

SCHOOL **P**ERFORMANCE
CATEGORIES

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN

**PETER MCWALTERS,
COMMISSIONER
OCTOBER 2002**

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CATEGORIES

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN OCTOBER 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I - School Performance Categories

Background.....	pg. 2
Categorizing Overall School Performance.....	pg. 2
- Achievement Levels.....	pg. 2
- Placement Based on Achievement.....	pg. 2
- Three Basic Categories.....	pg. 3
- Considering Progress.....	pg. 3
- Non-Categorized Schools.....	pg. 5
Correction.....	pg. 5
RIDE Response and School/District Responsibilities.....	pg. 5
Regents' Commended Schools.....	pg. 8
The Federal Context: ESEA Reauthorization.....	pg. 8

Appendix A - Category Placement Based on Achievement - A Worksheet

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CATEGORIES

BACKGROUND

In 1997, the Rhode Island General Assembly enacted Article 31, which required all schools to set student-performance targets, based on state assessments. This legislation also put into place a policy framework and accountability system that requires schools to align their educational process with the Rhode Island school reform agenda outlined in the Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES). The performance targets were submitted to the Commissioner of Education in November 1998 based on guidance distributed to schools in the spring of 1998. Schools are categorized annually based on a three year rolling average.

Article 31 requires the Commissioner to make judgements about school performance on a regular basis. The process used for placing schools into performance categories reflects Rhode Island's rigorous standards for all students and the need for ongoing improvement for all schools over time. The Board of Regents and the Commissioner also expect that schools will close equity gaps in performance among groups of students. Some schools, due to funding disparities and particularly needy student populations, will need extra support from the district, state, and other sources to meet these challenging expectations.

CATEGORIZING OVERALL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

The state's assessments divide student performance into the following five levels:

- 5 – Achieved the Standard with Honors
- 4 – Achieved the Standard
- 3 – Nearly Achieved the Standard
- 2 – Below the Standard
- 1 – Little Evidence of Achievement

The state adds a sixth level to these performance levels called "No Score." This level assigns a zero for those students who were required to take the state test but for some reason (e.g., illness, failure to make up some portion of the test, total lack of effort) did not receive a score on the test. This reflects the "All-Kids" focus of both state education policy and law that requires all public school students to participate in the State Assessment Program.

PLACEMENT BASED ON ACHIEVEMENT

Schools are placed in three distinct performance categories based on cumulative student achievement in the areas of mathematics and English language arts (reading and writing) over the last three years (2000, 2001, and 2002). Measurement of the number of students who achieved the

state's standard of proficiency (levels 4 and 5 above) and the number of students who are in the lowest achievement levels (levels 1 and 2 and the "No Score" category) are the determinants used for the placement of each school.

To arrive at the number of students who are **proficient**, determine the number of students who are proficient (levels 4 and 5) in each of the seven subtests (three in mathematics, four in English language arts) as well as in the RI Writing assessment test over three consecutive years (2000, 2001, and 2002). Add these 24 numbers to find the total number of proficient students. Next determine the number of students in the tested grade who were required to take the state test for each of the same eight tests over the same three years and add these 24 numbers.¹ Then divide the total number of students who are proficient by the total number of students required to take the tests to determine the percentage of students in the school who demonstrated proficiency.

To calculate the number of students in the **lowest achievement categories**, use the same process described above but replace the number of students in levels 4 and 5 with the numbers of students in levels 1 and 2 plus the "No Score" category.² This calculation determines the number of lowest performing students within the school and is used to track a school's effectiveness at moving its students out of these low achievement levels.

