found that in some of the Non-AYP schools, below average students are making substantial progress, indicating that certain kinds of progress get overlooked by the AYP classifications.

These contrasts raise questions about the meaning of "adequate" progress, for whom we wish to target progress, and the basis on which we label schools as making adequate yearly progress or not. We believe that closely examining the distribution of student achievement may provide an important supplementary or alternative measure of AYP. Our hope is that our approach provides a more informative picture of student progress beyond a single AYP indicator and may stimulate discussion among teachers and administrators to identify students in need earlier (see Seltzer et al., 2003). We also believe that encouraging educators to think about achievement levels rather than (or in addition to) current subgroup categories may be both more productive and actionable.

Our new approach to AYP measures can be extended in many ways. First, our approach could easily include differences in student- and school- characteristics. As we saw in an exemplary Non-AYP school, and as the literature suggests, low SES schools have a more difficult time in making AYP than do high-SES schools and more diverse schools have a harder time making AYP than to less diverse schools (Novak & Fuller, 2003). As we know, it is possible to take these factors into account in evaluating school performance. If we re-estimate the distribution of student progress using a model where we include differences in student background and in school characteristics (Choi & Seltzer, 2003), we might have even more unfavorable results for schools that are currently designated as making AYP.

It is also possible to extend our approach in settings where we wish to compare the performance of different cohorts of students. Our analyses focused on one cohort of students who were in Grade 3 in 2001. However, we might see some differences between this cohort and the 2000 or the 2002 cohort of students in this district. Using multiple measures in multiple cohorts of students (i.e., multi-panel multiple-cohort data), we would be able to examine differences in initial status and expected growth among and between the cohorts of students (see Bryk, et al, 1998). This longitudinal perspective is important because particular school reform efforts or changes in school characteristics that may impact achievement schoolwide or at a particular grade level might take place in some years and not others (e.g., increment of school budget, numbers of qualified teachers, student demographic composition, and so on). This multi-panel, multi-cohort design would increase the robustness of our design by adding a longitudinal component, and would also help us to track the cohort differences due to some of these unmeasured factors.

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