

MEMORANDUM



DIFFERENTIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE GROWTH MODELS PROPOSED IN ESEA WAIVERS

January 8, 2015

“What are the various ways in which states differentiate the growth of a school’s students with disabilities within the structures of the growth models described in their ESEA waivers?”

This memorandum presents results from the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation’s (CSAI) scan of growth models proposed in Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waivers, with a focus on U.S. states’ and territories’ differentiation of students who participate in special education programs.

Most of the states and territories with approved ESEA waivers utilize a growth component in their school accountability systems under ESEA Principle Two, “State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support.” Several of these accountability systems do not differentiate the growth of specific individual subgroups, and other accountability systems appear not to differentiate special populations at all. Among those that do, the means of differentiating special populations vary across the growth models.

Three common approaches to differentiating specific student populations allow states and territories to account for the growth of students in special education programs: allocating components of each school’s growth formula to specific subgroups’ growth scores; setting specific annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for each subgroup in a school; and factoring subgroup growth into school classification schemes.

Two other approaches permit states and territories to differentiate subgroups or underperforming populations without factoring specific subgroups into their growth models: accounting for a collective high-needs group consisting of students in any of the state’s or territory’s monitored subgroups; and tracking the growth of the lowest performing 25% of students in a school. Both approaches enable states and territories to

avoid neglecting special populations in schools with insufficient N-counts for any individual subgroup.

The table below presents a general summation of states' and territories' differentiation of special populations, particularly of students in special education programs, as indicated in the states' and territories' ESEA waivers. The summaries cite specific language and page numbers from waivers, when relevant. The table omits U.S. territories without waivers, but identifies states without waivers.

CSAI obtained the information reported in this memorandum exclusively from the contents of approved ESEA waivers, which are accessible on the CSAI website's State of the States section (csai-online.org/sos). In implementing accountability systems, states and territories may have deviated from the plans proposed in their waivers, resulting in discrepancies between accountability systems as initially proposed and as currently practiced. The state data reported here are intended to be used as part of a general summation of states' and territories' current accountability systems as reported in ESEA waivers, and not as definitive reporting on any individual state or territory.

Table: Differentiation of special education in the growth models proposed in ESEA waivers, by state or territory, with emphasis added in boldface.

State or Territory	Summary
Alabama	The state's accountability system's growth component is "[b]ased on the percentage of students in each ESEA subgroup demonstrating learning gains in mathematics or reading performance over the previous year. The growth percent for each school and content is the combined result of all assessment types. Once assessment results from [ACT] Aspire are available the advisory committee will define what constitutes learning gains as well as the growth method that will be used to make such determinations. Learning gains is a component of the Phase II Performance Index and will be implemented beginning 2015–2016 (p. 53)."
Alaska	Forty percent of the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI) is allocated to a "School Progress" component. Ten percent of this component (equivalent to four percent of the total ASPI) is allocated to each of four ESEA subgroups: Alaska Native/American Indian; economically disadvantaged; students with disabilities ; and English learners (pp. 54–57).
Arizona	The state's accountability system's growth model does not differentiate growth for special populations or ESEA subgroups.

State or Territory	Summary
Arkansas	The state's classification of a school as "achieving" or "needs improvement" is based on whether the school meets AMOs "in performance or growth and graduation rates (high school) for All Students and a Targeted Achievement Gap Group (TAGG) ." The TAGG includes students with membership in any or all of the following ESEA subgroups: economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities (p. 45).
California	Waiver not granted. The California Office to Reform Education (CORE) waiver for participating California districts includes a growth model that differentiates subgroup growth. Twenty percent of the School Quality Improvement Index is allocated to measures of academic growth, and half of this growth component consists of growth within subgroups (pp. 76–84).
Colorado	"The Academic Growth Gaps indicator measures the academic growth to standard of historically disadvantaged disaggregated student groups and students needing to catch up. It disaggregates the Growth Indicator into student subgroups , and reflects their median and adequate growth using the same criteria as Academic Growth to Standard. The subgroups include minority students, students eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch, English Learners, students with disabilities (IEP status), and students needing to catch up (students who scored Unsatisfactory or Partially Proficient in the prior year). . . . The framework sets minimum expectations for the Growth Gaps indicator in the same way as in the Growth indicator. The framework evaluates where each subgroup's median growth percentile falls into the decision tree/scoring guide above and assigns points to each accordingly. By disaggregating for the median and adequate growth of historically disadvantaged student groups, the School and District Performance Frameworks hold schools/districts accountable for the growth of all students, not only growth relative to their academic peers and where they started, but also to the standard of proficiency and college- and career- readiness." (p. 58)
Connecticut	Student growth is tracked in each of the ESEA subgroups . The state's accountability system's school classification system of five categories accounts for subgroup growth (pp. 94–100).
Delaware	The state's baselines for ELA and mathematics are "calculated for all students and each subgroup using the statewide percent proficient across all schools from the 2010–11 . . . targets that would result in a 50% reduction in the percent not proficient for each group by content area" (p. 62).