(Please refer to Appendix A - Category Placement Based on Achievement - [A Worksheet](#))

THREE BASIC CATEGORIES

High Performing Schools are defined as schools in which 50% or more of the students are at or above standard (achievement levels 4 and 5) when taking into account:

- All tested grades within the building
- New Standards Reference Examinations in mathematics and English language arts and RI Writing
- Three years of test data (2000, 2001, and 2002)

Low Performing Schools are defined as schools in which 33% or more of the students are at achievement levels 1 and 2 plus the "No Score" category across all applicable tests across three years (i.e., schools that have large numbers of students significantly below the state's standards)

Moderately Performing Schools are defined as all other public schools that do not fall into the categories of High Performing Schools or Low Performing Schools.

CONSIDERING PROGRESS

Once schools are classified as High Performing, Moderately Performing, or Low Performing, the next step is to determine whether the school has demonstrated improving test results over the years 1998-2002. Because year-to-year comparisons are unstable, a combination of a 3-year cumulative percentage (1998-2000 scores) compared to a 2 year cumulative percentage (2001-2002 scores) is

¹ The number of students required to take the test is the higher of the following two numbers: 1) Students enrolled as of the spring testing minus the students exempt from the testing period (LEP level 1 and in district less than one year, Alternate Assessment students), or 2) Students who completed background information on a test booklet cover minus LEP and alternate assessment exemptions.

² For all Area Career and Technical Centers except the MET and Davies Technical High School, method (2) determines the enrollment count.

used to determine whether a school has demonstrated significant improvement. *Cumulative* does not mean that the two years and three are averaged together. Instead, performance across each set of years is *summed* and then divided by the total number of students required to take the tests across the respective three or two year period. Improvement is evaluated separately for mathematics and English language arts.

Improvement requires both bringing more students to the state's proficiency standard as well as decreasing the number of students in the lowest two achievement levels. This dual measure provides an additional emphasis on a school's relative success at educating its lowest performing students. Improvement is defined as:

Condition A: increasing the percentage of students within the school who demonstrate proficiency against the state standards by at least 3%, and

Condition B: decreasing the percentage of students in the two lowest achievement levels plus the "No Score" category by at least 3%.

NOTE: If a school has 95% or more of its students at or above standard and/or 5% or less at the lowest levels of achievement (below standard, little evidence of achievement, and no scores) in both cumulative averages or in the 2001-2002 cumulative average that school is considered to be improving.

Schools that meet one condition but not the other are not classified as improving schools.³ This is because a school could be increasing the number of students who are proficient but failing to improve results, or even losing ground for its lowest performing students. A school is not considered to be improving overall if it is leaving the lowest performing students behind. A total of two possibilities present themselves once the conditions are defined:

Improving Schools are defined as schools in which a 3% or more gain was achieved between the 1998-2000 data points and the 2001-2002 data points in Conditions A and B as defined above:

- In two out of three mathematics subtests;
- In three out of four English language arts subtests (with the proviso that an improvement in RI Writing results can be substituted for one of the two New Standards Reference Examination writing subtests to meet this condition);
- Or in both two out of three mathematics subtests and three out of four English language arts subtests.

Non-improving Schools are defined as schools that did not meet the conditions of Improving Schools.

Schools across all three performance categories can then be classified as either improving or non-improving in a manner that recognizes both absolute performance against state standards and progress toward moving students into higher achievement levels. The following six classifications exist:

³ For K-3 schools that only have RI Writing results, the state used only this test to determine both performance and improvement. For schools that only had three years of test results (i.e., the school did not exist in the 1998 or 1999 school years) the state used the 2000 results as a single data point compared to a 2001-2002 cumulative data point. For schools with 5% or fewer students in the lowest achievement levels (1, 2, and no score), they were not required to move these students due to reliability issues, but were still considered to be improving for this condition.

- High performing and improving
- High performing and not-improving
- Moderately performing and improving
- Moderately performing and not-improving
- Low performing and improving
- Low performing and not-improving

NON-CATEGORIZED SCHOOLS

A separate category of **Non-Categorized Schools** is also recognized by the state. These are schools for which one of the following conditions holds true:

- There are no state tested grade levels (K, K-1, K-2 schools), or
- Schools that were recently created and who have only one or two years of test data.

