

ACCOUNTABILITY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Does Alabama have a single accountability system that encompasses state and federal requirements?

Yes. Based primarily on student assessment results in reading and mathematics from the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), the state used criteria from the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) to establish “starting points” (baselines) in both areas. Annual measurable objectives were established in both reading and mathematics for schools and local education agencies (LEAs) based on the state’s starting points and the fact that all students are expected to reach or exceed the proficient level in both content areas by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. All schools and LEAs in the state are required to demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” on the same set of academic content standards and academic assessments, academic related indicators, and percentage of students participating in the academic assessments. While the bases for accountability decisions will be uniform across all schools and LEAs, consequences in terms of sanctions and rewards will be different based on the extent of low performance and the length of time a school has not made AYP among all students and groups of students.

2. What does the term “AYP” mean?

The term AYP is used to describe whether a school or LEA has met its annual accountability goals. According to NCLB, all public school students should perform at grade level (be proficient) in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. “At grade level” in Alabama is defined as Level III – Meets Academic Content Standards.

The determination of the starting points or baselines for AYP were the assessment data from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 administrations of the ARMT and AHSGE. Using these starting points, the state set target goals or annual measurable objectives for schools and LEAs, providing a numeric descriptor for the amount of growth that is required each year so that the school and LEA reach the goal of 100% proficiency in 2013-2014. Several components are used in determining whether or not a school or LEA makes AYP.

A. Annual Measurable Objectives for Reading and Mathematics. *Students in the aggregate and each group must meet or exceed the state’s annual measurable objectives for reading and mathematics. Annual measurable objectives were established separately for reading and mathematics for each grade included in accountability. Annual measurable objectives are expressed as the percent of students scoring Level III and above in reading and mathematics. Grades 3-8 and 11 were combined for determining AYP using a proficiency index. A proficiency index score of zero or higher indicates that a group made AYP. (Also, see questions 17, 18, and 19 for additional ways to meet AYP.)*

- B. Additional Academic Indicators. Alabama uses attendance rate as the additional academic indicator in elementary and middle schools. A school or LEA is considered to have made AYP in attendance if it makes improvement toward or meets the goal of 95% attendance rate. The additional academic indicator at the high school will eventually be graduation rate. For this year, Alabama will continue to use the projected four-year dropout rate in lieu of the graduation rate because data are not currently available that will allow disaggregation of graduation rate by groups. A school or LEA is considered to have made AYP in dropout rate if it made improvement toward or met the goal of a 10% or less dropout rate.
- C. Participation Rate. To meet AYP, an LEA, school, and each group must have at least a 95% participation rate on assessments. Participation rate is calculated separately for reading and mathematics. (Also, see question 18 for an additional way to meet AYP.) Participation rate is calculated as the “number of students with test results divided by the number of students enrolled on the first day of the state testing window.”

The components of the accountability program for determining AYP for the 2005-2006 school year are depicted in the table below.

Matrix for AYP Determinations

Component →	Reading		Mathematics		Additional Academic Indicators
	Met Participation Goal	Met Proficiency Goal	Met Participation Goal	Met Proficiency Goal	Met Drop-out Rate/ Attendance Rate
All Students					
Special Education					
American Indian/ Alaskan Native					
Asian/Pacific Islander					
Black					
Hispanic					
White					
LEP					
Free/Reduced Meals					

3. What student assessments and other factors will be used to determine AYP?

The following assessments and other factors were used as they are applied to the grades served by the school:

- The ARMT
- The reading and mathematics subject-area tests of the AHSGE
- The reading and mathematics goals of the AAA
- Participation rate
- Attendance rate
- Four-year projected drop-out rate

4. What will be used to describe student academic achievement levels on state assessments?

Academic achievement levels define how well students are mastering the state's academic content standards at grade level. The State Board of Education adopted academic achievement standards in a resolution dated July 9, 2002. Therefore, the results of the ARMT and the AAA are reported in four academic achievement levels: Level IV – Exceeds Academic Content Standards; Level III – Meets Academic Content Standards; Level II – Partially Meets Academic Content Standards; and Level I – Does Not Meet Academic Content Standards. For purposes of NCLB, Level III is considered proficient, or at grade level. Therefore, a student scoring at Level III or Level IV meets the proficiency standard required of NCLB. A student scoring at Level I or Level II does not meet the proficiency standard required of NCLB.

The same reporting system will be applied to all criterion-referenced assessments with the exception of the AHSGE. The AHSGE will be reported using the following: Levels I-II (Does Not or Partially Meets Academic Content Standards/Fail), Level III (Meets Academic Content Standards/Pass), and Level IV (Exceeds Academic Content Standards/Advanced).

5. Which schools are required to meet AYP?

All schools are required to meet AYP. Schools with no tested grades, e.g., K-2 schools, are assigned the accountability status of the school into which the students feed. If students from the school with no grades tested feed into more than one school, the sending school will be assigned the accountability status of the receiving school where the highest percent of students will ultimately attend.

6. Are scores for all students included in accountability calculations?

While all students in the school must be tested and assessment results reported, scores for only students enrolled for a “full academic year” will be used for accountability calculations. Students enrolled for a “full academic year” are those that were enrolled as of October 1 and were enrolled on the first day of the state testing window.

7. Will test scores for limited-English proficient students who do not speak English be counted in accountability calculations?

Limited-English proficient students for whom 2004-2005 was their first academic year of enrollment in U. S. schools, will not be included in accountability calculations for proficiency. However, they will count toward participation.

