

TALKING POINTS

Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools

2009-2010 PLAS

April 2010

When the State of Nebraska accepted \$234 million of Stimulus Package funds to provide additional aid to the school districts, the state agreed to four school reform assurances. One of these assurances requires the state to identify low-performing schools known as Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools (PLAS).

PLAS is yet another way of looking at school performance to identify specific schools for assistance. PLAS does not replace the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of No Child Left Behind. All schools identified as being in need of improvement under AYP are now also considered PLAS. High schools with graduation rates below 75 percent over a period of three years, are considered PLAS. Secondary schools that are eligible for Title I funds but not served that are the lowest ranked among all the schools in the state are also considered PLAS.

The definition and process used to identify the PLAS in Nebraska is provided at:
http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ARRA/Data_Collection_Public_Reporting.html

This process differs from the previous process in that:

- Reading and math results are combined.
- Only the “all students” group’s data is used and data will not be disaggregated.
- Three years of data are used.
- Schools are rank-ordered – rather than measured against a single State goal.

Schools identified as PLAS will have the option of applying for a School Improvement Grant that is funded with new money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and Title I funds. To award these funds, the state must divide the PLAS schools into levels or the following Tiers:

Tier I Schools means the five (5) lowest-achieving Title I schools identified to be in school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring plus any Title I served secondary school with a graduation rate of less than 75 percent over the three latest years that was not captured in the above five schools.

Tier II Schools shall mean the 15 (which is equal to 5 percent) lowest ranked secondary schools where the “all students” group meets the minimum n-size for AYP that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds plus any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that has a graduation rate of less than 75 percent over the three latest years and was not captured in the above 15 schools.

Tier III Schools means any Title I school identified to be in school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that is not a Tier I School and any school that is ranked as low as the Tier I and Tier II schools but has no groups of at least 30 students.

HOW WERE SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED AS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT UNDER AYP?

Federal Accountability Under No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind required a different way of identifying schools in need of improvement. The federal accountability, known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), is based on student performance as well as other factors.

- The performance of schools and districts is measured against state targets goals for student performance in reading, mathematics and an additional area, writing, at the elementary and middle school grades as well as student participation rates and the quality of assessments. At the high school, student performance in reading and mathematics as well as the graduation rate was a factor. **In contrast, PLAS combines reading and mathematics performance and ranks schools to determine the lowest achieving schools.**
- Federal accountability determines if groups of students, schools, district and the state made AYP measured against state target goals. The groups of students are: all students, five categories of race/ethnicity, low-income, English language learners and students with disabilities served in Special Education programs. **In contrast, PLAS considers only the performance of the all student group.**
- Title I schools that were considered in need of improvement faced consequences. **In contrast, under PLAS, schools that rank at the lowest level have an opportunity to apply for School Improvement Grants and then must choose one of the following four intervention models:**
 - Turnaround: Replace the principal and all the staff and hire no more than 50 percent back.
 - Closure: Close the school
 - Restart: reopen as a charter
 - Transformation: Replace the principal and comply with 10 other requirements.