State or Territory	Summary
District of Columbia	<p>“For the identification of schools . . . the DC OSSE [District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education] will determine a school index score for each school. These school index scores are derived from student-level index values based on student performance of proficiency, advanced proficiency, or growth. There are two types of scores that will be created for each school. The first is an all students school index score, which represents all students the school is accountable for, and represents overall performance of the school. The second type of score is a subgroup index score for each subgroup for which that school is accountable, and it identifies any achievement gaps at the school. All students' school index scores will be used annually to classify schools into five categories: reward, rising, developing, focus, and priority. 'Subgroup' index scores will be used to classify schools as focus schools based on the achievement gaps. Both index scores are aspects of the overall accountability system.” (p. 51)</p>
Florida	<p>The state's accountability system tracks the growth of Florida's lowest-performing 25 percent of students, not of subgroups (p. 49).</p>
Georgia	<p>“Using the same methodology for setting the state performance target, individual subgroup performance targets have been set for each content area, statewide. The use of subgroup performance targets allows Georgia to recognize the current level of achievement for subgroups and differentiate annual growth for subgroups that need to make the most gains. . . . [F]lexibility provided through this waiver will allow Georgia to reset Performance Targets for each subgroup.” Growth at each school is then assessed for its all-students group and its subgroups separately (p. 50).</p>
Hawai'i	<p>The state's accountability system's growth model does not differentiate growth for special populations or subgroups.</p>
Idaho	<p>In the state's accountability formula, growth to achievement for a collective group of four subgroups, including students with disabilities, accounts for 20 percent of points for schools with grade 12 and 25 percent of points for schools without grade 12 (pp. 72–80). “Growth to Achievement and Growth to Achievement Subgroups are evaluated first based on the criterion of whether or not the growth rate is adequate for the typical or median student in the school/subgroup to reach or maintain performance level of proficient or advanced within three years or by 10th grade, whichever comes first. Academic growth and academic gaps are then evaluated based on a normative comparison to other schools.” (p. 76)</p>
Illinois	<p>Students with disabilities are only factored into the state's accountability system's “achievement” component, not the “progress” (i.e., growth) component (p. 47).</p>

State or Territory	Summary
Indiana	The state's accountability system tracks the growth of the lowest-performing 25 percent of students, not special populations or subgroups.
Iowa	Waiver not granted.
Kansas	The state's accountability system's growth model does not differentiate growth for special populations or subgroups.
Kentucky	The state's accountability system's growth model does not differentiate growth for special populations or subgroups.
Louisiana	The state's accountability system does not include a growth model.
Maine	The state's accountability system tracks "a 'super-subgroup' that includes each student who meets one or more of the following descriptions: a student with a disability , a student who qualifies for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, or a student who is African-American, Native American or Hispanic. If either the whole school or the super-subgroup fails to meet or make sufficient progress toward its AMO in both math and reading, the school is a Monitor school" (p. 50).
Maryland	The state's AMOs "will be calculated for each school for the 'all students' category and for all of the subgroups . The subgroup level AMO in the LEA [local education agency] will be used for any subgroup or 'all students' with a 90% or higher baseline." (p. 70)
Massachusetts	The state's accountability system's growth model does not differentiate growth for special populations or subgroups. Achievement measures of an all-students group and a "high needs" subgroup, including of students with disabilities , determine whether a school is assigned into the first or second level of the state's school classification scheme (pp. 25, 38).
Michigan	"If one of the demographic subgroups does not meet the proficiency target for the whole school, the safe harbor rate for that subgroup is set at the safe harbor improvement rate that applied to the whole school (for that particular level and subject). . . . [T]his improvement rate is reflective of the rate of improvement demonstrated by a school at the 80th percentile of improvement within a particular level. . . . If one of the demographic subgroups does not meet the proficiency target, and instead meets the safe harbor improvement target, this subgroup will receive a 'Yellow' on the Accountability Scorecard. . . . If a school fails to meet either the proficiency or the improvement target for a subgroup, that subgroup will be 'Red' on the Accountability Scorecard." (pp. 113–114)