8. Will scores from the Alabama Alternate Assessment be used in accountability determinations? If so, how?

(The Alabama Alternate Assessment is the assessment administered to special education students whose IEP teams determine they cannot participate in regular state assessments, with or without accommodations. The results are based on a special education student's mastery of his/her IEP goals and benchmarks and are reported using the same four achievement levels as other state assessments.)

Federal regulations (December, 2003) clarified that a state is permitted to use alternate achievement standards to evaluate the performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and give equal weight to proficient and advanced performance (Levels III and IV) based on the alternate standards in calculating school, LEA, and state AYP. The regulations stipulated, however, that the number of proficient and advanced scores based on the alternate achievement standards cannot exceed 1.0 percent of all students in the grades tested at the state or LEA level. Therefore, any number of students over the 1.0 percent scoring Levels III and IV on the AAA will count at the lowest proficiency level (Level I – Does Not Meet Standards) regardless of the students’ actual scores. If an LEA exceeds the 1.0 percent, the SDE will randomly select which students are counted as proficient and which students are counted as not proficient for accountability purposes regardless of their actual scores. The scores of these students will be counted the same at the school, LEA, and state levels.

In Alabama, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are defined as those students with cognitive functioning at least three standard deviations below the mean (I.Q. 55 and below) and whose cognitive impairments may prevent them from attaining grade-level achievements, even with the most effective instruction.

9. Is it true that if one student group, e.g., special education, does not make AYP the whole school does not make AYP?

Yes, if a school, LEA, or the state does not make AYP in any cell represented in the matrix below, the entity is considered to not have made AYP.

Matrix for AYP Determinations

Component →	Reading		Mathematics		Additional Academic Indicators
	Met Participation Goal	Met Proficiency Goal	Met Participation Goal	Met Proficiency Goal	Met Drop-out Rate/ Attendance Rate
All Students					
Special Education					
American Indian/ Alaskan Native					
Asian/Pacific Islander					
Black					
Hispanic					
White					
LEP					
Free/Reduced Meals					

10. What is the state’s goal for attendance rate?

95%. See response to Question 2.

11. What is the state's goal for dropout rate?

10% or less. See response to Question 2.

12. When will we know the names of schools and LEAs that did not make AYP?

August 11, 2005

13. If a school does not make AYP this year, will the school be considered "a failing school?"

The term "failing school" is not in the state accountability plan and is not in federal law or regulations. If a school or LEA does not make AYP, a description should be attached to the phrase "did not make AYP" to explain the basis on which it was determined that the school/LEA did not make AYP. For example, "the school did not make AYP among special education students (one cell) and limited-English proficient students (one cell)" provides much more information than saying that the school is a failing school. The Alabama Department of Education does not use the phrase "failing school" to describe the academic status of a school. (The U. S. Department of Education does not use that phrase either.)

14. Under what circumstances does a school get identified for "school improvement?" Corrective action? Restructuring?

A school/LEA that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years in the same component (reading, mathematics, or additional academic indicator) will be identified for School Improvement.

A school/LEA that fails to make AYP for three consecutive years in the same component will be identified for Corrective Action.

A school/LEA that fails to make AYP for four consecutive years in the same component will be required to develop a Restructuring Plan.

A school/LEA that fails to make AYP for five consecutive years in the same component will be required to implement the Restructuring Plan.

15. How does this relate to "state" accountability?

Since the state is implementing a single state accountability system, the accountability decisions are the same for all schools and LEAs. Consequences (sanctions) may differ, however, based on the extent and severity of low performance. Additionally, schools that receive Title I, Part A funds will be required to implement (1) public school choice in the first and succeeding years during which they are identified for School Improvement and (2) supplemental education services in the second and succeeding years during which they are identified for School Improvement. (Non-Title I schools may implement these provisions, but are not required to do so due to the cost factors.)

16. When will we know the names of schools and LEAs that are identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under Title I?

August 8, 2005

17. What is a “confidence interval” and how does it affect AYP?

Schools, LEAs, or groups with a proficiency index of zero or higher are considered to have made AYP. However, in order to ensure statistically sound decisions, confidence intervals (CI) are placed around the proficiency index scores for schools, LEAs, and groups. The confidence interval provides a test for whether or not a proficiency index is statistically different from the goal. If a school, LEA, or group’s proficiency index falls below the goal, but the goal is within the confidence interval, the school, LEA, or group is considered to have met AYP.

18. What is “uniform averaging” and how does it affect AYP?

In order to increase reliability of decisions, Alabama will incorporate a uniform averaging procedure. If the proficiency index or participation rate for the current year does not meet the goal, the proficiency index or participation rate for last year and this year, will be averaged. If this average meets the goal, the school, LEA, or group will be considered to have met AYP.

19. What is “safe harbor” and how does it affect AYP?

If students in a school or LEA in the aggregate and each group do not score at or above the annual measurable objectives, the school or LEA will be considered to have not made AYP. However, if a group does not meet its annual measurable objectives, the group (and as a result, the school) can still be considered to have made AYP by use of the safe harbor provision if:

- *The group decreased by at least 10% from the preceding year those who are not proficient,*
- *That group met the 95% participation rate, and*
- *That group met the goal or made progress on the additional academic indicator.*

Attendance rates and projected four-year dropout rates were disaggregated as necessary, for applying safe harbor to groups within the school and system. (Please note that when data are available to disaggregate graduation rate, graduation rate will be used instead of projected four-year dropout rate as the additional academic indicator in high school. It is expected that this will be available for the 2005-2006 school year.)