CORRECTION

School districts should review their School Performance Category data between November 4 and November 15, 2002 to ensure that every school has been placed accurately. A school district may ask for a correction of the placement of any of its schools during this window of time if an error has occurred when including the 2002 assessment data. Any and all corrections concerning prior years' data were made during the release of the first School Performance Categories.

Also, if you have additional high quality, standards-based assessment instruments with multiple years of data that you believe could affect the designation of improving or not improving, you may provide such information. Please provide us in writing by November 15, 2002 detailed information and the rationale for a proposed correction. These materials should be addressed to the Commissioner of Education from the Superintendent of Schools.

RIDE RESPONSE AND DISTRICT/SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

The 2002 student assessment data represents the fifth year of assessment results since Rhode Island instituted the New Standards Reference Examinations in the 1997-1998 school year. We can now measure a three-year rolling average against a two-year rolling average. Next year, we will finally be able to measure a three-year rolling average against a three-year rolling average. Being able to combine years of assessment results allows us to compensate for annual fluctuations due to changing test instruments and fluctuations in student populations. The nature of the Department of Education's response will vary according to each school's categorization, district capacity, and the school's involvement in ongoing district-wide or school-wide reform strategies. Low-performing schools will be the Department's highest priority. The emphasis in all schools will be on increasing student achievement in the core academic areas of English language arts and mathematics while still providing a balanced curriculum experience for students. Schools in need of improvement must focus on core academic skills, especially reading, as well as focusing on increased resources on those students who are performing least well in comparison with their peers.

Rhode Island's systems of School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) and Progressive Support and Intervention (PS&I) require all schools to use their assessment results to drive their continuing efforts at improvement. The SALT process requires each school to engage in an annual cycle of self-study, planning, implementation, program evaluation, and public reporting. Our system of Progressive Support and Intervention is results-driven, meaning that the lowest performing schools and districts will receive the greatest degree of RIDE support and direction regarding ongoing efforts to improve student achievement.

High Performing Schools - Improving - These schools should continue updating their School Improvement Plans through the SALT process in coordination with their districts so that they reflect new data, fiscal changes, and professional development needs. RIDE will want to recognize their success and provide formal recognition for these schools by the eventual formation of promising practices networks. Insights and models from learning networks of high-performing schools will be broadly disseminated throughout the state using practitioner leaders from these schools. District Strategic Plans required by May 1, 2003 should include periodic evaluation and reflective cycles outlined by the SALT self-study process to determine if student progress is being made. Teachers and principals should align their Professional Development Plans with their School Improvement Plans. This should yield revised and aligned District Strategic Plans, School Improvement Plans, and Professional Development Plans that will ensure focused support on mathematics and literacy; a refocusing of resources to support professional development programs and students in high need; and identification of strategies to address the particular issues each school faces.

High Performing Schools - Not Improving - These schools should revisit their School Improvement Plans and examine their strategies regarding mathematics and English language arts as well as their use of resources. A careful analysis should focus on the pattern of targets not met over the last four years. It is expected that many high performing-not improving schools will need to examine their practices regarding their lowest performing students. Schools will be asked to demonstrate school improvement planning and professional development efforts that specifically address student shortfall areas. While RIDE will continue its focus on lower performing schools, high performing schools with significant equity gaps will trigger Progressive Support and Intervention. Schools improving in only one area (ELA or mathematics) need to refer to the actions below for "Moderately Performing-Not Improving" in the area where they are not improving and follow-up with the appropriate required activities.