State or Territory	Summary
Minnesota	<p>“Growth gap reduction is focused on students in black, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian, special education, English learners and students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch subgroups. Schools receive a score based on the average of individual student growth Z-scores in these seven subgroups compared to the statewide average individual student growth in higher-performing subgroups. Growth gaps are a school-level measure of the degree to which higher-performing student groups at the state level are growing faster than lower-performing students in the school. Within each school, student growth score means are calculated for each of seven, lower-performing subgroups: students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, English learners, special education students, and students identifying as American Indian, Asian, Black, or Hispanic. The growth of each of these groups is compared to the fixed statewide average growth of their higher-performing counterparts. . . . The Special Education subgroup is compared to students who are not in Special Education.” (pp. 78–79)</p>
Mississippi	<p>The state's accountability system tracks the growth of the lowest-performing 25 percent of students, not special populations or subgroups.</p>
Missouri	<p>The state's AMOs are differentiated for subgroups, including students with disabilities.</p>
Montana	<p>Waiver not submitted.</p>
Nebraska	<p>Waiver not submitted.</p>
Nevada	<p>Nevada's School Performance Framework (NSPF) is based on multiple measures: 40 percent Nevada Growth Model, 30 percent Proficiency, 20 percent Subpopulation Gaps, and 10 percent Other Indicators (pp. 61, 64). Nevada proposed to reduce the N-count threshold to 10 students to account for special populations in schools. Additionally, Nevada proposed to closely monitor and report on the academic performance (status and growth) for subgroups, including students with disabilities. “As is the current practice, the school-level academic performance of every subgroup will be reported on the Nevada Report Card for students enrolled at their respective school for the full academic year. Further, the subgroup performance will be displayed on the Report Card in a manner that clearly indicates whether each subgroup meets the ELA and Mathematics AMOs.” (pp. 54–55)</p>
New Hampshire	<p>The state's AMOs are differentiated for subgroups, including students with disabilities.</p>
New Jersey	<p>The state's AMOs or performance targets are differentiated for subgroups, including students with disabilities, at the school and district levels.</p>

State or Territory	Summary
New Mexico	Each school will receive a grade for proficiency and a grade for growth, in addition to an overall grade. There are three types of growth measures: school growth; cohort growth (lowest and highest performing students); and individual student growth. It is in the growth component that New Mexico explicitly considers subgroups , including students with disabilities , in the calculation of school grades. School and individual student growth accounts for 10 points in a school grade.
New York	The state's AMOs are differentiated for subgroups , including students with disabilities .
North Carolina	The state's AMOs are differentiated for subgroups , including students with disabilities . North Carolina is currently working on generating Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) school growth data (p. 50).
North Dakota	Waiver not submitted.
Ohio	The state's accountability system consists of six components, including a "Progress" indicator comprised of a value-added measure. "For each LEA and building, Ohio will generate composite Value-Added grades for specific sub-populations whenever data are sufficient to make these computations (p. 55)." Additionally, the accountability system's "Gap Closure" component will take account of AMO achievement within 10 subgroups , including students with disabilities (p. 69).
Oklahoma	The state's AMOs are differentiated for subgroups , including students with disabilities . Test scores of students with disabilities are also included to identify priority, focus, targeted intervention, and reward schools.
Oregon	The state's accountability system includes school ratings for subgroup growth , which includes growth in reading and math for students with disabilities . The subgroup growth component is worth 10 percent of high school ratings and 25% percent of elementary and middle school ratings (p. 67).
Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania's accountability system will include setting AMOs for test participation, graduation, and attendance rates; closing the achievement gap for all students; and closing the achievement gap for historically under-performing students (e.g., students with disabilities). Schools will receive a rating based on a combination of AMO achievement and school academic performance. Pennsylvania will use math and reading scores on state tests, as well as data from the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS), where applicable, to determine schools' academic performance. Academic achievement and growth are worth 80% percent, while closing the achievement gap for historically under-performing students is worth five percent of the overall school performance profile.