Moderately Performing Schools - Improving - These schools should analyze their target data over the past five years to determine areas of improvement and areas where more work is required. Participation in a network of schools focused on the use of the best instruction practices is strongly encouraged. At the same time, the success represented by the improvement made should be publicly celebrated. District level support will be needed in order to examine current strategies and use of resources to ensure that progress continues. District Strategic Plans required by May 1, 2003, will be evaluated by RIDE to ascertain evidence of periodic program evaluations and reflective cycles as outlined by the SALT Self-Study process. Schools with effective planning, implementation, and evaluation cycles will require less significant oversight from RIDE. Schools improving in only one area (ELA or mathematics) need to refer to the actions below for "Moderately Performing - Not Improving" in the area where they are not improving and follow up with the appropriate required activities.

Moderately Performing Schools - Not Improving - These schools should revisit their School Improvement Plans and examine their priorities regarding instruction in mathematics and English language arts as well as their use of resources. A careful analysis should focus on the pattern of targets not met over the last four years. District Strategic Plans required by May 1, 2003 should include periodic evaluations and reflective cycles to determine if student progress is being made, particularly in content areas of the schools that have not met targets. Moderately Performing - Not Improving Schools should provide their district with a revised and resourced School Improvement Plan addressing the relevant issues of student achievement. Teachers and principals should develop Professional Development Plans that are aligned with the School Improvement Plan. These schools, accompanied by district level staff, may also be asked to take part in a face-to-face meeting with RIDE in the spring of 2003 if the school is in its second year of "not improving."

Low Performing Schools - Improving - Low performing and improving schools, with their district's involvement and support, should recognize and celebrate their success in improving school performance. RIDE may also showcase outstanding programs and instructional approaches that are having substantial impact within one or more low performing schools in the interests of helping other schools. Depending on a school's record of improvement over time, meetings may be planned with RIDE Commissioners, relevant RIDE staff, and respective district and school staff (e.g., superintendent, assistant superintendent/curriculum director, school committee chair, principal, SIT chair, union president).

Meetings between district staff and the RIDE support team will begin with a reporting of school efforts to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student support in mathematics and literacy. Schools should be prepared to help RIDE understand the challenges in these areas as well as any recent efforts that you think may begin to yield improved student performance in the school. These efforts at self-study should yield; revised District Strategic Plans and School Improvement Plans to ensure focused support in mathematics and literacy; refocusing resources to support professional development programs and students in high need; and identification of strategies to address the particular issues the school faces. The District Strategic Plans required by May 1, 2003 should be accompanied by a revised and resourced School Improvement Plan for each low performing school. The school Professional Development Committee should develop Professional Development Plans that are aligned with the School Improvement Plan. Participation in a network of schools focused on the use of best instructional practices is strongly encouraged. RIDE will consolidate its resources to support each school's work, remove barriers, and create relevant professional development opportunities.

Low Performing Schools - Not Improving - Any district that has a low performing-not improving school needs to take immediate and significant action to change the manner in which that school operates. Steps must be taken to determine the critical needs to be addressed in that school over the next year. The district will be expected to demonstrate that additional resources are being applied to areas of greatest need. RIDE will continue to stress its focus on two areas: school districts with large numbers of low performing schools and individual schools that are low performing and not improving. Meetings will be planned with the RIDE Commissioners, relevant RIDE staff, and respective district and school staff (e.g., superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum director, special education director, school committee chair, principal, SIT chair, union president) for every school that is low performing and not improving.

Meetings between district staff and the RIDE support team will begin with a reporting of school efforts around curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student support in mathematics and literacy.

Schools should be prepared to help RIDE understand the challenges in these areas as well as recent efforts which may begin to yield improved student performance in the school. These efforts at self-study should yield revised District Strategic Plans and School Improvement Plans to ensure focused support in mathematics and literacy; refocusing resources to support professional development programs and students in high need; and identification of strategies to address the particular issues the school faces. The School District Strategic Plans required by May 1, 2003 should be accompanied by a revised and resourced School Improvement Plan for each low performing school. Teachers and principals should develop Professional Development Plans that are aligned with the School Improvement Plan. Participation in a network of schools focused on the use of best instructional practices is strongly encouraged. RIDE will consolidate its resources to support the work, remove barriers and create relevant professional development opportunities.

If 2002 assessment results place your school in its second consecutive year as a low performing not improving school, be prepared for significant RIDE oversight over your Professional Development Plans and School Improvement Plans. As with other schools in need of improvement, low performing-not improving schools will need to update School Improvement Plans as necessary to provide for the needs of their students. Teachers and principals must also develop Professional Development Plans that are aligned with the School Improvement Plans. RIDE will consolidate its resources to support the work, remove barriers to improvement, and create relevant professional development opportunities.

Non-Categorized Schools - Schools in this category should continue the SALT cycle for school improvement. They will be reviewed again in 2003 under a combination of State and NCLB accountability systems to see if enough information exists to place them into a performance category or whether other information can be used in lieu of the state assessments to make a valid judgement (e.g., other "Learning Support Indicators" as explained in the "Learning Support Indicators Technical Bulletin").

REGENTS' COMMENDED SCHOOLS

As part of the statewide accountability system, an award called the "Regents' Commended School" will be given annually to those schools that meet improvement targets for two years in a row in both English-language arts and mathematics.

These schools will be so designated in all public announcements regarding school-performance categories. The awards will be presented in an annual ceremony.

In addition, all commended schools will be asked to submit a brief narrative report to the Regents, following guidelines to be prepared, explaining how they achieved success. These reports will be published, put on our Web site, and made available to all other schools. Grant support or federal funds may be sought to aid in this publication. The Regents will review the reports, and at least one school will be invited annually to present its report to the board.

THE FEDERAL CONTEXT: ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was enacted into federal law on January 8, 2002. Rhode Island's State System of School Accountability was built in compliance with the previous version of the ESEA,

but there are a number of additions mandated by the new law. For example, Rhode Island currently assesses students at grades 4, 8, and 10 in reading, writing, and mathematics using the New Standards Reference Examinations (NSRE). The NSRE complements state-developed assessment in writing (grades 3, 7, and 11) and health education (grades 5 and 9). Federal law now requires the State to develop assessments in English language arts and mathematics at every grade, 3-8, as well as one high school grade, by school year 2005-2006. The NCLBA also requires additional testing in science by 2007-2008.

In Rhode Island, all assessment data are currently disaggregated and reported by race/ethnicity, gender, poverty, IEP and LEP status. Disaggregated reporting by migrant status will be added this year. The No Child Left Behind Act is true to its name. Beginning with the 2003 assessment results, school performance groupings will be based not only on the performance of the entire student body, but also on the performance of its disaggregated student populations. Student groups comprising the following four disaggregated populations: race/ethnicity, disability, English language learners, and low socio-economic status, must meet the same performance targets as the general student population. In other words, schools will be held accountable for their lowest performing students.

While these changes are certainly consistent with the existing assessment scheme in Rhode Island, they do represent significant additional considerations for reform efforts at both the school and district level. The NCLB Act requires that Rhode Island move from grade-span standards to grade specific content standards and student achievement standards. This mandate will result in increased specificity of State targets at each grade level. More information regarding the specific nature of these targets at individual grade levels for both the general population and disaggregated populations will be forthcoming once RIDE submits its State accountability plan to the federal Department of Education (DOE) on January 31, 2003.

The most significant aspect of the new federal accountability structure is the specificity of mandated corrective actions. NCLB creates an annualized timeframe for corrective actions. A school is designated as "in need for improvement" based on its failure of its total student populations, or any of its four disaggregated sub-populations, to meet state-wide targets to adequate yearly progress (AYP). No corrective action is required for the first two consecutive years a school is designated as "in need of improvement." In the third year, the school must institute intra-district school choice, rewrite its school improvement plan, and apply for technical assistance from the State.