State or Territory	Summary
Puerto Rico	Puerto Rico's AMOs are differentiated for subgroups , including students with disabilities .
Rhode Island	The state's accountability system's growth model differentiates between progress within an all-students group, a "minority and poverty" group, and an " IEP and ELL" group.
South Carolina	Within the state's A–F accountability system, schools will receive points for the student groups that meet their AMOs, including their all-students groups and their subgroups (p. 62).
South Dakota	The state's accountability system allocates points for elementary- and middle-school student growth within a gap group , which includes students with disabilities , and a non-gap group. The school classification system also accounts for growth within the individual subgroups: "As a safeguard to ensure that no single ESEA subgroup within the larger Gap Group is ignored, schools in which one ESEA subgroup meets the minimum reporting size and is performing at a rate 75% below the Gap group at that school will be placed on an internal SD DOE "watch list" and contacted for technical assistance opportunities. If the group remains performing at this level for two consecutive years, the school will be identified as a Focus School if it is not already classified as a Priority or Focus School." (p. 50)
Tennessee	"[W]e have built in a safeguard at the LEA level in our accountability system, in that if any individual sub-group is not making progress in a majority of areas at the LEA level, the LEA will be subject to intervention (inclusion on a public list for LEAs in need of subgroup improvement and meeting with the TDOE [Tennessee Department of Education] to support the creation of an aggressive plan for corrective action). . . . [W]e consider the non-performance of individual sub-groups over time at the school level through the reward school methodology, in addition to the focus school lists. Schools that would otherwise be included on the reward list for high performance or high progress are excluded if any of the four achievement gaps identified in the focus methodology were larger than the state median achievement gap for that group, and where any achievement gap widened from 2009–10 to 2010–11." (p. 38)
Texas	The state's accountability system's growth model assigns equivalent AMOs to a school's all-students group and its subgroups. Subgroup growth is considered upon determination of a school's level within the classification system (p. 43).
Utah	The state's accountability system tracks the growth of a "non-proficient" group, not special populations or subgroups (pp. 41–42).
Vermont	Waiver not submitted.

State or Territory	Summary
Virginia	The state's accountability system's "Gap Group 1" includes students with disabilities , English learners, and economically disadvantaged students. This group's AMOs are differentiated from the all-student groups' and other gap groups' AMOs (p. 41). "As a safeguard against the masking of an individual subgroup's performance, for schools with a proficiency gap group 1 that meets the AMO, Virginia will require that the individual subgroups comprising proficiency gap group 1 also meet AMO targets established separately for each of those groups. Should any of the individual subgroups in proficiency gap group 1 fail to meet its AMO targets, the school will be required to implement an improvement plan to address the performance of that individual subgroup." (p. 55)
Washington	Waiver was not granted an extension.
West Virginia	"To arrive at an observed growth score, the following steps will be taken to calculate the percentage of points a school is assigned based on student growth during the most recent year's assessment administration: 1. A subgroup's median growth percentile is calculated for every student in a given school. 2. The total number of students in the school is calculated and disaggregated by subgroup. 3. If there are less than 20 students in a particular subgroup <i>across all grades</i> , that subgroup's growth value is suppressed. 4. The observed SGPs [student growth percentiles] for each valid subgroup are combined. 5. A multiplier is assigned to the combined observed subgroup SGP to calculate the total index value." (p. 75)
Wisconsin	The state's accountability system's growth model does not differentiate growth for special populations or subgroups.
Wyoming	Waiver approval is pending.