If the school fails to meet AYP for a fourth consecutive year, it must use 5-20% of its Title I money to provide parents of Title I students with "supplemental educational services." An additional year of failure to meet annual goals requires the school district to take more drastic action, such as replace school staff who are relevant to AYP failure, institute and implement new curricula, appoint outside expert to advise school on actions to take consistent with school plan, or restructure the internal organization of the school. Additional years of failure to meet AYP targets result in mandatory restructuring of the school, and eventually of the school district as well.

Rhode Island built its State assessment system on the belief that single year results were subject to unacceptable variances, and that three-year rolling uniform averages were required for a statistically significant system. The 2002 NSRE assessment results represent the fifth year of NSRE results, thereby allowing a comparison of a three-year rolling average to a two-year rolling average. Under

this system, 2001 was the first year that produced a reliable measure of adequate yearly progress, in that it was the first year that allowed for an average of at least two years to an average of at least two years. RIDE remains committed to the position that comparisons of single year results are not sufficiently reliable for a state-wide assessment system.

The NCLB will require many other changes, the vast majority of which are consistent with the "All Kids" agenda of the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals must meet stringent new standards. Parents will be given unprecedented access to information about their children's progress, as well as teacher credentials. Parents of children in low-performing schools will be given increased control over where their children attend school, as well as the manner in which Title I money is expended on additional tutoring services. The NCLB Act essentially mirrors the goals of Rhode Island's accountability framework; to set clear and consistent standards for what children should learn, to create accurate measures for determining whether student achievement has been achieved, and to create predictable and meaningful responses for schools and school districts whose students fail to meet established achievement targets. Beginning next year, 2003, Rhode Island school districts will be subject to both state-based Progressive Support and Intervention and the accountability provisions of the NCLB - regardless of their status as a Title I school.

RIDE is committed to continuing its emphasis on support and technical assistance to districts. We understand that transition to the new requirements mandated by the NCLB Act will pose difficulties. We are working to provide districts with templates for the many notice requirements regarding parent rights to services and information. We are developing guidance in the area of educator quality, including technical assistance related to new standards and assessments for paraprofessionals and teachers. Districts can also expect to receive guidance documents on new assessment and accountability provisions, as well as help in implementing school choice, supplemental educational services, and safe school mandates.

APPENDIX A

CATEGORY PLACEMENT BASED ON ACHIEVEMENT A WORKSHEET

1. Add the total number of students who met the standard or met the standard with honors on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest of the New Standards Exam for the years 2000, 2001, and 2002.
 - 1a. Add the total number of students required to take this test for the years 2001, 2001, and 2002.
2. You will need to convert the percentage of students to the actual number of students. To do this, multiply the total number of students enrolled at the grade level minus allowed exemptions and multiply that by the percent proficient represented as a decimal. For example:

Total # of Students Enrolled (minus students exempt): 120

Percent Meeting Standards with Honors: 4%

Percent Meeting the Standard: 32%

$$120 \times .04 = 4.8$$

$$120 \times .32 = 38.4$$

Then add these two products together

$$\begin{array}{r} 4.8 \\ +38.4 \\ \hline 43.2 \end{array}$$

Of course, there is no .2 of a child! You can round the number up or down appropriately. In this case, round down to 43 students.

3. Repeat this exercise for every subtest of the New Standards Exams and the RI Writing Assessment. You will end up with 24 numbers.
4. Add these 24 numbers together.
5. Add the 24 enrollment counts together. Remember, you may have different enrollments in mathematics and English language arts in the same year. You will have a different enrollment number for the RI Writing enrollment number.
6. Now divide the total number of students at or above the standard by the enrollment number. (This is the number derived in step 4). Convert this decimal to a percentage.
7. If the percentage is 50 or higher, the school will be classified as high performing.
8. To determine if you are a low performing school repeat steps 1 through 6 except calculate these numbers using the percentage of students with "no scores, little evidence of achievement, and below standard."
9. If the percentage is 33 or higher, the school will be classified as low performing.
10. Any school that is not high or low performing is moderate